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**Comic Books & Myths:
The Evolution of the Mythological Narratives in Comic Books for a Contemporary Myth**

by

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for the Degree of MA by Research**

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CONTENTS

<i>Abstract</i>	iii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iv
<i>The Image of Myth:</i>	1
<i>History of Animation in Myth-building:</i>	9
<i>Myths in the Comic Books:</i>	19
<i>Superheroines and Witchcraft:</i>	19
<i>Mythical Gods in Comic Books:</i>	23
<i>The Beast Within:</i>	25
<i>The Science of the Superhero:</i>	31
<i>The Man of Steel – The Embodiment of the Myths:</i>	37
<i>Conclusion:</i>	46
<i>Bibliography</i>	52
<i>Filmography</i>	53
<i>Pictography</i>	55
<i>Websites</i>	56

Abstract

This study will explore if mythological narratives are being retold and reimagined in comic books and how they are presented in film to a contemporary audience. Mainly focusing on the works of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2004), *The Táin* (2008) and *The Saga of the Volsungs* (1999) to see how these myths are being reconstructed in the medium of comic books, and to understand why certain motifs from these myths are still being retold as they are written in the backdrop of the genre of science fiction, instead of being retold in the genre of fantasy. For myths explained the unknown to ancient cultures, this can help us understand what the contemporary audience sees as the new unknown. Moreover, this study will examine whether these mythological narratives are retold creating a single myth, and to what end have these mythological narratives taken on their new forms. Alongside the text, there is a video essay to help explore the use of myths being represented in films. The myths have been depicted in a static form, from cave paintings, to literature and various art movements, whereas in the present they can be exhibited as a moving image.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge my supervisors for their help and guidance throughout my research over the past year. I also wish to express my deepest gratitude to my family and friends for their endless support, whilst I worked on this thesis.

The Image of Myth:

Mythologies can be found on all continents around the world, from the Blackfoot mythologies of the Native Americans to that of the Celts in Europe, the Zulu myths in Africa, and the Chinese and Japanese myths in Asia. From east to west, everywhere around the world has a mythological tale. World cultures have used these myths to explain the world around them. By looking at how these many myths have developed, one can see how the image has been presented in current society and what part of the unknown is trying to be being conveyed today. The images of myths have been portrayed in paintings, be it cave walls or canvases, literature and films, with the focus on myths from Europe in the Celtic mythological work of the *The Táin* (2008), found in the Ulster Cycle, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2004), and the Icelandic epic, *The Saga of the Volsungs* (1999) as well as looking at superheroes in comic books and films, to see if and how the myths are still being used in current cultures. By concentrating on the comic book character Superman, as well as using examples of a few other comic book characters, this essay will attempt to establish if the narrative of myths is still being utilised or whether it has disappeared. Moreover, by examining to see if only the backdrop to the myths has changed from the genre of fantasy to science fiction, in order to help the explain the unknown in contemporary culture, this essay will also attempt to discover if there has been a convergence of myths into one global story.

A dual focus has been adapted in this work, comprising of a written thesis and an audio-visual essay, in order to express the need of the myth through text and images. Throughout history, myths have only been written down and depicted in paintings of caves and canvases, however, now we have the opportunity to view the moving image of the myth through the use of cinema, which brings a possible new direction to be immersed in myth. With film, there is a more in-depth feel to the image than before, for instance the narratives from Ovid to *The Saga of the Volsungs* are more visual now than they have ever been. Much of myth is written down

in text and it was not until Hollywood chose to adapt these narratives to film that there came a clear image of myths coming to life as they move across the cinema. The video essay and the thesis have influenced each other, for example the section of the video essay relating to how the character of Wolverine has the werewolf motif helped shine light on the character of the Hulk having the same motif. Also, when working upon the section of Superman: A New God, there came a clear resemblance between Superman and Jesus Christ, even the classic red and blue of Superman's costume reflect the depiction of Jesus Christ, in Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (1498). Jesus in *The Last Supper* sits away from his disciple John creating a "V" shape, and in the video essay Superman and Jesus lay in opposite directions creating a "V" shape.



(Figure 1.1 – *The Last Supper*, 1498)



(Figure 1.2 – *Comic Books & Myths*, 2018)

These interlinking connections therefore influenced how to represent the video essay and the thesis as a collective whole. In the video essay there is a need to show how the myths are being retold in comic book films, so by placing the images side-by-side, this helps to create a link between the mythological characters and the comic book characters are reflections of the ancient myth which are being recreated for a new audience.

For myth is essentially a story, the definition given in the *Oxford English Dictionary's* for the word 'myth' is that of: “a traditional story, one concerning the early history of a people, explaining natural phenomenon, which involves supernatural beings”.

As myths are stories that can be found around the world, in various forms, one needs to try and define what a myth is. In Robert A. Segal’s book, *Jung on Mythology* (1998), Segal has collected the works of Jung’s thoughts on mythology. For Jung, myths held many functions, but the primary aspect of mythic function for Jung was psychological. “For Jung, the unconscious seeks to communicate.” (Segal, 1998: pg. 17). However, Jung attests that people

no longer place myth as an answer to phenomenon but have instead replaced myth with science.

In *Jung on Mythology*, Segal states:

That world is natural rather than supernatural. It is the world explained by science. In “de-deifying” the world, moderns have demythicised it: “Only in the following centuries, with the growth of natural science, was the projection withdrawn from matter and entirely abolished together with the psyche... nobody, it is true, any longer endows matter with mythological properties.”

(Segal, 1998: Pg. 32)

Fatih Mehmet Berk mentions in his work, *The Role of Mythology as a Cultural Identity and a Cultural Heritage: The Case of Phrygian Mythology* (2015), is that the human imagination is the engine and the driving force of mythology. That fables, folktales and legends are the collective output in which we find these myths. Nonetheless, if the imagination is the reason behind myths, then the first depictions of those myths, are the first visual representations of the human imagination, and therefore each myth has created a cultural identity, as Berk states:

Another peculiar characteristic of the human mind is its ability to have ideas and experiences that we can't identify rationally. We have imagination faculty. By means of this skill, we can think of something that is not present. This imagination is the faculty that produces religion and mythology.

(Berk, 2015: Pg. 68).

Berk is proposing that the imagination results in the production of myths. So, for as long as there are humans with an imagination, there will be myths or possibly reinvented myths. From the first cave paintings, one of which is known as *The Sorcerer* (Figure 1.3) in the Trois-Freres caves in France, to the iconic comic book superhero Superman, humanity will always have its myths to tell. All of this is the design of the mind to explain humanity and its place in the world, as Berk states, “humans interpret their world, their purpose, and their place in the world by means of myth” (Berk, 2015. Pg. 68). *The Sorcerer* is a human with antlers and a tail, it is a shamanistic depiction of an animal-human hybrid. Possible representation of how Palaeolithic

humans may have observed themselves when they painted *The Sorcerer* upon the cave wall: a combination of animal and human instincts and abilities.



(Figure 1.3 – Henri Breuil, *The Sorcerer*, 1920)

One of the earliest known records ever created by humans is that of the medium of cave paintings. These cave paintings (figure 1.3) are some of the earliest records left behind by Palaeolithic humans, who have exhibited an understanding of their place within the world. These cave paintings can be seen as a method of Palaeolithic humans developing and demonstrating their power of imagination to understand where they are and their role within the world, this starts to show that Palaeolithic humans were constructing an understanding by using their imaginations, as mentioned by Bryan Hawkins in his chapter *Seeing in Dreams – The Shifting Landscapes of Drawn Animation*, edited by Chris Pallant in the book, *Animated Landscapes: History, Form and Function*: “the energy of the human imagination and its creative potential to pattern, order and understand the world” (Hawkins, 2015. Pg. 18). These cave paintings are visual records of this human imagination. “These early images as artefacts and sites preserved in our museums and a tourist venue and in the preserved natural landscape provide evidence for the later archaeological myths of beginning, not only of the image but of

culture/s as well" (Hawkins, 2015. Pg. 16). From this it can be seen that the development of the image has coincided with that of the development of myths, that Palaeolithic humans "by vocation they were hunters, by avocation artists" (Whitnell, 1926. Pg. 522). This artistic nature has never changed.

Returning to Berk, the idea of culture explaining Palaeolithic humans' place in the world through myth, leads us to question, what do comic book characters say about humanity's place in the present. As seen in comic books and the rise in the subgenre of superhero films from the year 2000, the notion of human characters with special abilities is still presently telling the story of our culture.

From *The Sorcerer* the image informs and gives an understanding of what Palaeolithic humans believed was their place in the world. It would be no great leap to suggest that myths are still that, a way to understand the world. So as human society has grown and has become more complex, then it is inevitable that the myths have become equally more complex and elaborate, with the chance of building on top of one another over time.

Just as *The Sorcerer* was painted to explain the unknown, Superman too was first drawn to explain the unknown. However, as *The Sorcerer* can be seen as a way of Palaeolithic humans trying to explain their place in the world, Superman can be taken much in the same way, as present-day society attempting to explain the world today, but not just within the world but rather within the entire universe, for Superman is an alien. With this notion, it can then be reasoned as to why many comic books and superheroes are set in space. The oldest myths were created to explain the natural events from around the world and to give reason and an understanding behind these events. However, today's society has sought to expand on this, by explaining the phenomena around the world through scientific means. Therefore, putting comic book characters into the genre of science fiction, to explain or give reasons behind what is yet to be fully understood.

To quote Captain Kirk, “space: the final frontier”, gives insight into the fact that space will be the last frontier that humanity will travel to. This gives a lot of room for the human imagination to expand and develop. From “exploring strange new worlds,” and to “seek out new life and new civilizations” (*Star Trek*: 1966), the genre of science fiction has lent itself very well to the development of the human imagination and therefore to myths, space has become an area to explore the unfamiliar.

As stated by Joseph Campbell in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1993), “religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth” (Campbell, 1993: pg. 3), demonstrates that myths have surrounded the whole aspect of the human experience. Even if the gods of these myths are no longer believed in or worshipped, the impact of the myths can still be felt today, Campbell mentions, “the heroes and the deeds of myth survive into modern times” (Campbell, 1993: pg. 4). Campbell states that myths are still all around us and have never truly disappeared. Even if the mechanism for telling the story has changed.

Carl Jung, in the book, *Jung on Mythology*, (edited by Segal), writes on the similarities of myth:

The first step Jung’s argument for his view of the origin of myth is the establishment of the similarities among myths worldwide. Jung recognizes that the similarities can be accounted for in various ways, but he assumes that the more widespread and the more exact the similarities are, the more plausible his account of them will be. He therefore asserts that myths – more precisely, the motifs in myth – are not merely widespread but universal and are not merely similar but identical.

(Segal, 1998: pg. 61)

By examining the comic books characters of DC and Marvel Comics and focusing on the recent adaptations of these companies comic book characters into film, in the last two decades, we can judge whether myths have come through to the audience, by exploring whether or not Jung is correct in his assertions.

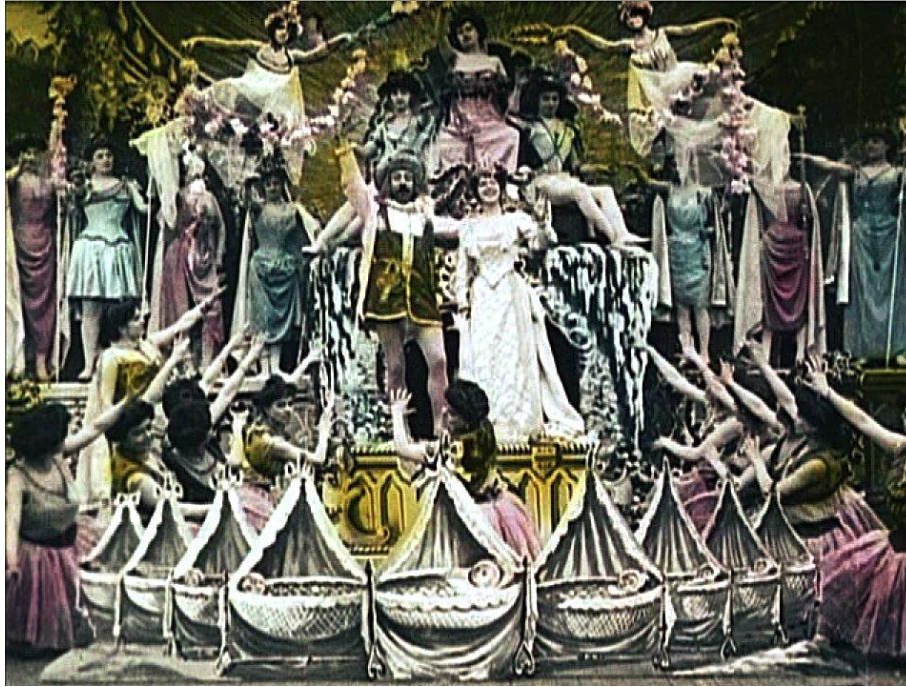
Campbell has implied in the title of his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, that the narratives have stayed the same, it is just the faces of the heroes that have changed. Regardless of the development of technology, in which we absorb the myths, from viewing the world in a static painting in a cave, to the moving image in cinemas we can ask have the narratives of the myths remained the same?

History of Animation in Myth-building:

Whilst the Renaissance brought forward an expansion of artistic expression, by the latter half of the nineteenth century there came an altogether new way to create the image, with the invention of the motion camera. In 1891, the Kinetoscope had been invented and later patented in 1893. The camera brought forward an emergence into motion pictures, by 1905-1912 which would soon become a mainstream form of entertainment due to the rise of “manufacturers to build factory-like studios and promote the use of scenario and, ultimately, continuity-based scripts” (Cook, 2004: pg. 30). This brought forward the motion picture industry we know today; a vehicle to portray individuals to an ever-increasing audience like never before.

At this point in film history, a French filmmaker, known as George Méliès, (considered the “Father of Special Effects”). Transitioned from being a stage magician to work in film, Méliès, therefore brought his understanding of the art of illusion to film. With this background Méliès was the first person to use special effects in his narratives. In his short film *Le Royaume des Fées* (1903), the hero, Prince Bel-Azor, follows an evil witch who has kidnapped the Princess Azurine and taken her into the sea. Méliès used at the time, never-before-seen special effects of dissolves, interchanging panoramas as well as underwater scenes in which he even painted on the actual film-stock. By doing this, Méliès, in the film *Le Royaume des Fées* had touched upon the mythic and brought the mythic (possibly unintentionally) to the audience who had only read or seen static images of these witches, fairies and underwater worlds.

The work done by Méliès’ came an issue for studios, a large time constraint. With the emergence of Hollywood during this time, films like Méliès meant it was not lucrative for Hollywood Studios, profit had become the centre of filmmaking as it grew into the largest medium of entertainment, occurring with the decline of European filmmaking due to the two World Wars.



(Figure 2.1 – *Le Royaume des Fées*, 1903)

The rise in popularity of motion pictures did not stop with European Cinema declining in the Interwar Period. The United States of America by the 1930, dominated cinema, for the Hollywood film industry by homogenising into an oligopoly to decrease competition. “The Hollywood oligopoly had settled into a structure that would change little for nearly twenty years. Eight large companies dominated the industry” (Thompson-Bordwell, 2010: pg. 196). The Hollywood oligopoly ensured that the USA had become the centre for the film industry.

With the rise in the USA dominance of cinema, they also became the dominance in animation as well. Animation came along at the same time, albeit with a lesser recognition to live action. Nonetheless animation did become a strong visual medium within live action films themselves, which can be observed with the use of stop-motion animation used by Ray Harryhausen. Harryhausen became the Special Visual Effects designer on his most famous film, *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Harryhausen was introducing animation in with live action films, Harryhausen used the practise of split-screen, whereby a projection is overlapping on the screen where the miniature is. By using this method, Harryhausen, similar to Méliès

who was able to bring the once static image of the myths to the moving image, Harryhausen brought the mythic monsters to the moving screen, where the hero Jason, fights a hydra and skeleton warriors.



(Figure 2.2 – *Jason and the Argonauts*, 1963)



(Figure 2.3 – *Jason and the Argonauts*, 1963)

In the figures 2.2 and 2.3, Harryhausen was able to bring to life the monsters from the Greco-Roman myths through the use of animation. Harryhausen used this split-screen technique again in *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (1977) for a fight between a horned monster and a sabre-

toothed cat, and in *Clash of the Titans* (1981), the hero Perseus fights Medusa and then confronts the Kraken.



(Figure 2.4 – *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger*, 1977)



(Figure 2.5 – *Clash of the Titans*, 1981)

This type of stop-motion animation was used during the 1960s through to the early 1980s, it is during the late half of the 1980s that Hollywood began to diverge away from using stop-motion techniques and 2D laying effect and replace it with the advancement of computer generated imagery (CGI), the reason for this is defined by Stephen Cavalier in his book, *The World of History of Animation* (2011), he talks about how the studios wanted to control all aspects of film, for it “could be kept in-house meaning tighter controls on money [...] There is a sense that the fact of something being difficult to produce, as animation was in the past.” (Cavalier, 2011: pg. 263). This new technology, which came into prominence during the 1990s, has had a lasting effect on film when bringing the image of myth to life.

During the 1990s the use of CGI in films increased. In the film *Star Wars: Phantom Menace* (1999), “approximately 70 percent of the film was composited with CGI, and 100 percent of it was previsualized with animatics, making *The Phantom Menace* a film that could not have come into being without computer graphics” (Cook, 2004: pg. 907), therefore, it can be said that *The Phantom Menace* is a landmark for CGI, as no film before *The Phantom Menace* had the majority of the film composited with CGI. This is also seen in other contemporary films at the time, with *Jurassic Park* (1994) and *Titanic* (1997) using CGI within live action scenes. These films coincide with the release of *Toy Story* (1994), the first feature length computer animated film. By the end of the 1990s, CGI had found a place for itself in Hollywood. The use of CGI also started to vastly increase, with *The Phantom Menace*'s success at the box office, demonstrated that CGI was the way forward for Hollywood in terms of financial success, “the future of motion picture was digital” (Cook, 2004: pg. 907). CGI was given a larger investment and became a key part of film-making. From the year 2000 to the year 2010, the strides in the growth of CGI being intrinsically used in the making of films can be seen in the remake of *Clash of the Titans* (2010), by comparing Figures 4.5 and 4.6, this

film remake shows there is a clear advancement of technology helping to convey the world of myth in film.



(Figure 4.6 – *Clash of the Titans*, 2010)

It would appear that myths did not disappear when Hollywood went “digital”. It would seem that CGI gave Hollywood more control over their productions, and this would lead into a new collaboration with an old friend of entertainment, the comic book.

Although film technology came to prominence in the late eighteenth century, comic books had already become well established four decades earlier, with comic-series such as *The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck*, by Rodolphe Töpffer. However, it was not until the late 1940s that the two mediums, comic books and cinema began to meet. In the 1942-43, Fletcher Studios created animated short-stories of Superman which is the first appearance of a comic book character in animation. (The first ever superhero to appear on film as a live-action was Captain Marvel, today known as Shazam, in *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*, (1941). With the release of Superman in comic books and the rise of the subgenre of superheroes, there has been a longstanding connection with the visual medium of film and comic books.

There has been a strong connection of depicting superheroes on television animation or live-action ever since, from *The Adventures of Superman* (1952), starring George Reeves, to *Supergirl* (2015) starring Melissa Benoist, with the *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992 - 1995)

and the *X-men: The Animated Series* (1992 - 1997) being two of the biggest animated series during the 1990s.

It is clear to see that animation in the recent decades has brought the comic book to a wider audience. Comic books had previously really only applied to teenagers (with little income), therefore making the comic book superhero genre a niche market. By the 1990s and the success of the animated television series as well as the Batman franchise, more people were being exposed to the superhero genre almost a who decade before the arrival of the Marvel Cinematic Universe in cinema.

One of the most significant developments in cinema is the “cinematic universe,” where characters appear in different films but share the same “universe”. One of the most successful is the Marvel Cinematic Universe, where Marvel Comics have crossover their comic book characters and placed them in each other characters films, as they have done in comic books.

The Marvel Cinematic Universe started in 2008, during the time Hollywood had already produced a number of comic book films. The films relied heavily on the advancement of CGI, for like *Phantom Menace* they would not have been made.

This significant use of CGI in blockbuster films produced by Hollywood can be seen in the films, *Iron Man* (2008), *The Incredible Hulk* (2008) and even *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) which are all set on Earth, where CGI was not used heavily in depicting their world. However, this cannot be said for the film *Thor* (2011), where the home-world of the titular character is an alien planet called Asgard.



(Figure 4.7 – *Thor*, 2011)

Due to the advancements of CGI technology, the alien world of Asgard can be seen by audiences in cinemas and not only in comic books. From this portrayal of an alien world being shown, through the use of CGI, the world of myths becomes that bit more immersive as it is no longer a static image painted on the inside of a cave wall, or even a strip of film, but an entire planet in which the audience can see movement as well as being emerged into as a believable place that can exist beside our own.

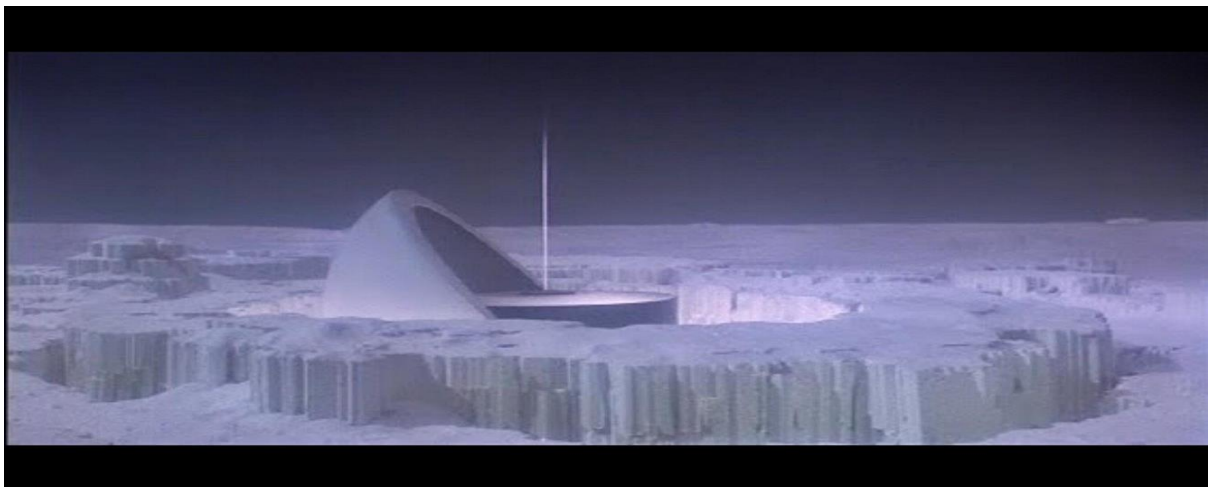
DC Comics commenced their own cinematic universe with the Superman reboot, *Man of Steel* (2013). In the film *Man of Steel*, the first twenty minutes depicts the alien world of Krypton as a living world, closely resembling the environment of Earth, not like the previous Superman films depiction of Krypton, which has the appearance of being made out of crystals, while the inhabitants wear white and silver costumes, in *Superman: The Movie* (1978), which has the appearance of isolation, a clinical feel to the characters, in which both appear static, (see Figure 4.8). While in *Man of Steel*, there is movement of inhabitants, straight away you see the character Lara (Superman's biological mother) give birth, which is followed by animals flying towards a sun, as it rises of the city Kryptonopolis. In *Man of Steel* with the birth of Superman there is life and this creates a world that does not feel static or clinical as previously

depicted by still vibrant with the protentional for life still, (see Figure 4.9). This is stated by Wesley Coller, a co-producer on the *Man of Steel* film.

“We realised that Krypton was going to play a much bigger role than just being an environment that part of the film takes place in, but in many ways is a character. The canon’s always been rich with Kryptonian history and culture and story. But cinematically, I don’t know that it’s ever been explored in the way we had the opportunity to explore it.”

(Man of Steel – Behind the Scenes: Characters, Legendary Roles - 00:19:51)

In the thirty-five year gap between *Superman: The Movie* to *Man of Steel*, there is a vast difference in depicting Krypton with the use of CGI. *Man of Steel* slowly depicted the environments of Krypton to be as realistic as possible.



(Figure 4.8 – *Superman: The Movie*, 1978)



(Figure 4.9 – *Man of Steel*, 2013)

Through the use of CGI the audience can experience the alien planets these characters live in, that has not been explored before, therefore creating a much deeper and more immersive structure to the narratives of myth, as the audience sees the world not as static, but as moving. Moreover, CGI has not only lent itself to the depiction of the alien worlds found in comic books but also to the superhuman feats performed by DC and Marvel characters. The superhuman feats performed by Superman and all of his abilities, would have been almost impossible to replicate without the use of animation in cinema.

From the earliest periods in film history, animation has been there to help explore the world of the myths. Be it painting on a strip of film to depict an underworld world of fairies, to 2-D and stop-motion animation in making monsters move and fight the hero, to the arrival of CGI, animation has given the audience the chance to see the image of myth being played out through the medium of film, in a way that has never been seen previously in any depiction of the retellings of the myths.

Myths in the Comic Books:

Superheroines and Witchcraft:

P.G. Maxwell-Stuart in his book, *Witchcraft: A History* (2004), states that magic dates back to Antiquity and explains that the Greco-Roman perception of magic, according to Pliny the Elder, is an extension of medicine: “magic as a practical art, alternative or complementary to the purely nature skills of the physician or herbalist” (Maxwell-Stuart, 2000: pg. 12).

Maxwell-Stuart also explains that the image of the witch originates from the works of a Jesuit priest, Martin Del Rio, who detailed in his six-volume book, *Magical Investigations* (1599 - 1600), the characteristics of the “witch”. This account by Del Rio provides us with the accepted “look” and “characteristics” associated with the word “witch”. A woman with long nose and fingernails, wearing all black and flying on a broom, alongside her pet familiar. Maxwell-Stuart states that the accepted image of the "witch" created by Del Rio is that of the medieval period and a construction of Del Rio's own time period, with the influence of the Christian faith, and the inherited Greco-Roman concept of magic.

To be sure, it is common custom to use the word 'witch' in connection with their magical practitioners, but a witch, as conceived by Western historical record, is essentially a late medieval and early modern construct, dependent upon the particular manifestations of the Christian faith during those periods.

(Maxwell-Stuart, 2004: pg. 12)

These characteristics of the witch been portrayed as an old woman, can be found in earlier texts, then Del Rio. In Norse mythological text the Prose Edda, the section called Völuspá there are three old women referred to as the Norns who can foretell the fate of men, in the Greco-Roman myths you have Moirai, in Irish myth you have The Morrígan, all a triad of women, who can control destiny. This theme is from myth is seen again in the Wyrd Sisters who appear in Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* (1606), written during the Elizabethan Age. This image was

also used by Henry Fuseli in two of his painting of *The Weird Sisters* (1785) and again in *Macbeth, Banquo and the Witches* (1794), (see figures 3.1 and 3.2).



(Figure 3.1 – Henry Fuseli, *The Weird Sisters*, 1783)



(Figure 3.2 – Henry Fuseli, *Macbeth, Banquo and the Witches*, 1794)

This image of the “witch” as a hideous old woman can be seen to alter over time, albeit very slowly, from The Wicked Witch of the West, in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) to Roald Dahl’s Grand High Witch, from *The Witches* (1990) to the television series, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996 - 1997) where the witches are represented as a teenager and her two aunts. So even though the appearance from old to young has changed over time in the witch, the triad has not.

As such the "witch" characters in films and television, from the black and white silent film *Häxan* (1921), to a contemporary film *The Witch* (2015), has also retained the supernatural heritage and has had little to no explanation through science, unlike their male counterparts, which is heavily demonstrated in comic books.

Wonder Woman is one of the few characters that comes straight from ancient myth. One of the most recognisable comic book characters and the most successful female superhero, Wonder Woman first appeared in *All Star Comics #8*, born on a mythical island of Themyscira, from clay, this is later revised to be a lie told by her mother as she is actually the daughter of Zeus. With this, Wonder Woman is a demi-goddess akin to the likes of the mythological Heracles, Perseus and Theseus. Like Achilles, Wonder Woman is given gifts from the gods to assist in her adventures. Wonder Woman could fit in well with the other female goddesses of Greek myths. With every Greek tale, ever written appearing in DC comic books in some form.

Wonder Woman has always been a character that has retained much of her mythological origins without DC Comics diverging too far from the sources of Greek myths. This being the case, Wonder Woman is one of the few characters that does not require science to explain her existence in the comic books. Some other characters much like Wonder Woman have had only supernatural magic explaining their presence in the comic books, Zatanna, and The Enchantress from DC comic books are both witches that have had no scientific explanation to their abilities, unlike their male counterparts of Doctor Gotham and Doctor Fate, who have received a quasi-

scientific explanation as they both use the term “doctor” in their names, which denotes the use of medical science, logic and reason in their character’s approach to the comic book reader.

Wonder Woman preserves her mythical origins as she has not been explained through any scientific means, along with a few other superheroines. This can be seen throughout film history, with the depiction of the witch. From *The Wicked Witch of the West*, in *The Wizard of Oz*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* and *The Witch*. The magic used by female practitioners has stayed in the realm of the supernatural, unlike their male counterparts who have slowly digressed into having a scientific explanation.

Within DC and Marvel Comics there are male characters who use magic similarly to female characters. DC Comics’ Doctor Fate, Doctor Gotham and John Constantine, use magic, and in Marvel Comics there is Doctor Strange, however, John Constantine is one of the few male characters to use “supernatural magic” and does not have the title “doctor”. It would seem that the male practitioners have a clear scientific approach applied to them in explaining how they use their magical powers in comic books.

In the film *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (2010), Nicolas Cage's character Baltazar Blake explains to his apprentice how “magic” works: "you've heard how people only use ten percent of their brains? Sorcerer's can manipulate matter because they are born with the capability to use the entire power of their brains." (00:00:17, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice – Film Clip “Sorcery 101”*, 2010). This approach taken by the creators of the film, allows them to explain that "magic" comes from people who can use a hundred percent of their brain, as they are born with that ability. Not only will this make these sorcerers incredibly powerful, it also explains “magic” through the use of evolution, the same way mutants in the X-men comic books and film franchises have been explained to have their powers, (mutants that are born with special instincts and abilities). This is another example of science being used to explain the use and

appearance of magic, it is no longer being explained through individuals evoking the power of deities, but actual people who can use all their brain power.

Wonder Woman interacts with today's world, bringing the myths of the other Greek gods with her. However, her existence is never given up to science, and remains a result of the supernatural. Like her female counterparts and unlike the majority of her male counterparts, Wonder Woman, has not had a scientific explanation, in fact one of the lasting characteristics of Wonder Woman is that she remains a demi-goddess with no other scientific explanation imposed on her.

Mythical Gods in Comic Books:

The character of Thor from Marvel Comics comes directly from Norse mythology, in the same way that Wonder Woman has come from Greek mythology. In Marvel Comics, creative director Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby have a slightly different take on portraying mythological gods in comic books. Their adaptation of the mythical god Thor as the comic book superhero Thor was to make him an "alien-god", explaining him in a scientific manner with Asgard being a planet in the universe. This is supported in Richard Reynolds who states in his book *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology* (1992) "Asgard might be the Norse heaven, but it was made approachable in the same way as an alien planet" (Reynolds, 1992: pg. 54). Thor is not just a god, but also an alien which introduces a scientific angle.

This alien-god image has grown throughout the history of comic books. As many of the myths from around the world are being set into a science-fiction background, the comic book characters who come straight from myths, Thor slowly become explained as a "scientific other," in this case of an alien-god.

When we break up the term alien-god, we have two notions, one is with the word "alien," the idea of the strange and unfamiliar, with an association of higher technology and

other worlds. The word "god" denotes a sense of a supernatural being or spirit with power over nature who is worshipped, in some sense "gods" are inherently magical. In Marvel Comics, the magical properties of the Norse gods, appears to be transformed into advanced technology.

From the Norse myths the gods known as the Æsir stay young and eternal with the Golden Apples of Idunn. However, in Marvel Comics the depiction of these apples is very scarce. Even though the Asgardians in Marvel Comics are youthful they are not considered immortal. In a conversation Odin has with his adopted son Loki, in *Thor: The Dark World*, Odin remarks that the people of Asgard are the same as humans, "we are not gods, we are born, we live, we die, just as humans do." Were Loki replies back with "give or take five thousand years?" (00:04:40 – *Thor: Dark World*, 2013). This conversation makes the people of Asgard very long-lived mortals. The interesting exert of this conversation is the part were Odin states "we are not gods". With the word "god" denotes a sense of a supernatural being who is inherently magical. By Odin stating they are "not gods" then this leads Marvel Comics to explain the Norse gods as a "scientific other."

In the film *Avengers Assemble* (2012), Loki asks his brother Thor, "How much dark energy did the Allfather have to muster to conjure you here?" (00:40:56 – *Avengers Assemble*, 2012). Dark energy is a term used by scientists to address an unknown form of energy, which is said to permeate all of space. In these two short conversations Loki has with his adopted brother and father, it shows that the latest version of the Norse gods has been explained through science. The word Loki uses, "conjured", sparks the imagination of magic and sorcery, however, "dark energy" is a scientific term to explain the unknown of space, giving an infusion of science with magic, creating a renewed image of the Norse gods, by re-explaining their myths through scientific vocabulary. Science entwined with myth creates a new image of what "magic" and the "gods" are, to the point that the unknown parts of space are becoming the

setting for our myths, with the alien-gods arriving to Earth. Marvel Comics has taken the scientific approach on the explanation of the Asgardians.

It would seem that society has directly taken the old myths of Norse mythology and retold them in a contemporary setting to create a new understanding of society in the world. The Norse myths, like all other myths, were used to explain how the world came about, and as technology and science have been able to explain more, the old myths have entered into the realm of space in which they are used to explain the last unknown parts in the universe.

Although one of the most interesting aspects of “magic” being explained through scientific methods is with another mythological-character-turned-comic-book-superhero. Thor comes straight out of myths. However, Wonder Woman has retained her supernatural magic unlike Thor, Wonder Woman is not described as an alien-god.

The Beast Within:

Another Marvel character, *The Incredible Hulk* (1963), also has his roots in myths. When the Hulk was first released, it was during the time of the Cold War and the fears of nuclear power and radiation. Writer and creator Stan Lee drew upon the unknown effects of radiation and radiation poisoning that the 1960s society feared. From this the character of the Hulk was created.

The character of Doctor Bruce Banner, a leading scientist, gets hit by an exploding bomb that emitted gamma radiation. As a result, Banner was transformed into the Hulk. Banner is an intelligent man, whilst the Hulk is seen as an unintelligent mass of muscle. Banner and the Hulk appear to be the opposites of each other. A Jekyll-Hyde character that is also reflected in the many myths of the werewolf. The werewolf from myth is where an individual normally depicted as a law-abiding citizen, during a full moon transforms into a werewolf, and attacks in rage, not being able to tell the difference between friend and foe. Banner is an intelligent,

rational and law abiding individual, he transforms into the Hulk, where his rage increases his strength and fights both friends and foes alike.

This is not the only link to myths that the Hulk has. From Irish mythology, there is a hero called Cú Chulainn from *The Táin*. The myth of *The Táin* from the Ulster Cycle, the hero Cú Chulainn defends the whole of Ulster, as the men have fallen victim to the Curse of Ulster, which does not affect women and children. The curse began when a man boasted that his wife, Macha, could run faster than the King of Ulster's chariots. The King brought the husband and his wife to his fort and challenged Macha to a race even though she was pregnant. She won the race but gave birth to twins. "As she gives birth she screams out that all who hear the scream will suffer the same pangs for five days and four nights in their time of greatest difficulty." (The Táin, 2008: pg. 217). So, when Medb Queen of Connaught invades Ulster the men experience the curse. It is only the hero Cú Chulainn who is left to defend Ulster from Queen Medb's army.

As Cú Chulainn defends Ulster, he asks for respect and says that he should be fought in single combat if the men of Ireland have any honour. So, the men of Ireland, all challenge Cú Chulainn to single combat. During these fights Cú Chulainn enters into a frenzy called torque or warp spasm by Thomas Kinsella's translation of *The Táin*.

Then he made a red cauldron of his face and features: he sucked one of his eyes so deep into his head that a wild crane would find it difficult to plumb the depths of his skull to drag that eye back to its socket; the other popped out on to his cheek. His mouth became a terrifying, twisted grin. His cheek peeled back from his jaws so you could see lungs and liver flapping in his throat; lower and upper palate clashed like a pair of mighty tongs, and a stream of white-hot flecks broad as a ram's fleece poured from his mouth. His heart belled against his ribs like a bloodhound guldering for its food, or a lion roaring through bears. The clouds that boiled above him in his fury glimmered and flickered with malignant flares and sultry smoke – the torches of Badb. His hair became the wiry tangle of a red thornbush that fences a gap in a stone wall.

(The Táin, 2008: pg. 109)

This description of the hero Cú Chulainn provokes a horrid sense of anger and magic at work. This ability Cú Chulainn has, to transform into a far stronger version of himself when his temper gets the better of him, is similar to Banner and the Hulk who share the same mythological traits as Cú Chulainn (figure 3.3).

It is mentioned in *The Táin* that Cú Chulainn's is the son of the god Lug, "I am Lug Mac Ethlenn, your father in the other world" (The Táin, 2008: pg. 104). Lug becomes the King of the Gods in Irish myths. Cú Chulainn's torque or warp spasm comes from his father Lug, while Bruce Banner's "torque" or "warp spasm" is taking a scientific approach by being exposed to gamma radiation. This ability to transform due to increased rage and aggression has been explained with a scientific approach. It appears in *The Incredible Hulk* comic books that the Hulk is a personality within Bruce Banner's psyche and is trying to get out, there appears to be a psychological explanation to the existence of the Hulk which has come from, "the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth" (Campbell, 1993: pg. 3), which has appeared in the Irish myths of *The Táin*.



(Figure 3.3 – *Comic Books & Myths*, 2018)

When it comes to superheroes in comic books, one of the most common themes is that of superheroes having animal powers. This is not to be confused with comic book characters, who have taken animals as their symbols, like Bruce Wayne taking the symbol of the bat, which is associated with fear and the night, to prowl around Gotham to install fear in criminals. Rather we refer to superheroes who are anthropomorphised, which is a prominent theme found in myth, this can be seen in comic book characters such as Wolverine.

Wolverine is popular among comic book readers, he has the powers of the animal, wolverine (he also has an adamantium skeleton). His archenemy is called Sabretooth, likewise he too has animalistic characteristics. Both Wolverine and Sabretooth are mutants in the Marvel Comics. Mutants in Marvel Comics are humans who have evolved to the next stage of humanity. These two characters have a trait shared with Banner, the ability to lose oneself to rage. In the comic books Wolverine has lost his temper and has attacked friend and foe alike, very similar to the myth of the werewolf. Also, Wolverine's principal fear is that one day he will kill a friend and that he tries his hardest to control his rage. While Sabretooth embraces this emotion and kills for pleasure. These characters are presented as the opposite side of the same coin – just as the Incredible Hulk would develop an uninhibited opposite in the character of the Red Hulk. Both Hulk and Wolverine with their opposites Red Hulk and Sabretooth are the metaphors for a new Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Wolverine and Sabretooth are in some context, a retelling of the werewolf myth. The stories of humans transforming into animals or obtaining animal powers have been around since the depiction of *The Sorcerer* was first painted in Trois-Freres caves. It appears that humanity has had an interest in the combination of animal and human for a very long time. These stories of a human turning into an animal can be seen in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in the story of King Lycaön of Acadia. In the story, Jupiter transforms Lycaön into a wolf, once

Jupiter has discovered Lycaön fed him human flesh. “Frightened out of his wits, Lycaön fled to the country, where all was quiet. He tried to speak, but his voice broke into an echoing howl. His ravening soul infected his jaws; his murderous longings were turned on the cattle; he still was possessed by bloodlust” (Ovid, 2004: Book 1: pg. 16). This depiction of Lycaön being transformed into a wolf, lays the foundations seen in many werewolf stories to come. The transformation into an animal, the curse from divinity and the bloodlust.

There is also another legend of a human transforming into an animal, which is found in *The Saga of the Volsungs*. In the saga there is a transformation of the hero Sigmund and his son Sinfjotli into wolves. Similar to King Lycaön, this transformation comes about because of a curse. The characters, Sigmund and Sinfjotli are also given the attributes of the animals they are changed into. In *The Saga of the Volsungs*, the author states: “Sigmund and Sinfjotli put the skins on and could not get them off. And the weird power was there as before: they howled like wolves, both understanding the sounds.” (*The Saga of the Volsungs*, 1999: pg. 44). This is similar to King Lycaön, with the "echoing howl", however, it should be made clear that whilst King Lycaön’s transformation into an animal was caused by a curse, Sigmund and Sinfjotli was the result of naivety on their part.

These two stories from Greco-Roman and Norse mythologies show that humans who take on the form of an animal, in this case a wolf, will have the ability and attributes of those animals. In these stories the reason why King Lycaön, Sigmund and his son Sinfjotli were turned into animals was due to a deity’s intervention. The direction of these retellings is that the deity has been taken out and replaced with a scientific approach. For Wolverine and Sabretooth that approach is of evolution. These comic book characters have stemmed from myth and are now being explained as a “scientific other”.



(Figure 3.4 – *Comic Books & Myths*, 2018)

The description of the aforementioned transformations, depicted in *X-men Origins: Wolverine* (2009). Wolverine, naively enters the Weapon X project, at the behest of another character called Striker, in which he obtains the adamantium skeleton. Once the procedure is complete, Wolverine explodes out of the tank, howling like an animal in which he cannot be stopped. In this tale of Wolverine, Striker acts in a similar way to Jupiter. Where Striker bestows a curse onto Wolverine which he will live forever with. While Sigmund curse is due to nativity, which is shown in Wolverine's naïve choice to accept the Weapon X project and is cursed to bear the adamantium skeleton.

Throughout *X-men Origins: Wolverine* (2009), Wolverine's human-hybrid powers along with Sabretooth's were used by a secret military organization that experimented on mutants. In the film, Wolverine is manipulated into undergoing the Weapon X project. This gives insight into the fact that Wolverine and his instincts and abilities are a weapon to be controlled. However, Wolverine and Sabretooth have the characteristics similar to the

werewolves King Lycaön and Sigmund and their rage, like the Incredible Hulk cannot be controlled.

Seen in the figures of 3.3 and 3.4, these interlocking images convey the werewolf motif in and the torque transformation found in both the Hulk and Wolverine. Wolverine tries to suppress his natural instincts due to his evolutionary mutant abilities, while Banner cannot resist the emergence of the Hulk. Both have the similarities of the Jekyll and Hyde motif. Which is a characteristic of the need for a person to suppress the beast inside themselves in hope not to transform and hurt innocent people. The tale of the struggle of the suppressed nature of humanity which has been retold, from King Lycaön to Sigmund, is now seen in Wolverine and the Hulk.

The Science of the Superhero:

Captain America is one of the most iconic Marvel Comics characters. Before Steve Rogers became Captain America, he was a short, thin and scrawny man with a lot of ailments. However, he was still chosen to partake in a secret programme and eventually selected not because of his physical attributes, (as the super soldier serum gives the person the physical attributes), but because of his character. “I don’t want to kill anyone. I don’t like bullies. Don’t care where they are from” (00:15:56 – *Captain America: The First Avenger*, 2011). Once the super soldier serum is injected into Steve Rogers, he becomes Captain America, and he has the ability to fight alongside other superheroes. This exposure to a serum recalls the story of Jason, the Greek hero from *The Voyage of the Argo* (1959). In the story of the Argonauts who venture out to obtain the Golden Fleece, Jason is the captain of the ship *Argo* and was chosen over Heracles because of his demeanour, akin to Steve Rogers being picked for the trial of super soldier serum. Captain America and Jason share another aspect in common, that is of the serum itself. In *The Voyage of the Argo*, Jason as arrived at King Aetes’ palace and asks for the Golden Fleece. King Aetes puts Jason through a trial, of yoking the bronze bulls who spouts

fire. However, Aeetes' daughter Medea, falls in love with Jason. Medea is a witch and creates a magical potion for Jason to drink on the day of his trial. "In the morning, melt this charm, strip, and using it like oil, anoint your body. It will endow you with tremendous strength and boundless confidence. You will feel yourself a match, not for a mere man, but the gods themselves" (Apollonius, 1959: pg. 137). It can be argued that the magic potion Medea offers Jason to complete his trials, gave Jason the power to complete his task. In the same way the super soldier serum taken by Steve Rogers to become Captain America, gave him the means to fight supervillains. It would appear that the magic potion from *The Voyage of the Argo* has become the super soldier serum, and that the comic books of Captain America have taken a scientific view of the ancient myth of a potion which allows one to obtain god-like powers.

Furthermore, it can be deduced that Captain America's character mirrors the Greek hero Achilles, who is the son of the Nereid, Thetis, and the mortal Peleus. Achilles was born a sickly child, his mother Thetis attempted everything to ensure that her son was healthy. In the film *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Rogers is trying to enlist in the United States Army, however, with all his ailments, the doctor refuses to enlist him for his own safety. Thetis wanted her son to be healthy, so she dips Achilles into the river Styx to cure Achilles of his ailments, and consequently he becomes the most skilled fighter and most powerful demigod during the Trojan War. Rogers was enlisted into the US Army: Strategic Scientific Reserve, in which the super soldier serum cured Rogers of all his ailments and he became the most powerful allied soldier in World War II.

In figures 3.5 and 3.6 combine the images of Captain America and Achilles on top of one another in the video essay, to show the emergence of the Ancient Greece myth in comic books. With this Captain America can be seen as the present-day equivalent to Achilles. As stated by the character Red Skull near the end of the film, "you could have the power of the gods" (01:39:45 – *Captain America: The First Avenger*, 2011). This statement indicates that

the imagery of both Jason and Achilles is still being reiterated as a man obtaining the powers of the gods, although no longer from a magic potion or river but, through means associated with science.



(Figure 3.5 – *Comic Books & Myths*, 2018)

Tony Stark is best known for two major aspects in comic books – his inventions and his mortality. One of his greatest inventions is the Iron Man suit (Mark I), which was first built in a cave. Stark survives this adventure, by creating the Arch Reactor in his chest, which keeps shrapnel away from his heart. Unlike many superheroes, Stark does not have superpowers, and is instead utilises his intellect, combating threats on street level to galactic level with people who possess the powers of gods. This makes Stark a parallel to the Greek hero Odysseus. Odysseus, who is famous for using his intellect to overcome adversity. Stated by Zeus in Homer’s *Odyssey* (1961): “how could I ever forget the admirable Odysseus? He is not only the wisest man alive but has been the most generous in his offerings to the immortals who live in heaven.” (Rieu, 1961: Book 1: pg. 26). However, Odysseus was not the only influence when creating Stark, he also embodies the two other Greek gods, Hephaestus and Ares.



(Figure 3.6 – *Comic Books & Myths*, 2018)

Stark’s invention of the Iron Man suit, is considered to be the most technological advanced weapon ever made, as suggested by the character Stane: “how ironic Tony, you tried to ride the world of weapons and you gave it its best one.” (01:47:15, *Iron Man* - 2008). Stark Industries (Tony Stark’s company) is used for manufacturing weapons and Stark is the mastermind behind the weapons. This draws Stark into parallels with Ares, the Greek war god. The connection between Stark and Ares is also psychological. Stark is known to be brash, short tempered and does not think of alternative strategies when fighting, just attack; epitomised in *Avengers: Assemble* (2011), when Captain America says, “Stark, we need a plan of attack.” Stark replies with, “I have a plan. Attack.” (00:40:20, *Avengers: Assemble* – 2012).

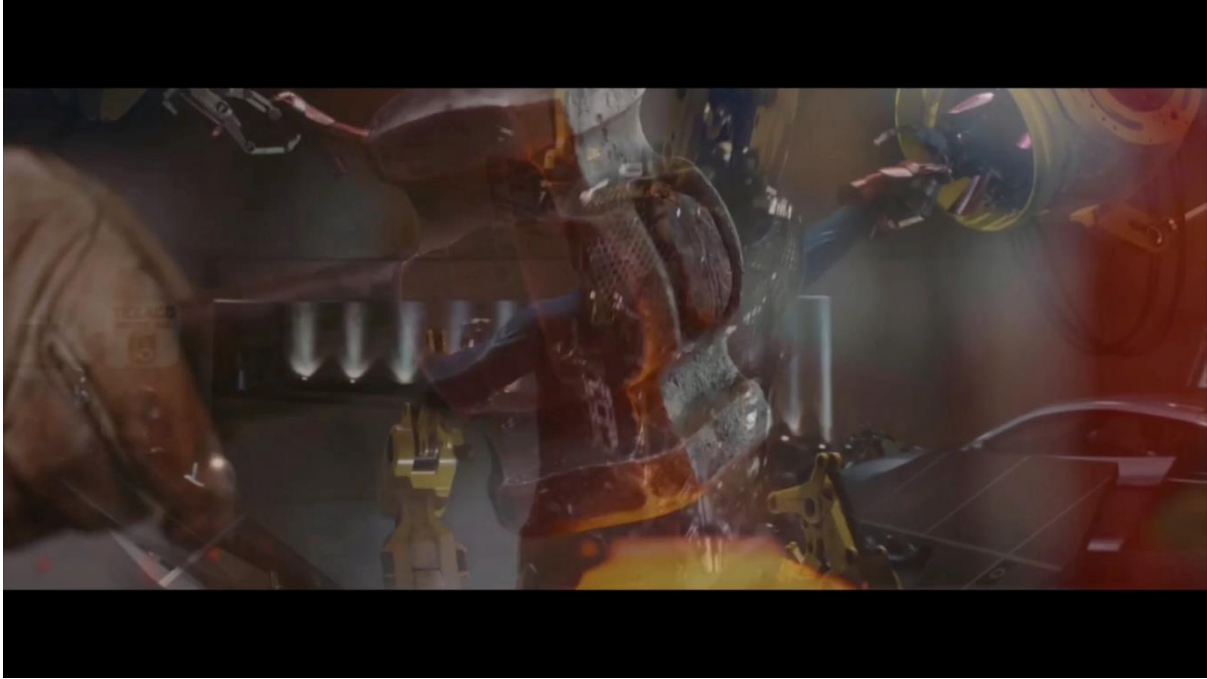
Stark is also famous for his numerous relationships. This characteristic of Stark, he also shares with Ares. The narratives of Ares in Greek myth are quite limited. However, he is known for his love affairs, the most famous one is with Aphrodite. Ares is the god of war, unlike his sister Athena, who is goddess of wisdom and therefore strategy and leadership. Ares represents

the violent and ruthlessness of war. Zeus was repulsed by Ares' actions when he hears his wife Hera recounts his actions in the Trojan War. The short temper and rash actions of Ares frequently lead him into conflict with the other gods, as Homer recounts in *The Iliad* (1998):

‘Father Zeus, look – aren’t you incensed at Ares and all his brutal work? Killing so many brave Achaeans for no good reason, not a shred of decency, just to wound my heart! While there they sit at their royal ease, exulting, the goddess of love and Apollo lord of the silver bow: they loosed this manic Ares – he has no sense of justice.’

(Fagles, 1998: pg. 189)

Hephaestus is the Greek smith god who created the lightning bolts for his father Zeus. Hephaestus is an inventor much like Stark. In Greek myth, Zeus became jealous of his son's powers and threw him off Mount Olympus, to the earth, (sometimes the underworld Hades), this action resulted in Hephaestus becoming lame. This can be seen in the film *Iron Man*. In the montage at the beginning of the film, the character Obadiah Stane, portrayed by Jeff Bridges, takes over Stark Industries, after the death of Stark's parents. Then as Stark grows up, Stane acts as a mentor and father figure to Stark. In the montage Stark joins the company and is portrayed as a prodigal son. Near the end of the film however, it is revealed that the terrorist who at one point captured Stark were working for Stane, who sought to eradicate Stark so he would have no rival within the company. Stark Industries can be seen as Mount Olympus and Stane as Zeus throwing his “son” down into a cave.



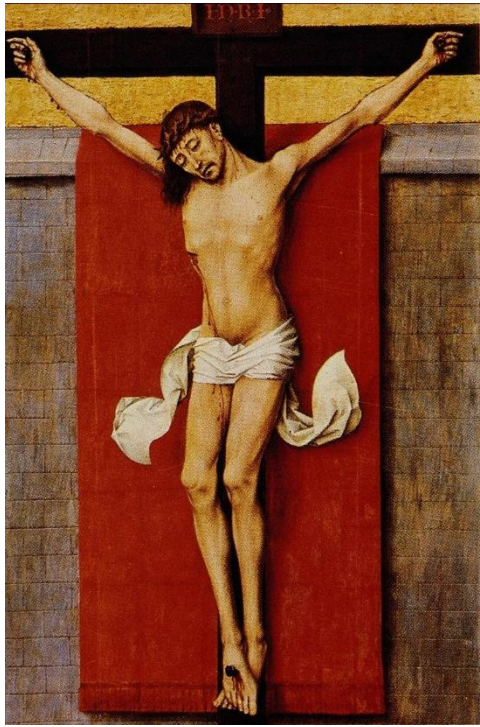
(Figure 3.7 – *Comic Books & Myths*, 2018)

This shows that Stark is the combination of two Greek gods Hephaestus and Ares and one Greek hero, Odysseus. The stories of these deities and hero have merged together and have evolved into the character known as Tony Stark. The effect of merging of three mythological characters into one, has brought the mythic together in a similar way that created Superman.

Both men, Stark and Rogers are ordinary people who become extraordinary in the comic books. This use of science to transform an individual into a god-like figure has been around for a while. These two superheroes are prime examples of science superseding myth, (see figure 3.7), “science has replaced religion [...] myth suffers the same fate as religion, of which it has traditionally been a part.” (Segal. 1998: Pg. 178). Stark and Rogers embodies this transition between the supernatural phenomena to the scientific.

The Man of Steel – The Embodiment of the Myths:

The film, *Man of Steel*, has connections with numerous myths. To see how the myths, work within the film, *Man of Steel*, it is prevalent to examine the origin of Superman. First published in *Action Comics #1*, (created by Jerry Siegal and Joe Shuster). Superman was not the first comic book character, or even the first costumed crime fighter, or even the first hero with a secret identity, but Superman is the first character in comic books to possess superpowers. Siegal and Shuster brought a new theme and direction for the comic book industry, that of superpowered individuals fighting crime. Superman primed the whole superhero genre. Siegal and Shuster however did not write Superman fully formed as he appears on the pages, they did not just pluck the idea of Superman out of thin air. Superman, is based on the myths that we look back on as a bygone era. Richard Reynolds, in his book, *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology*, looks at the similarities superheroes share with gods, he states: "Siegal and Shuster created Superman from material already at hand: the myths of Samson, Hercules and so on" (Reynolds, 1992: pg.53). Superman does not just embody the myths of Hercules and Samson in the film *Man of Steel*, but also that of the Biblical Moses, Odysseus, Achilles and Cú Chulainn. Not only does Superman have the characteristics of all these mythical characters, Superman, also has the Christian iconography of Jesus Christ placed on him (see figures 3.8 and 3.9).



(Figure 3.8 - Rogier van der Weyden, *Crucifixion Diptych*, 1460)



(Figure 3.9 – *Man of Steel*, 2013)

Before *Man of Steel* was released, there are a few more films centred around Superman and the myths. One of the earliest adaptations of Superman to film is the B Movies, produced during the 1950s, Lee Sholem's *Superman and the Mole Men* (1951), Superman takes the role of a benevolent sky deity who helps the Mole Men, who have the appearance of chthonic beings. In Richard Donner's *Superman: The Movie* (1978) and *Superman II* (1980), written by Mario

Puzo as one script, there is more depth found in Superman, with a stronger connection to the Christian iconography and the ability to change the fate of others by travelling back in time, seen in *Superman: The Movie*. In *Superman II*, Superman fights General Zod over Metropolis before the fight is taken to the Fortress of Solitude. It is here that Superman shows a similar ability that Zeus has in mythology, which is apotheosis, which means “to deify” in Greek. Zeus uses this on his son Herakles, his male lover turned personal cup-bearer Ganymede and the twins Castor and Pollux, in which upon their deaths turned them immortal. Superman in *Superman II* shows this power, but in reverse. In the Fortress of Solitude Superman is able to rid General Zod of his powers, effectively making him mortal. This shows that in previous Superman incarnations in film the mythic narratives have always appeared.

In the film *Man of Steel*, there is many more connections to the mythic. As stated previously, the Irish hero Cú Chulainn’s father, the god Lug Mac Ethlenn, who comes from the Other World, the home of the Irish deities. With this, Superman shares the same trait as Cú Chulainn, as Superman’s father Jor-El comes from an “other world” (known as Krypton). Krypton can be seen as the “other world” mentioned in *The Táin*, the home of the Celtic gods. Superman is born on Krypton and his father knowing his planet is doomed, builds a space-capsule to save his infant son and sends Superman as a baby through space to Earth.

There is a similar story told in the Bible, in the book of Exodus, the infant Moses is put into a basket and placed in the Nile River and found by the family of the Pharaoh. Shuster and Siegal knew this story of Moses as they are sons of Jewish migrants. In the short video *Mythology of Superman*, Phil Cousineau, compares Superman's arrival to Earth to that of the Biblical Moses, he states: "they put Superman into a little capsule and they floated him down the river of space, so to speak, like Moses." (Phil Cousineau, *Mythology of Superman*, 00:04:35). Moses is adopted by the Pharaoh's family. Superman is adopted by the Kent family.



(Figure 4.1 – *Man of Steel*, 2013)

Superman is famous for his weakness to Kryptonite. Although, in the film *Man of Steel*, the director, Zack Snyder introduces another weakness, that of Earth's ecology. In *Man of Steel*, Superman was a sickly child growing up on Earth, mentioned by Martha Kent, "when you were a baby, I use to lay by your crib at night, listing to you breathe. It was hard for you, you struggled. I worried all the time." (01:00:36, *Man of Steel*, 2013). This is again mentioned as he was adapting to the Kryptonian atmosphere on-board the spaceship, stated by the character General Zod, "you spent a life-time adapting to Earth's ecology, but you never adapted to

ours.” (01:17:18, *Man of Steel*, 2013). This demonstrates Superman shares traits with the mythological character of Achilles. Achilles was born a sickly child and his mother Thetis held him by his heel and dipped him in the river Styx, therefore, Achilles’ only weakness was in his heel. Superman is therefore also an analogy of Achilles, for Superman’s “Achilles heel” is the radioactive pieces of his home world Kryptonite.

The next myth Superman reflects, is that from Homer’s story, *The Odyssey*. The Greek hero Odysseus, attempts to return home after the Trojan War. Odysseus sails the Mediterranean Sea, in search for his home. When we first meet Superman in *Man of Steel*, he is sailing in the sea searching for a place for himself in the world. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus travels to an island, where his men get turned into swine by the goddess Circe, Odysseus goes to save them and returns them to the ship. In *Man of Steel* there is no goddess turning men into swine, instead you have Superman swimming to an oil rig, a proverbial island in the sea, where he saves the lives of the men on the rig. After Odysseus leaves Circe’s island, he finds his way home. For Superman, he is next seen in the Arctic walking through a Kryptonian spaceship, the remnants of Superman’s home world on Earth.

As previously mentioned above, Superman has Christian iconography of Jesus placed upon him, (figures 3.8 and 3.9) a similar attribute that Superman holds in common with Jesus is that Superman’s father Jor-El, sends his only son to Earth. When Superman meets the hologram of Jor-El, his father mentions he does not want Earth to make the same mistakes as Krypton and wishes his son to act as the connection of two worlds, Jor-El tells Superman, "you can be the bridge between two peoples", (01:26:20 – *Man of Steel*, 2013). This again shows the Christian iconography of Superman, as God sent his only son, Jesus to fulfil the role of Messiah and ‘bridge two worlds’ of the mortal and the divine, in Christian theology.

Near the end of the film, Superman battles with the World Engine, a Kryptonian machine that has the ability to change Earth into Krypton. Superman flies to the Indian Ocean

to disable this machine. As Superman approaches the World Engine, the machine uses its self-defence mechanism to attack Superman. Superman then punches these serpentine-arms, for them only to be dispersed and reform, akin to the second labour of Heracles, which is the slaying of the Lernaean Hydra. As the World Engine is terraforming Earth, it is creating a poisonous atmosphere for Superman, as it is the same atmosphere Superman experienced when meeting General Zod. This is linked to the Lernaean Hydra, as it is said that the creature has poisonous breath and blood which could prove fatal. During the fight with the World Engine, the serpentine-arms capture Superman and throw him under the machine. Underneath the World Engine, the machines power is terraforming Earth into Krypton by manipulating gravity. Superman therefore has the weight of the world on his shoulders, similar to the story of the Greek Titan, Atlas, who carried the weight of the heavens upon his shoulders.

Superman's home city is called Metropolis, which is Greek for "mother city", and this encapsulates were most of the myths that make up Superman came from. It is also interesting to note that this is the location where the battle between Superman and General Zod occurs. On Earth both Kryptonians have god-like powers and they devastate the city in their climatic battle. This conflict reimagines the Titanomachy (Greek for War of the Titans or Battle of the Gods). The Titanomachy rages between the Titans lead by Cronus and the Olympians lead by Zeus. In *Man of Steel*, Superman and General Zod are the only Kryptonians left, however, their battle takes place above Metropolis, the domain in which Cronus and Zeus fought for, the domain of the universe and the title, King of the Gods (see figure 4.2). This is another allegory where another myth, the Titanomachy has been retold, setting the City of Metropolis, along with Superman and his Kryptonian heritage as the backdrop.



(Figure 4.2 – *Man of Steel*, 2013)

Throughout the entire film of *Man of Steel*, there is a clear representation of the ancient myths being played out within the character of Superman, who has taken countless elements from the stories of Moses and Cú Chuliann which appear in *Man of Steel*, the setting has changed from the Nile River to Outer Space and the Other World to Krypton. In addition to this, the iconography of Jesus Christ from the Bible, the Greek pantheon of gods and heroes, such as Achilles, Heracles, Odysseus and Zeus are also present.

Even in the sequel, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) Superman can again be seen as Zeus in the battle with the monster Doomsday, forming another mythic retelling, this time of the battle Zeus had with Typhoeus:

The whole earth, the sea and the sky seethed; a dread quake arose in thee the wake of the immortals' charge and heaving waves rolled up against the shores; then Hades, lord of the wasted shades; below and Titans under Tartarus and round Kronos shuddered at the unending din and grisly clash. But now Zeus' strength surged and he grasped his

weapons, thunder and lightning and glowing thunderbolts, and lunging from Olpympos, he set fire to all of the hellish monster's gruesome heads.

(Athanasskis, 1983. pg: 25)

In *Batman v Superman*, Doomsday is not depicted with multiple heads, but does have heat vision similar to Superman, which is a characteristic of Typhoeus: "the eyes on all the monstrous heads flashed from under the brows and cast glances of burning fire." (Athanasskis, 1983. pg: 25). Zeus is said to descend from Olympus holding his weapons, while Superman descends from space, impaling the Doomsday with the Kryptonite Spear (figure 4.3) in a climactic battle of 'thunder and lightning'. Merging all the aspects of these narratives within his own, Superman has become an allegory for these mythic characters and their tales.



(Figure 4.3 – *Man of Steel*, 2016)

Superman has the image of an "alien-god", similar to that of the superhero Thor. This "alien-god" can be seen as a way to tell the story of myths to a new audience by using science rather than magic. As Richard Reynolds mentions: "science is used as an alibi for magic" (Reynolds, 1999: pg. 53). This could also be seen as a way that myths are being used through the genre of science-fiction to explain the unknown to a contemporary audience. Through Superman, it can

be realised that the many myths have been absorbed into one character, by positioning Superman as an alien and taking the myths of Achilles, Cú Chuliann and Zeus and merging them into one, society has drawn in these mythical characters to create a new character by retelling the myths of the old. We are witnessing the evolution of heroes and heroines of the older mythic cycles and sagas, and the repurposing of them for existing cultures.

Conclusion:

From the moment Superman first appeared in *Action Comics #1*, the use of myths in comic books has always been there as stated by Reynolds: “since the advent of Superman, writers and artists had been working with such models consciously or half-consciously” (Reynolds, 1992: pg. 57). With Superman and other comic book characters, the evidence shows that the myths of Antiquity and of the Middle Ages have been rewritten to fit into contemporary life and have then been evolving through the use of cinema as well.

The use of the superhero franchise by Hollywood can be seen as a commercial gain for the studios. So, this does question if Hollywood is passionate about the retelling and evolution of these mythic tales and the ideologies behind them. As they have always rearticulated old stories filled with myths, of none comic book characters, such as Robin Hood and King Arthur. Although, the stories of Robin Hood and King Arthur as steeped in mystery on who is the original author of these characters and their stories, and if they truly did live. Whilst for superhero characters, their authors are well known, the most famous is Stan Lee who created the Marvel pantheon with artist Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby. For Stan Lee he states that, “the only thing we could do perhaps, is come up with a god. I thought it would be fun to make a god a hero,” (*Stan Lee Speaks About the Mighty Thor* – 00:00:35). Lee wanted to tell stories and saw that no one had used Norse mythology and retold Thor because he wanted to ‘make a god a hero’. For William Moulton Marsden, the creator of Wonder Woman, he wanted to create and retell stories for a female audience and show a strong female role model, in the book by Tim Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound* (2014) Hanley, states: “Marston rejected the conventions of the burgeoning superhero genre and set up Wonder Woman as a new, unique brand of hero.” It would appear the authors of the comic book characters cared about bringing the myths back and this is seen when Hollywood adapt the comic books. Hollywood has the ability to largely influence the audience by retelling the mythic tales, however, with the comic

book adaptations, the myths would not be their unless the authors who wrote and drew the comic books themselves placed those mythic narratives there in the first place. Although, Hollywood does employ directors to tell the stories in film, it could be the director's choice to impart and retell the myths, such as Zach Snyder for *Man of Steel*, "there is a Superman who can do both things, to live in two worlds, and that means the mythological and then real "our world", and kind of bridge that gap." (*Zack Snyder Interview – Man of Steel – 00:00:38*).

Since the release of *Superman: The Movie* more comic book characters became adapted for film slowly over time, it would not be until the 1990s that the audience would start to see the emerging rise of comic books as a film franchise, dominated by the Batman franchise. It would not be until the turn of the century that we would witness the releases of *X-men* (2000) and *Spider-man* (2002), marking comic book films as a regular commissioning and box office dominance, prompting the moniker, "Golden Age of Superhero Films". This rise in popularity of superheroes and their narratives, echoes the rise of mythic on the silver screen.

From the mythological Thor being made into a superhero it shows very clearly that the world of myths is going hand-in-hand with that of the superhero, where the myths from the past are being rewritten for a new audience. Although, this idea is not just a stand-alone aspect to do with the myths and superheroes but can be seen in other stories. Nevertheless, the retelling of these myths is showing where society is going in these retellings. One of which is the retelling of the story of the werewolf. As the myth of King Lycaön's transformation, shows divine intervention and a curse. This transformation of human to monster, can also be seen in Bruce Banner morphing into the Hulk, which is explained through the use of gamma radiation. This scientific explanation rather than divine explanation indicates that these mythic tales are being redeveloped, by turned the monster concept of unleashing of a beast within, through science.

The notion of the myth being set in the present day, using science to explain mythic characters, can be understood with the story of the transformation of human into animal. The image of *The Sorcerer* in the Cave of the Trois-Frères and in literature of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *The Táin* and *Saga of the Volsungs* and in history of the comic books and the film industry, is the development of myth itself. As Berk mentions humans interpret the world through myth. This shows a change in representation to consolidate the culture as it shifts towards a new belief, from Palaeolithic humans depicting themselves as a hybrid of animal and human to Bruce Banner becoming the Hulk. The myth of transformation into an animal can be seen and it has changed from past to present culture. In the *Saga of the Volsungs* it is a curse brought on by magical wolf skins, to Wolverine being the next stage in evolution. As mentioned by Eric Csepo in his book *Theories of Mythology*: "mythology is indistinguishable from a particular ideological function" (Csepo, 2005: pg. 278). This change in the depiction of the transformation, shows that the present culture is using science to explain the transformation and use the fears or worries of contemporary issues in society, and expresses them by rethinking the myths to incorporate today's ideologies. Humans feared the power of the God and being cursed by witches, the ideology in the Middle Ages. When the Hulk was created in the 1960s, the biggest fear in American society was radiation poisoning brought about by nuclear war, Banner was exposed to gamma radiation and transformed into the Hulk, the fears of the 1960s used the human to animal transformation myth to explain their fears.

From the mythic stories emerging out of the comic books, which mainly use science for the explanation of the unknown, it is clear to see that the stories have not disappeared but only their faces have changed. From this it can be seen by Csepo that: "myth is one of the most important media for ideological work" (Csepo, 2005: pg. 301). There are clear signals that the present attitudes have put their ideologies onto the ancient myths and that they are evolving in the medium of comic books and film.

This explanation of science instead of using the supernatural, is paralleled with that of the character Superman. Superman is a method to show ancient myths to a present-day audience with a scientific approach to explain his existence. In *The Táin*, Cú Chuliann's father comes from the Other World, when shown in *Man of Steel* this 'other world' is called Krypton. So, the heroes of myth like Cú Chuliann and Heracles, whose powers come from their parents, who are from of the Other World and Olympus have become "alien-gods". By placing Superman's "other world" and parentage onto a planet in space, Superman has become this "alien-god", having a scientific explanation to his superpowers. With Superman based on a multitude of Greco-Roman gods, as well as Biblical figures, where does that leave the superheroes who are gods themselves, like Thor?

The world Thor inhabits is that of Norse myths, however, with Thor being transformed into a superhero, more connections can be seen with gods and superheroes. The gods have a place to live, Asgard or Olympus, which according to Reynolds this becomes: "the Fantastic Four's Baxter Building headquarters, or Wayne Mansion" (Reynolds, 1992: pg. 57). So, if Valhalla can be seen as any normal castle or palace, then Thor's home Asgard, one of the nine realms in Norse myths, can be a planet orbiting around a star. The mythological Thor becomes the comic book "alien-god" Thor, and his adventures told in space are therefore explained as a possible means to Thor's existence, as space is so vast and still largely unexplored.

Although, not all comics books based on myths have a scientific explanation. This is the case for the comic book story, *Slaine: The Horned God*, taking the myths of Ireland, the narrative of *The Horned God*, does not use any science to explain the existence of the supernatural magic found within the comic book. By placing the characters in "a time without time" (*Slaine: The Horned God*, 1998: pg. 1), it retains the myths in its "own" time period. Although, for many comic books, they are set in the present day. So, it can be seen that when

a myth is set in the present day, the characters are explained through science. However, when set in the past or an unknown time period, they retain their mythological origins.

In Campbell's book, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he states that there is a monomyth. This monomyth can be seen as all the heroes in myth have similar characteristics with that of comic book superheroes, the reuse of the image of the hero appears that as the myths are being retold, there is a cycle of a monomyth. Achilles and Jason narratives have merged together and evolved into the character of Captain America, whilst Cú Chulainn has been renamed as the Hulk. As for most of the male Greco-Roman pantheon, they have all merged into Superman. This can be considered the monomyth, the retelling of an old story where the characters have new faces to explain the unknown to a new audience.

This is no exception with Superman, who was compiled from many European myths. This shows that myths have not disappeared, they are being reused and retold with only the faces and settings changing. The setting of myths has been placed by contemporary mythmakers into a place society does not fully know, that of the mysteries of space and the possible unfamiliar alien life and what form it could take, David Adam Leeming states in his book, *The World of Myth* (1992):

As we explore the world of myth, we should remember that we are journeying not through a maze of falsehoods but through a marvellous world of metaphor that breathes life into the essential human story: the story of the relationship between the known and the unknown, both around and within us, the story of the search for identity in the context of the universal struggle between order and chaos. The metaphors themselves may be Indian, Greek, Native American, or Egyptian. The story they convey belongs to us all.

(The World of Myth. 1992: pg. 8)

There is a tendency to look back and reflect on the myths that have come before and stories of the past. The strangest fact is that myths of the past have slowly created our present and how we have come to view our own world. However, the truth is that myths are being recreated almost every day, as they are being used to explain the unknown of our own world and universe.

Myths are used to explain the unknown, within the works of the Norse, Greek and Irish myths, being placed in the backdrop of science fiction and in the unknown of contemporary culture, their stories have evolved to help explain our place in the universe. The realm of entertainment and the dominance of the Hollywood narrative illustrate that myth is embedded in film, and the narratives of the ancient myths found in the comic book adaptations into film gives a larger immersive feel to those myths that has only previously had the surface scratched. The background might change, and the reason for the existences of powers might no longer be magic but science, nevertheless, the stories found of ancient myths reappear as planets and aliens. The gods are reformed, the heroes remade, and the world is reimagined by each new generation. When society changes the myths with again evolve to explain the unknown for that society.

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