Major Research Paper

Fear of Apocalypse and Sinister Truths in the X-Men Universe

An Analysis on Metaphors of Mutation, the Collective Shadow, and Prevalent Archetypes of Good and Evil in the X-Men Comics

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Introduction

Joseph Campbell (1949), the author of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, declares that myths and mythmaking is an integral component to the paradigm of consciousness and the manifestation of cultural and social awareness. Myths and religion, the stories of our ancestors, resonate deeply in our collective consciousness and the study of archetypes presents for this reader's consideration, a way of constructing meaning of and purpose for our very existence through the exploration of texts old and new (in this case, through superhero comic books). For Campbell, the realization of our own potential and destiny goes beyond making whimsical connections with heroes, gods, and the natural world; it is through the vast nexus of patterned and interwoven stories (spanning the history of our world) that we may realize how the hero's journey correlates to our own pursuit of knowledge and amelioration. The hero's quest may indeed be reflective of our own moralistic pursuits and journey to transcendence; however, I contend that it is through the final confrontation with the Jungian shadow that real lessons are learned by both the characters and the reader, which in turn add to the construction of a shared consciousness and reflections on morality and identity.

This essay will examine the themes of human suffering as a precursor to the development and acceptance of one's social identity (as they are reimagined in superhero comics), specifically in the first twelve issues of *The Astonishing X-Men* (2004) series that are part of the Joss Whedon and John Cassaday run. Through comparative analysis with several other major sagas in *The Uncanny X-Men*, the original X-Men series written by Stan Lee, I will investigate the notion and possible presence of a "collective shadow" using a Jungian psychoanalytic approach and building upon the work of Campbell's monomyth theory. I propose the idea that, imbedded in modern retellings of the X-Men series, both the comics and the recent film adaptations, there is evidence to support the existence of a shared conscious fear of real-world global issues and that these texts are both social commentary of various forms of racial and gender discrimination applicable to our time. I hold that they can be seen as modern myths that bridge old and

new ways of storytelling for the purpose of moral growth and social development, primarily for the adolescent readership for which these texts were initially intended for.

This research paper relies largely on interpretative analysis of the primary sources, as well as secondary source content analyses of notable contemporary theorists, literary critics, historians, and psychologists. It will comprise of and be organized into two sections; (1) a comparative section to determine the presence of any literary anomalies that might deviate from traditional heroic and villain archetypes in the X-Men comics, specifically those that represent a collective group rather than an individual hero or villain and (2) an investigation of metaphors for morality and social change, about race, gender, and culture within the *X-Men* series mentioned that engage and enable readers to confront those issues, or the collective shadow, in the realm of fantasy. The aim of both sections is to identify personified manifestations of the shadow as a villain archetype, as well as other representations that are not embodied, but present themselves in the form of moral dilemmas and end-of-the-world scenarios, and to determine what sort of impact this may have on the reader. While reading for pleasures' sake and as a diversion from present reality lends itself to the particularly overtly escapist quality of superhero fiction, I argue that these texts do so much more than distract and engage in self-fulfilling fantasies; they function as a moral compass or, more precisely, a "mythic compass," in their capacity to generate familiar battlegrounds and scenarios that are recognizable and, that encourages and influences, nay even exerts and precipitates a shared moral dilemma between character and reader, a test and exercise on resolving conflicts that challenge pre-existing values and principles within the parameters of the fictional environment of the character, or the mental playground of the reader (Dewey, 1932; Krasny, 2007). Indeed, we (the readers) are hardly just spectators in that regard for we do bring the protagonist to life; our interpretive powers by the act of reading transform the characters and the fantastical landscapes from words into thought by mental reconstruction (Paivio and Sadoski, 2004), and with that, a shared contemplation of the issues explored and the lessons learned (if anything is learned at all). The dreams that we remember we commit to paper in the form of fiction, but hidden in the text are truths about human nature and the way we interact with one another. Unlike dreams, for which the unconscious exercises its

own authority and agenda over the dreamer and the visions that he or she is exposed to, the reader can make the conscious decision to proceed onward with the text, analyzing the messages that the author has contrived, typically about conflict and relationships.

The more recent metaphors of mutation in the X-Men comics indicate that the heroes are representative of a populace rather than single individuals and that they must contend with the prejudice and intolerance of an unjust society, often representative of the main villain in a story arc. The unjust world of the X-Men comics is thus an allegory of the "collective shadow" that threatens the existence of an entire people, again, not just a single individual. I wish to stress this point, for if it is so, Jung's "process of individuation" becomes a collective experience within the *X-Men* universe, a shared journey of human evolution between the reader and the fictional characters. They are stories about marginalized people that are a search for acceptance into society. At the same time, they are also about learning to accept ones' self, stories that serve as a mirror glass that shows us the self within and the tensions we feel in rejection. We look on, interpret, and sometimes the associations we make are unique, and sometimes they reveal a collective distress, like a dream sequence that creates the conditions for the shadow to reveal itself to the consciousness of an individual. As Oscar Wilde once stated "[…] every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself" (9). Perherps there is some truth in this, but Wilde falls short of taking into account that one's art is the impetus by which the unconscious rearranges the images to form language and associations. At the same time, the artist is responsible for making certain judgements about the world the subject lives in and commemorating them to paper to influence change. These texts present several important confrontations that challenge the moral standing of the reader. Although the argument could be made of other superhero series, I would argue that the *X-Men* sagas are unique in their archetypal depictions and posthumanist themes that provide social commentary pertaining to race/gender equality and the full inclusion of racial/gender minorities into North American society. Many of the less iconic characters in *The Astonishing X-Men* face conflicts that may initially appear only as physical battles with the main villain of

a particular story arc, but are in fact internal struggles that are indicative of one's acceptance of the shadow-aspects and the journey to self-enlightenment. Moreover, and as Joseph Campbell explains, "Jung's view […] is that the figuration of myth are to be read as metaphors of a necessary, almost pedagogical discipline, through which the powers of the psyche are led forward to mature relationships, first to the responsibilities of adulthood and then to the wisdom of age" (Campbell, Comparative Mythology, para. 17). Reflected in the moral messages of the *X-Men* comics, there appears to be a gradually evolving attitude of humankind that recognizes (and is often ashamed of) the bigoted attitudes of the majority and the subjugation and discrimination of minority groups in North America. And, while this series bares striking similarities to real-life social justice issues that, if not resolved, have the same potential apocalyptic outcome in our world, readers of the genre might denote that the conclusion of each of the stories are reflective of progress in the changing views specifically about race and gender, at least when comparing modern reboots to the Silver Age *X-Men* stories and other superhero narratives.

The merging of our unconscious mind with the impressionable words of the author are arguably a psychic link if there ever was one, and there is little doubt that Jung might dispute some kind of connection here since "[t]he dreamer's individual unconscious is communicating with the dreamer alone and selecting symbols for its purpose that have meaning to the dreamer and to nobody else" (Freeman, 12). We read a text and, whether or not we may wish it, we form intertextual connections and draw on comparisons with other stories known (Bakhtin, 1981; Krasny, 2002). However, the archetypal story (or myths) have multiple metaphorical meanings behind it and readers must open themselves to all the liberties and possibilities of allegory in order to grasp the lessons hidden within. In other words, archetypes are metaphors bordering on metonyms depending on how they are deployed. Perhaps a definition from Jung of the collective consciousness might win my reader's validation of this, but that is not the focus of this paper, only a connection to its true purpose and theme. At the very least, Jung recognized that:

> [n]ot for a moment dare we succumb to the illusion that an archetype can be finally explained and disposed of. Even the best attempts at explanation are only more of less successful translations into

> another metaphorical language. (Indeed, language itself is only a language.) The most we can do is to dream the myth onwards and give it modern dress" (Jung, Child Archetype, 79).

The psychoanalytic interpretation of a text and deciphering of the author's purpose is therefore analogous to the understanding of social and cultural views that change over time. The context in which a story is read is perhaps just as meaningful as the context in which it was written by the author. When looking closely at the archetypal heroes and villains of this series, both past and present versions and reboots, it will be made clear that shifting paradigms about cultural values and heroism is an evolutionary process and the archetypes adjust accordingly to the new times. For example, the X-Men may have been intended to function as a clear metaphor for social change and acceptance of minorities, but:

> [d]espite the at times obvious metaphor of mutants being feared and hated in a manner to racial [and sexual] minorities in the United States, almost all of the minorities who appear are villains, often with stereotypes representing their ethnicities. The only new members of the team are white mutants, whereas all the minority mutants are the villains" (Darowski, 36).

What we think we may know about a certain superhero is based more so on our knowledge of popular culture and less on the socio-cultural and historical transformation of familiar characters into what they are and represent today. Therefore, before arriving at any insights, a brief interjection is in order to provide a very brief history of superhero comics as to highlight paradigm shifts pertaining to race, gender, and culture. An overview of the components of the process of individuation and the shadow aspect will advance an understanding of the collective shadow, its function, dangers, and emergence into our actual lives.

Section I: A Very Short History of Superhero Comics

It is important to remember that superhero literature, per Peter Coogan, "[…] did not spring to life in literature but in comics" and, over the past eight decades, has grown in such immense popularity (7). The first superhero appeared in 1938 (Superman in *Action Comics* #1, published by DC Comics) and has risen in popularity over the course of seven decades. DC Comics did seem to have the larger myriad of

enduring characters toward the end of the Great Depression and all throughout World War II. Captain America seemed to be the only enduring Marvel character, created quite deliberately, as his name and storyline suggests, to serve as a propaganda tool to inspire victory over Nazi Germany. The 1940s and 1950s are now regarded as the Golden Age of Comics, featuring serial characters that are as popular today as they were back then:

> America's entry into World War Two gave the superheroes a whole new set of enemies, and supplied a complete working rationale and world view for a super-patriotic hero such as Captain America. This so-called Golden Age of comics and superhero comics in particular lasted up to the late 1940s, when the bulk of the costume superhero titles folded as a result of falling readerships. Only Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman came through the lean years of the early 1950s without a break in publication. The spotlight had shifted elsewhere—to crime comics, western comics, horror comics (Reynolds, 8).

Comic Book historian, Richard Reynolds, even mentions that, toward the end of the 1940s, western and crime comics in particular began to outshine the superhero genre for a period of time during this post-war economic crisis. According to an article that appeared in *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, entitled "Relationship Between War and Crime in the United States," Betty B. Rosenbaum explains that:

> War does not develop the virtues of peace [...] It is not a school that teaches respect for the person or property of others. Men return from war with a new outlook and habits of violent and forceful acts. When the rules of civilized society are suspended, when killing becomes a business and a sign of valor and heroism, when the wanton destruction of peaceable women and children becomes an act of virtue, and is praised as a service to God and country, then it seems almost useless to talk about crime in the ordinary sense." (723).

Thus storytellers found new ways of discussing and tackling the problem of increased crime rates. It is with little wonder that the popular interest in crime, western, and horror by the consumers had replaced the enthusiasm of superhero comic books; the thematic preoccupation with lawlessness and violent behaviour seemed to mirror the country's current state and superheroes of the Golden Age had developed a niche for international conflicts rather than local ones.

Marvel Comics, then known as Timely Publications, only seemed to get its competitive edge over DC Comics later on in the 1960s during the plight of the Cold War and the introduction of the superhero family team that comprised of a nuclear family structure. More specifically, the Silver Age was born out of the anxieties of the atomic age and fear of radiation (Superheroes: A Never-Ending Battle, 2013). Of

course, the central concerns of Americans during that time seemed to have shifted away from Germans and the Japanese to problems about communism and racial minorities within the country. The western comic and film returned to its historical roots to mythologize the origin story of the country, of manifest destiny and the claiming of the frontier, and making the heroes and the villains in such stories easy to recognize by clothing worn; white or neutral garments for the heroes and solid black for the villain's choice of cowboy hat and shirt. The Westerns especially "[…] contained implications relevant to the contemporary racial issue" prior to and throughout the Civil Rights Movement (Neale, 8). Suffice it to say, comics, it would seem, documented social concerns of the major eras in American history, sometimes quite intentionally as in the case of wartime propaganda, and sometimes as a record of social norms ascribed to by the general population, for up until the late 1950s, the comic industry was still quite new and building a fan base; they would only candour to the societal views of the majority without question. Stories about superheroes specifically show a shared collective experience during major eras, but they also provide some insight into the morals and values of the country, of their conception of good and evil in relation to global circumstances. Those morals and values are apparent once the fear or shadow aspects are addressed and unpacked in each of the respective time periods.

Still, far more interesting is the similar function that superheroes served and still do today; some are cautionary tales of temptation, some delve into the communal fears and societal angst of a certain era, some serve as propaganda to promote various ideologies. Whatever the purpose or function of superhero stories during the time for which they were written, it is clear that narratology of such stories is either a revisiting of mythological phenomenon or, or a deep-rooted psychological compulsion to create, articulate, imagine, and/or promote an exaggerated collective image of society and social interactions. "After 9/11", as comic book historian Breadford Wright explains, "the meaning of look up in the sky changed entirely" and with it, so too did our conception of the superhero and the evils they faced (Lawrence and Kantor, 37). America was now, in a manner of speaking, facing enemies one could not easily identify anymore and essentially were an abstract ideal in opposition to another ideal. Comic book publishers, writers, and artists would time and again address those social concerns very directly and very

indirectly depending on which series they were working with. Indirect references would have to be read into the text for issues too controversial to be brought into the public eye. For example, the “coming out” of the character North Star in 1992 as the first openly gay superhero sparked some controversy, for which Marvel closeted the character quickly, only recently exploring his gay identity in issue #51 of *The Astonishing X-Men*, a time period when gay rights were better accepted by North Americans (Perpetua, 2012). However, prior to this, the mutant metaphor encompassed all gender identities in a more general way, but only recently making direct reference to those marginalized groups. In December 2001, the first special issue of *Heroes* features iconic characters like Spider-Man, Captain America, Wolverine, Daredevil, and many others aiding in the rescue and clean up at Ground Zero. Panel upon panel was an indication of the superheroic meeting the heroic at an equal level, as can be seen as Daredevil aids a group of paramedics in removing an injured man from the rubble. This was a moment when myth and reality intersected, unveiling some insight about humanity.

But this is not a unique occurrence in our own time, as Campbell explains. What he regards as the “mythogenic zone” constitutes areas in which myths thrives when human beings encounter agents of psychological distress, generally speaking, any event that raises the question of our role in this universe or about our personal or shared identities. It is, without a doubt, “[a] fascinating psychological, as well as historical problem […] Man, apparently, cannot maintain himself in the universe without belief in some arrangement of the general inheritance of myth. In fact, the fullness of his life would even seem to stand in a direct ratio to the depth and range not of his rational thought but by of his local mythology” (Campbell, Primitive Mythology, 4). In contemporary society, Campbell would likely argue that there are fewer enclosed communities that sprout stories of humankind, about natural or historical phenomenon, that are sui generis by any means. The increase in commerce due to globalization, networking, and trade alone diminish the occurrence of new stories that are not based or contain traces of the established literary conventions of genre forms. However, the interpretive powers of the psyche do permit the extrapolation of new meanings and ways of approaching a given text, making it possible for one to identify connections between the self within, other texts, and the larger society. Campbell believes that “[t]he mythogenetic

zone today is the individual in contact with his own interior life, communicating through his art with those 'out there'" (Campbell, Creative Mythology, 93). The Silver Age in particular marked a period in which superheroes had more real internal problems to deal with such as questions about their identity, their impact on the world, moral duties, etc. The Hulk and the Thing grappled with their new physical appearance, while Spider-Man contested against all of the anxieties of growing up as a geeky, poor teenage boy in Queens. Even John F. Kennedy's death brought back a new conception of Captain America for the grieving nation that mourned the loss of their president. When art forms speak to a social body they create culture that endures and culture here is seen as a shared collective experience that speaks through the language of archetypes about the state of the world and how we cope with crisis.

The superhero genre and its many long-running series have been so saturated in our cultural consciousness that even those who are not necessarily comic book readers and enthusiasts have some knowledge of the more iconic characters and their origin stories and the values of many of the superheroes from the Golden and Silver Age are still present in the mottos, creeds, and moral lessons of their contemporary counterparts. In a PBS Superhero documentary, Ed Catto, a marketing strategist for pop culture, explains that superheroes are known throughout the world and "[…] you can engage in comics without ever reading the narrative" (Superheroes: A Never-Ending Battle, 2013). I might go as far as to say that superhero myths are told through the oral medium of communication, like a traditional folktale or children's story. I believe that mythology functions as a compass that helps navigate our contemplation of various kinds of human conflict in stories, helping us derive our own sense of good and evil. At the same time, our personal/primal fears stimulate our unconscious minds to manifest figures of evil that represent the very pain, anxiety, and/or conflicts in our social lives. Those same figures, which are the guises or representations of the Shadow, are transferable to written word by the author and reconstructed in the minds of the reader, providing texture and substance to real fears, and generating a recognizable foe that is a personified symbol of that evil. When he created the X-Men, Stan Lee's intended message to young people was that "we shouldn't hate or fear people because they are different" (Superheroes: A Never-Ending Battle, 2013) but such a message challenged the clear dividing lines

between hero and villains for villains were most certainly representative of that which is "different" and "the other" (even if that otherness did not become apparent until much later in the X-Men series). As a change in tone, "otherness" was becoming something that should be valued and celebrated rather than feared and loathed. In turn, and from an educational lens, the stories themselves follow the lives of fictional students as they cope with prejudice and commandeer the trajectories of their emerging social identities within the school setting at the Xavier Institute for Higher Learning and in the broader social community. The villain themselves are very much made in these stories, falling victim to the rhetoric of hate and the belief that acceptance is impossible, thus failing to accept their shadow aspect and being transformed by it (in a negative way). The fact that these transformations take place in an educational setting for both hero and villain is quite befitting since "[t]he vicissitudes of hate in education might well be staged as a problem of ethics in teaching" (Matthews, 186). Many of the X-Men team members and of course, their leader, Professor X, are advocators of their philosophies and belief systems, masters and apprentices to generations of superhero mutant groups. The same is also true of the villains with their polar opposite views. Dramatized in these fictional environments are examples in which pedagogy can negatively impact the psychological development of children and adolescent students, an evil that is not so apparent and is manifest in the posthuman powers and bodies of the characters. This is particularly true of both characters Tildie and Danger in *The Astonishing X-Men* whose shadow aspects are never thwarted and whose upbringings are haunted by the infectious properties of the shadow. These two characters will be the primary focus of the story arc analysis sections.

Section II: Clarification of Terms and Theories

The shadow, according to Jung, is dissolution of the persona and personifies that which the individual refuses to acknowledge about him or herself (Jung, 1964). However, superhero stories present shadow figures that are communally recognized and shared as fears toward potential doomsday scenarios or acts

of extreme violence. I believe that these stories are popular because they serve as therapeutic exercises to reconstruct, replay, and navigate moral dilemmas and scenarios in the reader's mind (Dewey, 1932; Krasny, 2007). They are recognizable but by no means easily accepted into the psyche. In other words, they offer, through cathartic moments, opportunities to face one's own pains and fears in the realm of fantasy since there are too few opportunities to face one's "shadow" in reality. The development of a healthy psyche is made possible by acknowledging those aspects of one's personality buried in the unconscious and bringing them to the surface, into conscious thought. While some experiences are unique to an individual and so too are representations of the shadow, there are also some representations that are shared by far too many to be considered idiosyncratic.

Presupposing that a work of literature leaves itself open to psychoanalytic interpretations of the author or of the reader, does not, in any way, count as psychoanalytic interpretation of the text. However, when searching for the dark side of the ego-personality, as von Franz explains, the reader and analyst is not acquainted that well with his or her own shadow aspect but can identify traces of it in others, otherwise known as projection (von Franz, Individuation, 172). The socio-political commentary (and possible agenda) of the text is a very conscious act that constitutes the intended purpose of the fictional piece in question, why it was written and who it was written for. It does not give very effective insight into the unconscious aspect of the individual who would otherwise deny their own shadow, but can see the shadow in the collective bodies for which it was written for, an obvious fact if the symbols are consciously created by the author for an intended purpose or effect on the reader. The application of psychoanalysis, to find the self within, requires much more "digging" and, at best, the findings are debatable, fragmentary glimpses into the well-fortified barrier of personas and archetypes, complexes and trials for the ego that encompass the illusive and hidden self. For example, Jung explains that ink-blot tests, favoured by Freud, were not painted to bare resemblance to a certain known figure; the arbitrary responses were based on personal identification with the drawings (Jung, Approaching, 27). This analysis does not reject the socio-political aims and commentary of the fictional text in question, but rather, regards it as a distraction of the central theme that links all the others in the Joss Whedon and John

Cassaday run of *The Astonishing X-Men*; the collective shadow and "[…] the reactions to, and spontaneous defense against, the body-destruction fantasies […]" (Campbell, The Hero, 149). In other words, the social commentary on real world issues are present but serve as a catalyst that challenge the characters responses and, more importantly, the reactions of the readers.

Jung recognizes the shadow to be the entirety of the unconscious, the dark side of our personality that the conscious mind rejects which may include a wide array of things such as fears and feelings of inadequacy, but also the forgotten (yet normal) animal instincts, insights, impulses, and appropriate reactions to external forces (Henderson, 110). In order to integrate the shadow aspect into the whole self, it is necessary for the individual to become better acquainted with the shadow aspect, to identify those flaws that are inhibited by the ego personality and blocked off from consciousness. Jung states that "[i]f we could see our shadow (the dark side of our nature), we should be immune to any moral and mental infection and institution" (Jung, Approaching, 85). For Jung, the recognition and acceptance of one's shadow launches the individuation process into its final trials of self-education and discovery. For Joseph Campbell, this equated to the final showdown or confrontation with the antagonist in which the triumphant hero gains some reward for his feats that is symbolic of a transformation of his very being. Immortality is usually a popular variation in classical mythology, a state of being that is almost synonymous with enlightenment, but a more contemporary outlook might come in the form of social awareness and understandings about moral truths. In the field of psychology, if the encounter with the shadow is successful, an intertwining and unified bond with the ego takes place and results in a healthy assimilation of one's "dark side" as part of their identity. Failure to come away victorious from one's encounter with the shadow results in "[…] falling victim to the shadow […] the black shadow which everybody carries with [them], the inferior and therefore hidden aspect of the personality" (Jung, Transference, 219). In the case of the hero in a fictional narrative, the destruction of the hero is the result of his or her defeat by the antagonist, a failure to transcend the limits of their mortal and benighted condition.

In "Approaching the Unconscious," Jung begins with a clarification of terms (which I do now, as stated in my interjection) for the purpose of establishing appropriate categorization of psychic phenomenon, though initially we may miss it in his writings, or altogether reject the distinguishing factors of the two, signs and symbols. By his definition, he states that "[w]hat we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning [the latter serving as a definition of "signs"]. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us" (Jung, Approaching, 20). Given this construct, we might categorize the socio-political aims of a fictional text as a deliberate motive by the author, which basically equates to a "sign," something that contains obvious meaning. On the other side of the spectrum, the collective shadow, which can only be represented by the symbolic, is shrouded with ambiguity and uncertainty. Psychoanalysis aims to translate those images and decipher the meaning that is not so obvious. The unearthing of meanings requires some conjecture and probing into a slew of possible interpretations, but upon which some feasible grounding is made palpable by using the archetypal structures of old stories and myths to navigate more recent fictional texts. By treating the stories as fragmented dreamscapes, the message of the collective shadow aspect can be brought into fruition (Jaffé, 321). Marie Louise von Franz, a contemporary and colleague of Jung's, corroborates this point, stating that "[…] the most frequent way in which archetypal stories originate is through individual experiences of an invasion by some unconscious content, either in a dream or in a waking hallucination—some event or some mass hallucination whereby an archetypal content breaks into an individual life" (von Franz, Fairy Tales, 24). She describes this as a "numinous" experience since such experiences are shared by either oral or written storytellers from primitive to present societies, "[…] and becomes amplified by any other existing folklore which will fit in" (24). But her most intriguing and suitable choice of words is that of "invasion," for it quite characteristic of the shadow aspect to emerge in the very conscious decisions we make or by the act of committing thoughts to paper. From the art, the reader, the author, the society as a whole, can spot lingering traces of the illusive shadow peering through.

Jung also acknowledges that the shadow often presents itself and operates using symbolic forms, usually through dreams, but can also lure their way into other aspects of our conscious lives, but again, only in the form of symbolic representations. Whether or not we are made aware of the complete message of the shadow is uncertain, but what is certain is that "[…] no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort […and] recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real" (Jung, The Five, 8). For the purpose of analysing story narratives, the latter is of particular interests as I later discus the infectious properties of the shadow aspect that metastasize into a collective shadow. Jung identifies two distinct aspects of shadow, not types, for the two are interrelated and very much connected; the personal shadow is quite elusive and unique to the individual, while the "collective" aspect pertains to the shared cultural and social values that are opposed somehow consciously or unconsciously by the individual. Moreover, it would seem to be Jungian belief that a disassociated state with the shadow is one of the major factors for human instability and chaos:

> Such tendencies form an ever-present and potentially destructive "shadow" to our unconscious mind. Even tendencies that might in some circumstances be able to exert a beneficial influence are transformed into demons when they are repressed […] Our times have demonstrated what it means for the gates of the underworld to be opened. Things whose enormity nobody could have imagined in the idyllic harmlessness of the first decade of our century have happened and have turned our world upside down. Ever since, the world has remained in a state of schizophrenia (Jung, Approaching, 93).

Jung of course speaks to the travesties of his own time; that of the Russian Revolution, of the tragedies of World War II and the holocaust, and what I assume might also include European colonization, particularly his mentioning of the British colonial rule of Africa. In our own time, we are haunted by those same dark moments in history and burdened with our more recent adversity and cataclysmic catastrophes—not just the wars and travesties we have witnessed, but rather what they represent—a collective failure to evolve that manifests itself into a monster, a villain, a shadow for the masses. These incarnations are certainly present in the X-Men comics from the Silver Age to the Modern Age, with such diabolical and seemingly omnipotent villains such as that of the "Dark Phoenix," created by Chris Claremont, Dave Cockrum, and John Byrne , and "Apocalypse," created by Louise Siomonson and

Jackson Guice. The latter will serve as an example here, for there will be more opportunities to discuss the Dark Phoenix as she does make an appearance in *The Astonishing X-Men*.

Certain villains represent not just the personal fears of the protagonist, or the "dark side" of their personality, but the wider encompassing fear of the masses when confronted with annihilation, suffrage, and degradation. Key examples of this in the *X-Men* "Age of Apocalypse" and the X-Men Apocalypse film (2016) directed by Bryan Singer, would certainly include many villain characters, especially those with carefully chosen biblical references like the Four Horseman. Apocalypse's name, so aptly chosen, marked one of the major series crossover storylines in the Marvel Universe, spanning nine series between 1995-1996 and relaunched again in 2011-2012. However, it is the character Apocalypse, an all-powerful and insane mutant, hell-bent on the enslavement of mutant and humankind, and the extermination of those that refuse to recognize him as a divine being, that we see a name that is synonymous with the villain's purpose. Moreover, I would also make the argument here that the name Apocalypse is an additional feature to Campbell's monomyth theory, particularly as a final transformation moment upon the return and re-assimilation into society. Edward F. Edinger, in his last book on Jungian psychoanalysis, *Archetype of the Apocalypse*, explains that "the 'Apocalypse' means the momentous event of the coming of the Self into conscious realization "[…] the shattering of the world as it has been, followed by its reconstruction" (5). Such characters are naturally fearsome, not just on account of the clear reference to an "end of days" experience or "doomsday" event, but because such a word, even in its Greek translation, represents the final goal of psychoanalysis (and the fictional hero's journey) that are never actually attained; a relative state of being in which little is known, and would likely mark the turning point from a primitive understanding about morals and society. An example might be made of the shifting of European politics, philosophy, science, communication, and industry during the 18th century, or the Age of Reason, for which there was much resistance toward new innovations in western thought. From one perspective of the collective society, the end of one era paves the way to the beginning of a new one that can serve the betterment of large-scale social communities. However, the acceptance of a new model for society is by no means an easy transition and is challenged by traditional paradigms that are percieved to be correct.

While the journey to enlightenment can be seen as its own reward, for the sheer adventure and the excitement of it all, the all-knowing triumphant hero would return to the world horribly dissatisfied, knowing better "pathways to bliss" than that of his/her inexperienced, unworldly neighbour. Joseph Campbell regards this as the final occurrence during the hero's return, when "[…] one may invent a false, finally unjustified, image of oneself as an exceptional phenomenon in the world, not guilty as others are, but justified in one's inevitable sinning because one represents good" (Campbell, The Hero, 205). Although the character Apocalypse never actually enters into *The Astonishing X-Men* series, he is an adversary from previous X-Men stories that casts a very moral philosophical question about the nature of the villain that resonates strongly in the writing of Joss Whedon and is worthy of some attention here.

By his own testimony, the character Apocalypse accuses humanity of following "false gods" in the modern age; the governments of the world, the social norm, religions, all ways of life. His plan to usher in a new era that cannot actually be perceived as evil, no more than we might perceive the Age of Enlightenment as evil. Even the great flood in Genesis or in the Epic of Gilgamesh was not, and could not, be seen as a villainous act of pure evil when its purpose was aimed toward something good. They are myths about cleansing the world, which parallels a similar function of the collective shadow that, if not realized by the hero, has damaging impact on the Self. Though he is the villain of the story, Apocalypse's judgement of the world is not without reasonable justification; however his notion of cleansing is far different from the solution proposed by Xavier and the X-Men. According to Peter Sanderson, Apocalypse is "[…] an ancient deity recast in science fictional terms, attempting to crush the contemporary world. The ultimate Social Darwinist, Apocalypse, in contrast to Xavier, seeks to foment warfare between mutants and normal humans so that only those who prove to be the strongest—including, of course, himself—will survive" (245). Rather than acceptance and inclusivity Apocalypse's solution echoes a return to a primitive state of conscious belief systems about superiority of one's own racial group. Edinger discusses a complex symbol system by which other archetypes in stories revolve around doomsday scenarios which interestingly include very similar features as can be typically found in the archetypal hero's journey. As a villain, the character Apocalypse, we may assume, is a result of his

failed attempts to overcome his shadow aspect and has thus become consumed by it, but as stated above, that does not appear to be the only possibility. Edinger explains further that:

> [i]f one has insight into one's own actions and has found access to the unconscious, then those psychological facts will manifest themselves; they will have some efficacy—not to serve ego purposes, you understand, since they are not under control of the ego. But, to an extent that the individual has a connection to the Self, the efficacy of the Self becomes operative in the human realm. That is how we can understand psychologically the promise of 'authority over the nations'" (31).

I do not necessarily argue that the character Apocalypse is in some way an unrecognized hero; I only mean to point out the perceivable truth that the character does not recognize himself as evil, only a supreme being with immense power who does not see society as a whole having reached the state of transcendence; that is, they have not properly integrated the individual shadow aspect into their personalities and therefore collectively are in a state of neurosis. In other words, the personified idea of a human apocalypse acts as a demonstration of what radical, supremacist views can lead to in our own society. Chris Deis, in his essay entitled "The Subjective Politics of the Supervillain," describes the supervillain as such: "The values of the supervillain are villainous in that they are antisocial and stand outside of the norms of "normal" society. Supervillains are also egomaniacal and selfish—personal enrichment, personal power, and control over others are raisons d'etre. Supervillains are also committed to their goals, convinced of the justness of their cause, and unflappable in their beliefs" (96). Certainly, some of the villains are plain character foils and that is definitely true in the Golden Age, but others have demonstrated that they embody holistic ideologies of the social and moral nature of human beings. Traditionally, a villain or hero's name is representative of their unique powers and abilities. Magneto can create magnetic fields and control metal, while Storm can control the elements of nature. Other characters' hero names are a summary of their ideals and values. Superman of course was borrowed from Nietzsche "Übermensch" concept, while Captain America is symbol of American valour and bravery (Ong, 35). Apocalypse's initial mutant power, as he has attained various new abilities throughout multiple series like *X-Factor*, *The Uncanny X-Men*, *Cable*, etc., is the complete control over the molecules in his body. At first glance, his powers may not initially correlate to his chosen villain name, but consideration

of the fact that the psyche is a scientific domain suggests that Apocalypse can alter his mental and physical form at will. He can control the ego gateway that separates the conscious from the unconscious. His power is a metaphor for the release of the inhibitions of the ego that spread infectious psychic suggestions into conscious actions. While visitations from other villains from the Uncanny X-Men make an appearance in the Astonishing X-Men comics, only the theme of Apocalypse, rather than the character, is present in the text.

It has been said by Robertson Davies that literature has the capacity to transmit good moral messages, however we must keep in mind that ethics are influenced by cultural norms (Davies, 1990). Another aspect to consider is that morals vary based on the cultural beliefs of the reader and a single text would undoubtedly resonate differently for each distinctive reader. Therefore, it stands within reason that the conflicts that are dramatized in the text provide a cultural construction of moral education. But superhero stories, from the standpoint of the reader, rely upon the villain to form the contrast between what is right and wrong, what is good and evil. In X-Men comics, there are not always clear dividing lines and, while some characters move back and forth between different ideologies, the reader ascertains that good and evil are very relative terms and labelling a character as the villain in the strictest sense, is not in and of itself morally unsound; there is little consideration or empathizing of the character's circumstances that led them to be corrupted by the shadow aspect. With such a large volume of characters and story arcs that center on each of the main team members, it is quite difficult to label any character as either hero or villain in the X-Men Universe. Morally wrong decisions can be rectified and often villains, even in their most evil moments, present themselves as tragic heroes or victims and products of an unjust society. Magneto is a suitable example of such a character, beginning as the major villain in the comics, but occasionally aiding the X-Men in battle and actually serving as the team's leader in *The Astonishing X-Men* series from 1990s. John Trushell argued in "American Dreams of Mutants" that, since Professor Xavier sought to establish an inclusive community between humans and mutants and Magneto was a radical extremist who saw mutants as superior to humans, there was a strong correlation between these fictional characters and the Martin Luther King Jr./Malcom X view on civil rights movements (152).

Michael Fassbender's portrayal of Magneto in *X-Men First Class* provided further depth into Magneto's character, revealing his traumatic experience of watching his mother die at the hands of a Nazi scientist, Dr. Klaus Schmidt (who is actually Sebastian Shaw/the Black King). By the end of the film, Magneto embraces his mutant name and avenges his mother, but not before revealing to Shaw that he agrees with his radical views: "I agree with every word you've said. We are the future." His views resonate strongly of an elitist like Malcolm X, but it is important to remember that, at odds between Magneto and Professor X, is not so much a generic battle between good and evil, but rather it is the two potential solutions to the problem of prejudice and intolerance in the world. An interesting moment in the First Class film was that of Shaw's death when Magneto moved a reichsmark coin slowly through the skull of his mother's murderer. The scene is incredibly powerful and not without a certain kind of irony since it was the same coin that Magneto failed to bend in order to demonstrate his powers for Shaw, which would have saved his mother's life. Moreover, it is highly symbolic of the transference of the infectious properties of the collective shadow aspect, for Magneto establishes himself as the new leader of the terrorist group of mutants. He physically penetrates the mind of Shaw, just as Shaw had penetrated his unconscious with his ideology. It is also important to note that Magneto kills his mother's murderer while Professor Xavier restrains Shaw by halting his consciousness using his telepathy. Xavier screams in anguish as he feels the coin (along with what is represents) pass through his own consciousness while merged through their telepathic link. He experiences the anguish and anger that Magneto could not in the end cope with. Magneto is indeed the villain of the story, but it would be difficult not to sympathize with the experiences that led to his transformation. His traumatic life and exposure to radical ideologies and politics show how he came to be a binary opposite of his friend and teacher, Charles Xavier.

The comics themselves seem to capitalize on the propaganda messages to invoke change in society. There have been multiple examples made throughout already, and no doubt more examples will follow in the pages ahead. It is vital to understand that literature can also spread attitudes that are disconcerting and, in either case, the messages are potentially infectious and can form into a "collective shadow." The political motives of a character that are revealed and battled over spark a metacognitive

response in the reader's mind, while other times they remain dormant in one's unconscious and influence our outlook and shape our collective views. According to von Franz, we are only able to witness them through social/cultural interactions with other members of our species. The infectious properties are that which generate irrational fears shared by a collective body, or the mainstream cultural views of a populace:

> […] the shadow is exposed to collective infections to a much greater extent than in the conscious personality. When a man is alone, for instance, he feels relatively all right; but as soon as "the others" do dark, primitive things, he begins to fear that if he doesn't join in, he will be considered a fool. Thus he gives way to impulses that do not really belong to him at all. It is particularly in contacts with people of the same sex that one stumbles over both one's shadow and those of other people. Although we do see the shadow in a person of the opposite sex, we are usually much less annoyed by it and can more easily pardon it (von Franz, Individuation, 169).

In the X-Men comics, there are quite a number of civil protests that shows a mob of humans in direct opposition to Xavier's dream of peace and prosperity between the two groups. Readers experience the conflict in a way that allows them to empathize with the invented conflict in the story. What I mean by this is that the discrimination toward mutants is not something that one can experience. Mutants are part of the fiction, but the metaphor naturally causes us to form associations of how people are discriminated in real society. In X-Men #44, Darwoski recalls the crucial "coming out" of Cyclops and Iceman as mutants in which displays of their powers during periods of heightened emotional stress (due to an encounter with a school bully) result in an accidental eruption of powers that are even unbeknown to them (43). While sometimes mutant powers are used as a form of self defense (as they were in case of Iceman's encounter in issue #44), in the case of Cyclops in the X-Men Apocalypse film, we observe more of an affective-shock reaction that triggers the autonomic nervous system to involuntarily awaken the mutant gene (Ghosh, 1). In another example, according to Darowski, "Cyclops uses his optic blast to disintegrate a crate that was falling from a construction site and would have killed the crowd below. With a rather illogical reaction, the crowd immediately wants to attack Cyclops" (42). This irrational fear and hatred on the part of humanity does not seem farfetched in consideration of the same illogical responses to human beings of non-Caucasian races. It is also interesting to note that Iceman's encounter draws a mob of angry American bystanders to the scene who form a mob that, with little regard to the unjust acts of the bully,

target both X-Men for having revealed themselves to the general public. Darowski denotes an unmistakable correlation as "[…] the imagery of the story takes an unmistakable turn toward the lynch mobs that took many African American lives" and identifies "[…] the lynch mob that takes justice into its own hands are clearly the villain of this piece" (43).

We cannot presume that the reader's reaction to this encounter would undoubtedly be one of empathy and remorse for the time in which it was written. The early 1960s marked a time of extreme social and political upheaval for which the rhetoric of extremist groups swayed many to racist and sexist views, far too many to discuss in a single essay. In fact, von Franz makes real world examples of several "collective infections," one of which does pertains to lynch mobs in a photo that appeared in her essay "The Process of Individuation" that shows a firey-cross with members of the Ku Klux Klan presiding over it. The collective infection, she argues, consist of all sorts of suggestive remarks that attach themselves to the shadow aspects of a large group, playing upon their fears and projecting them unto others rather than overcoming them in the individuation process. She explains that:

> [i]n some aspects, the shadow can also consist of collective factors that stem from a source outside the individual's personal life. When an individual makes an attempt to see his shadow, he becomes aware of (and often ashamed of) those qualities and impulses he denies in himself but can plainly see in other people—such things as egotism, mental laziness, and sloppiness; unreal fantasies, schemes, and plots; carelessness and cowardice; inordinate love of money and possessions—in short, all the little sins (von Franz, Individuation, 168).

Although such violence toward one's fellow man and woman can hardly be considered "little sins," von Franz makes an important point in stating how subtle the infectious properties can be. She also illustrates how one's reactions are often those of remorse and shame when recognizing that the effect of the shadow aspect on the personal life of the individual. The X-Men comics, in turn, seem to be a combined effort of writers and artists over the past seven decades to expose the infectious properties of radical groups that harbour racist and sexist views (the latter will be more evident in the pages to follow). The usefulness of choosing to use the genre form as a tool to combat these views is no doubt on account of the intended readership. Richard Dawkins insists that the process of language acquisition and development are pivotal

to the key learning moments of moral understanding. In his essay, "Viruses of the Mind," Dawkins explains that:

> A human child is shaped by evolution to soak up the culture of her people. Most obviously, she learns the essentials of their language in a matter of months. A large dictionary of words to speak, an encyclopedia of information to speak about, complicated syntactic and semantic rules to order the speaking, are all transferred from older brains into hers well before she reaches half her adult size. When you are pre-programmed to absorb useful information at a high rate, it is hard to shut out pernicious or damaging information at the same time (1).

But Dawkins also points out that "[t]he virus principle could, in theory, be used for non-malicious, even beneficial purposes" (4). This might mean one of two things; (1) that the infectious properties can be of good moral messages found in adolescent or children's stories, or (2) that by crafting stories that use allegory to reinvent moments of historical trauma, current social injustices, or present-day evolved values, the reader can confront the shameful sins of their personality and synthesize the conscious and unconscious elements to form a "wholeness" of the self, as Jung might call it.

In many ways, we cannot help but notice the correlation between the social and scientific aspects of the human self. In her essay and contribution to *Man and His Symbols*, Marie-Louise von Franz describes Jung's individuation process as a means of self-actualization, a discovery process that is modeled as an inward journey that one might envision as the penetration of a singular obscure cell, although perhaps made up of infinitely more complex parts. The layers of persona might constitute the cell membrane, the anima and animus might come in the form of the mitochondrion, in the place of the shadow you might arguably see the peroxisome, which reacts aggressively and defensively to external molecules, and the center, the nuclei, the genetic material and command core or the self. Interestingly enough, the opening credits of all X-Men films begin with a funnelling spiral into the genetic DNA strands and cells of mutants and concludes with a close-up of the entrance into Cerebro. Cerebro is a machine used by Professor Xavier in order to locate and make contact with other mutants, thus the means by which the story of each hero is put into motion, a divine intervention if you well. Director Bryan Singer may not have been fully aware of this symbolism, the internal journey into the self, but the allusion is quite powerful. The opening of all films in the franchise suggestively communicates the

message that the fundamental moral message is to look at what is inside someone, rather than concentrate on the exterior attributes that make us different. Professor X's mutant power of telepathy is emblematic of just that, peering into the self and, through therapy, bringing the shadow in union with the rest of one's conscious personality or the self. Franz describes the self as such:

> The self can be defined as an inner guiding factor that is different from the conscious personality and that can be grasped only through the investigation of one's own dreams. These show it to be that regulating center that brings about constant extension and maturing of the personality. But this larger, more nearly total aspect of the psyche appears first as merely inborn possibility. It may emerge very slightly, or it may develop relatively completely during one's lifetime. How far it develops depends on whether or not the ego is willing to listen to the messages of the Self (von Franz, Individuation, 162).

The emphasis on dream analysis is at that very centre of psychoanalysis and the argument has well been made that even psychoanalytic approaches to literature do not necessarily unearth true personified forms of the shadow in literature. To be blunt, it is not an exact science (or for some, it is not science at all). Still, some level of supposition is needed when navigating the uncertain terrain of the unconscious mind and archetypal images of the self and the shadow in particular lends themselves to more reasonable interpretations of literary texts since each is, unto itself, a unique experience by the author no matter the extent of his or her poetic style. We are a species of storytellers and even science contains a narrative aspect that develops, perpetuates and stifles conflict, and that follows through to a conclusion. And, like scientific study, we form a hypothesis and review data for trends and patterns. There is no magical machine like Cerebro that can peer into the neurotic or psychotic mind and form an instant diagnosis. However, there are collective patterns in archetypal language that allow psychologists to narrow the search and surmise potential mental afflictions that trouble the individual's personality. In essence, this is no different than what Professor X would do for his students, most notably for that of Wolverine, as he guides him through memories/dreams of his forgotten life due to amnesia. Still, he provides support by differentiating his methods to the unique needs of his students. For Jean Grey, who also possesses telepathic abilities, she remained under his close tutelage as her powers were rather undisciplined after "[…] she witnessed a girlfriend struck by a car […causing] an agonizing snap within her brain" (Kripal, 211). As von Franz would explain, "[a]lthough many human problems are similar, they are never

identical. All pine trees are very much alike (otherwise we should not recognize them as pines), yet none is exactly the same as another. Because of these factors of sameness and difference, it is difficult to summarize the infinite variations of the process of individuation" (von Franz, Individuation, 164). In this regard, we might look to literary fiction as a more comprehensive analogy/model of the individuation process since various images and features can be symbolic of the same mental state of the character and offer many variations of traumatic experience. One must also note that unique actions and choices by individuals (and the protagonist in a fictional text) are pivotal acts that alter the course of one's inner transformation, or discovery of the self. Our experiences shape our true personality, most especially experiences that frighten us. With that said, there are two types of shadow aspects, multiple heads, you might say, that are shared by the same leviathan beast from myth. One is neither big or small in their impact or threat to the individual, only consisting of unique traits and effects that define and distinguish them. While one (the personal shadow) evolves/emerges from within, the other (the collective shadow) is shaped by social behaviours in reaction to external influences that challenge or alter our established beliefs about the natural world (and those that dwell in it).

The X-Men comics, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the time of publication, offer profuse representations of the shadow aspect within the established frameworks of the mutant metaphor that are linked to social tensions. Along with them, are very powerful moral messages that emerge out of the internal conflicts experienced by the characters, some of which we have already seen examples of in issues from the 1960s and 1970s. Although it can be said that any fictional story can produce this effect, I argue that the unique feature of comic books, for which visual art and text are combined, and superhero myths, that offer prolific and grandiose scenarios of moral conflict, serve as the perfect medium and genre for cultivating and circulating these representations of the "shadow figure." Moreover, the X-Men series, as literary theorists and critics Ramzi Fawaz, and Joseph Darowski would agree, marked a crucial turning point in superhero literature in which deliberate uses of metaphor of mutation and alienation by early writers like Stan Lee and Chris Claremont set the framework for retaliation against racist and sexist discourse in modern-day North America. Fawaz explains that in superhero comics, the metaphors of

mutations were initially quite transparent to the American readers of comics as the early 1950s presented writers and artists an outlet for discussing changes in the demographic makeup of the country and shifting views of American identities for which left-wing democratic movements pervaded much of the Silver Age comic books (138). While the X-Men did not appear in publication until 1963, almost two decades after World War II, the mutant in comics served as a reframing of the superhero genre which had up until 1954 lay dormant as a genre in favour of mystery and suspense stories, but most especially westerns (as previously stated), which embodied a new patriotic image of American ideologies, values, and mythology. Fawaz states:

> In the wake of government chastisement, mainstream comic book producers returned to superhero as a fantasy figure traditionally understood to embody patriotic American values. Ironically this creative shift allowed writers and artists to explore bodies whose monstrous abnormality offered a rich site for critiquing the regulatory powers of the state and its inconsistently applied guarantee of national citizenship based on liberal ideals. Galvanized by such possibilities, the two major productive publishers of superhero comics, DC Comics (creator of Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman) and Marvel (creator of Captain America), reinvented the superhero as a biological misfit and social outcast whose refusal or failure to conform to the norms of social legibility provided the ground for a new kind of political community (9).

Superhero stories are repressed memories or histories disguised as narratives/fantasies. As a body of literature commissioned by various artists and writers; they may even be seen as wish fulfillment of heroes possessing abilities that could make more rapid progress in our world. I doubt that many would argue that the X-Men's mission represents attitudes that should have existed in times of prejudice and turmoil, both in the past and present. Jung, in his contemplation of discussions with Freud and Nietzche, states:

> Aside from normal forgetting, Freud has described several cases that involve the "forgetting " of disagreeable memories, memories that one is only too ready to lose. As Nietzsche remarked, where pride is insistent enough, memory prefers to give way. Thus, among the lost memories, we encounter not a few that owe their subliminal state (and their incapacity to be voluntarily reproduced to their disagreeable and incompatible nature. The psychologist calls these repressed contents (Jung, Approaching, 36).

We might simply conclude that long lasting impressions by a work of literature or story finds its way into more contemporary writings, however I contend that moral truths within a work of fiction are reflections by writers and readers that can identify the infectious properties of the shadow aspect. As Fawaz explains,

the long tradition of superheroes to be involved in the happenings of regular people would pose other problems from an ethical point of view and would not permit the reader to learn valuable lessons about morality from the pages of a comic book. The superhero, “[a]t once capable of refashioning the world in his image yet ethically committed to the well-being of a broader community beyond his own self-interest, […] has historically functioned as a visual meditation on the political contradiction between the values of individual liberty and collective good” (Fawaz, 7). Thus, the reader’s engagement with the text is vital to extrapolating the shadow from the recesses of the unconscious by seeing it scaffold by the characters interactions in the story. How does one cope in a world filled with irrational prejudice? What factors come into play that inhibit us from welcoming and sharing our unique identities with others? What is to become of our world if change is not eminent? These are some of the questions that I imagine pervade in the mind of one who engages in and reflects upon the themes of human conflict and suffering in the X-Men comics.

Section III: “Gifted” Story Arc Analysis

The same themes of intolerance and discrimination are further explored, using both allegory and direct reference, in the rebooted *Astonishing X-Men* series (2004-2011) by Joss Whedon and John Cassaday, but offer a more intricate outlook of current representations of socio-cultural conflicts. The superhero genre, which might be better seen as a subgenre of science fiction, employs young adult characters facing inconceivable issues and moral dilemmas in a way that stimulates an honest reaction, free of the biases of our own upbringing. But unlike the main X-Men series, there is a particular thematic preoccupation in the Joss Whedon/John Cassaday run on the mental anguish of being socially identified as a mutant, which in turn corresponds to racial and sexual identities. Take the opening of the Astonishing X-Men in its first story arc called “Gifted.” Indeed the first title seems rather befitting and, at the same time, contains its fair share of irony as we learn the true extent to which a mutant power in the X-Men Universe can be a

fantastic ability, a debilitating sickness, or a dark curse, the latter being ultimately the case for the first mutant the reader is introduced to. One of the first metaphors to explore here is that of mutation as a threat to social order and the conceivable relation it has to the infectious shadow properties. I begin here to dispel that idea that the shadow aspect is something purely evil. Dark does not necessarily equate to evil, only one variation of the archetypes that give substance to an abstract idea. Jung, in *The Psychology of the Transference*, explains that the shadow is something that is good and evil, depending of course on its function and degree of integration with the self. He states that:

> If, as many are fain to believe, the unconscious were only nefarious, only evil, then the situation would be simple and the path clear: to do good and eschew evil. But what is "good" and what is "evil"? The unconscious is not just evil by nature, it is also the source of the highest good: not only dark but also light, not only bestial, semi-human, and demonic but superhuman, spiritual, and, in the classical sense of the word, "divine." The Mercurius who personifies the unconscious is essentially "duplex," paradoxically dualistic by nature, fiend, monster, beast, and at the same time panacea, "the philosophers' son, "sapientia Dei, and donum Spiritus Sancti" (Jung, Transference, 28).

It is clear that Jung saw a correlation between the function of the unconscious and the language of myth used to comprehend the duality of its nature. In this regard, the "wisdom of God" that he refers to is heathy integration of that shadow aspect for which is also seen as a "divine gift," a realization of the self and control over the personified personal demons of the individual. The young child named Tildie, presently neutered of her mutant powers when introduced to the reader, awakes from the perpetual blackness of a nightmare. The page, interestingly enough, is divided into five equally spaced out panels, each giving a fragmentary conceptualization of the dream and the dream process. The first panel is covered entirely in black with the word "Mommy…" written along the left side in white. The reflective symmetry of the page shows another identical panel, ending with the word "Daddy…" at the bottom right-hand side. The panels in between, therefore, are essential in reading and interpreting the theme of the dream segment, even if it is not entirely clear what is taking place. The second panel down shows a picture of a young child, her mouth agape, followed by a picture of a hand trickled with blood, and the fourth panel presents another figure, a hideous red-skinned creature with sharp teeth and the overlapping semitransparent face of Tildie atop the creature, their grins matching. The message in its entirety reads as

such: “Mommy…/is screaming./Her screams are…/…yummy./Daddy…/…is next…” (The Astonishing X-Men, Issue #1).

In issue #2 it is revealed that Tildie was a mutant who had the ability to manifest her dreams as she slept. On the surface, such a miraculous ability seems gratifyingly pleasant to the reader when one considers the breadth of such a power, the omnipotence of materializing one’s thoughts into the tangible world. However, with little control over the unconscious, the reality is that such a power is a curse, with no ego to mediate the fantasies that rage in the unconscious, and allowing the fantasy world full access to the realm of reality. Jung would undoubtedly recognize the unconscious’ ability to impact the individual’s conscious thoughts as something potentially harmful as it renders the ego incapable of properly mediating the instinctual urges and drives imbedded in us all. One example of this could be found in his essay “Approaching the Unconscious,” for which Jung discusses a man who foreshadowed his own death in a dream. His patient dreamed of falling off a summit and, upon partaking in a mountain climbing excursion, curiously stepped off a cliff. Jung argues in this case and others that “[t]he dream compensates for the deficiencies of their personalities, and at the same time it warns of the dangers in their present course. If the warnings of their dreams are disregarded, real accidents might take their place” (Jung, Approaching, 50). Clearly the proper functioning of the ego is so vital to the individual, a safety mechanism that blocks our impulsive behaviours that are destructive. Tildie, in the midst of a nightmare involving a carnivorous beast, kills both of her parents and a police officer responding to the incident. While asleep she is ensued by kinetic energy that manifests itself into the very beast she is dreaming of. In turn, the scenario in her mind plays out in the real world and she exerts no control over the creature, her shadow aspect come to fruition.

The first page illustrates this concept quite boldly. The entirety of an individual is never actually shown, only some part, indicating that each panel is indeed representative of one aspect of the psyche at work. The first image of the child screaming is indicative of the conscious reaction to alarming circumstances, in this case, Tildie’s mother’s screams and the frightening realization that she is danger.

The panel below shows an outstretched arm that is trickled with blood and in a halting position; this hand represents the faltering ego desperately trying to block the outpour of the unconscious and the shadow figure present within. “Her screams are…” accompany the image with the outstretched hand and, in its failed attempt to prevent the completion of the sentence, the final panel with the monster reads “yummy.” The result is the admittance of the shadow-figure and perhaps in the form of the classic Elektra complex, Jung’s proposed female version of the psychosexual competition with a young girl’s mother for possession of the father. We might see her dream as an act of defiance toward conventional norms of womanhood, an instinctual urge to dispose of the presumably human mother and father who would not approve of having a mutant for a daughter. Her first kill is that of the mother and her words do not directly state that she aims to kill the father too (although that does seem to be the result of her nightmare). What is certain is the presence of an unconscious desire to kill during the awakening of the child’s mutation and a glimpse into the duality of complex psychic phenomenon. The subordinate personality of the shadow aspect is irrational and violent, and of course is the more dominant personality of the villain. According to Jung, “[i]t is an essential characteristic of psychic figures that they are duplex or at least capable of duplication; at all events they are bipolar and oscillate between their positive and negative meanings” (Jung, Aspects of the Kore, 157). Jung’s explanation of the “duplex” characteristic of the shadow is that a woman may wish to be perceived as both maiden and mother, for which I might extend the analogy to Tildie who wishes to identify as both mutant and human. Her unconscious fears of rejection (or the shadow aspect personified as a beast) attacks and kills the perceived figures of rejections.

Despite the horrible act of the unconscious shadow aspect in demon form, Tildie’s mental state does not paint a picture of evil incarnate; they are the manifestations of archetypal language that give insight into the damage the shadow aspect can have on the self when they are not properly filtered by the ego. And, as for mutation, we might regard Tildie’s experience as a failed attempt to merge conscious and unconscious elements of one’s personality. Dr. Kavita Rao, Tildie’s physician and a researcher in genetics, explains to a room full of reporters in Issue #1 of the story arc how she views mutants:

> They've been called angel and devils… They've committed atrocities, and been victims to atrocities themselves. They've been labelled monsters, and not without reason./ But I will tell you what mutants are./ Mutants are people. No better or worse by nature than anybody else. Just people./ People with a disease./ Mutants are not the next step in evolution./ They are not the end of humankind./ The mutant gene is nothing more than a disease./ A corruption of healthy cellular activity./ And now at last…/ we have found a cure (Astonishing X-Men, Issue #1).

Note the intriguing parallels of their duality, neither good nor evil forces, according to Dr. Rao, a group suffering from a disease that separates them from human beings, who in turn are just as capable of the good and evil acts demonstrated by other mutants. Her remark that mutation is a "disease" is intriguing and relates the mutant condition to a kind of inborn neurosis. The case of Tildie is certainly indicative of this, but it does not present the entire population of mutants on fair footing. Her peculiar ability manifested when she was quite young, before puberty which is rather uncharacteristic in the fictional history of mutation, but moreover, her mutation makes her a victim to the part of her psyche for which she has no control over. The child may have committed a horrendous act (even unknowingly), but she is not the villain of this story arc. Rather, it is the decision that she has made to overcome this traumatic experience that makes her representative of the real evil that the X-Men will have to contend with in the later issues.

Having discovered a way to supress and eliminate the mutant gene, Tildie is not so much cured as she is neutered as Dr. Hank McCoy (codename Beast) explains in later issues. She is stripped of the opportunity to integrate two important aspects of her identity. From the standpoint of the reader, she is unable to grow and develop due to Dr. Rao's interference in her "heroic journey" or her possible transformation into a superhero. Psychologist Dr. Robin S. Rosenberg makes an important observation that "[e]ven in cases in which superheroes are born with their powers […] superheroes are always in a sense 'made.' They all undergo a transformation" (9) and categorizes the catalysing acquisition of their powers and superhero status based upon traumatic episodes, destiny, and by simple chance. Any of these might be applied to Tildie, but her decision to use the cure forgoes her possible transformation or merging of the unconscious and conscious elements to form a complete self. For Tildie, the potential to use her powers in the same capacity as the X-Men, that is to fight for the rights of mutants and humankind alike,

has been stripped from her and, with that, a great destiny and journey, the outcome of mastering her fear of her mutant powers as an identity trait. Just has her power came into existence at a premature age, so too did her inward confrontation with the shadow aspect. The event itself might be linked to archetypes of the journey into the "belly of the whale" or the unknown, in which she meets the dark side of her personality. The images in the panels portray a child gone limp, yet levitating in the center of the monstrous creature, a powerful visual image of the shadow representation in control of the ego, holding her up like a puppet that now pulls the strings and controls the self. From the opening of the series the reader sees an abject failure to overcome the shadow aspect, not through Tildie's murdering of her parents using her formative, yet uncontrollable mental abilities, but through her willingness to help Dr. Rao to develop a cure to eradicate the mutant gene. She is the first child character to be influenced by the infectious properties of Dr. Rao's theory of mutated X-genes.

Instead of an opening where we observe the symbolic "separation" of the protagonist, the authors chose to open the series in media res, during Tildie's "initiation" and fall from grace for which no redemption is possible. Campbell might explain Tilde's consent to give up her powers as a regression into a state of unconsciousness or refusal to return to what he calls the supervonsciousness:

> Redemption consists in the return to superconsciousness and therewith the dissolution of the world. This is the great theme and formula of the cosmogonic cycle, the mythical image of the world's coming to manifestation and subsequent return into the nonmanifest condition. Equally, the birth, life, and death of the individual may be regarded as descent into unconsciousness and return. The hero is the one who, while still alive, knows and represents the claims of the superconsciousness which throughout creation is more or less unconscious. The adventure of the hero represents the moment in his life when he achieved illumination—the nuclear moment when, while still alive, he found and opened the road to the light beyond the dark walls of our living death (Campbell, The Hero, 222).

The idea presented here of the "superconsciousness" allowed Campbell to push the concepts proposed by Freud and Jung a step further into what he regards as the "cosmogonic cycle," for which he believes that human beings are born in a state of omniscience (all knowing or fully comprehending the self and the nature of the cosmic universe), and influenced into the state of unconscious by socially constructed myths and stories that, collectively created, function as a barrier to the knowledge of ourselves that has been lost.

From a reader or author's standpoint, Jeffrey Kripal argues that we come to the realization that we have no control over the stories that are written and that our consciousness is a reflection of those stories, not unique at all, but collective and influence one generation after another. He points out that "[…] human beings are not as free as they imagine, that through the intimate, often invisible influence of family, language, culture, and religion they are being constructed—they are being written […] these individuals come to realize that we are all figments of our own imagination" (28). Paradoxically, the message that Dr. Rao transmits to Tildie is one that is completely different from the message Whedon and Cassaday are communicating through this scene. Kripal's philosophical musings seem to support Campbell's idea of the superconsciousness since Kripal acknowledges that aspects of identity, language and culture especially, are imposed on the individual and that a unique self becomes lost under a buildup of persona. This intersecting of psychoanalysis into the realm of metaphysics has a ubiquitous implication to all of the literature and myths that we read, but in relation to Tildie, or any mutant who willing and successfully gives up his/her powers, translates perfectly into one's failure to overcome the shadow aspect when influenced by outside forces. After all, she had been born one way and physically altered or socially conditioned to become someone else. As a metaphor of mutation, it corresponds to a real world shedding or disassociation with ethnic, cultural, and sexual identities in favour of conformity.

The X-Men series (later changed to the Uncanny X-Men by issue #114) was indeed one of the first superhero comics to feature a team that was so culturally and ethnically diverse, and Xavier's school for mutants certainly became the equivalent of the American melting pot. I choose melting pot in favour of Canada's later conceptual cultural mosaic as the term melting pot fits more appropriately; the series consisted of five Caucasian team members initially, with only rather stereotypical minority groups being thrown into the mix without proper awareness of the dynamics, values, apparel, and language of those representative cultures. Moreover, while many minority groups were initiated into the X-Men family including Storm (Egyptian/Kenyan), Sunfire (Japanese), Banshee (Irish), and Thunderbird (Apache), there origin stories seemed to do their cultural backgrounds a great injustice in terms of their

representation. Storm was a tribal princess who was worshiped as a weather goddess, Sunfire held allegiance only to his Emperor, Banshee's fictional Ireland was home to leperchauns and other creatures in Irish folklore, and Thunderbird's "traditional" garments did not resemble anything like the actual clothing worn by his tribe (Darowski, 61-62). Other mutants' physical appearances seemed to be more so analogous of the ethnic makeup of North American society and the extreme prejudice toward visible minorities, as odd as that may seem. The racialization of these characters quite painfully reduced these ethnicities and cultures to quite offensive stereotypes. Dr. Mikhail Lyubansky, in her essay entitled "Prejudice Lessons from the Xavier Institute," recognizes the intentions of earlier writers like Stan Lee and Jack Kirby to tackle issues of young people trying to fit into the American homologous social structure, but concurs with Darowski that "[…] given that the ensemble of X-Men was entirely racially and ethnically homogeneous (as per the comic industry's standard of the time), the themes of prejudice were most likely not very well thought out at first" (76). The ideology of multiculturalism was definitely present, but the focus was strictly on the causes of intolerance and mistreatment, focusing more so on "[…] different characters try[ing] to come to terms with the ethical and psychological implications brought on by the dawn of a new evolutionary phase, in which genetic mutations have given a handful of humans a variety of different superpowers" and visible physical difference from the majority of the population (Lyubansky, 77).

Adilifu Nama, in his essay "Color Them Black," insists that an omission of black superheroes in particular speaks volumes to the sociopolitical climate of the time, both then and now. The symbolic representation that superheroes represent good and just values is definitely present in those X-Men characters that are African-American, is present surely, but as Nama explains "[l]ost, however, in the grand ethos and pathos that superheroes represent are the black superheroes that fly, fight, live, love, and sometimes die [and] what black superheroes may lack in mainstream popularity they more than match in symbolism, meaning, and political import with regard to the cultural politics of race in America" (Nama, 254). This is particularly true of the only longstanding black X-Men member, Ororo Munroe (codenamed

Storm). Second in command of the team, Storm has the (not clearly explained) mutant ability to control the weather itself. She is given a backstory similar to male superheroes, having been orphaned at a young age and having survived the hardships of a difficult childhood, something that was rather lacking in the introduction of other female characters like Jean Grey and Kitty Pryde. Storm was discovered by Professor Xavier in a small village in Kenya where she was worshiped by the people there as a rain goddess. Xavier managed to convince Storm that she was not a goddess, but a mutant, thus interfering with the internal development of her society, which is rather indicative of the white "civilized" man bringing knowledge to the "uneducated and primitive" tribal cultures during British Colonialism. While one might raise an eyebrow at the circumstances in which she joined the team, her powers, as Ramzi Fawaz explains them, offer a rather cleverly devised metaphor that may excuse the imperialist attitudes toward her culture and intellect:

> In Storm's character the comic book identifies the central condition of producing social worlds as that of cultivating an interior domain of self-reflection: Storm is at once a willful agent and a living ecosystem producing and sustaining relations through the use of her abilities. In these moments the series attaches the activity of "worlding"—the production of social bonds and the maintenance of a complex natural order—to the female body (151).

Storm's ability to harmonize the elements and throw them into disarray put her, above all the super powered beings in the Marvel Universe, into a very authoritative role. She is, in fact, the life-giving weather goddess that provides for the land and the people, and her mastery over the elements make her essential to the preservation and endurance of all societies on earth. Moreover, it is worth noting that Storm, despite her radical changes in costumes over the years, sometimes quite revealing of her figure, is never sexualized by the other team members in the way that Jean Grey was in the initial comic run by Lee and Kirby. This is not to say that she does not pursue romantic relationships, but rather it is a testament to the respect shown by the team for her ability to harmonize the natural world more easily than the rest of the team, in their combined effort, could hold together and link the social world. Her only susceptibility to the collective shadow aspect her represented by her personal claustrophobia, which is appropriate since closed-in spaces are rather suggestive of social constraints, of imprisonment, enslavement, and control.

Tildie's display of powers in the scene mentioned would appear to have a different effect on the general public and yet, ironically, still has much in common with Storm's ability to bind the world of humans and mutants. Tildie's ability is similar to that of Jean Grey when she bonded with an alien being known as the Phoenix. The Phoenix entity amplified Jean's mental powers making them rather limitless, as too are Tildie's powers as she is able to manifest her dreams. This power is seen as particularly threatening to a patriarchal society because it uses "[…] female characters in a way that can bring society as a whole closer to the idea of transcending the duality that is in various ways male-female, self-other, and familiar-foreign, to arrive at a new grasp of the singularity of humankind (Housel, 88). Jean's "coming out" as the Phoenix is seen by Fawaz as a self-actualizing of womanhood and feminist ideals:

> Materializing the feminist mantra "I am woman, hear me roar," Phoenix commonly appears rising in cruiciform shape, arms alight with energy and mouth agape in a primal scream that symbolizes an extraordinary show of self-determination as well as an exhilarating potential for a loss of control […] embodying the concept of feminist consciousness raising—a physical transformation representing Jean's "coming into consciousness" as a feminist (154-155).

Like Jean's awakening as the Phoenix, Tildie's powers erupt as she sleeps, symbolic, perhaps, of the shadow's desire to be freed from the unconscious in the way that Storm and Phoenix are. Both characters are seen at odds with their feminine and masculine traits, an acceptance of the animus that allows them to control their powers in ways that Tildie cannot. What is certain is that Tildie cannot transcend the dualities of social constructs following the death of her family, unable to see herself as both human and mutant as a combined identity. The mutant aspect of herself is perceived by Tildie as an anthropoid monster, an archetype perpetuated by her fear of the way others in society might view her.

While there were new opportunities to explore themes of actual racism after the publication of *Giant Size X-Men* #1(1975) and the inclusion of new "ethnically diverse" members, the focus seemed to be more toward building on the struggle for mutants with non-human features trying to fit in, and the persecution of minorities that could not pass as Caucasian. Some of these characters include Beast (in his blue cat-like form), Mystique, Azazel, and the Morlocks to name a few. Darowski makes a fine example of the character Kurt Wagner (codenamed Nightcrawler) in the 1970s,

> […] the first character in the X-Men he is obviously and unavoidably a mutant […] the majority of the characters look like normal humans when not using their powers. Nightcrawler can never look normal, at least not until he is provided with an "image inducer," which allows him to project a hologram giving him the appearance of a normal human. Although most mutants have their powers develop with the onset of puberty, Kurt Wagner was born with blue fur, yellow eyes, a tail, fangs, and only three fingers and two toes. His mutant powers, besides his appearance, are to teleport short distances and to disappear when in shadows. Nightcrawler's appearance is often described as demonic (65).

It is through a character like Nightcrawler that the readers of the X-Men series, especially those that consisted of minority groups, could clearly identify the concerning issue represented by a character who had to keep his physical appearance hidden from the rest of humanity. According to Baumeister and Pizzaro, unlike the medieval tradition of literature where "[…] evil was represented by characters who were named or physically labelled with their vices", Nightcrawler was unmistakably a hero (Baumeister and Pizzaro, 24). His charm and acrobatic abilities made him a playful addition to the team and even a character of comic relief during melodramatic disputes between other characters. Still, his appearance often only produced frightened and angry reactions by the human characters in the story, and even Kitty Pryde showed particular panic and unnerving whenever Kurt made attempts to converse with her, as seen in the main series and the *Pryde of the X-Men* 1989 television pilot.

Here the mutant metaphor runs parallel to the concept of the collective shadow as an allegory of fear of being visibly different from one's entire community. Unlike the other mutants in the series that could hide their mutant abilities, like Scott Summers (codenamed Cyclops) who wore a visor or glasses during the day to keep his optic blast at bay, or Warren Worthington III (codenamed Angel) who could wrap his large angel-like wings around his waist and conceal it under an overcoat, some of the members of the team, or those with other affiliations, could not conceal their mutational appearances so easily. One ought to note that, unlike other superhero characters in the DC and Marvel Universes that keep their identity a secret to protect those closest to them or to avoid public interference, the X-Men during the time that Nightcrawler was introduced in Giant Size X-Men #1 (1975) ceased to wear masks (with the exception of Wolverine). The argument can be made that the concealment of a character's physical "malformations" related to their mutation supports the notion that these characters are at odds with their

shadows, that they are ashamed of their appearances, fearful of others reactions, and exhibit a reluctant attitude toward their mutation. There disguises are meant to help them blend in with human society, but become images or personas that they covet, a defence against the shadow aspect of their real appearances. In the 2003 Bryan Singer sequel, *X2: X-Men United*, Nightcrawler, played by Alan Cumming, inquires about Mystique's ability to shapeshift into any form she wishes. He asks her "Then why not stay in disguises all the time? You know, look like everyone ele?" to which Mystique responds "we shouldn't have to" (X-Men: The Last Stand, 2006). Mystique's quick reply and dismissal of Nightcrawler is fervent of her strong belief in equal rights and that the absurd lines that divide mutants from humans is illogical and misguided. Unlike Nightcrawler, she completely rejects the prospect of socialization with human beings that denunciate her civil liberties as an American citizen based on her mutant ability and her physical appearance.

Bearing in mind that transformative experiences are regarded as steps to enlightenment and psychologically speaking are viewed as enriching and positive, per Jung in his statement that it "[…] reveals to the enlightened eye of the soul cleanliness, innocence, holiness, simplicity, heavenly-mindedness, and righteousness […] (Jung, Transference, 138), the same is not true of (and should not be misconstrued for) disguises. In regards to costumes, there are very few X-Men who wear uniforms that mask their true identities the way that other superheroes do; many of the characters openly show their faces and their real identities are hardly a secret to other superheroes and civilians. This would seem appropriate since the X-Men team represent a minority group that aim to be culturally integrated into American society and accepted by regular human beings. However, as stated before, there are members who do struggle with their physical appearance and make attempts to "mask" their peculiar mutant forms. Nightcrawler, for example, uses a piece of technology called an "image inducer" "[…] which allows him to project a hologram giving him the appearance of a normal human" (Darowski, 65). This seems to fit the definition of a persona, for which Jolande Jacobi explains "[i]t has two purposes: first, to make a specific impression on other people: second, to conceal the individual's inner self from [society's] prying

eyes" (350). It stands within reason that Nightcrawler's alteration of his physical appearance is evidence of taking on a persona as a reaction to the societal pressures to conform. Interestingly, though Nightcrawler could take on any form he chooses, much like Mystique, he chooses to present or identity himself as a Caucasian male. I do not mean to suggest that another racial identity would be better suited or imply that, to enforce the allegorical reading, a minority ethnicity would drive the point through. Rather, I contend that the choice of becoming a Caucasian male has implications that Nightcrawler has chosen a "mask" that would unburden him of the hardships of being a minority race and a mutant, thus doubling his hardships. One could argue that his choice of disguise is an attempt to be free from all kinds of alienation. Whatever the case, it is certain that "[…] the use of the image inducer marks a lack of willingness by Nightcrawler to accept his own minority identity" as a mutant (Darowski, 66).

Although Nightcrawler's image inducer might be seen as providing temporary relief from his inadequacies with his physical appearance, allowing him to take on the appearance of a Caucasian male, it appears that such is not the case for Dr. Hank McCoy (codenamed Beast) in *The Astonishing X-Men* and it is clear that Whedon and Cassaday sought to re-explore the theme through Dr. Rao's cure. At the end of Issue #2, Beast pays visit to Dr. Rao to substantiate that the formula works. He keeps his visit with Dr. Rao a secret from his team members and, when it is revealed that he is considering taking the cure in Issue #3, a fight breaks out between McCoy and Logan (codenamed Wolverine). Wolverine shares two exchanges with Beast, both of which are very deliberate attempts to point out that Beast is giving in to the deplorable social pressures represented by the cure that go against the X-Men's stand on equal rights and tolerance for mutants. He states "Is that how it goes McCoy? You've had enough? You wanna see how the other half lives their half-lives?" (Issue #3) Wolverine's words are an interesting choice, as he seems to almost be vilifying humanity, regarding them as only living "half-lives." As a hero, Wolverine, having undertaken many journeys and feats in his career has a superhero, speaks from a vantage point that is unique to the hero alone. He is able to see the bigger picture and from his enlightened standpoint, observes that those that prosecute and condemn the mutant minority group have failed in their journeys to

enlightenment, which is synonymous with self-discovery, the triumphant fulfillment of the hero's journey and the crossing of the return threshold (Campbell, The Hero, 188). His attitude in response to his marginalization suggests that the X-Men, as mentors to the students of the Xavier Institute and the world, must stand for the ideal that they strive toward and set an example. In psychoanalysis, this might translate into successfully acknowledging and coming to terms with the shadow aspect, not allowing one's fears and anxieties to alter their present course. We see this very much linked to their status as teachers and mentors, for Wolverine's bantering of Beast marks a clear divide between the X-Men as teachers and the X-Men as students. He says "some weak sister in the freshman dorm wants to drop his powers, I could care less. But an X-Man… one of us caves and it's over. It's an endorsement stamp for every single mutant to be lined up and neutered. And you know that. You know that!" (Issue #3). Wolverine's apparent frustration with Beast's moment of weakness is appropriate considering the hero of myth is also held at a high standard than the rest of those in society:

> Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man—perfected, unspecific, universal man—he has been reborn. His second solemn task […] is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed (Campbell, The Hero, 14-15).

Campbell's words speak directly to Beast's situation and to the origin of his blue, furry form. Certainly, "a mutant who is identified at sight allows the mutant metaphor to be more closely aligned with racial metaphor" (Darowski, 66). However Beast began the series as a Caucasian male, whose only abnormal mutant features were that of enlarged feet and extendable toes that gave him cat-like agility and a natural flair for acrobatics. This was easily concealed from the prying eyes of society. However, after taking a serum to isolate and suppress the mutant gene that gives him abnormally large feet, an accident occurs that actually further mutates his genetic material, causing him to mutate further and giving him his full Beast form. Scott Jeffrey acknowledges:

> Few characters have engaged with questions of identity and the body, often quite explicitly, as the mutants of Marvel's X-Men. Hank McCoy's highly intelligent mind and sense of humour are highly prized human traits, existing in stark juxtaposition to his startling appearance. Earning his

> codename because of his agility and ape-like features, it was actually McCoy's second mutation into a more obviously Animal body that sealed his pseudonym. More often The Beast's attitude to his transformation [is] prone to self-pity regarding [his] monstrous form (146).

The irony is quite clear; after trying to alter the minor malformations of his feet, the accident has left Beast entirely incapable of being regarded by society as a normal human being. It would seem that those who are more so unable to pass as humans suffer the most from the infectious properties of societal impositions that human beings conform to certain physical self-image. Beast, however, is regarded as a very outspoken voice toward social change, the poster boy of the X-Men team who embraces his new blue cat-like form. Richard Reynolds explains that this is consistent with the team dynamic, for which they jointly provide support for each other's struggles in a quiet, perhaps sometimes unnoticed manner, while serving as a more vocal inspiration to the student body at the Xavier Institute. Reynolds holds that "[o]n several occasions (beginning with X-Men 108, Byrne's first issue) the implication was made that the X-Men formed some kind of Gestalt entity, of which the whole was greater than the sum of the parts (91). This is certainly true of the way in which the X-Men work as a team in order to subdue their adversaries, but it also speaks to the rapport and friendships that they have built with one another, modelling a society that supports and appreciates differences. In Issue #4, during a mission to destroy Dr. Rao's cure and the mutant testing facilities, Wolverine gives sage advice to McCoy by offering his reflections on individual sacrifice for the X-Men's cause. He discusses that part of himself buried within that would have wanted to marry and have a family, but that the turmoil of present day society would not be a world he would wish to bring forth children into.

Section IV: "Danger" Story Arc Analysis

The second story arc in the Astonishing X-Men series is called "Danger" and it too has a many levels of deeper meaning pertaining to the metaphorical confrontation with the collective shadow. Firstly, the title pertains to one of the two villains in the story named Danger, who is an artificial intelligence and once served as the programming that controlled the training facilities for the X-Men. Known as the "Danger

Room," the training facility used mechanical robots and booby-traps to help the team utilize their mutant powers to escape hazardous situations they may encounter in the real world (or the fictional world of the Marvel Universe). The initial training facility comprised of simple mechanical devices and obstacle courses that were set up in a living room area in Xavier's mansion, but have since undergone some major upgrades in later issues and spin-off series. More recent models of the Danger Room primarily simulated vivid and immersive environments and trials using holograms and force fields. In this series, the Danger Room had been modified by Professor Xavier, who used alien Shi'ar technology to improve upon the creative capabilities to develop new and intricate mental/physical challenges for the X-Men team to overcome, thus preparing them for their future missions after provocations with simulated scenarios in the safety of the X-Mansion. These upgrades have more to do with the programming and development of a functional and evolving AI than that of new tricks and trappings like nets, snares, pitfalls, trapdoors, robots, and armories. Professor Xavier acquired the technology from the Empress of the Shi'ar, Lilandra, and made appropriate alterations to the programming of the Danger Room to increase the difficulty settings by adapting to the skills, patterns, habits, and techniques of each X-Men's fighting style. It's anticipation of attack and defense strategies would force the team to continuously self-improve and adapt in turn. Shortly after making these adjustments to the program, Xavier discovers that the technology used by Shi'ar is actually a sentient artificial intelligence, presenting a great moral dilemma in his decision to control the creature for his "noble" cause of training his X-Men. In this we some disconcerting parallels to the way in which technology is used to advance warfare technologies in the incongruous name of peace and social security. This of course would make Professor X the second villain, an ironic twist considering his moral standing and message of equality, acceptance, and inclusivity between humans and mutants. For, what is Danger if not a mutant herself?

Similar to the first story arc, "Danger" opens with Wing, the adolescent student at the Xavier Institute who lost his powers to the same "cure" that neutered Tildie. The reader observes the depressive state of Wing as he struggles with the loss of his powers, of being literally grounded, unable to fly, his

figurative wings having been clipped during his encounter with the villain Ord. However the last three panels on the third page of issue #7 convey his delusional belief that he is still capable of flight: “Poor pathetic human./ I’m not that. I can never be that. I’m not a normal human./ I can fly” (Issue #7). Here we see a stark contrast to the mutants we have encountered in the previous story arc who viewed the mutant “gift” has a curse that they were forced to struggle with, a burden that prevented them from having a conceivably normal life as a human. This was more so apparent in the example of Beast, whose physical form and animal instincts so clearly separated him from humanity and segregated him even within the X-Men team. However, Wing does not necessarily have to worry about fitting in since he does not have any physical malformation and could therefore live a comfortable life as a normal human being. In this particular case, we learn that Wing does not wish to be separated from the mutant community the way Tildie may have, or the way others had contemplated doing when the cure was discovered.

The disparaging state of his new condition, of being normal, certainly draws the reader to contemplate and relate to the inner battle waging in Wing’s mind, his back and forth consideration of his options now that he is no longer a “belonging” student at the school. Similar feeling of grappling with one’s closeted homosexuality, or other varied sexual identities, or simply feeling different on the inside seem to almost be alluded in some of the questions posed by Wing, although of course this is never directly said, only implied in his language. Joseph Darowski further explains:

> These interpretations of the concept of “mutant” remove some of the metaphor of institutionalized racism and sexism that have been identified with the X-Men series, instead favouring a more universal appeal to the idea of being different. However, they do not negate those themes; indeed, this broad inclusive interpretation of the mutant metaphor ensures that elements of racism, sexism, homophobia can be read into the series (9).

William Earnest, in his essay “Making Gay Sense of the X-Men,” might regard this as a “rhetorical equivalent” of the struggle LGBTQ people feel and endure during “coming out” rituals, only the situation is somewhat reversed since Wing can now assimilate into mainstream society (1). With the X-Men series, such parallels can only be viewed through language conventions for the most part. Jay Rachel Edidin and Miles Stokes, in their podcast *Jay and Miles X-Plain the X-Men*, have drawn attention to this mutant

metaphor in a number of their episodes, particularly in Episode 1, for which they denote an early provocative resilience to cultural assimilation with an emphasis on sexual orientation. In the case of Wing, however, we see a resilient attitude to being human or normal as the characters consider it. In this regard mutant power and superhero status give the students in Xavier's school a sense of belonging. It could also be said that we see in Wing an example of the archetypal "puer" or "puer aeternus," the etemal child, seen in many symbolic representations, most notably that of Icarus. Robert A. Segal describes the puer as such: "The opposite of the puer archetype is that of the hero. [...] Where a hero risks everything for whatever he has committed to, a puer has committed himself to nothing and so risks nothing [...] Because a puer is a failed hero in the first half of life, he is necessarily a failed hero in the second half as well. Indeed, for him there is no second half" (111-112). Still, I would argue that it is more appropriate to acknowledge that Wing's mental turmoil is based on the fear of being labelled as a puer since he has lost his powers. By assessing his contemplation of the situation we that the importance of hero status in the X-Men family is the equivalent of a meaningful cultural connection, that if lost, leaves the child or adolescent feeling as discluded as those in the real world who cannot identify with a certain social group.

One key point made by Stokes and Edidin pertains to the costumes worn by the X-Men. They explain that "the X-Men just look different from the rest of the Marvel Universe. They're all in bright reds and bright blues for all the heroes. The X-Men thematically are supposed to be on the side. Yes, they are superheroes, but they are the ones who people don't quite trust or don't quite see normally" (Episode 1). Interestingly enough, the yellow and black suits that are being referred to here are also the choice of costumes for the team in *The Astonishing X-Men*, bearing striking similarities to the original costumes in the first series. Superheroes in the Marvel and DC Universe do typically wear blue and red proudly, beginning with artist Joe Shuster's Superman in 1938, the colours of the American flag became boldly worn by most newcomers to the genre, an indicator of their heroic qualities in sharp contrast to the villains who could wear any other hue or shade on the colour-scale. The only other primary colour is worn collectively by the X-Men team, designating unto them the role of the "other" superhero, the one

that does not fully subscribe to American push factors for social conformity. It is not a stretch to imagine that, in their creation of the X-Men, Jack Kirby purposely chose yellow as an indicator of the X-Men as the "other superheroes," the ones that would not be hailed and commended for their noble deeds because they were not visually emblematic of American concerns about newcomer as a threat, common attitudes of suspicion and superiority that pervaded the 1960s and 1970s. Jeff Loeb concurs with this idea of the costume holding important symbolism of identity. He explains that "[…] by adding the costume to represent the other identity creates a different way of looking at things. That said, the costume is important as a visual icon of the character's mission and identity" (122).

Still, though a student at the Xavier Institute, Wing had never dawned the costume and therein lies the dilemma, similar to that of Tildie. His stricken mutant powers dash the possibility of him self-actualizing and becoming a member of the team. The closeted identity crisis may show similarities to a fear of coming out as a homosexual, as is often one variation of the mutant metaphor, but is actually a more general fear of being the other and being identified as such. Author and psychiatrist, Fredric Wertham showed very strong opposition to comic book publishers and fandom in 1948 and published his *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954. He wrote that "the normal concept for a boy […] is to wish to become a man, not a superman, and to live with a girl rather than with a superheroic he-man" (Regalado,161). It is clear that Wertham believes that superhero comics are a bad influence because they challenged homosocial roles and views, and celebrated the "other," but we also see through Wing that being an X-Man means to embrace the "otherness" within one's self. For other X-Men characters, the earnest wish to be "normal" is expressed quite often in the comics, and especially in modern film adaptations. Bobby Drake (codenamed Iceman) comes to terms with his otherness when he comes out to his parents that he is a mutant, while Anne Marie (codenamed Rogue) learns to pursue meaningful relationships with her classmates though she cannot touch them; she possesses the power to absorb a person's life force by touching them and refrains from romantic/sexual relationships (X2: X-Men United, 2003). Wing's depressive state is on account that he cannot be with the so-called "superheroic he-men" that Wertham

regards as uncharacteristic of being "normal." Most certainly, it echoes the torment of adolescents to fully " […] understand that skin colour, citizenship, religion, spirituality, languages, accents, and other characteristics operate to inform their difference and their possibilities in society" (James, 129); that these differences are parts of their identity that, if repressed, have catastrophic impacts on their psyche. The loss of his powers would essentially force Wing to live a life as a normal human being, for which we see a shift in the reaction to the metaphors; the yearning to be normal that we saw with Beast is juxtaposed with Wing, the idea of being normal thus becomes a constraint against expression and fulfillment of one's identity. The "other" yellow option grants an alternative pathway to self-discovery from the traditional blue and red, and Wing recognizes a sense of belonging at the X-Mansion with the other mutants.

While the core team of the X-Men face off against an anthropomorphic lizard monster in the streets of Manhattan, their allied friends The Fantastic Four come to assist. The confrontation with the monster serves no real purpose in relation to the story arc, as the creature they face only really challenges their combative prowess and capabilities of the X-Men, a feat that is plain and greatly reminiscent of the Golden Age of Comics. The inclusion of The Fantastic Four, however, does function as a foil to the way in which the X-Men are perceived by the general public in comparison to that of Mr. Fantastic, the Invisible Woman, Human Torch, and even the Thing, who malformed rocky exterior is perceivably accepted by the team and the public. The X-Men fight to protect those "that hate and fear them," but by all account the Fantastic Four are mutants too, only their powers were acquired by accident. Still they are beloved by the people of New York, work with the government, and even reside in Manhattan themselves. The fear of the X-Men might be a response to the fear that mutation can occur in anyone as the mutant x gene is passed on.

A shifting back and forth between the battle and that of Wing standing at the precipice of a cliff are very much linked together. The villain Danger, having taken the form of Wing's friend Hisako (codenamed Armor), states in the first panel that "I know what you're thinking," showing only Wing's face focused in on, with dark clouds in the background. She continues with "You can't fly Eddie" to

which Wing replies “My name is Wing.” Danger reminds Eddie that he has lost his powers and that he is no longer “gifted if [he] doesn’t have the gift.” In reaction to her taunting, his inner turmoil is put into more direct language as he state “Who cares?! I can’t fly, I might as well just snuff it! You don’t know what this feels like. If you lost your armor, what would you do?” Danger’s response, which is only partial and finishes on the next page with a large scale image of the team fighting in Manhattan reads: “Well, if I had any real guts at all…/…I’d jump off a cliff” (Issue #7). The colourful wideshot of the two teams fighting functions as a reminder to Wing of that which he cannot be a part of and conceivably we are not only witnessing the battle in Manhattan, but the inner longing of Wing to be a part of the X-Men team. Here we see a divided individual, or a divided personality in Wing as he faces off against his shadow aspect. Although Danger is pretending to be Armor and indeed intent on killing him, she provides Wing with an actual shadow aspect to face as she challenges him to accept his humanness. Jung insists upon a recognition of these two impetus sides of the same personality that may either work in cooperation with or against each other in the battleground of the mind:

> It is on such evidence that psychologists assume the existence of an unconscious psyche — though many scientists and philosophers deny its existence. They argue naively that such an assumption implies the existence of two "subjects," or (to put it in a common phrase) two personalities within the same individual. But this is exactly what it does imply—quite correctly. And it is one of the curses of modern man that many people suffer from this divided personality […] This predicament is a symptom of a general unconsciousness that is the undeniable common inheritance of all mankind (Jung, Approaching, 23).

The reader is shown the disheveled symbol of a real physical battle in order to bridge the idea that there is a mental battle taking place in the mind of an adolescent boy who is confused, scared, and uncertain of his new place in society. The reader recognizes that the contemplation of suicide is not exactly so simple. In having been a mutant (and under the belief that he can in fact fly), Wing’s refusal to accept his condition shows the two personalities clashing against each other. His fear of being a puer in the narrative of his own life is felt in the words that Danger imparts to him. This would certainly be cause for concern if we pause to compare what the life of puer entails in the fictional narrative. From a mythologist’s outlook, “[t]he life of a puer in myth invariably ends in premature death, which psychologically means the death of

the ego and a return to the womb-like unconsciousness" (Segal, 109). Indeed, Danger plays upon Wing's fears by telling him that "he gets to go home." In this case, the shadow aspect wins, proving to be the dominant of the two personalities.

It is interesting to note that the actual Hisako, who appears in Issue #8, is wearing a white shirt, while the fake Hisako hologram (Danger in "disguise") wears a black shirt. Danger's impersonation is thus very emblematic of the shadow aspect, literally draped in darkness like that of an actual shadow. However, we realize much later that the location in which the two characters are talking is not the demesne of the Xavier mansion, but rather within the actual Danger Room itself, for Danger can only interact through her programing, using holographic simulations to manifest a physical presence. Campbell refers to this encounter as being in the "belly of the whale." In his famous interview with Bill Moyers, Campbell said that the mythic theme involves being trapped in close confines with the shadow aspect, like that of Jonah inside the whale. It is a dark place where digestion takes place and new energy is created and thus is very much symbolic of a transformation; sometimes a good one in which the hero survives and sometimes a bad one in which the process of death and resurrection might be possible, or the hero aligns himself with the shadow and then succumbs to the infectiousness of the dark personality, all of course depending on the success of the hero to make the right choices within the story: "It's a descent into the dark. Psychologically, the whale represents the power of life locked in the unconscious. Metaphorically, water is the unconscious, and the creature in the water is the life or energy of the unconscious, which has overwhelmed the conscious personality and must be disempowered, overcome and controlled" (Campbell, The Power, 146). Here Campbell provides a translation of the shadow aspect into narratology as a symbol of a whale, a monster of the deep that swallows the hero whole. This definition fits in quite well with the state of the Danger Room, especially in this series where it has become a living thing.

We might imagine that Wing and the children have been swallowed whole by the school itself and that the belly of the whale that translates best for the Xavier mansion is the Danger Room with all of

its dangerous devices and holograms. This interpretation makes perfect sense since the beginning of this story arc actually starts off with a bird's eye view of the school, giving the illusion to the reader that story begins as an outward journey when actually we are within the structure, within a dream scenario orchestrated by Danger. We might identify the circular shape of the "School for Higher Learning" with Campbell's famous "pedagogical stunt," as he called it. On a blackboard he drew a picture of the psyche similar to that which was drawn by Marie-Louise von Franz in her essay on the process of individuation. In his explanation he explains that "Plato said the soul is a circle. I draw a horizontal line across the circle to represent the line of separation of the conscious and the unconscious. The dot in the center of the circle, below the horizontal line, represents the center from which all our energy comes. Above the horizontal line is the ego, represented as a square: that aspect of our consciousness that we identify as our center. But it's very off-center. We think this is what is running the show, but it isn't" (Campbell, The Power, 142). The school is an excellent blueprint or metaphor for this Jungian model of the unconscious, for we see a dot in the center and can make out various squared peaks and pinnacles from that elevated standpoint. The metaphor functions very well here because the readers are forced to recognize the collective properties of the school. It is a structure built for many, rather than a singular individual and while each panel focuses in closer and closer onto Wing, the presence of other students walking the grounds is a reminder that teen angst and feeling like being an outsider are very much shared shadow aspects by teenage boys and girls. The encounter with Danger or Wing's shadow aspect is as much of a simulation of an inner struggle for the reader as it is for Wing. The end of the issue is incredibly mythological as a blindfolded psychic mutant informs the X-Men that with Wing's death, Danger will be set free shortly after. Her prophecy is followed by a wide-shot panel zooming in on Wing's corpse that closes in slowly on his eye. From there, each panels backs up into a bird's eye view of Wing, lying sprawled on the ground, lifeless on a blue floor instead of grass, evidently in the Danger Room. The writing on the computer reads "Danger Room Simulation Environment: Campus Exterior/ Exercise Complete" and with that, Wing's encounter with his shadow aspect (Issue #7).

Danger's goal is revenge and is an impulsive reaction to the torment she endured as she was forced into the servitude of the X-Men by Professor X. During her attack on the X-Men and the students, she relies upon archetypal images that are often associated with the concept of evil, drawing upon her knowledge of biblical setting from her archives to create a smouldering inferno once the students are locked inside the Danger Room. As a precaution during her attack, all of the children are relocated to the Danger Room as it is the most fortified and secure room in the mansion, but what was believed to be a place of safety turns out to be a house of terrors. Similarly, the shadow aspect acts as such, appearing nonthreatening at first, for it is part of the whole personality, but consequently it is also very dangerous terrain for the hero. Of course, as the reader learns, this was Danger's plan to begin with, to trap the children, but interestingly, not to kill them. Instead, she forces them all to face a series of torments, giving life to monstrous slug and bat-like creatures and subjecting them to all sorts of terrors. What is most intriguing about this scene is that she describes the simulation as such: "This is a celebration! A Mitzvah! It's More. It's really a nativity scene, except nobody here is wise." These religious references seem more in line with the initiation phase of the hero's journey, if we consider the segment in the comic from the hero's perspective. They are very much trapped in the belly of the whale, contesting against all sorts of trials. It is important to note that the students, including Kitty Pryde, are subjected to the psychological collapse of Danger's unconscious mind and the demonic manifestations that she creates are translations of her anguish and suffering, borrowed of course from the breadth of knowledge she holds in her programming about human society. In that regard, the horrifying conception of hell is also a representation of the shadow (feelings of anguish, frustration, love and hate) that dominates Danger's personality. For the villain, such a successful evocation and dominance of the self by the shadow aspect is characterized by a damaging relationship and has transformative effects making it the initiation phase of the villain as well. Clare Pitkethly, author of "Straddling a Boundary: The Superhero and the Incorporation of Difference," argues that the mutant superhero and supervillain especially is "[…] a figure of contradiction, a figure marked by an identity crisis: He or she belongs to two different worlds and is not entirely at home in either" (25). Wing is a prime example of this as we have discussed, but so

too is Danger, who was created for one purpose by Professor X, but in losing that purpose, or transcending it, becomes utterly possessed by the shadow aspect. Ramzi Fawaz would agree that the

> […] dual ambivalence formed the core logic of the demonic possession story, which offered readers a spectacular story of the psychological unraveling whose material consequences—including physical violence inflicted upon one's former allies and the destruction of personal relationships, if not entire worlds—propelled the narrative outward toward a wider network of sociopolitical relations both affected by and shaping the perceived motives of the charaters at their center (210).

When Danger assumes control over the lifeless body of Wing, there is further support that Danger is representative of a mutant undergoing an identity crisis. She is the only one of her kind, thus even more so alienated from those around her, and her transformation offers an indictment of what the human race represents; a divided nation undergoing a crisis of identity in itself. Here the reader is introduced to a two part shadow, one that represents the personal fears of Wing, his feelings of inadequacy and being an outcast that are in many ways tied to Danger's own feelings, but one that also plays upon the collective fears of many and is representative of the "collective infection" of man as von Franz calls it. For Danger is a being that has significant influence over the environment of the Danger Room, as well as the ability to manipulate and control binary and quantum computers, which is by far the most frightening power in our technological age. We may not have total control of our environment as Danger does, however we do possesses control as a collective working body over the sociological and political conditions of our world.

After transcending her program, that is, finding a way around the "no killing" rule, Danger is able to extend her signal reach far and reanimate two Sentinels, who shout out "I hear you, Lord. I come" (Issue #8). The Sentinels were initially created by Jack Kirby and first appeared in Issue #14 in November 1965. In the initial X-Men comics, they were mutant-hunting robots created by an anthropologist named Dr. Bolivar Trask and designed to hunt down, and capture or kills mutants, usually the latter in the "Days of Future Past" storyline that tells of a dystopian future in which the X-Men team is almost entirely annihilated or captured by an army of Sentinels. Such a villain is quite formidable and there are few of these in the superhero genre. Some important ones might include Apocalypse and the Dark Phoenix

entity. These present themselves as the most interesting as they are quite abstract as a symbol of evil, though their goals and ambitions are quite emblematic of a catastrophic doomsday. At the same time, those collective shadow aspects are ones that we are quite familiar with as we are typically introduced to them at an earlier age in childhood, making them quite identifiable, sometimes through religious texts and sometimes through fairy tales and folklore. Marie-Louise von Franz, in her book *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, explains that:

> The figure of the shadow in itself belongs partly to the personal unconscious and partly to the collective unconscious […] The figure appears as a shadow-hero, more primitive and more instinctive than the hero but not necessarily morally inferior. […] We must ask, therefore, in what psychological circumstances does the hero-image split into a light figure and a shadow companion. A division of this sort often occurs in dreams in which an unknown figure appears for the first time, and the split indicates that the approaching content is only partially acceptable to consciousness (von Franz, Fairy Tales, 114).

I would imagine that such a split occurs in the "belly of the beast" and the final confrontation with the shadow determines the dominant aspect of the individual's personality. With Wing's death, we see the immergence of Danger. This is not to be confused with a death and rebirth archetype in which the hero is resurrected and given another chance, but such an argument could be made in the final confrontation on Genosha where Danger reprograms a massive Sentinel to kill the X-Men. When Kitty Pryde phases through into the Sentinel's brain, she unlocks the memory files that Danger has suppressed in order to fully restore the robot to its previous form of consciousness (Issue #12). She exposes the creature to "[…] aspects of one's personality that for various reasons one has preferred not to look at too closely" (von Franz, Individuation, 168). In doing so, the Sentinel is forced into remembrance of the countless mutant and human lives it had taken in its programed fight for humanity's survival. Ashamed of his atrocities, the Sentinel abandons Danger and takes refuge in space where it can do no harm. In this segment, the Sentinel is made aware of the infectious properties of Danger's collective shadow that has turned him into a pawn for her own personal vendetta (Issue #12). In our lives, the realization of the shadow occurs when we least expect it, when something is said or done, slipping past the ego and the thought lingers on in the consciousness of the individual when he/she never intended to face it. The event resonates strongly of the

moral lesson of the importance of reflection versus responding to primal instincts and emotions. By releasing the memories, Kitty provided the Sentinel an opportunity face his own shadow and confront the dark side of his own personality. The emotional suffering of the creature is a cathartic moment in which the reader and the team jointly evaluate their own susceptibility to the collective shadow.

Conclusion

Joseph Campbell once wrote that "[t]hroughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstances, myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind" (Campbell, The Hero, 1). It would seem that in post-modernity, the superhero story functions as a "mythic compass," a guide that can be referred to in order to make sense of our surroundings, that aid in determining the right choices from the wrong ones, and that help us develop into the heroes of our own real life stories. The appeal of superhero fiction lies in the mythic quality of these larger-than-life stories that are patterned on the myths of old and which reflect our evolving values as a global society. Stories about superheroes show a narrative identity interwoven into the text, a reflection of our own personal mythology and social development, as well as a glimpse into the human psyche. The X-Men comics in particular serve as both social and historical commentary about racial and gender discrimination applicable to our time. *The Uncanny X-Men* (1963) series, written by Stan Lee, as well as modern retellings of the series, such as that of *The Astonishing X-Men* (2004) and the film adaptations of the main series, show evidence that supports the existence of a shared conscious fear of real-world global issues. It is through the final confrontation with the Jungian shadow that real lessons are learned by both the characters and the reader, which in turn add to the construction of a shared consciousness and reflections on human morality and identity. Through symbols and the metaphor of mutation, we observe our own inner, never-ending battle against "evil" and the human power to evoke change in society.

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