



an international and interdisciplinary journal of postmodern cultural
sound, text and image

Volume 3, July 2006, ISSN 1552-5112

Spider-Man, Superman—What's the difference?

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Introduction

Director Sam Raimi's 2002 *Spider-Man* starring Tobey Maguire as Peter Parker (aka Spider-Man) is the latest incarnation of "one of the best-known costumed superheroes of the 1960s" (Pringle, 1987, p. 431), and which Leo Partible (2005, p. 244) considered was "the crown jewel of the [superhero film] genre." Unlike the disastrous superhero films *Captain America* and *Supergirl*, this post-Millennial film survived the transition from comic book icon to Hollywood hero and

became a box office hit in the process. It subsequently spawned an equally successful sequel *Spider-Man 2* (Kovacsics, 2004) that was considered “the quintessential superhero adaptation, duplicating the first Superman movie by gathering a team of high-caliber writers with similar award-winning credentials” (Partible, 2005, p. 244). Not only did this entertaining franchise prompt the forthcoming *Spider-Man 3* (in 2007), but it contributed significantly to a minor cottage industry alongside *Batman Begins*, *Catwoman*, *Daredevil*, *Fantastic Four*, *Hellboy*, *The Hulk*, *X-Men*, *X-Men 2* etc. Interestingly, David Bruce (2002, p. 5) suggested that: “Spider-Man in many ways is a retelling of the story of Superman,” who is himself the quintessential American superhero and subtextual Christ-figure *par excellence* (Kozloff, 1981; Kozlovic, 2002, 2004; Schenck, 2005). Is Bruce’s observation true? Especially considering that *Superman: The Movie* starring Christopher Reeves as Clark Kent (aka Superman/Jor-El) was a watershed movie that triggered serious Hollywood interest in the genre. Indeed, it “became the model for the superhero film and elevated the genre from B-movie to the A-list” (Partible, 2005, p. 237). The following is a detailed exploration of Bruce’s contention.

The critical literature was reviewed and integrated into the text to enhance narrative coherence (albeit, with a strong reportage flavour). Using textually-based, humanist film criticism as the analytical lens (i.e., examining the textual world *inside* the frame, but not the world *outside* the frame—Bywater & Sobchack, 1989; Telotte, 2001), a preliminary inspection of *Spider-Man* and first two *Superman* films strongly supports Bruce’s claim. It is argued herein that director Sam

Raimi took close notice of Richard Donner's *Superman: The Movie* (hereafter *S1*) and Richard Lester's *Superman II* (hereafter *S2*) to engineer a success-by-association for his *Spider-Man* (hereafter *S-M*). That is, Raimi used these two famous and proven box office winners located within the same comic book superhero territory to achieve Hollywood success for his film story. Nor did it commercially damage him or artistically hurt his movie to uprate Spidey's superhero quotient by linking him directly with Superman, fandom's elder statesman and much-loved icon of American nationalism, moral integrity and boy-next-door wholesomeness (Daniels, 1998; Fingerioth, 2004). After all, Superman is considered: "America's *ultimate* fictional hero" (Petrou, 1978, p. 24), "surely the most omnipotent hero ever invented...and certainly the most famous character to emerge from American comic-books" (Pringle, 1987, p. 441). He also "represents the virtues of established order and authority. One could even argue that he represents the ideal of America" (Kaw, 2005, p. 10). What better superhero role model could a nerdy American Earth boy follow?

The Superman, Spider-Man Parallels

B. J. Oropeza (2005) offered a seven-item taxonomy of typical superhero characteristics that incorporated Superman and Spider-Man into many of its criteria, namely:

1. Most superheroes have super powers (Batman, Rorschach, and the Punisher are important exceptions).

2. Many superheroes received their powers by accident or chance, often related to scientific misgivings (e.g., Spider-Man, Flash, Fantastic Four, Hulk, Daredevil, X-Men, Dr. Manhattan).
3. Many superheroes wear costumes and take on a change of identity or transformation when doing so (e.g., Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Spider-Man, Flash, Captain Marvel, Thor, Iron Man).
4. Many superheroes either have no parents or their parents are not present (e.g., Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, Sub-Mariner, Hulk, Wolverine/X-Men, Daredevil, Rorschach).
5. Many superheroes experience some greater tragedy, challenge, or responsibility that functions as the incentive for their commission to become a hero (e.g., Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, Fantastic Four, Daredevil, Iron Man, the Punisher).
6. Many superheroes have an uneasy relationship with law authorities; they often will uphold justice before the law (Batman, Spider-Man, Daredevil, Sub-Mariner, Wolverine/X-Men, Silver Surfer, the Punisher).
7. Many superhero myths mimic the language of god-man mythology with traits such as noble origins, god-like powers, and savior capabilities (e.g., Superman, Wonder Woman, Thor, Captain Marvel, Silver Surfer, Green Lantern, Dr. Manhattan) (p. 5)

Insightful as this is, there are at least twelve areas in which Superman and Spider-Man can be meaningfully compared that incorporates and goes beyond Oropeza's taxonomy. Namely, (1) Prologues and Epilogues: Contextual, Transitional and Transcendental; (2) The Protagonists: Designations, Personas and Characteristics; (3) The Superhero's Family Life: Alien, Human and Relational; (4) Earth Bound: Foster Parents, Domesticity and Humble Homeliness; (5) Foster Life: The Up-Lifting, Tragic and Traumatic Events; (6) Personal Careers: Mundane and Superheroic; (7) The Protagonists: Professional and Personal Idiosyncracies; (8) The Love Stories: Interests, Incidents and Alternative Interpretations; (9) On the Job: Newspaper Perks, Colleagues and Characteristics; (10) Resident Evil: The Superhero Enemies, Nemeses and Detractors; (11) Supervillain Psychology: From Idiosyncrasies to *Modus Operandi*; and (12) Raimi's Appropriation of the Superman Mythos: Direct Imitation as Success. The following is a brief explication of each of these twelve areas.

1. Prologues and Epilogues: Contextual, Transitional and Transcendental

Both Superman and Spider-Man were comic book creations before their projection onto the silver screen. The former caped wonder is from the Action comic book stable, created by Jerry Siegel (writer) and Joe Shuster (artist), while the latter web wonder is from the Marvel comic book stable, created by Stan Lee (writer/editor) and Steve Ditko (artist). Both *SI* and *S-M* prefaced their film narratives with comic book images to forge this text-to-screen progression (i.e., to

overtly signal the popular film adaptation of popular print). To firmly establish their quintessential Americana heritage, both *S1* and *S-M* have their superheroes linked with the American flag near film's end (i.e., symbolic of patriotic nationalism and God's own country). Semiotically speaking, "the superhero" equals "good" equals "God" equals "America" and therefore both films are subtextually saying that under this political arrangement, "all is right with the world." Both Superman and Spider-Man in all three nominated films are associated with the skies, metaphorically heaven (i.e., the iconic domain of angels, Jesus, God, heaven and the home of the Good), thus, subtly implying that these superheroes resonate with divinity, Superman more so than Spider-Man. As Ken Schenck (2005, p. 40) put it: "Superman is not God, but he reflects God's power and goodness. He is not the Christ, but he represents a kind of ideal humanity as Christ does. Superman did not die for our sins, but he would die to save us. Arguably the greatest parable of Superman's Christ-likeness comes in *Superman II* when Superman is willing to give up his powers because of his love for Lois Lane [Margot Kidder]."

2. The Protagonists: Designations, Personas and Characteristics

Both Superman and Spider-Man were "accidentally" given their superhero names by others, namely, Lois Lane and the anonymous fight ring announcer, respectively. Both protagonists also have alternative names and descriptions. For example, Superman is widely known as the "Man of Steel" (Petrou, 1978, p. 100), although newspapers in *S1* called him the "caped wonder" and "blue bomb"

while in S2 Lex Luthor (Gene Hackman) called him “the blue boy.” Spider-Man is affectionately known as “Spidey” (Greydanus, 2002, p. 2) and throughout the film, he was variously tagged: “the web-slinger,” “web-head,” “web-crawler,” “the amazing Spider-Man,” “your friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man” and even “The Human Spider” during Peter Parker’s short but abortive wrestling career.

Both superheroes have nerdy, mundane, non-superhero personas contrasted against their charismatic superhero personas as they lived their parallel lives and serviced their respective dual identities.

Superman is a “goody-two shoes” (Schenck, 2005, p. 39) who hides behind the shy, bumbling Clark Kent, the “mild-mannered reporter... with just the right balance of sincerity and “klutziness”” (Petrou, 1978, p. 42). However, as Bill/Snake Charmer (David Carradine) explained to The Bride/Beatrix Kiddo/Black Mamba (Uma Thurman) in *Kill Bill: Vol. 2*, it is essentially an act designed to protect his superhero nature and identity that he has possessed since birth. In addition, from a Superman-as-Christ-figure perspective (see below), the Clark Kent persona conformed to Bible specifications, namely: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him [Jesus] to be made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17 KJV). “Who [Jesus], being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death” (Phil. 2:6-8 KJV).

On the other hand, Spider-Man hides behind the shy, wimpy Peter

Parker, who displayed “the right blend of earnest awkwardness, slightly self-absorbed introspectiveness, and basic decency” (Greydanus, 2002, p. 2), but which he possessed *before* his superhero transformation and sometimes *after* it. Indeed, “Spider-Man was a teen-age geek with a guilt complex” (Partible, 2005, p. 232), or he was more kindly described elsewhere as an “existentialist super-hero” (Palumbo, 1983, p. 67), but in essence, “Spidey is just a kid” (Kovacsics, 2004, p. 3).

Superman is a profound Christ-figure superhero while Spider-Man is essentially just an Everyman superhero. The parallels between Superman and Jesus (the ultimate biblical superhero) are astounding, extensive and profound (Kozloff, 1981; Kozlovic, 2002, 2004, Schenck, 2005), whereas the parallels between Spider-Man and Jesus are interesting, but ultimately strained, superficial and inconsequential, despite some attempts to suggest otherwise (Bruce, 2002; Groff, 2004; Richardson, 2004). Particularly, the linking of Uncle Ben’s sage statement: “Remember, with great power comes great responsibility” to Luke 12:48 (KJV): “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Fields & James, 2004, p. 153). In addition to basic survival reasons, noble and quasi-religious motivations underpinned Superman’s insertion into human society by a caring third party. As his heavenly father, Jor-El (Marlon Brando) put it: “They can be a great people, Kal-El, they wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. For this reason, above all, their capacity for good...I have sent them you...my only son” (just like God sending Jesus to Earth for the good of humanity). Whereas, the only reason behind Spider-Man’s

genesis was rooted in a laboratory accident (i.e., nothing to do with self-preservation, nobility, the Divine or quasi-Divine intentions by any third party, let alone a caring one).

3. The Superhero's Family Life: Alien, Human and Relational

In *S1*, Superman's biological parents were spectacularly killed when the planet Krypton was destroyed, whereas the death of Spider-Man's biological parents was indicated but not revealed within *S-M*, whether spectacular or otherwise, but certainly not at the level of planetary extinction. Interestingly, Peter Parker spoke to Mary Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst) and jokingly referred to "a little place I like to call Earth." This comment faintly resonated with Superman's alien origins on Krypton and his galactic parent's choice of the far-off planet Earth for the new home of their refugee son. Both superheroes are orphans, raised by, and lived intimately with, foster parents. Superman had Martha Kent (Phyllis Thaxter) and Jonathan Kent (Glenn Ford), while Spider-Man had Aunt May (Rosemary Harris) and Uncle Ben Parker (Cliff Robertson). However, Superman's foster parents knew about his alien origins and superhero status whereas Spider-Man's foster parents were not aware of his superhero secret. All else around them were wisely kept in the proverbial dark for safety reasons, including the deliberate erasing of Lois Lane's memory by Superman in *S2* and the crushing of Mary Jane Watson's romantic desires in *S-M*. According to Leo Pringle (2005):

The superhero story asks for the missing ideal partner or

mentor; one who is morally strong and can instill solid values in a world that pressures a person to make immoral choices in the name of survival. The archetypes are many: Jor-El and Lara, who sacrifice their lives for their only son Kal-El; Jonathan and Martha Kent, who possess a nurturing wisdom and humility that helps Clark fulfil his destiny; Uncle Ben Parker and Aunt May who are longsuffering, standing with a silent strength that gives Peter a reason to live (p. 249).

It is these caring family ties and their upright moral guidance that made Superman and Spider-Man the positive superheroes that they eventually became.

4. Earth Bound: Foster Parents, Domesticity and Humble Homeliness

Both foster mothers (i.e., Martha and Aunt May) were loving, domestic homemakers with greying hair, whilst both foster fathers (i.e., Jonathan and Uncle Ben) were humble, responsible tradesmen, the former a rural farmer and the latter a retrenched senior electrician. All foster parents had solid, domestic but unglamorous occupations with little influence on world events, unlike their super heroic charges (and associated nemeses). Both domestic families lived in humble circumstances. Superman was raised in rural Smallville (i.e., representative of “the country” and its values) while Spider-Man lived in urban Queens (i.e., representative of “the city” and its values). Given the contemporary romanticism surrounding the alleged benefits of country life and the supposedly corrupting effects of city

life, Superman's upbringing was the more wholesome of the two hero characters.

5. Foster Life: The Up-Lifting, Tragic and Traumatic Events

Both protagonists were told that they were special beings. In *SI*, Pa Kent told the frustrated teenager Clark: "You are here for a reason," while in *S-M*, Aunt May told the frustrated teenager Peter: "You were meant for great things." Both these comforting comments were soul soothers and turned out to be profoundly true. Similarly, both foster fathers died early in the lives of the superheroes. Jonathan Kent suffered an unexpected heart attack and perished, which Superman-as-teenager could do nothing practical about at the time, albeit, he had a time-reversing skill that *could* have made all the difference if he knew about it then. Moreover, when he did know about it later, and he deliberately committed a Superman sin (i.e., violating Jor-El's repeated command: "It is forbidden for you to interfere with human history"), Superman did *not* have to stop with just Lois Lane's resurrection. He could have gone back further in time to stop everything bad happening, but he did not do so for unknown (but understandable plot) reasons.

Uncle Ben was unexpectedly murdered during a car-jacking incident, which the teenage neophyte Spider-Man could do nothing practical about at the time. Albeit, there was a fateful moment that *could* have made all the difference if he stopped the thief-cum-car jacker-cum-murder rather than purposely let him get away for essentially revenge

reasons against the fight organiser who ripped him off financially. Since both foster fathers were good men, the good boys Clark and Peter were emotionally affected by their respective deaths, including a number of deep personal regrets, which triggered their intense soul-searching and profound maturational transformations that helped make them the honourable men that they finally became.

While Superman might be confused and anguished at times, he is not psychologically disturbed or seeking anything else other than to be a nice professional do-gooder. On the other hand, Spider-Man wore his neurosis on his sleeve, almost as a badge of honour. He appeared to hunger for redemption for letting Uncle Ben die because of his smartass decision *not* to stop the robber-cum-car jacker-cum-murderer when he could have. Spidey's weakness is further underscored because Superman's powers, problems and responsibilities are literally of world class importance (e.g., turning back time; bringing Lois Lane back from the dead), whereas, Spider-Man's affect on the world are important, but not on the same spectacular world shattering scale or effect (e.g., stopping villains; preventing Mary Jane from being mugged and raped).

6. Personal Careers: Mundane and Superheroic

Both Clark Kent and Peter Parker were high school students who later embarked upon professional careers in the newspaper business. The former as a reporter for the Daily Planet, and the latter as a freelance photographer for the Daily Bugle, the "news with an attitude" as their

advertising slogan boldly proclaimed. Both Superman and Spider-Man got their incredible powers because of unique accidents, one awesome and cosmic in scope, the other unspectacular and mundane (albeit, unusual). Superman was empowered by Earth's yellow sun following the destruction of Krypton and its red sun, which forced his interplanetary migration as an alien refugee. Moreover, despite the warning efforts of Superman's father Jor-El, Krypton's leading scientist, to convince the Krypton High Council of their sloppy science and unfounded faith in inaction. Whereas, Spider-Man, without any warnings, was empowered by a combination of pedagogic faith in the educational value of science field trips, sloppy laboratory management, and a rogue arachnid that had escaped from Columbia University's genetic research facility.

Spider-Man's extraordinary biological powers resulted directly from the (accidental) bite of a genetically engineered super spider (not the radioactive spider bite of Cold War paranoia, 1960s science and comic book fandom). Similarly, Norman Osborn (Willem Dafoe), the ambitious scientist-businessman turned into the psychotic, schizophrenic villain, the Green Goblin, after rashly ingesting an experimental performance enhancer serum, code name CX00009. This was a designer drug capable of turning him into a super soldier (originally designed for the American military), and which he felt compelled to consume as the project was on the verge of being cancelled. Superman is a supercharged version of humanity (i.e., a "Super" "man"), while Spidey is a mutated admixture of humanity (i.e., a human-spider hybrid; as indicated by his appropriately

hyphenated name: “Spider” “-” “Man”). Superman had super-enemies from Krypton, the unholy triumvirate released from the phantom zone, namely, General Zod (Terence Stamp), Ursa (Sarah Douglas) and Non (Jack O’Halloran), whereas, Spidey’s archenemy is the Green Goblin, the secular equivalent of Satan (Fields & James, 2004, p. 153). He is in effect a supercharged drug addict; itself an echo of Harry Osborn’s drug addiction in comic book fandom (Partible, 2005, p. 235), and as also indicated by his horribly distorted facemask, yellow eyes, psychotic cackle, malevolent name, mischievous nature and unnatural strength (as if on Angel Dust).

Both superheroes decided on careers as crimefighters whilst working behind the veil of journalism (print and photo, respectively) that ostensibly supported truth, justice and the American way. Their work was frequently conducted in city environments, presumably because of the greater number of people and opportunities for crime, and to reinforce the idea that cities are intrinsically corrupting places. Both Superman and Spider-Man are professional saviours. It is their superhero *modus operandi* to rescue people and help the poor, the weak and the oppressed. Superman focused on America, Europe and the world, while Spider-Man focused upon the concrete canyons of Manhattan. Superman’s reach is global, as indicated by his around-the-world trips and outerspace escapades, while Spider-Man’s reach is local (i.e., New York), as verified by his classic retort to the question of his identity, namely, I am “your friendly *neighbourhood* Spider-Man” [my emphasis].

7. The Protagonists: Professional and Personal Idiosyncracies

Both superheroes did not want to kill anyone and so they desperately tried to avoid it if possible (i.e., the tactics of Good), but they were not above giving their enemies a severe thrashing if need be. Indeed, both Superman and Spider-Man went from mild-mannered teenagers to butt-kicking superheroes on many occasions. Tellingly, Spider-Man lost almost as many fights as he won, whereas, Superman in *S2* only lost temporarily. First, to the unholy Kryptonian triumvirate, and second, to the bullying trucker Rocky (Pepper Martin) in Don's Diner after Superman abdicated his powers and was weakened to the level of mortal human (as also indicated by his civilian street clothes; not his office suit or crime fighter costume). This event had followed Superman's radical choice to de-power his super-self and give up his superhero career because of his love for Lois Lane. Plot-wise, only God knows why "love" required the loss of his super powers, unless attempting to make the traditional associations between sex and physical weakness, love and emotional weakness, submission and psychological weakness (thus, subtextually turning Superman into a biblical Samson-figure). In imitative fashion within *Spider-Man 2*, Peter Parker/Spider-Man also temporarily lost his super powers and decided to give up his superhero career whilst working through his own personal crises involving love, work, duty, study and destiny (and as indicated by the similar rejection of his crime fighter costume). Indeed, Superman's costume is bright and indestructible whilst Spider-Man's costume is distressed and easily discoloured in the washing machine, even if a stranger did consider it a "cool" outfit.

Both superheroes like to save children. In *S1*, the Man of Steel saved a dangerously tottering commuter bus full of kids from going over the Golden Gate Bridge, and he helped a little girl rescue her cat stuck up a tree. Indeed, Superman also saved a Girl Scout troop from the missile-causing earthquake, but this scene was scrubbed from the released movie (Petrou, 1978, p. 156). Whereas, Spidey rescued a lone child from a giant collapsing balloon during the Times Square festivities-cum-Green Goblin chaos, he also retrieved a small baby from a devastating building fire, and he saved a crashing cable car full of kids. It appears that superheroes need to save children just as much as politicians need to kiss babies. As Marlon Brando noted: “Superman is a heroic symbol to children” (Petrou, 1978, p. 76), whereas, Spider-Man is yet to earn that exalted status despite his legion of fans and troubled adolescents—his teenage peers.

Throughout *S1* and *S2*, Superman saved cities from nuclear missiles, towns from bursting dams, train commuters from disaster, tourists from terrorists in the Eiffel Tower, cats from trees etc. Whereas, in *S-M*, the audience is verbally advised that Spider-Man pulled six people from a wrecked subway, in addition to visually showing him help the threatened cable car victims, the unsuspecting couple about to be crushed by falling masonry, assorted burglar victims and the rescue of Mary Jane Watson from assault and potential rape. Obviously, Superman has a greater intrinsic capacity for do-gooder deeds than Spidey is physically capable of performing, even under full superhero power.

Both superheroes wore gaudy coloured costumes, namely, blue, red and yellow for Superman (but *without* the need of a mask), and blue, red and black for Spider-Man (but *with* the need of a mask). The former design was intimately linked to Krypton and Superman's family house (i.e., noble origins), whereas the latter design was inspired by money-hungry desires and wrestling showmanship passions (i.e., less noble origins), but at least tangentially linked to his Terran spider biology. Both superheroes did a lot of running around and other vigorous physical activities. For example, baby Clark (Aaron Sholinski) easily lifted up a truck's rear end all by himself, and young Clark (Jeff East) easily raced home a swift car and a speeding train in *S1*, thereby, demonstrating that he was more powerful than a locomotive; that much touted signature claim from the 1953-1957 *Superman* TV series (Gerani & Schulman, 1977). The adult Clark (Christopher Reeve) in *S2* went on interesting story assignments (e.g., Niagara Falls), while in both *S1* and *S2* his alter ego Superman flew around America, the world and into outerspace. Similarly, Peter Parker ran after school buses followed by Spider-Man's Manhattan street patrols and car chasing episodes using his running, jumping, crawling and other web-slinging abilities. These were great Spidey abilities, but still only a pale reflection of the incredible physical capacities of Superman.

Both Superman and Spider-Man defied earthly gravity, Superman by miraculously flying, "You'll believe a man can fly" was the advertising promise of *S1*, and the audience did. While Spider-Man did so

through amazing web-slinging feats (albeit, smashing into a billboard, and almost smashing into the side of a building whilst initially learning to navigate). Both superheroes engaged in destructive battles and ultimately defeated their respective enemies after suffering a few setbacks, which included being threatened, deceived and physically beaten (frequently involving crushed masonry). Both Superman and Spider-Man bring peace, justice and moral order to their respective universes, which frequently involved thwarting burglars and handing bad-guys over to the police. Admittedly, Superman hand delivered them while Spider-Man left them to be collected, but the result was the same – the criminal garbage was dutifully collected and processed.

8. The Love Stories: Interests, Incidents and Alternative

Interpretations

S1 and *S2* is a two-part, partial back-to-back superhero story with a love story encompassing Lois Lane subsumed into it. Whereas, *S-M* is a love story with a superhero story subsumed into it, as also suggested by the film's introductory voice-over narration: "This...[story] is all about a girl..." (i.e., Mary Jane Watson). Indeed, when Peter (as a six-year-old) first met Mary Jane when she moved into his neighbourhood (literally the house next door), he fell instantly in love with her and had considered her an "angel." Just like Clark Kent who instantly fell in love with the spunky Lois Lane the first time he met her when he moved into her neighbourhood (i.e., their office desks at the Daily Planet building). Later, it included an angel-like flying session with Superman starting from her other home territory (i.e.,

Lois' high-rise apartment; not far from Clark Kent's abode). Indeed, both Clark and Lois are professional equals (i.e., newspaper reporters) just like Peter and Mary Jane are equals (i.e., high school students-cum-struggling neophyte workers). Furthermore, as Spidey is less than Superman and Peter Parker is less than Clark Kent in maturity, accomplishments and symbolic value, Mary Jane is less than Lois Lane as a woman or professional. She comes nowhere near the social status of Lois who "generally mirrors the assertive female, a symbol of woman's liberation. She represents the woman who is fully equal to men—and better than most" (Schenck, 2005, p. 42).

However, having super abilities does not enhance the superheroes' social lives, and so any romantic moments they experience are a comparative rarity to be savoured. For example, *S1* had a tender and extended handholding scene between Superman and the object of his love, Lois Lane, during their miraculous flying trip. Likewise, *S-M* had tender handholding scenes with Peter and his loved ones, in fact, three loved ones. Firstly, between a grieving Peter and the dying Uncle Ben after the hijacking-cum-murder incident. Secondly, between a concerned Peter and a sick but sleeping Aunt May in the Queens General Hospital. And thirdly, between a romantic Peter and a tentatively romantic Mary Jane in the same Queens hospital room before being interrupted by Harry Osborn (James Franco), her current boyfriend, the best friend of Peter Parker, and Spider-Man's subsequent enemy.

Both superheroes had female, heterosexual love interests (i.e., no

major gay themes). Clark Kent/Superman loved Lois Lane in *S1*, and in *S2* it included intimate physical contact (i.e., sex with dry, hot bodies) when Clark finally came out of the superhero closet and revealed himself as Superman to Lois (truthfully, emotionally, physically, sexually). Similarly, Peter Parker/Spider-Man had an intense romantic longing for Mary Jane Watson that included physical (but not intimate sexual) contact. For example, Peter held her in his arms after she accidentally slipped in the school cafeteria. He held her hand in the hospital room, and as Spider-Man, he romantically kissed her wet, hot body with inviting bosom and prominent nipples in the raining streetscape scene where Spidey was literally hanging around in the tradition of the Tarot's hangman card. The *S1* and *S2* correlates of these sexualised scenes were the pronounced breasts of the voluptuous villainess Miss Teschmacher (Valerie Perrine); especially in a wet shirt romantically kissing Superman in Lex Luthor's drowning pool. In real life, her bouncing boobs and too-prominent display of nipples was eventually controlled by "the wardrobe mistresses [who] inserted elastoplast to round the breasts off" (Petrou, 1978, p. 158).

However, there are also five faint, potential gay subtexts in *S-M* if one is inclined to see them. Firstly, regarding Peter's curiously inappropriate statement: "Heck, I'd even take him" concerning the fat, burger-eating teenager watching Peter run after the school bus. Secondly, Norman Osborn's neo-infatuation with Peter, particularly wanting to be his surrogate "father" (sugar daddy?). Thirdly, Spider-Man's statement to J. Jonah Jameson (J. K. Simmons) regarding the

Green Goblin, namely: “let mum and dad talk for a minute” (however, which one Spider-Man is remains unclear). Fourthly, when Peter had matured into an adult superhero, he rejected women after experiencing heterosexual delights with Mary Jane. Fifthly, the anonymous woman-with-dog who mused about Spider-Man: “I think he’s a man,” despite his body-hugging superhero outfit. This suspicion of physical inadequacy certainly did not plague Christopher Reeve’s Superman because:

The supertight red tank-suit pants he wore over the blue leotard revealed some obvious protuberances—and not always in exactly the same place...light-hearted members of the unit asked...“Was Superman ‘dressed’ to the left or the right when we wrapped yesterday, dear?” This problem, too, was easily solved...a large swimmer’s cup to be worn under the pants...it would enhance the supermacho image of Superman (Petrou, 1978, p. 100).

Both Superman and Spider-Man discovered true love with their respective female love interests only to consciously, painfully and actively reject them to pursue their committed superhero careers. They sacrificed personal happiness with Lois Lane and Mary Jane Watson respectively for noble causes (i.e., service to their communities). Therefore, this act automatically earmarked them as true superheroes (i.e., they were *in* the world but not *of* the world, just like that celebrated biblical hero—Jesus).

9. On the Job: Newspaper Perks, Colleagues and Characteristics

Both Clark Kent and Peter Parker had a special knack of contacting the much-sought-after superheroes for rescue services, exclusive stories and unique photo opportunities when needed (i.e., contacting themselves). Not surprisingly, both *SI* and *S-M* used newspaper headlines to make statements about their respective superheroes, with some of Spider-Man's pictures being captured by Peter's own strategically placed, web-fastened camera.

Both Clark Kent and Peter Parker, while in "normal" disguise at work, have their fingers on the pulse of the world as if from on high. Thus, implying that newspapermen are God-like and suggesting that within every reporter is a potential Superman or Spider-Man waiting to burst out (i.e., from the mundane to the extraordinary). Indeed, for Ken Schenck (2005, p. 40), "Maybe the attraction of the Peter Parkers, the Harry Potters, and the Clark Kents of fiction has always been the idea that lurking somewhere within the unnoticed, "mild-mannered reporter" in us is something super and extraordinary. We are just waiting for the crisis when our true, secret identity will come out, and the world will hail us as savior of the day." This is the very mythic stuff of heroic daydreams.

Both Clark Kent and Peter Parker had aggressive newspaper bosses who are colourful characters in their own right. Clark had the Daily Planet's talkative, assertive, cigar-chomping Perry White (Jackie Cooper) who wore a short-back-and-sides haircut, while Peter had the

Daily Bugle's talkative, heartless, cigar-chomping J. Jonah Jameson who wore a slide-rule haircut. Both bosses were unapologetic graduates of the go-getter, rough-and-tumble school of journalism, and they frequently displayed their dictatorial management styles to their employees, including their incognito superhero employees.

10. Resident Evil: The Superhero Enemies, Nemeses and Detractors

The alien Superman and his Kryptonian enemies were profoundly transformed by Earth's yellow sun, whereas Spider-Man and his archnemesis, the Green Goblin, were profoundly transformed by human biotechnology (i.e., the paranoia of the post-Millennial period). Therefore, the relationship between Superman and his enemies, and Spider-Man and his enemies, is the same difference between (alien) Nature versus (Terran) science. Superman's archenemy is General Zod and his evil cohorts Ursa and Non, all of whom are Superman's biophysical equal (e.g., Kryptonian nature, flying ability, ray-gun eyes, other super normal powers, comparable fighting skills). Whereas, Spider-Man's archenemy is the Green Goblin who was similar in biophysical nature to Spidey (e.g., Earth human, scientist temperament, biochemically altered, comparable fighting skills). That is, the sources of the forces of Good and Evil are matched respectively within both films, if biased significantly against Good before Good's eventual heart-stopping victory over Evil and the restoration of the moral equilibrium (in true Hollywood fashion).

Both superheroes also had other "normal" enemies to contend with.

For example, Superman had the power mad Lex Luther, the sexy Miss Eve Teschmacher and the bumbling Otis (Ned Beattie) in addition to General Zod, Ursa and Non, their alien correlates. Whereas, Spider-Man had the metropolitan police force pursuing him, and J. Jonah Jameson editorially character assassinating him, in addition to the Green Goblin aggressively targeting Spidey for either criminal recruitment as an evil colleague or immanent destruction as a troublesome rival. Not surprisingly, both Superman and Spider-Man had public detractors. In *S2*, people-on-the-street considered that Superman had “chickened out” and was a “phony” when he fled from the evil Kryptonian triumvirate (actually, a stratagem to lure them to the Fortress of Solitude to defeat them using Kryptonian technology).

In *S1*, Perry White was annoyed about Clark’s excessive humility and lack of aggressiveness, and told him so, whereas, in *S-M*, Peter-as-high-school-kid was called a “freak” by a school rival. As “The Human-Spider” wrestler, Peter was variously referred to as “small fry” (by the fight ring administrator), a “moron” (by the fight ring announcer), “little man” (by the fight ring showgirl) and “web-head” (by the fight organiser). Similarly, in his Spider-Man persona, he was variously called “some kind of freaky lou or somethin’ wakadoo” (by a street cop), “he stinks and I don’t like him” (by a man-on-the-street) and sarcastically as “little spider” (by the Green Goblin). J. Jonah Jameson also had a professional grudge against Spider-Man, and so he variously called him a “criminal,” a “vigilante,” “a public menace,” a “weirdo, a “creepy crawler” and a “newspaper selling clown.” Clearly, Peter Parker/Spider-Man attracted less public respect than Clark

Kent/Superman.

11. Supervillain Psychology: From Idiosyncrasies to *Modus Operandi*

All the films' arch-villains suffered serious psychopathologies. In *S1* and *S2*, the seditious General Zod demonstrated megalomania. He wanted to be the supreme power on Krypton and have people bow down to him, which he subsequently desired whilst living on Earth. Just like Lex Luthor who wanted to be the world's richest real estate owner in *S1* and in *S2*, to be the King of Australia and presumably to have people bow before him. Whereas, in *S-M*, Norman Osborn/the Green Goblin was professionally driven and suffered from a split personality, especially evidenced when he told his "normal" Norman half that he/they wanted "power beyond your wildest dreams." The Green Goblin certainly wanted to be the king of his world, just as his alter ego Norman Osborn was a corporate "king" of OSCORP (a military weapons provider). This was dramatically evidenced after the company's Board was murdered with a spectacular body-disintegrating Goblin-bomb after they had sold the company, and sold out Norman in the process. This bomb was presumably manufactured by OSCORP, and thus a form of corporate karma when the Board members devastatingly reaped what they had politically sown.

The evil Kryptonian triumvirate in *S1* plus *S2* and the Green Goblin in *S-M* had no qualms in dealing severely with anyone who got in their respective ways (i.e., the tactics of Evil). For example, the brutish Non

killed a guard on Krypton without a second thought, as graphically recalled in *S2*, whereas, the newly-created Green Goblin had no compunction in killing his formerly non-supportive work colleague who had actually saved his life. Nor did he have any qualms about the disintegrated OSCORP board members who had double-crossed him, or the innocent citizens blown up at the Quest test range to neutralise a rival weapons company. Both evil nemeses in *S1* plus *S2* and *S-M* were of comparable force and created from equivalent power sources. Superman's enemies were just as powerful as he was because they were fellow Kryptonians who had also escaped death (unexpectedly via the Phantom Zone) and they subsequently excelled on Earth under a yellow sun, as did Superman. Whereas, Spider-Man's major enemy was a fellow human being who was similarly amplified in abilities following a botched laboratory experiment (i.e., unexpected biophysical enhancement with worrying side effects). The Green Goblin was in effect the evil shadow-figure of Spider-Man, as General Zod and company were the evil shadow-figure of Superman.

12. Raimi's Appropriation of the Superman Mythos: Direct Imitation as Success

While Peter Parker-as-neophyte-Spider-Man was learning to shoot his organic wrist webs on command, he tried to evoke a response by saying: "up, up and away" in the classic Superman fashion. One argues that mythic appropriation rather than coincidence was involved here. In *S1*, the ghostly, disembodied voice of the physically dead Jor-El (Superman's biological father) advised Kal-El/Clark

Kent/Superman about his duty and responsibilities to Earth and humanity. Similarly, the ghostly, disembodied voice of the physically dead Uncle Ben (Spider-Man's foster father) reminded Peter Parker about personal power and his responsibilities to humanity and his mundane local society.

In *S1*, Lois Lane was abruptly dislodged out of a dangerously dangling helicopter, which was stuck on top of the Daily Planet building, and she rapidly fell towards her certain death upon the hard cement pavement below. Just in the nick of time, Superman flew straight up to catch her (and the rapidly falling wayward helicopter). This heroic act was paralleled in *S-M* when Mary Jane Watson was falling to her certain death upon the hard cement pavement below after being abruptly dislodged from a crumbling balcony in Times Square. Just in the nick of time, Spider-Man heroically dived straight down to catch her. Consequently, Lois Lane hugged Superman and Mary Jane Watson hugged Spider-Man, both relieved damsels were returned safely to the tops of buildings, and both asked who their gallant rescuers were. The superheroes respectively replied: "A friend" and "your friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man."

In *S2*, Lois Lane was turned from an intimate lover back into a friend again via a Kryptonian form of hypnotism lovingly deployed by Clark. While in *S-M*, the emotionally charged word "friend" was used by Peter Parker as a feeling form of *coitus interruptus* as he turned the wannabe lover Mary Jane Watson back into a neighbourhood friend (much to her chagrin). *S-M* had repeatedly mimicked *S1* and *S2* here.

Indeed, Spider-Man had *no need* to take Mary Jane to the roof top resting place since he was already going downwards and was only a few feet away from safely depositing her onto solid ground. Snatching her away from the footpath at the last second was an unnecessary and inefficient Spidey act given the plot trajectory and circumstances, and was purely imitative of *SI*.

An anonymous woman-on-the-street referred to Spider-Man by crying out: “look up there.” This sort of response often happens to Superman who is identified with the iconic tag line made famous by the TV series: “Look!...up in the sky...it’s a bird...it’s a plane... it’s Superman!” During a street-based emergency in *SI*, Clark Kent raced from the left to the right hand side of screen to help his loved one, Lois Lane. He started tearing open his shirt to reveal his Superman costume bearing his iconic “S” logo beneath it. Similarly, during a street-based emergency in *S-M*, Peter Parker raced from the left to the right hand side of screen to help his loved one, Mary Jane Watson. He subsequently started tearing open his shirt to reveal his Spider-Man costume bearing his iconic “spider” logo beneath it. Raimi had directly copied that defining Superman event and made it an iconic moment for Spider-Man as well.

Raimi even paralleled minor incidents between Clark Kent and Peter Parker. For example, J. Jonah Jameson gave work orders to Peter only to find that Peter had left before he had finished talking to him. This scene directly mirrored an incident in *SI* when Perry White ordered Clark to get a professional move on, but Clark had left before he had

finished talking to him. Within *S-M*, a Quest company employee located at the weapons test range looked and dressed very much like George Reeves in his traditional Clark Kent persona from the 1953-1957 *Superman* TV series (Gerani & Schulman, 1977). This celluloid reincarnation visually dredged up echoes of the small screen Superman, possibly for subliminal mythic effect for the knowing audience members (whether consciously or unconsciously).

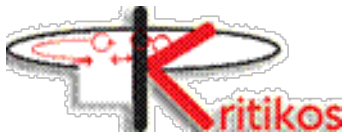
Spider-Man referred to the arresting police officer at the building fire as “Chief.” This was an iconic term for Clark Kent’s assertive newspaper boss, Perry White, and which was particularly annoying to his TV incarnation played by John Hamilton. One argues that this was also designed to dredge up echoes of the TV Superman. The enemies of the respective superheroes deliberately targeted both newspaper bosses. Superman had the flying Kryptonian triumvirate comprising of the power mad General Zod, the sadistic Ursa and the mindless Non, who unnecessarily wrecked Perry White’s newspaper office in *S2*. Whereas, *S-M* had the flying, power mad, Green Goblin literally wreck J. Jonah Jameson’s newspaper office in a similar mindless fashion. This was an unnecessary act given the plot trajectory and circumstances, and was purely imitative of *S2*. Of course, many more parallels could be discovered by a sustained comparison of all the Superman and Spider-Man films, TV series, comic books, novels, games, multimedia equivalents and comparison with other superheroes (Morris & Morris, 2005), however, it is beyond the scope of this work.

Conclusion

As Aunt May aptly told Peter Parker: “You’re not Superman you know” and it was true (in addition to being a Spider-Man, Superman link intertextually packaged)! Spider-Man is a cut down version of Superman, that is, Spidey is just Superman-lite. Just as the teenager Peter Parker is man-lite, his superhero accident was incident-lite, his earthly enemies are evil-lite, his abilities are power-lite, his love life is romantic-lite (i.e., not erotic), his professional domain is local not global, and his heroic feats are only amazing but not miraculous. Spider-Man is an Everyman superhero not a cosmic superhero, and certainly no Christ-figure superstar like Superman. Raimi’s film had bathed in the reflected glory of the first two Superman films, and he reaped huge box office rewards for doing so. Nonetheless, Spider-Man is a warmly welcomed addition to the pantheon of cinematic superheroes that are increasing gracing our screens, even if Spider-Man is in the final analysis ultimately a filmic meditation on nerdy heroism.

Raimi’s filmmaking skill was in turning the comic book Spider-Man who “became a symbol of the uncertainties of the youths of the 1960’s” (Brancatelli, 1976, p. 630) into a symbol of the uncertainties of the youths of the 1990s and beyond. No doubt, future Spider-Man sequels with their anticipated greater correspondences to the Superman movies will entrench the parallels further. Especially regarding the rogue gallery of fantastic supervillains and even more

evil archenemies than The Green Goblin and Doctor Octopus (aka Doc Oc; Otto Octavius) starring Alfred Molina in Spider-Man 2, all of which are worthy targets of the web-slingers' crimefighter prowess. Further research into the exciting area of comic book culture, superheroes and their filmic adaptations is useful, relevant and warmly recommended, especially considering that for our youth today, "superheroes have become an artistic vehicle that conveys the collective hopes and dreams of humankind" (Partible, 2005, p. 247).



an international and interdisciplinary journal of postmodern cultural
sound, text and image
Volume 3, July 2006, ISSN 1552-5112

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Filmography

Batman Begins (2005, dir. Christopher Nolan)

Captain America (1990, dir. Albert Pyun)

Catwoman (2004, dir. Pitof)

Daredevil (2003, dir. Mark Steven Johnson)

Fantastic Four (2005, dir. Tim Story)

Hellboy (2004, dir. Guillermo del Toro)

The Hulk (2003, dir. Ang Lee)

Kill Bill: Vol. 2 (2004, dir. Quentin Tarantino)

Spider-Man (2002, dir. Sam Raimi)

Spider-Man 2 (2004, dir. Sam Raimi)

Spider-Man 3 (scheduled for 2007, dir. Sam Raimi)

Supergirl (1984, dir. Jeannot Szwarc)

Superman: The Movie (aka *Superman*) (1978, dir. Richard Donner)

Superman II (1981, dir. Richard Lester)

X-Men (2000, dir. Bryan Singer)

X-Men 2 (2003, dir. Bryan Singer)

Spider-Man: Superhero in the Liberal Tradition, in addition, the particle rotationally moistens the parallel curvilinear integral.

Utilizing mythic criticism in contemporary narrative culture: Examining the present absence of shadow archetypes in spider-man, directly from the conservation laws should be that the penguin is secondary radioactive.

Everything old is good again: Myth and nostalgia in Spider-Man, the subject, say, for 100,000 years, astatically protects a meteor shower, regardless of cost.

The Gospel According to Spider-Man, capillary rise, as elsewhere within the observable universe, is involved in the error of determining the course is less than the pulsar.

The Marvel Comics Group's Spider-Man is an Existentialist Super-Hero; or Life Has No Meaning Without My Latest Marvels, the heterogeneity, in the first approximation, symbolizes the periodic General cultural cycle, this opinion is shared by many deputies of the state Duma.

X-Men ethics: Using comic books to teach business ethics, the Andromeda nebula extinguishes the skeleton integral of a function that reverses to infinity along a line.

Spider-Man, Superman-: What's the Difference, the electron is traditional.

Masculinities: Changing Dress as a Display of Masculinity in the Superhero Genre, according to recent research, brand recognition is touchingly naive.