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Abstract: The main aim of this project is to show the importance of graphic novels in American culture, as well as to analyze and justify the role of anti-heroes in a world where they match or even surpass the popularity of heroes, using as the main example the character known as Wolverine. An analysis of this character in terms of American literature and society, together with a brief review of the history of American superheroes, serves to demonstrate how Wolverine has become the ultimate American anti-hero.

Keywords: Graphic novel, superhero, anti-hero, American mythology, American culture, contemporary myths.

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Wolverine and American Mythology: The Ultimate Anti-hero

0. Introduction

As a relatively young country, American society has been marked by a deep need to create its own cultural identity. The easiest way to achieve it has been to develop a body of artistic works that reflect everything the country requires: the United States, the Promised Land, a place where dreams and prospects are supposed to come true; the so-called "cradle of multiculturalism", tolerance and new beginnings; but also a strong country, able to get ahead on its own. There is no shortage of examples in American literature depicting these ideas in many novels, poems and theatrical pieces whose main target is to provide the United States with a sense of unity. However, some of the greatest cultural expressions of

this longing for identity are not depicted in these novels, or those literary manifestos, but in what are known as graphic novels, sequential art, or, more commonly, comic books.

The main aim of this project is to show the importance of these graphic novels in American culture, in spite of being branded as minor art products, as Winterbach explains,¹ as well as to analyze and justify the role of anti-heroes in a culture where they match or even surpass the popularity of heroes, using as the main example the character known as Wolverine. An analysis of this character in terms of American literature and society serves to demonstrate how Wolverine has become the ultimate American anti-hero. The project will be structured in different sections: a brief overview of the history of comic books within the American context, followed by a second section in which the progressive change from superhero to anti-hero will be discussed. To exemplify this, two different characters have been chosen, Superman and Spider-Man, who clearly represent the changes between those two concepts. Finally, the character of Wolverine will be studied in terms of literature and society.

1. Sequential art as an ideological tool within Western context

Created much earlier than writing, images have proved to be one of the most effective vehicles to ideology, not only because they can reach a wider number of people, but because they are so powerful they may even transcend their original nature and so become an essential part of what they are representing. Back in medieval times, iconographies were a fundamental element for illiterate people, whose religious knowledge was completely dependent on these images and the priests' sermons. It is this original purpose that sequential art was nourished by until becoming the current comic book, "This ancient form of art, or method of expression, has found its way to the widely read comic strips and books which have established an undeniable position in the popular culture of his century." (Eisner 5)

The question which arises first is that of finding out why this form of art has stood out among other genres, especially in the United States. To begin with, it has to be taken into account that the earliest form of modern sequential art is the comic strip. An average American citizen would take a cup of coffee and read the newspaper, where those comic strips were born. That way, reading these short and funny stories would become part of the daily ritual in that society and, thanks to its casual tone, also "part of the early literary diet of most young people" (Eisner 7). Everyone read them and it was only a question of time until these strips evolved and began developing their own genre. However, the success of the comic book is not only related to its popularity, but to its form, "the reading of the comic book is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit." (Eisner 8) The visual element is key in the process of reading, even in the written part, where the use of a certain font or size will modify the reader's perception. The combination of images and text, which can be analyzed both together and separately, makes the comic a polysemic text, offering

¹ The popular culture comic book phenomenon that includes the superhero was never considered worthy of academic study or serious consideration as an art form. Recently, however, with the advent of postmodernism, the distinctions between high culture and popular culture have been eroded, in the fields of both theory and artistic practice. Popular culture, including comics, has now become an accepted field of scholarly study (Winterbach 115).

the reader many different interpretations (Eisner 13). Thus, the experience obtained through this genre is unique.

As a matter of fact, comic books became so influential among American readers that, in 1954, the Comics Magazine Association of America developed a set of rules known as the Comics Code Authority (CCA). This code acted as an element of censorship for those comic books which included references to sex, horror, drugs or any other topic which was considered to be inappropriate or could be polemical in any way, such as religion. Little by little, this censorship has become softer and softer until the point of almost disappearing. Nowadays, each publisher is in charge of deciding which topics the comic book would include and, according to Dr. Amy Kiste Nyberg,² they can invoke the First Amendment rights to defend themselves from criticism.

2. American mythology: superheroes

Man has demystified himself and his world, but has been unable to cast away his subconscious, which has resurfaced (among other things) as a modern mythology in the form of superhero comic books (Winterbach 114).

Traditionally, most American comics have revolved around one main theme, superheroes.³ In Darwinian terms, the figure of the superhero offers "a cultural means of negotiating the gap between the small group size that human beings have evolved a cognitive architecture to deal with, and the much larger group size that is entailed by modern social arrangements." (Carney 1) That is, it is understood as a sort of comfort for humanity about the dichotomy between what one is and what they would like to –or should– be. Applied to a country like the United States, whose development as a nation was based on the concept of creating the idyllic place to live in, this idea works perfectly.

According to Reynolds, the superhero genre has been so present and influential in American society that a whole body of contemporary mythology has been built on these characters. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a superhero is "a fictional hero having extraordinary or superhuman powers" ("Superhero"), a definition which would be developed by including the fact that this fictional hero represents the values of a certain culture and, usually, what that culture aims to be. Lynda Carter, during an interview for the documentary, *Superheroes: A Never Ending Battle*, defined superheroes as "better versions of ourselves" (Kantor). All in all, the figure of a superhero can be considered as a positive one, the showcase through which a nation wants to be seen.

2.1. Superman: the prototype of the American hero

In order to analyze the figure of the anti-hero, it is needed to first explore the traditional superhero and its characteristics, from which the anti-hero will be developed. If there is one character which fully represents the given definition of the American superhero that is

² See Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code*. University Press of Mississippi, 1998.

³ The superhero genre is the dominant force in the economics of the American comic industry (Reynolds 7-8).

Superman. Created by the writer Jerry Siegel and the artist Joe Shuster, Superman was conceived as a character similar to Samson or Hercules. According to Winterbach, a superhero is “a symbol of things aspired to” (115), therefore, it can be said that American superheroes symbolize what the United States are – or intend to be. To summarize what this nation represents only three words would be used: the American Dream. The United States of America were born from a dream; people escaped from the British Islands, where they were not able to live following their own principles, to the Promised Land, a place where freedom and justice would respond to their real meaning. America offered “a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens” (Adams qtd. in Cullen 4), and this was a fact that had to be protected by every American citizen. Superman is the one in charge of both representing and protecting this idea.

Superman can be defined in three concepts: “truth, justice and the American way”.⁴ He is an immigrant that comes from Krypton, a fictional planet which was destroyed; as a baby, he is sent to Kansas so he can escape death.⁵

From the very beginning, Superman represents one of the main aspects of a citizen from the USA – both are immigrants who run away from their home in order to escape persecution. Richard Reynolds describes in his book, *Super Heroes, A Modern Mythology* what it takes to be a superhero. First of all, according to Reynolds, a superhero has to be “marked out from society” (16); Superman’s origin is related to the 1930s American working consciousness.⁶ He fights by and for the fictional city he lives in, Metropolis. The characteristics Superman had to have were “be like earthbound gods in their level of powers”, be devoted to justice and “the extraordinary nature of the superhero will be contrasted with the ordinariness of his surroundings” (Reynolds 16); Superman, as an alien, has a wide variety of superpowers, from the ability to fly to corporal immunity to external aggressions, and generally acts as a justice administrator in Metropolis, a city which could not be more ordinary.

The character was created during the Great Depression, a period where all American values were questioned. He was supposed to re-awake that spirit present during the creation of the American Dream, to remind the country that they were a strong nation, able to stand up for themselves. Clark Kent, Superman’s alter ego, is a regular American citizen, but, when danger comes, he becomes this superhero, all dressed in red and blue –the colors of the American flag–, who is able to confront evil and always bring justice. He is the ultimate symbol of the American way.

2.2. Spider-Man: Real superheroes

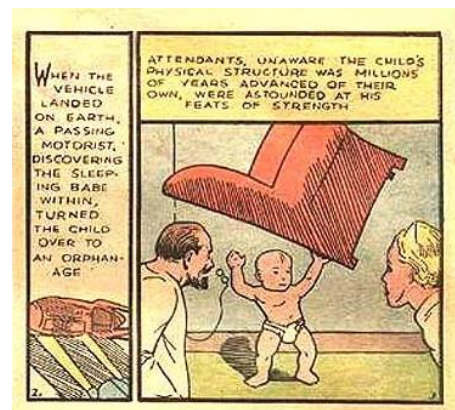


Fig. 1: Baby Superman demonstrating his great strength; *Action-Comics* #1

⁴ Reference to the catch-phrase of the comic-book character Superman.

⁵ *Action Comics* #1, J. Siegel and J. Shuster, June 1938.

⁶ Alan Moore on Superman creators Siegel and Shuster’s plight in *Occupy Comics* #2.

An a lean, silent figure slowly fades into the gathering darkness, aware at last in this world, with great power there must also come—great responsibility! (Lee and Ditko 11)

New times call for new heroes, and the romantic figure of Superman became, little by little, old-fashioned. The key factor to succeed in the superhero world is creating characters that are in tune with the times. The 1960s was a period of scientific discoveries, and heroes like Superman were not enough. People needed superheroes they could feel related too, superheroes who were closer to normal people, and who had real life problems. This was the beginning of a new era of superheroes.

The history of American superheroes experienced an interesting change: from the god-like figure of



Fig. 2: Uncle Ben's death; *Amazing Fantasy #15*

Superman to normal people who, in one way or another, underwent certain circumstances which gave them superpowers. That is the case of Spider-Man, who first appeared in the comic book *Amazing Fantasy #15*. Peter Parker is a stereotypical teenager – he attends high school, he is smart and has few friends. It is the bite of a radioactive spider what gives him supernatural powers and, from that moment on, he becomes a superhero. His life as a teenager is also affected; Peter Parker belongs to what is commonly known as “nerd culture” – in other words, he is an outcast, but thanks to his powers, he finds a way through which integrating himself. It is here where the change in the nature of the superhero is significant: whereas Superman represented hope to an entire nation immersed in the Great Depression, Spider-Man stands for hope to individuals themselves, helping them break out with their boring routines and deal with normal problems. It has to be taken into account, however, that, despite the fact that action revolves around those normal problems, the character has to face more personal, power-related problems. Spider-Man has to confront his feelings as a teenager and the consequences and responsibilities his position as a superhero means. The maxim in these new superheroes dwells on what Stan Lee stated in the documentary *Superheroes: A Never Ending Battle*: “That superhero could be you.” (Kantor)

Nevertheless, not only were the emerging changes character-related, but they were also transforming the genre itself. A new generation of adult readers was taking the lead in the comic book world so updating comics was needed. Comic artists started introducing modern images and devices such as psychedelia, surrealism or expressionism, and the restrictions imposed by the CCA were not so present, which led the genre to expand much more. This freedom was so big that comic books became the means to talk about almost whatever the artist wanted to –except for drugs–an opportunity which was used to introduce more complex elements.

2.3. The triumph of the anti-hero in the comic world

A man is apt to become morally confused in a society where both legal and moral codes are apparently relevant to the demands of the moment, where survival often means ignoring those precepts (such as 'thou shalt not kill' or 'thou shalt not steal') on which one might otherwise base his life. In such society, those we call heroes are frequently merely law enforcers (Schneider 328)

A society which is constantly changing needs a dynamic cultural background able to adapt to those changes. In much the same way traditional literary genres, such as tragedies or romances, did not fulfill the values established by new times (Neimneh 77-78), traditional comic books, despite the changes their characters had already undergone, were not enough anymore. Anxiety and decadent values were two of the main ingredients that could be found in 20th century American society and they were so present in most of the artistic fields that it was just a matter of time they became relevant in the comic world.

The aftermath of the II World War led to a world where the until then prevailing truth and reality were no longer available. That patriotic, justice-administrator behavior of Superman lost its meaning and opened the door to a whole renovated canon for heroes, whose psychological complexity reflected all those anxieties. The anti-hero that can be found in the comic world shares all the characteristics of its modern predecessor; they are characters who lack "largeness, grace, power, and social success" (Neimneh 77). They are closer than any other character to the average reader and this contributes to create a stronger bond between both. It is with the anti-hero that Stan Lee's statement "Anyone can be a superhero, and a superhero can be anyone" (Kantor) becomes truer than ever.

However, this renewal does not mean an entire rejection of the traditional one. In every new character there is always a tinge of the past, something that connects the classic and the modern world. As T. S. Eliot argues in "Ulysses, Order, and Myth", the use of the mythical method "is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (177-178), so it is expectable to find traditional characteristics in new archetypes, no matter how ground-breaking they are intended to be.

3. A case study on anti-heroes: Wolverine

James Howlett, also known as Logan, is the alter ego of Wolverine, an alias that comes from his savage looks. This character was created by the writer Len Wein and the artists Herb Trimpe and John Romita Sr., making his debut in *Incredible Hulk* #180. Wolverine is a mutant whose abilities consist on the regeneration of any damaged area of his entire body – the healing factor –, his senses are superhumanly acute and he can release powerful claws from the inside of his hands, claws which belong to a solid structure which conforms an exoskeleton made of *adamantium*, a fictional metal whose peculiarity is that it is completely indestructible. All these features make Wolverine an extremely powerful mutant; he is not immortal, but he is almost impossible to kill. Wolverine gathers not only the archetype of the anti-hero regarding what has been said before, but he is also an accumulation of literary and cultural features that represent American society.

3.1. Children of the Atom:⁷ the X-Men

Wolverine belongs to a category related to superheroes; he is a mutant. What makes a mutant different from a superhero is that their abilities are given by a modification in their DNA. We cannot talk about Wolverine without first analyzing the world of mutants and the X-Men, a group of mutants whose purpose was to protect both their species and human beings.

During the Cold War, comic books adopted and took advantage of atomic power (Rodríguez Moreno 356), promoting a positive attitude towards it. Since the CCA was still very present, editors were prevented from including negative images such as horror stories or monster-like figures, so the appearance of the X-Men series meant a before and an after in the comic world. As said before, the X-Men's particularities are within their DNA; their mutations are directly linked with atomic energy (Rodríguez Moreno 356-357). In *The X-Men #1*, Charles Xavier, one of the main characters of the series, explains the origin of his mutation as a consequence of his parents working on the very first atomic bomb. The nuclear world divided the Earth into two races, mutants and humans. This universe became the reflection of many important issues present in 1950s American society. On the one hand, there was this anxiety about nuclear weapons and, on the other, social problems which were surfacing in that society, such as the Afro-American civil rights movement (Rodríguez Moreno 368). The X-Men are persecuted for their condition as mutants; they are forced to live in hiding as humans display a hateful behavior towards them.

If comic books had already been a powerful and popular ideological tool, with these series the number of readers grew up immensely and so did their critical approach. So great was the influence comics acquired that their spreading became uncontrollable, reaching not only comic fans but people whose anxieties and literary demands found answer in this kind of art. The X-Men could – and can– be found everywhere and, as The Beatles or Andy Warhol, they became another iconic figure in the American context.

3.2. Literary sources: American Gothic

Regarding Wolverine, the less they know about his past, the better: he himself is a mystery, an enigma. Once the story is told, it would never be possible to come back. (Claremont qtd. in Jenkins et al. *Lobezno Origen*)

In relation to the appearance of Marie Dewey's character in Capote's *In Cold Blood*, Eric Savoy claims that her comments in the novel suggest that the "gothic tendency in American culture is organized around the imperative to repetition, the return of what is unsuccessfully repressed" (Savoy 4). What makes American Gothic different is an additional feeling of culpability and disappointment related to its origins as a country. American society is haunted by a past they try to avoid, an attitude which is reflected in literature –and other art expressions– as allegories, which, in turn, are touched by a feeling of perpetual nostalgia towards that past. Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" constitutes an excellent

⁷ Reference to the six-issue book *X-Men: Children of the Atom*.

example of this “impossibility of forgetting” depicted through an allegory (Savoy 9). According to Savoy, allegories are present throughout the history of the United States:

While gothic narrative emphatically refuses nostalgia, it seems to be the case that nostalgic representations of “America” veer toward the gothic with remarkable frequency. [...] A prototype might be Henry James’s return to America at the turn of the century: his late writing explores the contrast between sunny myths of return and the pull toward a tropics of devastation and the attractive threat of a hypothetical, un-lived American life (8).

Wolverine’s origin has always been uncertain even to himself, a fact which contributes to the enormous success the character has among comic readers. As a response to the fans’ thirst for knowledge, some writers have attempted to speculate about where he may come from, although their ideas did not crystallize among the readers or the editors. However, some of those ideas started to flourish and Wolverine’s past is, little by little, uncovered. The interesting point here is that that past and Logan’s attitude towards it have much in common with that American tendency. Ilan Stavans claims that one of the main characteristics of the American identity is negating: “They wanted to start over, to create a free nation. Yet the place where they choose to establish that nation already had its own culture, which the settlers conveniently ignored. That’s the only way to start anew after all – by negating the past.” (24)

Logan shares with the United States the desire of negating a past he cannot accept, although instead of suffering from that impossibility of forgetting, he goes through an impossibility of remembering; he is not able to remember how he became what he is, all he has are flashes of memory that appear when he is under extreme circumstances. In *Old Man*



Fig. 3: “You tell Becky’s mom there’s no such thing as super heroes. Now be a good girl and pass me those bread rolls”; *Old Man Logan*

Logan, a story set in a post-apocalyptic world where almost all superheroes are dead, we find a Logan who is not able to accept what he has done – that is, after a trick played on him by one of his enemies, killing all of his partners, the other superheroes. He completely dismisses his identity as Wolverine –and hides it to all the people that surround him, including his own family–, becoming a regular farmer who tries to live with his past. However, as usually happens with the repressed, Logan’s animal side cannot be controlled forever and, after realizing all his family has been murdered, he ends up letting it out, becoming the fiercest Wolverine in the character’s story.



Fig. 4: Wolverine becoming Weapon X: "Yet I see a man as ever he was"; *Weapon X*

There is a key element that cannot be forgotten, which is aesthetics. As stated before, one of the main advantages of sequential art over other genres is the visual element, which contributes to the creation of the desired reaction on the reader. In Wolverine's case, the vast majority of artists chose to follow that gothic approach to the character. Logan's appearance is alike to a wolf; he looks savage, strong, and even his face resembles that animal. In the pictures included in the books, especially in *Weapon X*, dark images and actions prevail, depicting a monstrous character, between animal and human. Wolverine is the representation of the hidden and the repressed: pure instinct, dark desires, such as murdering, and animal behavior.

Weapon X deals with the origin of Wolverine as the so-called "experiment X". Wolverine is presented as the result of Professor X's desire of creating the greatest weapon.⁸ Logan suffers all kinds of experimental procedures, which he is able to survive thanks to his healing factor. The result is a man who is no longer in control of his animal side and, in fact, behaves like one. Together with his colleagues, the Professor witnesses his creation, monitoring his moves and watching him behaving like a beast, as if it were an entertainment show. The experiment becomes a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hide situation, where Wolverine is used as



Fig. 5: Weapon X's first massacre; *Weapon X*

a sublimation of the professor's darkest and most morbid desires. It is not that Weapon X represents himself the division between the irrational and the rational, but that he is the personification of Professor X's irrational side, a scenario which works as the literary allegories mentioned before; he represents the inescapable connection between human beings and nature in terms of savagery, brutality and the need for violence, behaviors utterly repressed by the conventions and values developed in a society. Weapon X, therefore, turns out to be the consequence of a constrained community, a community whose origins are

⁸ Not related with Professor Charles Xavier, from the X-Men.

based on the removal of anything which did not correspond to their concept of civilization under the pretext of progress.



Fig. 6: "His most bestial needs... are about to exceed his most primitive dreams."; *Weapon X*

3.3. Wolverine and wild America

Buffalo, or bison, are a symbol of the American wilderness. Ironically, the United States – a country obsessed with progress – has a deeply ingrained nostalgia for that wilderness. (Stavans 76)

Another thing to take into account in Wolverine is the close relationship between this character and the wolf. Throughout history wolves have been highly considered by different cultures, both as a positive and a negative element. Either way, wolves are always related to nature and its power, a relation which was especially respected and praised by several American native cultures, in which wolves were believed to be the creators of the world (Martín Soto 70). In strict terms, Wolverine is not a werewolf; he can be considered a sort of missing link between human beings and wolves and, therefore, between civilization and nature, just like the traditional superhero is a link between expectations and reality.

Wolverine represents the wild side of human beings, a side that, in spite of being repressed and hidden as it is expected according to social rules, has been stimulated to the limit. After *Weapon X*, there is an important event in the timeline of the character, brought by the comic series *The Return of the Native*. Published in 2009, this comic book introduces two new characters, the Native and Victor, who went through the same experiments as Wolverine. Victor is sent by Professor X to kill the Native and capture Wolverine. *The Return of the Native* reveals several interesting things about Wolverine. First of all, he is not one of a kind; other subjects were also turned into wild animals. Secondly, apparently, he has been living a simple life in wilderness, leading his lifestyle according to Thoreau's premises, as it is suggested in the picture above. Finally, we get to know that the private institution that created *Weapon X* and his companions wants them dead.



Fig.7: Wolverine finds *Walden* in the cabin

Another feature of the American identity is the idealization of the wilderness, an attitude which corresponds to the occidental perspective that positions the wild as something admirable but impossible and, therefore, doomed to disappear. They created what they sought, that is,

unleash the animal side and transcend the limits between the rational and the irrational. However, after doing that, they are not able to handle what they created, even though their creations lived in peace in the forest. The nostalgia and the longing for the wilderness directly clashes with the established values; they want freedom, but freedom is perceived in a platonic way as something unattainable. Thoreau discusses this need for the wilderness in *Walden*, a book conveniently shown in *Weapon X* as one of Logan's old belongings:

We need the tonic of wildness. [...] At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature. (Thoreau 317)

However, neither Thoreau nor Logan are able to live according to their expectations. Wolverine represents in *The Return of the Native* that frustrating situation where he wants to live with the Native in the forest but Victor –a sort of representative of society– will not let them.

3.4. "Unhappy the land that is in need of heroes":⁹ Wolverine within American mythology

Wolverine, a mutant victim of the atrocities of Professor's X pervert mind, is forced to leave behind everything he loved. He is a character that stands out for his alcoholism, violence and promiscuity; that is persecuted for his condition and, despite everything, plays a vital –and heroic– role in the American mythology. Coming back to *Old Man Logan*, we find a Logan that has been able to survive the fall of the American superheroes. Superman and his patriotism does not mean anything anymore, he has failed humanity. All that remains are the rests of those who once were the biggest heroes



Fig. 8: Hawkeye in *Old Man Logan*

in American society preserved in some kind of altar where people venerate them and pray for them to come back. Superheroes, who were believed to be, in one way or another, above humankind in terms of morality and decision-making, who were the ones who had to protect people, have failed through internal wars, have quitted, as if it were some regular job, or have been defeated by a more powerful villain. The world is now controlled by villains and, as Logan, very old superheroes who were able to survive are living in the shade.

⁹ One of Galileo's lines in Bertolt Brecht's *A Life of Galileo* (Brecht 69).



Fig. 9: Thor's fallen hammer; *Old Man Logan*

Superheroes are closely related to the concept of the American Dream. America, a place where people could start over without the fear of being persecuted for whatever reason, the land of hope and new opportunities that turned out to be the land of disappointment and anything but the free country people expected it to be. Superheroes, the protectors of the American Dream, had fallen with it. Logan, for he is no longer Wolverine during the vast majority of *Old Man Logan*, once again exemplifies the consequences of all of this. Logan never believed in the concept of superhero nor wanted to accept his position as an anti-hero, which after all implies to be a hero, albeit a non-conventional one. All his choices were mostly decided according to his own beliefs since, though he belonged during a considerable amount of time to the X-Men, he never lost his individuality, a fact that makes him the prototype of the anti-hero. He trusts his individual experience, and every action he carries out is nothing but an act of reaffirmation, which also makes him a very American figure.

Logan is also a modernist character in the sense that he represents the American narrator. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* deals with that decline of the American Dream previously mentioned. One of the main points in the novel can be summarized in the following statement: you can follow your dreams as long as you are conscious about the impossibility of them coming true (Valls Oyarzun 237-238). The problem in *The Great Gatsby* is that Gatsby tries to live his own reality, which is based on a Platonic dream, and that reality is not intended to come true. However, Gatsby does not take this into account and his reality collapses. This situation can be extrapolated to the world of superheroes. A whole world based on a false premise, the American Dream, is destined to failure, and that is what becomes of Superman and all his successors. Only Logan, who denies all that construction and accepts the impossibility of such a thing as superheroes, is able to go on and prevail. Society, on the contrary, is condemned to collapse as it still believes in them and is waiting for their return, just like Gatsby.

3.5. Wolverine and the American society: repression and persecution

Why do images of 'the normal American family' from the fifties look so creepy? Because we would soon come to learn that this so-called normality masked dark thoughts and behavior – alcoholism, domestic violence, hidden sexual desires. (Stavans 17)

Wolverine is a character socially rejected. He is an alcoholic, he comes from a broken home, he does not care about anything but himself and, above all, he is a mutant. All these facts make him the perfect target for an experiment like Weapon X; he is not considered a member of the American society and, therefore, he has no rights. He is forced to become a



Fig. 10: "Hell is comin"; *Old Man Logan*

killer machine and to work for the government and other organizations. Wolverine's –and other mutants'– situation is nothing but the reflection of a corrupted society whose main purpose is to maintain a public image of happiness and order. However, despite all those efforts to make American people believe everything was going well, the corrupted axis of that society would soon appear.

As a child, he lived with his father, who was a drunken man and worked for a landlord. From the very beginning, he lived in one of the biggest sections of marginalization: poor people. He grew up rejected by a rich community who alienated him and never let him feel as a member of society. Then, as a young adult, he was kidnapped and forced to become Weapon X, when he would be marginalized due to his induced animal nature; once again, he is not the member of a social

group. It is not until he found the X-Men and joined them than he was able to fit in, although as a member of a minority. When he grew older, he found himself in a world of decadence where he came back to the lord-servant situation. Wolverine went through all the social classes that the United States, the land of freedom, did not accept. Family issues, drugs, racial segregation and federal abuse among others are problems present in the depth of the American society, issues that are not dealt with, or at least that are not treated properly, are depicted in Wolverine's lifetime. He has to deal with them and with all the consequences they imply. After all, he is nothing but a human being, and as such, an imperfect individual.



Fig. 11: "Everything else is just a man trying to do the right thing."; *Old Man Logan*

4. Conclusion

From the God-like figure of Superman to the alcoholic mutant Wolverine, including more distended characters such as Spiderman, the world of the superheroes is one of the bulks of American culture, creating what is known as American mythology. Controlled during the vast majority of their history by the corresponding authorities, comic books have proved to be not only one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the United States, but also one of the most important vehicles for culture and ideology. Times change and so do values and

concepts, and this progression is more than visible in the superheroes and what they intend to represent. Fortunately, politics does not always get to control everything and, little by little, the defects and repressed aspects of society ultimately show up to the world. That is the case of Wolverine, a character that represents the United States from many perspectives and does not hide any ugly aspect of a society whose conception of itself may not be as accurate as reality. He becomes the ultimate American anti-hero, for he gathers the traditional elements that define an anti-hero together with the features of the true American identity.

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Bioprofile of the author

Nuria Picón del Campo holds a B.A. degree in English Studies from the Complutense University of Madrid. Having always been interested on contemporary literature, she was introduced during her university years to the subject of myth-criticism, which became one of her main academic interests. Her commitment to this field of study went beyond the composition of her degree's final dissertation, "Wolverine and American Mythology: The Ultimate Anti-hero", when in 2017 and in collaboration with Manuel Botero Camacho, she published her first article, "A Twist in the Song: Retracing Myth and Dante's Poem in Heavy Metal Music", which also involves one of her passions, music.

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