Lois Lane
Lois Lane

An Analysis of a Female Character in American Superhero Comics

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LOIS LANE: AN ANALYSIS OF A FEMALE CHARACTER

IN AMERICAN SUPERHERO COMICS

by Alicia Gil Martínez

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Superman created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster.

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To Celia, who encouraged me throughout this work without cease.

To Ricardo, who helped me with his unconditional love and support.

To my father, who has always emphasized education.

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SUMMARY IN GALICIAN

RESUMO

Con este estudo concentramos a nosa atención na figura de Lois Lane como personaxe feminina nos cómics de Superman, e a través dela, pretendemos obter unha visión da percepción que a sociedade estadounidense ten do rol da muller nos vinte anos de historia norteamericana que cobren os cómics seleccionados. Especificamente, este estudo consiste nunha análise semiótica feminista da personaxe fictícia Lois Lane, comezando onde Jeanne Williams rematou a súa tese doutoral do ano 1986 cun tema similar. Considerouse que ese era un punto de partida adecuado porque a compañía DC Comics iniciou unha nova continuidade co evento cósmico Crisis on Infinite Earths [Crise nas terras infinitas, a miña tradución], o cal rematou case cincuenta anos dun multiverso demasiado extenso con dobres dos/as mesmos/as personaxes que foron aparecendo segundo as necesidades de cada período histórico, desde o debut de Superman, Clark Kent e Lois Lane en 1938. Con esa serie, entón, todo foi reducido a un único conxunto de personaxes nunha única terra nun único universo. Ademais, en 2005 a compañía publicou outra crise no seu universo ficticio, que foi considerada unha secuela da serie de 1985: Infinite Crisis [Crise infinita, a miña tradución]. Aínda que esta última crise non puxo termo á continuidade das historias dos/as personaxes do universo de DC Comics, que foi rematado e reiniciado en 2011, vinte anos pareceron un período adecuado para a análise.

O noso deseño para este estudo seguiu o enfoque usual dunha revisión xeral da literatura e un marco xeral de estudo ata chegar a un punto de vista feminista para
facer a análise dos cómics seleccionados que foron protagonizados pola nosa personaxe elixida, Lois Lane. Polo tanto, revimos a literatura máis relevante sobre cómics comezando cos influentes pioneiros europeos Umberto Eco e Román Gubern, e seguimos cos investigadores máis recentes Miguel Ángel Muro Munilla e José Luis Rodríguez Diéguez, incluíndo as pertinentes contribucións de Gérard Genette e Hans-Heino Ewers, que aínda non sendo especificamente sobre cómics, resultaban apropiadas para o tipo de textos multimodais e multimediais tan estreitamente vinculados aos cómics en estudo. Seleccionamos tamén tres prestixiosos investigadores e artistas de cómics ao carón estadounidense do noso traballo, Will Eisner, Scott McCloud e Robert Harvey, porque os seus libros seminais, como os europeos, aínda son unha fonte significativa de discusión en relación ao tema de cómics.

Cando diriximos o noso interese ao enfoque feminista do estudo de cómics, desafortunadamente atopamos moi poucas fontes relevantes. Dos estudos xerais de medios, puidemos rescatar un artigo de Jeffrey Brown que trata o tema revelador dun xénero en cómics (e filmes) chamado “bad girls” [rapazas malas, a miña tradución], e tamén un artigo escrito por estudantes de licenciatura que foi moi útil porque reviron máis de setecentas tapas de cómics para levar a cabo unha análise das imaxes baseado no xénero. Pero as máis eminentes investigadoras neste particular aspecto da nosa revisión deste tipo de literatura foron Trina Robbins e Lillian Robinson. Os tratados de ambas autoras foron fonte dunha investigación significativa do desvalorizado tema dos cómics desde unha perspectiva feminista. Non obstante, a última parte da nosa revisión que se concentraba especificamente na personaxe de cómics Lois Lane daría
lugar a sorpresas. Como no ano 2013 foi o 75 aniversario da publicación do primeiro exemplar de *Action Comics* [Cómics de acción, a miña tradución], onde Superman, Clark Kent e Lois Lane foron presentados por primeira vez, Nadine Farghaly editou unha antoloxía conmemorativa con ensaios académicos sobre a personaxe Lois Lane, e a palabra clave foi “académicos”. De todos os xeitos, só houbo tres artigos sobre cómics, porque a maioría deles concentráronse en filmes e series de televisión onde a personaxe de cómics aparecía, pero eses tres resultaron cruciais para rever a personaxe e algúns puntos de estudo moi relevantes, especialmente o artigo escrito por Bobby Kuechenmeister e Elizabeth Kuechenmeister, que analizaron os primeiros dez anos desta continuidade de DC Comics, dende o relanzamento por John Byrne en 1986 ata a voda de Lois Lane e Clark Kent en 1996, que xustamente coincidían coa primeira metade da nosa análise. Ademais, noutra compilación académica de artigos sobre cómics, atopamos un estudo que fixo Jennifer Stuller sobre a serie de cómics *Lois Lane* e que nos deu ferramentas máis especificamente feministas para traballar na análise de cómics. Finalmente, nin que dicir que a tese doutoral de Williams, que comprendeu unha análise de todos os cómics de Superman dende 1938 ata 1986, foi a parte máis importante desta sección, pero tamén incluímos aportes de Amanda Parkinson, que na súa tese superior de mestrado, examinou a serie *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* [A amiga de Superman Lois Lane, a miña tradución] dos anos sesenta e setenta, o que engadiu algunhas novas perspectivas á investigación de Williams nese período.

O Capítulo Dous está dedicado ao marco teórico dos estudos de cómics e da análise feminista. Alí tratamos a definición de cómics, coa súa controversia
especialmente iniciada entre McCloud e Harvey, e tratamos de atopar un punto medio coas perspectivas de Neil Cohn e Antonio Altarriba, eventualmente resolvendo o tema coa definición ampla de Gubern. Para investigar as características dos cómics, utilizamos os parámetros didácticos de Rodríguez Diéguez, e Daniele Barbieri presentou unha boa panorama da relación dos cómics con outras linguaxes. A clasificación de cómics resultou unha iniciación ao estudo histórico dos cómic porque os tipos de cómics desenvolvidos seguen esa evolución. Para estudar a linguaxe dos cómics, seguimos a proposta presentada por Eco de oito aspectos recomendados para unha análise semiótica deste tipo: iconografía, bocadillos, gramática da viñeta, sintaxe da montaxe, narración, argumento, tipoloxía dos/as personaxes e ideoloxía (véxase Apéndice 7). Estas categorías foron ampliadas cos aportes de moitos/as especialistas, como Erwin Panofsky ou Pierre Fresnault-Dereulle, e tamén cos xa mencionados autores Muro Munilla, Rodríguez Diéguez, McCloud e Gubern. Finalmente, revisamos a idea de xénero e fórmula argumental cos traballos de John Cawelti e Thomas Schatz, temas moi importantes para este medio popular, que nun posterior capítulo focalizamos no estudo do xénero do superheroe. Na última parte do capítulo, revisamos as nosas ideas básicas sobre feminismo, e particularmente con maior extensión, sobre a crítica e análise feminista. Dado que xa verificaramos que non había demasiada literatura en relación coa crítica e análise feminista de cómics, introducimos o traballo fundamental para a análise lingüística de Sara Mills, e para a análise semiótica de imaxes, o elaborado por Gunther Kress e Theo van Leeuwen, que aínda que non é especificamente feminista, os seus fundamentos están na análise crítica do discurso que é esencial para un enfoque de xénero.
O panorama histórico do Capítulo Tres levou a acudir aos estudos sobre a historia de cómics levados a cabo por Javier Coma e David Kunzle, acompañados coas ideas de Gubern sobre esa evolución. Deste xeito, isto abarca unha historia de cómics dende os seus antecedentes na historia da pintura e da escritura, os proto-cómics europeos, ata o concepto moderno de bandas deseñadas creadas para periódicos a principios do século vinte en Estados Unidos, coa subseguinte aparición das axencias de distribución de material periodístico misceláneo entre o que figuran os cómics. Estas axencias estandarizaron e censuraron os cómics de modo que foron adecuados para a súa venda non só a todos os periódicos dos Estados Unidos senón tamén á prensa estranxeira. Despois de toda esta evolución, finalmente comezou unha incipiente industria de publicación de cómics coa aparición de libríños coa reimpresión das bandas deseñadas dos periódicos que se daban como agasallos publicitarios, e posteriormente, xa como produto terminado tanto con reimpresións como con material novo, os cómics comenzaron a venderse nos quioscos de periódicos.

Pero o que logrou consolidar as compañías de cómics nunha industria florente foi a aparición de Superman en 1938, e con el desenvolveuse o xénero do superheroe que incluso hoxe é o puntal da industria dominante de cómics en Estados Unidos, xa non dispónibles nos quioscos, senón nos comercios especiais de venda directa. Finalmente, rematamos o capítulo coa creación concreta e histórica de Superman e Lois Lane polos dous adolescentes Jerry Siegel e Joe Shuster, e a posterior evolución de DC Comics, como a compañía que mantén a exclusiva propiedade dos dereitos do mundialmente famoso personaxe, e con el, a súa compañeira perenne, Lois Lane. Como eventos que influíron as operacións de DC Comics en relación co seu
personaxe principal, mencionamos a Segunda Guerra Mundial nos cincuenta, a persecución macartista dos cómics nos sesenta, o xurdimento do mercado directo nos setenta e oitenta, o colapso da burbulla dos coleccionistas de cómics nos noventa e, para rematar, unha reflexión sobre o ataque terrorista ás Torres Xemelgas en 2001 e a resposta do mundo do cómic.

O Capítulo Catro revé todos os aspectos extra-textuais que foron presentados ata ese momento; é dicir, os contextos de producción e de recepción dos cómics en estudo. A isto engadimos o traballo significativo de Peter Coogan sobre o xénero do superheroe baseado nas ideas de Cawelti e Schatz, co obxectivo de percibir máis claramente o tipo de textos que íanse analizar. A continuación, vimos as ferramentas de análise feminista de cómics mencionadas por Stuller, coa salvidade de que algunhas delas non son especificamente académicas na súa orixe. A máis importante parte do capítulo vén despois co profundo exame das ideas de Mills en relación co sexismo directo e indirecto, que foron incluídas para o traballo de análise feminista de textos, e finalmente, as ferramentas semióticas presentadas por Kress e van Leeuwen, co obxecto de examinar imaxes cun enfoque de xénero (véxase Apéndice 7). A última sección do capítulo está dedicada aos parámetros utilizados para seleccionar o corpus de análise. Deste xeito, compiláronse todos os cómics de aparición regular no universo de DC Comics desde o relanzamento de todo o elenco de Superman por Byrne para esta nova continuidade na súa miniserie de 1986 *The Man of Steel* [O home de aceiío, a miña tradución] ata o evento xa mencionado *Infinite Crisis* (véxanse Apéndices 3 e 4). De todos eses cómics, primeiro seleccionáronse aqueles nos que aparecía Lois Lane na
tapa, e después, siguiendo a Williams de un modo genérico, reducimos a una cantidad
manejable de un por año, mediante la elección de aquellos nos que Lois Lane era una
participante activa en la historia o tuviera un rol importante (véase Apéndices 5 y 6).

O último capítulo ten todas las análises das dezaoito historias seleccionadas que
abarcen os vinte anos que nos propuxemos analizar. As análises inclúen unha
introdución que mencionan os/as artistas e escritores/as que crearon as historias dos
cómics e tamén os seus paratextos e intertextos, se fora o caso, e incluso en “DC
Comics Presents Lois Lane” [DC Comics presenta a Lois Lane, a miña tradución], un
hipertexto baseado nos filmes de espías de James Bond, segundo as definicións de
Genette dese termos. Aparte disto, como a mayoría das historias están inmersas en
longos arcos narrativos, e moitos dos últimos cómics son parte de miniseries, tamén na
introdución, tivemos que presentar liñas argumentais ás veces antes ou depois da
historia en estudo, co obxecto de presentar apropiadamente as súas circunstancias.

Polo tanto, como paratextos obvios, as tapas foron meticulosamente analizadas
usando as ferramentas semióticas de Kress e van Leeuwen sempre tendo en conta un
punto de vista feminista. Como mencionamos varias veces nas análises, en xeral as
tapas foron deseñadas para atraer lectores masculinos, así que utilizáronse recursos
que ás veces poderían considerarse sexistas, como por exemplo o cílix da dama en
apuros. Pero non foi utilizado con demasiada frecuencia como flagrante estrataxe
tantas veces usada noutros períodos da historia do cónic, e en ocasións, podería
considerarse verdadeiramente sutil, como por exemplo a tapa de “Survival!”
[Supervivencia!, a miña tradución], onde un Superman inmóbil no aire non actúa,
senón que só vixía a Lois Lane, aínda que a imaxe mostraba realmente en perigo, xa que
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se suxeita inestablemente do teito dun camión do exército en veloz movemento. Máis evidente resulta a acción na tapa de “Echoes” [Ecos, a miña tradución], na que Superman exponse aos proxectís dunhas armas para salvar non só a Lois Lane senón tamén a Cat Grant, duplicando así a número de damas en perigo. Por outra banda, as dúas tapas de “Hard Decisions!” [Decisións arduas, a miña tradución] e “Prestidigitation Nation” [Pobo de prestidixitadores, a miña tradución] son similares pero concibidas de modo totalmente distinto, dado que en ambas Clark Kent está quitándose a roupa para revelar debaixo o traxe de Superman, acompañado de Lois Lane. Pero mentres que na primeira podería considerarse a representación dunha Lois Lane participando activamente na decisión que Clark Kent toma de transformarse en Superman, na segunda, ela só sirve de satélite supeditado ao superheroe. O que é interesante en canto a estas dúas tapas é que a menos sexista saiu oito anos antes ca outra.

Como pode apreciarse, algunhas tapas tenden cara a un ou outro extremo dun continuo desde a máis ou menos sexista e non se pode saber a ciencia certa se hai melloras en relación ao sexismo a medida que pasan os anos. Non obstante, hai unha tapa de 1988 que con seguridade pode clasificarse como de sexismo indirecto, segundo as propostas de Mills. En consecuencia, o cómic “Visitor” [Visitante, a miña tradución] ten unha lenda que di que a escena representada na tapa non aparece na historia, así que a imaxe está presentada como unha broma ou como algo que non é “verdadeiro”, pero o feito é que a imaxe de dúas mulleres, Lois Lane e Lana Lang, pelexando, supoñemos, por un burlón Superman que as separa, certamente aparece na tapa dese número. Confrontada unha persoa con esta imaxe, como afirma Mills, só
ten a posibilidade de rexeitala ou aceptala, pero inclusive se a rexeita, é difícil acusar a imaxe de sexismo cando pretende ser “inexistente”.

A diferenza das tapas, as historias tratan de mostrar con maior regularidade a Lois Lane como unha personaxe forte por dereito propio. É verdade que despois da revelación da identidade secreta de Superman en “Secrets in the Night” [Segredos na noite, a miña tradución] durante algúns cómics queda transformada nunha muller pasiva e apoucada, que contrasta bruscamente coa figura de aire resolto que aparece in “The Story of the Century” [A noticia do século, a miña tradución]. Pero isto non dura moito. Despois dun mes, foi publicada unha historia na que se desfixo desa actitude que non ía co seu carácter, porque a súa esencia é a da reporteira audaz que non dúbida en saír a buscar a primicia aínda cando signifique enfrontarse a calquera perigo.

En relación con isto, hai un fío que aparece en moitas narracións anteriores e posteriores á súa voda, no que compite por noticias con Clark Kent. O que Lois Lane comprende cando se descubre o segredo de Superman é a inxusta situación de desvantaxe na que ella se atopa en relación coas primicias que el pode conseguir mellor que ela grazas aos seus superpoderes. Incluso antes que iso, cando en “Visitor” descubre que Clark Kent e Superman son case como “hermanastros”, de repente quedou claro que ela dependía de ámbolos dous para recibir calquera noticia relacionada coas fazañas de Superman. Aínda máis, en “We’re Back!” [Estamos de volta!, a miña tradución], cando ela dille a Clark Kent en chanza que el só escribe sobre si mesmo, non podemos máis que lembrar que el logrou o seu posto no periódico The Daily Planet porque conseguiu a entrevista de Superman antes que Lois Lane en “The
Story of the Century”, o cal mostra a total inxustiza da competición. Pero esta competición no traballo non se relaciona coa “batalla dos sexos”, porque non é unha metáfora da única posibilidade de relación que eles poden ter, como está probado en numerosas historias nas que traballan xuntos, apoiándose para obter resultados, por exemplo, “Hard Decisions!” “Swan Song” [O canto do cisne de Swan, a miña tradución], “Power Crisis!” [Crise de poderes, a miña tradución] e “Return to Krypton, Part One: Sliding Home” [Retorno a Krypton, Primeira parte: Chegar a casa, a miña tradución]. E na maioría delas, é Lois Lane quen apoia ao superheroe ou incluso inflúe non só nas súas loitas senón tamén nas súas intencións e decisións.

Aínda que en moitas ocasións as personaxes femininas de cómics están na periferia das proezas e batallas dos superheroe, nestes vinte anos, Lois Lane foi protagonista de historias independentemente de Superman. Nun cómic como “Survival!”, ela actúa pola súa conta investigando uns roubos no exército e en “Prestidigitation Nation”, pon todo o seu empeño para entrevistar a un obstinado político do espectáculo. Ambas narracións e imaxes mostran a súa determinación para lograr a noticia sen axuda externa.

No cómic “Return to Krypton, Part One: Sliding Home” ten a voz narrativa nos cartuchos para comezar a historia dende o seu punto de vista e como trata da visita ao pai e á nai biolóxica de Superman, ela aproveita a oportunidade para comparalo e comparala non só co pai e a nai adoptiva do superheroe, senón tamén co seu propio pai e a súa nai. Aínda que en “Visitor” e “Survival!” hai poucos cartuchos, as historias están presentadas a través dos seus bocadillos que inclúen os pensamentos e o discurso dela, e incluso en “Visitor” o que ela escribe no seu computador portátil.
Tamén os cartuchos de “DC Comics Presents Lois Lane” inclúen as súas ideas sobre a noticia que redacta en su mente segundo o que vai ocorrendo, en tanto que os de “We’re Back!” parecen sacados do seu diario persoal e ao inicio de “Battery, Part Five” [Batería, Quinta parte, a miña tradución], aparecen como anacos de papel dunha carta ao seu home.

Cando consideramos o seu heroísmo, atopámo-lo en historias como “Swan Song”, na que arrisca a súa vida para salvar a de Jimmy Olsen ou en “Battery, Part Five” na que finalmente a feren de morte porque sae do refuxio para salvar un soldado ferido. Por outra banda, tamén está á altura dunha heroe de acción, como pode apreciarse en “Survival!” onde non parece fóra de lugar rodeada de paramilitares e tamén pode mantelos a raia ata que chegan as autoridades. E en “DC Comics Presents Lois Lane” fai o papel dunha espía estilo James Bond, descubrindo un laboratorio secreto de xenética, rescatando os/as reféns e destruíndo as instalacións.

Lois Lane foi caracterizada como unha rapaza militar debido á súa destreza en combate e defensa persoal que é tan notable que a súa irmá comparára coa de Wonder Woman. Pero isto ten un prezo, xa que tivo unha infancia moi difícil. Cun pai militar que sempre quixo ter un fillo e non tivo ningún escrupulo en mostrarlle abertamente este desexo incluso cando era moi pequena, ela sempre tratou de exceder as expectativas do seu pai sen logralo nunca. Entón, este é un fío que aparece nas historias “Visitor” e “Survival!” como escenas retrospectivas que van in crescendo porque na primeira ela simplemente baixa a cabeza e acepta os malos tratos, pero máis tarde, contéstalle ao seu pai incluso gritando, aínda que xa como moza. A última confrontación que vimos ten lugar en “The Wedding Album” [O álbum de voda, a miña... xxvi
traducción], pero xa non como escena retrospectiva. Nesta ocasión, a razón da pelexa é que Lois Lane non lle permite ao seu pai que faga a entrega tradicional da noiva no altar da igrexa e el séntese ofendido. Esta situación ofrece unha oportunidade ideal para presentar unha estratexia de eliminación de xénero específico e iso é precisamente o que decidiron facer os creadores do cómic, porque ela di que se fora o fillo que o seu pai tanto deseñara durante toda a súa vida, o que el enfaticamente repetía unha e outra vez, non soñaría con entregalo no altar, así que o mellor é que pense nela como un fillo.

Con respecto ás dúas ferramentas non académicas de análise de cómics mencionadas por Stuller, o test de Bechdel e o síndrome de Mulleres nas Neveiras, podemos dicir que “Visitor” pode estar na primeira categoría, aínda que o diálogo das dúas mulleres ao final da historia non pasa o test. Pero non é de estrañar xa que o obxectivo de Lois Lane na súa visita a Lana Lang en Smallville é falar do que sucedeu en Metropolis en relación con Clark Kent. Por outra banda, en relación coa segunda ferramenta, hai especialmente dúas historias que poderían ser adecuadas para ese tipo de análise, dado que o sufrimento de Lois Lane motiva as reaccións de Superman: “The Last Supervillain” [O derradeiro supervilán, a miña tradución] e “Battery, Part Five”. Ademais, ámbalas dúas poden ser percibidas como estruturas espelladas distorsionadas, porque na primeira historia, a morte de Lois Lane serve de catalizadora para que o superheroe reacione en contra do supervilán, ou non reaccione, como foi o caso, pero en realidade ela estaba ilesa, non morta, mentres que na segunda historia, aínda que a ferida mortal parecía que non tiña relación co superheroe no marco da historia analizada, cando se consideraba o arco narrativo maior, si xiraba ao
redor da reacción do superheroe tamén. Non obstante, en realidad, ningunha delas é sobre a morte real da personaxe como no caso da historia que orixinou a idea do síndrome das Mulleres nas Neveiras.

En relación coa aparenca de Lois Lane nos cómics seleccionados, pode dicirse que foi sexualizada en certa medida co realce de atributos e roupa reveladora para a mirada do espectador masculino implícito, especialmente en historias como “Kith and Kin” [Familiares e amizades, a miña tradución] e “DC Comics Presents Lois Lane”, pero en xeral, o estilo global das representacións gráficas mostra gran mesura. Así, este estilo va dende as figuras sutilmente femininas con vestimenta decorosa de “The Story of the Century” e de “We’re Back!” á figura exaxeradamente expresionista de “Stormy Weather” [Tempo tormentoso, a miña tradución] e das encantadoras case caricaturas de “Return to Krypton, Part One: Sliding Home” e “Prestidigitation Nation” ás imaxes delicadamente realistas de “Battery, Part Five”.

Noutro lugar dixemos que “The Wedding Album” podía ser un momento decisivo nas historias seleccionadas, pero ademais desta historia que xusto divide esta secuencia de cómics en dúas partes iguais, hai que ter en conta outro evento transcendental: a revelación da identidade secreta de Superman que ten lugar en 1991, despois de pasado só un cuarto de todo o período en estudo. Non obstante, cando consideramos toda a evolución desta personaxe durante estes vinte anos, ningún destes dous acontecementos cruciais nas vidas destes/as personaxes modificou moito o estatus de Lois Lane. Ela permaneceu como a compañeira do superheroe e a única diferenca real é que se incluíron momentos íntimos e domésticos nas aventuras. Outro aspecto que non cambiou é o nome de solteira de Lois Lane despois do seu
casamento. Parece difícil de entender debido á relación conflitiva co seu pai, pero podemos supoñer que é máis doado mantelo como o seu pseudónimo invariable.

Aínda que estas cousas non cambian a personaxe en sí tanto como se esperaba nun principio, aparece algún tipo de modificación na narrativa pero non necesariamente relacionada con eses dous eventos. Polo tanto, durante este período haialgunas historias que no parecen ser do xénero de superheroes. Entre elas, “The Wedding Album” mesma pode verse como unha colección de tradicións estadounidenses relacionadas coas vodas, e a beleza melancólica de “The Last Supervillain” pode ser presentada como unha fervente apelación para abolir a pena capital, en tanto que “Visitor”, que é unha historia anterior que non pode estar afectada nin pola revelación do segredo de Superman nin polo casamento da parella de personaxes de cómics, pode ser unha descripción dos sentimentos persoais de dúas mulleres achegadas a Superman.

Finalmente é necesario observar que aínda con altibaixos, en xeral, a personaxe parece estar á altura dos ideais do feminismo, xa que os/as creadores/as de cómics, na súa maioría homes, parecen facer reais esforzos para mostrar unha muller forte que enfronta unha situación insólita como é a relación cun ser tan diferente á vida ordinaria como pode imaxinarse. Pódesedílocamente elapa é un vínculo entre os dous mundos. Para concluir, pensamos que é apropiado aquí mencionar que esta análise só pode considerarse unha primeira aproximación a un tema moi amplo, dado que nestes vinte anos hai moitas máis historias que merecen a pena examinar aparte do corpus seleccionado e pode resultar realmente moi satisfactorio profundar nas complexidades dunha personaxe de cómics tan atraínte como é Lois Lane.

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INTRODUCTION

It seems almost self-evident and even redundant to state that comics have been deemed unworthy of study and marginal material in traditional academic studies. However, my interest in comics did not originate in the fields of academia but in a long-ago childhood passion for the medium. It started with an addiction to Superman comic books, which eventually expanded to include as many other comics of different topics as reached my hands, but with a particular bias toward science-fiction comics. I was thrilled by the idea of male and female heroes with incredible superpowers, of life on other planets coming to ours, of other parallel dimensions, of time traveling —everything that expanded the imagination. In addition, comics had the surplus benefit for me to have the stories inextricably linked with illustrations.

From those nearly forgotten years, a personal journey began. The path gradually and almost imperceptibly forked and those two aspects, text and image, have run parallel in my life ever since. Thus, apart from my English studies, I studied for years and received a bachelor’s degree in the visual arts from the National University Institute of Art in Argentina, and later, a master’s degree in the humanities, with specialization in art from California State University, in the United States. Then, while teaching English scientific, technical and general discourse analysis at the teachers’ training course dependent on the National Technical University in Argentina, I developed guidelines as an aid to help my students organize the theoretical material I asked them to read and to apply them on the practical analysis of actual texts taken from authentic sources (see Appendix 1). At the
same time, as an assistant to Professor Julio Flores, head of the subject Visual Language taught at the already-mentioned National University Institute of Art in Argentina, I also designed, at his suggestion, some guidelines for analysis of artworks to be used by students of the subject (see Appendix 2).

With all this background, it is fairly easy to understand my present interest in comics, a medium that partakes of both image and text. But when I decided to start my doctoral studies, I could never imagine I would be able to merge these two threads that had run parallel throughout my life. I approached my doctoral studies with a timid potential idea, and thanks to Professor Dr. Celia Vázquez García, who introduced me to the fertile field of children and youth’s literature, to ANILU, the Spanish research association in that field, and to the research group devoted to that expansive area of studies, that idea bloomed into actual fact. Now I can do sanctioned research of the graphic narrative basically made up of image and text, and while engaged in these studies, I have been gaining some enlightenment in themes and images that, otherwise, might have remained in my memory as naïvely as they were when I first came across them in my childhood. This return has, hopefully, been allowing me to penetrate deeper in the understanding, awareness, and interpretation of comics. What is more, these studies enabled me to merge those mentioned parallel life constituents, like two tributaries flowing into a wider river, and also to include some newly developed interests in women’s studies.

Nevertheless, revisiting those childhood devotions from an academic perspective is not something that I started without some apprehension. As I stated at the beginning,
academic literary and artistic studies (and even women’s studies, as we will see in Chapter One) have been especially reluctant to accept comics within their respective research fields, maybe not only because they are part of that global phenomenon called “popular or mass culture” (Altarriba 9; Castillo Vidal 248; Merino 11; Parrinder 45), but also because they use a hybrid language comprising image and text put together in areas where monomodality prevails (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001: 1). Monomodality is a term that British semiotician Gunther Kress and Australian communication theorist Theo van Leeuwen use in opposition to multimodality (1996: 18; 2001: 1). The latter refers to the putting together of different media in the same text, not only illustrations and print with different typography and sophisticated layout, but also in our electronic age, movement and music, in a quest for crossing mode boundaries that inspired twentieth-century semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 18; 2001: 1). As Kress and van Leeuwen argue, for many years the text in literature and the image in art have not dared to cross the limits of their respective disciplines (2001: 1).

Fortunately, the path has already been paved for the scholarly study of comics by others, and manifestations of popular culture started to be taken into account by mainstream intelligentsia (Merino 31). The 1960s, the decade of so many changes with the prominent role of young people, brought mass culture to the fore of academic studies, especially headed by Italian semiotician Umberto Eco’s pioneering and insightful book *Apocalípticos e integrados* (*Apocalypse Postponed*, published partial translation), which included several essays on comics and a very short one on science fiction. And in the early seventies, Spanish media scholar Román Gubern started to develop theories and analysis
of this type of works from different approaches in his book *El lenguaje de los cómics* [The Language of Comics, my translation].

In my preliminary thesis for the diploma of advanced studies (DEA), required to start working on this final dissertation, I followed Gubern’s and Eco’s proposals for comics analysis and supplemented them with the work of other comics scholars, such as American comics artists-writers-theorists Will Eisner and Scott McCloud (Gil 2003: 10-22). That preliminary thesis intended to show that comics are neither pernicious nor puerile for the young by analyzing the 1950s adaptations by EC Comics publishing company of the late American novelist Ray Bradbury’s stories from his book *The Martian Chronicles* (Gil 2003: 4-6). As Bradbury’s work has never been accused of corrupting juvenile minds or being childish, it served the aim of the study (Gil 2003: 5). The results of the analysis showed that in the translation of the textual stories into the comics medium no significant changes could be found, from that point of view (Gil 2003: 111). The term “translation” here is used freely, since as Scottish linguist John Catford states in his early exploration of the topic from a linguistic perspective, referring specifically to phonology and graphology, “[t]ranslation between media is impossible” (53). Instead of translation between media, an arbitrary conversion from the spoken to the written medium can be used (Catford 53). In our case, obviously, the modifications that were apparent between the stories and the comics adaptations were related to those arising from this conversion from the monomodal text to the multimodal comics with their different modes of representation.

Therefore, having reached the conclusion that comics merit academic research in their own right, I deflected my interest from Bradbury’s comics adaptations because I felt I
had exhausted the material for the final dissertation research, since I no longer needed to prove the worth of comics. Based on my experience with Gubern’s and Eco’s semiotic paradigms for comics analysis, I first considered to use them in a larger study to bring about a comprehensive model of comics analytical evaluation based on semiotics, including texts referring to artistic criticism, such as French semioticians Groupe µ’s book *Tratado del signo visual* [Treatise on the Visual Sign, my translation] and Spanish art scholars Alberto Carrere and José Saborit’s book *Retórica de la pintura* [Painting Rhetoric, my translation]. Unfortunately, no sooner did I make this decision, even discussing it with my dissertation adviser Dr. Vázquez García, than I came across Spanish literature scholar Miguel Ángel Muro Munilla’s book *Análisis e interpretación del comic: Ensayo de metodología semiótica* [Analysis and Interpretation of Comics: An Essay in Semiotic Methodology, my translation]. As the title indicates, this book is based on the same lines of critique tools as the ones I wanted to develop, although I later realized the study has a considerable emphasis on narratology. Evidently, I thought it redundant to add a new study to this highly comprehensive and erudite work.

I started considering several other research topics until I landed on my childhood passion for Superman comics published by DC Comics company and originally created by American comics writer Jerry Siegel and Canadian-born American comics artist Joe Shuster. After so many years, it was obvious that the superhero did not have the same appeal as he did when I was a child. Therefore, my attention eventually shifted from the superhero to his companion Lois Lane, the only fictional character in the long comics saga
who appeared from the very beginning as part of the original idea, together with Superman and his alter ego Clark Kent.

At first, I thought the study of this character through discourse and iconography would give the possibility of examining the different media (comics, radio plays, animation, film serials, television series, films, and even musical comedies) and their audience. However, guided by some parallel research in feminist criticism of comics my dissertation adviser encouraged (Gil 2010), I slowly deviated from this idea and focused on the status of this female character in Superman comics stories and American society’s perception of the role of women throughout this long period of American history.

Thanks to American comics scholar Peter Coogan, I discovered a website devoted to comics academic research and through this I found a 1986 dissertation, which dealt with the exact same topic I wanted to research: “The Evolution of Social Norms and the Life of Lois Lane: A Rhetorical Analysis of Popular Culture” by American media-comics scholar Jeanne Pauline Williams. This work studied how women are portrayed in popular media, specifically focusing on the fictional character Lois Lane, and it looked into changes from the first Superman comic book appearing in 1938 until 1986, the publishing date of the dissertation. This study did not discourage me; on the contrary, I saw the possibility of following in Williams’s footsteps, since it was obvious that there was plenty of room to continue the analysis of comics character Lois Lane where Williams’s dissertation left off.

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1 The website ComicsResearch.org <http://www.comicsresearch.org/>, directed by Dr. Gene Kannenberg, lists comics scholarship annotated bibliographies to aid in comics scholarly research (last accessed 10 Aug. 2012).
Taking all this material into account, the present study consists in a feminist semiotic analysis of the fictional character Lois Lane basing the subsequent comics research on Williams’s 1986 dissertation. We are characterizing the analysis as semiotic as an umbrella term of the study of communication and signs, even though some of the sources do not acknowledge their connection to this foundational study that will guide all the methodology. As will be discussed later in the literature review, some of the sources for developing the methodology are not strictly speaking semiotic, but we find them useful to supplement the methodological framework.

Originally, I was confident I could include the 136 comics of a spin-off from Superman called Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane, which were published in the 1960s and 1970s. But later on, I discarded the idea because these were included in Williams’s research, and also specifically in a more recently published master’s degree senior thesis entitled “Superman’s Girlfriend Lois Lane: A Reflection of the Changing Female Roles in 1960’s America” by American comics historian Amanda Parkinson, which will be used to qualify some of Williams’s findings in that period, when discussing them later in Chapter One.

Accordingly, all the regular comics in the main DC Comics publishing company’s universe continuity² since Williams finished her study in 1986 were compiled to select the final corpus for this analysis (see Appendices 3 and 4). This year is a suitable starting point because of the relaunch of DC Comics’ continuity with the 1985 Crisis on Infinite Earths

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² Continuity in fiction is the consistency of characters, plot, objects, places and events. Specifically in comic books, it refers to a number of related events set in the same fictional universe or parallel universes ("Continuity").
series (Wolfman et al.). We end the period under study in 2005, which also seems to be an appropriate roundup date because that year the company issued another crisis in its fictional universe, considered the sequel to the 1985 conflict: *Infinite Crisis* (Johns et al.). Although this latter crisis did not end the continuity of the characters stories in DC Comics’ universe, which came to an end and was relaunched in 2011, twenty years seem a suitable time for analysis, especially when we consider that the 1980s and the 1990s were part of an effervescent period in feminist anti-sexism campaigns to bring about changes in women’s representations in society “to draw attention to the general and specific discrimination against women” (Mills 2008: 155).

As regards the sources for analysis of the selected comics, apart from following Williams’s groundwork, the examination is going to be based on the methodological framework developed in the already-mentioned preliminary DEA thesis, basically Eco’s and Gubern’s methodology with Eisner’s, McCloud’s and other comics scholars’ insights. To this we are going to add a range of works from German art historian Erwin Panofsky’s ideas on iconography and iconology to Muro Munilla’s and Kress and van Leeuwen’s tools for semiotic analysis, supplemented by the book *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* by American comics scholar-cartoonist Robert Harvey. This last-mentioned book is not only a history as the subtitle claims, but also a perceptive and thought-provoking instrument for comics analysis. Other comics researchers’ material will be used *ad hoc*, as necessity arises, as we will see in the literature review, theoretical framework and methodology sections. Another line that will be relevant to this inquiry is the application of French literary theorist Gérard Genette’s framework of transtextuality, that is to say, his
concepts of intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, and architextuality. This aspect seems particularly apt for the period under study, since there was a lot of influence from events outside the comic books, both in the larger social context and in parallel Superman stories appearing in other media. Finally, the last but by no means the least significant element for the analysis framework is the feminist approach, which, as we will see in Chapter One, is based on a variety of sources. The most significant one among those sources is British feminist linguist Sara Mills’s toolkit of insightful categories developed throughout more than two decades of study to analyze sexism in society. It is important to highlight this aspect of the analysis, since the generalist semiotic view has to be carefully differentiated from a feminist strand; or even better, it should be qualified with a clear feminist perspective.

Consequently, the design of this study runs from a literature review and a general framework for the analysis of the selected comics starred by our focal fictional character Lois Lane to a feminist viewpoint. Chapter One deals with a review of the literature related to comics analysis in general, a feminist approach to them, and specific material on the fictional character under study. Chapter Two is devoted to the theoretical framework of comics studies and feminism. Chapter Three encompasses the contextual history of comics ending with the concrete historical creation of Superman and Lois Lane, and the later evolution of DC Comics publishing company. The methodology developed and the selection of the corpus of comics for this study are presented in Chapter Four, while Chapter Five is reserved for the analysis proper of the selected material, leaving the final chapter to propose certain conclusions of this inquiry.
To conclude, a few caveats go in order here. We have to bear in mind that, after all, our outlook has been restricted to the Western world, and in particular, to the American world. It cannot be otherwise, since our aim is the analysis of the fictional character Lois Lane in Superman comics published by the American publishing company DC Comics. Moreover, our educational and cultural background would make it difficult for us to consider Eastern traditions for the survey of comics (except for some sporadic comparisons), without similar parallel research. For instance, following Western authors and books, in Chapter Two, our definition of the graphic novel, one of the types of long comics, does not refer to Japanese manga tradition of book-length comics. These have been excluded from our consideration, because they follow a totally different cultural tradition.

The Reference section at the end of this study is divided into the following three sections: the first one includes all the primary sources, i.e. the comics stories under analysis; the second one lists other supplementary original fiction works mentioned in our text, but not analyzed in depth; and finally, the last section records all the usual secondary sources consulted and directly or indirectly quoted to support our work. Throughout our inquiry, we are using the Modern Language Association of America’s style of documenting sources, except in the case of citing two or more works by the same author or authors (Gibaldi 196-197). When that type of citation is necessary, instead of adding “the title of the work (if brief) or a shortened version” recommended (Gibaldi 196), we use the year of publication, and when coinciding, we include the first edition of the work, which is listed between square brackets on the reference section at the end of this study. As regards
Internet sources, we supplement the *MLA Handbook* with the chapter “Using MLA Style to Cite and Document Sources” of the online manual *A Reference Guide to Using Internet Sources* (Harnack & Kleppinger). Thus, for an online document, besides the usual data of author, document title, and website title, we add the date of Internet publication or posting, or latest update, the date of access to the source, and the URL in angle brackets (Harnack & Kleppinger).

For the bibliographic notation of comics, we are following American comics scholar Allen Ellis’s article “Comic Art in Scholarly Writing: A Citation Guide,” written under the aegis of the Comic Art and Comics Area of the Popular Culture Association, and which we refer to in full in our Reference section. This is based on the Modern Language Association Style, which we have used for this whole study, but there are some differences (Ellis). The most significant divergence from standard periodical citation is the addition of the magazine’s publisher (Ellis). This is important for comic-book citation, because the same character can vary from publisher to publisher (Ellis). The information added that does not appear in the source (bibliographic information is taken from the indicia, i.e. the small print usually found at the bottom of the first page or the inside front cover of the comic book) is included in square brackets, if applicable (Ellis).

Since the creation of comics is typically a collaborative effort, just as that of films, those who take part in their production should be mentioned (Ellis; Klock 14). These basically refer to the writer (w) and the artist (a), but sometimes there are two artists, one in charge of drawing the picture in pencil, the penciler (p), and another in charge of marking the picture in ink, the inker (i) (Ellis). As regards page number, in the cases
requiring it, we have included a pagination of the actual pages in the comic book between square brackets (Ellis), when they are not paginated or when stories are individually paginated. To specify panels, we have used a forward slash to separate them from page numbers, and the panel number was counted from left to right, top to bottom (Ellis), of each page.
CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been written about comics, though mostly from a popular perspective. As we have mentioned in the Introduction, academia has been late to realize the relevance of this kind of studies. Nevertheless, more than fifty years have passed since Umberto Eco’s essays and during this time, there has been an accumulation of studies that might be relevant for this inquiry. But although comics are the core of the analysis we intend to perform, the backbone is the feminist perspective, and from this point of view, there are fewer studies and even fewer ones have been attempted with a feminist semiotic approach in mind.

Therefore, in this chapter, we are going to review some pertinent selected material for comics analysis ranging from the already-mentioned pioneers Umberto Eco and Román Gubern to the more recently published book by Miguel Ángel Muro Munilla, as samples of a European point of view. Then, we will turn to several comics researchers that can give us an American perspective. The second section will deal with the meager number of works we were able to find in relation to a feminist approach to comics analysis. But these works will only serve as a means of access to the topic because most of them have treated it tangentially. Thus, we will have to resort to other types of feminist studies to develop our proposed methodology of analysis. As we mentioned in the Introduction, these will be fulfilled by the insightful studies by Sara Mills, which will be discussed in the section “Feminist Criticism and Analysis” in Chapter Two. Finally, as we
have already observed, for our purpose of analyzing the fictional character Lois Lane, the most relevant element in the long series of materials that scholars and pundits have devoted to the long-lived myth of Superman is Jeanne Williams’s 1986 doctoral dissertation “The Evolution of Social Norms and the Life of Lois Lane: A Rhetorical Analysis of Popular Culture,” since it is going to be used as the groundwork for our study. But before that, we will review several other articles on the character.

**Literature Review on Comics Analysis**

Umberto Eco’s *Apocalípticos e integrados* is a collection of essays organized around the idea of contrasting those who reject mass culture vehemently without finding any worth at all in it with those who embrace it without even realizing the dangers of a non-critical acceptance. Eco specifies that “Apocalypse is the obsession of dissenters, [whereas] integration is the concrete reality of those who do not dissent. The image of Apocalypse emerges from reading texts on mass culture; the image of integration emerges from texts of mass culture” (28, my translation, emphasis in the original). In a follow-up text more than ten years after the first publication of the book, Eco names two different intellectuals to synthesize the ideas in his twofold thesis of apocalyptic and integrated thinkers: German-born American philosopher Herbert Marcuse representing the former, and Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan representing the latter (21-22).

For this inquiry, probably the most relevant essays in Eco’s *Apocalípticos* are “El mito de Superman” [The Myth of Superman, my translation] (219-256) and “Lectura de ‘Steve Canyon’” [A Reading of “Steve Canyon,” my translation] (141-188). In “Mito,”
among the many —mostly negative— ideas that the figure of Superman evokes in Eco, two may be highlighted to introduce the concept of the superhero in our study: the mythical and the ideological. These two aspects are related, since Eco compares the characteristics of the contemporary superhero’s mythos with the features of classical mythical heroes stating that the mythos of Superman does not express a religion, but an ideology (18). But this is not the only difference between Superman and the classical mythical hero. The latter embodies eternal characteristics and irreversible vicissitudes of life, which are already known by the public, and thus, they are predictable and enjoyed as such (Eco 227-229). The former was born within the context of what Eco calls a “novel civilization” (my translation) (228). In this kind of civilization, the reader’s main interest is in the unforeseeable events in the narration with the consequent aesthetic value of originality and unpredictability (Eco 229). Although this might be debatable in our postmodern world, as we will see later, at the time Eco wrote this essay these ideas seem applicable.

Superman, as a mythical character, is in this peculiar situation: he is an archetype, a compendium of collective aspirations, and therefore, he is immobile in an emblematic stasis that makes him easily recognizable, but because of being commercialized in the context of novel production by a public consuming novels, he is subject to a development that is characteristic of the novel character (Eco 229-230). This is the contradiction that arises between being a myth and a novel character too. As a myth, Superman should not change, but as a novel character, he evolves all the time as the demanding public consumes new events in his fictitious life. Eco thinks that the solution to this problem was
achieved by telling the comics stories in an oneiric atmosphere, so that what happens before or after an event becomes confusing for the reader (236). Thus, Superman remains a myth only insofar as the reader loses control of temporal relations and gives up reasoning based on them, letting the flow of stories go on and on in a continuous present (Eco 239). In this connection, American literature scholar Geoff Klock states that Eco’s idea of “the ‘oneiric climate’ of the superhero story” is “probably the most insightful comment on the subject,” which can be applied even to contemporary stories (5).

But we think that at least since the 1980s or even earlier, comics superheroes have really become much more similar to their classical counterparts. Two factors may have brought about this change. On the one hand, as we will see below, at that time the comics industry shifted the distribution method from newsstands to direct sale comic-book shops, which allowed for new comics formats to appear (one-shot, graphic novel, miniseries, etc.) and for individualistic artistic expression to replace the previously preferred homogeneous “house style” (Harvey 144). On the other hand, the 1985 publication of the crossover miniseries Crisis on Infinite Earths (Wolfman et al.) ended DC Comics’ fictitious universe and started another anew, opening up the possibility of retelling the well-known lives of superheroes again. Altogether, these two changes mean that different creators have had a chance to re-imagine the origins and history of the superheroes in different comics formats. Just as in the old myths, everybody knows the story, but in comics, everybody enjoys the art and the slightly different perspectives of the same narrative.
Apart from the reinvention occurring in comics, we can expand this to other media by referring to multimedia systems offers, a concept developed by German literature scholar Hans-Heino Ewers, which can be linked to the amazing technological development in the last thirty years. Ewers defines multimedia systems offers as narratives not limited to a medium, but simultaneously presented in as many media as possible, such as films, radio plays, comics, novels, computer games, etc. Obviously, this concept is closely related to Kress and van Leeuwen’s idea of multimodality. But, though at the onset of their discussions, these authors insist that the notions of mode and medium are sometimes difficult to distinguish, they eventually decide to apply the term mode (abstract content) to the semiotic resources used in design, while medium (concrete expression) refers to the material resources used in production (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001: 6-7, 22). Therefore, modes can be realized in more than one production medium, e.g., the narrative mode can be realized in a wide range of media (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001: 6-7, 22). As regards modern multimedia systems offers, Ewers maintains that they do not emulate the novel, but they seem to go back to traditional myths and legends. In fact, they have structural similarity to stories about the gods: both types of narratives are inherently unclosed (Ewers). This openness implies flexibility and the possibility of extending the story with consequent growing complexity (Ewers), something that evidently has happened in comics narrations.

The true users of multimedia systems offers are the recipients of all the media offered, although these constitute a mass public, unlike the audience of epic poems who consisted of the elite (Ewers). The connection between the material and the
consumer/audience is similar to that of traditional epic poems, since the familiarity with stories is no impediment to their enjoyment and the repeated reception in different versions of the same narrative is of central importance (Ewers). In Superman’s case at least, we can say that the proliferation of origins stories and other alternative superhero histories with different viewpoints going back to the beginning again and again in most of the media available can certainly fall into the category of multimedia systems offers, and thus, superseding Eco’s ideas of a need for originality and unpredictability.

Because of this connection among different media, and the use of the concept of text in an encompassing way regardless of the media it may be realized in, here it might be useful to mention Gérard Genette’s research on transtextuality. He defines this notion as “the textual transcendence of the text” (Genette 1). In other words, it is an umbrella term he has developed to account for the different ways in which a text is related to other texts, or in his own words, “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (Genette 1). As it was stated in the Introduction, this thread may be helpful for our study, since as we have just seen as regards multimedia systems offers, distinguishing the different relationships between texts may broaden our understanding of that topic. We are going to focus on Genette’s first chapter “Five Types of Transtextuality, among Which Hipertextuality” (1-7), which serves as an introduction and framework for his book Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree, because it presents the five general notions referring to the different transtextual relationships between texts in an order that ranges from the closest to the farthest connection.
The first term is intertextuality, which covers quoting, allusion, and even plagiarism (2), and this is the closest relationship, which Genette explicitly defines as a “copresence between two texts or several other texts” (1). As can be seen, it is more restricted than the idea that intertextuality usually evokes, and Genette clarifies that many times the intertext is implicit; that is to say, an author may not include an explicit reference to the source, and in these cases, it is totally hypothetical from the point of view of the reader (2). Paratextuality, the second concept, consists in the relationship of the text proper to what Genette calls its “paratexts,” which may act as an external setting or environment for the text (4). The list of paratexts is rather long, but worthwhile, because it helps to make the notion clearer: “a title, a subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc.; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals . . . the various rough drafts, outlines, and projects of a work” (Genette 3). The third notion is metatextuality, which applies to commentaries on or criticisms of a text (Genette 4), and it is plain that there is a wider separation between these texts in this relationship than in the previous ones.

Genette leaves what he calls the fourth type of textual transcendence to the end of this introductory chapter because his book Palimpsests is a treatise on precisely this aspect of transtextuality (5), and by postponing it, this opening definition is smoothly integrated with the expanded discussion of the focal topic of the book. But strictly following the proposed order, the fourth type of transtextuality is hypertextuality, which refers to the derivation of a hypertext from an earlier preexistent hypotext (Genette 5).
This concept is illustrated and clarified with three literary works: the *Aeneid* and *Ulysses* are two hypertexts of the same hypotext, the *Odyssey* (Genette 5). Although the overall relationship is hypertextuality, Genette considers that there are differences. Thus, he categorizes James Joyce’s relationship as direct or simple transformation, because he uses Homer’s pattern changing the setting to twentieth-century Dublin, while Virgil’s relationship is referred to as indirect transformation or imitation, because he tells a different story, that of Aeneas, in a manner similar to Homer’s, taking as a model the genre established by the Greek poet (5-6). We think that this kind of transformations may be patent in some Superman stories, especially in the Elseworlds series of graphic novels, which allow for changes in settings, such as *Superman: True Brit* (Johnson et al.), a playful parody (according to Genette’s sub-classification of hypertextuality) of Superman growing up in England because it is there where his spaceship crashes.

Finally, the fifth type of relationship between texts, architextuality, is the most implicit and abstract of them all, and sometimes a silent one, broadly speaking, referring to genre (Genette 5). Architextuality can explicitly be a paratext; therefore, it may be shown in the title, i.e. *Poems*, or in the subtitle, i.e. *A Novel* (Genette 5). Nevertheless, his examples of *The Romance of the Rose*, not being a romance, and the question of the generic classification of *The Divine Comedy* are proof enough that even the explicit appeal to a genre is not reliable enough (Genette 4). Moreover, as this type of relationship is taxonomic in nature, when the architext is omitted, the reason may be that the author wants to reject a classification of his or her work (Genette 4). Although Genette states that genre is only one aspect of the architext, he does not specify what the other aspects
are, and he follows this by speaking about the difficulties of determining the genre of works, something that the reader, critic, or audience in general are entitled to do upon reception of the specific work (4, 5). In the next chapter, we are going to see that sometimes the concept of genre does elude definition, as Genette maintains.

Going back to Eco’s essay “Mito” we have been discussing, as regards the second aspect to be highlighted from it, i.e. the ideological content in Superman stories, Eco first states that superheroes are deeply good and moral, using their powers with beneficial social objectives (252). So, in his view, the pedagogical message of superhero stories is highly acceptable, at least at the level of children’s literature, and even the violent events that appear in the episodes aim to reject evil and to show that crime does not pay (Eco 252). But Eco perceives that these teachings are ambiguous because Superman acts at the limited level of the small town or city (Smallville or Metropolis), and he only fights against evil that threatens private property (253-254). Thus, Eco concludes that in these cases evil assumes the only aspect of an attack on private property, while goodness is only characterized as charity (254). Eco’s criticism is totally acceptable and reliable, especially if we take into account that a large company with conservative commercial interests, such as DC Comics, has had a strong hold on all its products, which will obviously reflect the company’s ideology.

However, as we mentioned above, since the 1980s there has been more room for creators to experiment and imagine more progressive alternative stories. Although this, by no means, implies that all of a sudden a company completely transforms its ideological stance, there has been a relaxation in the inherent conservatism typically associated with
the business world. This assertion may seem contradictory if we take into account the 1980s sociopolitical context of Reaganite and Thatcherite policies, but in a rather limited way, opening up the production to a more comprehensive range of creators and the distribution to a more specialized —albeit maybe wider in background and age—readership may mean opening doors to alternative world views.

A case in point is a graphic novel such as *Superman: Peace on Earth*, which can be seen almost as an illustrated novel (Ross & Dini). In this story, told in the first person from Superman’s point of view, he tries to solve, at least temporarily, the problem of hunger in the world, inevitably failing in the end. As stated in the novel, there are too many factors at play for one man, even a Superman, to solve such a large issue (Ross & Dini [60]). It is evident that this means going back to the limits mentioned by Eco, but the difference is that now artists and other creators are freer to deal with controversial issues arisen from the challenges that a fictitious character of this kind may face. Nevertheless, in spite of Eco’s mostly negative view of Superman, or even perhaps because of this, he ends the essay recommending the research not only of the formal aspects of the stories, but also the characters, expressly mentioning our object of this study —Lois Lane (255).

*Apocalipticos*’ second relevant essay “Lectura” is of interest to this inquiry from another point of view. In this case, the content is not about superheroes, and the medium is not even comic books, but comic strips. As we will see below, the distribution system of comic strips (they appear in newspapers) affects the production and even the content organization. However, the most important aspect in this essay on the comic strip serial *Steve Canyon* is Eco’s presentation of tools to analyze comics. Here Eco has developed
what he calls a semantics (155), a grammar within the frame (156), and a syntax between frames (157) for comics analysis, and this will be part of the methodology we are going to use in this study. In Chapter Two, the language of comics developed by Eco will be dealt with in detail, but below we will just mention some general notions of what this essay is about.

According to Eco’s conception expressed in the essay, it is not enough to plunge directly on the search of ideological features when we examine comics, because ideology is also present in the images and in their sequential order for the story (166). Consequently, the different levels of structure have to be studied before coming to the analysis of the ideological components (Eco 155-160). In other words, Eco suggests going from the concrete visual structure to the more abstract underlying ideology.

As a result, Eco starts the essay with a formal frame-by-frame description of the first page of the already-mentioned comic strip *Steve Canyon*, which coincides with the first installment of the serial (141-155). Although Eco introduces this section as a mere description, even at this early stage he is also proposing some ideological conclusions as when, in relation to the costume worn by the stereotypical secretary character in contrast with the also stereotypical vamp character, he speaks of a Manichean division between good and evil by which a comics character typology is inevitably regulated (149). This descriptive part is interesting as a sample of one possible analysis or reading (if we use the semiotic term), and in the second part Eco extracts the eight elements constituting the language of comics mentioned above, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two: iconography, the speech balloon, panel grammar, montage syntax, narration, the nature
of plot, character typology, and the resulting ideology (155-160). In the last sections of the essay, there are issues deriving from this type of analysis proposed, especially dealing with ideology and the problem of taste (Eco 161-188).

Román Gubern has dedicated considerable time to researching and reflecting on comics, and in the early seventies, he came up with the already-mentioned *El lenguaje de los cómics*, a fundamental book of comics in-depth research and analysis. He starts this important study with the historical origin of comics, which he places in the American newspaper medium in the late nineteenth century (Gubern 1974: 13-34). Then, he follows the history of comics through their different formats: the Sunday page, the daily strip, and the comic book (Gubern 1974: 35-52). True to a semiotic approach, he includes not only the sociocultural context that has been described so far, but also the production and distribution contexts that have influenced the development of comics so much (Gubern 1974: 53-81).

In the chapter “Interconexiones culturales” [Cultural Interconnections, my translation], Gubern details the reciprocal relationships between comics and other languages (1974: 83-103), a topic that Italian comics researcher Daniele Barbieri has examined and enlarged to reach a book-size treatise, as we will see in Chapter Two, when we describe the mutual influence of comics and other languages. The last part of Gubern’s book has been devoted to developing guidelines for a semiotic analysis of comics, starting with the rationality behind the use of semiotics (1974: 105-112), followed by a repertoire of the vocabulary of comics that can be assimilated to the paradigm or vertical axis (i.e. substitution) in a semiotic analysis (1974: 105-159; Chandler 83), and
ended with the operations related to montage and narration, usually associated with the syntagmatic or horizontal axis (i.e. positioning) in a semiotic analysis (1974: 105-180; Chandler 83). These guidelines are the ones that have more interest to us, when we focus on the language of comics in Chapter Two, but his ideas on the history of comics will also be useful for us when we deal with that topic in Chapter Three.

Another important contribution to the analysis of comics is French comics scholar-semiotician Pierre Fresnault-Dereulle’s essay “Lo verbal en las historietas” [The verbal in comics, my translation], which is completely devoted to analyzing text in comics using a corpus limited to Tintin comics from the “Brussels School,” representing a European tradition (1982: 182-204, 183). In the introduction, Fresnault-Dereulle states that the article deals with the balloon (1982: 182), but this not only belittles the title, which refers to all types of text in comics, but also the content itself, since he includes captions, calling them “diegetic spaces” (1982: 200), and “zero-balloons,” consisting of text without the enclosing line of the balloon (1982: 186). Granted, Fresnault-Dereulle recognizes that captions are on the limit of his topic (1982: 200), and except for these limited digressions, the rest of the article dutifully deals with balloons and their characteristics, including a very comprehensive catalogue of them, distinguishing between their description (1982: 183-192) and their function (1982: 192-204). But the article certainly covers all possibilities of text in comics. In Chapter Two, we will use Fresnault-Dereulle’s essay to qualify and complete some of Eco’s elements in the language of comics, especially, as can be surmised, in relation to the balloon, its elements, characteristics, and functions.
Just from the start, Miguel Ángel Muro Munilla’s title of his book Análisis e interpretación del comic shows the two basic operations underlying his research on comics: analysis and interpretation. In spite of this, Muro Munilla’s treatment is not balanced between these two aspects of the methodology he wants to put forward, since the bulk of the book is on comics analysis, and within this, on the study of narration. However, we have found Muro Munilla’s inquiry on this topic an important source of information from a semiotic point of view, since we agree with him, when in his introduction he highlights that he has concentrated on an understudied subject (24). In his plan for the book, then, Muro Munilla suggests dealing with the components of the language of comics and narration as the devices for comics analysis, to be followed by the task of interpretation, not only based, as Eco does, on ideology, but on a variety of aspects: thematic, psychological, stylistic, semiotic, etc. (24).

Accordingly, in the first chapter, Muro Munilla begins with a defense of semiotics as the appropriate discipline for this endeavor (25-62); this is followed by a characterization of comics (63-67), and then, by his methodology based on analysis and synthesis, the latter operation in the sense of interpreting the results of the previous analysis (69-67). As noted earlier, focusing primarily on analysis, Muro Munilla deals with comics components and elements (79-104), much as Eco does, but most of his book is devoted to comics narration (105-219), a topic important enough to help in the final undertaking of elucidating the meaning of comics. In the last chapter, he applies his methodology to three formal comics units — a panel, a page, and an episode (Muro Munilla 221-273). Taking mainly the material on narration into account, in Chapter Two
we are going to apply relevant concepts extracted from this extensive and learned study to our own survey of the language of comics.

Spanish pedagogy-comics scholar José Luis Rodríguez Diéguez’s book *El comic y su utilización didáctica* [Comics and Their Didactic Application, my translation] is favorably mentioned by Muro Munilla in his introduction to *Análisis* as the third comics research after Eco’s and Gubern’s (22). Even so, when he examines Rodríguez Diéguez’s four models of comics analysis, he finds them wanting because the author has failed to resort to narrative categories and components, that is to say, not paying enough attention to narratology (Muro Munilla 22-24). Nevertheless, as Muro Munilla says at the beginning of his commentary on Rodríguez Diéguez’s book, it offers meticulously detailed research and a clearly pedagogical presentation of the findings to provide a useful foundation for the analytical stage of the study of comics (22).

Rodríguez Diéguez’s study is divided into two parts: first, the examination of comics and their components (17-129), and then, the didactic application of comics to the class (123-148). The second part has actually the function of an appendix, because it includes the activities that are referred to in the first part while discussing the different analytical topics. Consequently, the emphasis of the study is on the analysis of comics, which is, in turn, divided into four sections —definition of comics (17-22), characteristics of comics (24-46), analysis of comics components (48-85), and finally, analysis of comics global messages (87-127) —, and a conclusion (129). We deem this book a truly helpful tool to complete many of the statements and findings on comics we will discuss in Chapter Two.
Before dealing with the American scholarly strand of comics analysis, we would like to refer to an extremely significant work written and compiled by Spanish film and comics scholar Luis Gasca and the already-mentioned comics pioneer Román Gubern, *El discurso del cómic* [The Discourse of Comics, my translation], a really comprehensive catalogue of the repertoire of comics. Starting with their definition, the authors go on to explain that comics show and narrate at the same time, an insight they attribute to Genette (13). Then, they explore the basic sources for the comics repertoire, made up of conventions inherited from preexistent cultural traditions and communications media, in particular the visual arts, literature, and the cinema (Gasca & Gubern 14-15). But they also refer to the original findings of comics, for instance, visual metaphors or ideograms, which are based on the iconic representation of colloquial language expressions, such as seeing stars or sleeping like a log (Gasca & Gubern 15).

After examining the sources for comics conventions, the authors classify the repertoire into three separate sections: iconography, literary expression, and narrative techniques (Gasca & Gubern 14). Within iconography Gasca and Gubern list types of shots (16-21), perspectives (22-31), character stereotypes (32-97), gestures (98-147), archetypal situations (148-193), kinetic symbols (194-273), movement conventions (274-307), distortions (308-311), and visual metaphors (312-411). In the second section of literary expression, Gasca and Gubern include captions (412-421), balloons (422-479), lettering (480-503), soliloquy (504-511), exotic languages (512-527), swear words (528-561), voice-over (562-571), notices (572-577), and onomatopoeias (578-587). Finally, Gasca and Gubern illustrate narrative technique with the following examples: montage (588-641),
the passing of time (642-651), parallel events (652-657), flashback (658-663), zoom in (664-471), points of view (672-707), and implicit message to the reader (708-712). Though the authors do not extend the text beyond the basic description and classification of the panels included, the compilation is a powerful visual aid to see actual examples of most of the aspects of the language of comics, and this is of undeniable importance. For us, this inventory serves as a preliminary presentation of the material we are going to discuss at length in Chapter Two when we deal with the language of comics.

So far we have been considering European comics scholars; let us now turn to their American counterparts, who interestingly enough are all three of them comics artists besides researchers, so by studying their views, we can fathom the creators’ perspective. Arguably the first noteworthy American comics analysis is Will Eisner’s *Comics and Sequential Art*, published in the mid 1980s. This book is deemed the first systematic approach to the subject of comics in the American context, and Einer’s successor, Scott McCloud recognizes its significance by manifesting that it was “the first book to examine the art-form of comics” on the acknowledgements page of his own comics analysis book *Understanding Comics* (n.p.), which is going to be discuss later. Obviously, we are accepting this title of “first” from the American point of view, since we have just seen Eco’s and Gubern’s notable preceding studies. However, from another point of view —the fact of considering comics an “art-form”—, maybe we should rightfully award Eisner’s contribution that preeminent position. Moreover, coinciding with what we stated in the Introduction, Eisner also notes that comics have “been generally ignored as a form worthy of scholarly discussion” (1985: 5), and perhaps in order to compensate for this
historical disregard, his text has a general high-sounding tone of extolling the virtues of comics.

Although Eisner’s study seems to be a kind of handbook intended for training professionals in the field of comics, the discerning information is of major relevance for any comics researcher. As he announces in the first chapter, his objective is to dissect the building blocks of comics and scrutinize the characteristics of this art form (Eisner 1985: 6). He regards comics as a medium dealing with two important communication media—text and images (Eisner 1985: 13). In his view, it is possible to tell a story without words, but images alone represent “a more primitive form of graphic narrative” (Eisner 1985: 24).

Despite the fact that Eisner’s treatment of the subject is not explicitly semiotic and he never makes reference to that discipline, he analyzes comics, including their images, drawing upon many of the terms originally used in linguistics, because he considers that “[t]he regimens of art (e.g. perspective, symmetry, brush stroke) and the regimens of literature (e.g. grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other [in comics]” (1985: 8). In addition, he concludes that the constituents and organization of illustration and of prose are very much alike, so that they become a separate language with its own grammar (Eisner 1985: 8). Consequently, to illustrate these assumptions, he applies the technical vocabulary of syntactic analysis to describe an image in a panel with two different actions happening simultaneously as if it were the syntactic analysis of a sentence with two clauses (Eisner 1985: 10). The subordinating clause has a predicate of two people wrestling in the background, while the main clause is made up of a subject
doing the action of shooting someone and the direct object is the person receiving the bullets (Eisner 1985: 10). There are also modifiers: adverbs modifying the action (the onomatopoeic sounds of the gun) and adjectives modifying the subject and direct object (posture, gesture, and grimace) (Eisner 1985: 10). As can be seen, this typically linguistic way of analyzing elements has been applied to a picture, and we are going to consider similar semiotic analyses by Gubern and others, when we discuss the language of comics in Chapter Two.

After establishing comics as a parallel form to reading and, as we have just seen, the possibility of reading images in a linguistic manner as well (1985: 7-12), Eisner then deals with the pictures themselves (1985: 13-24), and shows how writing developed from images analogous to the meaning conveyed (1985: 14-15). In Eisner’s opinion, for sequential art, images should be visuals, not illustrations (1985: 127-128). Eisner defines a visual “as a series or sequence of images that replace a descriptive passage told only in words” (1985: 127-128), whereas an illustration reinforces or decorates a verbal description (1985: 128); that is to say, the latter is not essential. Thus, according to Eisner, the visual aspect of comics functions “as the purest form of sequential art because it seeks to employ a mix of letters and images as a language in dealing with narration” (1985: 128). And since images describe without being mere decoration, in comics they should be intrinsically mixed with words, whose primary function should no longer be redundant description, but providing sound, dialogue and captions (Eisner 1985: 122). As we saw earlier, this is a return to the topic expressed at the beginning of Eisner’s book when he mentions that comics are made up of two languages, text and images (1985: 13).
Apart from writing and imagery as the components of narration, Eisner deals with the panel and the importance of its border to convey meaning and emotion (1985: 44-45, 59-61). Essentially, the panel is perceived by Eisner as the basic framing of time (1985: 38-43), and this framing is used as a narrative device (1985: 46-48). A very important distinction he makes is between time and timing, by arguing that the latter enhances narration by manipulating the elements of the former, and thus, creating suspense or achieving a certain message or emotion (Eisner 1985: 25-26, 29). Within the panel, Eisner mentions the balloon as another kind of framing, that of framing speech, and the different shapes of its outline add meaning or character to the enclosed sound (Eisner 1985: 26-27). Besides the balloon and still within the panel, Eisner studies characters and includes a whole chapter devoted to gesture and posture to convey expressions and emotions, both with the whole body and with the face (1985: 102-111). Beyond the panel and even the page panel is the so-called splash page in comics, which is the first page of a story, and it works as an introduction framing the narrative (Eisner 1985: 62). As can be seen, Eisner ascribes great significance to this idea of framing, since throughout his book he returns to this abstract notion to organize time, sound, and even the story. We will see later that Robert Harvey also takes up this idea, but he calls it “narrative breakdown,” and all these concepts will be discussed in the section about the language comics in Chapter Two.

Even though the comics industry is usually known for its propensity to hire many different professionals (writers, pencillers, inkers, letterers, colorists, and even people in charge of backgrounds) in order to meet deadlines or other requirements in the production of comics (1985: 123), Eisner emphasizes his idea that the roles of writer and
of artist should be merged in only one person (1985: 132). As we will see, this idea is also held by Harvey. But barring that possibility of only one comics creator, Eisner is of the opinion that the artist should dominate the creation of comics (1985: 132), though he does not fail to condemn the production of “pages of absolutely stunning art held together by almost no story at all” (1985: 123). Eisner demonstrates the veracity of this belief with plenty of examples extracted from his famous stories, making comparisons between the original scripts and the finished art (1985: 124-138).

Finally, in the two last chapters of *Comics*, Eisner focuses on aspects basically addressed to the professional practice of comics production. While the last chapter deals with some specific advice to practitioners in relation to comics components (1985: 148-153) and the technical aspects of printing and using a computer in the service of creating comics (limited by the technology available at the time of writing) (1985: 153-161), the second-to-last chapter shows the possible applications of comics not only to entertainment (1985: 139-142), but also to technical and attitudinal instruction handbooks (1985: 142-145), and to story boards for films (1985: 146).

Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* is a remarkable book, analyzing comics by means of the comics medium itself; that is to say, it is a comic book with the “serious” subject matter of examining all the aspects of comics. As we have seen, McCloud acknowledges his debt to comics pioneer Will Eisner, and Eisner’s definition of comics as “sequential art” serves as the groundwork for McCloud’s theoretical development (7/1). Once McCloud establishes the definition of comics in the first chapter as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or
to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9/5) (see below for further discussion), he bases the subsequent comics history on that, going back in ages beyond the usual origin of comics at the turn of the twentieth century (2-23), a theory we have seen Gubern holds in his book *Lenguaje*.

After that, in the following two chapters, McCloud deals with the vocabulary and the grammar of comics (24-59, 60-93). As he puts it, “If visual iconography is the *vocabulary* of comics, closure is its *grammar*” (67/3, emphasis in the original). Within iconography (see “The Language of Comics” in Chapter Two for further discussion), McCloud includes symbols (representing concepts, ideas and philosophies), languages (alphabetic or otherwise, scientific, communicational), and pictures (more or less iconic) (27/4-6). As can be seen from the categories included in iconography, the word “icon” is polysemous according to McCloud’s application. In other words, he uses it to mean “sign,” in the general semiotic sense, i.e. something standing for another thing (Chandler 21), and he also applies the adjective “iconic” to pictures, in American semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce’s sense taken up later by French semioticians Groupe μ for iconic signs (iconicity), i.e. something similar to what it represents (Chandler 40; Groupe μ 98-107).

We do not think that McCloud avoids using the semiotic terminology, which would have been clearer in this context, because of lack of awareness of this discipline, but possibly because of a false notion of not considering it popular enough for the implied addressees of the book.

We have seen that Eisner recognizes that there are two languages in comics: images and text, with the priority given to the former. McCloud, in turn, wants to go
beyond this conception, and since comics are but one medium, he tries to give it a unified language with a unified vocabulary (47/9). He starts this quest by analyzing images and text in relation to each other in the context of comics. In his opinion, then, pictures are received information, i.e. the message is instantaneous (McCloud 49/1): the more abstracted, the greater the levels of perception, more like words (McCloud 49/3). In contrast, writing is perceived information, i.e. you need specialized knowledge to decode the message (McCloud 49/2): the more direct, the lower levels of perception, and then, it is received faster, more like pictures (McCloud 49/3). It is certainly debatable that pictures impress information directly without processing, since even for the most iconic picture (in the Peircean sense), the viewer needs to use “specialized” knowledge to decode it, be it cultural or experiential, as anthropology has proven with aborigines failing to comprehend images in photographic material (Arnheim 29; Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 32). But it is understandable what idea McCloud tries to convey, and his visual message is persuasively clear.

Thus, on this continuum from the most realistic picture to the most abstract language lies the reconciliation of text and image as a unified vocabulary of comics. McCloud argues that both pictures and words have to go toward the center of that spectrum in order to be reconciled, that is, cartoony pictures and direct language (49/3). He also emphasizes that increasing sophistication in comics leads outward to separate ends of the continuum, that is, photographic images and literary language (McCloud 49/5). However, we cannot completely agree with this assessment if we think of the Latin tradition of photonovels, or as McCloud himself calls them, “photo-comics” (20/1), but it
is clear that they use the direct language of dialogue, located toward the center of the spectrum, so they are not so quite apart.

After having introduced the continuum, McCloud constructs an impressive triangle showing the complete pictorial vocabulary of comics (McCloud 51/1), and later the same triangle is filled with examples taken from an amazing variety of comics sources to demonstrate the virtually limitless possibilities of the universe of comics (McCloud 52). At the bottom of the triangle, he places the already-described continuum with reality on the left and language or meaning on the right (McCloud 51/1, 52). From the reality end toward the top of the triangle is the continuum of abstract images which reaches up to the picture plane where shapes, lines and colors can be themselves without any iconic reference to reality (Groupe μ’s plastic signs) (McCloud 51/1, 52). With this comprehensive triangle, McCloud has managed to include the whole vocabulary of comics, whose components are later compared to abstract aspects of life—at the top, the beauty of art; lower left, the beauty of nature; and on the right, the beauty of ideas (McCloud 57/2-4).

So far we have discussed McCloud’s view of the vocabulary of comics, now we are going to move on to his proposal as regards the grammar of comics in the third chapter (60-93). In this connection, McCloud highlights the importance of two aspects: one is the physical link of units in the comics story, i.e. the blank space between the panels, which is called “gutter” (66/1-3), and the other is the mental process taking place in the reader’s mind, which is called “closure” (62/1-3, 63/1, 107/3-6). According to McCloud, the former brings about the latter, which in his words is defined as “the phenomenon of observing
the parts but perceiving the whole” (63/1, emphasis in the original). Although McCloud has not acknowledged the source, closure is one of the grouping principles or laws of Gestalt psychology. According to the findings of Gestaltians, the grouping principles or laws (similarity, proximity, continuity, past experience, etc.) are used to achieve simplicity, balance, and regularity in any perceived configuration, and specifically closure refers to completing missing parts of a figure when it is not complete in reality (Arnheim 21, 54-58; “Gestalt”). Therefore, McCloud has found that this Gestaltian principle is the most suitable one to explain what happens when we read a comics story: we actively fill in the blank space between panels (gutter) with our ideas of what connects the two panels in question (66/4). He also refers to the principle of closure when viewers complete a fragmented or even a blank space within the panel itself (McCloud 86/4-8).

McCloud furthers this explanation with a classification of panel-to-panel transitions: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and non sequitur (McCloud 74/1) (see “The Language of Comics” in Chapter Two for further discussion). In relation to this topic, McCloud compares Western comics with manga, the Japanese traditional variety, and he states that Westerners are conditioned by reading experience to follow a linear progression from left to right and top to bottom, page after page (105/6, 106/1). Thus, Westerners who lack the necessary experience with manga may find Japanese comics artist Osamu Tezuka’s examples, presented by McCloud, especially difficult to read; in fact, if unwary Western readers fail to notice McCloud’s warning on the margin to read from right to left, they will surely not be able to make any sense of the sequences presented (78/2-3). Later McCloud illustrates
this difference between Western and Eastern reading styles with two panels, one with an open eye and the other with a closed one, saying that the safe assumption is that the images are perceived as an eye closing, but in the following panel, the balloon ironically reads from right to left: “Safe, that is, if the audience doesn’t read right to left!” (85/20).

McCloud devotes the next chapter to time (94-117), associating it with space because panels indicate a division of either time or space, and consequently, we perceive time spatially (98/11, 99/3, 100/1). He demonstrates the flexibility of handling time spatially in comics; for instance, expanding time can be achieved by including more panels, broadening the gutter or by stretching the shape of the panel (McCloud 101/1-4), while a borderless panel can take on a timeless quality (McCloud 102/4). Apart from space, time is also related to motion, and McCloud shows how developments by comics artists to show motion in static images can be linked to an interest in film and in the visual arts (e.g. works by such artists as the Italian Futurists and French conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp) (108/2-3, 5, 110/10). As he did with closure, McCloud compares the Western tradition of showing motion in comics with the Japanese one. Curiously, the latter tends to move the background instead of moving the object (subjective motion), so it feels as if the viewer moves with the object (McCloud 113/6, 114/1).

McCloud divides motion into two subsets—one achieved by closure across the panels and another within the panels themselves (116/4-5, 121/2). But besides this basic classification, according to McCloud, there are several techniques to show motion: multiple images (112/3), photographic streaking (112/4), motion lines (110/10), subjective motion (114/1), and polyptych, a moving figure in multiple panels with a continuous
background (115/1-4) (see “The Language of Comics” in Chapter Two for further discussion). Finally, sound emerges as another aspect associated with time and motion (McCloud 116/1), which can be shown in comics through speech balloons and sound effects (McCloud 116/2) (more of this in Chapter Two, section “The Language of Comics”).

The expression of emotion in comics images is explored by McCloud in the following chapter (118-137), and he focuses on what appears within the panel, since as we have seen, closure accounts for the emotions the reader fills in across panels (121/3). McCloud relates this aspect of comics to the Expressionist movement in the visual arts, for instance works by Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh (actually, post-Impressionist, but precursor of Expressionism) or Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, and also to the studies of line and color by Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky (considered the first abstract artist in the modernist school) (122/5). Moreover, McCloud shows that this idea of making visible invisible emotions has developed in comics into the visual metaphors (seeing stars, looking daggers, etc.), and even further than that, expressionistic effects have been conceived for almost any emotion and attitude imagined (129/9, 130/3, 131/1). In this connection, McCloud also highlights the importance of the balloon shape and lettering style to convey invisible emotions and attitudes (134/3-5).

The well-known activity in American elementary school classes “show and tell,” which is usually used to teach children how to speak in public from an early age, becomes the title of a chapter that deals with the relationship between pictures and words in comics (McCloud 138-161). In two panels, McCloud visually summarizes the great divide of literature and art, and he contrasts these “high” culture monomodal activities with the
multimodal realm of popular culture, where words and pictures conspicuously coexist without pretense (140/1-2). Then, he visually displays the “progress” in people’s lives from illustrated books in childhood to “real” books with no pictures at all in adulthood (McCloud 140/3-5).

Resuming the use of his already-described triangle by applying it to the history of human culture, McCloud first shows how language and images separate from their common ancestry of words derived from stylized pictures (142/1). He later sets a specific point in time, the early 1800s, to reveal how art and literature moved widely apart to occupy the opposite ends (pictures and words) of the continuum on the triangle, using works by French artist Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and English poet John Keats as archetypes of this cultural breach (McCloud 145/1). However, later on these two languages changed course toward the center of the triangle (McCloud 147/6). While literature began using a more direct and colloquial language in all its modes, a move toward the pictorial section (McCloud 147/3-5), the modernist movements in the visual arts at the beginning of the twentieth century were the catalysts to produce more iconic and non-iconic abstraction (McCloud 146/5-6, 147/1). But they also prompted the move toward the right of the triangle, where word meaning is located, with the inclusion of text in collages or the use of calligraphic symbols, such as works by Swiss-born German artist Paul Klee (McCloud 148/3). Eventually, the collision of words and pictures occurred with the artistic production by Dadaists (McCloud 148/1-2), and we can also mention current works in visual poetry. But as noted earlier, in popular culture the use of words and pictures together has never been abandoned (McCloud 149/1-2), a fact that can be
attested by the “picture-stories” which were produced by Swiss school teacher Rodolphe Töpffer at the height of the rift between literature and art in the early 1800s (McCloud 149/3, 201/1-2) (see “Proto-Comics” in Chapter Three for further discussion).

McCloud acknowledges the general perception we have recurrently mentioned since our Introduction that comics are usually underrated even by comics creators themselves (150/3, 151/5). He specifically refers to the fact that comics creators want nothing but to emulate what is considered “great” art and “great” literature and he grimly warns that “as long as we view comics as a genre of writing or a style of graphic art this attitude may never disappear” (McCloud 151/6, emphasis in the original), a temptation even Eco falls prey to, as we will see in Chapter Two. McCloud recognizes that words and pictures in combination is not his preferred definition of comics, but he highlights the fact that the combination has had a tremendous influence on its development (152/1). Finally, McCloud classifies the ways in which words and pictures can combine in comics: word specific (153/1-2), picture specific (153/3-4), duo specific (153/5-6), additive combination (154/1-2), parallel combination (154/3-4), montage (154/5-6), and interdependent combination (155/1-2) (see “The Language of Comics” in Chapter Two for further discussion).

In the following chapter (162-184), McCloud introduces his definition of art—an encompassing activity that precludes the specific functions of reproduction or survival (164/1); and then, he presents what he considers the six steps in the path of creation that any artist often follows in pursuing art. The penultimate chapter (McCloud 185-192) deals with the problem of the use of color in comics, which has been heavily influenced by both
commerce and technology (McCloud 186/1). Specifically these two critical factors affected the production of superhero comics that have tried to attract readers with spectacular action and colors since their very launch, but because at the start of this type of comic books color cost was high and color technology was rudimentary, they had to make do with flat bright primary colors outlined in black ink (Barbieri 209; McCloud 187/7-9, 188/1). But this disadvantage became the identifying feature of four-color American superhero comics (McCloud 187/8, 188/1). In the concluding chapter (193-215), McCloud summarizes and reviews all the topics in his book reclaiming the work of many neglected artists in the history of art for a newly developed and fully comprehensive history of comics (200, 201/1). He exhorts readers to forget pre-conceived notions about comics (McCloud 199/1), and he maintains that the best definition is the most expansive one, opening the door to a controversy that is going to be taken up by Harvey, whose work is going to be considered next (McCloud 199/3).

Robert Harvey’s study The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History is an extended earnest plea for his definition of comics, which clashes with McCloud’s. The problem originates in two different emphases of their definitions of comics. McCloud’s comprehensive one seen above is summarized as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence” (9/1, emphasis in the original). While leaving out the specific reference to words and treating them as “other images,” this definition allows McCloud to embrace an impressive lineage for comics going back to prehistoric paintings (207/2). On the other hand, Harvey’s definition places the emphasis on the dual nature of comics as a
hybrid form, i.e. pictures and words (3), and he compresses his conception into the phrase “visual-verbal blending” (4).

Although Harvey does not state it, in this definition he also agrees to a certain degree with Eisner, who, as we have seen, has acknowledged that a graphic narrative without words is not as evolved as one with words (24). Whereas this conception of comics drastically reduces their history, it serves as a rule of thumb to evaluate comics art. As Harvey puts it,

one litmus test of good comics art is to ascertain to what extent the sense of the words depends upon the pictures and vice versa . . . . [W]hen words and pictures blend in mutual dependence to tell a story and thereby convey a meaning that neither the verbal nor the visual can achieve alone without the other, then the storyteller is using to the fullest the resources the medium offers him [or her]. (4)

We will present and probably find one possible resolution to this controversy in Chapter Two, when we discuss the definition of comics, but here we will solely present Harvey’s ideas developed in his book, just as we did with McCloud’s above.

As we stated in the Introduction, Harvey’s book goes beyond a mere history to become a tool of in-depth analysis of comics; i.e., it is a study of the evolution of the comics potential to achieve certain peak manifestations by comics creators instead of a complete history (15). His intention is clearly expressed as follows: “only to chart the aesthetic development of the medium, rather than every comic book title, character, or creator” (Harvey 15). Therefore, he reviews the history of comics with the aim of
highlighting the characteristics that can make comics an art, from his point of view of visual-verbal blending, with plenty of visual examples he analyzes with the vocabulary and grammar he presents in the first chapter (Harvey 3-15). His analysis specifically takes into account the following four aspects:

- **narrative breakdown**— the division of a story into panel units;
- **composition**— the arrangement of pictorial elements within a panel;
- **layout**— the arrangement of panels on a page and their relative size and shape; and **style**— the highly individual way an artist handles pen or brush (or draws a face or composes a panel or lays out a page or breaks down a story). (Harvey 9, emphasis in the original)

We considered this idea of narrative breakdown when we dealt with Eisner, who perceives the panel as the basic framing of time (1985: 38-43), and this framing as a narrative device (1985: 46-48). The importance of framing or narrative breakdown for these two comics theorists is undeniable. Later on we are going to see that, according to Harvey, narrative breakdown and speech balloons are essential in comics (107). What is more, if one of these elements is missing, then Harvey adamantly affirms that the result cannot be called comics (109).

Nevertheless, Harvey uses not only breakdown narrative, but also all the four above-mentioned aspects to examine the work by the cartoonists he deems important enough to be included in his aesthetic historical survey. “Cartoonist” is a title that Harvey confers on those who can smoothly blend words and pictures in their creation, i.e. writers-artists (26; Cohn 2005: 243), restating Eisner’s emphasis on only one comics creator
leading comics projects (1985: 132), as we saw above. Harvey also agrees with Eisner on the fact that the artist has to guide the presentation of a comics story, being able to handle it in a pictorial manner rather than a verbal one (44). Harvey regrets that in the 1970s with the promotion of comics writers to editorial positions in the comics industry, the writer became the dominant figure in the creation of comics, producing illustrated stories and thus overlooking his visual-verbal blending ideal (26-27). But in the late 1980s, the visual aspects of comics emerged once again, although Harvey warns that the tendency toward illustrated verbal narratives remains a temptation for comics (28).

Even though Harvey’s book is devoted to comic books, when he uses the title cartoonist, he refers to comics creators in the two basic kinds of comics — comic strips (usually published in newspapers) and comic books (see “Classification of Comics” in Chapter Two for further discussion). Thus, Harvey compares the characteristics of both types, showing that comic books have more potentialities than comic strips (24). This can be simply verified by the larger space available in comic books, which not only allows for graphic expansion and experimentation but also for a more developed narrative, since the serial nature of comic strips implies a large amount of repetition and redundancy to keep the readership abreast of the unfolding story (Harvey 24). However, during the first fifty years of their history, comic books were hard pressed to attain their inherent potentialities because of economic stringencies on their creators (Harvey 24). We are going to see what syndication (distribution by agencies in the American context) meant for comics in Chapter Three, when we discuss the history of comics, but here we are going to
restrict the explanation to how syndication affected these two different kinds of comics creators.

Since the first comic books consisted of reprints of comic strips, syndicates charged their publishers a fixed amount a page for reproduction rights (Harvey 25). Once the demand increased enough for original material to be required, it had to remain competitive with the reprints (Harvey 25). This situation established the page-rate formula for comic-book creators’ payment and the assembly-line or committee-work method of production with teams of writers, pencilers, and inkers to produce enough pages to support their livelihood and compete with the reprint rates (Harvey 25, 26; Cohn 2005: 242). The division of labor by itself may not have affected the quality of comic books (Harvey 26). After all, many comic strips are also collaborative productions though smaller ones (Harvey 27, 28). But in these group endeavors, one aspect was different: while the comic strip creator has always had strict control over the story and the art, until the 1980s the comic-book creator had been more subject to the publisher’s “house style,” with certain notable exceptions such as EC Comics (Harvey 27, 129) (see Chapter Three).

Moreover, the syndication of comic strips implies that strip cartoonists’ incomes increase with the number of newspapers publishing their comic strips, while comic-book cartoonists received a page rate not related to their comic-book circulation (Harvey 25). As a consequence, experienced cartoonists usually worked with the limited format of comic strips, whereas younger newly recruited cartoonists tried their hand at comic books in order to move on to the better paid world of comic strips (Harvey 25). This ideal was clearly expressed by Eisner when he was offered to develop *The Spirit* as a comic-book
supplement for newspapers, “I could now break out of the ghetto of comic books and move into the world of mainstream comic strips, the Mecca of all cartoonists” (qtd. in Harvey 68-69).

According to Harvey, this status quo is going to be changed by two cartoonists to be discussed later out of the following four comics creators he highlights as the most important ones in the development of comics: Will Eisner (66-99), Gil Kane (100-125), Jack Kirby (29-49), and Harvey Kurtzman (126-151). Harvey introduces them with plenty of visual examples to show their importance, but beyond their individual artistic achievements, he sees these four cartoonists as beacons in the history of comics, who have helped change the medium. We have already stated the significance of Eisner, both as a comics creator and a theorist. Harvey also acknowledges this and quotes Kane and Kurtzman in support of Eisner as the explorer of the potential of comics and developer of their grammar and dramatic structure, especially with his most important work The Spirit (66, 69-70). As Kurtzman states, “Eisner became a virtuoso cartoonist of a kind who had never been seen before in comic books —or, for that matter, in newspaper strips. He used all the elements of the comic book page —dialogue, drawing, panel composition, color— with great daring, but never at the cost of narrative clarity” (qtd. in Harvey 91).

According to Harvey, Kane’s uneven experiment Savage in the late 1960s may help define the graphic novel (109, 116) (see “Classification of Comics” in Chapter Two for further discussion). In this work, some parts are no more than prose with illustrations giving some atmosphere, but there are many other sections where all the elements are integrated (Harvey 111). As we mentioned earlier, in Harvey’s view, the main features of
comics are speech balloons and narrative breakdown, and in the graphic novel, narrative text has to be added, but the two other characteristics of comics cannot be put aside if the essential spirit of the comics medium is to be preserved; otherwise we are talking of something else (107, 109, 116). And this is what Kane achieved in Savage: the blending of the three elements — speech balloon, narrative breakdown, and narrative text —, which Harvey considers the basic aspects of a graphic novel. Kane also tried to innovate comic strips with a two-tier format in order to supply them with the vitality of comic books (Harvey 117). Unlike Eisner’s use of breakdowns for timing and dramatic effect, Kane uses breakdowns and page layouts to emphasize the creation of character and mood (120).

As noted earlier, the two other great cartoonists Harvey highlights contributed together to radically change the comic-book milieu in the 1980s. Both Kirby with the revitalization of superhero comics in the 1960s (Harvey 47) and Kurtzman with the famous 1950s Mad comics inspiring the underground comics movement (Harvey 140) started the chain reaction that ended the fifty-year newsstand distribution system in favor of the direct sale shops, and with this, the beginning of economic opportunities for comics creators as important in comic books as they were in newspapers strips. These developments are going to be also considered in Chapter Three, devoted to the historical overview of comics; here we are going to see how these affected comics creators and their work, according to Harvey.

Because of the economics mentioned above, it is no wonder that Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster tried to get their Superman concept first published as a syndicated newspaper comic strip, and only after its rejection did they try it in comic books, where it became a
success (Harvey 16, 25). With this and the influx of artists, such as Kirby, superheroes were the main feature in comic books from the late thirties through the forties (Harvey 35). From the artistic point of view, as Harvey sees it, comic books were the best medium at the time to visually depict superheroes’ exploits convincingly — films were not technically developed enough to show realistic images and books lacked the visual impact of comic books (Harvey 35, 50). In the long run, though, most comics superheroes have been convincingly translated to the cinematic medium thanks to the development of computerized special effects. Thus, a convincing Superman was achieved in 1978 with Christopher Reeve in the starring role, while a convincing Spider-Man was perfected more than two decades later in 2002, starred by Tobey Maguire.

But by the late 1950s the genre of superheroes in comic books seemed all but exhausted, until in 1960 writer Stan Lee and cartoonist Jack Kirby developed the so-called Marvel Method of working on comics (Harvey 44). In this method, labor was divided as follows: first, Lee provided the rough plot outline; then, Kirby did the artwork of the whole story; and finally, Lee completed the dialogue and captions (Harvey 44). As a result, this method improved the rate of production, and what is more, the artist became a dramatizer controlling storytelling, while the writer became the story structurer (Harvey 44). Moreover, Kirby created superheroes with human rather than archetypal personalities (Harvey 49). As he affirmed, “Perfect heroes are boring to the reader . . . they’ve got to have human frailties to keep the story interesting” (qtd. in Harvey 47). The first publication of this type in 1961, The Fantastic Four comic book, revitalized comics,
while setting a new fashion for superheroes, which was followed by other publishers too (Harvey 47).

Superheroes with human weaknesses attracted a captive audience that eventually evolved into a comics fandom network with exchange of letters, newsletters, and later fanzines, until the first comics conventions were organized and the word “comicon” was coined to refer to these types of meetings (Harvey 47, 49). This ebullient network was large enough in the mid-1970s to support direct sale comics shops (Harvey 47). With these developments, the comics market was revolutionized — no distribution intermediaries, no returns of unsold comic books, a growing interest in back issues, print runs based on orders, and the possibility of issuing extremely individualistic artistic titles that appeal to the fan market (Harvey 48, 49). This revolution also made small publishing houses, called “alternative publishers,” profitable, which implied more outlets for creative expression (Harvey 49). As we will see in Chapter Three, all this important evolution in comic-book market was almost destroyed by the rise and fall of speculation around collectible back-issues in the 1990s, something that Harvey’s optimistic perspective in his 1980s book could have never foreseen.

The revitalization of superhero comic books can be traced back to Kirby’s inspiration in the 1960s (Harvey 49), but it was not the only reason for the appearance of direct sale shops and the change in status of comic-book creators. As noted earlier, from another point of view, Kurtzman also contributed to this change. Kurtzman was initially associated with EC Comics, a company which flourished in the 1950s with its horror and science fiction comics, and its famous Mad comics, which later became a magazine
(Harvey 128) (see Chapter Three). Within the company Kurtzman was in charge of doing adventure and war stories, which he researched extensively for authenticity and pictorial details (Harvey 129). But Kurtzman’s greatest impact was with the creation of EC Comics’ Mad, where he indulged in parodying newspaper comic strips and comic books (Harvey 136). When in the mid 1950s EC Comics was attacked by McCarthyism (more on this in Chapter Three), the only title that survived was Mad converted from comic book to magazine format (Harvey 138).

Kurtzman’s irreverence in the early issues of Mad was inspirational: it showed that comics need not abide by social conventions, but actually, they should challenge them (Harvey 140). These new ideas led to the development of underground comics, and by the end of the 1960s, cartoonists were publishing their own black-and-white comic books, called “comix,” to set them apart from mainstream comics (Harvey 141). Underground cartoonists wanted to attack American conventions, and also especially the censorship of the self-imposed Comics Code Authority that helped eliminate EC Comics (Harvey 141). But that was not all. From the economic point of view, they also wanted to do away with the set rate per page and comics publishers’ unfair practice of seizing ownership of all comic-book characters, regardless of whoever created them (something that is closely—and sadly—linked with the history of the creation of Superman, as we will see in Chapter Three) (Harvey 141). Through the 1970s some underground and alternative publishers sought to protect creators’ rights, but this state of affairs did not affect the mainstream newsstand comic-book publishers, DC Comics and Marvel Comics, until the early 1980s (Harvey 141). By the end of the 1980s, creators could earn royalties based on
comic-book sales and sometimes a percentage on character merchandising, apart from the usual page rate (Harvey 143). Comics creators could also retain ownership of their original art (another development originating in the underground), and they sometimes owned the characters they invented (Harvey 143).

Therefore, to the already-mentioned fan-based network that enabled the development of direct sale comic-book shops, we can add counterculture’s head shops that profitably sold comix, proving that newsstand distribution was not vital to establish a successful marketplace (Harvey 144). In this way, the American circuit of direct sale comic-book shops was in place supported not only by comics but also by comix, with the personal works of underground and unconventional cartoonists (Harvey 144). The success of the direct sale network eliminated the need of newsstand distribution, and so, it was instrumental in prompting the major mainstream publishers DC Comics and Marvel Comics to produce comic books that reflected the personal visions of their creators (Harvey 144).

In order to show basic differences among cartoonists, Harvey simplifies comic-book creation to two traditions—the figure drawing tradition and the storytelling tradition (144). Obviously, there is no clear-cut separation between the two, but simply an emphasis with slightly different results in comics (Harvey 144). Although, according to Harvey, Kirby equally partakes of both traditions, he helped to establish the importance of figure drawing in the superhero genre (144). Other artists in this tradition mentioned by Harvey are Americans Gil Kane, Curt Swan, Neal Adams, Bill Sienkiewicz, George Pérez, British-born Canadian-American John Byrne, and Spanish José Luis García López (Harvey
Harvey points to Neal Adams as the summit of the figure drawing school in the early 1970s, and both Kirby and Adams set the mold for house styles in superhero figures (144). Harvey also considers Byrne as a cartoonist whose talent is notable in both traditions, as we will see in Chapter Three and later in the analysis of some of his comics stories in Chapter Five, with his intervention for the revamping of Superman in the mid-1980s post-
Crisis period (144).

Harvey firmly sets Eisner and Kurtzman in the storytelling tradition because their preoccupation with story and content made them organize their highly individualistic compositions in subordination to the narrative (145). Following in their wake, artists such as Americans Jim Steranko and Frank Miller produced comparatively idiosyncratic works, which, in turn, inspired others to emulate them (Harvey 145). According to Harvey, when Miller and Byrne in the 1980s made the transition from artists to artists-writers (cartoonists), the already-mentioned committee-generated comic book went into decline as a viable standard practice to produce mainstream comics (148). And in the mid 1980s Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight*, together with British writer Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbon’s *Watchmen* brought about the change toward a “darker” view of superheroes (Harvey 148, 150). Their success deeply affected the treatment of superheroes by major mainstream publishers: instead of trying to restrict this type of production to choking corporate policy, they started allowing cartoonists to reinterpret the superhero ethos solely in the interest of telling good stories (Harvey 150).

Just before the conclusion of his book, Harvey surveys many innovative underground and mainstream comics creators in one chapter (192-262). Among them, we
have chosen three for a brief discussion of their creations — Robert Crumb’s *Mr. Natural* and *Fritz the Cat* (193-209), Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (237, 239-245), and the already-discussed study Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (245-249). Although Harvey affirms that Crumb was not responsible for the first underground comic book, he is generally considered the father of comix (210). Crumb himself described his work as “sweet, optimistic, LSD-inspired mystic vision drawn in the loveable big-foot style that everyone found so appealing” (qtd. in Harvey 202). However, his *Fritz the Cat* is not sweet at all; in fact, this comix character is a heartless and insensitive lover who gets killed by the end of the series (Harvey 218). Crumb did not try to experiment on the formal aspects of comics, such as layout, timing, special effects, etc.; on the contrary, his comics tell their black-and-white stories in a direct and conventional way (Harvey 202). It is in his selection of subjects where Crumb showed his originality by breaking age-old taboos of American society (Harvey 202, 210).

In Harvey’s opinion, Spiegelman’s Holocaust story *Maus* is also told in fairly conventional comics style with a grid of regularly shaped panels in his page layout, and his timing is similarly unremarkable (243). Harvey notes that Spiegelman uses an occasional splash panel for dramatic display, and a borderless panel around scenes taking place in the narrative present, contrasting these with the bordered pictures of Holocaust narration (243). Although Harvey considers Spiegelman’s depiction of Jews and Nazis as mice and cats a stereotyping racist view of Holocaust’s victims, he does say that the story is so powerful that rises above any attempt, whether deliberate or accidental, to trivialize or diminish its impact (244-245). Whatever the flaws Harvey finds in *Maus*, he nevertheless
rightfully acknowledges the importance of the work to show that comics are capable of achieving the status of “serious, respectable” literature (245).

As we mentioned above, Harvey basically disagrees with *Understanding Comics*, pointing out that McCloud’s definition of comics slights their verbal component, and emphasizes sequence, the images ordered in a deliberate manner (245, 246). Harvey considers that McCloud’s most insightful and provocative section is the one concerned with closure (246), a concept we discussed at length earlier. It is in these two concepts—sequence and closure—where the difference in their definitions lies, since as Harvey states:

> for McCloud, sequence is the essential character of the medium; for me, it’s the ingredients, the verbal content and the visual content. Sequence is vital to McCloud because it creates the opportunity for closure—and, hence, for the creative participation of the reader. In asking this of its audience, he maintains, comics are unique. I see the medium as unique, too; but the closure I emphasize is the closure between word and picture. (246)

However, Harvey sees that McCloud’s book is an ambitiously conceived and brilliantly executed work of cartooning (245-246). And just as he did with Spiegelman’s *Maus*, he acknowledges the importance of McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* as a patent proof of the capacity of comics to discuss a “serious, complex” subject extensively, and thus, to expand the potential of the medium (Harvey 246).
Literature Review on the Feminist Approach to Comics

In search for comics analyses from a feminist perspective, we considered that a book such as *Looking on: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*, edited by British feminist art historian Rosemary Betterton, might have some studies on comics, since the title announces that it is going to deal with the media. But, in fact, it does not even recognize that this particular medium has been counted out. In the introduction, Betterton says that the aim of the book “is to strengthen existing links between critical work in different areas of the visual arts and media, as well as to develop fresh connections” (1). And she specifies that “[t]he main focus of the articles collected here is on the still image and its diverse contexts of production and consumption in advertising, fine art, photography and pornography” (1). She, then, goes on to affirm that she does not include the cinema or television, something redundant, because she has already stated that the concentration is on the *still* image. However, what is not redundant is that within the category of the media she does not include comics.

It seems incredible that she never once mentions comics in the compilation—not even to disregard them. And what is even more incredible is that she remarks that “[t]here is no obvious equivalent category of women’s pictures or photographs in the same way as there are ‘women’s films’ or ‘women’s fiction’” (13). We can accept that she does not know about photonovels, a medium developed specifically in Latin countries, but genres such as romance comics and girls’ comics, e.g. *Young Romance* and *Archie* comics, have been addressed to women and girls since the early 1940s (Robbins 8-14, 50-52). It is true that mainstream romance comics have all but disappeared, but *Archie* comics are still
alive and well (Robbins 135, 136). Therefore, pictures and photographs within the framework of narration do exist specifically with a female audience in mind, and comics written by women for women have started to appear since the development of the women’s liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s, as we will see later (Robbins 83-85).

To show an alternative (albeit not feminist) example with the word “media” in the title to the previous blatant omission, a book such as Media Studies by British media scholar Stuart Price does include a section devoted to comics, as part of the media (389-400). Granted it is a very small section and not very well researched. For instance, Price states that the first comic books Famous Funnies were “drawn by an artist named Gaines” (390), when actually, as we will see in Chapter Three, these comics that had appeared in newspapers were compiled by American pioneering comics entrepreneur Max Charles Gaines (Coma 1979: 115; Gaines 256; Gubern 1974: 49; Von Bernewitz & Grant 32). But later on, Price corrects his mistake when he speaks about the 1950s McCarthyist persecution of comics, because he refers to American EC Comics owner “William M. Gaines, whose father had produced Famous Funnies in the 1930s” (391). In spite of the mistakes, in this instance at least comics are acknowledged as part of the mainstream media.

Though with a strong focus on film and television, the collection of essays Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture, edited by American feminist popular culture scholar Sherrie Innes, deals with a wide variety of media, including action figure toys, video games, and at least one article on comics. In the introduction, Innes
maintains that the articles study “the cultural and social impact of tough women in the popular media” (6). Moreover, she asserts that there have always been strong women characters in the American mythology, for instance, the portrayal of real-life American heroes Annie Oakley and Calamity Jane in 1800s popular westerns, but she considers that now they are more pervasive than ever, so they merit study (Inness 3). The book is divided into two parts, and according to the editor, while the first section reviews how female action heroes were depicted and changed in the 1990s (Innes 9), the second section questions “the media’s standard constructions of female toughness and suggest different forms that toughness can take” (Innes 11-12). From the presentation of these articles, the editor concludes that the results of the analysis are not simple, because some of these tough women are basically created to appeal to a male audience, but at the same time, they also challenge stereotypes of what being female traditionally means (Innes 14). Thus, female bodies can be muscular and well trained, and by resorting to these assets, women can exhibit new models of behavior to defend themselves without depending on guns or “male saviors” (Innes 14-15).

As noted earlier, only one of the articles in the anthology, “Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books,” written by American popular culture scholar Jeffrey Brown, specifically mentions comics in its contents (47-74). However, most of the article is devoted to film female action heroes, referring only to comics as the source material for those films. In spite of this, it is worth having a look at Brown’s discussion, since he foregrounds some striking ideas as regards this topic, which arguably is related to Lois Lane as she sometimes is considered “a true equal not only to
him [Superman] but to other superheroes as well” (Farghaly viii), and also, “as much a hero as Superman” (Starke 126). Just as Innes, Brown observes the difficulties in interpreting female action heroes because they may expand the popular conception of female roles and abilities, but they may also be simply sexist sexy figures performing masculine feats for the male gaze (Brown 47-48) (see Chapter Four for a discussion of the male gaze concept). Nevertheless, Brown thinks that the female action hero is a transgressive character because she embraces both masculinity and femininity (49, 52).

As we have mentioned, most of Brown’s article discusses films with these tough women as protagonists, and the section dealing with comics focuses on a genre called “bad girl,” which is defined as “books featuring extremely leggy and buxom superheroines [sic] costumed in highly revealing, skintight outfits . . . carrying a prominent weapon, usually a gun, sword, or whip” (61). Brown sees the emergence of the bad girl genre as a result of and counterpoint to the hypermasculinity of superhero comics in the 1990s (61). Although these female characters are as powerful and violent as male characters in comic books, their bodies have exaggerated typically female characteristics (63). Brown observes that these combine symbolic seductive femininity and symbolic tough masculinity, thus embodying both genders and ridiculing the notion of the dichotomy female/male (63, 66). Finally, Brown links all this with the symbolic figure of the dominatrix, and he specifies, “not as a kinky subcultural fetish but as a complex symbol that combines and exploits power (both physical and social) along the axis of gender (both masculine and feminine)” (69). The really transgressive potential of both female action
hero and dominatrix is that they mock masculinity as they enact it, and this shows the weakness of the dichotomy female/male (Brown 69).

American comics artist-scholar Trina Robbins’s wonderfully illustrated book *From Girls to Grrrlz: A History of Q Comics from Teens to Zines* is a remarkable source of information about comics related to women, both as readers and as creators. As the title suggests, Robbins’s history ranges from the conventional 1940s comics intended for girls to the retaliating women’s underground comix and feminist comics of the 1970s and the so-called “post-feminist” years. Apparently, the symbol Q is used in the subtitle to avoid the use of the word “women,” since it was a source of controversy in the 1970s. As the author explains, “*Wimmen’s Comix* was criticized for keeping the word *men* in its title. Feminists were experimenting with new ways to spell their gender, such as womon or womyn” (Robbins 93, emphasis in the original).

This period of feminism was characterized by a focus on certain words labeling women; for instance, Robbins’s comix *All Girl Thrills* and *Girl Fight* were also criticized by feminists because of the use of “girl” in her titles (93). Robbins remembers that “[t]he new thinking was that *girl* was a demeaning term, just as boy had been a demeaning term for black men” (Robbins 93, emphasis in the original). Finally, the wheel turned full circle as Robbins remarks, “In 1992, *Wimmen’s Comix* finally removed the word men from its name and became *Wimmin’s Comix*. By then, though, it no longer mattered. Young women had started to reclaim the word *girl*, and they were using the previously forbidden word in the titles of their comics” (113). In addition, Robbins emphasizes that during the
1990s, the above-mentioned bad girl genre comics used the word “lady,” while the feminist comics have the word “girl” in their titles (113).

Robbins’s book is organized into four parts, which refer not only to the chronological development of comics, but also to the coming of age of feminism and its relationship to the medium. The first chapter “Girls’ Comics” from 1941 to 1957 deals with comics for girls starting with Archie in 1941, which was cutely advertised as “clean and wholesome” (Robbins 9). These comics were addressed to teenagers, a concept that originated in the 1920s, when Americans began having enough wealth to enjoy a leisure adolescence, and in the 1940s and 1950s Archie was typically read by girls aged from six to thirteen (Robbins 11, 12).

The second chapter “Women’s Comics,” chronologically overlapping the first, ranges from 1947 to 1977 and examines romance comics started with My Date, and later Young Romance, co-written and co-drawn by American cartoonist Joe Simon and the already-mentioned cartoonist Jack Kirby (Robbins 49-50, 52). The idea of a love story in comic format was directed to a slightly older readership, and this was evinced by the banner stating, “Designed for the more adult readers of comics,” on the cover of Young Romance comic books (Robbins 50). However, here “adult” merely meant girls in the early to late teens, and the comics were almost as “wholesome” as Archie comics were, except that there was no lighthearted teenage humor (Robbins 50, 51). Instead, the stories were stereotypical romances written by men to represent women limited by their contexts; for example, girls getting bad reputations from kissing too many men, or
working women confined to nurse or secretary jobs, which were traded more than willingly for marriage to become homemakers (Robbins 51).

The third chapter, “Womyn’s Comix” from 1970 to 1989, shows how the growth of the women’s liberation movement in the United States paralleled the development of the new underground comix movement (Robbins 83). Robbins regrets that most male underground cartoonists did not understand the new women’s movement, and responded to what they considered a menace in two ways: they drew comix depicting violence against women and they refused to accept female cartoonists in their midst (85). Left on their own, women cartoonists started producing an avalanche of feminist underground newspapers all over the United States in 1970, and together with these, feminist comic strips (Robbins 85). Later that year, Robbins and other women cartoonists created the first all-women comic book, naming it after one of the feminist newspapers, It Ain’t Me, Babe, with the subtitle “Women’s Liberation” (87). In 1972 Wimmen’s Comix was introduced, causing the controversy referred to earlier, and as Robbins emphasizes, within the span of two years since the appearance of the first women’s comix, enough women cartoonists turned up to have two women’s underground comix running in the United States (90).

In the fourth chapter “Grrrlz’ Comix” dealing with the 1990s, Robbins reports that numerous women cartoonists appeared in anthologies and produced their own comic books (116). For instance, World War 3 was a radical comic book published by a group of both male and female New York cartoonists, who vindicated what had been achieved by second-wave feminists in the 1960s and 1970s (Robbins 118, 125). Second-wave
feminism is the name given to the movement started in the United States with the 1963 publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by American feminist writer Betty Friedan, and it is the movement that originally developed all the feminist background theory we are going to explore in Chapter Two. Although these feminist waves are traditionally counted from the suffragists at the turn of the twentieth century onwards, the case has been made to put forward an even earlier wave that may include women writers from the Enlightenment, such as English philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft (Robbins 125; Varela 123-131). As regards second-wave feminism and its subsequent evolution, *World War 3*’s view was clearly expressed in a 1992 special issue on sexism, where American cartoonist-editor Sabrina Jones wrote, “Today most women expect to enjoy certain hard-won rights of the feminist movement, while disavowing feminism itself. They’re afraid to alienate the men in their lives, who still hold most of the power” (qtd. in Robbins 118).

Robbins specifically relates the origin of the third wave of feminism to the retaliation of female punkers who were violently moved away from the American punk scene by their male counterparts in the early 1990s (124). Thus, in the wake of these events, the retaliation took the form of the *Riot Grrrl* zine, and with this publication, a new stage of the movement emerged, reclaiming in “grrrl” the word “girl” with the twist of a defiant growl (Robbins 125). Robbins gives the history of zines in a nutshell, and she explains how they affected this new feminist stage (126). Fanzines were first produced by young science-fiction fans in the 1930s, using mimeographs and hectographs, technical forerunners of photocopy machines (Robbins 126). These fanzines usually consisted in letters in booklet format, with news and reviews of science-fiction books or stories, and
they could be exchanged for other zines or they could be received by mail, previously providing a postage stamp or very little money (Robbins 126). As we have seen, in the 1960s comics fans started using similar zines, and underground cartoonists also adopted them for their communications in graphic or written form (Robbins 126). Cheap photocopying in the 1980s opened up the possibility of self-publishing, and then, in the 1990s with this medium, women could emulate Riot Grrrlz to spread and share their ideas, stories, and obviously, comics (Robbins 126-127).

In the book Women and the Comics, Robbins also researched the work of female cartoonists from the early twentieth century until the 1980s, with the help of American writer Catherine Yronwode. Whereas the previously described book by Robbins focuses on comic books, hence the starting point in the 1940s, this earlier collaborative book by Robbins and Yronwode makes no distinction and includes female creators of comic strips, comic books, and even one-panel cartoons, hence the starting point at the turn of the twentieth century. A further difference between these two books is that unlike From Girls, which includes comics related to women regardless of their authors’ gender, Women deals specifically with female comics creators, and thus, it rescues a long list of woman cartoonists from oblivion (see the section “Feminist Criticism and Analysis” in Chapter Two for an expanded discussion of these two kinds of feminist research and analysis).

A case in point is Nell Brinkley, whose famous girls were “as much of a popular ideal and media craze as the Gibson Girl, the Vargas Girl or the John Held, Jr. Flapper” (Robbins & Yronwode 13). But while these last three persisted in the American collective imagery, the Nell Brinkley Girl was almost obliterated until feminist efforts recaptured its
importance in the period (Robbins & Yronwode 13). Robbins and Yronwode advance some explanation for this flagrant disregard: “Perhaps a clue to the answer lies in the fact that the other three artists were men. They depicted women from a male point of view, while Brinkley’s drawings were distinctly feminine in style, and were enjoyed largely by a female audience” (13). In addition, Robbins and Yronwode hypothesize that

Sometime during the middle of this [twentieth] century, art produced for the enjoyment of women and girls came to be regarded as shallow and unimportant. Aesthetic judgments are always arbitrary to some extent, and in this case, it seems to have been decided by the world of art critics that the sweetly romantic portrayal of life is unacceptably cloying, and that the very fact that such images appeal markedly to a female audience can be taken as a telling indication of the low esteem in which they are to be held.

(13)

As we will see in Chapter Two, this opinion coincides with other revisionists of the art world, where the ideas of the “master” and “masterpiece” have typically and traditionally permeated the whole artistic environment, disparagingly rejecting everything that does not conform with these preconceived notions.

For our purposes, another relevant piece of information in the book is the story of the publication of Brenda Starr, Reporter, created by artist Dalia “Dale” Messick, who changed her first name in the 1930s to a genderless one to be taken more seriously into account by male editors (Robbins & Yronwode 36-40). Messick started to be interested in comic strips about career girls in 1935 and tried to sell them to syndicates, but it was not
until 1940 that she “did break into the syndicated field” with the famous female reporter (Robbins & Yronwode 40-41). We think that the successful publication of Superman two years earlier, with such a prominent role of Lois Lane, also a female reporter, might have streamlined the acceptance of this other fictitious reporter as protagonist in a newspaper daily strip, whose career spread onto American comic books, films and television and only ended as recently as 2011 (“Brenda”).

The late American feminist theorist Lillian Robinson wrote her book Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes with a very ironic, witty, and playful style. Definitely coinciding with our own evaluation of comics as a leftover topic by academia, Robinson unequivocally states,

If the comics have come last and still ambiguously to recognition as cultural expression, they have been even slower to receive critical attention commensurate with their cultural significance. As the study of mass media and the more complex field known as cultural studies have developed, their practitioners have shown little interest in the comics, as compared with other popular culture forms. (2)

Thus, Robinson devotes her book to comic-book female superheroes, and in spite of the general playful tone of the book, and her assertion of the “cultural significance” of comics, she wants “to begin the work of examining the comics from a feminist perspective, taking them seriously without exaggerating their importance in either reflecting or shaping our culture, and enjoying what they have to offer without becoming the mouthpiece of the mass culture industry” (Robinson 7, my emphasis). In other words, her aim of seriously
analyzing comics from a feminist perspective — the first work we have found that explicitly identifies this objective in common with ours — is enhanced by a critical approach without an unwitting support of the products issued by comics publishers, something that has been usually happening with Lois Lane, as we will see in the next section.

Accordingly, when Robinson compares her book with other previous studies of female superheroes, she concludes that they “can most charitably be characterized as ‘uncritical,’ describing, detailing, and cherishing their subject, rather than analyzing it” (Robinson 6, emphasis in the original). Although not all the studies Robinson mentions work within a feminist framework, for those which do embrace that framework, she believes that this uncritical approach is particularly unusual in feminist studies (6), since “feminism is a world view directed at understanding and remaking society” (7), and thus, basically critical in its approach to its objects of study.

We agree with Robinson that there has been a lack of critical studies on the feminist aspects of female superheroes, and this lack “is only deepened when it comes to feminist criticism, which has produced even less study of the form than the pop-culture mainstream” (6). But this uncritical approach is understandable in relation to female superheroes, because of the need for feminists to have “a heroic icon over an understanding of how the presentation of such icon derives from and serves — as well as challenges — the dominant social forces” (Robinson 6). As a result, female superheroes are the focus of Robinson’s critical analysis, not only because of that lack, but also because she sees them as “a challenge to the masculinist world of superhero adventures” (7).
this connection, her argumentation is based on the idea that stories of female superheroes are more transgressive than male superhero comics are, telling different narratives about gender (Robinson 6). Robinson warns that her study is restricted to mainstream American mass-circulation adventure comics (8), and one point of interest is that she categorizes DC Comics’ three original iconic superheroes in terms of narrative genres —“For Superman, it is science fiction, for Batman, technodrama, for Wonder Woman, modernized epic” (73).

As regards the organization of the book, Robinson has divided it into three chapters, lightheartedly borrowing the titles from a biblical context, “Genesis” (27-63), “Chronicles” (65-94), and “Revelation” (95-135). These chapters are introduced by the section, “The Book of Lilith” (11-25), which she calls a “prequel,” and which includes her 1989 comic-book critique, showing Robinson’s recognition of the importance of comics to cultural studies (11). Finally, the last chapter deals with her preview of the cultural work that female superheroes have before them (Robinson 8). Although “Chronicles” and “Revelation” include discussions of other female superheroes, such as Supergirl and She-Hulk, as the title of the book indicates, most of the content is devoted to the most famous female superhero, Wonder Woman, created in 1941.

In the bulkiest section “Genesis,” Robinson examines the origin of Wonder Woman, a comic-book character that at this stage she considers “an inconsistent but unquestionably liberatory icon” (65). The chapter “Chronicles” explores superhero icons from the 1950s to the 1970s (8), but Robinson considers this a period of decline for female characters in general from a feminist point of view, just as it happened with other female
comics portrayals, such as our focus of study, Lois Lane, as we will see in the next section. Particularly, Wonder Woman’s decline is reflected in the modifications she undergoes both in graphic design, her shrinking costume and her “increasingly hypertrophied breasts” (62), and in storyline, with romance continuously emphasized (65).

“Revelation” deals with the modern and postmodern varieties of superheroes, in the latest reincarnations of Wonder Woman and in a new generation of third-wave feminism (Robinson 8). In this last section, Robinson presents the idea that postmodernism in contemporary comics is shown in the fact that though they strictly adhere to science-fiction conventions as regards the global battles repeatedly displayed in their issues, in fact they move narration toward superheroes’ personal lives and individual consciousnesses (138). In addition, according to Robinson, they also show postfeminist notions by depicting an ideal time characterized by its gender equality without any kind of gender discrimination, but they fail to present the process by which they have arrived at such state of affairs or the way in which it can be achieved in the real world (138).

From another perspective, Robinson questions the 1990s development in feminism we saw earlier when we discussed Robbins, “It is important to know whether the female superhero, after a long incarceration as a girl, should now be identified as a Grrrl. Or if she is better understood as a Woman” (96). This might be a question of semantics, but the context in which Riot Grrrl comics appeared, as described by Robbins, seemed conducive to that kind of response, which in fact was fruitful for a variety of reasons, not the least was the possibility of an emergent cultural effervescence with a great number of women’s zines and comics springing to life in the United States during that period.
To conclude this section, we are going to present the undergraduate but very revealing paper “Look, Up in the Sky. It’s a Bird, It’s a Plane, It’s a… Bikini?: Depictions of Gender in American Superhero Comic Books, 1960-2010,” written by Sociology students at Portland State University (Augustdt et al.). Though not precisely a feminist analysis, it is an extensive quantitative gender-based examination of more than seven hundred comic-book covers from twelve publications by DC Comics and Marvel Comics during five decades. This chronological visual assessment of how representation of gender developed over time was itemized in the following hypotheses: (1) increasingly revealing costume and sexualized female characters’ portrayal, but not male characters’ (Augustdt et al. 6); (2) decreasing depiction of victimized female characters (Augustdt et al. 7); (3) increasingly muscular male characters’ portrayal, but not female characters’ (Augustdt et al. 8); (4) increasing relative frequency of female characters’ appearance and protagonist role on comic-book covers (Augustdt et al. 9, 10); and finally, (5) equal likelihood of female and male characters’ portrayal as villains or heroes without change over time (Augustdt et al. 11).

The methodology of the analysis consisted in dividing the selected period into decades to allow for social change, and choosing ten issues at random for each decade from each publication (Augustdt et al. 12). The two main variables analyzed are time, issue selection falling on the years 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010, and gender, with three subcategories, male, female (adults with clear male or female characteristics), or unclear (monsters, robots, entities, etc.) (Augustdt et al. 27). Finally, there are five variables dependent on the comics characters, as follows (Augustdt et al. 13): (1) role
(heroes, villains, or bystanders) (Augustdt et al. 22-24); two variables related to physicality: (2) dress (modest, revealing, sexualized, or unclear) (Augustdt et al. 18-22), and (3) body type conforming to stereotypical ideals of the male and female physique (slim, average/muscular, extremely muscular, or unclear) (Augustdt et al. 14-18); and two final variables related to the situational context of the comics character: (4) action (perpetrator of violence, victim, or other) (Augustdt et al. 25-27), and (5) prominence (primary character, or not primary character) (Augustdt et al. 24-25).

Most of the findings of the study support the five hypotheses presented for analytical corroboration (Augustdt et al. 28-32). Even so, there are two unconfirmed aspects. On the one hand, in all time periods male characters are featured at least twice as often as female characters on comic-book covers, and as regards their leading role, the data are inconclusive, since there are sharp fluctuations and the authors’ “initial cultural observations of rising labor force participation, enrolment in universities, and feminism have proven not to align with the prominence variable” (Augustdt et al. 33). On the other hand, female and male characters are equally likely to be portrayed as heroes, but it is significant that male characters are more likely to be portrayed as villains (Augustdt et al. 34).

Apart from these conclusions, it is not clear what the authors mean by the statements, “Body types of male characters have evolved significantly over time in terms of weight and musculature, while female body types remain relatively static” (Augustdt et al. 32) and “While males feature more physically impressive and athletic bodies over time, female characters have consistently been drawn the same way: very slim” (Augustdt et al.
In contrast, they acknowledge that their “findings support the research data that explained how gender stereotypes are overemphasized to create a spectacle for entertainment” (Augustdt et al. 32). It is certain that over time both male physiques and female attributes have been “overemphasized,” not only demonstrated by simply browsing comic-book issues from different periods, but also confirmed by scholars, such as Brown or Robinson above. Thus, those assertions on the persistent slimness of female characters remain unclear, especially when they also recognize that female characters’ dress has become “revealing or sexualized” (Augustdt et al. 28). In brief, setting aside these obscure earlier remarks, although in general the conclusions are encouraging, especially as regards the sharp fall in “overtly misogynistic depictions” of violence against women, the authors are cautious and end their study by stating, “superheroes celebrate a tradition rooted in camp culture and a predominantly male fan base. For these reasons, it is unlikely that comic books will depict gender in a truly non-stereotypical manner any time in the near future” (Augustdt et al. 35, 36).

It is evident that this literature research on the feminist approach to comics has produced rather limited results and not all of them within the clear framework of feminist criticism and analysis—although it is worth singling out Robinson’s remarkable study. Yet all of them certainly have an orientation toward this aim, finally settling on the idea of a more generalized gender examination. In any case, we are going to supplement these works not only with some newly-published essays on the comic-book character Lois Lane in the following section, but also with feminist-aimed material from other related areas,
which, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, will be fully developed in the section “Feminist Criticism and Analysis” of Chapter Two.

**Literature Review on the Comic-Book Character Lois Lane**

As we have stated at the beginning of this chapter, before dealing with the most important material on Lois Lane, Jeanne Williams’s dissertation “The Evolution of Social Norms and the Life of Lois Lane: A Rhetorical Analysis of Popular Culture,” we are going to review some articles on this comic-book character. Until 2013, there had been but a few, mostly popular, articles on Lois Lane. As it is well known, 2013 marked the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the publication of the first issue of *Action Comics*, where Superman, Clark Kent and Lois Lane debuted. There is an obvious commemoration by DC Comics, which took the form of a reprint of comic books featuring Lois Lane entitled *Lois Lane: A Celebration of 75 Years*. The comics are separated into five parts, and at the end of the book, there is a compilation of famous covers. Except for the fifth section, which includes imaginary and out-of-continuity stories, the remaining four parts are organized chronologically —“Girl Reporter” (1938-1956); “Superman’s Girl Friend” (1957-1985); “Lois and Clark” (1986-1999); and “Twenty-First Century Lois” (2000-Present) (*Lois* 6-67, 68-129, 130-208, 210-371, 372-384). By sheer chance or design, that year also saw the publication of a collection of academic essays specifically devoted to this fictitious character, *Examining Lois Lane: The Scoop on Superman’s Sweetheart*, edited by American gender and popular culture scholar Nadine Farghaly, but before examining it, let us review the characteristics of previous literature.
As we have just mentioned, before 2013 the majority of the articles on Lois Lane had been popular ones, promoted by comics publishers as advertising stunts or as products recapitulating the characters in the Superman universe to be specifically offered to new comics readers coming to the saga for the first time. These materials (including websites) may differ in details, such as place of birth, and evidently date of birth too, since it is based on their date of publication and in spite of her being over 75 years old, Lois Lane obviously maintains her perennial youth in her innumerable reincarnations. More importantly, there are variations in her personality. And these depend not only on the different comics editors, writers and cartoonists that have tackled the task of reinventing this character over and over again, but also on social attitudes toward women in each period, which may be reflected or challenged in stories written mainly by male cartoonists (Farghaly vii; Stuller 243), as we will see below when we discuss Williams’s dissertation. Nonetheless, most of these materials coincide in that Lois Lane is a determined, curious, intelligent, courageous, hard-working, competitive ace investigative reporter prone to get into trouble because of her job at The Daily Planet, a broadsheet newspaper in the fictitious city of Metropolis (Beatty 42, 36; Connors 112-113; Crow & Mortika 20, 84; Daniels 20; Dougall 178; “Essential”; Fleisher 145-146, 151; “Lois” 2012: 905; Vaughn 153).

As regards Farghaly’s 2013 commemoratory anthology, most of the academic essays included basically deal with Lois Lane in her character recreations for the television series, Smallville in the 2000s, Lois & Clark in the 1990s, and even Adventures of Superman in the 1950s, for the early film serials in the late 1940s and the classical Superman films from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, and beyond that, for the second-to-last modern
film in 2006, Superman Returns. There is no study on the latest film Man of Steel, but it is no wonder because both Farghaly’s book and the film were released in the same year, 2013. Within the anthology, the most important essay for our purposes is “The Quest of Lois: From Lois Lane to Mrs. Superman in Comics (1986-1996),” written by American pedagogy-popular culture scholar Bobby Kuechenmeister and American feminist popular culture scholar Elizabeth Kuechenmeister, not only because it is one of only three essays that explore comic books, but also more relevantly, because the comics it examines overlap with the first half of the comics in the period under study in our present work (89-112).

One of the two other essays analyzing comics in Farghaly’s anthology, “Supermen and Not-So-Super Women: The Degradation of Women to Plot Points in Superman and Classical Epics,” written by American feminist popular culture and classical scholar Hannah Starke, compares the role of Lois Lane in the Superman saga with the role of women in the three classical epics, The Iliad, The Odyssey and The Aeneid (113-127). This study goes back to the idea of myth we explored in the first section of this chapter, but instead of concentrating on the superhero, it focuses on mythological female characters accompanying classical heroes. Predictably, none of the fictitious women have the appealing roles their males counterparts usually enjoy in the stories. Starke shows how female figures, such as Briseis, Penelope, and Dido, depicted in each of the three ancient epics, “though undoubtedly strong in their own right . . . are completely at the whim of the story’s male protagonist” (115). And apparently so is Lois.
Yet Starke argues that “Lois served a much bigger purpose than this, even if the writers did not intend it. . . . Lois was the audience’s window into Superman’s world. Through her they experienced the wonder of an alien coming to earth as a savior and learned that even without powers, they could have their own adventures” (125). What is more, thanks to this intermediary position between alien and earthlings, Lois Lane “offers Superman humanity. With Lois, he can achieve the human intimacy and emotions that are supposed to be completely foreign to his heritage” (Starke 121). Even so, in many occasions, she is downgraded to a sidekick by the shortsightedness of mainly male comics creators, and until they see beyond that, the potentialities contained in this fascinating character will fail to flourish (Starke 125-126).

The other essay on comics in Farghaly’s anthology, “Feminine Mystique: Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane in the ‘Silver Age’ of Comics,” written by American librarian-children studies scholar Vibiana Cvetkovic, deals with the 1958-1972 series Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane (39-60). Another study on this series but from a different anthology is “Second-Wave Feminism in the Pages of Lois Lane,” written by American feminist popular culture scholar Jennifer Stuller (235-251). Coincidentally, both essays show the relationship between the development of second-wave feminism and the publication of Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane series (both events roughly concurring in time), and how the latter reflects the emerging gender politics put forward by the former. But whereas Stuller makes an in-depth analysis of only two comic books from the series, using feminist conceptual tools for the task, Cvetkovic makes a more extensive analysis of the series, using the tools of mythology and fairy tale structural theories. Likewise, the
senior thesis mentioned in our Introduction, Amanda Parkinson’s “Superman’s Girlfriend Lois Lane: A Reflection of the Changing Female Roles in 1960’s America,” also examines this series in an even more comprehensive analysis, based on Williams’s, but arriving at certain divergent conclusions within the period in question, which are going to be included at the appropriate moment in our discussion of Williams’s dissertation below.

Before dealing with Williams’s dissertation, however, let us review the remaining essay on comics in Farghaly’s anthology, Kuechenmeister and Kuechenmeister’s “Quest of Lois” (89-112). This article is highly significant, as we stated above, because it analyzes half of our period under study. Thus, the objective of the article is to examine “the character development of Lois in the comics from the 1986 reboot to the 1996 wedding, through the lens of feminist theory” (Kuechenmeister & Kuechenmeister 90). One point to highlight is that the authors use feminist tools to accomplish the analysis, and this reinforces our interest in the outcome. The given premise is that at the beginning of the period Lois Lane is presented as a hypermasculine caricature in order to resist the construction of her identity through the discourse of the men around her, her father, Sam Lane, her boss, Perry White, her colleague, Clark Kent, and her romantic interest, Superman (Kuechenmeister & Kuechenmeister 96, 105). Through quoting several comic books during this period, the authors follow the process by which Lois Lane leaves behind these stereotypical masculine traits and embraces her empowered independent femininity without resorting to traditional feminine stereotypes (Kuechenmeister & Kuechenmeister 104).
The results seem encouraging, and the argumentation seems solid, agreeing with our own partiality for the character. However, this study basically differs from ours in relation to the weight given to the analysis of images in comic books. Although it certainly gives consideration to some image construction, most of the arguments relate to discourse and storyline in order to put forward the ideas that convey Lois Lane’s development from caricature to rounded character. In any case, this is a compelling exploration of the comic-book character Lois Lane that is extremely important in the context of such reduced sources of academic endeavor in this topic.

As its title shows, “The Evolution of Social Norms and the Life of Lois Lane: A Rhetorical Analysis of Popular Culture,” Williams’s dissertation deals with the analysis of the changes in the image of comics character Lois Lane over the forty-eight-year period between the launch of Superman in 1938 and the thesis publication in 1986, in order to show “the interplay between the popular beliefs of an era and its mass entertainment” (29). Williams describes her objective clearly: “This study examines how Lois Lane has developed since 1938 as the various writers, editors and artists of the Superman comic books attempt to tie expectations for the character to evolving cultural values” (38).

In the chapter devoted to the literature review, Williams first gives a historical overview of comics, then some theory about the relevance of comics in social studies, a review of methodological analysis of comics, and finally, the image of women in comics, which smoothly leads to the specific image of Lois Lane in the Superman series of comics (11-32). The methodology applied in this work allows to organize the stories featuring Lois Lane into a manageable and reliable corpus by selecting a sample of comics for each

The criteria for selection of stories for the content analysis are based primarily on Lois Lane appearing as an active participant and playing a major role in the action of the story (Williams 35). Williams’s content analysis of the selected comics is divided into the following categories: work, romance, women, and visual depictions of Lois Lane on the cover and the splash page of the selected comic books (35, 43-66). The results she obtains from the content analysis reveal four different periods of character development (1938-1947, 1948-1967, 1968-1982, 1983-1986) (Williams 40).

The first period starts with the publication of the first Superman comics story in *Action Comics* in 1938, continues through World War II, and finishes in 1947 (Williams 40). During this period, Siegel and Shuster’s original conception of Lois Lane was a character to be admired, portrayed as a confident and dynamic career-oriented woman (Williams 44, 120). Although the Superman-Lois Lane-Clark Kent triangle is initiated in these stories, romance does not play a major role in the plots (Williams 120).

During the second period, between 1948 and 1967, the original conception of Lois Lane as an active, self-reliant reporter becomes less clear, since she is usually portrayed as fickle, childish and unlikely to follow an assignment or an idea to its conclusion (Williams 40, 121). More comics plots are devoted to “her personal life, her attempts to persuade Superman to marry her and his intervention in her work” (Williams 40). Although the comics stories show her as a competent reporter, they seem to reaffirm the feminine mystique, i.e. the traditional view of women achieving life fulfillment solely by
domesticity, which was originally put forward and criticized in Betty Friedan’s already-mentioned 1963-namesake book *The Feminine Mystique* (“Feminine”; Williams 121).

Here is where Amanda Parkinson’s analysis differs from Williams’s ideas for this period. Parkinson clearly rejects Williams’s findings, “contrary to the scholar Jeanne Williams’ research, Lois did not continue to exemplify the feminine mystique throughout the early and mid 1960’s” (22). According to Parkinson, in 1961 Lois Lane’s career turns into a unified part of the storyline in comics (23), and one of the three stories, which are the usual content of a comic book in that period, always includes some “political connotation, reflecting American women’s involvement with political ideas and groups” (24). Superman begins to show more respect for Lois Lane, which seems to be the result of her greater engagement in politics and work (Parkinson 25). Although Lois Lane continually insists in marrying Superman during this period, none of the comic books are only devoted to this quest, since two of the usual three stories deal with her career and the last one with the character’s personal life (Parkinson 27). Therefore, Parkinson concludes that “[t]he early sixties shift of Lois Lane becoming more independent, career orientated, and politically inclined illustrate [sic] that she had cast of [sic] the feminine mystique before 1967, not after as Jeanne Williams had declared” (29).

Going back to Williams’s analysis, in the first and second periods, Lois Lane’s basic image changes, but her circumstances remain the same (Williams 40). In the third and fourth periods, however, there is a development in the stories that modifies Lois Lane’s situation (Williams 40). In the third period, from 1968 to 1982, Superman openly admits his love for Lois Lane, which marks a transcendental change in their relationship (Williams
After that, the unfolding of their relationship becomes a subplot running through the action stories (Williams 41, 121). However, there is an imbalance in their relationship, since Superman never reveals his secret identity (Williams 122). Although Lois Lane’s abilities as a reporter are not undermined, her work is rarely the focus of the comics stories, and she never returns to her original characterization as a symbol of female autonomy (Williams 120, 122).

Finally, in the fourth period, from 1983 to 1986, Lois Lane makes the decision to break off the relationship with Superman after Clark Kent becomes involved with Lana Lang, Superman’s resurfaced friend from his childhood and adolescence in his hometown Smallville (Williams 41, 122). By making this decision, Lois Lane again becomes an independent character, but this makes her place in the Superman cast uncertain (Williams 122-123). Her story unfolds as a separate subplot away from the main action of the comics, and eventually, when she returns to Metropolis after losing a major assignment to Lana Lang, her parallel story comes to an end (Williams 123). Having made Lois Lane an autonomous character again, apparently the comics writers and artists could not find a new role for her (Williams 123).

After the content analysis of the four periods (outrageously summarized above), Williams centers the subsequent rhetorical analysis on one comics story for each of the four periods, which is the representative anecdote for that period (41). Analysis and comparison of how Lois Lane is presented in the narrative in each period reveal the values implied in the comic books, thus showing how popular culture is related to social norms (Williams 41). The rhetorical analysis of the representative anecdote and its relation to
social norms in each of the four periods are introduced by three sections: a summary of the major developments in the comics industry; a discussion of the major events in the history of Superman; and a synopsis of the representative anecdote (Williams 67-126). Some aspects of the results of this rhetorical analysis have been added to the summary of the four periods above.

To complete Lois Lane’s story, let us continue where Williams leaves off. Williams’s dissertation tangentially mentions what happens in 1985 in the DC Comics universe (111). After the then almost fifty years of publishing comics, there was an unwieldy continuity with an immense, complex set of characters (Superman 47; Williams 111). In as early as the 1960s, the establishment of DC Comics’ multiverse, the concept of multiple parallel universes, permitted explaining inconsistencies in events and characters, which had been changing since the launching of superhero comics (Superman 45, 46; Williams 111-112).

Apart from the convenient idea of the multiverse, other changes introduced in the DC fictional universe in the 1960s were, as noted earlier, mainly due to the increasing popularity of a kind of flawed superhero different from the godlike figures traditionally encouraged by DC Comics, with stories emphasizing plot and suspense (Superman 45; Williams 97, 98). We already mentioned that those new types of superheroes were first developed by Jack Kirby and Stan Lee, a team belonging to DC Comics’ competitor Marvel Comics, when we discussed Harvey’s book The Art of the Comic Book earlier (Harvey 47, 49; Superman 45; Williams 97). Although reluctant to jump on the new superhero bandwagon, DC Comics eventually gave in shifting characterization of old superheroes, so that
they show as much concern with their personal life as with their public life as crime-fighters, hence allowing for a more direct identification with the audience (Superman 45; Williams 97). In addition, another new trend in the 1960s was the abandonment of the conventional unconnected stories about the same character in favor of stories featuring plots that continued from one issue to the next, frequently crossing over into other related titles (Williams 98).

With all these accumulated conflicts in continuity, overlapping worlds in different universes, and changes in characterization, in 1985 DC Comics decided to simplify everything and create a more logical universe by publishing the already-mentioned twelve-issue limited series and crossover event Crisis on Infinite Earths (Superman 47, 149, 926; Williams 111, 112; Wolfman et al.). From the outcome of the series, several major characters disappeared with the interesting result that in the new reality that followed, they never existed, and thus, they were neither mourned nor remembered (Klock 21; Superman 150; Williams 112). Also, the concept of the multiverse was removed, collapsing all DC universes into one (Superman 150; Williams 112). Because of the pervasive and significant modifications that Crisis implemented, the series became a defining and crucial moment in DC Comics’ lengthy continuity, which came to be known as “pre-Crisis” and “post-Crisis” (Superman 153).

This reboot of DC Comics’ universe in the mid-1980s has a lot to do, as we have seen earlier, with the changing demographic in the fan-based network related to the development of direct sale shops (Harvey 47, 49; Klock 21). But Crisis was more than the attempt “to make the DC universe simpler to comprehend for new readers and readers
who preferred the more manageable continuity of Marvel . . . [it] started the new interpretation of superheroes” (Klock 21). In the new stories created within this revamped universe, “[r]etroactive changes, reimaginings, reinterpretations, revisiting origins, and revisions became major storytelling tools, tools that, rather than overturning the difficulties of continuity, fit in nicely with [the above-mentioned] Eco’s ‘oneiric quality’” (Klock 21). Ironically, creating stories in this way makes superhero comic books all the more intricate, complicated, and multi-layered, resulting in an even more labyrinthine DC universe than before (Klock 21). Therefore, Crisis failed in achieving simplification, but as the already-mentioned author Geoff Klock states, it succeeded from another point of view: “What would change . . . is the perspective that saw unwieldy chaos as a bad thing. Like many aspects of superhero comic books, what appears to a newcomer or outside observer as a drawback or flaw turns out to be, upon closer inspection, one of the genre’s unique strengths” (24).

Following Crisis, then, the backstories of all of DC Comics’ characters were altered and updated to conform to the revised DC universe (Superman 47; Williams 112). As regards Superman, in the new continuity, it fell to the already-mentioned cartoonist John Byrne to revamp the superhero in The Man of Steel and this series brought significant changes to the character (Byrne & Giordano; Superman 47, 153, 926; Williams 113). As we will see in more detail in Chapter Three, Byrne substantially rewrote Superman’s origin and history, but a notable alteration was that Clark Kent became the real person and Superman the disguise, leaving behind the idea of the mild-mannered journalist as Superman’s secret identity (Byrne & Giordano; Superman 47, 153, 908, 926; Williams 113).
With this change in Clark Kent’s personality, there is at last a setting in which Lois Lane can logically fall in love with Clark Kent because this time he is the real person (Superman 926; Williams 113). Lois Lane, in her turn, was also revamped, and she is portrayed as a very strong reporter who rarely needs rescuing (Byrne & Giordano; Superman 905, 908). Although their relationship was not revived at the beginning, in the 1990s the famous comics couple ultimately got married (Superman 926; Williams 113).

The successful public response to Crisis inspired the titles of several subsequent DC Comics crossover series; among them, the most important are Infinite Crisis (Johns et al.) in 2005 and Final Crisis (Morrison et al.) in 2008 (Superman 150). Finally, in 2011, the main continuity in the DC universe was relaunched again (Superman 910). In this new timeline, Lois Lane heads the media division of The Daily Planet newspaper owned by Morgan Edge, originally a supervillain but in this reincarnation he is depicted as a powerful African American media mogul (“Morgan”; Superman 910). She is no longer married to Clark Kent and she has gone back to see him as a friend and to respect him as a journalist (Superman 910). Moreover, Lois Lane seems once more to be unaware that Clark Kent is Superman, although yet again she does have her suspicions (Superman 910).

To conclude, let us quote two writers on their ideas about Superman. On the fiftieth anniversary of the appearance of the first Superman story, in tribute to the superhero, American writer Harlan Ellison remarked, “If one of the unarguable criteria for literary greatness is universal recognition, consider this: In all of the history of literature, there are only five fictional creations known to every man, woman and child on the planet. . . . Mickey Mouse, Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan, Robin Hood... and Superman”
(Dooley & Engle 11). In the documentary *Secret Origin: The Story of DC Comics*, British writer Neil Gaiman finishes the film by saying, “I can tell you that a hundred years from now there will be kids who’ll want to find out what’s happening with Superman.” And together with the superhero, the fearless reporter will be there side by side in whatever rebirth comics artists and writers will give her because being a character continuously evolving, nobody knows what fate has in store for her.
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

So far we have been discussing comics and the literature surrounding them, without a distinct identification of the body of theory underlying our inquiry; thus, the time has come to deal with it in this chapter. Although we certainly acknowledge that everyone intuitively knows for sure what comics are, we deem important to start by working on the definition of comics, in order to clarify our object of study. Because of the American controversy over that definition, we already partially touched on this subject when we spoke about Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* and Robert Harvey’s *The Art of the Comic Book* in the literature review of American comics theorists in Chapter One. Here in the first section we intend to give a possible response to the controversy, but we are also going to review the definitions of comics given by European scholars, especially Román Gubern’s. Once comics are defined, we will turn to the closely related description of their characteristics and their relationship with other languages. All these topics will straightforwardly lead to a classification of comics that will narrow down such an umbrella term as comics, and in this way, it will also circumscribe our field of study.

The central part of this chapter will be devoted to the language of comics, a theoretical groundwork that will be the basis for the methodology we are going to develop in Chapter Four. But as we mentioned in the Introduction, our analysis has a feminist backbone and this makes us engage in the examination of what we theoretically mean by feminism, since many theorists emphasize that there is not a singular movement,
but a multiplicity of feminisms. However, as we mentioned in Chapter One, our foundation is laid on the concepts developed by second-wave feminism. Finally, the last section of this chapter will take the feminist ideas as they apply to criticism and analysis.

Since we have seen that comics partake of both words and images, we are going to review literary and visual art criticisms, and we will also take into account the already-noted insightful studies by Sara Mills. But as these are word-based linguistic analyses, they will be combined with Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen’s analytical semiotic instruments, which though not intrinsically feminist, they have a critical outlook that renders them more than suitable for a gender-based analysis.

**Definition of Comics**

Since the misleading word “comics” (established at the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States, when all strips were indeed comic) seems to reduce comics to humor, there has been an ongoing debate among comics scholars about its use and about its possible alternatives, such as pictorial fiction, narrative illustration, image literature, sequential art, graphic storytelling, visual novel, or graphic novel (Fernández Paz 8-9; Gaines 245; Gubern 1981: 172; Kannenberg; Kunzle; Witek). Of all these alternative labels the one that seems to have taken root as a real productive option has been graphic novel. Its main function, however, has apparently been that of legitimizing comics by bridging the status gap between comics and “serious” fiction, being an appropriate term to be used with a very different cultural charge from that of comics (Harvey 107, 109, 116, 117; Witek). Although when we dealt with Harvey’s *The Art of the*
Comic Book in Chapter One, we saw what characteristics he suggests for graphic novels, some comics scholars directly equate them with comics in order to avoid the “intellectual embarrassment” of that word (Witek). Thus, they embrace the term without qualms; for instance, in her already-mentioned anthology about Lois Lane, Nadine Farghaly refers to ordinary Superman comic books as “graphic novels” (vii). But despite its lack of cultural pedigree, “comics,” the most readily recognizable term (used even in other languages, such as the transliterated (Catford 66-70) word “cómics” in Spanish), seems to be a valid option to encompass not only comic books, comic strips and single-panel cartoons, but also even the one that has been proposed as its substitute — graphic novel.

Having discussed the usual terminology resulting in the preservation of the umbrella term “comics,” let us turn now to the already-mentioned American controversy over the definition of comics. As we saw in Chapter One, McCloud bases his characterization of comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence” (9/1, emphasis in the original) on Eisner’s idea of comics as “sequential art,” placing the emphasis on sequentiality (Cohn 2005: 236), while Harvey’s definition of “visual-verbal blending” (4) highlights the component elements, text and images. McCloud acknowledges that sometimes the juxtaposition of words and pictures can prompt people to label the product comics (21/4), but he finds this a too restrictive definition (21/5). These comments seem to refer to Harvey’s own definition of comics, an inference that may be foregrounded by what appears to be a challenge in McCloud’s next panel: “if anyone wants to write a book taking the opposite view, you can bet I’ll be the first in line to buy a copy” (21/6, emphasis in the original). Additionally, there is also a
challenge to Harvey’s idea of using his definition as an evaluative tool of comics (4), when McCloud states, “‘good’ comics as those in which the *combination* of these very *different* forms of expression [writing and drawing] is thought to be *harmonious*” (47/6, emphasis in the original). By putting the word “good” between inverted commas, the statement definitely implies a clear separation from the idea that harmony between words and images can produce better comics than otherwise.

Apparently, there is no solution to these two different points of view, and as American comics scholar Neil Cohn remarks, “both McCloud’s and Harvey’s positions are fraught with inevitable problems, which, as one might expect, lead to their open-ended debating” (2005: 237). It is worth noting that most arguments on this controversy center on the roles and interaction of images, text and sequentiality (or narration), but other aspects of this issue, such as producers, recipients, content, and distribution, are not given the relevance they should deserve (Cohn 2005: 236). Furthermore, illustrated children’s books have been utterly disregarded as comics although they may share all those three primary features (Cohn 2005: 236). What is more, the focus on some rather than other features results in the exclusion of, on the one hand, single-panel comics, and on the other hand, silent or extra-text comics (Cohn 2005: 236). Consequently, McCloud’s emphasis on sequence discards single-panel comics, and though Cohn affirms that “even McCloud accepts them as comics” (2005: 239), actually, McCloud only accepts their existence as cartoons, not comics (20/5-6), because “there’s no such thing as a sequence of *one!*” (20/5, emphasis in the original). Although Harvey does not so summarily dismiss comics with unbalanced text-image features, his prescriptive perspective makes it difficult
for many comics to achieve the highly-regarded status of art that he proposes. And here is another contentious argument which not only can be ascribed to Harvey but can also be tracked back to Eisner’s definition of comics as “sequential art” (my emphasis). Cohn contests this idea of an inherent definition of comics as art (2005: 243-245), since the label of art can only be applied to a product that meets certain “individual and cultural qualifications” (2005: 243).

Based on the conceptions of language developed by Swiss structuralist linguist Ferdinand de Saussure as *langue* (language-system) and *parole* (language-behavior), and by American generativist linguist Noam Chomsky as competence and performance (Lyons 8-11) (instead of these Chomskyan technical terms, Cohn uses “I-language,” internal language, and “E-language,” external language), Cohn draws a parallel with the notions of visual language and comics (2005: 240-241). Visual language, then, is to comics, as *langue* and competence are to *parole* and performance, respectively (Cohn 2005: 241). It is debatable whether *langue* and competence are comparable, since the former is a social concept, while the latter is related to just an “ideal” speaker (Lyons 8-11). Nonetheless, the parallelism is understandable, as everyone, especially in infancy, has the innate capacity of drawing images, and society has also enjoyed this treasure of visual language-system since primordial times. In addition, Cohn considers that this division between visual language and comics makes the need to define comics by structural makeup superfluous (2005: 245). In other words, the structure of “single panel comics, text dominated comics, and text absent comics,” on the one hand, and illustrated children’s
books, on the other hand, do not make these specific works fall into the classification either as comics in the first case or not comics in the second one (Cohn 2005: 245).

Therefore, instead of using the structural components, as McCloud and Harvey do, the definition of comics can actually be achieved by “cultural categorization, be it of readership, publishing, or content, though they share common elements of structure—text, images, and narrative” (Cohn 2005: 246, emphasis in the original). From this perspective, “comics can only be understood as sociological, literary, and cultural artifacts, independent from the internal structures comprising them” (Cohn 2005: 246). Accordingly, comics, as cultural artifacts, have supplied visual language with “a vessel to travel in throughout the last century” (Cohn 2005: 246), and they have become “a writing of a type of language, perhaps accompanying verbal/textual language, and perhaps not” (Cohn 2005: 247, emphasis in the original). This is what Spanish comics writer-scholar Antonio Altarriba means when, instead of using Cohn’s comparison with linguistics and semiotics, he turns to literature to show that just as the format of words does not matter to be considered literature, the channel of narrative images cannot be taken into account to be labeled comics (11). Altarriba does not split the idea of comics into two, but he goes as far as Cohn does with his definition of comics as “image stories” (12, my translation). Indeed, just as Cohn has found that visual language can be traced back to ancestral times (2005: 241-242), Altarriba playfully states that in the beginning there was the icon, not the word (12).

Other comics theorists have also defined comics in different ways. For instance, José Luis Rodríguez Diéguez in his typical didactic fashion reviews twelve definitions of
comics, summarizing them in charts and highlighting the basic elements (17-21), and from these definitions, he extracts the most important features to be discussed throughout his book. Miguel Ángel Muro Munilla, in his turn, chooses Gubern’s definition in a 1994 presentation, similar to the structural one we are going to see below (63). Thus, we are going to finish with Gubern’s definitions, because we think they are complete statements referring to the period and the type of comics we are going to deal with in this inquiry. However, as we have seen, this does not mean that they are the final statements on the concept of comics.

According to Gubern, then, there are two different ways of defining comics: from the historical-industrial-editorial point of view, and from the semiotic-aesthetic point of view (1981: 141). The former goes back to the configuration established by the American press at the end of the nineteenth century (a topic that will be taken up in more detail in the section “The Origin of Comic Strips” in Chapter Three), and this comprises the following characteristics: a panel sequence, a standing character, and dialogue speech enclosed in balloons (Gubern 1981: 141). This is the “modern” idea of comics limited to a restricted period of time, the “last-century vessel” Cohn mentions (2005: 246), but not, as he remarks, the visual language actively employed throughout human history (2005: 241-242). Gubern’s latter point of view of defining comics characterizes this medium as a narrative structure consisting of the progressive sequence of pictograms or panels, where elements of phonetic writing can be integrated (Gubern 1974: 35; 1981: 141). This, again, is a structural definition, which has been rejected, as we have seen, by Cohn, and also Altarriba, who not only expands this with his own definition, but also includes, within the
possible genres, autobiography, history, philosophy, journalism, etc., thus going beyond narrative fiction. To these, we can add the technical and attitudinal instruction handbooks and story boards for films mentioned by Eisner (1985: 142-145, 146), and theoretical treatises as well, such as McCloud’s on comics. Nevertheless, although in the next section we are going to use Rodríguez Diéguez’s significant analysis of definitions to extract the typical features that can be found in contemporary comics, Gubern’s will be our definitive working definition for this study, without precluding others or prescriptively limiting them.

**Characteristics of Comics**

From Rodríguez Diéguez’s summary of definitions by twelve comics theorists, the characteristics which can be elicited and which are shared by most of them are as follows: comics are a narrative message (nine out of twelve); they use an iconic-verbal language (eight out of twelve); they employ specific conventional codes beyond the iconic-verbal ones, such as speech balloons and onomatopoeias (seven out of twelve); and they are a mass medium (five out of twelve) (24-25). Only Umberto Eco mentions that their objective is entertainment (Rodríguez Diéguez 24-25), but as we have just mentioned, this indeed restricts their definition.

We saw in the previous section that there is more to comics than narration, and Rodríguez Diéguez emphatically affirms that comics are predominantly but not exclusively narrative (33). But taking into account the list above, the main characteristic of comics that stands out and that most (but certainly not all) comics theorists agree on is that of being a narrative mode. That is to say, comics constitute a medium for telling stories with
a specific language of their own (Altarriba 11-12; Fernández Paz 9, 29; McCloud 2-24; Muro Munilla 63-67; Rodríguez Diéguez 24, 27-33).

Therefore, we have to revise our preliminary attempt at stating the different types of comics in the previous section, since, as we have seen, single-panel cartoons do not have a sequence to tell a story (Fernández Paz 9; Gubern 1974: 107; McCloud 21). McCloud clearly states the difference between cartoon and comics, the former is an “approach to picture-making” and the latter is a “medium which often employs that approach” (21/3, emphasis in the original). But we have to bear in mind the caveat already stated that there are macropanels or splash panels which show a story, or at least a sequence, within a single panel, most of the time occupying a whole page, and as we will see in the section “Classification of Comics,” these can be typically found in Sunday or weekly comic strips (Gubern 1974: 37; Rodríguez Diéguez 30-31). Nevertheless, for this study we take the stand that “the sequential organisation of panels . . . is what distinguishes comics from cartoons. The two media are similar in the way they make use of words and pictures, but they differ in the fact that cartoons are always composed of only one panel, whereas comics are always composed of more than one panel” (Saraceni 35, emphasis in the original). Thus, we reserve the term “cartoon” for single-panel comics appearing in isolation, because, as we will see in our analyses in Chapter Five, within a story there may be a large panel with sequences of mini-stories recapitulating events from previous issues.

But from the features above, it also emerges that comics not only narrate, they show by means of images as well, and this implies another key characteristic of comics
— the juxtaposition of the iconic and linguistic codes (Eisner 1985: 8; Fernández Paz 29-30; Gasca & Gubern 13; Kannenberg; McCloud 138-161). Again, we have to be cautious and remember, for instance, what Eisner states: “It is possible to tell a story through imagery alone without the help of words” (1985: 16). Nevertheless, most comics scholars agree that these are the exception not the rule. And for some comics theorists, as we have observed, the comics medium transcends a mere juxtaposition of visual and verbal languages: it is a synthesis of word and image, components that are integrated as a whole forming a language with its own rules or conventions (Fernández Paz 10; Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 197; Gubern 1974: 109; Harvey 3-15).

Accordingly, comics are written-iconic media based on narration with sequences of still images that may integrate literary texts (Gasca & Gubern 14). The pictograms or panels with integrated words and images inside their boundaries are themselves juxtaposed one next to the other, and the narration sequence is based on the elision of certain scenes, i.e. narrative ellipsis or closure (to use McCloud’s term mentioned in Chapter One), which is yet another fundamental characteristic of comics (Fernández Paz 29-30; Gubern 1974: 117; McCloud 66-67). In other words, a comics story develops from panel to panel, and each panel represents only a certain significant moment of the story: the intermediary moments that are considered irrelevant (i.e. redundancies and time-outs) are elided (Fernández Paz 30; Gubern 1974: 117). This means that the narrative ellipsis can be minimal or as long as requiring an ancillary caption to make the transition explicit for the reader, because with or without caption it is the reader who fills in the gap and connects the images restituting the narrative continuum (Fernández Paz 30; Gubern
This narrative ellipsis is the basis not only of comics but also of all visual-verbal languages, such as cinema, television, and photonovels (Fernández Paz 30; Gubern 1974: 117).

We have mentioned the basic characteristic of the integration of image and word in comics, but besides the visual-verbal languages there is a structural presence of a multiplicity of different codes, such as setting, gestures, and costumes (Gasca & Gubern 14; Zunzunegui 122). When French film theorist Christian Metz states that comics are manual, multiple, and motionless media, his actual intention apparently is to relate comics to other languages (qtd. in Zunzunegui 121). As a result, with these three characteristics, Metz links comics to painting and traditional figurative arts because of the manual aspect of production — though at present we have to acknowledge the widespread use of computer aids (Zabel) —, to film and photography because of the possibility of being profusely reproduced from a single specimen, and again to painting and photography because of the immobility of the images (qtd. in Zunzunegui 121). There are also other languages that converge on the comics code, as we will see in the following section.

Comics and Other Languages

The languages linked to comics in different ways have been studied in-depth by Italian comics theorist Daniele Barbieri. In his book Los lenguajes del comic [The Languages of Comics, my translation], these languages are divided into three broad categories related to the intrinsic characteristics of comics, as we saw in the previous section: image languages, temporal languages, and languages of image and temporality.
Each of these three categories, in turn, includes a series of different languages. Sometimes it is difficult to choose what exactly each of the languages discussed contributes to comics, and the choice of one aspect rather than another might appear arbitrary, because some features mentioned can be either contributions of two or more different languages. However, following Barbieri’s work, here we are going to emphasize the most typical element of the language analyzed in connection with comics, obviously conceding that the selection might have been otherwise.

Illustration, caricature, painting, photography, and the graphic arts are all image languages (Barbieri 16). Although illustration and comics may seem almost the same type of language, the basic difference between them is that the former comments, while the latter, as noted earlier, narrates (Barbieri 21). This means that the language of illustration is more descriptive than narrative, and although comics might have descriptive panels, their basic aim is to tell a story, as we stated in the previous sections (Barbieri 22). The second image language, caricature, can be considered expressive deformation, which helps to ease the reading and understanding of comics (Barbieri 75). Caricatures as used in comics can lead to stereotyping characters, and as such, they have advantages and disadvantages. In particular, many times exaggeration and caricature are needed in comics to visualize an idea, or to distinguish one character from another, so that they are readily recognized by the reader, especially when comics are developed through a long time in serialized sequences (Eisner 1998: 17-20; Zabel). But the simplification and generalization involved in stereotypes might be pernicious, or at least, offensive, and the reiteration of stereotypes might induce a simplistic and biased world vision (Cervera 183;
Eisner 1998: 17). Nevertheless, stereotypes are also typical of fairy tales, but there they do not seem to attract so much criticism, perhaps because the iconic language of comics is so patently and universally comprehensive.

It is so evident that many of the elements constituting the language of painting are shared by illustration that different authors place the relations between painting and comics differently. For instance, Gubern includes within the realm of painting all the techniques that Barbieri details under the label of illustration (Barbieri 26-68; Gubern 1974: 87-88). And this again shows the arbitrariness of the selection. Still, following Barbieri’s analysis, we can relate comics to one intrinsic aspect of painting, the Renaissance invention of mathematical perspective, which undoubtedly serves the purpose of depicting depth and volume in comics panels (Barbieri 100). The modern language of photography supplies the experience acquired about framing, camera angles, and temporal cuts, concepts that are essential for the narrative structure of the panel components (Barbieri 133-142). The last image language, the graphic arts, not only helps in the distribution of comics panels by providing the balance and rhythm necessary on the page layout, but also in the organization of some of the elements inside the panels, namely balloons, captions, and lettering (Barbieri 151-153, 170-173, 175-180).

The languages of temporality comprise poetry, music, and fiction (Barbieri 16). The factors of harmony and polyphony, typical of music, are used in the counterpoint between comics images and the captions that aid the iconic narration, as they do not always express exactly the same ideas (Barbieri 196-198). Repetition, which can eventually be modulated, can be said to partake of both poetry and music, and it is borrowed for use in
comics images (Barbieri 199-200). Fiction, in turn, provides a variety of text structures, which are often taken as basis for stories in comics (Barbieri 207-210). Being both narrative languages, there have been many adaptations from novels and short stories to comics (Gubern 1974: 84). A case in point is our focus of a previous analysis mentioned in the Introduction: Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles*, adapted by EC Comics in the 1950s (Gil 2003).

Finally, theatre, animation, and cinema constitute the languages of image and temporality (Barbieri 16). Theatre is related to comics in the use of gestures and words, the stereotyping of gestures, gesticulations and emotional expressions, the themes of expressive conventions, and the informative use of dialogues and monologues (Barbieri 213-222; Gubern 1974: 83-84). Whereas animation and film share many characteristics, their contribution to comics is divided into the representation of movements, which has been linked to animation (Barbieri 223-234), and the aspects of montage (panel sequence) and time, the temporal use of dialogues, and the representation of time span, slow motion, flashback and organization of sequences, which have been linked to film (Barbieri 241-274). Comics montage is a more complex phenomenon than that of films, because comics merge into a continuum by juxtaposing static elements (Eco 162). The representation of time in all its facets has associated films and comics closely. In this connection, one important feature to highlight is the difference between narrated time, the “literary” span of time, and presented time, the time depicted in the image, because sometimes they do not coincide (Barbieri 261). Not only has film supplied comics with the cinematic techniques of montage and time representation, it has also provided the basic
vocabulary to speak about comics staging, which is extensively used in analyses of comics panels, such as close-up, long shot, camera angle, temporal cut, etc. (Fleury; Zabel).

**Classification of Comics**

We have already observed that the concept of comics includes three types of comics: comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels. These categories are inextricably linked to the way, in which they historically evolved, and thus, they have been listed in chronological order; that is to say, the first to appear was the comic strip, and the last one, the graphic novel. While in the historical overview of Chapter Three we will discuss their historical evolution, here we intend to characterize them as briefly as possible.

Comic strips are associated with the typical mass medium where they first appeared— the newspaper. There are basically two types of comic strips: the Sunday or weekly strips, which usually appear in supplements, each strip covering a whole page or most of the page with a top strip or topper (ancillary strip at the top of the page), and the daily strips (Coma 1991: 12). A comics page, typical of Sunday strips, can be defined as a peculiar montage structure, which is characterized by being conceived and made to be reproduced on the whole page surface, in order to achieve graphic unity with global plastic coherence (Gubern 1974: 37). Since this definition does not refer either to panels or to narration, it includes those cases in which panel and page coincide (the sequence appears in the panel itself or by taking into account the preceding and subsequent pages), and those pages or panels which tend to be more descriptive (i.e. spatial analysis) than narrative (Gubern 1974: 37). The daily strip can be defined as a horizontal montage
structure, which constitutes a publication unit (Gubern 1974: 39). Unlike the weekly strip that occupies a whole page, the daily strip only covers a page fragment, and the whole page where it appears generally has a heterogeneous content (Gubern 1974: 39).

From the point of view of their narrative structure, both the daily and weekly strips can be a stand-alone or a serial; in general according to their genre, the former is typical of humor, and the latter, of adventure (Barbieri 207-208; Gubern 1974: 39). Serial newspaper comics in installments usually have, all in all, a long extension in time, since the narration develops as an interminable saga, where events take place and situations resolve while others evolve from them almost without definite conclusion (Barbieri 209). This narrative format can create the suspense necessary to any story, but they face the problem that much repetition is needed to recapitulate the events of previous days (Harvey 24). Therefore, it is important to distinguish the mode of comic book from that of newspaper comics, since with the comic book, comics became independent from the press medium restrictions not only in panel size and number but also in their serial stories format (Frattini & Palmer 182; Harvey 24).

Thus, according to Robert Harvey, newspaper strips have less graphic and narrative potential than comic books, and only Sunday strips with their whole page format can have similar freedoms to those enjoyed by comic books (24). Still, having many more pages than Sunday strips and being organized between covers as a unit, comic books have many more possibilities to realize the full capacity of the comics medium (Harvey 24). “Comic books can tell their stories all at once with no repetition (and therefore with greater dramatic impact), can exploit varying panel sizes and shapes to embellish stories with
special narrative-enhancing effects, can manipulate time over longer periods to create mood, and can do it all in color” (Harvey 24), although this last one is a characteristic usually shared by Sunday strips. As regards their readership, the target audience of comic books has been typically younger than newspaper strips’ which were addressed without compunction to adults as part of their circulation-building mechanism (Harvey 24). This different type of audience usually leads to associate comic books with the immaturity of youth (Harvey 24).

Concerning format, the comic book consists in a monthly magazine often with a 19-by-26-centimeter page size, and usually containing three or four complete color episodes; that is to say, with the comic book, short story comics appear (Barbieri 209; Coma 1979: 113; Gubern 1974: 49; Kunzle). Nowadays, though, comic books tend to develop only one story in a single issue, many times seamlessly connected with other titles of the same character, and even crossing over to others in order to encompass all comics in a whole universe. But historically, since comic books had complete stories between its covers, they can be compared to feature films, while comic strips with their episodic nature are similar to the film serials of the first decades of cinema (Coma 1979: 113). Thus, as mentioned above, unlike the comic strip that bases its narration on suspense to prompt the reader to buy the next installment, the comic book bases its narration on action that becomes spectacular (Barbieri 209). That is why superheroes with their stories full of movement and excitement are typical characters of comic books (Barbieri 209). Tension in the intricate plot is not as important as in comic strips; rather the spectacle that the plot intricacy is able to display (Barbieri 209).
The working definition of graphic novel among many comics scholars is a “series of comic books, usually sharing a storyline, bound together as a compendium edition, or a unique work of sequential art (comic art) that stands alone” (Carter). There are other definitions of graphic novel that appeal to its formal aspects, and they take into account, for instance, the number of pages. Thus, whereas the term “one-shot” has been coined for a comic book containing less than 64 pages, a graphic novel is a comic book of more than 96 pages, and the ones between 64 and 96 pages can be called either (Fleury). Merely counting pages results in a rather awkward definition with no clear-cut distinction in content, and as Harvey states, it is regrettable that a narrative, which is simply longer than the usual comic-book short story in the magazine package and which is bound between hardback covers, can be called “graphic novel” (116-117). Not only does he regret this definition solely based on external aspects, but he also attempts to formally and functionally differentiate graphic novels from comic books with Gil Kane’s 1960s experiment Savage, as we saw in Chapter One (Harvey 109, 116). But Harvey does recognize that there were no other graphic novels following in Kane’s footsteps, and eventually comics publishers subverted the notion of a distinction between comic books and graphic novels by abusing the label in the marketing hype (116). Apparently, as we stated in the section “Definition of Comics,” they use the adjective “graphic” to refer to the visual character of the issues, while the noun “novel” seems to be the pretentious appropriation of a long-standing respected term (Harvey 116).

Taking all this into account, the first definition of graphic novel mentioned above, which is shared by many comics scholars, seems quite appropriate for our aims. It is more
comprehensive, and it acknowledges the history of the present-day graphic novel, considered to be an outgrowth of comic books (Carter). The graphic novel, then, has been a late newcomer to the history of comics, and comics theorists still debate which the first graphic novel was. The most widely agreed candidate is Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* (first published in 1978), since Eisner was one of the first cartoonists to describe his own work as graphic novel. Harvey disagrees with this opinion, because he thinks that “Eisner’s blend of words and pictures in [this work] is fairly conventional” (116). In other words, it does not qualify for his lofty ideal of visual-verbal blending as described earlier. Still, Eisner’s *Contract* can be considered as the first or certainly among the first author-acknowledged graphic novels, and undoubtedly as the most popularly recognized stand-alone sequential art narrative to originate from comics (Carter).

**The Language of Comics**

In this section, we are going to follow Umberto Eco’s description of the language of comics in his article “Lectura de ‘Steve Canyon,’” using this as a basic framework to be complemented and qualified with other comics theorists’ studies (see Appendix 7 for an outline of the concepts presented here). As we mentioned in Chapter One, Eco starts with a formal description of the first page of the comic strip serial *Steve Canyon* (141-155), and from this, he extracts certain key elements constituting the language of comics, which, in his view, have to be considered when analyzing comics (155-160). Those elements may be categorized into three main levels — illustration, concepts, and sounds — which may be
related to the traditional linguistic categories of semantics and syntax, generally used in semiotic analyses (Eco 151). Thus, while the semantics of comics comprises the repertoire of iconography, and the balloon (Eco 155-156), syntax takes into account not only the level of the relationship between panels, but also the level of the relationship between the elements inside the panel (Eco 157-158). To semantics and syntax Eco adds narration, and within this category, he includes the formal elements of narration (framing, montage, etc.), the nature of plot, and character typology (159). The final aspect of Eco’s analysis is the ideological statement of the story, which is related to the universe of values (160). In Chapter One, we saw a similar repertoire of comics organized by Luis Gasca and Román Gubern, which may be used as a very comprehensive introduction based on sample images from actual comics, although it fails to include Eco’s final ideological analysis. We agreed with Eco that ideology is of major relevance in a semiotic analysis of comics, but in our case, with a twist —our ideological analysis will take up a feminist emphasis.

According to Eco, then, the first element in the language of comics is a concept developed by German-born American art historian Erwin Panofsky in relation to the analysis of Renaissance art —iconography. But Eco also mentions another of Panofsky’s terms, when he says that there are canonical figurative elements “with precise iconological categories” (155, my translation and emphasis). In his essay “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art,” Panofsky divides the act of interpreting a picture into three levels: pre-iconographical, iconographical, and iconological (53-67). The first one is related to pure forms associated with the representation of objects as seen in the world, and Panofsky defines it as “Primary or
natural subject matter” (53-54, 58-61). The second one is related to the conventional meaning applied to those representations, and it is called “Secondary or conventional subject matter” (Panofsky 54-55, 61-64, 66). Finally, the third one refers to the symbolical values arising from the representations through the researcher’s intuition, and Panofsky names this “Intrinsic meaning or content” (55-61, 64-67). In conclusion, for a complete analysis of an image, Panofsky suggests “operating on these three levels, pre-iconographical description, iconographical analysis, and iconological interpretation” (58).

On the whole, what Panofsky suggests for the study of Renaissance art is very similar to what Eco proposes for the study of comics, i.e. going from the basic forms to the more abstract values. And this is what Eco does in his formal analysis, as we saw in Chapter One; however, when he derives the language of comics from that, he skips the analysis of the image itself and plunges directly into the analysis of the image and its conventional meaning: iconography (155). This is why Eco relates iconography and semantics (155), although strictly speaking even at the level of pre-iconographical description, we can find a first stage in semantics, since the first operation, as Panofsky states, is to associate the representational forms with their obvious referents, which he calls “factual meaning” (51). Nevertheless, Eco is more interested in conventional meaning (iconography) expressed through stereotypes and visual metaphors (bright idea, seeing stars, sleeping like a log, etc.), which constitute an elementary figurative symbolism (155). Rodríguez Diéguez also mentions Panofsky’s ideas in order to distinguish between representation and expression in comics (9-11). He places representation at the level of
pre-iconography and iconography, and expression is revealed by an iconological analysis (Rodríguez Diéguez 10).

The second element Eco describes is the speech balloon, but within this category, almost as an afterthought, he also mentions the graphic sign used as an extension of onomatopoeic resources or sound effects (156). As regards the balloon, he enumerates the usual descriptions of the shape of the balloon and its tail or pointer (signal toward the speaker), which conventional meaning ascribes to speech when the words are encircled by a continuous straight line, to thought when the words are enclosed in curved lines simulating a cloud, and to emotions (fear, anger, excitement) or, not mentioned by Eco here but shown in the Steve Canyon images, electronic communication when the balloon has a zigzag line (156). In addition, Eco suggests in a footnote that rather than being a conventional element belonging to the repertoire of signs, the balloon might be considered a metalinguistic element, i.e. a kind of preliminary signal that imposes a reference to a certain code for the decodification of the signs inside its shape (156).

Eco’s idea of the balloon as a metalinguistic component in comics is picked up by Pierre Fresnault-Dereulle in the already-mentioned essay “Lo verbal en las historietas,” which is completely devoted to text in comics (1982: 183, 182-204). Fresnault-Dereulle incorporates a catalogue of balloon forms similar to Eco’s, but he does include a reference to electronic communications though different from the one in Steve Canyon mentioned above (1982: 185-186). As in his article Fresnault-Dereulle has used a corpus limited to Tintin comics from the “Brussels School,” representing a European tradition in comics rather than an American one, instead of the zigzag broken line for electronic
communication, he describes a wavy line indicating radio broadcast, and understandably, he finds this a suitable graphic representation imitating radio waves (1982: 182, 185-186, my emphasis). In contrast, the American tradition relates the jagged outline to the “crisp crackle” of radio or telephonic transmission (Eisner 1985: 46). Fresnault-Dereulle adds a category called “zero-balloon” (my translation), referring to those cases when the balloon is absent and the text invades the image without an encircling line (1982: 186). This, he explains, can refer to uncontrollable emotion (anxiety, fear, pain, etc.) or noise (avalanche, explosion, engine, etc.) (Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 186).

Furthermore, Fresnault-Dereulle also deals with the suprasegmental features of speech (a topic totally overlooked by Eco). In this connection, he ascertains the nature of the modification of signs manifesting sounds in balloons; for instance, some words may be larger in size, in boldface, or in italics, and these obviously correspond to words uttered in a louder voice or with different intonation (Fresnault-Dereulle 1978: 155; 1982: 197), a notion mentioned by Eisner as well (1985: 124-125). Fresnault-Dereulle also distinguishes between the text in balloons and in captions. Unlike balloons, words in captions, being the place for the voice-over narrator (i.e. the indirect style), usually show almost no emphasis in larger typeface size, boldface, or italics (Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 200).

Apart from the speech balloon itself, Fresnault-Dereulle also includes the shape the balloon may take as part of the metalinguistic dimension referred to by Eco (1982: 184). Thus, the graphic representation of a balloon with a continuous line implicitly alludes to certainty in speech; a zigzag line implies a kind of energy release due to emotion; and a segmented tail in the shape of small balloons to suggest thought
seemingly depicts a psychic emanation from the character’s forehead (Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 184, 186). In Fresnault-Dereulle’s article “Lo verbal,” there is a very important insight in relation to the balloon tail: it is seen as an intermediary making the connection between the linguistic code, text, and the iconic code, image (1982: 188). Accordingly, the balloon tail can be equated with the introductory sentences in fiction direct discourse, although in this case it is “I say” instead of the more usual “s/he says,” and in Fresnault-Dereulle’s opinion, it works as Russian-born American linguist-literary theorist Roman Jakobson’s shifters (i.e. indexes) or deictic elements in linguistics, pointing both at the sounds or words emitted at a certain moment, and at the origin of those sounds or words (1982: 188).

So far, Eco has suggested the general analysis of iconography and the speech balloon, i.e. image and text. Gubern, on the other hand, divides the material in more graspable chunks. In order to make a semiotic analysis, he proposes dividing comics into meaningful units, with the panel as the basic one (1974: 109-110). Taking Gubern’s concepts into account, three kinds of possible analysis can be distinguished: first, at the level of the panel or frame (meaningful unit), and then, above and below that level (meaningful macrounits and meaningful microunits) (1974: 110). Thus, the macrounits are the global elements, which include, for instance, not only aspects of the structure of the publication (comics page, comic strip, story in the comic book or graphic novel), but also the drawing style of the comics artist, and the color scheme (Gubern 1974: 110). The meaningful microunits, in turn, are all the elements that define, constitute, and are integrated in the panel: framing (including composition, setting and scenery, costumes,
and character typology), qualification (camera angle and lighting), and certain specific comics conventions, such as word balloons (which can contain dialogues, inarticulate sounds, thoughts, and visual metaphors), onomatopoeias or sound effects, and kinetic figures (Gubern 1974: 110-111).

With a less technical language and in his usual didactic fashion, Rodríguez Diéguez also deals with a complete vocabulary of comics at the level of the panel (48-85). What is more, he identifies the components of comics with the components of the panel, and he divides the panel between container and content, namely the limits of the panel and what is inside it (Rodríguez Diéguez 48). But before dealing with these aspects, he summarizes his own definition of panel from others, concluding that a panel is “a spatiotemporal unit, a meaningful unit, a montage unit, and also a unit of differentiating perception” (Rodríguez Diéguez 48, my translation). A similar conception to the last one mentioned by Rodríguez Diéguez is presented by Cohn, who states that panels can be “thought of as ‘attention units’ that graphically window parts of a mental environment” (2013: 415). As we saw in Chapter One, this is also what Eisner understands the panel is, namely a framing device (1985: 38-43). We are going to discuss more of this when we discuss montage syntax below.

The panel container is characterized by its lines, shape and size (Rodríguez Diéguez 48-49). The lines normally (but not always) limit the panel and they can be straight, curved, wavy, etc.; the shape is often rectangular, but it can also be square, triangular, circular, etc.; and the size can be absolute, i.e. taking the panel in isolation, or relative, i.e. in relation to the page, other panels, etc. (Rodríguez Diéguez 48). An important aspect
mentioned by Rodríguez Diéguez is that this metalinguistic container can become a linguistic component when it takes part in the story (52), as for instance, when a character sees panels as rooms to be rent, a comic strip analyzed by Muro Munilla (229). As regards the meaning of these three elements, Rodríguez Diéguez remarks that the panel line usually changes when flashbacks or flashforwards are included in the story, namely non-“real” time; different panel shapes may be used for just aesthetic reasons, but in general an emphasis on verticality implies instability and more rhythm, while serenity and relaxation are the usual implicit meanings of horizontal panels; and finally, size specifically depends on the other panels limited only by the page size, with the caveat of publication restrictions (55-56), for example, the ones we have seen in relation to newspaper strips.

Concerning the panel content, there are, as we have mentioned, basically two types: iconic and verbal elements (Rodríguez Diéguez 48). The iconic content, in turn, can be divided into two categories: the substantival iconic aspect (substantivization or representation), which refers to what is represented, and the adjectival iconic aspect (modification or qualification), which refers to how something is represented (Rodríguez Diéguez 51). To characterize substantivation, Rodríguez Diéguez adapts French philosopher-sociologist Abraham Moles’s concept of iconicity (ranging from reality to language, in a similar way as McCloud’s triangle mentioned in Chapter One) to comics, by reducing it to five basic iconic levels of representation: photograph, realist drawing, caricature, humanized animals, and nonfigurative illustration (60). As can be seen, Rodríguez Diéguez’s continuum differs from McCloud’s diagram, in not taking language into account, which McCloud specifically includes within the concept of iconography.
As we suggested in Chapter One, the reason why McCloud adopts this position may be because of his ideal to achieve a unified language of comics; instead, Rodríguez Diéguez just intends to describe a taxonomy of comics components, and thus, his aim may be the presentation of discrete categories rather than merged ones (50).

But as Rodríguez Diéguez aptly states, the choice of one iconic level of representation rather than the other already means a kind of qualification (63). It is not the same to use a realistic image for a serious topic, as to use caricatures or even humanized animals, as we were able to notice when we spoke about Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* in Chapter One. Apart from this, we can also add the idea of connotation that an image can carry even at the first iconic level (Rodríguez Diéguez 64), as for instance, associating the prestige of science to a product by showing a person in a lab coat. But this is often difficult to define because there are no clear-cut divisions, rather a continuum that ranges from denotation to connotation, or from representation to expression (Rodríguez Diéguez 65).

Although there are several adjectival resources related to panel iconic content, the most important one is the selection of the information to be displayed, and this is basically achieved by the shot, a term borrowed from film theory referring to the distance of the camera to the object or subject (Price 240; Rodríguez Diéguez 65-66). This is directly connected with the already-mentioned idea of framing developed by Eisner (1985: 38-43) and Harvey’s narrative breakdown (9), which we discussed in Chapter One. Although theorists may classify shots differently, we are going to follow Rodríguez Diéguez’s categorization of five types of shots: long shot, generally used as a “establishing shot” to
show location at the beginning of a scene; full shot, showing the full length of the character(s); American or medium shot, popularized by American westerns which needed to show the gun holster in duel scenes, thus showing three quarters of the body of a character; close-up shot, concentrating on the head; and extreme close-up shot, depicting details of a character or setting (66-67; Price 240).

Closely related to selecting aspects of reality is the point of view which in film and still photographs the camera adopts (Rodríguez Diéguez 67). In comics images are depicted in relation to a virtual (not real) camera, but even this affects the point of view, and thus, it is linked to two adjectival iconic aspects: the angle the camera can take and the location of the horizon (Rodríguez Diéguez 67). There are five basic types of camera angle: eye-level shot, which is neutral, and then, higher and lower shots, namely, high-angle shot and low-angle shot; and finally, the extreme angle shots are bird’s eye view, top-down angle, and worm’s eye view, bottom-up angle (Rodríguez Diéguez 67-68). It is uncommon for the horizon not to be horizontal, and the exceptions may be the side of a mountain or similar steep places; so there are two types of horizons in an image: neutral shot or tilt shot (Rodríguez Diéguez 68-69). Also, the horizon may be high or low, i.e. more land than sky, or vice versa (Rodríguez Diéguez 69).

The fourth adjectival aspect is motion, and the classification of kinetic codes can be organized under three headings: trajectory or path, secondary effects from motion, and snapshot (Rodríguez Diéguez 70). A trajectory simply shows the hypothetical graphic trail an object (or character) leaves as it moves, especially at high speed, and it can be a simple action line, a color action line, or in the case of vibration, a dotted halo or similar elements
tracing the outline of the moving figure (Rodríguez Diéguez 71). Rodríguez Diéguez lists four secondary effects from a moving object, as follows: impact, which may be shown with a transparent or contrasting starry shape; speed clouds, associated to the dust cloud left by a moving object on a dust road, but used even in cases when dust is not expected; kinetic distortion, indicating the changes an object may undergo due to speed; and visual breakdown, referring to the blurring of the moving parts or the presentation of three or more moving positions (71-72). Snapshot is the last adjectival motion aspect and it is related to bringing a moving object to a halt in an unstable position that may imply motion (Rodríguez Diéguez 72).

In general, all these motion aspects are complementary and are combined to reinforce the idea of movement and to produce interesting effects in comics (Rodríguez Diéguez 72). In Chapter One we saw a similar catalogue of motion techniques detailed by McCloud without trying to group them under global headings, but now we are going to attempt that grouping using Rodríguez Diéguez’s categories. Thus, McCloud’s motion lines obviously are to be included in the trajectory catalogue (110/10), and then, the rest of McCloud’s list, that is multiple images, photographic streaking (blurred moving object), subjective motion (blurred moving background) and polyptych (moving object through several panels), may all be grouped under visual breakdown (112/3-4, 114/1, 115/1-4).

Gesturality is the last adjectival aspect that Rodríguez Diéguez mentions, and he finds it difficult to define due to the extremely wide range of expressive gestures in comics (75). However, as we have stated several times, Rodríguez Diéguez’s study is didactically-oriented, so he considers it important to mention some classifications (75). The first one
is based on the relationship to the audience, some gestures are exclusively addressed to the implied reader (see discussion of this concept below), which may be seen when the character is alone, and some are addressed to the other characters (Rodríguez Diéguez 75). A second categorization of characters’ gestures and actions may be divided into the following four types: expression of elementary feelings, such as fear, anger, etc.; expression of interpersonal behavior, such as conversation, attack, help, derision, etc.; expression of frequent actions with no relevant outward emotions, such as walking, reading, running, etc.; and expression of unusual complex actions, which can be extrapolated from more common ones, such as Superman flying by adopting postures similar to swimming (Rodríguez Diéguez 75). There are finally two classifications of facial gestures: the first one gives four basic facial expressions (cheerfulness, anger, sadness and serenity) and two derived from the combination of basic features (naïveté and malice); the other one describes certain typical features and the associated meaning, such as a dark nose implying inebriation or cold, or a grinning mouth showing teeth implying hypocrisy or cunning (Rodríguez Diéguez 77-78).

We have just finished discussing the iconic content of panels according to Rodríguez Diéguez, now we are going to touch only on some aspects of the verbal content because we already dealt with that in part when we talked about the speech balloon above, and also in Chapter One with Gasca and Gubern’s inventory and McCloud’s study. There are basically two types of verbal content: voice-over and speech balloon (Rodríguez Diéguez 79). As we have already noted, the voice-over is a text that has not been uttered by any of the characters, and it may be surrounded by a line (caption) or not (Rodríguez
Diéguez 79). It essentially has two functions: relay, i.e. adapting or changing the temporal rhythm; or anchorage, i.e. reducing the information uncertainty typical of certain images (Rodríguez Diéguez 79).

The speech balloon has three components: the outline, namely the line limiting the surface to be covered with meaningful elements; the pointer, showing the direction of the message sender; and the content (Rodríguez Diéguez 79). We have already talked about the balloon outline, but it is worth including Rodríguez Diéguez’s taxonomy: conventional shape, already mentioned earlier; complex conventional shape, when two or more speech balloons are linked with only one pointer for all of them; iconic outline, shaping it in order to take part in the story and to reinforce it, for instance, imitating tears if the character is crying; and the absence of outline, already discussed before (80-81). We already dealt with the pointer or tail above, but let us see the categories listed by Rodríguez Diéguez: simple line, zigzag, bubbles, and multiple pointers, when there are many speakers (81). Finally, the content of the speech balloon can consist of the following: verbal content with conventional lettering, special lettering (e.g., Gothic font for a very traditional person), or speech sounds or onomatopoeias; iconic content, which can become a kind of panel inside the panel; paralinguistic elements, such as aggressive symbols representing swearing or visual metaphors (e.g. bright idea); and mixed content, which includes some of the variety of the expressive forms already detailed (Rodríguez Diéguez 81-83). Although here we are talking about lettering as different from iconic content, Eisner remarks that sometimes even the lettering style can be read as an image (1985: 10). Moreover, Rodríguez Diéguez’s category of paralinguistic elements can be certainly included in the iconic
content, and Fresnault-Dereulle’s category of suprasegmental features should also be mentioned here.

Panel grammar is the third element Eco mentions on his list of the language of comics and it accounts for the relationships between word and image (157). Eco describes the following types of relationships: complementary association, words expressing what pictures cannot explain in all its implications; speech redundancy, words expressing what in fact is already explicit in the image; ironical independence, words detaching themselves from the image and telling the opposite story only related to the pictures in an ironical way; plain independence, pictures with more details than really required by the message; and finally, picture-word fusion, where words and pictures can combine to achieve an almost cinematographic representation (157).

Here it is important to remember Eisner’s grammar analysis of a comics panel we described in Chapter One, in order to appreciate the relevance of Eco’s panel grammar category. We should not forget, however, that for Robert Harvey’s high-handed prescriptive ideal, the only possible combination that can gain his approval is the last one, which he calls “visual-verbal blending” (4). Conversely, all of Eco’s relationships may correspond to what Barbieri calls “polyphony and harmony,” when relating comics to music and poetry (196-199), as we saw in the section about the languages related to comics. Barbieri specifies that when confronted with comics, we will find out that the text will never tell exactly the same story as the image; that is to say, it will tell something at least slightly different either incomplete or complementary (198). Sometimes the distance between text and image is very short, but sometimes these “musical lines”
(polyphony) are much more separated and the stories are far away (Barbieri 198), which can be assimilated to Eco’s category of plain independence or even ironical independence (157).

Furthermore, McCloud’s categories in relation to the link between text and images mentioned in Chapter One may also be associated to Eco’s, since complementary association may be what McCloud calls word specific combination (emphasis on words) (153/1-2); plain independence may be equated with picture specific combination (emphasis on pictures) (153/3-4); speech redundancy may equal duo-specific combination (words and pictures give the same message) (153/5-6); and word-picture fusion may be considered interdependent combination (“words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone”) (155/1, emphasis in the original). McCloud does not mention Eco’s ironical independence, maybe because it is one category that ultimately depends on the reader, but he includes a similar one without making reference to irony: parallel combination, “where words and pictures seem to follow very different courses —without intersecting” (154/3, emphasis in the original). Besides this, he adds two more relationships: additive combination, “where words amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa” (154/1, emphasis in the original); and montage combination, “where words are treated as integral parts of the picture” (154/5, emphasis in the original).

Fresnault-Dereulle also refers to these relationships between words and pictures in his article “Lo verbal,” and to introduce them, he uses the linguistic concepts of “the saying,” words, and “the said,” pictures (my translation), based on French linguist Oswald Ducrot’s “le dire et le dit,” ideas which are, in their turn, developed from French linguist
Émile Benveniste’s “énonciation et énoncé,” the act of uttering discourse and the utterance resulting from that action, respectively (García Negroni). This may seem appropriate if we think that the saying is linked to the context of the speech event (i.e. participants, time, place, etc.), which is precisely what images usually show.

However comprehensive Eco’s list seems at first sight, there are some cases he neglects to take into account, particularly, the not uncommon case of panels without words. In his article “Lo verbal,” Fresnault-Dereulle divides these “zero-word” (my translation) images in comic books into four categories: initial images, which may act as an economical deictic element introducing the comics character with the implicit meaning of “here s/he is”; picturesque images, which are usually bigger to show the setting and may be compared to descriptions in fiction; check images, which are a type of zooming in on a detail and this implies attracting the reader’s attention to it; and gag-images, which are on the fringe of this definition because instead of consisting of one panel, they are usually a short sequence within the story and the images are silent precisely because events happen without any speech (1982: 193-194).

In addition to these limit cases of zero-word images, Fresnault-Dereulle also mentions two others: the “rich” image and the “poor” image (1982: 194, 195). In the former, words play a repressive role in order to reduce the image and guide the reader, while in the latter, words play a compensatory role to complete the image and to inform the reader (Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 194-196). To all these limit cases, Fresnault-Dereulle adds a medium one, i.e. the complementariness of words and pictures, achieved in three ways: repetition (Eco’s picture-word fusion), which, according to Fresnault-Dereulle, is not
common because, as action develops, words are ahead or behind the image; relay, which implies this delayed or advanced transmission of information; and mixture (McCloud’s additive combination), which consists of complementariness of word as a commentary or explanation of the action expressed physically by the image (1982: 198-199).

Eco’s fourth element on his list of the language of comics is montage syntax (158). Although Eco does not relate panel grammar to montage syntax, the mere fact that the labeling of these two aspects has this idea of organization of parts in a structure (either words and pictures or a string of panels) surely implies a certain link, and besides, as it is well known, syntax is part of grammar (Lyons 118). Nevertheless, Fresnault-Dereulle does make explicit what Eco leaves implicit, and he speaks about these two relationships in terms of axes, though the vertical one cannot be equated with the well-known paradigmatic axis of semiotics, since it is not a question of substitution (Chandler 102), but of connection; thus, the vertical axis shows the relationship between text and image within the frame, and the horizontal or syntagmatic axis shows the concatenation of frames (Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 192, 202).

As noted earlier, Fresnault-Dereulle’s study is focused on the verbal, so he concludes that words isolate and link at the same time—in the vertical axis of representation (mimesis), words fragment and isolate the content, while in the horizontal axis of diegesis (story), words make the development of action and reading flow (1982: 202). What is more, he considers the balloon and what he calls “diegetic spaces,” i.e. voice-over or captions, as very important syntagmatic cohesive elements in montage, and he explains his chosen terminology for captions when he says that the text in the diegetic
spaces is in indirect style and it specifies spatial and temporal modalities (Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 200). He also clarifies that these diegetic spaces highlight the distance that separates two images, but they also bridge them in continuity (Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 200-201).

Concerning balloons and montage syntax, Fresnault-Dereulle states that, as conventional elements in comics, they are homogeneous and imply a flat written space which reveals the falseness of the perspective code used for realistic pictures within the panel (1978: 140; 1982: 187). Therefore, balloons are flat-surface shapes floating over the images, but they are conventionally read, in relation to continuity, as if they were a connecting thread at the level of global perception (Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 201). Many times the continuity is also expressed in the content of the linguistic message by means of ellipsis in the last phrase pointing forward to the next balloon or to the next diegetic space or caption (Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 202). In this way, text serves as an element of message concatenation or cohesive vehicle between the different images and panels, and it operates in terms of the flow in the development of action and reading (Fresnault-Dereulle 1982: 200, 202).

In comparing film montage syntax with comics montage syntax, Eco obviously considers them different, because comics do not tend to resolve a series of still frames in a continuous flow as film does; instead, there is a kind of virtual continuity through real discontinuity (157-158). According to Eco, comics fragment the continuum in terms of a few essential elements, and then, readers merge these elements in their imagination, and see them as a continuum (158). These independent frames with essential elements
mentioned by Eco may constitute what French film theorist Jacques Aumont defines as an “essential instant,” which expresses the essence of an event represented in an image (245, my translation), and this serves as a basis for the merging of frames in continuous actions. In addition, they may also relate to what Eisner calls “encapsulation,” a freezing of the most relevant scene encapsulated by a panel frame from the whole flow of action (1985: 39). Finally, this may be connected with what Muro Munilla means in his book _Análisis_ when he explains that in comics it is not important to show the instant as a frozen gesture, as a capture of a temporal and spatial fraction, but as a condensed moment of past action and suggested future anticipation, and he even states that panels are micro-stories (40-41, 64-65).

Though differing in some aspects of terminology, in general both Gubern and Muro Munilla coincide in their description of comics syntax. As comics consist in a panel-based text, at the syntactic level the juxtaposition of meaningful units (panels) brings about montage, i.e. the syntagmatic discourse or sequential structure (Gubern 1974: 111, 161; Muro Munilla 97-99). Montage is an operation that articulates material with basic meaningful units to turn into a message in this medium (Muro Munilla 98). This articulation gives rise to montage macrounits (to use Gubern’s term), which can be classified according to graphic or formal criteria in physical units (comics strips, comics page, etc.), and according to narrative criteria in narrative units (comics sequence, comics episode, etc.) (Gubern 1974: 111; Muro Munilla 98-99). The physical units produce different visual and narrative results according to the relationships between components, such as format or size, and this may change the syntactic relations even between separate
panels (Muro Munilla 99). According to Gubern, the basic narrative montage unit is the scene, and scene montage can be analyzed from the point of view of raccords or unions (through cuts, consecutive spaces, fusions, captions, or voice-over), spatial structures (amplification, concentration, and analytical montage), temporal structures (slow-down, flashback, and flashforward), and psychological structures (dreams, subjective perceptions, and psychological flashbacks and flashforwards) (1974: 111).

Whereas Gubern in these last montage operations mostly takes panel content into account, McCloud typically focuses on closure, that is, as we have seen, the semantic connection the reader makes between frames. Consequently, he classifies the transitions from panel to panel, as follows: moment-to-moment, requiring little closure, i.e. almost no filling in the gap (panel gutter), because very little time elapses; action-to-action, a single character showing two stages in the process of performing an activity; subject-to-subject, from one aspect to another of the same scene or idea, requiring a great degree of involvement by the reader in order to make the connection meaningful; scene-to-scene, implying a significant change in time and space, demanding deductive reasoning from the reader; aspect-to-aspect, focusing on details of a place, idea or mood, without necessarily changing time; and even non-sequitur, namely two unrelated images (McCloud 70/1-2, 71/1-2, 72/1-2, 74/1).

To semantics (iconography and balloons) and syntax (panel grammar and montage), Eco adds narration as a fifth element on his list, and within this category, he includes the formal elements of narration (framing, montage, etc.), which function as action conditions but emerge as explicit organizations in readers’ consciousness (159).
Then, Eco mentions the sixth and seventh elements, which can be considered intrinsically related to narration, since they are constituted by the nature of plot (cinematographic one or others) and character typology (based on precise stereotypes), respectively (159). As Cohn confirms, narration as a whole involves many aspects, “including the context and circumstances surrounding a telling, the role of the author and/or narrator and addressee, how a text constructs a world and immerses a reader into it, the emotive qualities that a text elicits, and the ordering of events into a coherent sequence which may include inferred events that have not been overtly specified” (2013: 417).

As regards comics narration, we have found in Muro Munilla’s book Análisis an important source of information, since he has researched many aspects of this topic in relation to comics from a semiotic point of view. Here it is worth noting that Muro Munilla uses some traditional concepts, such as the notions of story, plot and theme or two very conventional typologies of characters, but he reframes these concepts within new semiotic scaffolding that makes them totally valid for the analytical narratological framework he develops. Thus, Muro Munilla specifies that narratology takes narration as its object of study and it is a discipline that aspires to establish a twofold theory: on the one hand, defining and taking stock of all the narrative components or techniques, and on the other hand, distinguishing the laws that rule the narrated universe (53-54). True to his semiotic foundation, he also introduces three approaches to narration: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic (Muro Munilla 55). These are considered complementary rather than alternative; that is to say, all three can be applied to the same textual units, but they can also concentrate on specific elements, relationships and structures (Muro Munilla 55).
Consequently, each approach highlights certain textual components (Muro Munilla 55). For instance, pragmatics pays special attention to the communicative situation originated by the text, both in its internal communications between narrator, narratee, implied reader and implied author (these concepts will be discussed below), and in its external communications between the sender or actual author and the recipient or actual reader together with their cultural systems (contexts of transmission and reception) (Muro Munilla 55, 59-61). Notions or categories, such as time, place, events, and characters, especially show their syntactic dimension, while those related to the narrator, such as attitude and point of view, are particularly manifested as semantic (Muro Munilla 55).

In order to establish an analytical and interpretative methodology for narratology, it is important to distinguish three levels in narration — story, plot and discourse (Muro Munilla 106, 108). Although at first Muro Munilla states that the difference between these levels is confusing, he eventually arrives at quite satisfactory definitions (107). The difference between plot and story is the order of events: in the plot the events appear as they are retold by the narrator, while in the story the events appear in their logical chronological order without a narrator (Muro Munilla 106, 107, 121). Thus, the plot is the result of a first meaningful synthesis made by the reader on the discourse, while the story is the result of a second operation of abstraction by the reader (Muro Munilla 108). Basically discourse belongs in the surface structure (and in the case of comics it is both verbal and visual), that is to say, the only level that is evident to the recipient of the text, while plot and story, being in the deep structure, require a certain level of abstraction by the reader (Muro Munilla 207).
According to Muro Munilla, action is the essence of narration and its components are events, characters, time, and place (109). All these units can be observed from a semantic viewpoint, that is, their meanings in the two typical aspects, internal denotation or external reference, but traditionally the most usual approach to these elements is syntactic (or syntagmatic) in order to observe the actions in their relation and construction (Muro Munilla 109). A basic unit in narratology is the sequence and in comics there is a clear physical segmentation in panels that can be seen as micro-sequences (Muro Munilla 111). The sequence is a logical succession of nuclear units in a relation of solidarity, which implies risky moments, alternatives, possibilities of choice or different developments (Muro Munilla 111). It is not clear if Muro Munilla’s sequence can be equated to Gubern’s scene, which, as noted earlier, is considered a narrative montage unit, but we think that they may be equivalent, since both authors call them basic narrative units, and their characteristics can be said to coincide. Even though Gubern includes scene as part of montage syntax, we should not forget that, as Eco affirms, montage is part of narration (159), and following Muro Munilla, we can add that it belongs in the discourse level of narration, i.e. surface structure.

As can be seen, neither scene nor sequence is a distinctly defined concept. Now let us turn to Neil Cohn’s article “Visual Narrative Structure” to have a schematized design to analyze narration with more clear-cut categories. The article presents a theory of narrative structure, describing “the basic narrative categories and their relationship to a canonical narrative arc” (Cohn 2013: 413). The canonical narrative arc works as a generative schema in which any constituent can be recursively organized into a narrative
arc of its own (Cohn 2013: 416). As Cohn puts it, “Through this structure, narrative pacing can be interpreted as a reflection of various patterns of embedding: right- and left-branching trees, center-embedded constituents, and others” (2013: 416). Thus, unlike McCloud, Cohn places less importance on the panel transitions than on the roles panels play in relation to the whole narrative (2013: 418).

Furthermore, Cohn’s approach emphasizes the separation of narrative structure (presentation) and events (meaning) (2013: 416). This is why it is difficult to find a parallel between narrative arcs (and phases within them) and Gubern’s scenes or Muro Munilla’s sequences, since Cohn takes a stark syntactic approach, and the other two narrative units are more related to semantics, i.e. the meaning they convey through their juxtaposition. Nevertheless, Cohn claims that “[t]he structural model proposed here is not opposed to . . . semantic descriptions, and they could be integrated” (2013: 418, emphasis in the original). It is important to highlight that Cohn differentiates between individual images in panels and panel phases (sequences) (2013: 418). By making an analogy with discourse and syntax, a panel could be seen as a sentence, and a phase as a chunk of discourse (Cohn 2013: 418). Cohn’s panel and phase can be construed from another point of view that coincides with Eco’s panel grammar and montage syntax and Gubern’s meaningful units and meaningful macrounits as elements that can be analyzed syntactically and narratively.

Therefore, just as Muro Munilla does, Cohn presents the panel as a narrative unit, and in his approach, narrative grammar comprises five core categories as follows: establisher, which presents an interaction; initial, which starts the tension; prolongation,
which follows the tension; peak, which is a kind of climax where the most important thing
in a phase happens; and release, which is a kind of coda or punchline (2013: 420-424). All
of these categories can be made up of only one panel or a sequence of panels configuring
a phase (Cohn 2013: 420-424). As can be imagined, only the peak cannot be discarded to
form a phase, but when all of the categories are present, they should follow the canonical
sequence presented by Cohn, which is considered a coherent piece of a narrative
structure arc (2013: 420). It is worth noting that establishers are not the same as
establishing shots because there is no need for a wide long shot to set up the setting,
rather they are similar to topics or framesetters in discourse (Cohn 2013: 424).

After presenting the categories, Cohn analyzes the combinatorial structures in
narrative, finding two basic rules: conjunction, which is made up of multiple panels in the
same narrative category; and embedding, which consists in including a whole phase inside
another broader structure until the completion of a narrative arc (2013: 425-427). These
two basic rules can generate multiple structures, such as left-branching, where each phase
can serve as an initial for the following one; alternating initials, where an “on-off” pattern
of several panels can form a conjunction that acts as an initial for a final phase; and
center-embedded phases, where a complete phase can be one of the categories (Cohn
2013: 428-430). These structures are similar to the ones developed by the Prague School
of linguistics as regards the theme-rheme organization patterns that can be analyzed as
thematic progression in a text (see “Information Structure” in Appendix 1).

In order to identify the category of a panel, Cohn presents several techniques to
ascertain that the analysis is not incorrect: substitution, alteration, deletion and
reordering (Cohn 2013: 430-435). But more important for narrative structures, there are also tests to recognize constituencies (Cohn 2013: 435). Cohn states that in order to detect the boundaries of constituents, we can rely on changes in characters, locations or causation; in other words, “significant semantic changes between juxtaposed images signal the boundaries between hierarchic constituents” (2013: 435). Additional techniques include windowing, deletion, reordering, and alteration (Cohn 2013: 436-438). Although most of these indicators are self-explanatory, windowing is not so, and it refers to the selection of several panels from a broader structure in order to check that they make sense as a phase, and contrast them with other selections (Cohn 2013: 436).

As noted earlier, the story is the notion resulting from ordering the events of the narration in a natural chronological order (Muro Munilla 121). Thus, time is a basic component of narrative syntax, and at the level of story, time implies strict succession and development (Muro Munilla 121). Space is not such a relevant factor for the story, and it is not taken into account in the definition of story (Muro Munilla 123). In contrast to the time factor, which is indispensable for the syntactic development of the story, since an event following another implies the passing of time, it is not necessary for place to change while events are happening (Muro Munilla 123). However, in some stories, place becomes a structural element, for instance, in the journey or quest pattern (Muro Munilla 123; Scholes 127). What is more, in comics temporality starts with the spatial situation of panels, and the interrelationship of time and place, as necessary components for the development of the action, constitutes the framework of the narration (Muro Munilla 124).
At the level of story, Muro Munilla describes several structures and typologies of narrative syntax, among them, three paradigms: adventure, romanticism, and learning (131). Here we are going to diverge from Muro Munilla’s proposal and to present a different perspective. In this traditional presentation not necessarily embedded in semiotics, there are three master patterns, two based on the idea of change, and one based on the idea of movement (Scholes 126-127). All of these are also based on a harmonious or inharmonious relationship of the hero with his or her world (Scholes 126). Within the idea of change, there are patterns of education, which imply a rise in society (harmony), and patterns of expulsion which imply the opposite (disharmony); conversely, in patterns of quest there is neither rise nor fall but a journey of the hero, and the most important events in the story are the adventures or encounters (Scholes 127). These patterns are specifically related to romance and fantasy, but once realism enters the equation, things get more complex; for instance, rises and falls are not so obvious, and instead of accounting for the whole story, the master patterns are merged in different episodes blurring their boundaries (Scholes 125, 127).

The theme of a narrative can be the result of summary and abstraction, eliminating circumstantial elements, but maintaining reiterated ones (Muro Munilla 136). It is the general idea of a text meaning, the notion that summarizes its content (Muro Munilla 134). In order to arrive at the theme of stories in comics, the paraphrase implies a substantial change, since the iconic medium of comics has to be translated into the verbal medium (Muro Munilla 136), or in the above-mentioned author John Catford’s view, it has to be converted, since strictly speaking, as noted earlier, translation between media is not
possible (53). Normally, themes are referred to with an abstract noun, such as love, death, ambition, etc. (Muro Munilla 136). However, we have to take into account the link between the theme and the cultural and ideological conditions in which a narration is born or in which it is received and commented, and also the connection between the theme and the artistic environment and genres or architexts, because all these aspects may influence the choice of one theme over another (Muro Munilla 136-137). This is evidently related to Eco’s final analytical aspect of comics, ideology, and the notion of genres, which are going to be discussed below.

In the process of abstraction from discourse to story, characters are devoid of individuality and become actors with basic features and typical roles, a kind of typical character (Muro Munilla 117). But at the level of plot, characterization, i.e. the technique of developing a character, becomes important (Muro Munilla 200). Generally speaking, characterization can be achieved by means of direct definition or indirect presentation (actions and relationships with other characters), but the types of features (psychological, physical, attitudinal, motivational, etc.) used in character development have to be taken into account as well (Muro Munilla 201). The typology of characters may be basically limited to their being flat or round and leads or supports (Muro Munilla 201-202).

Flat characters are configured around only one feature or idea, which remains the same during the whole work (a kind of stereotype) (Muro Munilla 201-202). This does not necessarily mean that they are superficial or insignificant, since by means of other components, especially action and the narrator’s attitude, they can show a great deal of depth (Muro Munilla 202). Round characters are composed with several features and
they may evolve throughout the work, so that they can surprise the reader (Muro Munilla 202).

Distinguishing the protagonists from the supporting characters is sometimes an intuitive task, but almost always successfully achieved (Muro Munilla 202). Protagonists or leads are more physically or latently present in events than any other characters, and besides, they are the focal point of the most important action (Muro Munilla 202). In other words, action is structured around them and they are the center of interest for the reader (Muro Munilla 202). Comics have found it very important to focus on the main character and to typify characters in general (Muro Munilla 202). Focalization has been such a successful move for comics that most of them bear the name of the protagonist as title, and typification is very important as well, because comics are a kind of communication that needs to simplify reception and character recognition (Muro Munilla 202).

As regards the narrator, there is a complex situation in comics, because they have two narrators, the verbal narrator (like novels), and the visual narrator (like films) (Muro Munilla 54, 139). The narrator can be defined as the subject of enunciation or the origin of the information constituting the narrative message (Muro Munilla 138). Concerning the functions of this figure, the narrative one (story creation and transmission) and the administrative one (control over discourse) are considered fundamental; but there are other optional three: the communicative function (narrator orienting discourse toward narratee, a concept to be explained below), the testimonial function (narrator showing its presence), and the ideological function (narrator’s and characters’ comments,
interpretation and evaluation of the story) (Muro Munilla 138, 168). It is clear that we have to review all the participants pertaining to a narrative message, because as it is well-known, we cannot equate the categories of author and narrator, and as we have already stated, there are more participants than these two involved in narrative communication. Therefore, from the sender of a narrative message to the addressee, there are the following participants: the real author, the implied author, the narrator, the narratee, the implied reader, and finally, the real reader (Muro Munilla 168-176; Price 250).

The real author and the real reader are the actual people in the real world outside the transmitted message, who have historical and empirical existence in reality (Muro Munilla 169-170; Price 250). With the implied author and the implied reader we are leaving the real world behind, since they are embedded in the textual material (Muro Munilla 170-171; Price 250). The implied author is the conception of the real author that the reader acquires from reading or viewing the message (Muro Munilla 170-171; Price 250). We did not qualify the word “reader” in the previous sentence to leave the idea open, but it is worth noting that the relationship of the implied author, as Muro Munilla appropriately clarifies, is not established at the same theoretical level with the implied reader, but with the real reader (171). The implied reader is “the subject-position that the text offers the reader, whether or not it is taken up” (Price 250). Just as the implied author is related to the real reader, the implied reader is not related to the implied author, but to the real author (Muro Munilla 172). For any interpretation, the most important aspect from this point of view is the type of reader or viewer the text contains or presupposes (Muro Munilla 173). We already defined the narrator and described its
functions above, and the figure of the narratee “appears whenever the text addresses a ‘you,’ or speaks to the reader directly as a person” (Price 250). As with the concept of narrator, comics offer the two available literary and iconic possibilities for the configuration of the narratee (Muro Munilla 176). As can be seen, there is a very slight difference between narrator and narratee; therefore, some theorists subsume their characteristics into the figure of the narrator, leaving the word “narratee” as a synonym for implied reader (Goddard & Patterson 38, 108; Muro Munilla 174-176).

The final aspect of Eco’s analysis of comics is the ideological statement of the story, which is related to the universe of values (160), and this is a relevant aspect for this study. As we have already mentioned, in comics, generally speaking, there is a substantial allegiance to the values of the American way of life, so that the character and the story become a life model for average readers (Eco 160). Sometimes there is a great emphasis on conformity, inserted in the plot itself, and resolved almost at the level of an implicit metaphysical ideology (Eco 160). However, there is also a possibility of identifying ideological statements based on apparent or real protest and opposition to the status quo (Eco 160). In those cases (for instance, certain science-fiction narrations), the conventional character (the spatial hero, the bug-eyed monster, the intergalactic technocrat, or the mad scientist) is not a mere confirmation of the status quo; rather, the character constitutes the basic element of an allegory that goes beyond conventionality, assuming breach functions with the context (Eco 217-218). But whenever that happens, it is evident that the narration is not centered on the character, nor does the character have a central role, but instead the character is a pretext to tell a sequence of events with a
clear gnomic or aphorismic function (Eco 218). The conclusion will be, then, that when
the fictitious conventional character becomes central (the explicit objective of the
narration), the work only proposes practical life models that are purely external, in which
readers think they can recognize themselves, while in fact the character projects on them
only the most superficial aspect of the personality (Eco 218).

Eco’s tenets as regards the ideology conveyed by conventional protagonists in
mass products are similar to Spanish comics historian Javier Coma’s. In his book El ocaso
de los héroes en los comics de autor [The Twilight of Heroes in Author’s Comics, my
translation], Coma develops the central idea that since the 1950s and especially during the
1960s and 1970s (the book was published in the early 1980s) comics heroes were eclipsed
by their authors, who started to present ideological statements that were at odds with the
traditionally regressive doctrine that comics had historically embraced. The comics in this
period are known as “author’s comics.” Although evidently all comics have authors,
author’s comics are said to be so, because the author’s image prevailed over the
conventional character and the public began to identify authors rather than the characters
they created. In Chapter One we have seen a similar analysis of this and further historical
periods by Harvey.

Eco concludes that comics are an autonomous literary genre (this last phrase
appears between quotation marks in the original) (160). They have their own structural
elements, and an original communicative technique, based on the existence of a code
shared by readers and referred to by the author (Eco 160). The comics author uses this
code to articulate a message according to original formative rules, addressing it
simultaneously to the reader’s intelligence, imagination and taste (Eco 160). We are uncertain about the quotation marks used by Eco in the phrase “literary genre” (160, my translation), since elsewhere he continues calling comics a genre without them. Still, in contrast with Eco’s characterization of comics, we cannot but agree with Altarriba that comics are a medium with genres, such as adventure, superhero, science fiction, etc. (9, my emphasis).

Of course, as we saw in Chapter One when we discussed Genette’s concept of architext within his theory of transtextuality, the idea of genre is not as clear-cut as we would like to assume, and even in semiotic studies we encounter difficulties in its definition. For instance, when speaking about modality markers, Australian semiotician Robert Hodge and the already-mentioned semiotician Gunther Kress argue that there are “[d]ifferent genres, whether classified by medium (e.g. comic, cartoon, film, TV, painting) or by content (e.g. Western, Science Fiction, Romance, news)” (qtd. in Chandler 67). Rather than having this comprehensive use of the word “genre,” we prefer, following Altarriba (9), to clearly ascribe the sample channels mentioned to the word “medium” and to limit the word “genre” to the relationships across messages, as regards content, and several other aspects, as we will presently see.

Moreover, with a topic as prickly as comics are, we think that we have to pay heed to McCloud’s warning when he claims that “as long as we view comics as a genre of writing or a style of graphic art this [downgrading] attitude may never disappear” (151/6, emphasis in the original). And although we have acknowledged that genre is not a straightforward notion as it seems at first glance, McCloud presents an interesting
sequence that visually explains one possible way of differentiating between medium and genre (even though the narrator speaks of message and messenger): the pictures show a jug, symbolizing the vessel (or medium), and the content, which is made up of writers, artists, trends, genres, styles, subject matter, themes (6/1-8, my emphasis). Thus, as McCloud himself puts it, “The artform—the medium—known as comics is a vessel which can hold any number of ideas and images” (6/1, emphasis in the original).

But in order to clarify the concept “genre” even more, we may resort to the ideas developed in American popular culture scholar John Cawelti’s book *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories As Art and Popular Culture*, and in American film scholar Thomas Schatz’s book *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*, which were discovered thanks to American comics scholar Peter Coogan’s book *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre*. This survey is necessary because these theoretical concepts are the basis to our description in Chapter Four of the superhero genre stemming from Coogan’s analysis, which is, in turn, one aspect of the extra-textual framework of the comics stories to be analyzed in Chapter Five.

Cawelti relates genre to his notion of formula story, as two stages of the same process (7). In his view, “a formulaic pattern will be in existence for a considerable period of time before it is conceived of by its creators and audience as a genre” (Cawelti 8). Consequently, a genre is a consolidated formula, and formula stories involve more than content: they are “a structure of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in a great number of individual works” (Cawelti 5). We saw different types of narrative structures when we discussed Muro Munilla’s theories above, but here formula includes not only
story patterns, which may be universal, and which Cawelti calls “archetypes,” following Jungian terminology, but also stereotypes, which are usually culture-specific, and which are considered conventional ways of treating people or objects (5-6). Thus, a “formula is a combination or synthesis of a number of specific cultural conventions [or stereotypes] with a more universal story form or archetype” (6). Though in general Cawelti narrowly refers to literature and sometimes to the cinema, formula, as he describes it, can be seen as “a pattern characteristic of the widest possible range of literature and other media” (33).

It is important to refer to these ideas because formula literature or popular genres are usually “defined as subliterature (as opposed to literature), entertainment (as opposed to serious literature), popular art (as opposed to fine art), lowbrow culture (as opposed to highbrow), or in terms of some other pejorative opposition” (Cawelti 13). Instead of accepting these antithetical views, Cawelti proposes establishing a continuum with the two extremes of mimetic or non-generic works and formula or generic works, so as to avoid the implicit evaluation of labels, such as low and high or popular and serious (13). Whereas non-generic works usually deal with the experience of reality, generic works deal with the experience of an ideal world without the uncertainty and limitations of the real world (Cawelti 13). As a matter of fact, it is uncommon for a work to fall entirely on one of the two poles of the continuum, rather most works lie between them (Cawelti 13).

As it is well-known, genre works have been condemned by many academic critics because of two characteristic qualities that stand out and are not considered valuable in
our times — standardization and escapism (Cawelti 8). In spite of its customary underrating, standardization is an essential part of all communication (be it literature, cinema, painting, comics, or any other media), since standard conventions establish a common ground between producers and audiences (Cawelti 8). In the specific case of formulaic or generic works, conventions are vital to their creation and they evince the concerns of creators, distributors, and audiences (Cawelti 9). Even though a genre work is an original individual or collaborative creation, the characteristics and limitations of that originality are established by the standard conventions of the genre (Schatz 13). In this connection, American film and popular culture theorist Robert Warshow states in his book *The Immediate Experience* that “originality is to be welcomed only in the degree that it intensifies the expected experience without fundamentally altering it” (qtd. in Cawelti 9).

Thus, within the restrictions of the genre, originality can be achieved by the revitalization of stereotypes, and by plot and setting uniqueness (Cawelti 11-12). Authors can revitalize stereotypes with qualities conflicting to the stereotype or with more complex personalities (Cawelti 11). And the uniqueness of a formulaic or generic work can only be accepted without breaking the conventions, so in this sense, a work is unique when it incorporates a new component into the genre or it represents the personal vision of the creator (Cawelti 12). If these original changes become popular and are imitated, a new version of the genre will appear, or even a new genre altogether (Cawelti 12).

Escapism involves two contradictory psychological needs — escaping from the boredom of routine and security in life, and escaping from the ultimate uncertainty and insecurity of life (Cawelti 15-16). Both needs can be addressed with formulaic or generic
works, since within their imaginary worlds “we confront the ultimate excitements of love and death, but in such a way that our basic sense of security and order is intensified rather than disrupted, . . . because the excitement and uncertainty are ultimately controlled and limited by the familiar world of the formulaic structure” (Cawelti 16). There is a very interesting and enlightening analogy to show the escapist aspect, and also the conventional one, of formulaic or generic art. Those aspects may often be equated to games, because both genres and games have set rules and the possibility of innumerable variations, which make them always engrossing regardless of the repetition (Cawelti 19; Schatz 18).

What is more, whereas individual works are solely made by producers, genres are generated by the collective response of the audience to the repetition of similar works because of some shared quality or interest, and their enjoyment and success are based on the intensification of a familiar experience that becomes established precisely by repetition (Cawelti 10; Schatz 15, 16, 264). This is comparable to what Eco sustains in the section “Defensa del esquema iterativo” [Defense of the Iterative Pattern, my translation] of his essay “El mito de Superman,” discussed in relation to the superhero myth in Chapter One (242-246). But we have to remember that popular stories are repeated as long as they satisfy audience demand and are profitable for the producers (Schatz 16). Taking all these characteristics into account, the most significant formulaic works are those that go beyond the limitations of the genre and balance escapism and standardization with revitalized stereotypes, some degree of originality, and plausibility within the conventions of the genre (Cawelti 20).
There are three recurrent devices in genre works: suspense, identification, and an imaginary world (Cawelti 17-20). Suspense is the temporary sense of fear and uncertainty about the fate of a character, but within the secure generic framework, the female or male hero is usually saved, and thus, suspense always directs toward a possible resolution (Cawelti 17). Identification with the protagonists is encouraged, because unless we relate to them, much of the emotional effect of the work will be lost (Cawelti 18). This is achieved by foregrounding action instead of exploring characters’ psychology, and by employing stereotypes to reflect the audience’s conventional cultural views (Cawelti 19). Finally, the imaginary world should be sufficiently removed from our ordinary life “to make us less inclined to apply our ordinary standards of plausibility and probability to it” (Cawelti 19). If we willingly suspend our disbelief following the rules of such a world, “it is easier for us to escape from ourselves into identification with a story’s protagonists” (Cawelti 19). In the case of Superman, this willing suspension of disbelief has given rise to the production of such works as The Science of Superman, which endeavors “to seriously examine Superman as a fascinating and scientifically plausible biological phenomenon rather than as simply a fictional being” (Wolverton 9, my emphasis).

Schatz presents a typology of genres based on the most popular ones in films representing two dominant narrative strategies: genres of order (Western, gangster, detective) and genres of integration (musical, screwball comedy, family melodrama) (34, 35). Genres of order center on an individual traditionally male protagonist, generally a redeemer figure, who is the focus of dramatic conflicts within a setting of contested or ideologically unstable space (Schatz 34, 35). Conflicts within these genres are
externalized, translated into violence, and usually resolved through the elimination of some threat to the social order, typically through the death of a character (Schatz 34, 35). The resolution in these genres is somewhat ambiguous because the hero, either through departure or death, does not assimilate the values and lifestyle of the community but instead maintains the original individuality (Schatz 34).

Genres of integration are set in civilized or ideologically stable space and trace the integration of the central characters into the community (Schatz 34, 35). There is generally a doubled (romantic couple) or collective (usually a family) hero (Schatz 34). Their personal and social conflicts are internalized, translated into emotional terms, and resolved through the eventual renouncement of their interpersonal antagonism in favor of a harmonious community (Schatz 34). Integration systematically takes place through romantic love with the final embrace as its symbol (Schatz 34).

While the themes of the genres of order are usually mediation-redemption, macho code, isolated self-reliance, and utopia-as-promise, the themes of the genres of integration are normally integration-domestication, maternal-familial code, community cooperation, and utopia-as-reality (Schatz 35). As can be imagined, there is considerable overlap between the genres since all order genres are concerned with social integration, and all integration genres are concerned with maintaining the existing social order (Schatz 34). Since Schatz’s typology deals with both narrative strategy and social function, it is worth exploring the relationship between these two genre aspects, but before that, let us have a look at Cawelti’s view of genre social functions.
In order to explain the sociocultural functions of genres, Cawelti proposes four interrelated hypotheses, as follows: the maintenance of the status quo, the harmonization of social conflicts, the exploration of the forbidden, and the assimilation of new values (Cawelti 35-36). Therefore, first, genre stories confirm the traditional definitions of the world by depicting an imaginary world that corresponds to the interests and attitudes of society (Cawelti 35). Second, genre stories resolve tensions generated by the conflicting interests of different cultural groups or by ambiguous attitudes toward certain values (Cawelti 35). Third, genre stories “enable the audience to explore in fantasy the boundaries between the permitted and the forbidden and to experience in a carefully controlled way the possibility of stepping across this boundary” (Cawelti 35). Finally, genre stories help to assimilate changes in values thanks to their ability to internalize and naturalize new meaning, facilitating the transition between the old and the new, and thus contributing to cultural continuity (Cawelti 36). Then, also, Schatz adds that just as folk tales, genre stories “serve to defuse threats to the social order and thereby to provide some logical coherence to that order” (263).

After examining the social and cultural functions, it seems evident that there is an emphasis on the idea that genres mostly function to reinforce the existing social beliefs. But by including the function of assimilating new values, Cawelti implicitly opens the door to social change. And although Schatz suggests that each genre represents a distinct problem-solving strategy that repeatedly resolves basic cultural contradictions, he also points out that “genres are not blindly supportive of the cultural status quo” (35). We have to concede that the genre resolution mainly confirms the ideology of the majority in
society, but “the nature and articulation of the dramatic conflicts leading to that climax cannot be ignored” (Schatz 35). In other words, we have to allow for the possibility that “genres function as much to challenge and criticize as to reinforce the values that inform them” (Schatz 35). Genres basically tend to constantly renegotiate the tenets of the community’s ideology, and as they develop, their conflicts are treated more clearly, whereas their resolutions become more obscure, equivocal, and ironic (Schatz 35).

Genres are both static and dynamic systems; that is, they have a static deep structure made up of rules, components, and functions, and a dynamic surface structure consisting of all their individual works, which show the development of genres with their individual gradual changes in form and substance (Schatz 16, 18, 20). For instance, we have seen how the superhero genre underwent changes from the original omnipotent demigod, as characterized by Superman, to the 1960s troubled young man plagued by very human concerns, as exemplified by Spider-Man. Drawing on French art historian Henri Focillon’s theories, Schatz developed the following pattern of general stages in the evolution of a genre:

an experimental stage, during which its conventions are isolated and established, a classic stage, in which the conventions reach their “equilibrium” and are mutually understood by artist and audience, an age of refinement, during which certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form, and finally a baroque (or “mannerist” or “self-reflexive”) stage, when the form and its embellishments are accented to the point where they
themselves become the “substance” or “content” of the work. (Schatz 37-38, emphasis in the original)

These four stages show the “genre’s progression from transparency to opacity —— from straightforward storytelling to self-conscious formalism—— [which] involves its concerted effort to explain itself, to address and evaluate its very status as a popular form” (Schatz 38).

At the experimental stage, genres show an idealized cultural or social image without any stylistic embellishments or formal convolutions in order to transmit a straightforward message, since it is assumed that “a genre is a society collectively speaking to itself” (Schatz 38). Once the conventions of a genre have been defined, the genre evolves into its classical stage, characterized by formal transparency (Schatz 38). This means that both “the narrative formula and the medium work together to transmit and reinforce that genre’s social message —its ideology or problem-solving strategy— as directly as possible to the audience” (Schatz 38). When the classic direct message has been repeated over and over again, the audience becomes aware of and even saturated by the formal and thematic structures, and the genre arrives at the age of refinement (Schatz 38). As the classic conventions are refined and eventually parodied and subverted, the formal transparency of the genre phases out and turns into formal opacity (Schatz 38). This means that the audience is no longer interested in an idealized cultural or social image; instead they are absorbed by the form itself (Schatz 38). Thus, in this last baroque stage there is a slow change in narrative focus from social value to formal aesthetic value (Schatz 41). But this does not imply that there is no aesthetic merit in the
first stages of a genre or that there is no social worth in the last ones; rather the focus shifts from a cultural, social and ritualistic function to a formal and aesthetic function (Schatz 41). We have seen the evolution of genres in general, and in Chapter Four we are going to examine the specific development of the superhero genre, as part of our contextual framework for the methodology we are going to apply in this inquiry.

**Feminism**

In this section, we follow the ideas about feminism already discussed in previous articles, which were encouraged by doctoral adviser Celia Vázquez García (Gil 2010; Gil 2014). Feminism is a political theory and practice arising from the awareness of the discrimination and oppression which women have suffered during the whole history of humanity; therefore, it reviews all the power relations in society based on gender differences (Chadwick 9; Varela 14, 17). As a result of this awareness, several social movements have emerged in different periods of history in order to modify the status quo (Varela 14). These movements have had characteristics and objectives related to the period when they have emerged (Varela 14). This is the reason why we do not usually speak about a single feminism, but a multiplicity of feminisms, as there are different factors and a variety of positions according to the needs and interests in women’s historical global struggle (Deepwell 35; Mills 1995: 2; Varela 15).

Although totalizing concepts (and other aspects of the historical Enlightenment project) are criticized in the postmodernist debate, we agree with Spanish feminist philosopher Celia Amorós that those concepts still allow for a clear understanding of
policies (in contrast to symbolizations or mental constructions), which should be followed to meet the objectives of feminism (346-347). Therefore, there are four fundamental notions that can be used in a feminist theory: patriarchy, gender, androcentrism and sexism (Varela 175). Spanish feminist writer Dolors Reguant presents one of the most complete definitions of patriarchy in her book *La Mujer no existe* (1996) [Women with Capital Letters Do Not Exist, my translation]:

It [patriarchy] is a pattern of political, economic, religious and social organization based on the idea of authority and leadership by the male of the species. In this organization men prevail over women; husbands prevail over wives; fathers prevail over mothers and children; the old prevail over the young; and the patrilineal descent, i.e. inheritance of name, property and title through the male lineage, prevails over the matrilineal descent. Patriarchy emerged historically as men seized power. They appropriated women’s sexuality and reproduction, and its product, children, and at the same time, they created a symbolical order through myth and religion which perpetuates it as the only possible structure. (qtd. in Varela 177, my translation)

In other words, “society is organized in such a way that it works, in general, to the benefit of men rather than women; that is, that it is patriarchal” (Mills 1995: 2). As can be seen, ending patriarchy as a form of political organization is one of the main objectives of feminism (Varela 179).
The notion of gender is also very important in feminist theory. It originates from the idea that the characteristics of “female” and “male” are not natural or biological facts, but cultural constructions (Madsen 16; Plaza 27; Varela 181). Thus, sex and gender are not synonyms: rather the former refers to biology while the latter refers to social norms and rules of behavior distinctly applied to women and men according to their sex (Varela 181). The differences in those rules and behavior imply, in fact, inequality, since they point to a superiority of one sex over the other (Plaza 28). This is the reason why one of the most basic tasks in feminist theory is to distinguish between what is biological and what is cultural, and this has had great political relevance because it has shifted the problem of women’s subordination to the area of human will and responsibility (Varela 184).

Androcentrism consists in considering man as the measure for all things; in other words, defining the world as male and man claiming the representation of the whole of humanity (Varela 175). In an androcentric vision of the world, men monopolize the mass media (Varela 176), and from that to history there is only one step. It only takes to browse an ordinary history book from any school curricula to realize that history is made by men almost entirely. This concept will be further discussed in the next section and in Chapter Four.

According to Spanish writer-researcher Victoria Sau, sexism is defined as “the set of every method employed within patriarchy to maintain the situation of inferiority, subordination and exploitation of the dominated sex—the female one. Sexism covers all the spheres of life and human relations” (qtd. in Varela 180, my translation). A concept
extremely connected with sexism is machismo, which can be defined as the discourse of inequality, since it consists in discrimination based on the belief that men are superior to women (Varela 180). Machismo might be thought of as the explicit manifestation of sexism; that is to say, in Spanish feminist writer-journalist Nuria Varela’s words, “sexism is conscious and machismo is unconscious. Sexism is an ideology that defends the subordination of women and it includes all the methods used to preserve the inequality between men and women” (180, my translation). Sexism is going to become a central notion for this inquiry, as we will see below.

**Feminist Criticism and Analysis**

Just as the previous section, part of this one, specifically the discussion of feminist art and literature criticism follows previous articles (Gil 2010; Gil 2014). In Chapter One we have seen that there is very little feminist scholarly criticism about comics, so we have to base our first approach to the feminist critique of comics from the point of view of the two disciplines that can be related to their basic components—art and literature. Initially the question of what makes art or literature critiques feminist can be answered by proposing the fundamental idea that there is no neutral path to criticism: all interpretation is political, since it implicitly or explicitly involves a certain ideological position as regards issues relevant to feminism (Belsey & Moore 1; Deepwell 34; Donovan 76). What is more, it has to be recognized that critical appreciation is as subjective and personal as the works it deals with, which can be considered neither neutral nor simple representations of reality: they are world interpretations with the latent possibility of
reproduction and reinforcement of patriarchal systems (and any other ideology for that matter, as we saw when we discussed Eco’s view on the subject) (Belsey & Moore 2; Deepwell 27-28; Donovan 79).

According to American feminist scholar Sydney Janet Kaplan, there are two perspectives in feminist criticism which can be applied not only to literary and art critiques but also to the criticism of comics or other media: gynocriticism and feminist criticism (qtd. in Deepwell 31). Gynocriticism (a concept first developed by American feminist literary critic-writer Elaine Showalter) focuses on female artists and writers creating all types of works, and it centers on their common influence and interests, their ideas about the body, their written or visual language and women’s psyches, interpreting them in relation to the social contexts where they emerge; in contrast, feminist criticism is basically centered on works and not on people, and it focuses on women’s images and stereotypes in literature, art, comics, etc., the omissions and wrong ideas about women in criticism and in works, highlighting the ways in which patriarchal attitudes affect them (Deepwell 31; “Gynocriticism”). We saw examples of both in Chapter One when we examined Trina Robbins’s books Women and the Comics (gynocriticism) and From Girls to Girrrlz (feminist criticism).

Bearing in mind the framework of these two perspectives, a global feminist criticism should work toward several goals: promoting the re-discovery of women’s historical achievements in literature, art, films, comics or other media, and stimulating interest in women’s works among the public, in order to generate a suitable environment where women could shift from a passive attitude of mere objects for representation to an
active attitude of production subjects; that is to say, giving independent voice to female artists, writers, script writers, cartoonists, etc., and spreading their contribution to culture (Chadwick 14; Deepwell 30; Madsen 14-15).

This is necessary because very frequently critics, particularly the so-called “high culture” critics, have cast female creators aside, specially arguing that their themes are trivial or minor, since many times they refer to aspects that are traditionally considered closer to female activity due to the well-established separation between the private sphere of home or domestic life that “belongs to women” and the public sphere “dominated by men” (Archer 119, 128-129; Donovan 77-78). However, this rift between the two spheres was undermined by the strong feminist conviction that the personal is political, and thus, from being considered a repressive activity, domestic life changed into an important theme in art and literature, defying the convention that certain themes are more relevant than others (Archer 128-129). The goal was to consider identity and personal experiences serious and reputable in art and literature (Archer 131).

In addition, feminist theory puts forward this primeval gap as part of a system of binary oppositions in Western thought, which at first sight seemed natural differences in the essential qualities of women and men —public/private, outside/inside, culture/nature, intellect/intuition, reason/emotion, objectivity/subjectivity, language/feeling, day/night, sun/moon—, but in reality they are only significant within a certain ideology or culture (Archer 118-119; Chadwick 9; Donovan 79). The real difference between women and men is the role given to power: who has it and who has it not; and the objective of those gender stereotypes is to make look natural that men are better suited for certain
roles and women for others, but this is not natural, rather a cultural construct (Archer 119; Muñoz Ruiz 29).

Besides having the objective of promoting women’s works in the past and in the present, feminist criticism should have more goals. It should establish a female perspective on critique theories in different media, such as art, literature, comics, etc.; it should also identify how femininity is represented; it should produce a criticism resisting the location of women as males’ spectacles or objects to be regarded; it should criticize and/or transform the coercive and hierarchical domination structures of patriarchal power; it should promote a positive image of women in works and in life; and it should make the public aware of the oppression of women (Chadwick 14; Madsen 14-15).

With all these objectives, feminist criticism can be described as a kind of rejection and non-acceptance: rejection of the limits imposed by models established by the patriarchal culture and nonacceptance of the images and oppressive falsehood perpetrated against women both in works and in criticism (Donovan 74, 76, 80; Luna 16). Criticism thus understood becomes a reading resistant to stereotypes that construct the system of definitions of the female concept simplifying and distorting reality, and through endless repetition, those stereotypes eventually seem indisputable truth (Luna 24; Plaza 25, 35, 36; Varela 301).

Consequently, it is important to pay attention to the way we read, since without a clear feminist critique, we run the risk of perpetuating gender relationships which have supported the historical system of women’s subordination (Luna 21-22). Undoubtedly, reading is a culturally conditioned activity, so women do not necessarily read in a “female”
way just because they belong to the female sex (Luna 17, 24; Madsen 16). Women are taught to identify themselves with males against their own interests; and this is how the contradictions in the female condition are created (Luna 17; Madsen 16).

Even the structure of language itself and the ideas conveyed by words contribute to uphold patriarchal attitudes of domination, as for instance, accepting without questioning the androcentrism of language, reflected in the fact that the “norm” is a male subject explicitly presented with the singular masculine third person, the so-called generic pronoun “he” (Archer 127; Mills 1995: 57, 65-66; 2008: 48, 87). A case in point was that of Lucy Lippard’s, a very important American art critic, who helped to develop feminist criticism in the visual arts and at the end of the 1970s she recognized that in her previous essays she used to write “‘the artist, he,’ ‘the reader and viewer, he,’ and worse still—a real case of confused identity—‘the critic, he’” (qtd. in Archer 117, emphasis in the original).

Following up with other examples in art, though this is repeated in many disciplines, in the language of art history and criticism, a great master is a celebrated artist and “his” product is a masterpiece, but there is not a parallel conception of a “great mistress” in this sense or a “mistresspiece”; this means that the attribution of “genius” in art is completely determined by gender and totally restricted to males even by language itself (Archer 118; Chadwick 9, 25-28; Deepwell 33). The nineteenth-century quotation, “There is no female genius. If there is one, the female genius is a man,” reveals the paradox of recognizing and denying the existence of female genius at the same time, and thus, constructing and reiterating the stereotyped categories of female production which
seem to be natural, but in reality, they are ideological and institutional (Chadwick 31). With blatant frequency, common critique terms have been employed in art to devaluate women’s work, such as “decorative,” “pleasant,” “soft,” “sweet,” “delicate,” “tender,” and even the highly negative “effeminate”; all qualifiers which refer to femininity, while “vital,” “strong,” “vigorous,” “heroic” are qualities seen as positive and associated to maleness (Chadwick 9, 25-28; Deepwell 33).

As Spanish writer Lola Luna says, “In order to register women’s historical and imaginary experience, language has to be appropriated, and with it, its symbolic and representational forms; you have to see the world and name it” (22, my translation). Therefore, in order to do a feminist reading, you have to consider, among other issues, the source of patriarchal prejudices and the privileges of male perspective that have become the “norm”; how women are represented in literary or art texts, what they say about gender relations, how sexual differences are defined; and even when texts do not represent any women or say anything about gender relations, from a feminist viewpoint, this also has a meaning (Belsey & Moore 1; Deepwell 31). If criticism fails to explore these issues, this action implies that they do not matter (Belsey & Moore 1).

Many times feminism has been stigmatized as an entity without political influence or intellectual interest, and it has been devaluated as an obsolete and superseded concoction in order to actively discourage feminist projects, ideas or works (Deepwell 28). But as we have seen and go on seeing in our daily reality, all the issues that gave rise to this movement have not disappeared. The characteristics that make feminism look paradoxical—its argumentation in favor of eliminating gender roles (equal rights) and the
value set to the female being (recognizing the difference)—are not mutually exclusive but are part of the ideas that emerge from the feminist debate (Deepwell 36).

Feminist criticism should be simply considered as one more field in the wider feminist coalition, as an opportunity to consider the implications in women’s work, and as a medium to spread women’s contributions and feminist themes among new publics (Deepwell 39). Thus, supplied with all the above objectives, feminist criticism of comics can start on a fruitful path, because as American feminist art critic Katy Deepwell says, feminism continues to be the means for women to achieve power, to have the right to rule and describe their perspectives and to be part of an open, self-reflective and developing series of debates on what it means to be women (in plural) within a patriarchal culture (27).

Turning to a more specific language analysis, as we mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, we are going to use Sara Mills’s remarkable and conscientious framework for the feminist perspective in this inquiry. Two books by Mills are of special interest in this connection: Feminist Stylistics and Language and Sexism. Following the prevailing Zeitgeist of second-wave feminism, the former is filled with fervor and resolution to detect and reform the sexist views in society which we mentioned earlier when we discussed feminist criticism. Thus, in Feminist Stylistics there is a “concern first and foremost with an analysis which identifies itself as feminist and which uses linguistic or language analysis to examine texts. Feminist analysis aims to draw attention to and change the way that gender is represented, since it is clear that a great many of these representational practices are not in the interests of either women or men” (Mills 1995:}
1). The latter takes all this into account as well, which means that this research encompasses the type of second-wave feminist analysis developed in her first book, but it also acknowledges the modifications in feminist approaches to language analysis which third-wave feminism brought about. In Mills’s words, “Broadly speaking, Second Wave feminism focuses on the language of women as a subordinated group and Third Wave feminism challenges the homogeneity of women as a group, focusing instead on localised studies” (2008: 22).

Whereas the term “second-wave feminism” has not generally stirred up controversy, referring, as noted earlier, to the mostly liberal and radical feminism of the 1960s onwards which promoted the equality of women, the term “third-wave feminism” has generated heated debate (Mills 2008: 22). Following different points of view, alternative terms have been proposed to this latest feminist movement, but we agree with Mills that “Third Wave feminism is a term preferable to post-feminism (which assumes implicitly that the aims of feminism have been achieved and that therefore feminism is largely irrelevant) and post-modern feminism (which, whilst theoretically more complex, has difficulty formulating any notion of a political programme)” (2008: 23).

Mills does not believe that second-wave and third-wave feminist analyses are chronological approaches replacing one another; instead, second-wave feminist analysis is the source and an integral part of third-wave feminist analysis (2008: 22). As we have mentioned, second-wave feminist theorists and activists were primarily concerned with changing the language which discriminated against women and the way they were represented in texts belittling and trivializing feminine activities (Mills 2008: 1). The result
of those actions has been highly positive, and Mills acknowledges that “Second Wave feminism has achieved a great deal: feminist campaigning and consciousness-raising in the 1960s and onwards have changed attitudes to the role of women and have resulted, in Western Europe and the US, in equal opportunities legislation, greater access to work within the public sphere, access to childcare, and reproductive rights” (2008: 23).

Therefore, since the 1970s and 1980s, women’s position in society at large has improved immensely, especially in the sheer numbers of women pursuing full-time careers (Mills 2008: 19, 20). This has had a dramatic impact on the way women are perceived, and also the way they perceive themselves (Mills 2008: 19). For instance, women’s increased financial independence and status within the workplace make them less likely to be tolerant to sexist comments and discrimination (Mills 2008: 19). Nevertheless, this does not mean that women are treated as equals to men even now, but the strong presence of women in all sectors of the public sphere has changed the type of language that it is possible to use (Mills 2008: 19, 20).

Here it seems relevant to discuss some specific concepts in relation to sexism, as seen from second-wave and third-wave feminist points of view, and how these two different perspectives affect its study and analysis. Unlike second-wave feminism which assumed that gender is an extra-textual factor pre-existing texts and influencing their construction and interpretation, third-wave feminism concentrates on the process of construction and interpretation of texts, and sees gender as one of the elements which is included from ideological knowledge, and which can be accepted or challenged (Mills
This implies a move away from the top-down model of second-wave feminism toward a more localized study of the notion of gender (Mills 2008: 30).

As regards meaning, second-wave feminist linguistics “was concerned with analyzing the inherent meanings of words and often made statements about the abstract meanings of words, constructing dictionaries of sexist language and advising on the avoidance of certain words” (Mills 2008: 25), as we saw when we discussed Robbins’s book From Girls to Grrrlz in Chapter One, and earlier in this section. Much of this feminist work emphasizes the idea that language is an extremely important element in making up our world-view and the way we think, and this notion was based on studies of linguistic determinism by American linguist-anthropologist Edward Sapir and American psychologist Benjamin Lee Whorf (Goddard & Patterson 5-10; Lyons 303-312; Mills 1995: 62-65). Whether language reflects the world or affects the way we perceive the world was an issue hotly debated at the beginning of the twentieth century and the result was the so-called “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” (a name given by American scholars in the 1950s), which is generally related to linguistic determinism (Goddard & Patterson 5-10; Lyons 303-312; Mills 1995: 62-65). As Whorf puts it, “We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. . . . [T]he world . . . has to be organized by our mind —and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds” (qtd. in Goddard & Patterson 6). When the hypothesis was investigated in that decade, its weaker version was confirmed (Lyons 306-307). This means that the basic conceptual framework in our thought-systems (time, space, number, etc.) is not affected by language (unconfirmed strong version), but less
basic culture-bound concepts, i.e. socially transmitted knowledge, are influenced by language (confirmed weak version) (Goddard & Patterson 9-10; Lyons 308; Mills 63).

In contrast with this global view of language, third-wave feminist linguistics considers meanings to be co-constructed within particular contexts; that is to say, participants in communication negotiate their contestation or affirmation of meanings with the conventional constraints of status and institutionalized linguistic routines (Mills 2008: 26). Because of this focus on specifically contextual communicative situations, third-wave feminists have trouble in addressing global, structural and systematic forms of discrimination (Mills 2008: 26). According to Mills, then, “What is necessary is to integrate the campaigning zeal of Second Wave feminism which would bring about material changes in women’s lives, with Third Wave feminism’s theoretical sophistication and contextualized focus” (2008: 27).

With the notion of “communities of practice,” third-wave feminist linguistics has moved away from second-wave feminist notions of language in society at large (Mills 2008: 28). A community of practice is a group of people who are engaged together on a task, and thus, they develop shared linguistic repertoires which serve to consolidate the group (Mills 2008: 28). For feminism, it is crucial to take both aspects into account: communities of practice and the wider society above them; therefore, feminists should be able to analyze texts at the community level and also to be aware of the institutional and wider social norms which influence that local context (Mills 2008: 29-30).

French philosopher Michel Foucault’s theorization of power has had a critical influence on third-wave feminism (Mills 2008: 27). According to this theoretical view,
power is not a possession, but a network of relations; consequently, instead of being an abstract and intangible factor, it becomes a material, tangible and everyday element (Mills 2008: 27). Many feminist theorists differentiate between “institutional status (that is, the status that you are allocated through your position within an institution) and local or interactional status (that is, the position that you manage to negotiate because of your verbal skill, confidence, concern for others, ‘niceness’ and so on)” (Mills 2008: 27). It is obvious that these two aspects are closely related, but now third-wave feminists often focus on the local status, while second-wave feminists have focused on institutional status (Mills 2008: 27). Since the institutional rank is the most difficult aspect to negotiate, and since it greatly affects the parameters of negotiation within the local rank, it seems important to analyze both the fairly stable institutional factors and the negotiation of what is considered suitable at the local level (Mills 2008: 28).

Apart from contrasting views about some fundamental concepts in second-wave and third-wave feminism, Mills criticizes two different approaches to linguistic analysis—content analysis and close reading (1995: 11-12). Using content analysis alone, much Anglo-American feminist theory has examined representations of female characters in order to relate them to a generalized female self-identity and experience (Mills 1995: 11). By focusing on content analysis alone, these feminist approaches seem to be a return to the subjectivity of traditional literary analysis, because the theorist assumes a single reading or meaning for the text, and thus reducing it to a single evaluation of good representation of women or sexist representation of women (Mills 1995: 11). As Mills puts it, “Although content analysis is important, . . . it needs to take place alongside, and

Close reading techniques are used to analyze the language of a text by selecting and identifying a preponderance of certain language items, which can justify an initial reaction to the text (Mills 1995: 11). Nevertheless, “it can be argued that this kind of close reading can really be used to justify any argument the reader may have about the text, since the language items for analysis are selected after a judgment has been passed on the text” (Mills 1995: 11). Moreover, since no previous theoretical framework has been developed for the close reading analysis, some relevant language items may be overlooked because they may be considered commonsense or natural (Mills 1995: 11). This idea of commonsense items used in argumentation is similar to Ducrot’s topoi, which refer to packets of argumentative principles belonging to the belief universe of the linguistic community where they are used (García Negroni). Topoi are never asserted, since each topos is a common belief resource drawn upon to achieve a certain conclusion in an argumentation and it is presented as universal (even though it is really not, because it depends on the linguistic community both for its chosen type and its acceptance) (García Negroni).

Accordingly, texts can present certain information as if it were commonsense, which a close reading strategy may fail to detect or may accept without challenge, if it only relies on intuition (Mills 1995: 11, 12). Thus, in order to prevent this, Mills’s approach to texts aims to raise consciousness and awareness of the methods of presenting information, and also, to help take analytical distance from naturalized readings (1995: 11,
12). Mills is not only interested in the representations of gender in order to contest them or reinterpret them, but she also wants to challenge the natural commonsense perception of those representations in order to find different and more productive ways of depicting gender, i.e. to turn gender-specific or sexist language into gender-free language (1995: 2, 65). Another problem with a close reading lacking a theoretical framework is that there will be different interpretations and conclusions about the same text, according to each reader’s set of background assumptions (Mills 1995: 11, 12). Consequently, “what is needed is to develop a model of analysis which will enable close, suspicious readings that will be replicable; that is, the model of analysis will not change overly [sic] from reader to reader and from text to text” (Mills 1995: 12).

Mills’s model of text, which bears resemblance with Muro Munilla’s framework described above (obviously, without its feminist emphasis), is presented after discussing traditional models of language and text (1995: 20-23). These traditional models reflect the conventional idea that the message is encoded by the speaker in isolation or the text is elaborated within a diffused and generalized sociohistorical background only indirectly affecting an ideal author (Mills 1995: 20-23). In contrast to these romanticized notions of authors’ isolated rule over their work and readers’ unencumbered interpretation, Mills develops a feminist model with the text at the center of the diagram, the context of production on the left, and the context of reception on the right (1995: 22-23). Each of these two contexts has many factors influencing a text, as we will presently see, but none of these factors should be considered independently, since production and reception are
interconnected in very complex ways, and even the text in the middle of the diagram may exert pressure on production, which in turn may affect future texts (Mills 1995: 24-25, 27).

On the production-of-text side, then, there are the following factors: first, the general language and discourse constraints (in comics, evidently, we have to add image conventions), text antecedents and trends, which limit the range of ideas available, according to each sociohistorical conjuncture, and also the form these ideas can take when expressed; second, the affiliations the producer(s) of text can have as individuals, e.g. gender, race, politics, nationality, class, etc.; third, publishing practices, which affect the way the text is produced (as we saw in Chapter One, this is a crucial factor in the case of American comics); and fourth, sociohistorical factors, and political, economic and cultural Weltanschauung, which are “vital to the construction of a text, since so much of the commonsense knowledge of that period is contained in the book either to be unconsciously included by the author or to be resisted” (Mills 1995: 24). Mills concludes that “[i]t is not possible to be fully aware of all of the factors which influence what is included in a book, but it is clear that the author is not the determining factor, as has often been assumed [although] the author has a major input in the production of the text” (1995: 24). This last aspect is even more evident in relation to comics, since they are a collective endeavor, developed within the constraints of a business company.

On the context-of-reception side of the model, Mills includes three positions for the receiver of the text: the intended audience, the implied reader, and the actual audience (1995: 24). Two of these categories are also listed in Muro Munilla’s model above, but the label of one of them is different, since instead of using the category of
actual audience, he speaks about the real reader, i.e. a single person, not a group. The intended audience is “the general community of readers to whom the text will be marketed”; although this is classified into the reception side, it is clear that it might be also included in the production side, because this factor is of vital importance for authors and publishers when producing a text (Mills 1995: 24), and even more so in the case of an intellectual product, such as comics. As we have seen, the implied reader is the dialogic position addressed by the text, and determinant of the shape and style, but as Mills suitably adds, it is not a static position, since it might shift during the course of the work (1995: 24). The actual audience, as described earlier, is the real people, who buy or read the text, and as such, they may not be equated with the intended audience, but both types of audience influence the way a text is produced and received (Mills 1995: 24). Finally, sociohistorical factors also affect the way the text is received; for instance, “general trends in buying, lending in libraries, and reviewing may determine the availability of books, and also may determine the views that readers have about the books and the readings that they make of the books” (Mills 1995: 24). This is also a key aspect as regards comics. On the one hand, as we saw in Chapter One, changes in their channels of distribution affected both production and reception. On the other hand, for most of their history, as we will see in Chapter Three, and maybe even now in some contexts, as we have repeatedly stated, they have been considered second-rate literature not deserving a place in a lending library, much less in the education system.

This model is more advantageous than traditional models because of several reasons: first, while traditional models consider only the context of production, this model
places textual reception as part of the context as well; second, traditional models are at a loss to describe the processes of discrimination affecting the production of a text; third, traditional models consider the author responsible for the text and if, for example, the text contains elements of sexism, that is simply a problem with the individual author; and fourth, traditional models see the reader as isolated and as producing an individual response to the text (Mills 1995: 25). Readers do not normally share a single response to a text, so it is essential for “feminist readers to be able to produce a range of readings which a particular reading community is likely to have, and to see the reader as being offered choices in the hypotheses they formulate about the text” (Mills 1995: 25). Just as authors and publishers, readers are influenced by affiliations to various groups (ethnicity, religion, class, politics, gender, family, etc.), and their perception as members of these groups is a vital aspect of their identity (Mills 1995: 25). Therefore, the readings of a text may be affected by the extent of the identification with these affiliations, and one of the tasks for the feminist critic is “to look at how texts cue certain readings for certain readers” (Mills 1995: 25).

In order to detect these different potential readings, two types of information are needed—identification of certain cues to interpretation, and prediction about the implied reader’s background knowledge and model of the world (Mills 1995: 25). With these tools, the feminist reader can ideally locate other possible readings of the text, and this flexibility gives the reader more scope for intervention (Mills 1995: 25-26). As can be seen, in Mills’s model of text, readers’ roles are given more prominence, since they are addressed by the text, and thus, they can not only be influenced by the text, but they can
also influence the interpretation of the text (Mills 1995: 26). Rather than being the passive recipients depicted by traditional models, readers are active participants, negotiating with, resisting or questioning the meanings in the text (Mills 1995: 26).

In feminist analysis, there is an emphasis on the interaction between the text and the reader in the production of interpretations, and on the contextual factors that influence the writer and the reader (Mills 1995: 50). With Mills’s more theorized model which takes into account the determinants of the construction of a text and the constraints on its reception, the idea of traditional models maintaining that linguistic features are solely inside the text is finally cast aside, since it cannot be assumed that every reader will understand the same message from the same set of linguistic cues (1995: 28, 50). Based on their background knowledge, ideological framework, expectations and hypotheses, readers come to different conclusions about the meanings of a text (Mills 1995: 50). Nevertheless, it is evident that the text is not a tabula rasa for readers to impose their own interpretation; indeed, as we have stated, the text itself influences readers by addressing them either in a direct or indirect way, and offers some interpretations as the most likely ones (Mills 1995: 50).

These preferred interpretations are contained in the text as an apparent coherent message (called “dominant reading” by Mills, but we may draw a parallel with the notion of theme, as stated by Muro Munilla, and also with Eco’s ideological statements as regards comics), which readers are supposed to find true or obvious, even if they disagree with it (1995: 50, 52). According to Mills, the “dominant reading is not the writer’s intention (which is unrecoverable), but a position (or positions) which the text offers or proffers to
the reader within a particular historical moment, because of the range of ideological positions available which make that text understandable” (1995: 55-56). In other words, this dominant reading does not lie in a contextual vacuum; on the contrary, it is reinforced by various ideologies pervading the Zeitgeist or culture of the time (Mills 1995: 56). But “dominant” does not mean “unique,” rather it obviously implies other concomitant readings, just as Mills puts it, “there are always other elements intermingled with the dominant reading and it is these elements which may lead to a different oppositional reading” (1995: 56).

French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser puts forward the ideas of interpellation and obviousness, both embedded in a text (qtd. in Mills 1995: 52). “Interpellation” may be taken as a synonym for “address,” but it is more comprehensive than a direct address because when we are interpellated by a text, we as readers can adopt either the position of the supposed speaker or the role of the supposed addressee, or finally, we can be positioned as an overhearer of the interaction between speaker and addressee (Mills 1995: 51). In their usually multilayered contents, texts have numerous direct and indirect addresses, and the reader has the option of responding to them, or not doing so, i.e. resisting them (Mills 1995: 51, 58). Whereas the direct address is easy to spot in its explicitness, the indirect address may be overlooked, because it is not usually explicitly presented in texts as an address to the reader (Mills 1995: 53).

Mills describes two markers of indirect address —obviousness and background knowledge (1995: 53-55). Obviousness, a concept originally developed by Althusser, refers to the considerable amount of information that texts contain which is implicitly
accepted by readers, and with that acceptance, they position themselves in the role of people who receive that information as self-evident (Mills 1995: 53). French semiotician Roland Barthes suggests that we can detect these elements of the obvious, when they are preceded by introductions such as “we all know that” or “it is evident that,” or the like (qtd. in Mills 1995: 53). British critical discourse analyst Norman Fairclough describes background knowledge as “members’ resources,” and these resources are the knowledge the text assumes that the reader has (qtd. in Mills 1995: 53). The difference between obviousness and background knowledge is a rather subtle one: obviousness refers to information presented as known by the general public, while background knowledge is more specialized information presented as known by the intended audience of the text, and thus, the text delimits its readers (Mills 1995: 53). This delimitation may be the reason why Fairclough uses the word “members” in his definition of background knowledge, and these members’ resources can be detected by outlining explicitly the presuppositions and implicatures that appear in statements (Mills 1995: 53).

With all the above theoretical background, in her book Language and Sexism, Mills aims to develop a third-wave feminist analysis of sexism which still retains some of the features and benefits of second-wave feminist analysis (2008: 34). As we have seen, feminist analysis and activity as regards sexism have moved from a concern in the 1970s and 1980s with bans or reforms of words which seemed to be intrinsically sexist toward the examination of terms functioning as sexist in specific contexts (Mills 2008: 32). The problem with these third-wave localized studies is that they find it difficult to deal with the notion of sexism, since, as we saw in the previous section, it is grounded on the belief
that discrimination against women is systematic, imposed by power above, entrenched in
social structures and working to the benefit of all men (patriarchy) (Mills 2008: 30).

Coinciding with Amorós’s views about totalizing concepts mentioned in the section
“Feminism,” Mills states that “[w]hilst global generalizations about the meanings of words
and phrases judged to be sexist are more complex now, it is still essential to hold onto the
notion of the possibility of generalizing about language and gender and to analyze the
influence of wider social structures” (2008: 34). In other words, instead of considering
sexism homogeneous and global, it can be analyzed and interpreted at the local level, but
still retaining a sense of the larger social and institutional norms which rule local usage
(Mills 2008: 30). Thus, language can be considered a site to challenge sexism, and hence,
the status quo, so the changes at the local level may bring about changes in the overall
meanings of words and also larger changes at the social level (Mills 2008: 30). That is to
say, anti-sexist interventions by feminist activists to change language are not based on a
simple sense of being abused by sexist language, but by the system that allows it, and they
should not be seen as a trivial academic exercise, but as a call for critical thinking in order
to empower individuals to achieve a consequent sociopolitical action (Mills 1995: 29;
2008: 36, 38).

This is the reason why Mills thinks that critical discourse analysis can be useful to
third-wave feminist analyses of sexism (2008:32). In her view, feminism and critical
discourse analysis “both have a clearly articulated political position and a motivation for
analysis, in that they wish to bring about change” (Mills 2008: 32). Having the conviction
that no discourse is ideologically-free, the above-mentioned authors Gunther Kress and
Theo van Leeuwen also believe that critical discourse analysis should be part of their model, which will be discussed below, since it “seeks to show how the apparently neutral, purely informative discourses of newspaper reporting, government publications, social science reports, and so on, may in fact convey ideological attitudes just as much as discourses which more explicitly editorialize or propagandize, and how language is used to convey power and status in contemporary social interaction” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 12-13). Critical discourse analysis can supply the ways and means to discover underlying meanings, so as to have alternative readings to the conventionally accepted ones, and even to reveal the signs of power, which have become represented in increasingly illusive ways (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 13). But since critical discourse analysis has mostly been limited to verbal texts, Kress and van Leeuwen not only think that it should have a role in their framework, but they also see their book *Reading Images* as a contribution to expand the discipline toward multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 13). Therefore, we are going to add Kress and van Leeuwen’s contribution in visual analysis to our theoretical framework, but before that, let us finish our discussion on Mills’s analytical framework.

Mills’s definite feminist framework for the analysis of sexism is based on the evolution of second-wave and third-wave feminism. Although she divides sexism basically into two categories —namely, overt or direct sexism, and indirect sexism—, she also lists political correctness as part of her taxonomy. Overt sexism is the type of sexism analyzed by second-wave feminism and targeted by many of its campaigns about discriminatory language (Mills 2008: 33); in particular, it is the basic and bulkiest subject matter in Mills’s

Second-wave feminist lexicographical work reflected in the classification of overt or direct sexism above has been crucial in drawing attention to overt sexist language, but because of the consequent rising awareness, now more complex third-wave feminist strategies are required, and so, direct sexism has become only one class of sexism (Mills 2008: 38). Those strategies should be applied to analyze “the other types of sexism which have arisen more recently in response to these feminist campaigns” (Mills 2008: 38). Accordingly, Mills lists two responses to second-wave feminist anti-sexist campaigns —political correctness, and indirect sexism (2008: 33-34).

To Mills political correctness is such an alien concept to her studies that she distances herself from the notion by consistently putting the phrase between quotation marks whenever she deals with it in her treatise *Language and Sexism*, and especially in the section she devotes to its discussion (2008: 100-123). In fact, she sees political correctness “as a media response to feminist campaigns on language, . . . which was
developed in order to undermine or trivialize the campaigns for those who were arguing for gender-fair and anti-homophobic language” (Mills 2008: 33-34). With such a negative hype, there are misinterpretations of the aims of anti-sexism; what is more, the general public views political correctness as an infamous limitation to their freedom of expression, so much so that political incorrectness is usually considered in a positive light as a risky and daring challenge to that “oppression” (Mills 2008: 34, 152, my emphasis).

In order to discuss indirect sexism, Mills proposes that “sexism can be best described if we consider it as a resource available within the language” (2008: 124, emphasis in the original). In other words, it may be utilized or rejected, according to different individuals, environments or contextual pressures. At work, for instance, many institutions support anti-sexist policies, so that overt sexism has been stigmatized in their attempt to eradicate it or discourage it within public discourse, although, unfortunately, it has not been entirely eliminated in informal interactions (Mills 2008: 34, 133). In contrast to those auspicious anti-sexist institutional policies in work environments, within the context of the media, a form of sexism accompanied by humor and irony has developed in public discourse (Mills 2008: 133).

Indirect sexism, therefore, is “that sexism which is masked by humor and irony and is consequently quite difficult to classify as sexism” (Mills 2008: 34). This use of sexist humor and irony does not alter the essence of sexism itself, instead it merely transforms the response into something more complex, because this indirect sexism can only be resisted by disclosing some of the presuppositions implicit in this kind of sexist language (Mills 2008: 134, 135). For this reason, it is vital to analyze indirect sexism from the point
of view of third-wave feminism, since it is better equipped than second-wave feminism to deal with the sexist resources available in a language and its local manifestations (Mills 2008: 34).

However, as noted earlier, the constant dual perspective on the local and on the global should be maintained if a balanced analysis of sexism is to be achieved at all (Mills 2008: 34). Moreover, it has to be admitted that there is a general instability in sexism, which implies that it is difficult to interpret texts as unequivocally sexist; and what makes this task even more difficult is that women themselves have appropriated some of the sexist terms and started using them in ironic ways (Mills 2008: 135), as we have seen when we talked about the word “girl” in connection with Robbins’s book From Girls to Grrrlz in Chapter One. Mills lists the following types of indirect sexism: humor (Mills 1995: 106-110; 2008: 140-145); presupposition (Mills 1995: 100-105; 2008: 145-147); conflicting messages (Mills 2008: 147-148); scripts and metaphors (Mills 1995: 105-106; 2008: 148); collocation (Mills 2008: 148-150); and finally, androcentric perspective (Mills 2008: 150-152). As with the categories of overt sexism, the elements of this classification are going to undergo an in-depth examination in Chapter Four, when we deal with methodology, and now we will turn to the visual aspect of our framework for feminist analysis.

In their book Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design, Kress and van Leeuwen “intend to provide inventories of the major compositional structures which have become established as conventions in the course of the history of visual semiotics, and to analyse how they are used to produce meaning by contemporary image-makers” (1996: 1). For our purposes, in this explanation of what these authors’ treatise is about, the key
word is “meaning.” Since we already saw the visual constituents of the comics medium in the section “The Language of Comics” above, now what we have to focus on is their meanings and underlying ideology, in order to detect feminist-relevant aspects in images as well as in texts. To this effect, the fact that these authors base their study on critical discourse analysis, as we have seen, social semiotics, and British-born Australian linguist Michael Halliday’s systemic functional grammar makes this book an invaluable and reliable tool for our own inquiry. Although the above-mentioned author Neil Cohn criticizes this type of visual grammar because, in his view, it does not foreground the narrative aspect of panel sequence in comics enough (2013: 419), we believe that the emphasis placed on trying to establish meaning and ideology in images by means of a solid scholarly foundation offsets all adverse criticism.

As the subtitle indicates, Kress and van Leeuwen’s book is a visual grammar, which implies a wide variety of visual media; that is to say, it not only comprises comics, our subject of study, but also all kinds of visual works, such as paintings, photographs, magazine layouts, and so on (1996: 3). In spite of their extensive subject matter, the authors warn us that this is not a universal grammar, since visual language “is not transparent and universally understood, but culturally specific” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 3). We also mentioned this counter-intuitive lack of universality of images in our Introduction, and when we discussed McCloud’s book Understanding Comics in Chapter One, specifically contrasting some aspects of Western comics tradition with manga or Japanese comics. Accordingly, Kress and van Leeuwen explain that the visual communication they are dealing with is limited to Western culture because it is strongly
influenced by the convention of writing from left to right, top to bottom, attributing values or meanings to these key dimensions of visual space (we will see later how this applies to the analysis of visual texts) (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 3). But this notion of global Western visual communication does not mean the exclusion of regional and social variations, which, obviously, occur when we take into account more localized images (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 4).

Kress & van Leeuwen use the theoretical notion of the three metafunctions developed by Halliday, in order to organize the analysis of the system of visual communication (1996: 40). The ideational (or referential) metafunction deals with the representation of objects and their relations (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 40-41); the interpersonal metafunction deals with the relations between the producer of a sign or text, the viewer (or receiver) and the object represented (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 41); and finally, the textual metafunction deals with “the capacity to form texts, complexes of signs which cohere both internally and with the context in and for which they are produced” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 41, emphasis in the original).

In organizing the material following the three Hallidayan metafunctions, the authors, first, present the patterns of narrative representation (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 43-78), and conceptual representation (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 79-118); second, they present the patterns of interaction with the relations between the makers and viewers (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 119-158), and their modality (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 159-180); third, they present Halliday’s textual metafunction in the meaning of composition (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 181-229), with the materiality of
visual signs in the tools used to make images (ink, paint, brushstrokes, etc.), and in the materials used to make images on (paper, canvas, computer screens, etc.) (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 231-241); finally, in the last part of the book, they present three-dimensional visuals, which are not part of our inquiry (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 242-263), and a postscript with a final analysis of a painting (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 264-267). We are going to examine all these aspects related to the analysis of visual communication in Chapter Four, when we deal with methodology.
CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

It is customary for comics historians to start their discussion of comics with a long history relating comics to the ancient arts. Even Román Gubern, who first dismisses the long genealogy of comics in his famous and pioneering book *El lenguaje de los comics* (see discussion in Chapter One) accusing other authors of coupling comics with a lineage of already highly-ranked ancestors in order to ennoble them (1979: 13), in his later article “El comic,” after a brief semiotic description of comics, he discusses the antecedents and development of the language of comics rightfully starting at prehistoric cave painting (1981: 143). Gubern’s first dismissal of recording an aristocratic ancestry seems to have been prompted by the nature of comics, since they are considered a mass-media product that cannot be divorced from the technology that permits mass production and distribution (1979: 13). However, by recapitulating from the origins lost in the times of history, one can see that comics have their roots in the history of painting and writing, just as Scott McCloud and Neil Cohn have also done (see Chapter One and Chapter Two). And as Antonio Altarriba states, comics cannot be defined by the mechanics of production but by the moment of creation (11-12).

Antecedents of Comics

As we have mentioned, in the comics medium the visual and verbal languages are integrated, and thus, we have to trace the history of painting and writing in order to
perceive how we arrive at the development of comics at the end of the nineteenth century. Pictorial representation, as the first form of communication, is also an antecedent of writing. Human beings invented writing through the successive phases of pictograms, representation of objects and beings; ideograms, representation of ideas; and finally, phonograms, representation of the oral sound, which could, in turn, be syllabic, with the syllable as the phonographic unit, or alphabetic, with the letter as the phonographic unit (Gubern 1981: 144).

Throughout the history of painting, when artists tried to represent the time that is implicit in all narrative structure, they have either of two ways available: sequential iconographic narration, namely the division of plastic space into consecutive images, or reiteration of figures in the same plastic space (Gubern 1981: 148; also see “The Language of Comics” in Chapter Two). The former is going to give rise to the language of comics as a whole, while the latter announces certain experiments of avant-garde (especially cubism and futurism), and some kinetic conventions adopted by comics (Gubern 1981: 148; also see Chapter One, and “The Language of Comics” in Chapter Two). With the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, the possibilities of developing literacy and reaching a wider public like no other period in history were at hand, and thus, we surely come to the time of the true forerunners of present-day comics (Gubern 1981: 149-150).

**Proto-Comics**

The technical progress of image reproduction from xylography or woodcut (process of wood engraving, and of transferring ink images on paper from this) to
lithography (process of producing a picture on stone with some greasy substance, and of transferring ink images on paper from this), which is more direct, allowed the development of an incipient mass image culture (Gubern 1981: 151). In the early period of illustrated narrative there were two main forms to achieve narration by means of pictures: the sequence of small images printed on a single page (narrative strip proper), and the sequence of one image per page, which when spread formed a narrative frieze or picture story (Kunzle). The eighteenth century was the golden age of the English political cartoon based on caricature, with English painter William Hogarth as the key figure of this period (Gubern 1981: 151-152; Kunzle). The introduction of caricature into the broadsheet established the “comic strip” as basically comic in both form and content (Kunzle).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the heir to the experiments of English caricaturists —and the father of the comic strip in its modern sense— was the already-mentioned pioneer Rodolphe Töpffer (Kunzle; also see Chapter One). His images were in black and white, painted with Indian ink, with one-or-two-line explicative texts, and panels ranging from 143 to 225 (Gubern 1981: 156). Töpffer created eccentric antiheroes who struggled hopelessly and comically against the whims of fate, nature, and a nonsensical, mechanistic society (Kunzle). His fantasy was so peculiar that he can be called a legitimate pre-surrealist (Gubern 1981: 156). In Töpffer’s strips “the normal relationship between cause and effect or crime and punishment, which had underpinned all the older stories, disintegrated” (Kunzle). Töpffer’s importance in the history of comics lies in his adoption not only of narrative technique as the basis of his images (including the use of thought
balloons and music notes on the heads of characters), but also of graphic caricature, by exploiting systematic doodling and chance (Gubern 1981: 156; Kunzle).

French drafter Christophe (pseudonym of Georges Colomb), who was Töpffer’s admirer and disciple, published serialized comic strips in children’s periodicals for the first time (Gubern 1981: 157). Technically innovative and following his expressive needs, he used a great variety of panel formats, long shots, flash-panel (small panels expressing a quick succession of events), many camera angles (among them, bird’s eye view, which was very unusual at the time), and lively panel montage (Gubern 1981: 158). Such types as the naïve bourgeois and the absent-minded professor, which were gently mocked by Christophe, have become established figures in French folklore (Gubern 1981: 158; Kunzle), and even in the world collective imagery. As Christophe’s graphic narrative was originally designed, like Töpffer’s, for the children of his own household, he first drew them without words, and when children learned to read, texts were added below the panels (Gubern 1981: 157; Kunzle). Therefore, the established format for English and French children’s comics, which survived down to World War II, was with text excluded from the image, instead of the balloons used in the United States (Kunzle).

The dominant figure of the late nineteenth century was German artist Wilhelm Busch, who was very popular in his own day and is remembered even today (Kunzle). Busch first published in periodicals, and then in separate albums; consequently, he was soon considered “the first fully professional and truly popular comic-strip artist, appealing to educated and simple, young and old alike” (Kunzle). His best known characters, the infant pranksters Max and Moritz, have had numerous imitations down to our own day,
like the iconic Spanish characters Zipi y Zape developed by Spanish comics creator José Escobar Saliente in 1947, with the key theme of their stories being rebellion against familiar and adult authority (Gubern 1981: 1959; Kunzle; “Zipi”). Busch’s graphic vocabulary (kinetic lines to represent movement and new conventional signs to express shock, pain, and other emotions) has been useful even to present-day humorous strip cartoonists (Kunzle). At first, he did not want to include accompanying texts because he asserted that an image that needed to be explained by means of a text lacked expressive qualities, but eventually he had to submit to the requirements of his period and add the required texts (Gubern 1981: 159).

**The Origin of Comic Strips**

Three factors converged to create the comic strip at the end of the nineteenth century in the United States (Coma 1979: 9). From a technological point of view, the extraordinary development of the American press, which was able to produce huge circulation numbers and color print, allowing truly for the first time to call newspapers mass-media products (Coma 1979: 9; Gubern 1981: 153). From a sociological point of view, there was an impressive number of immigrants who flooded the United States, with little knowledge of English, and thus, with a disposition towards contemplating images rather than reading text (Coma 1979: 9). From a cultural point of view, at the mass level that the journalistic business required, iconography was preferred to text, so that a high quantity of graphic material was included in newspapers (Coma 1979: 9).
The first step towards the genesis of comics was taken when color printing at a low cost in the newspaper industry was put to a good use in humorous drawings (Coma 1979: 9). The second step was determined by the popularity of comic illustrated magazines, which spurred some New York leading newspapers, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, to include Sunday supplements in the line of those magazines, as an advertising stunt in order to attract readers (Coma 1979: 9). Finally, the definite third step for the birth of modern newspaper comic strips was the commercial competition between those New York newspaper giants that started the trend of Sunday supplements (Coma 1979: 10; Kunzle).

Therefore, in 1895 American journalist-publisher Joseph Pulitzer launched a full-color comic page drawn by American drafter Richard Felton Outcault in the Sunday supplement of his newspaper New York World (Coma 1979: 10; Gubern 1974: 20; Hogben 219-220; Kunzle). It was a panoramic page graphically describing events in a working-class area of New York, and featuring a bald child with a long shirt as protagonist (Gubern 1974: 20; Hogben 210). As Pulitzer’s rotary press had problems with the impression of the yellow color, the shirt of Outcault’s protagonist served as trial area for that color, and in this casual way, the first continuing comic character in the United States —the Yellow Kid— was born (Gubern 1974: 21; Kunzle).

In 1896 American editor-publisher William Randolph Hearst (whose life inspired American director Orson Welles’s 1941 film Citizen Kane) enticed Outcault to abandon Pulitzer, and having succeeded in doing so, he announced the appearance of the Yellow Kid in the weekly full-color comic supplement of his own paper, the Morning Journal
Undaunted, Pulitzer responded by asking American painter George Luks to continue the comic strip character with Outcault’s style, and this curious co-existence of the character in two different newspapers started a peculiar characteristic of comics: the continuing existence of characters and styles independently of their creators (Gubern 1974: 24; Kunzle).

From the point of view of the formal characteristics of comics, all the scattered technical and narrative findings that the forerunners of comics had been accumulating came together in the United States to originate the fundamentals of the language of comics (Gubern 1981: 162-163). Basically, in 1896 Outcault abandoned the uniform and global framework of the single panel to articulate an episode in five consecutive panels with speech balloons, and with this transformation, comics ultimately acquired their definitive and present format (Gubern 1981: 168). Therefore, Outcault synthesized the three already-mentioned elements of the language of comics: the continuing character, the panel sequence, and the dialogue balloon (Gubern 1981: 168). But above all, Outcault generated popular interest towards his creation, laying the foundation of comics as an art and an industry (Gubern 1981: 168).

Examples of comics as an art in the first decades of the twentieth century are American comics artists Winsor McCay’s *Little Nemo in Slumberland* and George Herriman’s *Krazy Kat* (Gubern 1981: 174-176; Kunzle). However, these technologically and ideologically innovative, almost surrealist, creations were soon to be inhibited by the advent of syndication in the American scene, a development indicating that the newly-
born comics were becoming a regulated and standardized industrial activity, as we will see in the following section (Gubern 1981: 177).

The appearance of the black-and-white daily strip in newspapers took place ten years later than that of the weekly color comics page, and this mode did not achieve widespread circulation in the United States until the 1920s (Gubern 1974: 39). The daily strip was first tried out and failed in 1904 in the Chicago American newspaper with American illustrator Claire Briggs’s A. Piker Clerk comic strip, in which a character gave tips on horse races (Gubern 1974: 26; Kunzle). But it became successfully established in the United States thanks to American drafter Harry C. “Bud” Fisher’s Mr. A. Mutt (later Mutt and Jeff, when Mutt met the new character Jeff in a mental hospital), which was inaugurated in 1907 (Gubern 1974: 26; Kunzle).

The Emergence of Syndicates

Following the lead of Pulitzer and Hearst in the 1900s, the newspaper Sunday supplement became widespread in the United States (Gubern 1974: 35-36). Together with Sunday supplements, the spread of comics to other newspapers was quick and was aided by the emergence of newspaper syndication (Kunzle). Syndicates are agencies in charge of selling newspapers miscellaneous literary and artistic material, such as short stories, recipes, cartoons, crosswords, etc. (Gubern 1974: 69). Thus, in order to impose an efficient and strict work division, syndication put an end to a period of craft tradition in American journalism, in which each newspaper had its own drafters (Gubern 1974: 70). Although with this development newspapers no longer had the exclusive of the material,
they had evident advantages, since they did not need to hire a permanent specialized staff to cover these miscellaneous sections (Gubern 1974: 69-70).

The influence of syndication on comics was felt essentially in two aspects—format and ideology. On the one hand, it was necessary to unify the formats of daily and weekly strips, in order to adapt them to the different newspaper sizes of potential buyers (Coma 1979: 31). On the other hand, this standardization had to be extended also to the ideological content, in order to avoid possible rejection from buyers and possible offence to any conceivable readership or commercial-interest group (Coma 1979: 31; Gubern 1974: 70; Kunzle). Apart from the standardization of format and ideology of comics, one of the most important consequences of the appearance of syndicates was the codification of strips in thematic genres, such as ethnic-character, career-girl strips, gag strips, family-saga or domestic-problem strips, adventure strips, aviation, detective drama, science and space fiction, and since 1938, war and supermen strips (Gubern 1981: 179; Kunzle).

Therefore, syndicates imposed a rigorous censorship on comics authors, especially as regards sex, violence, religious and racial issues, and criticism to the American social and political system; that is to say, they had to avoid controversial issues of the day and observe strict, conservative codes of morality and decorum (Coma 1979: 31; Kunzle). Furthermore, cartoonists were encouraged to promote the conformist pattern of the American way of life, widely accepted by the American community and easy to export because of the growing international prestige of the United States (Coma 1979: 31; Gubern 1974: 73). Eventually, then, not only was distribution of American syndicated newspaper material domestic, but international as well (Gubern 1974: 70). Through
comics, syndicates exported American customs, rites, expressions, and even English phonetic onomatopoeias that became fossilized in other languages (Gubern 1974: 73).

As can be imagined, influential syndicates came to have an enormous power of decision over comics, since with total impunity, they could modify strips, suppress panels, and change dialogues, and even when the creator died or abandoned the strip, it was the syndicate that decided who the successor would be (Gubern 1974: 75). In sum, syndicates have dictated the editorial policy of newspaper comic strips in the United States, since they emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century (Gubern 1974: 78).

The Development of Comic Strips

During the first three decades since its appearance, the comic strip had exploited humor in all its different aspects (Gubern 1981: 186-187); hence, the original label “comic,” as we saw in the section “Definition of Comics” in Chapter Two. In the 1930s, new factors were going to influence the development of comic strips (Gubern 1981: 187). The first one was the pressure exercised on comics artists by naturalistic film images that enhanced the expression of plastic material (Gubern 1981: 187). Closely related to this, the technological advances of photography also inspired comics artists to give a try at more realistic images (Gubern 1981: 187). And on top of this, there was a wide expansion of competing highly-realistic illustration in magazines and advertising that exhibited chiaroscuro contrasts and brushwork with photographic detail (Gubern 1981: 187).

The fact that a new generation of drafters trained in art academies was incorporated to the comics industry at the end of the 1920s allowed the introduction of a
new realistic plastic language, which, being totally different from traditional caricature, gave rise to epic adventure comics (Gubern 1981: 187). Thus, comics were at last liberated from their cartoonish historical origin, in order to access the structure of the novel, particularly the serialized adventure novel, which reinforced reader continuity, just as film serials had consolidated the cinema-going habit (Gubern 1981: 187). The great age of epic adventure comics was inaugurated in 1929, with three main sub-genres: exotic adventures in the colonial Third World, detective adventures and thrillers, and science fiction, though there were also some minor sub-genres, such as aviation and medieval adventures (Gubern 1981: 188). Apart from genres, in the same year, two important characters from pulp magazines (referring to the cheap coarse wood-fiber paper they were printed on) were transferred to comic strips — Tarzan and Buck Rogers (Daniels 11, 13; Fingeroth 2004: 43).

Comic strips, then, consolidated their sociocultural position between adventure films and illustrated adventure novels (Gubern 1981: 188). Apparently at a disadvantage as regards cinema because of less realistic still images and higher intellectual demand in reading the written texts, comics, nevertheless, offered a lower cost and the possibility of re-reading the material as many times as the consumer wanted (Gubern 1981: 188). In contrast with illustrated novels, comics had the obvious advantage of higher iconography and lower intellectual demand (Gubern 1981: 188-189), although this latter aspect is debatable, since as British children’s literature scholar Peter Hunt states, there has been widespread “prejudice against the convention of the speech balloon — although it requires a certain skill to read texts in this mode” (65).
The Origin of Comic Books

The success of newspaper adventure comics spawned a new and highly lucrative vehicle for the comic strip: the cheap, staple-bound comic book (Gubern 1974: 48; Kunzle). But this type of comic strips was not the only cause of the development of comic books. According to American comic-book historian Bradford Wright and American comic-book writer-teacher Danny Fingeroth, pulp magazines also played an important role in this content development (just as they had done with comic strips as well), contributing with genre material and pulp heroes, like Tarzan, Buck Rogers, the Shadow, Doc Savage, and Conan (Daniels 13; Fingeroth 2004: 38-40; Wright 2, 3). However, the content origin of comic books followed the same pattern as that of comic strips, since at first it consisted of the humorous reprints of comic strips already published in newspapers, which were given away as advertising premiums to buyers of certain products (Gubern 1974: 49; Kunzle; Wright 2, 3).

While in 1929, as we have seen, the pulps emerged in comic strips, comic books lagged behind not only as regards content but also format. Thus, in that year Dell Publishing Company (later publisher of Walt Disney’s, Warner Brothers’ and others’ popular cartoon characters until the end of the 1950s) launched a tabloid-sized collection of color comics called The Funnies to be sold on newsstands, but sales were not good and it was canceled; and finally, in 1933, Funnies on Parade appeared in the present format of the comic book (Gaines 256; Gubern 1974: 48-49; Rhoades 10; Wright 3, 187-188). It was the already-mentioned American entrepreneur-comics pioneer Max Charles Gaines (and also later founder of EC Comics, the 1950s publishing company that issued such famous
titles as *Tales from the Crypt* and *Mad*, under the direction of his son, William Gaines), who came up with the idea of “folding the tabloid in half to create a sixty-four-page magazine format” for *Funnies on Parade* (Rhoades 10). As American comic-book expert and former publisher of Marvel Comics Shirrel Rhoades states, with Gaines’s invention of the format, *Funnies on Parade* “had all the physical requirements of a ‘standard’ modern-day comic book” (10). Gaines was present in almost all the stages of the comic-book launching, so much so that he deserved an article in the influential American business journal *Forbes* in 1943 (Coma 1979: 115; Von Bernewitz & Grant 32). With the monthly magazine *Famous Funnies* published in 1934, Gaines employed the same formula of reprinting newspaper comic strips, but this time, just as Dell before him, with the intention of putting them for sale on newsstands available to the general public, instead of using them as advertising give-away premiums (Gaines 256; Gubern 1974: 49; Rhoades 11; Von Bernewitz & Grant 32).

In contrast with Dell’s experience, Gaines’s success soon made appear the first original art work, characters and stories in the comic book *New Fun*, and later, *New Comics*, both published by U.S. Army Major-pulp magazine writer Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson in 1935 (his company National Allied Publications was the starting point of DC Comics) (Daniels 23; Gaines 256; Gubern 1974: 49; Rhoades 12-13; Wright 4-5). But returns were not as high as expected, and Wheeler-Nicholson fell increasingly into debt, especially to his distributor, Romanian-born American printing-plant owner-magazine distributor Harry Donenfeld, until in 1937 he had no option but to take Donenfeld on as a partner (“DC”; Rhoades 13-15; Wright 5). Donenfeld’s accountant-business manager
Ukrainian-born American Jack Liebowitz and Wheeler-Nicholson founded a second company, Detective Comics, Inc. (later DC Comics), in order to launch a third new eponymous series (“DC”; Rhoades 15-16; Wright 5). *Detective Comics*, the first themed comic book, marked a new formula and a new direction to the comics industry, finally leaving humor aside and focusing on crime-fighting and action adventure based on pulp fiction and film serials (Fingeroth 2004: 44; Gubern 1974: 49; Wright 5). Thus, this newly-organized comics publishing company established the basic characteristics of comic books as follows: “We’ve got a real editorial policy. All new material — fast-moving adventure stories, 6 to 13 pages long — no serials, but the same strong characters continuing from issue to issue” (qtd. in Von Bernewitz & Grant 32, emphasis in the original).

In 1938 Wheeler-Nicholson was bought out of the company by Donenfeld and Liebowitz, who took charge of distribution and management, respectively (“DC”; Rhoades 15-16; Wright 5). Deciding to launch a fourth publication, Liebowitz came up with the title *Action Comics* and asked his editor American artist-publisher Vincent Sullivan to find some material for it (Fingeroth 2007: 36; Rhoades 16; Wright 7). Superman, which was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster and had unsuccessfully been intended to be sold to syndicates since 1934, was brought to Sullivan’s attention and got eventually published in the first issue of *Action Comics* in 1938 (Fingeroth 2007: 36; Gaines 256; Rhoades 16; Wright 7). It was an immediate success that consolidated the comic-book format, and the formula of the superhero, who transcends all physical and social laws to punish the wicked, was launched to be widely imitated (Frattini & Palmer 182; Kunzle). The publication of Superman was such a momentous event that Wright titles the section
retelling the account, “The Industry That Superman Built” (7), echoing what American artist-editor-publisher of DC Comics Carmine Infantino had eloquently expressed before, “Superman literally created this industry” (qtd. in O’Neil 49); and Rhodes emphasizes the magnitude of the feat by stating, “Arguably, this appearance of Superman in Action Comics #1 was the most significant event in comic book history,” and by labeling this particular instance as one of his milestones in the history of comics (17). This evident importance and our own present study merit a more detailed chronicle of the creation of this character and the eventual fate of his creators in the next section.

The Creation of Superman… and Lois Lane

As Fingeroth observes, “Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster have become figures almost as legendary as their greatest creation, Superman” (2007: 39). It seems now incredible that two adolescents by themselves created such an important enduring character during their high school years. In fact, it took them three attempts to come up with a serious strong heroic character, just before they finished high school in 1934 (Daniels 13-19; Dooley 20; Fingeroth 2007: 40). The first superman was an evil megalomaniac villain with mental superpowers, telepathy and thought control, who wanted to conquer the world, but this apparent take on the mad-scientist topos is in reality a variation on the Frankenstein theme, since this superman was the subject and outcome of an experiment that developed his brain, and not the scientist carrying it out (Daniels 13-14; Rhoades 17). The story was self-published in the fanzine that Siegel and Shuster mimeographed in 1932,
entitled *Science Fiction: The Advance Guard of Future Civilization* (Daniels 12-13; Fingeroth 2007: 36; Rhoades 94).

The second superman was the protagonist of a lost comics story Siegel and Shuster developed in 1933, complete with a cover bearing the title *The Superman: A Science Fiction Story in Cartoons*, the slogan “The Most Astounding Fiction Character of All Time,” and even a 10-cent price value, as the reproduction in American writer-comics expert Les Daniels’s book shows (16). This cover is the only part that remains thanks to Siegel, who saved it from Shuster’s intentional destruction, after thinking that its rejection from a publisher was due to his inadequate art work (Daniels 16-17). According to the authors, this superman was similar to a later character they created for the first issue of *Detective Comics*, called Slam Bradley, who was very strong but lacked both superpowers and a costume (Daniels 16-18, 24).

Finally in 1934, the third and definitive Superman was, according to Siegel and Shuster’s well-known story, the result of a sleepless night when Siegel hit upon the idea of a benign hero but this time with physical instead of mental superpowers, and in the morning, he rushed to discuss it and further shape it with Shuster (Daniels 18; Dooley 28). As Wright puts it, they created “a brilliant twentieth-century variation on a classic American hero type . . . the Western frontier hero, who resolves tensions between the wilderness and civilization while embodying the best virtues of both environments himself” (10). Wright goes on to explain that the change from hero to superhero was demanded “to resolve the tensions of individuals in an increasingly urban, consumer-driven, and anonymous mass society” (10). But although this theory is realistic and
perfectly acceptable, it cannot be forgotten that Superman’s strength can be traced back to the tradition of legendary heroes in every culture, from Jewish Samson to Greek Hercules or Anglo Saxon Beowulf (Daniels 18).

Moreover, for Superman #1, the first comic book devoted to a single original character, Siegel and Shuster reasoned the “science” behind Superman’s powers: a lesser gravitational pull on Earth than on Krypton due to the smaller size of the former, and the closer terrestrial comparison with the strength of ants and the leaps of grasshoppers, which had also appeared in the one-page origin story of the first issue of Action Comics (Daniels 41-42; Siegel & Shuster). We have to remember that, as American comics writer Dennis O’Neil states, “Superman began with rather modest powers and abilities: He could leap over a skyscraper . . .; he couldn’t be hurt by anything less nasty than an exploding shell; he could outrun a locomotive . . .; and he was strong enough to bend steel in his bare hands” (50). These abilities were so impressive in those days that, as we have seen, Siegel and Shuster made use of analogies in the natural world to explain them, but even these formidable abilities were nothing compared to what they were going to become in later years (O’Neil 50). Perhaps, as O’Neil interprets this evolution, the reason originates in the typical American tall-tale tradition, “the yarns build from the extravagant to the preposterous to the silly. . . . Editors and writers had to continually devise new stunts, new powers and new uses for the powers Superman already had, competing with what he had done last month, last year, with what their colleagues were doing” (51).

But Superman’s superpowers by themselves could not have prevented his fading into oblivion, just as many similar characters have done. There has to be more to this
character than these. One possible explanation may be, as we have seen, Superman’s roots in the Western and its powers of assimilation. Yet the nineteenth-century pastoral American dream envisioned by the Western was not relevant to Superman’s creators’ contemporary cityscape (Engle 82-83). Therefore, according to American popular culture scholar Gary Engle, Superman became “an improvement on the Western: an optimistic myth of assimilation but with an urban, technocratic setting” (85). And there are two key components in the Superman concept as originally conceived by Siegel and Shuster for this character to have achieved the repercussion and endurance he has — his status as an immigrant mythically arriving from the sky as a savior (the Mosaic idea of the saved child and the metaphor of the sacrifices immigrant parents make for their children were also included in the origin story on the first page of the first appearance of the superhero), and his dual identity with Clark Kent representing the common man in order to achieve identification with the reader (Daniels 29; Engle 80, 83, 85; Feiffer 13; Fingeroth 2007: 44).

The fact that Superman is the ultimate immigrant speaks directly to the American character, since except for Native Americans, the nation was founded on immigration (Engle 80), and maybe, it is also relevant to many other peoples in the world that have had to leave their land in order to find a better life. Yet the immigration ethos seems somewhat more prevalent in American society for its association with constant movement, “[u]pward mobility, westward migration, Sunbelt relocation — the wisdom in America is that people don’t, can’t, mustn’t end up where they begin” (Engle 81). Engle identifies Superman’s powers as “the comic-book equivalents of ethnic characteristics” (81). He adds that “they protect and preserve the vitality of the foster community in
which he lives in the same way that immigrant ethnicity has sustained American culture linguistically, artistically, economically, politically and spiritually” (Engle 81). In contrast with Eco’s negative evaluation (see Chapter One), Engle states that “[t]he myth of Superman asserts with total confidence and a childlike innocence the value of the immigrant in American culture” (81, emphasis in the original). Eco’s lack of immigration experience and adherence to an ideological interpretation based on the 1950s Superman, a more conservative character than the one originally conceived by Siegel and Shuster, as we will see below, may not have let him perceive this aspect of the myth.

As descendants from Jewish immigrants, Siegel and Shuster, consciously or unconsciously, developed a separate literary tradition —that of the superhero— that addressed the theme of immigrant assimilation in terms closer to their personal experience (Engle 83). In their context, there were two options: maintaining the old cultural ways or becoming absorbed by the mainstream culture (Engle 83). Both were equally damming for the people involved. While the former implied “isolation in ghettos, confrontation with a prejudiced mainstream culture, second-class social status and impoverishment,” the latter meant “a loss of the religious, linguistic, even culinary traditions that provided a foundation for psychological well-being” (Engle 83). For Jews abandoning their roots may be a distinctly devastating event “because of the fundamental role played by history in Jewish culture” (Engle 83). At the time Superman was born, there was no symbolic representation open to Jewish (or other origin, for that matter) immigrants to reject these either-or possibilities. As Engle puts it, “Even in the comics, a medium intimately connected with immigrant culture, there was no image that presented
a blending of identities in the assimilation process in a way that stressed pride, self-confidence, integrity and psychological well-being. None, that is, until Superman” (85).

Therefore, more than the straightforward fact that Superman is an immigrant what “makes the myth of Superman so appealing to an immigrant sensibility” is the double identity, which “addresses in dramatic terms the theme of cultural assimilation” (Engle 82, emphasis in the original). As Engle points out, “The brilliant stroke in the conception of Superman — the *sine [sic] quä non* that makes the whole myth work — is the fact that he has two identities” (Engle 85, emphasis in the original). Thus, the dual identity is a deeper and more universal symbol that transcends the pedestrian interpretation of mere reader identification (Weinstein 24). And it goes even beyond the undoubtedly interesting interpretation that a second identity may be important to all of us, since “[w]e all want to think there is greatness in ourselves that the world cannot see, or that we cannot allow it to see, that the facades we display in everyday life are just that — masks that society forces us to wear” (Fingeroth 2007: 49).

For immigrants looking for figures that can provide the ideal of assimilation into the new culture without forsaking their roots, the myth of Superman fits the bill without doubt, because of the important addition of the dual identity. As Engle notes,

Clark Kent is the clearest stereotype of a self-effacing, hesitant, doubting, middle-class weakling ever invented. He is the epitome of visible invisibility, someone whose extraordinary ordinariness makes him disappear in a crowd. In a phrase, he is the consummate figure of total cultural assimilation, and significantly, he is not real. Implicit in this is the
notion that mainstream cultural norms, however useful, are illusions. Though a disguise, Kent is necessary for the myth to work. This uniquely American hero has two identities, one based on where he comes from in life’s journey, one on where he’s [sic] going. One is real, one an illusion, and both are necessary for the myth of balance in the assimilation process to be complete. (85)

Furthermore, Fingeroth agrees with Engle that for any immigrant, “the dual identity becomes the way to either bridge to, or wall off from, the self we were in the old country. It holds out the possibility that we can invent the new self we hope to become in this new world in which we have a reasonable amount of freedom to define who and what we are” (2007: 49). However, this is even more important for “Jewish immigrant families like those from which Siegel and Shuster came” (Fingeroth 2007: 49). As Fingeroth emphatically asserts, for them “the dual identity was more than a convenience. When your history tells you that you can be murdered because of who your parents happened to be, the freedom provided by being able to blend into the mainstream culture is essential to survival” (2007: 49).

Apart from Superman’s superpowers, his condition as an immigrant from another planet, and his dual identity, Siegel and Shuster decided to give him a primary-color costume (Daniels 18-19; Rhoades 18). Shuster remembered suggesting this visually emblematic attire: “Let’s put him in this kind of costume, . . . and let’s give him a big S on his chest, and a cape, make him as colorful as we can and as distinctive as we can” (qtd. in Daniels 18, emphasis in the original). The costume reminds of circus performers of
yesteryear—not only the usually cited acrobat, but also the almost forgotten strongman with shorts worn over a contrasting bodysuit (Daniels 18; “Superman”). But it was not the sight of a “grown man dashing about in tights” and a cape that made Superman outlandish to its adult public, since that type of wardrobe was customarily worn by the likes of Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon in future or alien contexts (Dooley 31). Rather “Siegel and Shuster’s brilliant innovation—which seems ironically to have made their creation just a little too exotic for their contemporaries—was to make their hero an honest-to-God extraterrestrial and to set his wonderful adventures on the streets of a contemporary American city” (Dooley 31, emphasis in the original). Never mind his ordinary American urban backdrop, his brightly colorful outfit, or his showy superhuman qualities, “the character touched off something big. Not only did it change the face of 1930s American popular culture, it changed the face of popular culture around the world. Superman became the model that all adventure heroes would either adhere to, rebel against, or comment on, to the present day, and will likely continue to into the foreseeable future” (Fingeroth 2007: 50).

So far we have mentioned all of Siegel and Shuster’s components of their original conception of Superman, except for one, Lois Lane: “his flamboyant cape and costume, his otherworldly origins, his dual identity as the mild-mannered reporter, and the unattainable Lois . . . . Thus was born one of the most famous and touching love triangles in all of American literature, American folklore, anyway” (Dooley 28). According to longtime American DC editor E. Nelson Bridwell, this “was a maddening romantic triangle, wherein Clark Kent, reporter for the Daily Planet, fell in love with coworker Lois Lane,
who, it seemed, had eyes only for Clark’s secret identity as Superman! How perplexing! Clark was his own competition for Lois’ affections, his own chief rival!” (qtd. in Rhoades 17).

Scholars and pundits wondered about the model for Lois Lane, since it was not so common in the 1930s to find such an assertive, and from our contemporary view, proto-feminist female character (Wright 9). Nevertheless, there were a few similar characters in films, such as Rosalind Russell playing a newspaper reporter opposite Cary Grant in the film *His Girl Friday*, but according to Joanne Carter —Siegel’s wife and previous artist’s model for Shuster, who hired her years before her marriage to pose for drawings of Lois Lane—, Siegel indeed got ideas from the first performer of the 1930s film serial character Torchy Blane (Daniels 20-22). Carter explained that “[h]er name was Glenda Farrell and she played a girl reporter, very fast-talking, and she always got the story” (qtd. in Daniels 20).

Apart from the movies, a source of inspiration for Lois Lane might have come from closer encounters with girls in Siegel and Shuster’s high school, and specifically from the collaborators to their weekly high school newspaper *The Glenville Torch*, where they used to contribute illustrated stories (Daniels 11; Dooley 22; Weinstein 21). For instance, American writer Dennis Dooley speculates that “[i]t seems likely that at least some aspects of the character were based on one or two prominent female reporters connected with *The Torch*” (28). In particular, Martha Yablonsky, one of Siegel’s fellow journalists may be “at least in part, the original model for Lois Lane, the archetypal ambitious, hard-
working female reporter,” since she “seems to have been writing practically half the paper” (Dooley 22).

However, Siegel and Shuster’s fellow student named Lois Amster reputedly “gave her name and something of her personality to her comics counterpart” (Daniels 19). “She was very bright — and one of those disturbingly self-assured girls who make their male contemporaries uneasy by dating older fellows. . . . She appears to have been the sort of young woman high school boys lie awake brooding about or trying to get up the courage to ask for a date” (Dooley 29). The idea that Amster was, if not the total source, at the very least some kind of muse to the duo of cartoonists in the creation of the comics female reporter was confirmed in a 1970s interview when Shuster confessed that he “had a crush” on her, and he added, “She’s a grandmother now in Cleveland, . . . but I don’t think she has any idea that she was the inspiration for Lois Lane” (qtd. in Dooley 30).

From a 1930s male perspective, Lois Lane may not have been an ideal female character: “While physically attractive and spunk, she put her career ahead of romance with the kind but boring Clark Kent and pined after Superman, whom she could never possess” (Wright 9). And while Clark Kent may be attracted to her, Superman “was too strong and self-assured to succumb to the allure of a beautiful woman” (Wright 9). As Siegel himself pointed out, “I enjoyed the fact that he wasn’t that affected by all their [women’s] admiration,” reasoning that Superman “would be so advanced that he would be invulnerable in other ways than physical” (qtd. in Dooley 30). Lois Lane’s separate reactions to Superman and Clark Kent were intended by Siegel as a joke on her (Daniels 20), hence a wink to the male reader. Taken at face value from a contemporary
perspective, this might seem the “misogynistic fantasy of a disappointed male . . . [Yet] Lois Lane was redeemed by many positive qualities, including courage, independence, and ambition” (Daniels 20).

Now with all the parts of their creation in place, Siegel and Shuster tried to get Superman published, as we have mentioned, first as a newspaper strip, but “the middle-aged men who ran the newspaper syndicates failed to see the appeal of Superman” (Wright 7), so “nobody in a position of power could see much potential in the character” (Daniels 22). Therefore, reserving Superman for a more propitious opportunity, they started freelancing for the new comic-book publishers (Wright 7). In 1935 they sold single-page installments of the period pieces “Henri Duval of France, Famed Soldier of Fortune” and the supernatural mysteries “Dr. Occult, the Ghost Detective” to Wheeler-Nicholson for his titles *New Fun* and *More Fun Comics*, and in 1936 they supplied FBI stories entitled “Federal Men” for *New Comics* (Daniels 23, 25). In 1937 *Detective Comics* #1 appeared, now, as we have seen, with Donenfeld and Liebowitz partnering with Wheeler-Nicholson, and Siegel and Shuster’s contribution to the comic book was “Slam Bradley,” a strongman’s adventure, “which they always described as close to their second version of Superman, the one Shuster had burned when it failed to sell” (Daniels 26).

As noted earlier, the Superman comics story had suffered a series of rejections from newspaper syndicates since 1934, and once more a 1937 letter told Siegel and Shuster that the strip was “attractive because of its freshness and naïveté,” but it was “still a rather immature piece of work,” implying that it was not appropriate for an adult newspaper readership (qtd. in Daniels 26). The rejection “was not quite as shortsighted as
it now seems, since indeed it would be kids who eventually turned Superman into a hit” (Daniels 26). In spite of all these rejections, still hopeful, Siegel and Shuster gave Superman to Gaines—who was associated with both a syndicate and the printing house doing all of Wheeler-Nicholson’s comic books—for a chance of getting it published by his syndicate (Daniels 26, 30). What followed seems an entanglement of sorts which eventually got “the painstakingly perfected version of Superman” published (Daniels 30, 31). Thus, when Liebowitz asked Gaines for a comics story for their new series Action Comics, Gaines, prompted by his young American editor Sheldon Mayer, asked Siegel and Shuster, who had already been freelancing for Wheeler-Nicholson, now gone from the partnership, permission to offer the Superman strip (Daniels 30; Rhoades 28). Siegel and Shuster believed that through the publication in comic books, they may get to newspaper syndication; in this way, once they agreed to the offer and accepted the rate of ten dollars per page, the above-mentioned Detective Comics and Action Comics editor Vincent Sullivan asked them to put the comic strip into a thirteen-page comic-book format (Daniels 30-31; Wright 7). “As part of the deal, they signed a standard release form giving sole copyright ownership of their idea to the company. . . . So they sold Superman to DC for $130 and went to work on his first comic book adventure” (Wright 7, 9).

There is no doubt that only Siegel and Shuster believed in Superman at the time: Liebowitz said that the publication was “a pure accident,” and Sullivan merely thought it was “interesting” (qtd. in Daniels 35). For the publishers, the first Superman story was basically an experiment, since they did not give it any publicity or promotion; consequently, “it was actually the ordinary reader who made the character a star”
Siegel and Shuster’s stories were compelling for their readers because they dealt with “the social problems of the day. The thirteen pages of Superman’s adventures in *Action Comics #1* include episodes centered on unjust imprisonment, spousal abuse, and corrupt government officials” (Daniels 35). As Siegel explained, “I just wrote stories that I enjoyed, and I was hopeful that if I enjoyed it then other people would” (qtd. in Daniels 35). And this first Superman was not the “rather stiff and morally upright character” that he was going to become later on; instead, he was originally conceived as “a tough and cynical wise guy,” who cracked down on crime with great gusto (Wright 9).

Once they realized that their character had become extremely popular, Siegel and Shuster tried to change their arrangement with the company, but at the time, the response they got was that they were “grossly exaggerating the importance of Superman” (qtd. in Dooley 33, emphasis in the original). However, 1939 saw the first *Superman* comic-book title, which was soon selling records of 1.3 million copies bimonthly, in addition to *Action Comics* with only one Superman story usually selling about 900,000 copies, at a time when other successful comic-book titles might sell between 200,000 and 400,000 copies per issue (Dooley 32; Rhoades 28-29). But Superman popularity did not stop at comic books. Also in 1939 he was finally nationally syndicated appearing in both a black-and-white daily strip and a color Sunday page (Daniels 37). And the media expansion continued in the following years. A 15-minute radio serial started airing in 1940, Polish-born American animator Max Fleischer’s exceptional colored animated shorts were produced between 1941 and 1943, and the first novel adaptation of a comic-book
character, *The Adventures of Superman* by American writer George Lowther, was published in 1942 ("Adventures"; Dooley 32).

By 1941 not only was Superman published in 230 American newspapers with an estimated circulation of 25 million, but he was also exported around the world, and the character spawned a myriad of toys and related products (Dooley 33). While all this licensing implied the astonishing amount of almost $1.5 million in 1940 and 1941 for one of Donenfeld’s companies, because of their agreement, Siegel and Shuster only received payments for writing and drawing the comic-book pages and newspaper strips (Daniels 41; Dooley 33). Thus, although Superman was their brainchild, they had to negotiate for financial and creative participation in his development (Daniels 41). When the publication of the newspaper strip started, Donenfeld had agreed “to let them do a regular strip for syndication for a share of the net if they would agree to work exclusively for him for the next ten years at $35 a page” (Dooley 33). In spite of their protests, they had little choice since Donenfeld had all the rights to Superman (Dooley 33).

As their income started declining while the character continued bringing in millions in profit for the company, in 1947 Siegel and Shuster decided to take their chances and tried to regain the rights to Superman in court (Dooley 33). Needless to say, the outcome was not favorable. Whereas “[t]hey were awarded $100,000 in compensation for Superboy” —a new character developed by DC Comics while Siegel was in the army—, “the court denied their claim to ownership of Superman” (Dooley 33). Soon after this risky move, when their ten-year contract with Donenfeld expired, they were obviously
summarily dismissed, and this was the starting point of deeply disappointing years of futile legal attempts to reestablish their rights over Superman (Dooley 33, 34).

In the early 1960s due to the two cartoonists’ financial difficulties, Siegel’s wife interceded with DC Comics on behalf of them in order to find them work (Daniels 107; Dooley 34). Thus, Siegel was rehired “as an anonymous writer for a reported salary of $20,000 and Shuster, who was then all but legally blind, for $7,500” (Dooley 34). But the low salaries in contrast with the company’s staggering profits, the lack of credit for their current work, and even more of a sore point, the lack of acknowledgement for their original creation, since their names no longer appeared in the Superman stories, made them appeal once again unsuccessfully to the courts of justice, and as expected, what followed was a new break with DC Comics (Dooley 34). In 1963 “Siegel went to work as a mailroom clerk at $7,000 a year and Shuster was taken in by his brother Bern. But the two never surrendered their belief that Superman rightfully belonged to them” (Dooley 34).

When in 1975 Siegel and Shuster learned that the multimillion film Superman: The Movie was in the making, they started a new media campaign to remind the public of their situation as regards their creation (Daniels 139; Dooley 34). Fortunately, two concomitant events helped them in their effort. On the one hand, two successful American comics creators—Neal Adams and Jerry Robinson—supported them in their endeavor, and on the other hand, a new generation of executives at DC Comics was more open to help Superman creators, since after all, several court rulings over the years had confirmed the company’s rights to the comics character (Daniels 139; Dooley 34; Rhoades 111). As DC Comics executive vice president Jay Emmett put it, “We are not indifferent to their plight,
and we intend to do something about it. Legally, nothing has to be done. Morally, I think something should be done” (qtd. in Daniels 139). Moreover, trying to avoid adverse publicity over the new film, “Warner Communications, which now owned DC Comics, at length offered — in exchange for Siegel and Shuster’s agreeing to suspend hostilities — to give them each $20,000 a year for life along with medical coverage for themselves and their families and a promise, in the event of their deaths, to take care of Siegel’s wife and Shuster’s brother” (Dooley 34). Thus, Siegel and Shuster, now in their sixties and not in good health, finally desisted in their demand for legal ownership of Superman, but they not only received life pensions, but also something that was more than fair — their names were restored as creators of Superman (Daniels 139; Dooley 34; Rhoades 111). Shuster died in 1992 and Siegel died in 1996, but Shuster’s nephew, legal heir to his estate, and Siegel’s wife and daughter continued the legal battle to receive copyright compensation not only for Superman but also for Superboy (“Superman”). They received some compensation, but the latest 2013 ruling “effectively ensured DC Comics’ sole copyright to Superman” (“Superman”).

**DC Comics**

Let us recapitulate the first years of the nascent company and with it the real reason why the comic-book industry started flourishing. We have described how Wheeler-Nicholson founded the company National Allied Publications — which can be seen as a proto-DC Comics —, and how through his lack of business acumen Donenfeld and Liebowitz stepped in and eventually took over the company. Just as the medium
itself, under Wheeler-Nicholson, this first company started with humorous comics, and then, it branched out to the actual genre that was going to forward the development of the industry with its sister company Detective Comics, Inc. This publishing company supported not only its eponymous title *Detective Comics* but also the pivotal *Action Comics* which, with its publication of Superman, achieved success for the company, but even more importantly, it made the American comic-book industry thrive.

In 1940 Liebowitz selected Gaines to start a third company called All-American Comics, so as not to burden Detective Comics with more titles (Rhoades 28). In the same year, Batman debuted in *Detective Comics*, but All-American Comics would eventually boast many famous characters, such as the Flash, the Green Lantern, Hawkman, and “Wonder Woman, the first major female superhero” (Rhoades 28). Liebowitz had chosen Gaines as a partner “not just because he had invented the format of the modern comic book, but also because it had been Gaines’s editor Sheldon Mayer who suggested that DC publish Superman” (Rhoades 28). “In 1944 Liebowitz merged all the companies into a single corporate entity, National Periodical Publications, which was a direct precursor of today’s DC Comics and became publicly traded on the stock market in 1961” (Rhoades 28). However, in spite of this official corporate name, from 1940 onwards the company used the brand “Superman-DC,” and it “became known colloquially as DC Comics for years before the official adoption of that name in 1977” (“DC”).

When Gaines decided to sell all his shares of the All-American Comics-Detective Comics partnership in 1945, he took with him the rights of titles specializing on history, science, and the Bible, such as *Picture Stories from the Bible* and *Picture Stories from
World History, in order to found the high-minded publishing company EC Comics, abbreviation of Educational Comics, reflecting his firm belief in the educational value of comic books (Rhoades 45; Von Bernewitz & Grant 10). Although this aspect of EC Comics has been long forgotten, the company gained recognition in the history of comics, as we have already mentioned, because under Gaines’s son William Gaines, EC Comics became Entertaining Comics, and published such memorable titles as Tales from the Crypt and Mad. In the 1960s, this latter magazine came to be under the aegis of the same company that bought DC Comics, Kinney National Company, a forerunner of the present Time Warner multinational media corporation, the parent company of Warner Brothers, which in 2010 launched DC Entertainment with three subsidiaries—DC Comics, publisher of mainstream comics, Vertigo, an imprint for graphic novels and mature series, and the satirical Mad magazine (Daniels 132; DC; “Mad”; Rhoades 93; “Time”).

DC’s Editorial Director Whitney Ellsworth (1940-1950)

When DC Comics editor Vincent Sullivan left the company in 1940, American comic-book editor Whitney Ellsworth, who had worked under Wheeler-Nicholson, became editorial director, and from this position, he “is credited with helping to define the style and subjects of the American comic book” (Daniels 41). Before Ellsworth, some Superman stories showed the superhero callously punishing villains, sometimes with such force that a deadly outcome was implied (Daniels 41, 42). Therefore, Ellsworth institutionalized “a proper code of conduct for Superman” (Daniels 41). With his tight editorial control, Superman was “forbidden to use his powers to kill anyone, even a villain” (Daniels 42). So
many restrictions were in place that by 1941 Siegel’s scripts needed Ellsworth’s approval before DC artists could work on them (Daniels 63).

In order to help Ellsworth with the increasing number of comic books, the company hired American pulp editor Mort Weisinger as a managing editor (Daniels 63). Coming from the science-fiction fandom, just as Siegel did, Weisinger started his career by editing pulps (Daniels 63). However, no sooner had he started working at DC Comics than he was drafted for World War II, and thus, he was replaced by a colleague of his, American pulp editor Jack Schiff (Daniels 63). Nevertheless, after the war, the company had grown so much that both Weisinger and Schiff were needed to deal with the even larger number of comic books (Daniels 63).

With the war, in spite of the rationing programs, the comic-book business boomed, and comics improved their public image, since the conflict made the industry’s, the government’s, and the public’s views coincide (Rhoades 39; Wright 31, 33, 54). Specifically, World War II made the superhero genre particularly popular, maybe because, as Rhoades puts it, “people needed that kind of inspirational archetype” (39). By showing superheroes beating the Axis, the comic book became “a key weapon in the country’s propaganda arsenal during the war” (Rhoades 40). Moreover, “comics gained in popularity during the war as inexpensive, portable, easy-to-read stories about good triumphing over evil” (Rhoades 39).
Superman's Editor Mort Weisinger (1950-1970)

In the late 1940s Ellsworth served as a consultant for the adaptation of the comic-book superhero to the fifteen-part film serial Superman (Daniels 76; “Superman”). In 1950 Ellsworth still remained in Hollywood, this time working on a film that was also a pilot for the 1950s Adventures of Superman television series, starring George Reeves (Daniels 76, 95; Rhoades 71; “Superman”). Ellsworth’s absence from his position as editorial director at DC Comics implied that Weisinger would assume total control over Superman’s destiny in comic books for the next twenty years (Daniels 76, 95).

While these changes were taking place in DC Comics, the comic-book industry as a whole saw its first slump after World War II with the declining popularity of superheroes (Daniels 70). Wright shows it in numbers when he states that “[d]uring the war over 90 percent of the comic books published by DC had featured superheroes, but by the end of the war, just over half of them did so” (57). This means that important original characters like Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman continued to fare well, but the postwar market made wartime favorites like Green Lantern and the Flash disappear altogether from the newsstands (Rhoades 47; Wright 57-58). Wright explains that lacking “the crusading spirit of the New Deal and World War II, superheroes seemed directionless and even irrelevant now that those victories had been won” (59). But the industry soon recovered by experimenting with a diversification of genres from jungle queens to crime and horror, which would increase the popularity of comic books themselves, but would open the door to controversy (Daniels 131; Rhoades 47; Wright 59, 72-84), a development that will be explored in the next section.
Wright appropriately interprets this decline of superheroes as a growth in conservatism both in the postwar public mood and in the editorial policies of comic-book publishers (59). In the case of DC Comics, for instance, its postwar editorial direction “increasingly de-emphasized social commentary in favor of light-hearted juvenile fantasy” (Wright 59). Even if DC Comics maintained his classic roster of superheroes, they no longer represented the ideals of the 1930s and 1940s, and among them, “[n]o superhero retreated further from his original premise than Superman” (Wright 60). Superman’s ideological shift during this period is summarized by Wright: “Having launched his career as a crusading champion of social injustice and a militant antifascist, by the end of the war Superman had assumed his befitting role as the conservative elder statesman among comic book heroes, above the political and social concerns of the day” (60). It was Weisinger who created “a fantastic mythos that owed less and less to any standard of reality” (Wright 60). As O’Neil puts it, “As Superman became more and more godlike, he had less and less to do with the problems of ordinary people” (52). Thus, while “the original series created by Siegel and Shuster had been a modern social fantasy, the Weisinger series amounted to a modern fairy tale” (Wright 61).

Therefore, Weisinger’s “fairy tale” was populated with new concepts and characters that were constantly introduced during this period (Daniels 102). As he remarked, “I would bring out a new element every six months, . . . to keep the enraptured kids who were our audience involved” (qtd. in Daniels 103). If the new idea was successful, it would be transferred to other titles, and this can be considered the beginnings of a more unified DC Universe (Daniels 102). Instead of presenting
independent stories, the usual format since the advent of comic books, the Superman comics started to connect characters within different stories, and hence becoming most rewarding for the faithful fans (Daniels 103).

Some of Weisinger’s new ideas may be perceived as innocuous, such as the Fortress of Solitude, an Arctic hideout where the superhero could be at home, but others undermined the very essence of Siegel and Shuster’s conception of Superman as the last survivor of Krypton. A case in point is the miniaturized Kryptonian city of Kandor, which had been shrunk by the interplanetary villain Brainiac (Daniels 103-104; Wright 60). But a more serious example of this tendency was the debut of Supergirl in 1959, Superman’s cousin and a refugee in a rocket who came from Argos, a Kryptonian city floating in space (Daniels 104; “Supergirl”). And what can be considered as a more ludicrous tone in Weisinger’s innovations is the introduction of a long list of super-animals: some Kryptonian in origin, but also a supernatural creature, distorting the science fiction world of Superman by the intrusion of spurious magic, and a last one acquiring powers through exposure to a new mineral — kryptonite (Daniels 104, 106). The different varieties of kryptonite became contrivances to add interest to stories (Daniels 106). Among them was the well-known deadly green kryptonite, but the unpredictable red kryptonite was the most useful tool for Weisinger to present unexpected stories (Daniels 106). “I enjoyed surprising the readers,” he said (qtd. in Daniels 106). Nevertheless, Weisinger’s program of novelties was worthwhile for DC Comics, because with his strategy “the Superman comic books were again the industry’s best-sellers” (Daniels 104).
Weisinger not only created new characters and concepts, but also increased the number of comic books in the Superman line. In the early 1950s there were three comics featuring the adult superhero: Action Comics, Superman, and World’s Finest Comics, and two featuring the younger character: Adventure Comics and Superboy (Daniels 99). Taking into account the popularity of the television series Adventures of Superman and the amusing portrayal of the cub reporter Jimmy Olsen, Weisinger started his expansion of the Superman series with Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen, which successfully ran for twenty years from 1954 to 1974 (Daniels 99). Moreover, Weisinger also gave Lois Lane her own series with Superman’s Girlfriend Lois Lane, which began in 1958 and lasted for sixteen years (Daniels 100). According to Weisinger, “The management protested that the characters weren’t strong enough and they’d never go. But I had a gut feeling, . . . and I had talked to kids” (qtd. in Daniels 102). This direct contact with the readership was achieved through the letter column “Metropolis Mailbag” (Daniels 102).

**McCarthyism and DC Comics**

Under Weisinger’s direction Superman was flourishing although, as noted earlier, other superheroes were no faring so well (Daniels 131). However, with the great variety of titles addressing every genre from romance to westerns “targeted toward almost every segment of the population, American comic books achieved peak sales in 1953, with an estimated 70 million copies appearing every month, but they were about to take a fall” (Daniels 131). And that fall was the consequence of the policies adopted during the 1950s McCarthyist period in the United States.
We should not forget that the 1950s is the time of that amazing period in American history of the “witch hunt,” when Americans became “obsessed with the idea of communist infiltration, espionage and betrayal” (Hodgson 257). The obsession originally started in the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in 1947, but became fanaticized to extreme levels since 1950 by notorious Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy (Coma 1984: 17). Films, newspapers, and magazines caught the spirit, warning of “a red under every bed” (Our Times 377). The persecutions are well known and documented, both popularly and academically, especially in connection with Hollywood and the film industry, but they have been relegated almost to oblivion in connection with the comic-book industry by mainstream public and academia, without realizing that they also determined the evolution of comics (Coma 1984: 17; Our Times 349).

It is important to remember that, unfortunately, McCarthyism was not the result of a few zealots in the American government; on the contrary, it was indeed supported extensively by American public opinion that had succumbed to a kind of collective paranoia, as we have already stated, by the conditions involving this early period of the Cold War (Coma 1984: 48). In cases such as comic books, then, it was not McCarthy himself who started the vicious crusade, but it was initiated concurrently with his own actions by cohorts who shared his reactionary ideas against individual liberties and freedom of expression (Coma 1984: 48). McCarthyism’s classical “tools were innuendo, hysteria, and ad hominem attacks” (Our Times 405). And it put them to use in the comics milieu with the help of the opportunistic book The Seduction of the Innocent by German-born American psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, which linked comics to juvenile delinquency,
a connection that was never scientifically proven, but nevertheless, profoundly affected American public opinion (Coma 1984: 49-50; Gubern 1974: 78; Rhoades 58; Von Bernewitz & Grant 10). As Wright puts it, “Pompous, polemical, and sensational, it aimed to impress a popular audience with professional expertise and moral outrage. . . . Yet Wertham failed to document any of his evidence, and he provided no footnotes or bibliography to verify his research” (157-158).

In general, Wertham asserted that children “imitated crimes committed in comic books, and that such stories corrupted the morals of youth. He felt that juvenile delinquency had increased in direct proportion to the spread of comic books among children” (Rhoades 58). Perhaps more than anything else what showed Wertham’s lack of real understanding of comic books was his indictment of anti-Semitic attitudes in their stories, disregarding who the original publishers, editors, writers, and artists were behind the whole industry, as can be attested by this direct quotation from his book: “Comic books read with glee by many children, including very young ones, teach the props of anti-Semitism” (102). What is more, as ridiculous as may sound when one studies the origin and ideas behind Superman and his creators, in his book Wertham accuses Superman of being a Fascist and relates the “S” emblem of his uniform to the infamous S.S. Nazi organization (34).

Another clearly disproven charge against the superhero has to do with Superman being an offshoot of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s superman (Wertham 15). According to Wertham, Superman fulfills “the Nietzsche-Nazi myth of the exceptional man who is beyond good and evil” (97), and he expands his views about the superhero stating
that in “the superman ideology: the stronger dominates the smaller and weaker” (88).

This is not the place to discuss the fact that many experts have rejected the notion that Nazism was the outgrowth of Nietzsche’s thought—suffice to quote British rabbi-scholar Simcha Weinstein in his book about superheroes and Jewish culture:

Hitler’s “master race” ideology is often mistakenly associated with philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of the *ubermensch*, or “superman.” Nietzsche believed that religion and traditional values made men [or women] weak. Only by overcoming such influences and determining values of his [or her] own, said Nietzsche, could man [or woman] realize his [or her] full potential. After his death, his views were increasingly linked directly to Nazi philosophy. (25, emphasis in the original)

Moreover, in his enlightening article “Is Superman a superman?,” British writer-literature professor Adam Roberts gives us a taste of Nietzsche’s philosophy in order to understand the differences between “Nietzsche’s superman and the comic-book version” (123). He obviously concludes that they are different and that there was no evidence that Siegel and Shuster were especially interested in Nietzsche’s thought (Roberts 123). But Roberts finds a more interesting aspect in which not only Superman but all comic books may embody Nietzsche’s conception (123). According to Roberts’s interpretation, comics transcend the nineteenth-century ideals of the novel as “high” art (123-124). As he puts it, “This is how Superman is a superman. Not that he was Siegel and Shuster’s slavish translation of Nietzsche’s ideas into comic-book form (for clearly he wasn’t). But that he, and all the other Higher Men, and Higher Women, of the comics world, smashed the old pieties and
old certainties of how Great Art is made. They overcame the stifling aesthetic certainties and made something new” (Roberts 124).

Following Wertham’s accusations, Tennessee senator Estes Kefauver’s Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency decided to investigate comic books as contributing factors to juvenile crime (Rhoades 61; Wright 165). But other politicians and moral crusaders extended this charge, and “(without any basis of evidence) blamed comic books as a cause of crime, juvenile delinquency, drug use, and poor grades” (Rhoades 61). Publicity ran like wildfire, and even the famous Reader’s Digest and Ladies’ Home Journal, which were household props in the 1950s, printed sections of Wertham’s book scaring parents out of their wits (Rhoades 58). Therefore, parents, teachers, and other school educational groups took to extremes, and “held public comic book burnings, . . . [while] some cities actually banned comic books” (Rhoades 61). The final report issued by the committee exonerated comics from causing juvenile crime, but its recommendations amounted to a threat of government censorship (Rhoades 63). Accordingly, in the midst of a very polemical climate, the Comics Magazine Association of America, founded in 1953, created a moral code in 1954, which was basically some obligatory self-censorship rules for the members, just as the Hays Code in 1930 had been for the Hollywood industry (Gubern 1974: 79). Examples of the rules of the comics code are “No comic shall use the word horror or terror in its title,” and “Policemen, judges, government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority” (qtd. in Von Bernewitz & Grant 95). Soon a Comics Code Seal of Approval was printed on the cover of almost all comic books on newsstands (Rhoades 63).
Actually, the heart of the matter of the comics controversy in the 1950s was that comic books had never had the conservative control of newspapers and syndicates, a circumstance that allowed for more boldness in topics and situations, also stimulated by the almost absence of advertising and the need to compete in the market to pay for costs (Gubern 1974: 78-79). With a complaining tone, Wertham himself confirms this lack of restrictions on comic books when he compares them with comics appearing in the press: “Newspaper comic strips function under severe censorship exercised by some 1,500 newspaper editors of the country . . . . For comic books there exists no such censorship by an outside agency” (14-15). As a consequence, in 1955 a Newspaper Comics Council was instituted with the objective of separating newspaper production from comic books, so as not to come under the same type of attack (Gubern 1974: 79). As comic books were one of the types of the entertainment preferred the most by the young in the 1950s, adults found this absence of censorship alarming, but once young people focused their interest towards another type of entertainment, parents also redirected their criticism, just as it happened with rock and roll (Daniels 131), and more recently with video games, as can be attested in Oscar-winning documentary *Bowling for Columbine* by American filmmaker Michael Moore. However, by the time accusations against comics subsided in the late 1950s, many comic-book publishers had already gone bankrupt, distribution had come to a virtual standstill, and many comic books had disappeared altogether from newsstands (Daniels 131).

In any case, DC Comics was among the few publishers that survived the McCarthyist onslaught on the comics industry, and in 1956 it was American comic-book
editor Julius Schwartz who revitalized the company and started a new stage in its history by introducing new versions of the Flash, Green Lantern, and others, hence reestablishing the superhero genre as the mainstay of the industry, just as a decade earlier (Daniels 131; Rhoades 70, 100). Daniels links these events to Weisinger’s new concepts and characters discussed in the previous section: “No doubt the success of Schwartz’s new wave helped inspire his friend Mort Weisinger to introduce some of [his] innovations” (132). Being under Weisinger’s direction, Superman remained out of reach until his retirement in 1970, and it was only then that Schwartz could have a try at the superhero’s revamping, which will be discussed in the next section.

In Chapter One, we mentioned that in the 1960s Marvel Comics started a new kind of superhero, “a more vulnerable character with human failings —the same traits teenagers could identify with!” (Rhoades 79). Meanwhile, DC Comics maintained its safe conservative approach of archetypal superheroes, and in such roles, they were all so unselfish that their actions were only motivated by the ideal of protecting humanity, hence all reflecting the same personality (Rhoades 87; Wright 185). Wright specifically refers to Superman as “a citizen of the world who dutifully respected all established authorities” (184). He also mentions Superman’s obsession to obey the law to such extent that a whole 1962 story was based on the idea of “The Day Superman Broke the Law” (Wright 184, 317). As a result of this stagnancy, DC Comics sales fell so much that in 1967 Liebowitz and the Donenfeld family (Harry Donenfeld had died in 1965) sold their share to Kinney National Company, the corporation which eventually turned into the present-day conglomerate Time Warner (Daniels 132; Rhoades 91, 93). As noted earlier, today DC
Comics is part of the Warner Brothers division of Time Warner, the largest media company in the world (Rhoades 93; “Time”). In spite of the sale, however, Liebowitz stayed on a few more years directing the company, but changes in management had been in motion since 1967 (Daniels 132). When retirement came along for Liebowitz, one of his last decisions was to appoint the already-mentioned comics artist Carmine Infantino as editorial director, who “broke precedent by selecting several artists [like himself] to serve as editors, but when it came to Superman he turned to Schwartz” (Daniels 132).

**Superman’s editor Julius Schwartz (1970-1985)**

As already stated, when Weisinger retired from DC Comics in 1970, he was succeeded as the character’s editor by Schwartz, whose radical changes would reverse many of Weisinger’s gimmicks (Daniels 115, 116, 132). No sooner was Schwartz appointed by Infantino than he clearly listed his intentions: “I want to get rid of all the kryptonite. I want to get rid of all the robots that are used to get him out of situations. And I’m sick and tired of that stupid suit Clark Kent wears all the time. I want to give him more up-to-date clothes” (qtd. in Daniels 132-133). Among his most extreme alterations to the character was the idea of updating Clark Kent’s classical job as a reporter: “And maybe the most important thing I want to do is take him out of the *Daily Planet* and put him into television. . . . Our readers are not that familiar with newspapers. Most of them get their news on television, and I think it’s high time after all these years” (qtd. in Daniels 133).
With DC Comics management’s acquiescence to the project, Schwartz chose the above-mentioned comics writer Dennis O’Neil as the head writer to develop the planned modifications for Superman (Daniels 133). Earlier in 1969 O’Neil and artist Neal Adams had successfully revitalized the *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* series by immersing these “superheroes in the social and political issues of the times: racism, poverty, political corruption, the ‘generation gap,’ the plight of Native Americans, pollution, overpopulation, and religious cults” (Wright 227). But as mentioned above, for the company’s flagship character, modifications would be more modest, specifically focusing on Weisinger’s contrivances. For instance, O’Neil recalls discussions about reducing Superman’s powers: “One of the first things Julie [Schwartz] and I agreed on was the story line that would scale him back almost to what Jerry [Siegel] and Joe [Shuster] started with in 1938. Actually, we never got him quite that far back. For example, he never lost his power to fly” (qtd. in Daniels 133). In his essay “The Man of Steel and Me,” O’Neil’s memories of that period are bittersweet, because, in his view, he “couldn’t find a connection with even a vastly scaled-down version of this demigod” (56).

But perhaps it was not just O’Neil’s lack of connection with Superman that prevented substantial and lasting reforms. Going against the grain to change, at that time, more than thirty years of deeply entrenched ideas about the superhero must have been a demoralizing task for anyone concerned, and DC Comics management was becoming restless because the changes did not improve sales (Daniels 135; O’Neil 56). As Schwartz remembers it, “After a year or so they decided I was making too many changes . . . . They wanted me to do more the type of story Mort [Weisinger] had been doing after all, which I
sort of compromised on” (qtd. in Daniels 135). Schwartz also faced the problem of lack of coordination among all the titles featuring Superman, until he managed to control them all and coordinate the stories (Daniels 135, 138). But by that time, things were reverting to the old ways: “Kryptonite crept back into stories, and eventually Clark Kent lost his job on television and went back to print journalism” (Daniels 138).

As we stated in Chapter One, the 1980s saw the development of comic-book direct sale shops (or direct-market distribution) in replacement of the traditional newsstand distribution. These comics shops were usually run by comic-book fans, who, apart from comics, may also stock “collectibles like baseball cards, movie posters, and assorted memorabilia” (Wright 260). According to Wright, this change saved the comic-book industry because in the late 1970s sales had shrunk so much in the American comic-book market that both Marvel and DC Comics survived thanks to foreign markets and licensing deals (such as television, cinema, and superhero merchandise), a situation that made some corporate executives wonder why publishing comics at all (259, 260). As we have seen, direct distribution is advantageous for all parties concerned, because in exchange for giving up the right to return unsold issues, comics shops receive greater discounts, and publishers do not have to print in excess as with the newsstand system, which in the 1970s made them print “about three copies of a comic book for every one they sold” just in order to break even (Wright 261). The unsold comic books are treated quite differently by comics retailers; rather than consider them losses, they place them in plastic bags and offer them as collectible back issues (Wright 261).
Moreover, with the direct sale shops comic-book fans have become more important than the casual buyers browsing through newsstands (Wright 261). As American comic-book writer-editor-former DC president Paul Levitz put it in 1982, this was the “triumph of comics fandom . . . [since] for better or worse, a majority of comics published today are produced for the entertainment of comics fans” (qtd. in Wright 261). Besides sales, direct distribution affects other aspects of the comics market because coming originally from the comics fandom, retailers know their products well and can provide publishers with important information about customers, and this not only influences production but also even creation (Wright 261). In this connection, according to Wright, “Comic books remained essentially the domain of superheroes and male adolescent fantasies [because] . . . [s]urveys of the direct market indicated that fans still wanted comic books about superheroes, albeit with more ‘realism’” (Wright 262).

With all this contextual background, time had come for DC Comics to make drastic changes in the amalgam of characters that Schwartz himself had helped to develop back in the 1960s, when he started connecting DC’s characters in titles like *The Justice League of America* (Daniels 146). As we recounted in Chapter One, DC Comics’ unwieldy fictional history was considered too complex for new readers, and the recently developed comics shops could entice new potential steadfast readers if the unmanageable DC Universe did not put them off. Thus, in 1985 the already-mentioned cosmic event entitled *Crisis on Infinite Earths* was introduced to eliminate all the stories that had been evolving for almost fifty years, allowing for a new continuity to start again (Daniels 146, 148; Wolfman et al.). As regards Superman’s career, this momentous makeover made “the changes
Schwartz had instituted in 1971 looked like no more than cosmetic surgery” (Daniels 146). 

Crisis was a twelve-part miniseries, running from April 1985 to March 1986, and its appearance meant the end of fifteen years as Superman’s editor for Schwartz, who was seventy years old at the time with a comics career spanning for over forty years (Daniels 146, 148; Wolfman et al.).

**Post-Crisis on Infinite Earths (1985-present)**

After Crisis, Superman —together with all DC characters— had to start his adventures from scratch, and a new team had to be assembled to work on this (Daniels 148, 159; Wolfman et al.). American comic-book editor Andy Helfer was selected to replace Schwartz as Superman’s editor, and as noted earlier, John Byrne was chosen to recreate the superhero (Daniels 159). In relation to his task, Byrne commented: “If you’re starting at zero, you have a whole bunch of bits and pieces to pick from” (qtd. in Daniels 159). Thus, his final version of Superman was a synthesis of many aspects that had been developed throughout, at that time, the almost fifty years of stories (Daniels 159). As Wright puts it, Byrne “recalled what had made a popular series successful in the first place and then reworked these nostalgic qualities into a modern superhero narrative” (Wright 265). For instance, Byrne decided to return to Siegel and Shuster’s original idea that Superman became a superhero as an adult, with his powers developing in adolescence, thus skipping the Superboy stage altogether (Daniels 159), just as it happens in the television series Smallville. But instead of Siegel and Shuster’s ideas of being champion for the oppressed, “Byrne found success by appealing to the uplifting qualities of
superheroes,” in a way that was clearly related to the Reaganite neoconservative politics prevailing in mainstream American culture at that moment (Wright 266).

In the stories, Byrne eliminated the hints Superman used to give about his double identity, and the obvious consequence was that now Lois Lane would not need to be obsessed with finding out Superman’s civilian identity (Daniels 159-160). In Byrne’s words, “I wanted to change all that. I wanted Lois to be a three-dimensional character who had more to her than just wanting to nail Superman as the ultimate catch” (qtd. in Daniels 159). Lois Lane was also allowed to drop her damsel-in-distress persona, becoming a literally strong character who could hold her own against the bad guys (Daniels 160). In this way, the Superman side of the superhero could give way to the human side of a more interesting and less “mild-mannered” Clark Kent (Daniels 160). As regards Superman’s archenemy Lex Luthor, Crisis writer Marv Wolfman suggested casting him as a ruthless business tycoon with infinite resources, instead of his classical role as a mad scientist (Daniels 160).

Soon after Byrne started his work on the superhero, American comic-book editor Mike Carlin replaced Helfer as Superman’s editor, maybe because Carlin had experience working with Byrne when they were together at Marvel Comics (Daniels 161). But only after Byrne left in 1988 did Carlin begin “to feel like he was really in charge of the character” (Daniels 161). At that moment, there were four titles featuring the superhero every month: Action Comics, Superman, The Adventures of Superman and The Man of Steel (Daniels 161). Just as Schwartz before him, Carlin wanted to coordinate them so that
they could “hang together in a seamless narrative despite the diversity of the writers and artists involved” (Daniels 161).

In the late 1980s, the television series The Adventures of Superboy was broadcasted for four seasons until 1992, and inexplicably, the American actress playing Lana Lang, Stacey Haiduk, influenced Lois Lane’s look in the 1990s comic books, making the change from her classical blue black hair to long wavy auburn hair (Daniels 161, 164-165). While Superboy was on television, plans were initiated for his adult counterpart in comics to face, arguably, the most earth-shattering event in his whole superhero career up to that date—his marriage to Lois Lane (Daniels 165). There were many doubts about this, especially because “the tension between these two characters had provided plots for countless stories over the years” (Daniels 165). Although Byrne was among those who expressed doubts about this major step, in reality his idea of creating a more assertive personality for Clark Kent paved the way for the marriage of the comics couple (Daniels 165). Eventually, the proposal was embedded in a story arc in which Superman lost his powers, so there was no impediment for Clark Kent to marry Lois Lane, because he was now an ordinary human being (Daniels 165-166). As can be surmised, he later regained his powers, but Clark Kent did not reveal his superhero identity right away, raising the speculation of whether or not the wedding would take place (Daniels 166). In the end, Superman revealed his secret identity to Lois Lane, and the wedding became a serious affair, but it would take years for the comics couple to formalize their union (Daniels 165, 166).
Superman’s marriage was put on hold because the 1990s television series *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* was going to start airing (Daniels 166-167). As Carlin explained, “DC’s decision was that it would be a good idea to hold off the wedding and do it at the same time as the TV show, if it got that far” (Daniels 167). But there were delays for the television production to start, and Carlin and his team did not have any story line to follow apart from the suspended wedding, so “[t]hey decided to kill Superman, and thus launched what proved to be the most widely discussed and publicized story in the history of the medium” (Daniels 167). Carlin was amazed at the widespread repercussions that the death of Superman story produced, and he insisted that “[c]haracters die every day in comics” (qtd. in Daniels 168). In Carlin’s view, “This is old news to us. If it had been a new idea, I would have been worried about it, but this really is one of our cliché stories” (qtd. in Daniels 168). But the mainstream press took it seriously and assumed that a comic book that depicted a dead Superman on the cover was meant to stay that way (Daniels 168). Carlin recalled that “[t]he real newspapers started getting hold of the story and actually believing it . . . . We were stunned. I can’t believe that people went for it as hard as they did” (qtd. in Daniels 168). Even *The New York Times* used the 1992 comic-book story to compare Superman’s death with the recent electoral defeat of President George Bush to Bill Clinton (Wright 282).

Although it was mainly considered a publicity stunt (Daniels 168; Rhoades 135), in his article “Manipulating Demand and ‘The Death of Superman,’” American communication scholar Mark Rogers analyzes this event from the point of view of the speculation environment that pervaded the comic-book market in the United States in the
early 1990s, because of “naive consumers who believed the get-rich-quick hype surrounding comic book collecting” (155). As noted earlier, there had been a dramatic increase in the number of comic-book specialty shops, and even other types of “existing retailers such as gaming and trading card shops added comics as a side business” (Rhoades 116). In many cases this was due to the popular idea that collecting comics may become a profitable investment, but when collectors realized that rarity was what really made comic books reach high prizes, the speculation bubble burst and the comic-book market collapsed with the closing of two thirds of all comics shops between 1993 and 1997 (Rhoades 116, 129, 130). In 1993 comic-book sales had soared to $1 billion, but by 1996 they slumped to $450 million (Wright 283). As Wright puts it, there was a “fan backlash against artificial ‘collector’s items’ and one too many confusing and expensive ‘crossover’ series” (283).

Against this bleak backdrop of contracting market in the comic-book industry, Superman stood his ground, and his wedding both on television and in the comic books took place in 1996 (Daniels 173-175). On television, weddings are considered a desperate attempt to boost ratings, and although Lois & Clark was originally created with Superman’s marriage to Lois Lane in mind, it did not manage to outlast it beyond that fourth season (Daniels 174; Lois). In the comics, weddings are a different matter, since “[c]omics characters from Blondie to Dick Tracy have survived their weddings, which are often postponed for so many years that they seem almost obligatory” (Daniels 175). At this point, after more than half a century, the comic-book characters Lois Lane and Superman were certainly ready to tie the knot (Daniels 175). The lavish wedding issue
was responsibility of American comic-book editor Joey Cavalieri, who became Superman’s editor after Carlin was promoted to the position of executive editor for the whole DC Universe (Daniels 175). Cavalieri saw this event as an opportunity to do away with the repetitive old plots about Lois Lane trying to expose Superman’s secret identity: “I could slam the door on those types of stories forever. I think it always tended to make Lois a jerk. At least now she is center stage and sharing her life with Superman” (qtd. in Daniels 176). In his own way, Cavalieri seemed taken by the Lois Lane character, as he continued praising her: “She is the intrepid, brave reporter you always hoped she would be, and with a weekly comic book we can give her attention without pulling the spotlight away from Superman” (qtd. in Daniels 176). It goes without saying that many readers believed that the marriage would not last, but it did last until the reboot of the whole DC Universe in 2011, the same year that the television series Smallville ended after a ten-year broadcast (Daniels 176; “Superman”). Although in that new continuity Superman is involved with Wonder Woman, in 2015 DC Comics issued Convergence, a miniseries which revisits characters from past storylines, and here Lois Lane and Clark Kent continue to be married and they even have a son together, proving the never-ending power of stories in comic books (Beedle; “Lois” 2015).

We do not want to close this chapter without a reflection on the response from comic-book makers to the 9-11 terrorist attacks which “stunned the American entertainment industry as it did the entire nation [and the world]” (Wright 287). As we have seen in this brief history, from the starting point of the Great Depression, superheroes had been quick to react in the face of disasters, but in the immediate
aftermath of the attacks, costumed heroes that had been an appropriate tool for propaganda in the 1940s, especially after Pearl Harbor, no longer seemed suitable metaphors to express the feelings of Americans confronting what happened on September 11, 2001 (Wright 287, 288). American journalist Robert Wilonsky insightfully characterized this discordant frame of mind: “In a post-Sept. 11 world even the phrase, ‘Look, up in the sky! It’s a bird! It’s a plane! [It’s Superman!]’ sounds different; its awe has been replaced by shock and revulsion. The sense of escapism comic books have provided no longer exists; the fantasy world must give way to the real one” (qtd. in Wright 288-289). Therefore, those devastating events “forced comic book makers to step back and reevaluate the place of their industry in American culture” (Wright 288). They eventually published a series of anthologies, such as the two-volume 9-11, whose proceeds were donated to 9-11 charities (Wright 289). Whereas the stories were retold “through the lives of ordinary victims and heroes . . . [c]ostumed heroes appeared in the benefit books only as metaphors who acknowledged their own limitations” (Wright 289). Thus, these comics show Superman plaintively recognizing, in a postmodern way, his fictitious status as a character who can work marvels only within the confines of comic books: “I can defy the laws of gravity. I can ignore the principles of physics . . . . But unfortunately . . . the one thing I can not do . . . is break free from the fictional pages where I live and breathe . . . become real during times of crisis . . . and right the wrongs of an unjust world” (qtd. in Wright 289).
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY FOR THE ANALYSIS

Thus far we have seen the situational and general contexts of the comics we are going to analyze in Chapter Five. We have surveyed the extra-textual material that surrounds the communication event performed by comics. While discussing the most relevant literature related to comics in Chapter One, we considered how the changes in distribution and production have affected cartoonists and their final work. Chapter Two furthers the review of languages surrounding comics and their language itself, presenting the elements that can be drawn on in a comprehensive analysis of comics, and the last section of the chapter reexamines all these but from a feminist perspective. Lastly, Chapter Three follows the historical developments of the medium as comics have unfolded, paying special attention to the creation and development of Superman and DC Comics. Throughout all these separate discussions, a thread of a feminist approach has gone hand in hand with all the material specifically related to comics. Now we have finally arrived at the stage where everything is put together to use in the analysis of the comics we are going to select from the twenty-year span that is presented in Appendices 3 and 4.

Methodological Approach

In our journey through all the typical stages in an inquiry of this kind — literature review, theoretical framework, and historical overview —, we have touched on the main extra-textual points raised by the already-mentioned feminist linguist Sara Mills in her
model of text analysis we discussed in Chapter Two. Accordingly, in our literature review we considered how the changing publishing and distribution practices in the comics industry in the 1980s affected both the context of production and the context of reception. As we saw there and in the historical overview, during the 1960s, two events—the underground movement of comix with their counterculture head shops supporting its sales network, and the change in comics from the traditional genre of omnipotent superheroes into a modern genre of troubled superheroes, spurring the development of a comics fandom network—helped to destabilized the almost fifty-year newsstand distribution system and to establish the direct sale comics shops. This feedback between the context of production and the context of reception has changed comics, that is, the text at the center of all the factors in Mills’s model.

We observed that as a result of those developments, comic-book creators became more important in the industry and thus felt freer to deal with topics that interested them and their audience, and even to flout both visual and verbal comics conventions, which had held fast for many years. We also viewed these conventions and their discursive constraints when we discussed the language of comics in Chapter Two. The importance of iconography, speech balloons and panel sequence was revealed in detail from the point of view of several comics scholars following the path of Umberto Eco’s pioneering analysis in *Apocalípticos*. Just as in Chapter One and Chapter Two we described the specific sociohistorical factors that developed comics as a text at the production and reception ends of Mills’s model, in Chapter Three we saw the larger sociohistorical factors at play
that framed the development of the medium in society, and specifically, the creation of the characters focus of our analysis.

The notion of community of practice, which Mills introduces in her discussion of third-wave feminist analysis, serves as a framework to explain not only the reception side intended fandom audience of superhero comics, but also the context of production. Both sides concern themselves with developing shared linguistic repertoires which help to consolidate the community of practice (Mills 2008: 28). On the producer side of the model, DC Comics, a leading representative of American mainstream comics industry, published the comics we are going to analyze in Chapter Five, and its mainly male gender affiliation makes us expect some kind of stereotypical gender representation. As Jennifer Stuller confirms when talking about 1970s DC comic books, “the majority of writers, artists, and editors were men, leading us to question just how capable, or at the very least, interested, male staff were of addressing true female sensibilities” (246). Even in the span from 1985 to 2005 which is the object of our inquiry, this state of affairs in relation to comics production did not change substantially, as can be evinced simply from a cursory review of the names of the comics creators listed on Appendix 5. Only American cartoonist Louise Simonson stands out as the sole recurrent female comics writer on the list of comics stories bearing an image of Lois Lane on the front page, including such a feminine topic as the wedding album, a special issue produced by more than thirty cartoonists (although there is the token title Girlfrenzy! Superman: Lois Lane #1 in 1998 by two female cartoonists).
The reception side forms an active fandom group engaging in the tasks of reading and commenting, as well as supporting the medium and genre with purchases that maintain the industry, and even feeding the production side with new comics creators (Mills 2008: 28; Coogan 218). These consumers also help to spread the medium to other media generating multimedia systems offers, as can be attested by the popularity of comic-book movies and other different versions of the stories, including novels and games (Coogan 2006: 3-4; Ewers). We mentioned in Chapter One that in general superhero comic books have a “predominantly male fan base” (Augustdt et al. 36), and from the very beginning, Superman comics had an “original emphasis on action and adventure that was directed toward an audience of boys and young men” (Rittenhouse 79). Even in Chapter Three we quoted Bradford Wright stating that, according to direct-market surveys, the superhero is the most popular genre among comics fans; consequently, “[c]omic books remained essentially the domain of superheroes and male adolescent fantasies” (262).

Moreover, if we take into account the sociocultural function of genres as a way of harmonizing social conflicts referred to in Chapter Two (Cawelti 35-36; Schatz 29-31), this task is accomplished by the superhero genre in relation to “the problem of binding adolescent males to the larger community. Hero stories traditionally have fulfilled this function by narrating the adventures of young men who learn to apply their strength to benefit their social group. Superhero origin stories tell of selfish boys made into selfless men” (Coogan 2006: 24, my emphasis). What is more, according to the already-mentioned comics scholar Peter Coogan, in the superhero genre, superheroes may be considered metaphors for male freedom; they are free from all kinds of human
limitations: they can overcome physical constraints with their superpowers, they can flout legal restraints by taking the law into their own hands, and they are not usually closely related to family or attached to love interests (2006: 14). And individual superheroes may assume particular metaphoric meanings, but always, it seems, in relation to the male audience; for instance, Coogan observes that the “Superman/Lois Lane/Clark Kent triangle is easily read as a metaphor for adolescent boys’ conflicted feelings about girls —if the girls could only see the true man behind the nerdy façade, they would flock to the skinny, social outcast” (2006: 15). Obviously, all these aspects do not show us the real audience but the implied readership, since what these analyses are actually doing is inferring who the addressees of comics are from the narrative itself.

In Chapter Two we argued that comics are not a genre but a medium with genres, and Scott McCloud’s metaphor served to visualize them as a container with many elements, among them different types of genres (6/1-8), or in Gérard Genette’s terminology, architexts (4-5). We also dealt with the theory underlying genre or formula stories in general, and now we are going to focus specifically on one of comics architexts —the superhero genre. In his already-mentioned book Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre, Coogan, coinciding with Genette’s theory, suggests that a “genre is a relationship —between the genre and other genres, individual texts and the genre as a whole, creators and audiences, and the reader and texts— both the individual text being read and the corpus of the genre, as well as other genres and other texts” (2012: 204, emphasis in the original). And also specifically connecting Coogan’s views with Mills’s model, genre can also be understood as “a kind of conversation between cultural producers and
consumers,” because a genre can be grasped by repeated consumption and comparison of genre stories (Coogan 2012: 204).

In the case of the superhero genre, there is no doubt that it is the character that defines the genre (Coogan 2006: 176). Accordingly, the following definition of superhero by Coogan serves to characterize the genre as well:

A heroic character with a selfless, pro-social mission; with superpowers—extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume, which typically express his [or her] biography, character, powers, or origin (transformation from ordinary person to superhero); and who is generically distinct, i.e. can be distinguished from characters of related genres (fantasy, science fiction, detective, etc.) by a preponderance of generic conventions. Often superheroes have dual identities, the ordinary one of which is usually a closely guarded secret. (2006: 30)

From this definition, the primary superhero genre conventions can be extracted—mission, powers, and identity (2006: 30-39). The mission convention is deemed crucial to the characterization of the superhero genre because only by their unselfish heroic deeds can superheroes be considered as such, but this factor does not set them apart from previous heroes in popular culture (Coogan 2006: 31). Certainly, it is superpowers that are the most distinctively recognized quality in superheroes, since they “emphasize the exaggeration inherent in the superhero genre . . . and they are the first area of real
difference between Superman and his pulp and science fiction predecessors” (Coogan 2006: 31-32). The identity convention includes the codename and the costume, “with the secret identity being a customary counterpart to the codename” (Coogan 2006: 32). Unlike earlier heroes with double identity, the codename expresses something related to the inner character or biography of superheroes (Coogan 2006: 32). For example, the codename “Superman” describes the superhero’s inner character because he is “a superman who represents the best humanity can hope to achieve” (Coogan 2006: 33). The costume is also a key element to identify superheroes, and even though there were other costumed heroes before Superman, his costume, particularly with the “S” on his chest, is the symbol of the character’s identity (Coogan 2006: 33).

Superman was the originator of the superhero genre, because his first story in 1938 not only included all the primary conventions defining the character and more, but also prompted “the imitation and repetition necessary for the emergence of a genre” (Coogan 2006: 175-176). While recounting Superman’s origin, therefore, the first page of Action Comics #1 presents the most important conventions: the mission, the superpowers, the costume, the dual identity, the urban setting, and the analogical science (explanation of Superman’s superpowers by comparison with the strength of ants and the jumping ability of grasshoppers) (Coogan 2006: 175-176, 199, 268; Siegel & Shuster 1). The story itself reveals other ancillary conventions, such as “the superhero code, the supporting cast, the love interest, the limited authorities, and the super/mundane split” (Coogan 2006: 199; Siegel & Shuster). Finally, throughout the years, comics creators expanded
those superhero genre conventions with “the supervillain, the slugfest, the sidekick, the superteam, and continuity” (Coogan 2006: 199).

We have established that due to the divergent conventions, Superman is essentially different from traditional pulp and science-fiction hero genres, but there is still another significant distinction: the treatment of criminals (Coogan 2006: 185). In the 1930s pulp novels, the “conspiracy of upper-class masterminds and lower-class hoodlums against middle-class victims provides a symbolic way to understanding the Depression as the result of market manipulation and criminal conspiracy” (Coogan 2006: 186). As we saw in Chapter Three, at first this coincided with the first Superman stories, especially those created by Siegel and Shuster, but later on, this changed radically with the different editors that left their mark while ruling the destine of the Man of Steel (Wright 11-13). Consequently, in superhero comics there has been a divide between the worlds of law-abiding citizens and lawbreakers, recreating the conventional Western genre separation between civilized and “savage” worlds, and thus, adopting an ideology at odds with that of pulp novels (Coogan 2006: 186, 187, 188).

As we mentioned in Chapter Two, Schatz presents four stages in the development of film genres: experimental stage, classic stage, refinement stage, and baroque stage (37-38). Coogan states that this kind of evolution “can be applied to nearly any genre” (2006: 194), but it seems to suit the superhero genre remarkably well, because the traditional ages used by the comics fan community to separate comic-book history into identifiable periods closely match Schatz’s stages (2006: 58-59, 193-195).
The first comics period called Golden Age starts with the publication of the first Superman story in *Action Comics* #1 in 1938, and ends in the mid 1950s (Coogan 2006: 193, 198-199; 2012: 205; Siegel & Shuster). This corresponds to Schatz’s experimentation stage, and accordingly, the various conventions of the superhero genre started to be developed, mostly in the first issue of Superman, distinguishing it from other similar genres, as we have seen (Coogan 2006: 199). Moreover, this age fits Schatz’s pattern of formal transparency with straightforward stories featuring confrontations between good and evil, which intend to transmit and reinforce the dominant ideologies in the American society of the period: essentially, social reform based on New Deal policies and patriotic fervor associated to World War II (Coogan 2006: 199, 201). In order to see the evolution of the genre, Superman is a case in point, since he initially defends ordinary citizens by fighting for social reform in the high spheres of society, but later the appearance of the supervillain as an outsider changes all this (Coogan 2006: 201, 203-204; Wright 11-13). Society no longer needs internal reform, and as threats come from outside, defending society implies maintaining the status quo (Coogan 2006: 204).

The second period called the Silver Age ranges from the mid 1950s to 1971, and this corresponds to Schatz’s classic stage, when genre conventions are consolidated and understood (Coogan 2006: 205, 206; 2012: 205). There are two major innovations in the Silver Age: on the one hand, continuity, which is expanded with the creation of the multiverse, crossover stories, and extended storylines, modifications that virtually eliminate the original comics format of short story; and on the other hand, what Coogan calls “melodrama,” which refers to the revival of superheroes with the creation of the
troubled ones by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, a topic discussed at length in Chapter One (2006: 205, 206). Whereas the stories of this period still present confrontations between good and evil, “these concepts are complicated slightly with virtuous villains and reluctant, selfish, or bickering heroes” (Coogan 2006: 206). Reversing the evolution of the Golden Age, Silver Age superheroes start defending the status quo and accepting established authority, but end doubting the status quo and resisting authority (Coogan 2006: 207). During this period, while conveying the prevailing social ideology, comics go from relevance — i.e. including topical and controversial political or social issues — to formula, which hails the change from Silver Age to Bronze Age and implies a movement away from texts conveying explicitly ideological messages (Coogan 2006: 207, 208-209).

The third period called the Bronze Age lasts from 1971 to 1980; if we apply Schatz’s categories, this is the refinement stage, when the form is embellished by certain formal and stylistic details, and the audience no longer looks through the form to the ideals, values, and conflicts of the society it represents, but it begins to look at the form itself (Coogan 2006: 210; 2012: 205). According to Coogan, in the case of Superman, there is an attempt to make the character more realistic by reducing his powers and eliminating kryptonite in 1971, and also to update Clark Kent by moving him into television reporting, encouraged by the above-mentioned editor Julius Schwartz, as we saw in Chapter Three (2006: 211, 212). Nevertheless, this is “a surface realism, not the reflection of social ideology as occurred in the relevance movement of the late Silver Age” (Coogan 2006: 211). By the end of the 1970s there is some kind of turning point in the superhero genre: continuity develops and universes expand, but time seems to decelerate in comparison
with the Silver Age (Coogan 2006: 213). In the Silver Age both chronological time and narrative time seems to be roughly parallel; in the Bronze Age this synchronization begins to go astray, and thus, narrative time starts losing ground until it stops altogether by the end of the decade, which implies that no aging of characters has occurred since about 1978 (Coogan 2006: 214).

The fourth period called Iron Age starts in 1980 and arguably lasts until 2000, since it overlaps with the last period beginning in 1995, which Coogan calls the Renaissance Age (2012: 205). The Iron Age corresponds to Schatz’s last stage in his cycle, the baroque stage, which alters the balance of content and form in works, the latter becoming their main objective—in other words, “we no longer see superhero comic books but comic books about superheroes” (Coogan 2006: 214). During the Iron Age with the exhaustion of the genre, the conventions of superhero comics become problematic and no longer seem to work for comics creators or readers, so there are attempts at their reinvigoration (Coogan 2006: 215, 217). For example, since continuity turned into an inconvenience, DC discarded it with *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, which merged the multiverse into a single universe with a unified history, declaring that all stories before 1986 had never happened, as discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Three (Coogan 2006: 216, 217; Wolfman et al.). But as Coogan puts it, “without a wholesale reconstruction of the genre’s conventions these measures only last a short while” (2006: 217). Superman is again a case in point; the series *Man of Steel* apparently reinvigorated the superhero mythos, but by the 1990s, the title seemed to decline again, and had to be boosted with many major events: *The Death of Superman* series, the four Supermen, Superman’s new powers and costume, and
the marriage to Lois Lane, which leaves behind the traditional Superman-Lois Lane-Clark Kent love triangle (Byrne & Giordano; Coogan 2006: 217; Jurgens, Ordway et al.). All this demonstrates the exhaustion of the superhero genre, and “the essential failure of the reinvigoration approach” (Coogan 2006: 217).

In this baroque stage a genre turns in on itself, and this self-reflexiveness in the superhero genre grows out of two important developments in the comics industry, which were discussed earlier from other perspectives (Coogan 2006: 218). On the one hand, from the 1970s onwards professional comics creators who thought of comics simply as their livelihood had to leave the comics industry en masse because of labor disputes, and they were replaced by comics fans who aspired to work in this métier (Coogan 2006: 218). On the other hand, the shift in the distribution system from traditional newsstands to direct sale comics shops also implied a change in readership from casual buyers to specific self-acknowledged comics fans (Coogan 2006: 218). Consequently, these two sides of the text in Mills’s model—production and reception—coincided and affected the superhero genre. As Coogan remarks, “With the producers and consumers largely coming from the same small segment of the population and sharing the same cultural and literary interests, the superhero genre turned in on itself away from the larger social concerns that had driven the genre in the Golden Age and the interest in relevance in the late Silver Age” (Coogan 2006: 218).

As noted earlier, Coogan suggests the eventual advent of a Renaissance Age as a kind of reconstruction stage to overcome the “darkness and cynicism” present in the Iron Age (Coogan 2006: 219-221, 230). This means that “a new round of evolution” may start,
but as the conventions of the superhero genre have reached extreme levels of saturation during the first completed genre cycle, it is not expected for consumers to demand new levels of complexity and self-reflexivity or for creators to produce them (Coogan 2006: 230). Intertexts referring to the past creep up in the new narratives —such as, homage, references, and visual quotations—, but stories are not directly related to the past as they were in the baroque stage (Coogan 2006: 217). Unlike the Iron Age, which attempted to reinvigorate conventions, this Renaissance Age or reconstructive stage reestablishes them, but with the complete understanding of the full four-staged evolution turn of the superhero genre (Coogan 2006: 204, 220).

We have reviewed the stages of the superhero genre, and with them, how the basic narrative formulas and ideologies represented in this genre have been changing with the evolving views of society, arriving at the last ones which disclose the general characteristics that are imbued in the comic books we are going to analyze in Chapter Five. With this task we have completed the examination of the larger aspects of context that surround those comic books, bearing in mind that just like films or other popular culture products, comics “are cultural artifacts revealing much about not only the people who are depicted in them but also those who make them and view them” (Shary 12). But our analysis is going to be more specific than showing society at large; just as the already-mentioned feminist author Jennifer Stuller suggests in her own feminist analysis of comics, “the ultimate goal is to determine from our artifact how women are represented in popular culture, and what that might say if anything, about a culture’s ideas about gender, femininity, and sex roles at a given point in time” (239).
In order to do precisely that, Stuller puts forward several points to consider in any analysis of this type. Thus, the first important aspects to take into account are the positions and outfits of women characters in comics, or in any other visual media for that matter, especially in connection with the male gaze (Stuller 237). British feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey developed this concept of the male gaze in reference to the depiction of women as objects to be regarded from a man’s point of view, placing all the viewers in the position of male subjects, even though many of them evidently happen to be female (MacDonald; Mills 1995: 143; Stuller 237). A related idea introduced by Stuller is the representation of women as “fractured body parts” (237), or as Mills calls it, “the technique of fragmenting the female body” (1995: 133). Mills clearly states the consequences of fragmentation:

This has two primary effects. First, the body is depersonalized, objectified, reduced to its parts. Second, since the female protagonist is not represented as a unified conscious physical being, the scene cannot be focalized from her perspective — effectively, her experience is written out of the text. Fragmentation of the female is therefore associated with male focalization — the female represented as an object, a collection of objects, for the male gaze. (1995: 133)

Therefore, there is a relationship between fragmentation of the female body and the male gaze, i.e. focalization from a male perspective, and also linked to these two notions, Mills mentions the practice of juxtaposition more specifically related to images and advertising,
which involves the connection of the female body with products that acquire the qualities of the woman represented (1995: 135-136).

Other relevant aspects are the differences in representations of male and female bodies, and a helpful widely-used technique to study this is the male/female reversal, which can foreground the underlying meanings associated to gender representation in images (Pollock 41). For instance, Stuller has highlighted that “the focus on male bodies in comics emphasizes the power of their physique, whereas the focus on female bodies in comics is meant to titillate the presumed male reader, as well as privilege his interests as consumer and audience” (Stuller 237). Reversing these images can show the sometimes ridiculous exaggerations either in postures, shapes or behaviors, as can be promptly and ironically seen in the forceful French short film *Majorité Opprimée [Oppressed Majority]*. In action sequences, this difference in portrayal may be even exacerbated, and violence may take an ominous sexual overtone when directed at women (Stuller 237).

As a matter of fact, violence against women in comics is so frequent that American comic-book writer Gail Simone coined the term “Women in Refrigerators Syndrome,” based on an infamous story in which superhero Green Lantern’s girlfriend is murdered and stuffed in a refrigerator in order to advance the narrative (Stuller 237; “Women”). Tired of these types of excesses, Simone started a website to list “female comic book characters that have been injured, killed, or depowered as a plot device within various superhero comic books” (“Women”). This stirred a great deal of—not always favorable—interest within the comics community, achieving Simone’s obvious aim of calling attention to the recurrence of this kind of trope, and the unbalanced treatment of female characters, who
seem to simply function as motivation for the superhero to react (Stuller 237-238; “Women”).

Furthermore, the significance of female roles should not be overlooked—if there are any which may account for a certain substance in the narrative, since in numerous superhero stories, as Stuller states, women “are peripheral to the male hero and only relevant to the story through their relationship with him” (238). And she lists the most usual roles played in comics by female characters: “the nemesis, or temptation, the love interest or the damsel, the daughter or mother, the sidekick or spin-off” (Stuller 238). Therefore, whether women are protagonists or supporting cast, it is vital to examine their position in relation to male characters (Stuller 238).

Finally, Stuller introduces the Bechdel Test to explore the depiction of relationships between women in comics, in order to see if there is gender bias, warning us that both the Women in Refrigerators Syndrome and the Bechdel Test are not academic tools, but useful in this context, particularly if we consider that they were developed within the comics community to account for some kind of gender analysis in the medium (Stuller 238; “Bechdel”). The test was named after its creator, American cartoonist Alison Bechdel, and a story passes the test of unbiased gender representation if it features two or more women talking to each other about something other than men (Stuller 238; “Bechdel”). This type of test is convenient because, as we have already remarked, most stories depicting “one or more male characters will have a token female who serves a traditionally feminine, and often less important, role” (Stuller 238).
After this quick overview of some major resources in feminist comics analysis, we have to lay the groundwork for the methodology globally presented in Chapter Two, when we outlined the categories of the framework for analysis we are going to describe in this section. As we mentioned at the end of that chapter, here we are going to expand on Mills’s categories comprised under the overall headings of overt or direct sexism, and indirect sexism, and then, we are also going to develop Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen’s most relevant categories for the semiotic analysis of visual language. All this will be the basic structure for the analysis of the corpus which is going to be selected according to the parameters to be described in the following section.

As we mentioned in Chapter Two, overt sexism is the explicit gender discriminatory language targeted by second-wave feminism (Mills 2008: 33). We have already stated that nowadays overt sexist comments seem to be, to a certain extent, responses to previous feminist campaigns, and those comments may be seen as a way of aligning with older conservative values in contrast with more contemporary ones (Mills 2008: 41). Thus, there are conflicting discursive practices within society (Mills 2008: 41). On the one hand, institutional sexism seems familiar because it is based on stereotypical and commonsense “natural” notions about women (Mills 2008: 42). On the other hand, feminist discourse and equal opportunity legislation introduced a disruption to the status quo, which makes sexist speech seem anachronistic and conservative, as well as discriminatory (Mills 2008: 42-43). As we have seen, comic books are a popular product reflecting social values and these conflicting discourses are no exception. Since comic books are primordially marketed for young people (Wright xviii), we may expect a comics
content of progressive language; however, as superhero comics are “a distinctly masculine fantasy” (Wright 9), we may also expect samples of retrograde language in them.


Many feminists in the 1970s and 1980s maintained the theory that women did not participate in the practice of naming and defining things in a language that for all intents and purposes was considered man-made (Mills 2008: 43). However, as Mills insists, there is no need to argue that “men invented language to perceive a strong androcentric bias in many areas of the language” (1995: 78). Although overt sexism seems to have been superseded thanks to the feminist campaigns that have opened our eyes to naturalized sexist terms, we can still find lexical items which seem to be plainly sexist in naming and representing women (Mills 2008: 44, 45). We may obviate, for instance, the different connotations evoked by such words as “fox” or “pro” used in relation to women and men,
as in “She is a real pro” or “He is a real pro” (Goddard & Patterson 13; Mills 1995: 85), but according to Mills, even seemingly innocuous adjectives such as “shrill” and “feisty” are used almost exclusively to describe women, and evidently not always in a positive light (2008: 44). Mills contends that “[u]nderlying these terms is a contrast with a male norm: males are ‘independent’ and ‘strong’ by right but not ‘feisty’; males voices are the ‘normal’ pitch and even when they are high, they would generally not be described as ‘shrill’” (Mills 2008: 45). As British feminist theorist Mary Talbot states, “classifying people is part of the naming and ordering experience; it both reflects and sustains existing social relations and identities. The categorization of people is a powerful normative force” (qtd. in Mills 2008: 45). We discussed in Chapter Two that it is not clear if changing language gives rise to changing views in society or if altering women’s social positions will follow a change in language, but even if we do not take those extremes, “there is a complex two-way process, whereby language items affirm and reflect and possibly contest the current state of play of beliefs about women and men” (Mills 2008: 44).

Although dictionaries and grammars are not patently relevant for our purposes, it is worth noting some aspects about these ubiquitous linguistic instruments. Unlike the Spanish Academy, whose motto “Limpia, fija y da splendor” [Cleaning, setting, and casting splendor, my translation] clearly shows that its ideal is to supervise and correct the language by the prescription of rules and restriction to vocabulary expansion (“Real”), the English lexicographical and grammar tradition boasts that the objective of those books is to describe the language as it is used. But even though they generally consist of compilations of words and structures about language use, they are usually seen just as
normative and prescriptive as Spanish dictionaries and grammars, rather than descriptive, their ultimate aim (Mills 1995: 95; 2008: 45). In fact, they can actually act as gatekeepers of the language because it is lexicographers and grammarians who filter the words and structures that eventually enter the compilations and codifications to be published (Mills 1995: 95; 2008: 45). Specifically, their choice of examples with androcentric generics and gender stereotypes has institutionalized sexist language (Mills 2008: 45).

Feminist research and later campaigns, however, have considerably influenced the work of lexicographers and grammarians, in such a way that the new dictionaries, for instance, no longer use the generic male reference (Mills 2008: 46-47). To illustrate, we may compare the word “patriot” in two different dictionaries divided by a lapse of less than ten years. The 1986 version of the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* defines “patriot” as “a person who strongly supports his country” (Hornby 616, my emphasis), while the 1993 edition of the *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* already exchanges this blatant androcentric use for the neutral “their” in the following definition: “someone who loves and is willing to defend their country” (968, my emphasis).

As already described, with the label “generic pronoun,” we refer to the use of “he,” “him,” “his,” and “himself,” comprising both men and women, which, by the way, has a rather vague meaning, to say the least, since the referent may be only males or people in general (Mills 2008: 47). Moreover, when the generic pronoun is used indiscriminately, two additional consequences follow: “affirming the markedness of female reference (i.e. male is the norm and female is the marked form) and [contributing] to the general
invisibility of females within the language and within society as a whole” (Mills 2008: 47). This is why this gender-specific kind of language is called “he-man” language (Mills 1995: 65). We saw examples of this in Chapter Two when we talked about the experience of art and art criticism with such pervasive usage that even women unwarily bow to this convention. In later years, as we have observed, feminist campaigns have succeeded in nearly eradicating this kind of generic pronoun in print by promoting truly generic pronouns (Mills 2008: 48). These campaigns achieved a two-forked goal with publishers editing out gender-specific generic pronouns and institutions such as trade unions and universities creating guidelines for usage (Mills 2008: 48).

American sociolinguist Suzanne Romaine suggests that now there is a need to go beyond the use of gender-specific generic pronouns in order to see if males and females are equally represented (qtd. in Mills 2008: 49). Romaine’s analysis of a corpus of American English showed that in one million words, “there were over 9,000 occurrences of ‘he’ and only over 2,000 occurrences of ‘she,’” evincing that generics alone could not “account for that discrepancy, and that we need to be aware of the relative lack of reference to women” (qtd. in Mills 2008: 49). This is similar to our findings of reference to Lois Lane in Superman comic books, as we will see in the next section.

Closely related to generic pronouns are the so-called “generic” nouns such as “man” (Mills 2008: 49). These are terms supposedly comprising both men and women but, in reality, they usually refer only to men or are understood as a male reference (Mills 2008: 49). And associated with this usage, there is the general conception that the male term is the norm or default and the female one is the marked term (Mills 1995: 66; 2008:
We have mentioned that many of these usages have been largely reduced thanks to feminist campaigns, but there are some aspects of the language that do not lend themselves to easy gender-free substitution (Mills 1995: 66-67). Set-phrases, idioms and proverbs are such cases, as for instance, “to be man enough” or “the man in the street,” since they cannot be easily exchanged for “to be person enough” or “the woman in the street,” and this difficult or impossible interchangeability certainly shows that they are not true generics (Mills 1995: 66-67).

Whereas male insult terms in English seem to focus on lack of intellect or stupidity, according to many feminist theorists, insult terms specifically used for women tend to be sexualized, and they seem to be more numerous than those available for men (Mills 2008: 52, 57). In Britain, Mills documents that women are usually “insulted in relation to their sexuality (‘slag,’ . . . ‘tart’), their appearance (‘dog,’ ‘trout’), talking too much and too loudly (‘gossip,’ . . . ‘nag,’ ‘strident’), and their non-compliance (‘battleaxe,’ ‘old bat,’ . . .)” (2008: 57). In this connection, Mills presents the complex case study of some samples of British rap music, and she ends her discussion by stating that the insult terms used “are indeed sexist and homophobic, but they are not reducible to those meanings alone, since they have a history of usage which makes their meaning multi-layered. . . . [T]his analysis of a particular context forces us to be wary of making snap judgements about the inherent sexism or homophobia of particular words” (2008: 56).

By semantic derogation, Mills means gender-specific terms associated with women or with femininity which have historically become derogatory towards women, in contrast with those of the same category available for men (1995: 83; 2008: 56). The evolutionary
pattern of pejoration can be seen in such words as “lady,” “governess,” “mistress,” and “madam,” which were originally used only for powerful women, but the later semantic deterioration has given way to wider and usually derogatory reference, while their counterparts “lord,” “governor,” “master,” and “sir” have maintained their association with high status (Mills 1995: 84; 2008: 56). The word “woman” has gone through similar decay, and although it is not necessarily an insult to apply the word “man” to a woman, the word “woman” referring to a man is always considered an insult, as can be shown by the contrast in the phrase “be a man; don’t be such a woman,” which is evidently an accusation of being weak (Mills 2008: 57). Even English linguist John Lyons, in his more aseptic discussion of componential analysis in semantics, acknowledges the difference in connotation, since the elements “human,” “female,” and “adult” are not enough to explain “the fact that the relation between ‘girl’ and ‘woman,’ in most contexts, differs from the relation that holds between ‘boy’ and ‘man’” (154), leaving implicit what the difference is.

British feminist linguist Muriel Schultz believes that this process of word pejoration may have three causes: contamination, euphemism and prejudice (qtd. in Mills 2008: 61). Contamination with other low-status concepts may be a factor in semantic fluctuation; for instance, terms such as “woman” or “female” may acquire sexual connotations, and coming to mean “prostitute” or “mistress” in different historical periods (qtd. in Mills 2008: 61). Euphemism plays a role in semantic derogation because the avoidance of certain words, for instance the naming of prostitutes, prompts the use of either words referring to other women, or dysphemisms (qtd. in Mills 2008: 61). Prejudice is the main
reason for semantic derogation, and in Schultz’s view, it is “occasioned by the need for men to constitute women as an ‘out-group’ by focusing largely on their sexuality when referring to them” (qtd. in Mills 2008: 61).

The working context also gives examples of negative connotations or trivializations when women are in the majority (Mills 2008: 57). Mills cites the “lollipop lady,” a title given in Britain to crossing attendants, which suggests lack of serious consideration or worth for the job (Mills 2008: 57). Feminists have claimed that more often than not diminutives are used in reference to women although, fortunately, these words are becoming obsolete, like “aviatrix” or “usherette” (Mills 2008: 59). There are also words related to women which, apart from negative connotations, have acquired restricted reference; for instance, the term “priestess” is specifically associated with pagan religions, so the phrase “women priests” has begun to be used in reference to ordained Christian women (Mills 2008: 60). Moreover, it is worth highlighting that there is no male equivalent for the ordinary phrases “working mother” or “career woman,” still showing the asymmetry in relation to the working environment for women and men (Mills 1995: 86-87).

Some first names in English are shared by both women and men, for instance, Hilary and Jocelyn, although similar first names are marked by a different letter, such as Lindsey-Lindsay or Francis-Frances, and there are many female names derived from male names: Stephen-Stephanie or Christopher-Christina (Mills 1995: 82). Women tend to be given diminutive forms, for example Mandy or Debbie, whereas this is not so common for men, but both female and male first names may be shortened to more informal forms,
and these are used by women and men, usually with the spelling “ie” for female names (Mills 1995: 82; 2008: 61). Although women may take male first names without much fuss, this process is not reciprocal for men (Mills 1995: 82). We have to remember, though, that in the United States the choice of first names is more flexible and it is very common for children to take their mother’s surname as first name.

In relation to the use of first names by participants in a communication event, an important aspect is the tendency to call women by their first name even if the situational context is not informal (Mills 1995: 82). Mills cites the case of literary criticism where female authors tend to be called by their first name or name plus surname, while male authors are always referred to by their surname only (1995: 83). And not only in the reduced environment of academia is this naming process afoot: we only have to remember the references to former American First Lady, Senator, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the newspapers. As regards comics, in the twenty-year span of our inquiry, we may expect an evolution in the naming of Lois Lane, for instance, by her boss Perry White.

Until the 1930s in Britain, the taking of the husband’s name by a married woman symbolized the coming into the possession of the woman as an object and literally involved the appropriation of her property (Mills 2008: 61-62). Feminists debated the traditional loss of name on marriage, but there were no clear solutions: retaining their maiden name implied accepting their father’s surname, which seemed for many as androcentric as taking their husband’s (Mills 2008: 62). The possibility of turning their surnames into double-barreled one by adding their married surnames at the end has been
seen as a partial solution, because very often the first surname is eventually lost, especially in relation to children (Mills 2008: 61). In this connection, it is interesting that Mills explains the Spanish custom of retaining both the parents’ first surnames and losing their second ones as an alternative, adding that in the 1990s in Spain a law was passed that allowed parents to choose the order of their children’s surnames (2008: 61). As within the period of Superman comics under study, the fictional couple gets married, we will have the opportunity to see how this is solved in the DC universe.

Feminists have foregrounded that titles for women force the user to choose between married or unmarried forms, while this is not so with titles for men (Mills 2008: 64). Thus, in the 1970s they introduced the term “Ms.” in the Anglo-American setting, “in order to give women the option of choosing to represent themselves as something other than married or unmarried” (Mills 2008: 64). Mills acknowledges that nowadays Ms. is widely used by feminists in Britain, and it is extensively available as an option on official forms, but many people still find it suspicious (2008: 64). However, in the context of English language teaching (ELT) the abbreviation Ms. does not seem to be charged with negative connotations and it appears completely neutral in most textbooks, especially in English for international business, whereas Miss seems outdated, maybe because of its translation as the Spanish “señorita.” Some contemporary online dictionaries reinforce this idea. As an example, *Macmillan Dictionary* includes a note entitled “Avoiding offence: Ms,” where in relation to the title “Miss,” it warns that “many women now consider this old-fashioned and prefer to use Ms as their title” (“Ms,” emphasis in the original).
Instead of Miss, Mrs. or Ms., academic women have the possibility of using the professional titles such as “Dr.” or “Professor,” but outside the university or hospital backgrounds these titles may appear pretentious (Mills 2008: 64). As can be seen, women have many resources at their disposal and they even may select different titles and names depending on the context and the particular community of practice (Mills 2008: 66). For feminists the selection of titles and names is even more challenging, since there is a seeming tug-of-war between “the demands of what they perceive as sexism (largely the conservative anti-feminist forces in society), and what they perceive as anti-sexism (largely feminist ideas),” which results in selections according to their own interpretative frameworks or depending on the contexts (Mills 2008: 68).

Generally speaking, the analysis of sexism basically focuses on nouns, pronouns and adjectives, but Mills also includes instances of overt sexism in verbs or processes, which encompass several categories, as we have mentioned (2008: 68). As a process, transitivity analysis examines, as Mills states, “who does what to whom” in texts (2008: 69). Mills bases her ideas of transitivity on the already-mentioned systemic grammar developed by Michael Halliday (1995: 110). Performing this kind of analysis on a novel, Halliday tries to connect the syntactic choices the literary author makes for the characters with the creation of a world-view, and thus, to discover the relationship between language and ideology (1995: 110). Therefore, this analysis shows “the representation of who acts (who is an agent) and who is acted upon (who is affected by the actions of others)” (Mills 1995: 110, emphasis in the original). This implies that syntax can reveal if characters are represented as passive victims of circumstance or active doers controlling
the environment, making decisions, and taking action (Mills 1995: 112). In the case of female characters, there is a tendency to be represented as the recipient of actions, i.e. in the object position rather than the subject position (Mills 2008: 69), and if this is repeated constantly, it can be considered stereotypical and sexist. Therefore, the analysis of transitivity choices can be a powerful tool to uncover the ideological messages which circulate in texts; nevertheless, this does not imply a one-to-one equivalence in meaning, rather as Mills contends, “transitivity choices, like other linguistic choices, have a range of meanings dependent on the context in which they occur and the presuppositions which the reader brings to bear on the interpretive process” (1995: 116).

Indirect speech is the usual reporting strategy used to represent women in the media, and this lack of direct quotation leads to evaluative statements with reporting words such as “claim” or “argue” (Mills 2008: 71). Brazilian-born British discourse analyst Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard considers that these mediated statements make female voices fairly “unaccessed” (qtd. in Mills 2008: 71). Moreover, when direct style is used, those female voices tend to be associated with the private sphere, for example those of daughters, wives and mothers, rather than the professional public one (qtd. in Mills 2008: 71). Thus, according to Caldas-Coulthard, “The private/public distinction is a very important feature of social organization. If women are represented mostly speaking in their personal roles, they are marginalised in terms of public or ritual speech” (qtd. in Mills 2008: 71). It is debatable that this institutionalized usage of indirect style constitutes overt sexism or indirect sexism, but Mills has classified it under the former heading with the caveat that “there is a great deal of overlap between the two types of sexism” (Mills
As regards comics, characters typically speak for themselves through the balloon scheme. Nevertheless, it may be intriguing to observe if this particular instance of sexism has somehow crept into the world of the superhero comic books under study.

Jokes are also going to be discussed under the category of humor as indirect sexism, because as we have seen, some sections of overt sexism coincide with indirect sexism. Here it is explicit jokes that Mills studies, while the classification of humor deals with those that rely more on presupposition. In general, sexist jokes can express objectionable views of women without any consequences, because jokers can argue that they themselves are not the authors, and after all, “It’s just a joke” (Mills 2008: 71).

Sometimes even insults can have an interpretation as jokes, since insults are often used to indicate familiarity or intimacy, and this difficulty in interpretation is at the core of the analysis of sexism (Mills 2008: 72, 73). Nevertheless, it can be observed that sexist jokes are a way of excluding women as a “minority group” or an “out-group” without taking responsibility for doing it (Mills 1995: 108; 2008: 71). This is similar to the strategy used in xenophobic jokes, which set up out-groups within a certain society, for instance, Poles in the United States, the Irish in England, Belgians in France, and even Galician people in Argentina.

The sexist exclusion of women as an out-group in society is achieved by using stereotypes and prototypes in order to re-establish the clearly defined traditional roles and spheres of men and women (Mills 2008: 73). Thanks to feminist campaigns these distinctions became blurred, and many women and men find this troubling, so there is a need to assert sex difference as binary and natural in order to go back to “an early period
of order when people supposedly ‘knew their place’” (Mills 2008: 73). But it is important to realize that sexism is not homogeneous, and it can often be difficult to classify a remark as sexist, because analysts have to take into account not only speakers’ intentions, but also whether they do use stereotypical images of women (Mills 2008: 75).

Consequently, the concept of stereotype is often evoked in discussions of sexism (Mills 2008: 126), and this concept is also significant for comics analysis, as we saw in Chapter Two (Eisner 1998: 17-20; Gasca & Gubern 32-97). In their compilation of comics stereotypes, for instance, the already-mentioned authors Luis Gasca and Román Gubern not only include characters, but also animals, things, and actions or results from actions (32-97). It is worth noting that they list a female hero category, and contrary to the usual classification of comics character Lois Lane as Superman’s love interest or sidekick, they assign her to that category (Gasca & Gubern 66). Unfortunately, our expectations are quickly dashed when we take a closer look at their definition of the so-called “female hero,” since it actually refers to the damsel-in-distress stereotype (Gasca & Gubern 66).

From a feminist perspective, the definition of a stereotype does not rely on a fixed set of characteristics, but on “a range of possible scripts or scenarios (sets of features, roles and possible narrative sequences)” (Mills 2008: 126). Accordingly, there is a focus on an extreme aspect of behavior exhibited, or even imagined to be displayed, by some members of an out-group, and then, that feature is generalized to the whole group (Mills 2008: 126). “In this sense, the stereotype is based on a feature or set of behaviours which may have occurred within that community, but the stereotype is one noticeable form of
behaviour which is afforded prototypical status, backgrounding all of the other more
common, and in a sense more defining, forms of behaviours” (Mills 2008: 126).

The media, or in our case comics, assume that the audience accept stereotypes
without contention, but their public can “take up a variety of positions in relation to this
information, some affiliating with the values of the stereotype and others rejecting them”
(Mills 2008: 127). One important contribution by feminism is its opposition to stereotypes
of appropriate behavior for men and women encouraged by the media and society at
large; thus, “the notion that women are weaker than men or that they should not
compete with men in the workplace are notions which cannot be drawn on without also
drawing upon discourse of feminism” (Mills 2008: 127-128). This latter idea of women’s
duty to avoid competition in the workplace has been challenged by comics character Lois
Lane since the very inception of Superman, although, as we have mentioned, her
character has fluctuated between socially acceptable stereotypes and more progressive
views throughout the long-running history of the comic books.

It is obvious that there are several concurrent stereotypes of femininity which are
at odds with each other: the nagging woman and the gossip can in all likelihood coexist
with “the stereotype of the over-polite woman who is concerned only with surface
appearances, or that of the self-effacing woman silenced by a dominating male partner”
(Mills 2008: 128). Most of these stereotypes of femininity may be based on the notion of
prototype mentioned above, and this implies that they may have originated in certain
salient aspects of the behavior displayed or encouraged to be taken up, for instance, by
white middle-class American women in the 1950s, but it is clear that there were other
forms of behavior in conflict with mainstream impulses at that time and within the American middle class (Mills 2008: 127). Here it is relevant to consider the conflicting views of femininity and the polarized responses provoked by controversial attitudes; indeed, “women who have a strong investment in femininity for their own self-identity may not consider sexist those statements which are interpreted as sexist by feminists” (Mills 2008: 75). To illustrate, there are statements that may be labeled either as “street-compliments” or “sexual harassment,” according to two different views: “those who affiliate with traditional feminine values may consider street compliments to be flattering and a recognition of their attractiveness, whereas for Anglo-American feminists, these comments will only seem like unwanted sexual attention” (Mills 2008: 75).

However, these views are not static, as can be noted by the changing attitudes within feminism regarding traditional femininity, since “it is no longer seen solely as a set of negative behaviours which keep women in a subordinate position, but rather there is potential play within the behaviours which have been traditionally seen as denoting powerlessness” (Mills 2008: 128). Although adopting certain traditional feminine positions does not involve great social recognition (e.g. caring jobs, which have been associated with the private sphere, are not economically rewarding), this investment in femininity may be valuable for some women, for instance, providing respectability, and thus, some status and moral position (Mills 2008: 129, 130). Consequently, “caring, concern for appearances, emotional excess, incompetence in relation to non-domestic tasks, have all in the past been markers of the feminine,” but changes in female positions within the public sphere with greater access to employment and social mobility, together
with more choice in relation to marriage, divorce and conception, have had a profound impact on women (Mills 2008: 130). Although many women do not openly identify themselves as feminists, with all these changes many of the values of feminism have become common sense, but this does not imply that the ideals of femininity have instantly vanished without trace, since, as we have stated, there are contradictory views and discourses in society (Mills 2008: 130). These contradictions lead to different evaluations of feminine stereotypes, and these feminine stereotypes may be found sexist only when they are negatively evaluated (Mills 2008: 129). By way of example, consideration for others as an innate feminine quality should not automatically be assumed as sexist, because some might argue that this is a valuable behavior, while others might think that it is a weakness and a waste of time, and it is this latter view that can indeed amount to sexism when that characteristic is solely ascribed to women (Mills 2008: 129).

Different assumptions about stereotypes of gender may provoke controversy not only between women and men, but also among women themselves, “where some hold a more traditional view of what women should do, whilst others aim to challenge those stereotypes” (Mills 2008: 129-130). As noted earlier, stereotypes are not static discursive structures, but as Mills remarks, they are resources which can undergo change fairly quickly, “with certain anachronistic aspects being available to be called upon by certain speakers and writers within particular communities of practice” (2008: 132). Although sexism is surely considered anachronistic by many people, it is kept within the language as an active set of resources for some, while it is observed by others as a set of attitudes to
be eradicated, just as the stereotypes on which it is based (Mills 2008: 132). Therefore, Mills confirms that

the history of sexism is embedded in the language which is available to be used; those words about which feminists have campaigned, such as ‘chairman’ and ‘weathergirl’, have not disappeared, but exist as an inflection or pressure on current usage of related or opposed words. Sometimes, the usage of a particular word is stigmatised and individuals then avoid the use of that word, but that stigmatisation then has an effect upon related language items. The past meanings and usages of a word exert themselves on current usages and interpretations. (2008: 124-125)

In other words, users of a specific language receive these ready-made conflicting discursive systems, and they have to decide which meanings to accept and align themselves with and which meanings to reject and challenge (Mills 2008: 126). Therefore, sexism is a resource available to individuals not only to position themselves as affiliated with certain groups, but also to construct their own identity (Mills 2008: 126).

Currently there is less overt sexism in the public discourses of many institutions, due to their open and relentless attempts at eradication or, at least, discouragement (Mills 2008: 133). Although overt sexism still persists in informal interaction, it is stigmatized to a certain extent within public discourse (Mills 2008: 133). In this connection, Mills includes a very important footnote, which is specifically apt for Spanish-speakers: “Nevertheless, in languages other than English, at least in languages which have grammatical gender, sexism is still overt and blatant, since the masculine form is used to
refer to both males and females fairly consistently” (2008: 133). But just as there are handbooks with advice on how to deal with sexism in the English language (Son), there are also recommendations on Spanish language use, especially in the media, e.g. avoiding male generics with different strategies, specifically the well-known use of slash to include the grammatical female form (Alario et al. 16-23), and suggestions on how to warrant women’s public visibility, e.g. using symmetrical ways to portray women and men with the same qualities and respect (Sánchez Aranda et al. 168-172).

In conclusion, within the heading of overt sexism, there are a number of conventionalized and institutionalized ways of representing women, which can fall under two basic strategies: on the one hand, the sexualization or trivialization of women in conventional usage, and on the other hand, the representation of women as a deviation from a male norm (Mills 2008: 76). However, there have been changes both in sexist forms and feminist forms in recent years in response to one another (Mills 2008: 76). Therefore, as Mills urges, it is vital for feminists to continue campaigning about overt sexism, since all this has “an impact on the way women construct their sense of their own identity and their positions within institutions and communities of practice” (2008: 76). According to Mills, overt or direct sexism has been challenged through several reforming measures initiated by feminists; but eventually, these campaigns have led to two responses: one, the development of “political correctness” and “political incorrectness,” both implicitly criticizing feminist interventions, and the other, the development of what Mills calls “indirect sexism” (2008: 124).
Indirect sexism is “that sexism which is masked by humor and irony and is consequently quite difficult to classify as sexism” (Mills 2008: 34). Mills explains that indirect sexism seems to challenge overt sexism, but in reality it maintains the same old attitudes, and she adds that it “is very reminiscent of, if not identical to, past forms of sexism, but the only difference to overt sexism is the way it is used” (2008: 134). Therefore, using humor and irony with sexist statements does not change the essence of sexism itself, but instead it merely changes the way it can be responded to (Mills 2008: 134). Facing this kind of sexism, anti-sexist campaigns are hindered by the complexity of reaching a consensus of what is sexist and how to respond appropriately, since “sexism is an evaluation of an intent to be sexist rather than an inherent quality of the utterance or text alone” (Mills 2008: 136).

Mills presents an approach to indirect sexism that “allows for an analysis which is both localised, i.e. analysing how gender is addressed/oriented to/constructed within a particular interaction/text, and generalised, i.e. analysing the general and fairly regular patterns of production and interpretation of discourses” (2008: 140, emphasis in the original). With this approach, it is possible to analyze indirect sexism within a specific context as “a complex negotiation between participants’ assessments of what is stereotypically appropriate, or what they assume is appropriate within a particular community of practice and their notion of their own gendered identity” (Mills 2008: 140). Mills divides indirect sexism into the following categories, which were introduced in Chapter Two: humor (1995: 106-110; 2008: 140-145); presupposition (1995: 100-105; 2008: 145-147); conflicting messages (1995: 58-60; 2008: 147-148); scripts and metaphors
Humor usually plays on the exaggeration of stereotypical features related to a certain group, remaining unaccountable for the offence involved in the facetious remarks (Mills 2008: 140). As American gender linguist Robin Tolmach Lakoff confirms, “Saying serious things in jest both creates camaraderie and allows the speaker to avoid responsibility for anything controversial in the message” (qtd. in Mills 2008: 140). Sexist irony is a common strategy for humorous statements about women, but it does not work as traditional irony, rather as a kind of disclaimer for the speaker (Mills 2008: 141). Mills regards jokes “as a small part of a much wider discursive structure which discriminates against women. Ignoring jokes . . ., actively enjoying them or characterising them as ‘silly’ will not alter those discursive structures and will perhaps reaffirm them and allow them to proliferate” (2008: 144). For instance, many advertisements may include sexist notions in a supposedly parodic way, but if the response invokes criticism and accusation of sexism, it is played as the out-group concepts of being puritanical or overly literal, or not being sophisticated or “postmodern” enough to see the playfulness or ludicrousness of the adverts (Mills 2008: 145). Thus, with these practices of indirect sexism, it is even possible to make overtly sexist comments without consequences, and hence, to keep those sexist attitudes in play (Mills 2008: 145).

Mills observes that sexism at the level of presupposition is even much more difficult to confront than humor because the sexist remarks are embedded within the background knowledge necessary to make sense of what is said; therefore, it is necessary
to disentangle the covert sexist assumptions, which are usually hidden in order to offer the opportunity of denial (1995: 102; 2008: 145). The example Mills uses to illustrate this is patently clear. In the question “So, have you women finished gossiping?,” there are several presuppositions about women and talk, such as “that women’s talk is trivial, that women engage in gossiping more than men, that two women talking together can be assumed to be gossiping, and so on” (Mills 2008: 146). This is a yes/no question that makes it problematic to take issue with the sexist stereotypes, unless the underlying assumptions are brought into the open before answering outright (Mills 2008: 146).

Within this category there is a type of indirect sexism that German linguists Marlis Hellinger and Hadumod Bussmann call “social gender,” i.e. connecting certain terms with gender stereotypes (qtd. in Mills 2008: 147). For instance, “[m]any higher-status occupational terms such as lawyer, surgeon or scientist will frequently be pronominalised by the male specific pronoun ‘he’ in contexts where referential gender is either not known or irrelevant. On the other hand, low status occupational titles such as secretary, nurse or schoolteacher will often be followed by anaphoric ‘she’” (qtd. in Mills 2008: 147). German feminist linguist Friederike Braun describes “this as the MAN principle (Male as Norm Principle); that is, if confronted by a genderless noun, you choose the masculine, unless there are stereotypes which make you choose the feminine” (qtd. in Mills 2008: 147). As Mills insists, this type of presupposition of gender stereotypes is harder to challenge than overt sexism (2008: 147).

Texts do not usually present a simple message for the reader to take a comfortable unquestionable positioning, instead there may be conflicting messages even within the
same discourse, and this is especially so when dealing with gender and feminism (Mills 1995: 59; 2008: 147). As we have seen, the pressure from feminist campaigns has made many institutions adopt changes in representational practices (Mills 2008: 147). However, many times these changes are not deep enough to account for a total removal of sexist messages, and conflicts between these two types emerge in apparently enlightened texts (Mills 2008: 147). By way of example, Mills presents the case where egalitarian discourses and sexist presuppositions clash and invalidate each other in the same text, as follows: on the one hand, giving the option of the Ms. title and not listing housewife as an occupation; but on the other hand, allowing for only one job-related description of full-time women carers — unemployed (2008: 147-148).

In gender studies, metaphor is not considered a literary deviation of a standard or literal usage in the form of identity instead of comparison, but rather an element taken from a body of thought or background knowledge which may shift the basic idea of the object of the metaphor (Abrams 63; Mills 1995: 105). This is particularly evident in the so-called “dead metaphors,” those cases in which there is a lack of awareness of the discrepancy between the object of the metaphor and the metaphoric word used (Abrams 64; Mills 1995: 105). When we dealt with naming above, we saw a very telling example of this, which only made us become aware of the metaphoric difference when confronted by feminist research: “She is a fox” versus “He is a fox” (Goddard & Patterson 13). There is another interesting instance cited by Mills: the warfare-related associations of the phrase “the battle of the sexes,” which assumes “at a metaphorical level that the relations
between the sexes can be considered only as if they were always antagonistic, . . . rather than considering other forms of thinking” (1995: 106).

It is also worth examining extended metaphors or scripts which are used in relation to women and men in the public sphere (Mills 2008: 148). Mills illustrates this with the example of an article in the business section of the *Guardian* newspaper about a female London Stock Exchange chief executive and her negotiations with other European stock exchanges (2008: 148). Her failed negotiations are depicted in the newspaper as an extended metaphor of a broken love relationship; thus, this influential female executive is portrayed as a jilted lover, whereas it is difficult to conceive that this kind of metaphor may be used in relation to male chief executives (Mills 2008: 148). Although it is not easy to characterize this scenario as overtly sexist, “we need to see that this is a type of institutionalized indirect sexism, where sexual or romantic scenarios or scripts are drawn on when referring to women in positions of institutional power” (Mills 2008: 148).

According to Mills, the examination of the connotations and the collocation of words associated with women may reveal an even more complex operation of indirect sexism (2008: 148). Collocation is the connection of words to create natural-sounding discourse, so an anomalous collocation takes on a marked quality (Mills 2008: 148-149; *Oxford* vii). At first glance, some words do not seem sexist in themselves, but when associated with certain terms, negative connotations may emerge (Mills 2008: 149). For instance, in the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English*, the highly-regarded professions of “doctor” and “engineer” with a long et cetera appear as attributes of “father,” and the sample sentence given in this connection is “Their musician father
encouraged their love of music” (296). But for “mother” the only word loosely related to jobs is “working,” with no example provided (Oxford 508); thus, in comparison with the professional terms available for “father,” this seems very meager indeed.

For her part, Mills cites the analysis carried out by feminists on the collocation of some key terms in the British media, and the results show that the words “mum,” “divorcee,” “single mother,” “lone parent,” “working mother” and “career woman,” which are not necessarily considered sexist in themselves, are usually connected to words with negative connotations or are often embedded in contexts where problematic issues are discussed (2008: 149). Their findings also indicate that the word “husband” occurs much less frequently than “wife,” which implies less use of the relationship to a woman when mentioning males than vice versa, and when named, “husband” usually appears in subject position, rather than the object position often occupied by “wife” (Mills 2008: 150). We agree with Mills that this type of analysis on collocation and subject/object position is crucial to understand the indirect impact that these contexts have on the representation and perception of women and men (2008: 150).

For many feminists there is no doubt that in many types of writings there are strongly suggestive androcentric perspectives even after years of campaigning for gender-free discourses (Mills 2008: 150, 151). Mills illustrates this point by drawing examples from reports in British newspapers about the intention by the Protestant Church of England to appoint women as bishops just before the publication of her book in 2008, since at that time the church allowed for women to be ordained as priests but not bishops (2008: 151). For that move to become reality it took several years, for it was not until
2014 when the General Synod of the Church of England gave “its final approval for women to become bishops in the Church of England” (“Church”). As Mills points out, in those news reports there are no explicit arguments against the appointment of women as bishops, and neither is there explicit mention of the inadequacies of women to be bishops, “but implicit in their statements is that women are not fit to be bishops” (2008: 151). Among the many subtle innuendoes, a great number of articles refer to the apostolic succession being male, to the devaluation of the male bishops’ office if women are appointed, and to the threat that some church leaders would rather leave the church than accept women bishops (Mills 2008: 152). And to reinforce this bleak view, the campaigns in favor of women being appointed as bishops are hardly ever reported (Mills 2008: 152). Within this particular context, the term “traditionalist” is used as a word with positive connotation, and the “traditionalists” are represented as if circumstances are imposed on them, since they “face the prospect of serving in the church alongside women bishops or leaving” and they are being “forced to leave” (qtd. in Mills 2008: 152). These newspaper reports collude with the views of those church leaders who are against the change in the church status quo, by representing the debate entirely from their perspective, as if there were no other views on the subject (Mills 2008: 152). Therefore, these instances of indirect sexism become very hard to identify and challenge, because the androcentrism of the text is not foregrounded and it is embedded in subtle arguments that can be easily overlooked (Mills 2008: 152).

To recapitulate, as part of the methodological approach of our study, we have presented a brief overview of the global context of situation, the evolution of the
superhero genre, some general aspects of feminist comics analysis, and Mills’s specific categories of feminist language research that had been previously listed in Chapter Two.

Now let us turn to the methodological tools for the semiotic analysis of comics, which were also introduced in Chapter Two. As noted earlier, then, Kress and van Leeuwen use the theoretical notion of the three metafunctions developed by Halliday, in order to organize their analytical system of visual communication (1996: 40). The ideational (or referential) metafunction (representation of objects and their relations) includes the patterns of narrative and conceptual representations (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 40-41, 43-78, 79-118); the interpersonal metafunction (relations between the producer, the receiver, and the object represented) includes the patterns of interaction between producers and receivers, and their modality (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 41, 119-158, 159-180); and finally, the textual metafunction (coherent and cohesive texts) includes the meaning of the composition and the materiality of texts (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 41, 181-229, 231-241).

In a semiotic act, there are two types of participants: the interactive participants, those taking part in the act of communication, and the represented participants, the subject of the communication (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 46). Based on Hallyday’s ideational metafunction, there are also two kinds of possible representational structures: narrative patterns, which “serve to present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements”; and conceptual patterns, which “represent participants in terms of their class, structure and meaning, in other words, in terms of their generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence” (Kress & van Leeuwen
The basic characteristic that differentiates these two structures is that in the former there is always a vector, which conveys directionality and dynamism, while in the latter there is never a vector, since they are static compositions (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 57). As they are dynamic elements, vectors normally form diagonals (they could be bodies in action, but any represented element can become diagonal lines of action), and they are indispensable for a narrative representation (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 53, 57).

The represented participants can take different names according to their function in the narrative visual. Thus, the participant that forms a vector in some way or that is its origin is called “Actor” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 61). Actors are usually “the most salient participants, through size, place in the composition, contrast against background, color saturation or conspicuousness, sharpness of focus, and through the ‘psychological salience,’ which certain participants . . . have for viewers” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 61). Images with only one participant (Actor) are called “non-transactional,” i.e. similar to intransitive verbs in language (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 61). Likewise, when narrative representations have two participants, they are called “transactional,” i.e. similar to transitive verbs, and in this case, the Actor directs the movement towards the participant called “Goal,” which is the aim of the vector and the action (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 62, 63). In some bidirectional transactional narrative structures, each participant can play the role of Actor and Goal (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 63).

On the occasions when the vector is formed by the direction of one or more of the represented participants’ eyeline, the process is not considered an action but a reaction, and instead of Actors and Goals, there are Reacters and Phenomena (Kress & van
Leeuwen 1996: 64). Since Reacters do the looking, they must have visible eyes and facial expressions, hence the need for them to be human or human-like (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 64). The Phenomenon is not limited to participants, object of the Reacter’s observation, but it can be a whole visual proposition, e.g. a complete transactional narrative structure (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 64-65). Just as actions, reactions may be transactional or non-transactional, that is to say, with or without Phenomenon, since in the latter case, for instance, the Reacter may look at something outside the picture frame (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 66). According to Kress and van Leeuwen, in general women are usually represented gazing into the middle distance, while men tend to be represented with their eyes on far horizons (1996: 66). While the viewer can develop strong empathy or identification with the represented participant, this kind of images can also become a source of representational manipulation (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 66, 67). The pointer in speech balloons and the bubbles in thought balloons are a special type of vector that is related to transactional narrative reactions, since they connect a human or human-like being with content (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 67). However, instead of the content of perception usually associated to transactional narrative reactions, balloon pointers direct to the content of speech and thought bubbles to the content of an inner mental process (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 67).

Up to this point, we have seen narrative processes that involve an agent, either as an Actor or as a Reacter. In a different kind of narrative processes, there are participants called “Relays,” which are the Goal in relation to one participant and the Actor in relation to another (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 68). These processes, which Kress and van
Leeuwen have labeled “conversion,” are often used to represent natural events in a chain of transactional narrative structures, and as the name “conversion” implies, Relays in those processes do not merely pass on what they receive, but they somewhat transform or convert it into something else (1996: 68).

Secondary participants or “Circumstances” in narrative structures are those involved in a relation to the main participants which precludes vectors; thus, Circumstances “could be left out without affecting the basic proposition realized by the narrative pattern, even though their deletion would of course entail a loss of information” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 71). There are three basic types of Circumstances: setting (location), when there is a contrast between foreground and background (apart from Circumstance, it can also be interpreted as an embedded analytical structure, a category we will examine below); means, when there are tools used in an action process without a vector between the tool and its user; and finally, accompaniment, when there is more than one participant but again without a vector to connect them (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 71-72).

As mentioned above, conceptual patterns represent participants in terms of class, structure or meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 56, 79). There are three basic types of conceptual structures of representation: classificatory, analytical, and symbolical (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 56). Classificatory or classificational patterns link participants to each other in a taxonomy—a set of participants are Subordinates in relation to at least one other, the Superordinate (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 56, 81). Taxonomies can be overt or covert: while in the former, the Superordinate is revealed, in the latter, it is either only
indicated in the caption or accompanying text, or inferred by the viewer from the similarities between the Subordinates (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 81-82). In order to recognize covert taxonomies, it is vital that the equivalence between the Subordinates be visually realized by a symmetrical composition, i.e. they should be “placed at equal distance from each other, given the same size and the same orientation towards the horizontal and vertical axes” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 81).

Analytical patterns relate participants in terms of a part-whole structure, and they include two kinds of participants, the Carrier or the whole, and any number of Possessive Attributes or parts (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 89). Analysis always presupposes selection, so some attributes or characteristics of the Carrier are chosen as relevant criteria, while others are disregarded (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 90). In unstructured analytical patterns, the Possessive Attributes or parts of the Carrier are presented, but not the Carrier itself; that is, the way the parts fit together to make up a whole is omitted (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 94). Spatially structured analytical patterns can be exhaustive; in other words, they can represent the Possessive Attributes in such a way that they can be assembled together to form a complex shape, accounting for the whole Carrier (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 97). Structured analytical patterns can also be inclusive; that is to say, they can represent only some Possessive Attributes, leaving blank space without accounting for the whole Carrier (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 97).

As noted earlier, analytical structures normally focus on spatiality, but there are also temporal analytical structures, which are basically realized by time lines (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 95). Therefore, although time lines have a temporal dimension, which
suggests narrative, “they are not vectorial, and, rather than representing history as a gradual unfolding of events, they analyse it into successive stages with fixed and stable characteristics” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 95). Time lines may be topographical, i.e. drawn to scale; or topological, i.e. with participants organized in the right sequence, but not with time intervals drawn to scale (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 95).

The final conceptual image representation is the category of symbolical or symbolic patterns, depicting what a participant means or is, and it is realized in two types—the Symbolic Attributive structure and the Symbolic Suggestive structure (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 56, 108). Two participants are involved in the Symbolic Attributive pattern: the Carrier, whose meaning or identity is established, and the Symbolic Attribute, which represents the meaning or identity itself (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 108). In contrast, in the Symbolic Suggestive pattern, there is only one participant, the Carrier, and the symbolic meaning is established by what Kress and van Leeuwen call “mood” or “atmosphere,” and also by a depiction not of a specific moment or analytical details, but of a generalized essence (1996: 108, 110). Instead of being involved in some action that could be read as narrative, human participants in symbolic structures usually pose for the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 109). Whereas in Symbolic Attributive patterns, the Carrier seems to receive its meaning and identity by the surrounding elements, in Symbolic Suggestive patterns, meaning and identity seem to derive from the Carrier’s inner qualities themselves (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 112).

We have discussed the representation of interactions and conceptual relations between the people, places and things depicted in images (represented participants); now
we turn to the interaction between the producers and the viewers of the image (interactive participants, i.e. those who communicate with each other through images), and as already stated, these latter relations are based on Hallyday’s interpersonal metafunction (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 119). Although there are many face-to-face interactions that may involve the production of images, e.g. snapshots of one another or diagrams to give directions, there are also many times when there is a disjunction between the context of production and the context of reception (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 119). As we mentioned in Chapter Two, this disjunction gives rise to two represented participants—the implied author and the implied reader (or viewer)—, and also to represented social relations, because the producers are absent from the place where the actual communicative transaction is completed by means of the image under scrutiny (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 120-121).

There are two kinds of contact between represented participants and viewers: demand, when pictures represent participants looking directly at the viewer’s eyes, and offer, when the represented participants’ eyes are averted from the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 122, 154). The demand image implies a form of direct address, since the represented participant’s gaze demands some imaginary relation with the viewer, and in doing this, images define the viewer to some extent (male or female, inferior or superior), excluding other viewers (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 122). The offer image, on the other hand, addresses the viewer indirectly without direct contact, and here the viewer is not object, but subject of the look, while the represented participants are offered as items of information or objects of impersonal contemplation (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 124).
Besides these manifestly different types of contact between demand and offer images, there is also a subtler distinction between them, involving communicative power: some represented participants are entitled to look directly into the viewers' eyes and others not (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 126).

While in Chapter Two we saw the traditional shots established by film (and comics) theory to show frame distance, here Kress and van Leeuwen propose possible meaningful interpretations for those shots (1996: 130-135). Just as the choice between offer and demand images can suggest different relations between represented participants and viewers, the choice of frame distance and the size of the frame can be linked with the interactive meanings of images (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 130). Kress and van Leeuwen associate the meanings of the traditional language of film or television to refer to size of frame with the idea of proxemics, a term coined by American anthropologist Edward Hall, who, in turn, acknowledges the influence of the work by American figurative painter-portraitist Maurice Grosser to develop this concept (1996: 131). According to Grosser, if the model is far away, there is no real connection and he or she can be compared to a tree in a landscape or an apple in a still life, but if the model is close enough to have social intimacy and easy conversation, “the sitter’s soul begins to appear” (qtd. in Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 131). Thus, Hall has applied this and shown that we establish a set of invisible boundaries for people to come near us, and he divides these boundaries according to the people allowed to enter our transparent circles into personal or intimate distance, social distance, and impersonal or public distance which accounts for friends and
intimates, acquaintances, and strangers, respectively (qtd. in Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 130-131, 154).

Accordingly, shot distance represents these social distances in relation to human represented participants, but unlike the system of offer and demand images, the system of social distance can apply also to the representation of objects and of the environment (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 133). In Chapter Two we dealt with the fact that the frame size is traditionally referred to in terms of specific sections of the human body (close-up, American shot, etc.), but in this segmentation, objects are not taken into account; however, according to Kress and van Leeuwen, there may be at least three suggested correspondences between these shot distances and our everyday experience of objects and of the environment, in other words, size of frame can also suggest social relations between the viewer and objects, buildings and landscapes (1996: 134). As regards objects, then, at close distance, the implication may be that the object is used; at middle distance, the object is shown in full, but without much space around it, so it may be represented as within the viewer’s reach, but not as actually used; finally, at long distance, an invisible barrier seems to be established between the viewer and the object, thus it is there for contemplation only (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 134). The same kind of distinctions can be made with respect to representations of buildings and landscapes (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 134). They can be seen at close distance in relation to some participant or action, even from within; they can also be seen at middle distance as if identifying destination; or from a long distance, with space around them, maybe with respect or as an overview (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 134).
Apart from shot distance, images may indicate relation between represented participants and the viewer by means of perspective, which involves choosing an angle or a point of view, with the possibility of expressing objective or subjective attitudes towards represented participants (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 135). In Chapter Two, we showed that perspective has a mathematical geometric foundation, so from the point of view of meaning, it can be naturalized and presented as “faithful copies of empirical reality” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 135). Since the development of perspective in the Renaissance, there are two kinds of images in Western culture: subjective images, which have central perspective and hence built-in point of view; and objective images, which lack these characteristics (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 136). Objective images disregard the viewer and represent everything there is to know even if it is necessary to flout the laws of naturalistic depiction, just as children do when they depict things of the world as they know them, not as they see them (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 136, 137, 153). Subjective images are based on the system of “true” perspective developed in the Renaissance, with a naturalistic point of view selected for and imposed on the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 137; Soltes). In contrast with the earlier significance or salient perspective, i.e. related to the social, religious hierarchy and taking the environment into account, the “new” perspective with a centralized viewpoint became more and more independent of the environment, a kind of window on the world, eventually turning the image into an autonomous movable object produced for the market, rather than for specific locations (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 136, 139; Soltes).
Directly related to subjective perspective is the camera angle, and there are two types: horizontal angle, which may be frontal or oblique in relation to the viewer, and these two positions can be respectively associated with involvement with or detachment from the represented participants; or vertical angle, which has three positions in relation to height—high, low, and eye-level angles—, implying superiority (making the represented participants look small and insignificant, and giving the viewer power over them), inferiority (making them look imposing and awesome, and giving the representation power over the viewer), and equality (without power difference), respectively (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 143, 146, 154). Obviously, all these interpretations have to be qualified in each specific occurrence, because, for instance, the horizontal angle in an image could be frontal in relation to some represented participants and not others, so that viewers can accept some as part of their world (involvement or acceptance), and reject others as the “other” (detachment or exclusion) (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 143). In some cases, the reason for the choice of point of view and frame size is not given, and the exact nature of the relation of power and involvement may remain a metaphorical interpretation (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 148). Moreover, in other cases, implied viewers can intrude in the picture or have a space allotted to them, or even a certain sequence of images may narrativize the point of view and impose a fictional viewer between the represented and the interactive participants (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 148, 149; Soltes).

So far we have dealt with the subjective attitude of perspective and shot angles, but there are some particular angles—directly frontal or perpendicular top-down
angles—, which can produce an objective attitude, precisely because they suggest privileged viewer positions that neutralize perspective (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 149). However, they are not objective in entirely the same way: while the frontal angle is the angle of maximum involvement and oriented towards action (implying that this is how to do something), the top-down angle is the angle of maximum power and oriented towards theoretical knowledge (implying that this is a contemplative, even god-like, point of view) (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 149). There is a third objective viewpoint almost limited to diagrams: the cross-section or X-ray view, which reveals hidden aspects beyond the superficial appearances, hence its objectivity (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 150).

Finally, it is worth mentioning less subjective perspectives than the central one with centralized vanishing points we have discussed up to this point (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 152-153). One instance of such perspectives is the frontal-isometric perspective, which is characterized by the lack of distortion of the front of an image and the lines receding from the viewer are parallel instead of converging towards a vanishing point, but even though there is a frontal view of the image, its “objectivity” allows for no real choice between involvement and detachment (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 152). Unlike the frontal-isometric perspective, the angular-isometric one has the front of the image distorted in an angle, but still the receding lines remain parallel without converging, and this oblique point of view implies a detached meditative distance (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 153). With inverted perspective, both sides of an object can be seen, but the perspectival vectors neither run parallel nor converge, instead they diverge to show all the aspects of an object, and as we mentioned above, this is typical of children drawings
In the history of art, Cubism also took and developed this idea to a greater extent, in order to represent the world in a multifaceted way with multiple and often incompatible viewpoints of the same object in the same image (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 153).

The question of reliability of messages can be related to the linguistic term of modality, which refers to the truth value or credibility of statements about the world, and it can account for visual communication as well (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 159, 160, 161). From the point of view of Hallyday’s metafunctions, modality should be considered interpersonal rather than ideational, because it does not express absolute facts or fictions; instead, it produces shared truths aligning recipients with some statements, and distancing them from others (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 160). Likewise, Kress and van Leeuwen confirm that

Visuals can represent people, places and things as though they are real, as though they actually exist in this way, or as though they do not—as though they are imaginings, fantasies, caricatures, etc. And, here too, modality judgments are social, dependent on what is considered real (or true, or sacred) in the social group for which the representation is primarily intended. (1996: 161)

To put it another way, again as Kress and van Leeuwen state, “Reality is in the eye of the beholder,” because what is regarded as real depends on how reality is defined by a particular group (1996: 163). For instance, in scientific realism, a diagram may be better
than a photograph, since it accounts for what is generic and regular without taking into account ephemeral superficial details (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 163).

But nowadays in our society at large, the dominant unmarked standard of visual realism, and hence visual modality, is naturalism, conventionally understood as photorealism; in other words, the criterion of what is real and what is not real is based on the appearance of things and how they are represented according to the pervasive available technologies of visual representation (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 163). This is related to McCloud’s continuum at the base of his triangle of representation, which was discussed in Chapter One, but here we are going to expand on the modality markers from the point of view of semiotics. Apart from representation, which is a scale running from maximum representation of pictorial detail to maximum abstraction (McCloud’s continuum towards the top of his triangle), Kress and van Leeuwen include the following modality markers: color saturation, from full color to black and white; color differentiation, from diversified colors to monochrome; color modulation, from fully modulated color to plain unmodulated color; contextualization, from absence of background to fully articulated and detailed background; depth, from absence of depth to maximally deep perspective; illumination, from light and shade to its absence; and brightness, from a maximum number of different degrees of brightness to just two degrees: black and white, or dark grey and lighter grey, or two brightness values of the same color (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 165-167).

As can be seen, modality is realized by a complex interplay of visual cues, and in general, it depends on the genre or addressees: particular modality configurations may
require to reduce some modality markers (make them less than real) and amplify others (make them more than real), and this either in relation to an anchoring point of commonsense high naturalistic modality or in relation to an anchoring point situated in some other realism (176-178). The latter seems to be the case in superhero comics, as we will see in our analysis, because throughout the span of two decades they have changed in their representation from what can be considered the mid-1980s anchoring point of “naturalistic” modality established by the already-mentioned cartoonist John Byrne to American comics artist Ed McGuinness’s more exaggerated cartoony style at the beginning of the 2000s.

Hallyday’s textual metafunction is the last one that remains to be examined, and as its name suggests, it is related to the composition of the whole text or, in this case, image—namely, how the representational and interactive elements discussed so far are integrated into a meaningful whole (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 181). Composition, then, links the representational and interactive meanings of the image with each other through three interrelated systems or principles of composition: information value attached to the placement of participants on the image (left and right, top and bottom, center and margin); salience of certain elements (according to placement in the foreground or background, relative size, contrasts in tonal value or color, differences in sharpness, etc.); and framing (presence or absence of framing devices connecting or disconnecting elements of the image) (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 183).

In analyzing composite or multimodal texts with meanings realized through more than one semiotic code, the question may arise whether the products of the various codes
should be examined individually or in an integrated manner, but Kress and van Leeuwen
do not hesitate about taking the latter path (1996: 183). They seek to be able to look at
the whole page as an integrated text, and in their view, the integration of different
semiotic codes is the result of an overarching code (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 183).
Kress and van Leeuwen put forward two such integration codes: visual composition, the
code of spatial composition, with elements that are spatially co-present (paintings,
magazine pages, comics, etc.), and rhythm, the code of temporal composition unfolding
over time (speech, music, dance, etc.) (1996: 183). When the multimodal text uses both
(e.g. film and television), rhythm is usually the dominant integrative principle (Kress & van
Leeuwen 1996: 183-184). In the case of comics, it is evident that we are going to deal
with the code of visual composition, and Kress and van Leeuwen confirm that the spatial
principles of information value, salience and framing apply not only to stand-alone
pictures but also to page layouts (1996: 184).

Based on Hallyday's idea of the information structure of the clause, Kress and van
Leeuwen have generalized this notion from mass-media images and applied their findings
to pictures or layouts (1996: 187). Thus, when the composition of an image makes
significant use of the horizontal axis, the elements positioned to the left of the center are
presented as Given, while the elements placed on the right are considered as New (Kress
& van Leeuwen 1996: 187). The idea of Given confers the represented participant the
status of a known element, “as a familiar and agreed-upon point of departure for the
message” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 187). The idea of New, conversely, means that the
represented participant is unknown or maybe not yet agreed upon, so that special
attention must be paid (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 187). Kress and van Leeuwen emphasize that the meaning of the New is “problematic,” “contestable,” and “the information ‘at issue’”; whereas the Given is presented as commonsensical, and self-evident (1996: 187). In their opinion, this structure is ideological in the sense that it may not correspond to the producer’s or the consumer’s conception of the image; nevertheless, “the important point is that the information is presented as though it had that status or value for the reader, and that readers have to read it within that structure, even if that valuation may then be rejected by a particular reader” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 187, emphasis in the original).

The information value of top and bottom can be summarized along the following lines: when some elements of a composition are placed on the upper part, they are presented as the Ideal, whereas the elements on the lower part of the picture are considered as the Real (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 193). The notion of the Ideal, then, means that the represented participant at the top is presented as the idealized or generalized essence of the information, and hence, also its most salient part (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 193-194). The notion of the Real is, thus, “opposed to this in that it presents more specific information (e.g. details), more ‘down-to-earth’ information (e.g. photographs as documentary evidence, or maps or charts), or more practical information (e.g. practical consequences, directions for action)” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 194).

As was stated in Chapter Two, Kress and van Leeuwen are largely concerned with the description of the visual semiotics of Western cultures (1996: 3, 199). Accordingly, the information value of the positions examined so far is bound to be different for non-
Western cultures with different reading directions (right to left or bottom to top), because Kress and van Leeuwen believe that “reading directions may be the material instantiations of deeply embedded cultural value systems” (1996: 199). Nevertheless, directionality (margin and centre, left and right, top and bottom) cannot be overlooked, since it is a semiotic resource in all cultures, even if different cultures give these spatial dimensions different meanings and values (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 199).

Apart from left-right and top-bottom patterns, visual compositions may also be structured along the positions of center and margin, although this is not very common in contemporary Western images, since “[m]ost compositions polarize elements as Given and New and/or Ideal and Real” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 203). Yet a visual composition may place one element in the middle (Center), and the other elements around it (Margins) (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 206). In this case, the Center is presented as the nucleus of the information, with the Margins dependent on it, and many times bearing identical or very similar characteristics, so as not to have “a sense of a division between Given and New and/or Ideal and Real elements among them” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 206). But when Given-New and Ideal-Real combine with Center and Margin, the result is the figure of the Cross, a fundamental symbol in Western culture (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 207).

Nevertheless, not all Margins are equally marginal, since circular structures can gradually shift from Margin to Center or vice versa, and the marginality of Margins depends on the size and salience of the Center, but even if it is empty, it remains undisturbed (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 206, 207). One possible interpretation for the
small number of centered compositions in contemporary Western representations is that, in the words of Irish poet William Butler Yeats, “the centre does not [sic] hold” any longer in many sectors of contemporary society (qtd. in Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 207). Even in triptychs of modern magazines and newspapers there is a prevailing polarization, with a Given left, a New right, and a non-salient center bridging the two (Mediator) (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 208-209). Thus, contemporary triptychs can be either symmetrical Margin-Center-Margin structures or polarized structures with the Center functioning as a Mediator between Given and New or, if there is a vertical axis, between Ideal and Real (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 211).

As an integration code, composition is not just a question of formal aesthetics, of feeling, or of attracting the reader, which it certainly does, but its fundamental function is textual, because integration serves to produce a coherent text, to place meaningful elements into the whole, and to provide organization and order (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 212, 213). So far we have discussed the placement of elements in a composition and the information values they receive according to their position in relation to other elements, but the composition of a picture or a page layout “also involves different degrees of salience to its elements” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 212). Salience can create a hierarchy of elements, selecting some as more worthy of attention than others, regardless of their position in the composition (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 212).

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3 The original line in the poem “The Second Coming” by Yeats reads: “the centre cannot hold” (“Second,” my emphasis).
general, viewers can intuitively judge the weight, i.e. the salience, of the various elements of a composition, and thus how they balance (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 212, 213).

Salience results from a complex interaction between a number of visual factors: size, sharpness of focus, tonal contrast, color contrasts, placement in the visual field (e.g. elements appear heavier as they move towards the top or towards the left), perspective (e.g. foreground objects are more salient than background objects), and also quite specific cultural factors, such as the appearance of a human figure or a powerful cultural symbol (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 212). As we have seen, central perspective produces centers of its own, and by doing so contributes to the hierarchization of the elements in compositions (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 213). As a result, viewers may relate to compositions in two ways: perspectively, which is based on the viewers’ perspective/position, and hence, they become the center of the composition; or non-perspectively, which is based on the internal viewpoint of the representation (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 213).

The third key element in composition is framing, which accounts for the connection or joining together of elements or groups of elements, or their disconnection from each other (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 214). Visual framing is a matter of degree: elements of the composition may be strongly or weakly framed (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 214). Whereas a strongly framed element is presented as an individual unit of information, the absence of framing emphasizes group identity, and when several elements are connected in this way, they are presented as one unit of information (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 214-215). Framing can be realized in many different ways: objects,
frame lines, discontinuities of color or shape, or simply by empty space between the elements (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 216). Connectedness, on the other hand, can be emphasized by vectors, which can guide the reading of the composition from one element to another, beginning with the most salient element (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 216). Broadly speaking, horizontal and circular compositions tend to have weak framing, while vertical compositions tend to have strong framing (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 217). It should finally be noted that, at a deeper level, there is also an element of framing in styles of drawing and painting (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 218). For example, while line drawings sharply outline objects setting them apart from their environment, certain painting styles integrate the elements with their environment, and they are only discernible by subtle transitions of color (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 218).

As can be seen, framing and connectedness are two closely related concepts that lead to the idea of following a path when reading both texts and images. In this connection, compositions can be linear and non-linear: printed pages, traditional comic strips, and time line diagrams, for instance, are designed to be read from left to right and from top to bottom; magazines and newspapers are not often read in linear order, but selectively and partially (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 218). Therefore, linear texts are like movies, where viewers have no choice but to see the images in a predetermined order (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 222). Conversely, non-linear texts are like the Internet, where viewers can select their own images and view them in an order of their own choosing, i.e. they are more interactive (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 222). Linear texts, thus, impose a syntagmatics on the reader, so they describe the sequence of and the
connection between the elements, and the meaning of the individual elements is less strictly coded (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 223). Non-linear texts impose a paradigmatics, so they select the elements that can be viewed and present them according to a certain paradigmatic logic (Center and Margin or Given and New), but they let the reader sequence and connect the elements, and the meaning of the individual elements is more highly coded (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 223). As can be seen, linear and non-linear texts constitute two modes of reading, and two systems to control meaning and to establish reading paths (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 223).

Texts encode reading paths to different degrees and according to various compositions, setting up particular hierarchies of the movement of the implied reader within and across their different elements (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 218, 220). As noted above, such reading paths begin with the most salient element, from there they move to the next most salient element, and so on (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 218). Since, as we have seen, the most salient element is culturally determined and reading paths of non-linear compositions are not strictly coded as printed pages or conventional comic strips, there may be more than one reading path to any composition (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 216). The shapes of reading paths may be as varied as the creative possibilities allow (circular, diagonal, spiraling, etc.), but they are not just interesting patterns, they are always true sources of meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 219). The most common ones—circular, horizontal and vertical—can be summarily interpreted, but other types of reading paths may depend on the specific composition. Thus, a circular reading path is an outward pattern of reading, following “concentric circles, from a central
message which forms the heart, so to speak, of the cultural universe” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 219). A linear and horizontal reading path “constitutes a progression, moving inexorably forwards towards the future, or backwards, towards the origin of all things” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 219). Finally, a vertical reading path has a sense of hierarchy, a movement from the general to the specific, e.g. from the headline to the footnote (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 219).

Since texts are material objects, they are the result of a variety of representational practices that use multiple signifying systems, contributing to the meaning of the text (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 231). Although not usually taken into account by analysts, the material expression of texts is always significant, since it is made up of a separate semiotic variable that Kress and van Leeuwen call “inscription” (1996: 230, 231). In order to understand the meanings encoded in the materiality of texts, we have to examine the surfaces used to make inscriptions on (paper, in the case of comics), the substances used to make inscriptions with (ink and paint, received usually printed, in the case of comics) and the tools used for making the inscriptions (pencil, pen and brush, received usually printed, in the case of comics) (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 231). Obviously, when we are giving the example of comics, it is the conventional media we refer to, and not the now fairly common e-comics or digital comics, which can be entirely created on a computer, or scanned and released digitally like an e-book or on the Internet as webcomics.

As regards production technologies for inscription, Kress and van Leeuwen distinguish three major categories: technologies of the hand (pencils, brushes, etc); recording technologies, i.e. technologies of the eye and ear (photography and film, audio
tape); and synthesizing technologies, which have reintroduced the human hand by means of a technological interface (keyboard, mouse, etc.) (1996: 233). The boundaries between these technological categories are not clear-cut: a photograph can be hand-colored, and the possibility of mechanical reproduction is not uniquely related to any of the three categories, since printing can be done from a hand-carved master, photographically, or with a laser printer (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 233). But the categories remain useful, particularly as they can be linked to major periods in the history of inscription, and to the epistemologies that went with them (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 233).

As noted earlier, this classification of inscription modes is based on the way representations are produced: by hand, by more or less automated recording, or by electronic synthesis (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 234-235). But different inscriptions technologies also favor different modes of reception: some surfaces (walls, cinema screens) favor public reception, and others (pages, computer screens, tablets) favor private reception (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 235). Also, something which is more difficult to describe is the effect of the physicality or the tangibility of the surface on the recipient (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 235). As we started to mention earlier in relation to comics, the surface on which the text is received may no longer be the same as the one on which the text is produced (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 235). Currently, transcodings are very common, especially with the advent of the Internet: an image may be produced in an inscription mode, as a painting, for instance, and received in a recording mode, as a photograph, or it may be produced in a recording mode, as a photograph, and received in a synthesis mode, retrieved from an image bank on the web (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 235).
Comics can be said to run the gamut of the three types: they may be produced by hand, reproduced by recording and printing, and/or made digitally available.

In this connection, Kress and van Leeuwen mention the well-known essay by German philosopher Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” which stresses the loss of the aura of the hand-made artwork (qtd. in 1996: 233, 269; Aumont 319-320), but they also state that nowadays the most pressing controversy is that introduced with the availability of digital recording (1996: 234). Recording leads to ontologies of referentiality; that is to say, representation is based on direct, referential relations between representations and the world (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 234). Synthesizing inscription technologies, instead, undermine or even abolish reference replacing it with “‘signification,’ the production, out of existing semiotic resources, of new semiotic means, new signs, new texts, new images, new visions, new worlds” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 234). This does not mean the end of reference; “[r]ather, the formerly naturalized relation, the identity of representation and reference, has broken down” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 234). This idea is interesting in relation to superhero comics, because of the greater possibility of the design to become more and more realistic with the aid of computer-graphics technologies; however, as we mentioned earlier, this is not generally the case in the period under study. On the contrary, as the second decade of the samples collected for our inquiry progresses, the style becomes more and more exaggerated and cartoony, something that leads to figures and expressions outside the traditional “naturalistic” depiction of the superhero genre, as we will see in our analysis in Chapter Five.
Selection of Corpus for Analysis

Taking the cue for the selection of the corpus to be analyzed in this inquiry from Jeanne Williams’s dissertation, and to a somewhat lesser extent, from Amanda Parkinson’s thesis, since both are academic studies dealing with cultural artifacts similar to ours, we have decided to make a preliminarily choice of those issues that present Lois Lane on the cover, as can be observed in Appendix 5. While Parkinson randomly chose at least one issue per year of a standard month or when unavailable the closest one (6), Williams deliberately selected those issues that depicted Lois Lane in the story (35). This disparity of approaches is surely due to the fact that Parkinson’s study is on the series of comic books specifically devoted to Lois Lane, Superman’s Girlfriend Lois Lane, which, as we mentioned in Chapter Three, spanned from 1958 to 1974, whereas Williams’s research includes all the Superman titles in the period under her study, just as ours does.

Therefore, in order to see the evolution of the depiction of this female character in superhero comics, from the total amount of comics compiled (see Appendix 3), we have made a preliminary selection of comics, as noted above, based on the appearance of Lois Lane on the cover. As can be seen in Appendix 5, this selection produced a result of 81 issues. There are several covers which do not really show the figure of Lois Lane, but some aspects that can be metonymically related to the character: an engagement ring (Michelinie, Dwyer & Rodier), a half-buried female hand (Kelly, Nord & Brumgartner), a tombstone with Lois Lane’s name engraved on it (Simonson et al.), a banner announcing that “Lois Leaves Superman” (Jurgens, Frenz & Rubinstein #115) and the title in relief of a wedding album (Jurgens, Kesel et al.). And we talk about metonymy associated to Lois
Lane, when we mention a ring or a wedding album on the cover of a title related to the Superman series, because Lois Lane and Superman/Clark Kent are the most recognizable and well-known couple in the world of comics (Farghaly vii-viii; Tresca 11), so that the mere display of those items on the cover of a Superman comic book during the period under study can only be linked to this couple.

Taking all these caveats into account for the preliminary selection of regular titles depicting Lois Lane on the cover, we can work out the percentage of these out of the total of regular titles during the two decades under study (Appendices 3 and 4). This percentage only amounts to 8.52, but if we consider all the compiled issues, it drops even more to 6.64, as can be confirmed at the end of Appendix 5. One possible reason is that during this period the famous death of Superman took place, as we saw in Chapter Three, and in 1993, the following year, Lois Lane appears on no cover. That year is devoted to the repercussions of Superman’s death and there are many covers with only Superman’s emblem on them, referring to the different Supermans that appear replacing the original. We can speculate that other reasons for such low proportion of her appearance is that feminism had an impact on the industry, and DC reduced the stereotype of the representation of the damsel in distress on covers, generally used to attract the male readership. Nevertheless, even though Lois Lane, on the whole, does not appear on many covers, she has a relevant role in many stories.

Although Williams’s analysis is basically different from ours, after our preliminary selection, we follow her criteria based primarily on Lois Lane’s “appearance as an active participant in the action of the story” and playing “a major role in the story” (35). But the
rest of her criteria are more specific to the type of analysis she carries out. Thus, we are not going to pre-establish specific categories of analysis as Williams does (35), since we are going to follow the flow of the stories, and analyze them within the feminist semiotic framework already presented in the previous section, while using the tools that have been reviewed throughout the whole of the present study (see Appendix 7).

Nevertheless, we can benefit from some aspects of Williams’s image analysis of the covers and splash pages (as explained in Chapter One, this refers to the first page of the story, designed to increase reader interest) to record what changes appear in the visual depiction of Lois Lane. Thus, we can make ours the following criteria she uses to analyze images, which are also similar to some of the techniques introduced by Stuller and Kress and van Leeuwen, and discussed in the previous section: “1) whether Lois is depicted in the foreground (as a central character in the picture) or in the background; 2) how her physical appearance is depicted (whether, for example, she is pictured as wearing a low-cut or revealing outfit); 3) what she is depicted as doing in the picture (taking aggressive action, crying or screaming, etc.); and 4) what emotions she seems to be expressing” (Williams 36).

Within the total compilation of comics, we considered that there are two crucial stories that cannot be excluded from an inquiry of this type: the introduction of Lois Lane to this new continuity by John Byrne in 1986, and the wedding album in 1996, which contrary to the expectation created by the title, it is not a collection of representative images as the ones issued by DC Comics from time to time to celebrate some important corporate event, but a full-fledged story as we will see in Chapter Five. It is evident that
“The Wedding Album” separates two periods in the Superman series as regards Lois Lane’s role, and it is of even more pivotal importance than that, as we can surely ascertain that it divides two contrasting views of the possibilities of leading two different types of lives of the most paradigmatic American superhero: the isolated lonely alien bachelor and the socially-integrated married man. The first one had been explored over and over again since the very inception of Superman, as this was the original idea by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster; instead, the second one was an interlude that lasted from 1996 until 2011, when DC Comics decided to reshuffle the cards again and a new continuity started from the very beginning, as we mentioned in Chapter One and Chapter Three. Apart from these two issues, the final selection of the corpus for analysis, based on the appearance of Lois Lane “as an active participant in the action of the story” and playing “a major role in the story” (Williams 35), includes one feature per year, except 1993 for the reasons stated above, as can be seen in Appendix 6. The total result of this final selection, then, is the 18 issues which are listed in Appendix 6 with their bibliographical reference detailed at the end of this study in the section “Primary Sources,” and which are going to be analyzed in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED CORPUS

Let us recapitulate our work until now. We have established the situational framework for the analysis of the selected corpus of cultural artifacts, i.e. the eighteen comic books listed in Appendix 6, according to the parameters discussed in Chapter Four. We also have all the tools for the analysis at our disposal, as they have been presented in Chapter Four and outlined in Appendix 7. In the present chapter, we are going to analyze the eighteen comics stories as they are chronologically listed in Appendix 6, but before each analysis we are going to include some intertextual, paratextual and metatextual characteristics related to them.

“The Story of the Century!”

“The Story of the Century!” was written and drawn by John Byrne, the cartoonist in charge of the revamping of Superman in the 1980s. As we stated in Chapter One, Byrne is considered a cartoonist whose talent is notable in the two comic-book creation traditions presented by Robert Harvey — the figure drawing tradition and the storytelling tradition (144). Therefore, we can expect a good story with corresponding artistic rendering, and that is exactly what we get with this comic book, as we will presently see when we discuss the comics story proper. But before that, we are going to have a general perspective on the context of the miniseries where this narrative is included, since it is the second part of Byrne’s six-issue miniseries The Man of Steel, presenting the whole new Superman canon...
intertwined with some of the old basic aspects of the story originally created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, as we discussed in Chapter Three.

The first issue of The Man of Steel miniseries develops the origin story from Krypton to Kansas and later Metropolis, where the main events of the new Superman saga are going to take place. There is a basic change in the Krypton script: instead of sending a baby who lands on Earth as a child, this time Superman’s biological parents Lara Lor-Van and Jor-El send an embryo in a birthing matrix capsule (Beatty 16; Byrne & Giordano #1 [1-8]). This means that the immigration theme radically shifts, since rather than being an immigrant, Superman is born on Earth as an American citizen. As he reflects on the magnificently drawn last splash page, depicting the impressive physique of the costumed superhero, in the last issue of the miniseries, “Krypton bred me, but it was Earth that gave me all I am. All that matters. It was Krypton that made me Superman... But it is the Earth that makes me human!!” (Byrne & Giordano #6 [22], emphasis in the original).

The Smallville, Kansas thread is also altered: Superman’s adoptive parents Martha and Jonathan Kent do not die early in his life, but continue to be part of it in adulthood, with an important supporting role embodying the traditional moral values of the American Midwest (Byrne & Giordano #1 [19]). Moreover, in this new story the adolescent Clark Kent is popular in high school as an American football star (Byrne & Giordano #1 [9-11]); thus, he no longer fits the conventional mild-mannered mold he had to adjust to in his first incarnation. In this way, the Metropolis story also undergoes a fundamental change with Clark Kent being the real person and Superman, the disguise, opening the way, as we mentioned before, for Lois Lane to be able to fall in love with him. This is even
recognized by Clark Kent himself when he confides his feelings for Lois Lane to his parents in Smallville, “I’ve been contenting myself with her clear infatuation with Superman, but it’s not enough. Superman isn’t real. He’s just a fancy pair of long johns that lets me operate in public without losing my private life. And it’s that private life that’s incomplete without someone like Lois” (Byrne & Giordano #6 4/5, emphasis in the original). These three basic worlds of Krypton, Smallville and Metropolis, which are just drafted in very few pages in the first issue outlining Superman’s origin story, are further developed by Byrne in three eponymous four-part miniseries (see Appendix 3).

As noted earlier, The Man of Steel is a six-part miniseries, whose first issue deals with Superman’s origin story, while the rest of the issues subsequently introduce the main well-known supporting characters (Byrne & Giordano #1-6). Thus, the second issue introduces Lois Lane, and this is going to be the focus of our analysis in the next section. The third issue presents Batman, but not in his previous status as a friend. Rather, in their first awkward meeting, these two superheroes show mutual distrust and suspicion of their parallel lives as crime fighters; indeed, at first, Superman mistakenly catalogues Batman as a criminal (Byrne & Giordano #3 5/1). The fourth issue is devoted to Superman’s real adversary and perpetual archenemy, Lex Luthor, who suffers his own updating from his original role as a bald mad scientist to this new incarnation as a red-headed tycoon (Byrne & Giordano #4), although later in the saga he loses his hair but earns the most important position in the United States — he becomes President (Beatty 70-71). The fifth issue is a kind of follow-up of Luthor’s first encounter with Superman, because once he fails to enlist the superhero as his private henchman, he directs his scientists to clone Superman’s
DNA (Byrne & Giordano #5 3-4). But the attempt at duplicating Kryptonian DNA goes awry, resulting in the imperfect Superman clone, Bizarro, his well-known antithetical Doppelgänger, who poignantly dissolves at the end of the story to reappear whenever Luthor gives cloning another try (Beatty 74-75; Byrne & Giordano #5 22). The last issue introduces Lana Lang, Superman’s closest childhood friend, who, unlike the character before Byrne’s recreation, acts as his confidante and guards his identity secret, but not without apprehension about what she feels as a traumatic burden (Byrne & Giordano #6 10-14).

The above overview of the miniseries serves as a prelude for the analysis of the issue under study in the context of the whole introduction of this supporting cast. In this connection, it is important to examine the paratextual element of the cover in conjunction with the other covers in the miniseries. All the covers of the six issues show the characters to be introduced on the right and a scene on the left separated in a manner resembling a golden section with a blank flat background that highlights the

Fig. 1: Advertisement for the miniseries The Man of Steel (Byrne & Giordano, The Man of Steel #1 [34]).
figures, but not completely, since all the figures are also related to the scenes that are depicted behind them, as part of the story developed inside each comic book (see Fig. 1).

Some aspects of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen’s concepts discussed in Chapter Four seem to be patently clear in these layouts. The basic information value of Given-New related to the position of the elements in the picture seems valid, since the action scene is the point of departure, the noncontroversial typical element in a superhero comic book, and the figure on the left is the new addition, presented for the viewer’s evaluation in a pattern of conceptual representation. This pattern can be characterized as symbolic attributive in Kress and van Leeuwen’s terminology, which means that the subjects of the conceptual representation are surrounded by elements or attributes to show their identity or what they stand for.

In these specific cases, the outfits and accessories establish some identifying meanings. Evidently, the two superheroes have their emblematic costumes, together with Bizarro as Superman’s imperfect duplicate, but even the other three characters introduced can be stereotypically recognized. Lex Luthor with his dark suit, his cigar, his heavy build, and his cunning sidelong glance can be said to be the quintessential successful businessman, while Lana Lang with her unassuming jeans, shirt, jacket and sneakers, her ponytail, and her self-effacing posture and bashful facial expression can be considered the typical unsophisticated countrified woman. In contrast, Lois Lane shows all the characteristics of the urban competent working woman—from her posture that parallels that of Superman’s and Lex Luthor’s, in her stylish but not overdressed outfit with sensible pumps, a utilitarian large shoulder bag, and holding a cassette in her right
hand (the mark of her occupation as a journalist), to her confident smile and unwavering look directly into viewers’ eyes (see Fig. 2).

As we saw in Chapter Four, the relationship between the represented participants and the interactive participants is the second type of structure in the semiotic analysis of images developed by Kress and van Leeuwen. In this interactive pattern, there is a demand created by Lois Lane’s look at viewers, establishing them as objects of her gaze, and thus placing them in a certain category. We believe that this category is neither superior (she does not look upwards) nor inferior (she does not look downwards), but the straight line of her gaze at an eye-level vertical angle implies equality of treatment of her interlocutors without any power difference between them and her, and the directly frontal angle of her posture in relation to viewers also implies maximum involvement with them.

From the point of view of the textual structure, there is an apparent similarity if we
compare the first issue cover with Superman/Clark Kent on it with the second one with Lois Lane (see Figs. 2 and 3). Both are organized in an inverted pyramid echoing the Superman emblem of the title, but in a more acute angle formed by the diagonals of the left open legs of the figures and the motion lines of the main elements in the action scenes behind them. Specifically, in Lois Lane’s case, her left foot seems to be the origin of the splash of water which, actually, is caused by Superman’s lifting the car from the bottom of the sea. Nevertheless, in the story we learn that she does play that causative role, since she purposely drives her car off a pier into the sea in order to force Superman to rescue her and have an opportunity to interview him after a succession of failures to catch up with him.

Finally, the choice of color also suggests something about the meaning conveyed by the image, and it is very telling that the top worn by the journalist is pink—a color stereotypically associated with women. It is evident that colors are a matter of taste, but in our opinion, the selection is an incongruent throwback that clashes with the other progressive feminist elements in the image. We cannot determine what role Byrne played in the choice because, as it is well known, the division of labor in the comics industry implies that another person is in charge of applying the color, as in fact, the credits which appear on the splash page show that Byrne is not the colorist.

Analysis of the Comics Story

“The story of the Century!” opens with a splendid splash page that places viewers in The Daily Planet’s managing editor Perry White’s shoes opposite Lois Lane (see Fig. 4).
The importance of the extreme close-up of the hand precariously holding a cup of spilling coffee cannot be overstated. This represents viewers’ astonished reaction to a first look at a flying man with their own eyes. We have to remember that in the first issue of *The Man of Steel* Lois Lane has already reported the appearance of a “superman”—her naming—to save an experimental space shuttle from crashing while she was aboard. The report in the press, however, is not enough. The public has been subjected to press releases on UFOs of many different kinds, ESP events from ghostly apparitions to telekinetic abilities, and a variety of news stories beyond belief. So Perry White’s astonishment, in spite of his previous star journalist’s report, is not inconceivable and can be shared by most ordinary people, as can be seen by the gestures and expressions of passers-by behind Lois Lane, and in the following panel where a wonderful foreshortened figure of a flying Superman leaves openmouthed bystanders including Lois Lane and her boss behind (Byrne & Giordano #2 1/1; 2/1-2).
At this moment, we can observe Perry White address Lois Lane for the first time, and this is one aspect we decided to explore in Chapter Four in connection with the feminist analysis. He calls her by her first name, but this is hardly inappropriate since on the splash page Lois Lane appears calling her boss by his first name (Fig. 4). Throughout the story, she is consistently called “Miss Lane” by most characters, even Superman, until she pointedly asks the superhero to call her “Lois” (Byrne & Giordano #2 19/4). Therefore, even though Byrne uses many feminist attributes in the visual characterization of Lois Lane, it seems that he has chosen to stick to the customary title “Miss,” which shows her unmarried status, instead of using the more progressive and less revealing “Ms.” In the story, there is nothing unexpected in the T/V forms of address to show power relations, which are exemplified twice —with Lex Luthor’s driver, who respectfully addresses the journalist “Miss Lane” while she calls him “Guthrie,” and with young photographer Jimmy Olsen, who addresses her in like manner while she calls him “Jimmy,” or “Jim” when she impatiently dismisses his call for her attention (Byrne & Giordano #2 3/2-4; 15/1; 22/1).

The story centers around Lois Lane’s efforts to interview Superman in order to get what she calls “the story of the century,” futilely and inadvertently competing with Clark Kent for it, because at the end of the story it is he who scoops her, and thanks to this coveted news article, he gets hired by The Daily Planet. This can be seen as one of the most traditional Superman stories, following in the steps of countless comics stories that had been published before the schism of Crisis on Infinite Earths (Wolfman et al.). Not only does the competition for a news story —with Clark Kent’s unacknowledged advantage of his alter ego’s superpowers over Lois Lane— take us back to previous times
when that fact played an important conventional role in the historical relationship between the couple, but also other subplots that have the flavor of old Superman feats. Of these there are three that are completely visually depicted with lavish images—the catching of the petty thief, a hostage situation in a liquor store, and the supposedly damsel-in-distress predicament played by Lois Lane (Byrne & Giordano #2 5-7; 8-12; 16-18). We only see the denouement of the other four subplots—helping fire fighters put out a fire, thwarting a bank robbery, stopping the subway to save a woman fallen on the tracks, and foiling an armored car heist—, as Lois Lane fails over and over again in her attempts to catch up with Superman to interview him, by arriving late at the places where the superhero has intervened (Byrne & Giordano #2 14/1-4; 15/2).

In the three completely depicted episodes mentioned above, three women are protagonists—one as a victim, the second one as a perpetrator, and the last one is Lois Lane, but she obviously appears in the whole story and not just in the episode with the superhero, as the others do. In this comic book, then, the capture of a bag snatcher is Superman’s first intervention as a crime fighter (Fig. 5). As we saw in Chapter
One, this is the type of action lamented by Umberto Eco when he criticizes the ideology of superhero comic books, not because he approves of the crime but because Superman, with all his superpowers, seems to reduce crime punishment to localized private property crimes instead of dealing with the root of the problem. Even Superman in this case recognizes the pettiness of the deed when he listens to a “real” crime on the woman’s radio and tells both thief and female victim, “You’ll both have to excuse me, now. That sounds like something a little more up my alley” (Byrne & Giordano #2 7/3).

Thus, he flies off to intervene in the other crime, but not before turning down the sound of the woman’s radio, while patronizingly telling her, “Oh... and I think that radio is a trifle loud, don’t you? After all, in a city this size, consideration for others is the only thing that keeps life bearable” (Byrne & Giordano #2 7/5, emphasis in the original). This is another act that seems to belittle his superpowers, almost making him look as a bully, even more so when we see the protagonists of the crime: the petty thief seems to be a hunger-stricken poor devil, and the woman does not seem to care much for the loss of her handbag, as long as she retains her loud oversized radio (see Fig. 5). What is more, the last panel of this episode—an episode as a whole which seems to work only as an ironical reminder of old funny superhero adventures—shows the diminutive head of the woman looking upwards in awe at the godlike figure of the superhero levitating before her astonished eyes in a frameless panel which emphasizes his limitless possibilities (see Fig. 6). The difference between the humble female human and the super-powerful male superhuman is plainly apparent, and her portrayal as a dimwitted, careless woman does underscore the abysmal disparity between them.
The next episode seems to be a more determined attempt at dealing with a very serious crime which involves innocent hostages in the hands of cold-blooded criminals. Visually, it seems that all the perpetrators are men, even though the one that leads a relentless attack at Superman and seems the most violent and ruthless of them all wears long hair and bangs (see Fig. 7). Only after Superman subdues most of them and the turn comes to deal with this individual can readers realize that, in reality, she is a woman by her own admission, when she tentatively asks Superman not to hurt her because she is a “lady” (see Fig. 8). With this last incident, maybe Byrne wants to shock viewers out of their complacent belief that vicious crime is commonly committed by men, or maybe he just wants to play on the two opposite female figures, in order to introduce Lois Lane as a third much more appealing possibility. Nevertheless, as we stated earlier, these two episodes are the beginning of a series of events when Superman recurringly appears and when Lois Lane repeatedly fails to track him down in time for an interview.
In her most determined role as an earnest journalist, Lois Lane is depicted purposely and hurriedly striding from left to right, to imply the advancement, or at least, the strong determination to advance in her quest. The first time takes place just after she spurns Lex Luthor’s invitation in favor of her Superman pursue (see Fig. 9). This shows a change in her attitude towards the businessman, as she later reflects, “I guess Lex Luthor is a situation I really must address, one of these days. After all, he is the most powerful man in Metropolis. Or is that ‘used to be?’ And, his attentions are very flattering. But I’m just not in the market for what he’s selling” (Byrne & Giordano #2 13/4, emphasis in the original). The idea of Superman replacing Lex Luthor as the most powerful man in Metropolis is going to be taken up, as we have seen, in a later issue of this miniseries, when the superhero’s archenemy is introduced.

Although Lois Lane rejects Lex Luthor’s invitation to talk to him in his limousine, she has no compunction about using his corporate resources, since on the following page, we can see her searching for Superman in a LexCorp helicopter (Byrne & Giordano #2 4/3). But her rejection of a limousine ride with the tycoon is also emphasized by the surrounding environment where Lois Lane chooses to walk in. As can be seen, the panel

Fig. 9: Panel 1, page 4 of “The Story of the Century!” (Byrne & Giordano, The Man of Steel #2 4/1).
shows the “typical” city-center slums full of the decay, squalor and homelessness that had been exacerbated by Reaganite policies in the 1980s (Fig. 9). Even though this serves as mere “setting” for the intrepid journalist, it is based on the grim reality that was pervasive in the United States at the time.

The other occasion when Lois Lane is purposefully walking without paying attention to an interlocutor cannot be called “spurn,” but summary dismissal, since unlike Lex Luthor, Jimmy Olsen, object of her curt retort, as noted above, is in a subordinate position in relation to her (see Fig. 10). These remarkably long and brisk strides may be a visual symbol of Lois Lane’s resolution and strong will, tested by her failures to interview Superman. In the end, she decides to play the damsel in distress by intentionally driving into the sea, but cautiously carrying scuba diving equipment, although Superman thinks that “an Aqua-Lung as small as the one she had in the car would have run out by the time [he] heard her calls for help” (Byrne & Giordano #2 21/2). He does not share this opinion with Lois Lane, so we cannot know how she had planned her escape, but maybe there was no need for him to worry, since such a resourceful person as she is may have taken his failing to appear in time into account.
Nevertheless, her reckless behavior is difficult to condone as Superman does, when he thinks about her after the interview, “She’s quite a woman, Lois Lane. Quite a woman! And quite a reporter, too! Imagine, deliberately driving her car off a pier, just to lure me in for an interview” (Byrne & Giordano #2 21/1). The interview, by the way, is conducted in a very unorthodox manner, since Superman patiently waits in Lois Lane’s apartment while she is having a shower after her rescue, and then, she just sits beside him in a loose robe and wearing a towel wrapped around her wet hair.

Thus, she finally does the interview, but to no avail, since the story of the century has already been published by Clark Kent. After she learns of her defeat to the new reporter, Perry White introduces them in the last panel, which visually contrasts with the first splash page of the comics story (see Fig. 11). Here we have the same characters in a reversal of positions — while Clark Kent is in the foreground (we have seen his legs in Fig. 10), Lois Lane and Perry White are in the background watching him, just as the editor sees Superman passing by on the splash page. All in all we cannot but admire the story in all its glorious images, in spite of some reactionary aspects, and even these can be also read as taking a stroll down memory lane.

Fig. 11: Panel 5, page 22 of “The Story of the Century!” (Byrne & Giordano, *The Man of Steel* #2 5/22).
“The Name Game”

Although John Byrne’s “The Name Game” story appeared more than a year after *The Man of Steel*, the cover seems to follow the same pattern as the miniseries covers (Fig. 12). In fact, just as the comics stories of the miniseries are introductions of Superman’s supporting cast, this graphic narrative introduces the well-known mischievous master villain from the Fifth Dimension, Mr. Mxyztplk, to this new continuity (Beatty 88-89).

According to *The Ultimate Guide to the Man of Steel*, his gnome-like trickster enjoys playing pranks on Superman with his fifth-dimensional “super-science” —mere magic in the previous continuity, but in this description it seems to fit British science-fiction Arthur C. Clarke’s Third Law of prediction, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic” (Beatty 88; “Clarke’s”). Thus, Mr. Mxyztplk’s astonishing “scientific” power “can animate inanimate material or create matter from nothingness” (Beatty 88). Byrne’s story, however, contradicts what the *Guide* states, because in the comic book Mr. Mxyztplk himself says, “I used my *magic* to make sure I’d hit the right keys!!” (Byrne & Kesel 19/4, my emphasis). This means that Byrne maintains the magical convention, but as the *Guide* was written fifteen years later, there was plenty of time for other comics creators to change this tradition.
The title of the story refers to the only way in which Superman can get rid of this adversary, albeit only for 90 days: by outwitting the prankster into speaking or writing the name Mxyzptlk backwards (Beatty 88). In the story, he introduces himself to Superman as “a gamester . . . a gambler” (Byrne & Kesel 14/2, emphasis in the original), and he challenges the superhero “to the name game” explaining its rules: “All you have to do is get me to write, spell or say my name backwards” (Byrne & Kesel 15/1, emphasis in the original). Eventually, Superman achieves this by changing the connecting wires of a giant typewriter Mr. Mxyzptlk types his name on to show the superhero that the letters of his name have not been chosen at random (Byrne & Kesel 19-20).

Using Kress and van Leeuwen’s analytical tools to describe the structure of the picture on the cover, we can see the similarities with \textit{The Man of Steel} six covers, since it shows Superman on the left as given information and Mr. Mxyzptlk accompanied by Lois Lane on the right as the new information (see Fig. 12). Obviously, Lois Lane is not a new character, but the fact that she and the prankster make a couple, as she states in the lower right-hand balloon, is a clear and amazing novelty (Fig. 12). The diagonal made by her leg follows the top balloon pointer (Fig. 12). This emphatic diagonal is important to attract attention to the top balloon, which may be overlooked because the well-known title of the series overruns it (Fig. 12). There is incongruity between Lois Lane’s expression of pleasure and the statement “drop dead” she utters in this top balloon (Fig. 12), since this slang expression is usually “used rudely in commands to express dislike, annoyance, etc.” (\textit{Longman} 391). The incongruity is explained in the story as Lois Lane has fallen under Mr. Mxyzptlk’s spell, and acting completely out of character, she happily agrees
with everything he suggests. The astonishment on Superman’s face may well mirror that of viewers’ when they have a look at Mr. Mxyzptlk’s appearance and his proprietary gesture of taking Lois Lane by the arm (Fig. 12). But the splash page has a surprise.

Analysis of the Comics Story

Instead of Mr. Mxyzptlk’s gnome-like body depicted on the cover, the splash page of “The Name Game” shows an impressive male specimen of human being, even more impressive than Superman himself, who appears as Clark Kent in the right-hand background observing the exchange between that man and Lois Lane (Byrne & Kesel 1). Yet for us the iconographic characteristics of this impressive man in a white suite with a black T-shirt, long curly blue black hair and stubble on his face seem dated with the kitschy flavor of the 1980s Miami Vice television series (see Fig. 13). But perhaps even at the time of this 1987 comics story, this type of ensemble was chosen for the villain, in contrast with Clark Kent’s restrained clothes, because it may have been starting to seem rather tawdry.

As we mentioned in the introduction, Lois Lane acts out of character and breaks her lunch date with Clark Kent to go out with Mr. Mxyzptlk in his disguise as the attractive man (Byrne & Kesel 2/3-6). Unbelievably, she later accepts his proposal of marriage to be

Fig. 13: Panel 1, page 10 of “The Name Game” (Byrne & Kesel, Superman v.2 #11 10/1).
withdrawn in the same breath after he spots a mannequin in a shop window (Byrne & Kesel 9/1-3). When Lois Lane points out that it is not alive, he animates it and takes it from the window display exclaiming that the mannequin is “everything any man could want!” (Byrne & Kesel 10/1, emphasis in the original; Fig. 13). When the mannequin states that taking it may be considered stealing, he answers that an exchange may be more acceptable, and he transforms Lois Lane into a mannequin, leaving her behind in the window display (Byrne & Kesel 10/2, 11/2). This scene is thought-provoking because instead of a breathing, intelligent woman, a mannequin seems to be more desirable not only for the villain but, in his opinion, for “any man,” which can be considered a metaphor for a male fantasy. However, there is a reversal in the story for this view, because the same thing can be said about Lois Lane’s acceptance of Mr. Mxyzptlk’s disguise and rejection of Clark Kent. Although we later learn it is an unintentional rejection, since she is under a spell, it may be, nevertheless, also seen as a metaphor for female fantasies.

These kinds of parallel and reversal scenes are also included in the subplot of the lunch and dinner dates. As noted earlier, it is Lois Lane who first breaks her engagement to have lunch with Clark Kent, a conversation that is witnessed by a new addition to Superman’s supporting cast, female character Catherine “Cat” Grant, The Daily Planet’s gossip columnist, who appeared for the first time in a previous story during this same year (Beatty 33). Cat Grant is the stereotypical quintessentially sexy, flirtly coworker, and appropriately, a catty gossip, who has set her eyes on Clark Kent. As soon as she sees what happens with Lois Lane, she seizes the opportunity, and tries to console him with a substitute invitation for lunch (Byrne & Kesel 3/2). Even if he seems to accept, he stays in
the newsroom apparently waiting for Lois Lane’s return, but Cat Grant insists this time on cooking dinner for him at his apartment in the evening (Byrne & Kesel 6/5). Then, it is Clark Kent’s turn to break a date, and he does so by apologizing to Cat Grant stating, “Sorry, Cat. Have to take a rain check on that lasagna. Something... just came up,” and thinking, “Something that may be a job... for Superman!” (Byrne & Kesel 6/6, 7/1, emphasis with usual title typeface in the original).

This subplot continues in the last two pages of the comics story, when remorseful for her treatment to Clark Kent, Lois Lane carrying a shopping bag full of groceries has decided to surprise him at his apartment and cook him dinner. But she is the surprised one when it is sexy Cat Grant and not Clark Kent who answers the door. Fig. 14 shows the confrontation of the two visually different female characters, emphasizing not only Cat Grant’s stereotypically sexy outfit (or lack of it with her bare feet), but also the languid body language that can, paradoxically, be read as aggressive towards someone she may categorize as a competitor. It is important to highlight that both females assume the traditionally expected role of the cook for the male, even though both are successful professionals in their own right. Another interesting aspect in this subplot is what can be taken to be female-male difference in reactions to breaking previous engagements in the story. In Lois Lane’s case, she feels guilty and intends to make amends by cooking dinner

Fig. 14: Panel 1, page 22 of “The Name Game” (Byrne & Kesel, Superman v.2 #11 22/1).
for Clark Kent. In Clark Kent’s case, rather than feeling guilty, he is the recipient of “a nice dinner” cooked by spurned Cat Grant (Byrne & Kesel 22/1, emphasis in the original; Fig. 14).

“Lois Lane and Lana Lang in ‘Visitor’”

“Lois Lane and Lana Lang in ‘Visitor’” is the last one of Byrne’s stories to be analyzed in this study, since as mentioned in Chapter Three, he left DC Comics in 1988, though he later participated for special issues, as we will see. Although in the previous comics story we examined, Lois Lane is represented opposite newcomer Cat Grant, her traditional antagonist for Superman’s attentions is redhead Lana Lang, who, in this continuity, as Superman’s childhood friend, knows his secret identity, as noted earlier.

But on the cover of the present story, that traditional antagonism between the two women is nearing a fight, a depiction that seems to be a throwback to Mort Weisinger’s 1950s stories (see Fig. 15). In other words, this is a really sexist image that can be analyzed with Kress and van Leeuwen’s tools. There are two structural patterns suitable for this — representational and interactive. In the representational pattern, Superman is the actor stopping the action of the two women, the goals or the recipients of his efforts.
to separate them (Fig. 15). From a feminist point of view, although the two women seem the most active participants, in reality, their efforts come to nothing because of the intervention of the male protagonist, and on top of that, supposedly he is the objective of the fight, the final prize (Fig. 15). In the interactional pattern between the represented participants and the interactive participants, since the two women direct their looks at each other and not at viewers, they become objects for contemplation; in contrast, Superman looks straight into viewers’ eyes with a sardonic expression emphasized by his arched brow and mocking smile (Fig. 15). He seems to connect directly with his male implied readers and say, “What can you expect from these two females?”

However, as Sara Mills cautions, we have to be careful with swift conclusions, because according to Byrne, this scene is not real. In what seems to be a surrealist statement taking its cue from Belgian artist René Magritte’s painting *The Treachery of Images*, with the image of a pipe and the caption “This is not a pipe,” Byrne includes a warning in the lower right-hand corner of the cover stating, “I guarantee that this scene does not appear in this issue!” (Byrne, Star & Williams, emphasis in the original; Fig. 15). Sure enough, although both women play a part in the story, the mood has nothing to do with the angry quarrel represented on the cover. What is more, this story lacks all the usual trappings of a superhero story—near-death battles in the middle of desolate cityscape destruction. This story does not even take place in Metropolis, but in Smallville, since the title itself, “Visitor,” refers to the visit Lois Lane pays Lana Lang in her hometown in order to clarify some events that occurred in previous comic-book issues. Nevertheless, also following Mills, we think that this is a case belonging in the category of indirect
sexism — gender discriminatory actions difficult to classify as sexist because they are masked by certain strategies. Here the strategy is the statement that this is an imaginary scene that never happens in the story, but one thing is certain: imaginary as it is, it has been published on the cover.

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

When looking for Lana Lang, Lois Lane is surprised to find her with Superman (Byrne, Star & Williams 5/4). Thus, true to her reporter’s instincts, she starts asking them difficult questions until she arrives at the crucial one, “Well... I’ll ask you, point blank... Superman... are you Clark Kent?” (Byrne, Star & Williams 8/6, emphasis in the original). At that point, Martha and Jonathan Kent just get to Lana Lang’s house and listen to that question (Byrne, Star & Williams 9/1). Intervening in time, but not knowing how to answer it, they tell her a convoluted story with the core notion that they have raised Superman and his son together, without realizing the implications that may arise as regards Lois Lane’s relationship with the superhero and Clark Kent (Byrne, Star & Williams 9-10). It goes without saying that Lois Lane immediately grasps the implications, and she openly asks Superman: “So you and Clark are... almost like stepbrothers??” (Byrne, Star & Williams 10/5, emphasis in the original). Forgetting that some minutes before he told Lois Lane that the relationship between Clark Kent and him was not “friendship” because it “is perhaps too strong a word,” so it is better described as “a... working relationship” (Byrne, Star & Williams 7/3, emphasis in the original), Superman agrees with Lois Lane’s idea that they are almost stepbrothers, without realizing, just like the Kents, the implications of this
admission: “Well, yes. I guess that is a pretty good description of the relationship” (Byrne, Star & Williams 10/5, emphasis in the original).

At this Lois Lane becomes righteously indignant with Superman, feeling like a toy both the superhero and Clark Kent have played with (see Fig. 16). As can be seen in the first panel of Fig. 16, her indignation spills over the frame of the adjacent panel and it cannot be contained by a conventional frame, so the first image is not enclosed within a line. The body language and the face expressions of the two figures reveal their respective states of mind—Superman’s submission like a small child’s being told off and his apologetic and appeasing extended hand palm up, and Lois Lane’s rage with a mother’s gesture of a pointed finger in one hand, but at the same time, the fist of a fighter ready to strike in the other (Fig. 16). The absurdity of the scene would be farcical if not for the fact that what Lois Lane accuses Superman of doing is the reality that had never been acknowledged in Superman comics until this specific story: the unfairness of the work competition between Clark Kent and Lois Lane.

What is more, years after this when she learns about his secret identity and they are engaged, she realizes all these implications more clearly, and she thinks, “All these
years, I’ve been losing stories to that big lug and he let me think it was fair and square…

that he was a better reporter. Only now I know how he did it!” (Simonson, Bogdanove &
Janke #4 4/5, emphasis in the original). In that same story, she directly tells Clark Kent,

“. . . some of us don’t have secret identities to make the news we report on… some of us
have to fall back on talent! Not that I begrudge you the use of your powers. I mean, hey--
‘Anything for a scoop!’ I know how it is…” (Simonson, Bogdanove & Janke #4 9/4,
emphasis in the original). Finally, she challenges him, “… but you look like a better
reporter than me… you may be a better reporter than me, but we’ll never know, will we? I
don’t mind being beaten out of story fair and square, but... could you really have scooped
me all these years if it weren’t for Superman?” (Simonson, Bogdanove & Janke #4 9/5,
emphasis in the original).

Going back to our present story, although in the heat of the moment when she is
talking to Superman, Lois Lane does not clearly explain this problem with their
competition in their journalistic work, when it is Clark Kent’s turn to face her anger, she is
calmer, almost dispirited, and thus, more articulate when she states these important
facts: “All these years you’ve had Superman in your back pocket! You got your job at the
Planet by turning the world’s first exclusive on Superman!” (Byrne, Star & Williams 13/4,
emphasis in the original), “And I find out that you and Superman have been in cahoots all
this time! That every exclusive I ever got on him, I got because the two of you let me have
it!!” (Byrne, Star & Williams 13/6, emphasis in the original).

After these manifestations, the following panels (see Fig. 17) show Clark Kent
trying to make some feeble excuse and reassure Lois Lane that she is a good journalist in
her own right, while she recalls her father’s heartless disapproval and disparaging remarks during her childhood, just because she is a girl (Byrne, Star & Williams 14/2, 4; Fig. 17). As can be seen, the container of these flashback panels has rounded corners to differentiate them from the present-time panels and are appropriately tinted in a melancholic blue color (Byrne, Star & Williams 14/2, 4; Fig. 17). Specifically in the last flashback panel, her father’s pointed criticism cannot be overlooked: “Are you going to be a helpless female all your life? Can’t you learn to do anything without a man’s help?” (Byrne, Star & Williams 14/4, emphasis in the original; Fig. 17). The imprint of her father’s unfair disappointment in her is too strong a feeling to overcome lightly, especially in the face of the realization that she has been dependent for some of her more important news articles on Superman and Clark Kent.

Just before Clark Kent’s visit, Lois Lane is depicted in her hotel room from a high angle (Fig. 18). In Kress and van Leeuwen’s interactive pattern, this structure is a system of offer in which the represented participant is shown as an item for contemplation. Even more, in this case, she has been made a subject for the viewer’s pity, emphasized by a box of tissues on the bed next to her, and used ones on the floor, evidence of her crying (see
Fig 18). She is alone, but instead of using the more usual thought-balloons, Byrne sandwiches the image between two black blocks that include the reflections about the events and her disillusionment which she is typing on her 1988 laptop (see Fig. 18). From our perspective, the black background of the typewritten letters in the two captions can be read as a further graphic symbol of Lois Lane’s somber mood, but if we have a look at the primitive laptop she is writing on, we can imagine that this is purely coincidental (Fig. 18). Nevertheless, when we analyze this kind of image, we should not overlook serendipitous findings in design. We think that Byrne purposely made use of these two black blocks with such contrasting tonal value as a strong framing device in this textual pattern for the hierarchical salience of the protagonist and to enhance her gloomy mood (Fig. 18). What is left unsaid in what she is writing on her laptop is who of the two men in her life she is thinking about — Clark Kent or Superman?

Before Lois Lane leaves Smallville, Lana Lang invites her to breakfast so as to talk about what has happened (Byrne, Star & Williams 15/5). The conversation takes place in a typical small town American diner and, in contrast with the image on the cover, it is represented in an objective, placid way, since several of the panels do not even display the two women, but just the balloons from the outside of the diner and even the outside
of the town (Byrne, Star & Williams 16/6, 17/3, 6).

In addition, there are two panels with what Kress and van Leeuwen call “objective image,” usually used in science and technology because, with their privileged viewer position, they produce an objective attitude that neutralizes subjective perspective (1996: 149; Figs. 19-20). One of these two objective images is Fig. 19 with a directly frontal angle, and the other is Fig. 20 with a perpendicular top-down angle or bird’s eye view.

These extreme perspectives emphasize the serenity and equanimity of a conversation that shows that both women are in love with Clark Kent, but Lana Lang discloses the secret that he is in love with Lois Lane (Byrne, Star & Williams 16/6, 17/6, my emphasis).

Before discussing the last part of the story, it is worth reviewing the form of address among the main characters. Superman and Clark Kent consistently call Lois Lane by her first name, but she calls Clark Kent by his last name and so does Superman when he speaks about his alter ego (Byrne, Star & Williams 7/3, 14/1, 6, 15/2). As this story shows conflicts among the characters, especially from Lois Lane’s point of view, it is no wonder that she addresses Clark Kent by his last name. But even at the beginning of the story
when she thinks about her colleague without any strong antagonistic emotion, she uses his last name (Byrne, Star & Williams 1). Only in the previous story we analyzed when she breaks her lunch engagement with Clark Kent does she call him by his first name (Byrne & Kesel 2/4). We can fairly conclude that this asymmetry shows that Lois Lane usually thinks about Clark Kent as her colleague “Kent,” but when she wants to be especially friendly, she uses his first name. In contrast, the male protagonist, in both his personas as a superhero and a journalist, always calls her by her first name, showing his status as friend, although first names may run the gamut from friendliness to lack of respect (Tanner 210).

On her return to Metropolis, Lois Lane decides to visit a friend in hospital, and there she again encounters Superman, who also pays a visit (Byrne, Star & Williams 21/1). They avoid talking about what happened in Smallville; rather, they choose a less personal subject discussing the events that led to their friend’s injuries. On their leaving, the two last panels of this story make up a poignant ending, when Superman tentatively offers to fly her up to her apartment, and she flatly refuses stating that she prefers to walk (Byrne, Star & Williams 22/4-5; Fig. 21). Suitably enough, the last picture shows an extreme close-up of Lois Lane’s boots, as she is walking away from a very small figure of Superman (Byrne, Star & Williams 22/5; Fig. 21). From a
feminist point of view, we may think that this kind of representation of her boots may be considered what Jennifer Stuller and Sara Mills call “fragmentation,” i.e. representation of women as body parts, but there are other feminine parts for the male gaze that can more suitably be given that label. Instead, we consider that this scene may better represent the break of the dependence of Lois Lane on the Man of Steel, even for something as insignificant as a lift.

“Echoes”

“Echoes” was written by George Pérez, who is also a renowned comics artist, placed by Robert Harvey, as we mentioned in Chapter One, in the figure drawing tradition (144). As an artist, Pérez worked with comics writer Marv Wolfman on the important series Crisis on Infinite Earths. For “Echoes,” he was supported by Roger Stern, who wrote the script, and Dan Jurgens, who drew the graphic narrative. All these comics creators have long and distinguished careers in the industry — Jurgens and Pérez, both as comics artists and writers, and Stern as a comics writer.

This comics story is embedded in a longer narrative arc, which was started by Byrne in 1988, with several parallel strands that converge here, but are not concluded. The most important ones among them are the saga of Supergirl, and a period of Superman’s self-imposed exile from Earth into space. In reality, Supergirl is not Superman’s cousin from Krypton, as in the previous continuity, but a shape-shifting artificial being, called Matrix, who is the sole survivor from a world’s total destruction brought about by three evil Kryptonian criminals, escapees from a prison, known as the
Phantom Zone. The exile was a punishment that Superman imposed on himself because he broke his commitment of never destroying a life, when he faced the dire necessity to execute the Kryptonians, who were bent on continuing with world extermination, and had designs on Earth itself as their next target. While Superman was away in deep space having his own adventures to find redemption, on Earth Lois Lane suffered some injuries in an attack by a giant robot operated by the criminal organization Intergang, and Matrix, no longer posing as Supergirl, replaced Clark Kent with some difficulty, since she (or he) was not used to being an ordinary human being. Moreover, a bomb planted by Intergang blew off Clark Kent’s apartment to pieces and he was presumed dead for a while. This is an important fact because during that time Lois Lane realizes her deep feelings for him.

The cover of this comic book, like many others that are designed to attract readers, depicts a scene that does not actually take place in the story. The setting and the characters are correct, and metaphorically we can say that Superman shields Lois Lane and Cat Grant from an Intergang attack, but literally that scene never happens as it is represented on the cover (Fig. 22). Nevertheless, its objective is met by this attractive striking image with the green diagonals of the rays converging on the radiant Superman emblem (Fig. 22). What is even more important for a male audience is that the damsel-in-
distress cliché is successfully used once more. With suitable distressed looks, their number has been increased to two damsels!

The title “Echoes” refers to the connection between Superman/Clark Kent in Metropolis and Matrix still in her impersonation of him staying with the Kents in Smallville, where Superman took her (or him) to recover his identity. When Superman returns to Earth and realizes that Matrix has taken his place as Clark Kent, he feels conflicting emotions — relief to have his disappearance covered so as not to relate Superman’s to Clark Kent’s, but at the same time, anxiety about the gaffes that the protoplasmic being may have made while posing as him.

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

The story “Echoes” starts in Metropolis where Superman receives the thanks and admiration of citizens, after his sojourn in space (Pérez et al. 1-2/1). But as soon as he changes into Clark Kent and gets into his apartment, there is an explosion (Pérez et al. 2/3-6), and the scene changes to Clark Kent’s double, Matrix, in Smallville because it is not a real explosion but a nightmare (Pérez et al. 3/1-2). This implies that there is an echo of connection from one to the other. In this case, Matrix’s past experience is passed on to Superman, but as the story develops, it goes the other way round. An example can be seen on the second row of panels in Fig. 24. The first two panels show Clark Kent dancing with Lois Lane at the Journalism Awards banquet (Pérez et al. 11/4-5), whereas the two last panels represent Matrix shadowing the same movements without a partner, and repeating the same things like a somnambulist (Pérez et al. 11/6-7). This is an
unproblematic scene, but later situations get dangerous, since while Superman deals with an Intergang attack, Matrix wreaks havoc in Smallville, copying Superman’s fight and destruction without the perpetrators (Pérez et al. 14-22).

The subplot of Clark Kent and Lois Lane’s evolving relationship serves to review past events in just four panels (see Fig. 23). The sling she has her arm in serves as a reminder of the injuries she suffered due to the Intergang robot attack (Pérez et al. 9/1; Fig. 23). The peace offering she brings—ironically, a bunch of flowers for the gentleman—refers to the quarrel they had, which was depicted in the comics story “Visitor,” analyzed in the previous section (Byrne, Starr & Williams; Pérez et al. 9/1-2; Fig. 23).
refers directly to it, calling it a “disagreement” (Pérez et al. 9/2; Fig. 23), and in the same breath she also remembers “that horrible week when we believed you were dead” (Pérez et al. 9/2; Fig. 23). Referring to their quarrel in Smallville again, she tells him, “we’ll probably always be in competition for stories-- but we can still be friends can’t we?” (Pérez et al. 9/3, emphasis in the original; Fig. 23). Unknowingly, she speaks of Matrix, when she says, “You were... a little distant last week” (Pérez et al. 9/4, emphasis in the original; Fig. 23). He amusingly answers, “Last week, my mind was off in space-- I’m much better now!” (Pérez et al. 9/4; Fig. 23). With this comment, he is winking directly at readers because they know that he was literally in space as Superman. The last panel does not look back to the past, but forward to the future of the Journalism Awards banquet they are going to attend, in order to receive, together with Cat Grant, a prize for an investigative report on Intergang, but that criminal organization will try an attempt on their lives at that event (Pérez et al. 9/5, 13/4).

In the short scene shown in Fig. 23 and later in the ballroom dancing reproduced in Fig. 24, forms of address between the two protagonists vary continuously. When Lois Lane arrives, she greets Clark Kent using his surname, but in the following panel, when she remembers her emotions about his supposed death, she uses his first name (Pérez et al. 9/1-2; Fig. 23). Conversely, Clark Kent greets her with her full name to compliment her style, and then, he uses her first name as usual (Pérez et al. 9/1, 4; Fig. 23). When they are dancing at the banquet, there is a contrast between the intimate moment represented and the formal forms of address chosen, a formality playfully used as a counterpoint to heighten the closeness of the relationship (see Fig. 24). To conclude, in Clark Kent’s
address, at last, we can see the change from the traditional “Miss” in all the comics stories we have analyzed so far to the “Ms.” proposed by feminism (Pérez et al. 11/3; Fig. 24).

“Survival!”

“Survival!” was written by Roger Stern, who was the scripter of the previous story we analyzed, and comic-book artists Bob McLeod and Brett Breeding were in charge of drawing the graphic narrative. Just like the previous cover, this one contains all of the elements that are part of the story, but the scene inside the comic book was not quite like the one that is represented (Fig. 25). In spite of the differences, this cover has been beautifully executed with multiple diagonals that emphasize the dynamism of the thrilling scene, and the speed lines of the truck that have been blurred in a very realistic way (see Fig. 25). The dramatic and exaggerated exploit by Lois Lane enhances the attraction of the image that looks like an action film (Fig. 25). But in the story when she is on top of the van (not a military truck, as can be confirmed in Fig. 26), Superman is never hovering near her as a guardian angel in the damsel-in-distress topos. The comics story title “Survival!” is rather ambiguous because it can refer either to the danger which Lois Lane is exposed to and survives, or to the army of extreme survivalists she faces during her adventure.
Analysis of the Comics Story

The comics story “Survival!” focuses on Lois Lane playing the role of an action hero à la Rambo, while following a news-story investigation on some army thefts. Her first dangerous action — jumping on to the roof of the van in order to follow the criminals — is connected to her usual competitive spirit against her colleague reporter: “Let’s see Clark Kent top this!” (Stern, McLeod & Breeding 2/5; Fig. 26). This competitiveness is also related to the motif of the father-figure imprint that appears from the very beginning of the story, almost as a follow-up to the one in the comics story “Visitor,” we analyzed earlier. In this case, the flashbacks are enclosed in wavy lines, and their color scheme is not blue but, instead, it is somewhat washed-out or even devoid of all color, in black and white, to contrast them with present-
time scenes (see Figs. 26-28). Again unlike the static unchanged flashbacks in “Visitor,” here they progress in time from the submissive little girl to the young woman who puts a stop to the abuse and talks back to her father (Fig. 28). Not only is the passing of time important in these two pairs of panels (Figs. 27-28). While in the first pair the present shouting of the leader of the survivalists takes her back to her father’s shouting, in the second set it is her rebelling in the past that influences her behavior in the present (Figs. 27-28). Moreover, a remarkable aspect of the past-present parallelism of these scenes is the fact that both female and male interlocutors had abusive fathers, but the leader, instead of getting over that, just as Lois Lane has done, still looks up to his own father—a violent sadist paramilitary criminal who appears in a 1988 comics story—and plays the angry role of Lois Lane’s father in the present (Figs. 27-28). This produces a distorted mirror effect: the woman overcoming her past, but the man committing crimes to emulate his own.

At first, Lois Lane does not need help to escape from her captors. What is more, she plays the damsel in distress in order to take advantage of their distraction, and she steps on the foot of the one who gets near enough for her to disarm him (Fig. 29). The last panel of Fig. 29 shows her successful maneuver in a masterfully drawn comics image, with the
automatic rifle crossing over to the previous panel, no containing line to show the importance of the expansive diagonals and curves of the movements forming some kind of dance enhanced by the speed lines, the resulting sound of the broken foot in red letters in the lower right-hand corner, the agonizing cry and the expression of excruciating pain in the face of the man emphasized by the yellow radiance over his head connecting with a similar one over his foot (Stern, McLeod & Breeding 14/3; Fig. 29). Although ultimately Superman rescues Lois Lane at the end of her adventure, she is never depicted as helpless (Stern, McLeod & Breeding 18/5). It is a rescue that can certainly happen to an ordinary man in an adventure story of this type, and in Figs. 30 and 31, we can appreciate who the protagonist is. Even in Fig. 30 that shows Superman in the foreground in a perspective that enlarges his figure depicted from the back, everything leads to Lois Lane, in a zigzag line of the composition that ends up pointing to her face. Furthermore, in Fig. 31, she is represented in charge of all the survivalists with total self-assurance in such a dangerous situation. This is a far cry from Mort Weisinger’s 1950s traditional portrayals of Lois Lane.
Her assertiveness and pluck do not stop in the battlefield — there are other fights she has to get involved in, and in the denouement of the story, she faces one of them.

The armed forces try to cover up some aspects of the incident because of a matter of national security (Stern, McLeod & Breeding 21/5). At first, she thinks that the whole story is going to be dismissed, and her angry reaction can be observed in Fig. 32, heightened by the impassive look of her boss, Perry White. Again the composition leads to her as the leading character, despite having her boss at the forefront of the image (see Fig. 32). However, when she receives an explanation, she coldly agrees not to publish some sections of her story, and acknowledges the gratitude of the army with a freezing “Don’t mention it, Colonel,” the line of the balloon encircling the words with the stereotypical stalactites that reinforce the iconic representation of her mood (Stern, McLeod & Breeding 21/7).

In the final page of the story, she apologizes to Clark Kent because she stood him up when they were going to have a dinner with his parents in Smallville (Stern, McLeod & Breeding 3/3, 22/3; Fig. 33). At this point in the continuity, their relationship
has advanced to romantic involvement, and it is directing towards marriage, as the Superman emblem surrounding “The End” with two hearts at the bottom confirms in the last panel of the story (Fig. 33). What is worth noting in this apologetic exchange is that Clark Kent also takes the opportunity to show his regret for the innumerable times that he has also stood her up with the reference to their respective professions as journalists, but it is a subtle reminder of his escapades as Superman (Stern, McLeod & Breeding 22/3; Fig. 33).

“Secrets in the Night”

Roger Stern and Bob McLeod joined again to create this unprecedented event in the life of Superman—the revelation of his secret identity to Lois Lane. As the cover states, “At long last... the secret revealed!” (see Fig. 34). Although, as usual, in the story there is no such a scene in which Lois Lane takes off Clark Kent’s glasses, the cover design is spectacular (Fig. 34). The idea of using the glasses as mirrors to reflect Superman’s shield on Clark Kent’s chest when he opens his shirt is genuinely creative and brilliantly executed (Fig. 34). The extreme close-up of the glasses is very important to involve viewers as if they themselves could take the place of the superhero, so that implied viewers become part of the image (Fig. 34). Lois Lane’s
surprised expression at the discovery does appear in the story, but not at the level of amazement that is portrayed on the cover (cf. Stern & McLeod 20/7; Fig. 39). This can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the image engages the viewer; thus, the utter astonishment on Lois Lane’s face can be related to this implied viewer. On the other hand, we will see that this excessive surprise is in accordance with her out-of-character behavior during the present narrative.

Below we are going to discuss this comics story, but we have to bear in mind that this is part of a longer narrative arc, just like others. In the following issue of *Adventures of Superman* (remember these stories continue seamlessly from title to title), just as Lois Lane sees Superman off on a mission, she tells him, “I’ll be waiting. Just be careful, okay?” (Jurgens & Breeding 8/5). But as soon as those words are uttered, she comes to her senses and thinks, “Wait a minute! What’s wrong with me anyway? Since when does Lois Lane sit back and pine while some kind of battle rages over Metropolis?” (Jurgens & Breeding 9/1, emphasis in the original). And this time, true to her character, she rushes into action in the following panel reflecting, “Even if I can’t help Clark fight off whatever menace this is-- I can still be the prize-winning reporter I’m supposed to be and get at least a story out of it!” (Jurgens & Breeding 9/2, emphasis in the original).

The revelation of Superman’s secret is a subplot of the main superhero story of fighting the female supervillain Silver Banshee. Silver Banshee first appeared in 1987 in one of Byrne’s stories, with a wailing power similar to the original Irish myth of a female spirit or fairy, whose Irish name was adapted to English with the word “banshee” (“Banshee”). The original Irish banshee is not a murderer like the Silver Banshee in the
world of comics, but in reality she is “usually seen as an omen of death and a messenger from the underworld” (“Banshee”). Apart from her debut, Silver Banshee struck Metropolis two more times in 1988— one story by Byrne and the other by Stern—, and she had apparently been destroyed by an ancient and mysterious Crone, who gave Silver Banshee her power in the first place, to attempt her own redemption. Although the main strand in the comic book is the fight, it is obvious that the title “Secrets in the Night” refers to the momentous revelation, and this issue became a transcendental one in this continuity.

Analysis of the Comics Story

As we mentioned above, the out-of-character behavior displayed by Lois Lane can be seen in her first encounter with the Silver Banshee, who, in search of Superman, assaults Clark Kent without realizing that they are the same person (see Fig. 35). Thus, there appear two aspects as regards Lois Lane facing the Silver Banshee. On the one hand, we can say that it shows courage to attack a monster with the weird and scary features of the Silver Banshee, but Lois Lane has met her before and knows what that fiend stands for. On the other hand, her reaction of throwing a pot of popcorn at her fiancé’s attacker might be considered simply that, an impulsive response of striking with what is at hand, but her facial expression and her
posture depicted for this action seems rather ludicrous, and they lack the inexhaustible energy and firm resolution we saw in stories previously analyzed, such as “Survival!” or even in the milder story “Visitor” (cf. Figs. 16, 29, and 32).

Furthermore, the next images in the subplot story show a Lois Lane who seems to be another person, not the enterprising journalist always competing with Clark Kent for a news story. This passive woman seeing her fiancé off cannot be the Lois Lane we are used to reading about in comic books, and it is not that she chooses not to go because she cannot accompany a superhero in his superhuman feats, since at this stage in the story she is still unaware of his alter ego (Fig. 36).

As can be seen in Fig. 37, she remains at home, just sitting on the bed and talking on the phone, and she is not even weaving like patient Penelope waiting for Odysseus! What is more, patiently waiting has never been one of her personality traits until now. Is this The Daily Planet’s most important investigative reporter who won a Pulitzer prize? In this story, she is characterized with such a timid personality that when Clark Kent returns, she is scared by his sudden arrival in the dark (see Fig. 38). Can she be
more different than the character Byrne created for this new continuity? We have seen her as a powerful and decisive woman over and over again since her revamping, but in this comics story, it seems that the features that have made her a strong character in her own right have been forsaken.

The second-to-last page of the disclosure shows how Clark Kent tries slowly to introduce the topic, and when he speaks about secrets, Lois Lane admits that she has her share of those, because she has always wanted to defy her father (Stern & McLeod 20/1-5; Fig. 39).

However, we do not think that the facial expression does justice to what she is talking about, and with her hand to her forehead, she is more likely to appear suffering from a headache (Stern & McLeod 20/4; Fig. 39). In the last panel of this page, we can see her surprise although, as we commented earlier, her countenance does no betray the utter astonishment portrayed on the cover (Stern &
During her long run in comic books, many detractors of the character have scorned Lois Lane, and complained that she has never seen beyond the glasses Superman wears, but we noted that in the comics story “Visitor,” she pointedly asked him about his secret identity, so she must have wondered, and this should not be as unexpected as the cover shows.

Finally, the revelation occupies the whole last page of the comic book, with a lavishly drawn image that does not spare minute details, such as the shadow of the vase with flowers on the carpet, and the deformed shadow of the rim of the coffee table on her slipper (see Fig. 40). An open-mouthed Lois Lane stares at Clark Kent taking off his glasses and opening his shirt to reveal the famous costume (without cape) under it, and a radiance on his head emphasizes that this is a turning point in his life (Fig. 40). The image is extremely appealing, but we still do not feel that receiving such news quietly sitting on a couch does justice to the Lois Lane we are accustomed to seeing in comics stories.

“Stormy Weather”

As we mentioned in Chapter Four, Louise Simonson is one of the few female comics creators in the ranks of DC Comics. As the writer of the story “Stormy Weather,” she collaborated with comics artists Jon Bogdanove, who was in charge of drawing the narrative in pencil and Dennis Janke, who inked it. In 1991 Simonson, Bogdanove and DC editor Mike Carlin launched this new title Superman: The Man of Steel in the Superman series, where this comics story was published (see Appendices 3 and 4).
The cover shows Lois Lane in the foreground uncontrollably and bitterly weeping with her hands clenched into fists, but her fists do not imply and attitude of defiance to strike back or fight back; rather, it is more related to pathetic impotence or despair (Fig. 41). From the point of view of the interactive structure, she does not face viewers, so she can be placed in a pattern of offer, i.e. an item for contemplation, or in this case, even sympathy (Fig. 41). With these feelings associated to the image of Lois Lane, the low vertical angle from which she is represented does not reflect on viewers the usual idea of inferiority towards the represented participant (Fig. 41). On the contrary, as already state, the aroused emotion is closer to pity. Quite another matter is the figure of Superman, whose imposing shape, although in a second plane, is depicted with a muscular impressive physique and impassive body language, in an angle even steeper from below, making him a remarkably threatening character (Fig. 41). He seems to be the cause of Lois Lane’s distress, since he looks at her indifferently with a stern expression and without warmth or a comforting gesture (Fig. 41).

Finally, there are two figures lurking in the shadows of the high background in the top right-hand corner of the cover (see Fig. 41). Even without a proper introduction, we may surmise that these are the villains, because of the menacing representation: the humongous monster with intimidating claw-like hands, and the female figure with an
ominous skeleton attire (Fig. 41). As we later learn in the story and in a follow-up comic book, these are a pair of cyborgs sent by a mysterious supervillain, called Cerberus (unrelated to the mythological Greek three-headed dog, guarding the entrance of Hades), to keep a closely and constant watch on Lois Lane, in order to find the best moment to kidnap her and use her as bait to trap Superman as a slave (Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #7; Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #8). This thread of the comics story comes to fruition in the next Superman: The Man of Steel comic book, but in the present story they are only introduced as a lurking menace (Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #8).

These are all the figures represented on the cover, but there is something more in the background—the elements. Across a dark blue backdrop that may be considered the night sky, there appears a yellow spiky forked diagonal that may depict a bolt of lightning, and the title of the story confirms this, “Stormy Weather.” This is one of the few covers that includes the title of the story (the only one since we started our analysis). In the lower left-hand corner, we can see it with rough serrated fuchsia letters (Fig. 41). The weather referred to in this title can be metaphorically connected to Lois Lane’s state of mind in a stereotypical pathetic fallacy, i.e. “ascription of human traits to inanimate nature” (Abrams 129). However, although in the story, there is a lot of rain, there is no situation that merits Lois Lane’s anguished crying. Neither is Superman aloof. What is more, the superhero appears only once to stop two criminals, while he is thinking all the time about Lois Lane. Therefore, as a standard practice in comics, the scene on the cover has little to do with the story proper. But there is one more obvious way in which the storm can be metaphorically associated with all the characters involved in this story—the
idea of unleashed stormy emotion, and this may be a more suitable connection between title and content (*Longman* 1309). Specifically, in Lois Lane and Clark Kent’s strand, the storm may clearly refer to expressions of anger, as we will see in the next section (*Longman* 1309).

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

There are four parallel strands with four different couples in this issue: our hero reporters Lois Lane and Clark Kent; Smallville friends Lana Lang and Pete Ross; Lois Lane’s sister Lucy Lane and photographer Jimmy Olsen; and finally, the pair of cyborgs female Jolt and male Blockhouse, on the side of crime, who are following Lois Lane closely to find the opportune time to strike at her (*Simonson, Dwyer & Janke* #7; *Simonson, Dwyer & Janke* #8). As we mentioned above, there is a storm with pouring rain in the story, but it does not affect Lois Lane and Clark Kent, as we will presently see.

However, it does affect two of the couples mentioned in two different ways. The storm is one element more on top of an accumulated number of circumstances that leads towards the separation of Jimmy Olsen and Lucy Lane. When unemployed Jimmy Olsen finds himself evicted from his apartment in the middle of the storm, the stark contrast between the sophisticated figure of Lucy Lane in a yellow raincoat with matching hat, boots, and umbrella, and his own depiction as a wet mouse pushing a supermarket cart carrying his meager possessions shows the yawning gap in their romantic relationship (*Simonson, Bogdanove & Janke* #7 14). Thus, Jimmy Olsen decides to cut his losses and breaks up with her, before the tables are turned on him, and she breaks up with him
(Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #7 14/4). Here, certainly, one of the Lane sisters breaks into tears, though not the one portrayed on the cover (Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #7 14/5-6).

Conversely, the storm serves to unite another of the couples. When the storm destroys Lana Lang’s apartment, Pete Ross — her Smallville friend, who has been in love with her since they were adolescents, just as she with Clark Kent, hence the eternal triangle — gives her shelter in his own apartment (Simonson, Bogdanove & Janke #7 17/5). She, then, comes to realize that her future is not with Clark Kent but with Pete Ross, and symbolically, she throws away Clark Kent’s portrait, the only valued possession she saved from the wreck of her apartment (see Fig. 42).

The same economic problems in The Daily Planet that resulted in Jimmy Olsen’s layoff made other employees take the last resort of a strike, and here a new character, who is a union organizer called Jeb Friedman, comes to help the workers (Simonson, Bogdanove & Janke #7 5/2). As the struggles between workers and management are part of a longer narrative arc, he appears for the first time in a 1991 comic-book story, when he starts making his advances to Lois Lane (Simonson, Bogdanove & Janke #4 9/1-2). Now when Clark Kent is attacked by workers for not supporting the strike, Jeb Friedman stops them, but emphasizes Clark Kent’s lack of cooperation with The Daily Planet’s workers’ plight (Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #7 4-5). Although at this moment, Clark Kent is not part of the permanent newspaper staff, since he is a freelancer, Lois Lane knows that his
absence was not due to negligence, but because of his duties as Superman, and neither she nor he can reveal this (Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #7 6/1-2; Fig. 43). What she can indeed reveal is the part he played as a reporter, “Clark was busting Intergang, which was a lot more important than carrying around a sign to impress Planet management” (Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #7 6/3, emphasis in the original; Fig. 43). Her defense in front of his opponent enrages him, and he retorts, “Look, Lois, I can fight my own battles, especially against this clown” (Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #7 6/3, emphasis in the original; Fig. 43). At this, Lois Lane loses her temper with both men, and angrily says, “You two act like a couple of gorillas every time you get around each other. What’s your problem, anyway? Testosterone poisoning?” (Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #7 6/4-5, emphasis in the original; Fig. 43).

This can certainly be the storm invoked by the title of this comics story, but on the last page of the comic book, all the misunderstandings are clarified. It is worth noting that Lois Lane reminds Clark Kent that he resented her defense, though he has saved her
countless times: “...but when I tried to defend you... like you’ve defended me millions of times... you practically bite my head off” (Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #7 22/4, emphasis in the original; Fig. 44). Therefore, this is an acknowledgment of the times she has to be rescued by Superman, something that she may also resent, but she tries to repay in some small way when opportunity arises, as in the case of Jeb Friedman’s accusations. For Clark Kent this comes as a surprise because he has had suspicions about Lois Lane’s interest in the union organizer, and she, in turn, realizes that his outbursts are due to jealousy (Fig. 44). With their respective insights into each other’s feelings, their anger fades, just like the storm, and readers get a happy ending with the word “end” inside a pink heart (Simonson, Dwyer & Janke #7 22/8; see Fig. 44).

In relation to Román Gubern’s macrounits of layout and style seen in Chapter Two, in this comic book we start to see changes in the images that are going to be consistently varied as different artists take it in turn to try their hand at the timeless characters. From
this comic book on, we will see an evolution towards image hyperbole, i.e. the figures start to develop more exaggerated shapes. For instance, in Fig. 43 this can be seen in the disproportionately large builds and small heads of the male characters, and also, in Lois Lane’s extremely long legs in the first panel. Moreover, the body language and facial expressions are nearing caricature, towards the center of the base of Scott McCloud’s triangle dealt with in Chapter One (see Figs. 42-44). More movement in the organization of the layouts is also apparent, with variation in panel sizes, bright density in color, and gutters in different colors, instead of the traditional white (see Fig. 43). Specifically, the density of color that can be appreciated from now on is related to what Kress and van Leeuwen call “inscription,” and in the case of an industrial product such as comics, the change can be ascribed to the improvement in the technology of printing processes. Finally, taking one step further Pierre Fresnault-Dereulle’s idea of balloons as flat surfaces emphasizing the horizontal axis of montage syntax discussed in Chapter Two, most of them now overrun panels (see Figs. 42-44).

“Swan Song”

“Swan Song” is the comic book we selected after the year 1993 when DC Comics’ announcement of the death of Superman took the media in the real world by storm (see Appendices 3 and 6). As we described in Chapter Three, *The Death of Superman* series was a fill-in for Lois Lane and Clark Kent’s wedding due to delays in the television series *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*. During that whole year, then, the death of Superman and all its repercussions filled the pages of the comic books issued by DC
Comics. In the year 1994 more conventional stories start to appear, and “Swan Song” is the story published in the anniversary issue number 700 of *Superman in Action Comics*, with 54 pages instead of the usual 22 pages. The series had been running without changing the number sequence since the first 1938 *Action Comics* with the famous cover of Superman lifting a car (see Fig. 45).

For this 1994 special issue written by Roger Stern, several comics artists were invited. Among them the most famous one was American artist Curt Swan, who was the designer of the most recognizable image of Superman from the 1950s until *Crisis on Infinite Earths* in 1985, when John Byrne took over the revamping of DC Comics’ flagship character in *The Man of Steel*, as we have seen. As a regular DC artist on Superman, Swan’s last work was the 1986 imaginary two-issue story “Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?,” in which Lois Lane is interviewed about Superman’s death (“Curt”; Moore et al.). After this story, Swan continued contributing with occasional projects for DC, just as the one under analysis here (“Curt”).

Swan died in 1996, and it is said that his swansong “was five pages published posthumously in the 1996 special *Superman: The Wedding Album* (“Curt”). However, if we understand the meaning of “swansong” correctly, this cannot be so, since it is “the last piece of work or performance of a poet, painter, etc.” (*Longman* 1338), but “[i]t generally carries the connotation that the performer is aware that this is the last performance of his
or her lifetime, and is expending everything in one magnificent final effort” (“Swan”). Moreover, the use of the word “Swan” separately from the word “song” seems to emphasize the reference to the surname of this influential comics artist. That is why we think that the title of this story “Swan Song” refers to Swan’s contribution as his real swansong, which is, as we will see in the following section, an important parallel thread in the whole comic book.

This time the cover really reflects the main plot of the comic-book story—the destruction of Metropolis by Superman’s archenemy Lex Luthor, just as the banner at the top says, “The Fall of Metropolis!” (Fig. 46). More specifically, it shows the scene when the enormous globe that used to be on top of The Daily Planet’s building is rolling down a street where Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, and here there is a discrepancy from the main story, because instead of those strangers on the left, there is only one other civilian in this scene of the story, newcomer reporter Ron Troupe (Stern et al. 38/1; Fig. 46). Maybe appropriately for this celebration of the 700th issue, the two strangers included on the cover are reminiscent of the men fleeing in panic on the famous first cover of Action Comics (see Fig. 45). But that is the end of the similarity to the old cover, because on the present cover, instead of a car, Superman is trying to stop The Daily Planet’s huge globe, and he is belittled by the immense yellow sphere with the letters of
the word “Planet” flying around (Fig. 46). A terrified Lois Lane is center stage, running together with a similarly terrified Jimmy Olsen in order to avoid being crushed to death by the globe (Fig. 46). Although Superman is the savior of their lives, this cannot be considered a case of the usual damsel-in-distress cliché, because she is not the only one in peril—the whole city is. From the point of view of the interactive structure, viewers are also involved in the catastrophe, since the perspective is taken as if the globe is running towards them too.

Before starting our commentary on the story, we would like to refer to the new character Ron Troupe, an African American reporter that was introduced in a 1991 story. This new addition seems to be DC Comics response to the idea of including more minority characters in the Superman series. Thus, Ron Troupe starts his career as a recently graduated journalist seeking work, who is eventually hired by The Daily Planet in a 1992 story, and his 1993 report on Superman’s battle to death “earned him a permanent spot on the Planet’s staff” (Beatty 33). Finally, he becomes Lucy Lane’s husband and they have a son together, who is named after her father, Sam Lane.

Just before Ron Troupe gets his position at The Daily Planet, there is a demonstration at the newspaper, and his sister accosts Perry White, telling him the reason for it, “We’re here to protest the lack of minority hiring at this newspaper” (Stern, Jackson & Rodier 10/1). But incredulous, the old editor retorts, “Eh? You can’t be serious. The Daily Planet was one of the first newspapers to aggressively recruit women and people of color! Our minority internship program is one of the first! Great Caesar’s ghost, our C.E.O. is Asian-American!” (Stern, Jackson & Rodier 10/1-2, emphasis in the original).
Ron Troupe, who has admired the editor since he gave a talk at his university, stops his sister, and accepts what the editor states, “If Perry White says it, it’s no bull, Roberta! You’re ‘way off base on this one! . . . The Planet’s supported civil rights longer than we’ve been alive... and they’ve always put their money where their mouth is!” (Stern, Jackson & Rodier 10/4, 5, emphasis in the original). This exchange may be interpreted as a discussion on DC Comics itself, although in actual fact it does not seem to truly show DC’s hiring methods, at least during the period under study, since as we have seen female comics creators are poorly represented in the company.

Analysis of the Comics Story

The splash page of the story “Swan Song” shows an incredibly beautiful close-up of Lois Lane with a videocassette in her hand (see Fig. 47). Just as the cassette she holds in her hand in the image we analyzed from the cover of the title which introduced her in the present continuity of DC Universe, this videocassette may also symbolize her profession and her devotion to it, because in this story it is the proof she has resourcefully obtained to accuse Lex Luthor of many crimes (Fig. 2, 47). As regards the interactive structure of the image, she directly looks at and talks to viewers, in a demand pattern. Thus, just as the introductory image we have mentioned, the straight
line of her gaze at an eye-level vertical angle implies equality of treatment of her interlocutors without any power difference between them and her (Figs. 2, 47). But unlike that introductory image that shows a full shot of the complete figure, this close-up of the face entails a personal or intimate distance, though the oblique horizontal angle in relation to the viewer qualifies this intimacy with some kind of detachment from this represented participant, making her less accessible and reinforcing her inscrutable smile (see Figs. 2, 47).

Following Lois Lane’s findings, when Superman tries to arrest a Lex Luthor ravaged by illness, the criminal attempts to fire bombs at the city of Metropolis (Stern et al. 23/1). However, Superman convinces him not to do it (Stern et al. 25/1-8). But thinking that he is true to his boss’s original wishes, Lex Luthor’s right-hand man launches the bombs instead (Stern et al. 25/10, 26/1). Fortunately, as there has been a danger for some time that this terrible event might happen, the city is almost totally evacuated. However, assuming that there is no longer risk, reporters Lois Lane, Ron Troupe and photographer Jimmy Olsen have been sent to The Daily Planet building, and they are nearly getting there when the bombing starts (Stern et al. 30).

At this point, what is depicted on the cover of this comic book takes place. The three journalists start running when they see the globe rolling towards them, but in the wild scramble to get out of the way, Jimmy Olsen stumbles and falls (Stern et al. 39/1). Risking her life in a selfless gesture, Lois Lane goes back and tries to help him (see Fig. 48). The panel is vibrant with doom and gloom, and with a very low vertical angle from the point of view of fallen Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane’s hand can be seen extending towards him
(and implicitly almost towards viewers themselves), both with desperate expressions on their faces, and the dramatic chiaroscuro on Lois Lane’s face heightening the despair of the situation (Fig. 48). Conversely, at the bottom of the panel, Ron Troupe’s cool expression serves as a contrast of sangfroid and irony to the drama, especially when he notes with equanimity that there is no need for theatrical high-minded gestures, since Superman has already saved them all by stopping the globe (Stern et al. 39/2-3; see Fig. 48).

Before the last pages of the comic book, in the aftermath of the catastrophe, the scenes we reproduce here in a fresh layout of superimposed panels look like scenes in an action hero film — the solitary figure of the hero in the middle of the rubble that Metropolis has been reduced to; the hero trying to reconstruct the destroyed globe of *The Daily Planet*, a symbol of Metropolis; the heroine trying to comfort the hero for what he feels is his failure; the extreme close-up of the united hands; and the power of the hero to look directly at his audience, something the heroine is not allowed to do in these scenes, since she is totally concentrated on the object of her devotion (see Fig. 49). His somber view, emphasized by a suitably baroque chiaroscuro, is that he failed even though he had the help of Superboy, a clone that appeared in a 1993 story, and Supergirl, the returned artificial being Matrix that was part of the story discussed in an earlier section (Stern et al. 51/6; see Fig. 49). But Lois Lane sees this differently with the positive view of lives saved and part of the city
still standing (Stern et al. 51/6; see Fig. 49). Throughout the years there have been many calamities in the city, but not at the level of this total devastation, which eerily happens in downtown Metropolis, a fact that does not fail to remind us, 2015 readers of this 1994 story, of Ground Zero in the World Trade Center attack.

So far we have been describing the main plot, but running as a counterpoint to all the fight, explosions, and disaster in Metropolis, there are interspersed pages of what is happening in Smallville (Stern et al. 17-19, 29, 37, 41). As Lois Lane says, when she finally gets to a defeatist Superman, “The phone lines are a mess, but I finally got through to your parents. I guessed we missed a nice little wedding” (Stern et al. 51/3; see Fig. 49). Almost as if it were an alternative universe, this “nice little wedding” takes place at the Kents’
farm: Lana Lang and Pete Ross are getting married with witnesses Martha and Jonathan Kent (see Fig. 50). Although there are no specific credits, this idea of alternative reality can be recognized in Swan’s clear drawing and serene line, without dramatic chiaroscuro, with the peace and tranquility of the ceremony (Fig. 50). This is Swan’s legacy.

**“Hard Decisions!”**

“Hard Decisions!” was written by comics writer-inker Karl Kesel, penciled by comic-book artist Stuart Immonen, and inked by comic-book artist José Marzan, Jr. So far we have not mentioned the nationalities of the new comics creators we have introduced in this chapter, because all of them are American. This time, however, we have to specify that Immonen is a Canadian cartoonist.

The story is the denouement of a longer narrative arc in which the worst nightmare usually imagined by a superhero with a dual identity comes true. Thus, Clark Kent’s former Smallville friend Kenny Braverman, a.k.a. Conduit in his criminal career, discovers his secret identity and tries to kill everybody close to him. In one of the previous stories called “The Death of Clark Kent” —the 100th anniversary special issue of the Superman title that started with the revamping of the series—, the Kents’ farmhouse is destroyed, but fortunately, the elderly couple is saved by Superman in the nick of time (Jurgens, Breeding & Rubinstein 51/3). At the end of this story, Superman tells his parents, in an impressive splash page, “Conduit has won! For all intents and purposes, Clark Kent-- and the entire Kent family-- are dead from this day on!” (Jurgens, Breeding & Rubinstein 54, emphasis in the original). Thus, so as not to be recognized either as the
reporter or the superhero, since nobody coming near him is safe, Clark Kent leaves his life behind to conceal his parents.

In another story when he thinks his parents were killed in a new attack, he is so desperate that he burns his costume with his heat vision, and shouts, “I will be Superman no more!” (Simonson, Bogdanove & Janke #45 21/1, emphasis in the original). Soon he discovers that his parents survived, and they all take to the road on a motorhome, to try and keep off the radar of this relentless supervillain (Jurgens, Kane & Rubinstein 14-15). And later on he realizes that he cannot stop being Superman. When he has to use his powers to save some people, he acknowledges his identity, and resolutely states, “Superman. I’ll always be Superman” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #524 14/2-3, emphasis in the original).

But not only are his parents in danger. All his close friends and relations risk their lives by the mere fact of being that. Lana Lang and Pete Ross, now married, are sent a bomb in a package (Jurgens, Breeding & Rubinstein 14-16). Superman is just in time to save them, but their house, just like the Kents’, is destroyed, and they have no option than go into hiding (Jurgens, Breeding & Rubinstein 18-21). Lois Lane is lured to a building and given up for dead after its explosion (Michelinie, Guice & Rodier #710 21-22; Simonson, Bogdanove & Janke #45 1-4). As expected, she survives, but tries to lie low so as not to risk other attacks, and without contacting anyone, she tries to catch up with the Kents, who obviously think she was killed and so does Superman (Jurgens, Kane & Rubinstein 7; Simonson, Bogdanove & Janke #45 22). Jimmy Olsen is kidnapped and rescued by Superman, but unbeknown to the superhero, he decides to disguise himself and stay in
Conduit’s hideout in order to discover more information about him, but unfortunately, he is later reported missing (Jurgens, Breeding & Rubinstein 24-26, 36-41; Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #524 3-6).

Even acquaintances may be the target of this insane monster. For instance, Conduit tries to kill Lieutenant Maggie Sawyer of the Metropolis Special Crime Unit, who usually works with Superman to fight supervillains (Simonson, Bogdanove & Janke #45 6). Another case in point is a character called Judith McGivney. Under an assumed name, Superman is hired by her as a logger (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #524 8). But when a forest fire starts and he saves lives with superhuman feats, his cover is blown and he is recognized for the superhero he is (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #524 9, 14, 17). The dreadfully fatal consequence of this is that the despicable criminal learns about it, and brutally murders unsuspecting McGivney, just because she is Superman’s employer and friend (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #524 19-20). The title “Hard Decisions!” then, refers to the dilemma of bringing mortal danger to the people who knows Clark Kent-Superman. As he realized earlier, he cannot stop being Superman because he will always try and rescue people in danger. But the alternative is the one he considers viable. Should Superman stop being Clark Kent in order to save the lives of those close to him?

The cover tells us something about this dilemma and what the answer will be in the story. Although at face value it simply represents the famous comics couple kissing, such romantic cover is not so common in the superhero genre, but neither is completely unusual to see this type of scene in relation to Lois Lane and Superman (Fig. 51). Nevertheless, we can assume that there is some influence from the television series Lois &
Clark: The New Adventures of Superman, which is airing during this period with great success. Indeed, the banner at the top of the cover reads a kind of allusion to this, “Lois & Clark Forever!” (see Fig. 51). But in the analysis we may elucidate some references to the present story.

Lois Lane and Clark Kent-Superman do not look directly at viewers, so they are in an offer pattern for viewers’ contemplation, which entails for the represented participants some lack of concern for the outside world while they are in this most intimate moment (Fig. 51). Perhaps this kiss is a goodbye one, because Superman has to perform his duties as a superhero should, leaving her behind for a while (Fig. 51). This may be why he is taking off his shirt while kissing Lois Lane, but she is not a passive recipient of the kiss (Fig. 51). She is also an actor removing Clark Kent’s glasses in order to reveal the superhero underneath (Fig. 51). So this may imply her acquiescence to his duties, even more than that—it may be her total support for the difficult and dangerous tasks he has to carry out in his capacity as a superhero, but also her tight hold on his glasses may also indicate her firm belief in his maintaining his secret identity as Clark Kent (Fig. 51). This is indeed what happens at the end of the story, as we will see in the next section.
Analysis of the Comics Story

At the beginning of the story “Hard Decisions!” there are a few pages devoted to the thread of a still weak but recovering Lex Luthor, rescued by a team of female lawyers who are going to save him from legal charges, after the debacle of Metropolis, which we discussed in the preceding analysis of “Swan Song” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 1-3). But the bulk of the comic book deals with the denouement of the story about Conduit, who was killed in a terrible fight against Superman in an earlier issue (Michelinie, Guice & Rodier #711). This is the moment when Superman ascertains that there are no more threats to his parents’ lives, but they still do not know that Lois Lane is alive (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 4-5).

When Superman returns to his parents’ motorhome, he realizes that the police are chasing a driver, and again, as we saw in our first analysis, we can say that speeding is the type of petty crime that may belittle the figure of Superman. Here there is an attempt at making it look more important than it really is, with several police cars involved in the chase of the offender (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 8/2-3; Fig. 52). But even with that, Superman’s intervention seems too much. Perhaps we may allow for this action-movie resource to make their reunion have a stronger visual impact, such as can be seen in Figs.

Fig. 52: Panels 2-4, page 8 of “Hard Decisions!” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan, The Adventures of Superman #525 8/2-4).
52-53. Or maybe in the lifting of the car in Fig. 52, there is some unacknowledged allusion to that famous first car Superman lifted (cf. Fig. 45).

Moreover, the scenes also give us some funny moments: when Lois Lane is in the air while she is saying that she is not going to let the Kents “take off” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 8/3; Fig. 52); when they realize that one is in the car and the other is below the car (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 9/1-2; Fig. 53); when realizing that they are surrounded by the police, instead of letting his pent-up emotions go, Superman has to restrain himself, maintain his superhero role, and say, “I don’t know what to say either, except you’re-- um-- you’re under arrest Ms. Lane” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 9/4-5, emphasis in the original; Fig. 53).

The real dilemma starts when they settle down, and Clark Kent shocks Lois Lane with the statement, “I’m not sure I can ever go back to being Clark Kent” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 10/4, emphasis in the original). She tries to show him his mistake, “You can’t mean you’d turn your back on your entire life! All your friends…” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 10/5, emphasis in the original). And he reinforces the idea that he cannot stop being Superman “All I do know is... I’ll always be Superman. That’s my destiny” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 11/4, emphasis in the original). But Lois Lane retorts, “Well, I
didn’t come all this way for Superman! I came for Clark Kent—” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 11/5, emphasis in the original).

When they are in a small town, to make him understand what he is missing with his decision, she asks him to go and buy a coffee as Superman (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 15/5). The scene in the coffee shop seems to have been taken out of a western film when the gunman comes into the town saloon, asks for a whisky, a black decaffeinated coffee instead, and people are staring at him expectantly, thinking there is going to be a mortal duel (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 17-18). Then, the sheriff comes in, the local police instead, asking if Superman is in their town because of a problem they are going to face, and Superman ironically answers, “You mean like an alien invasion or crazed supervillain. No-- no, I’m just getting coffee...” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 18/1).

Later Lois Lane explains, “The fact is, people will always treat Superman differently. You need a secret identity. It’s what protects you from people... and it’s what connects you to people. Under that costume you’re Clark Kent-- you’ll always be Clark Kent. You can’t live without him... and neither can I!” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 19/3-4, emphasis in the original; Fig. 54). The image of this exchange is important, because although Lois Lane does the talking, she is not properly depicted as an actor, but suitably behind the superhero, and she is not allowed to look at the viewers, not even to see beyond in a noble way, as the superhero does in the
first reproduced panel (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 19/3; Fig. 54). Meanwhile, the only action shown in the last panel reproduced here—caressing her cheek—is performed by Superman (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 19/4; Fig. 54).

Nevertheless, there is a change of opinion instigated by Lois Lane, as she shrewdly says in the coda to the story, when she talks to Perry White on the phone about missing Jimmy Olsen, while Superman flies off, “... I’ve got a feeling Superman’s looking for him right now. And you know as well as I do, once that man decides to do something nothing can change his mind. Well... almost nothing!” (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 22/3, emphasis in the original). All the same, just as before, there are contradictions, since she is the one who remains on the train, like a good homemaker, while the superhero goes out to work (Kesel, Immonen & Marzan #525 22/2-3).

“The Wedding Album”

“The Wedding Album” is an impressive special edition comic book of over ninety pages, with an embossed Superman shield imitating the usual wedding invitations, as if it were an aristocratic coat of arms. The title of the story “The Wedding Album” is printed in conventional invitation italics, under the customary series title Superman. As it is a special issue, it does not follow the usual sequence of the series, instead it bears the number one with the word “special” underneath. As we mentioned in Chapter Four, contrary to the expectation created by the word “album” in the title, this is not a collection of illustrations, but a comics story created collectively by over thirty cartoonists, as the announcement on the cover states, “By Superman writers and artists past and present.”
Of them only Dan Jurgens is credited as a writer and an artist, the rest either perform one or the other of those two important tasks. Among those cartoonists, it is worth mentioning female comics writer Louise Simonson, and guest comics artists John Byrne, Gil Kane, and Curt Swan, with his posthumous contribution mentioned in the previous analysis of “Swan Song.” In Chapter Four we also stated that “The Wedding Album” separates two periods in Superman-Clark Kent and Lois Lane’s lives, and in the present analyses, it also neatly starts a second part, just in the middle of the number of stories selected.

In spite of Lois Lane’s commitment to Clark Kent and his alter ego, which we witnessed in the previous story analyzed, she later becomes doubtful about her accepting a second place, and she breaks off her engagement, because, in her view, “Superman’s the one who’s always taking ‘Clark’ away from me” (Michelinie, Dwyer & Rodier 13/3, emphasis in the original). When Mr. Mxyzptlk intervenes to try to get the couple reconciled (apart from bringing other disasters to Metropolis and Superman), Lois Lane realizes that what she said is not the real reason for her breakup. In her words, “At least he [Mr. Mxyzptlk] made me quit blaming you [Superman] for our breakup and acknowledge the real problem! It’s me, Clark! When I’m with you, I wait... for you to leave... to risk your life... to save the world! Then I wait to see if you’ll come back to me! In my heart, I’m always holding my breath... waiting! It’s like... my life isn’t mine anymore!” (Simonson, Dwyer & Rodier #56 22/2-3, emphasis in the original). This is really what we discovered in the earlier analysis of the comics story “Secrets in the Night.”
When they later talk again, Superman even hints at leaving his job as a superhero behind, “I’m telling you that I love you. That all I’ve ever wanted is to live a normal life! I’ve no intention of sacrificing that to a... a... cape! Without you, I have... nothing!” (Jurgens, Frenz & Rubinstein #112 15/1, emphasis in the original). But Lois Lane categorically rejects that suggestion, “Clark, if you’re offering to stop being Superman... don’t! I will not be responsible for the retirement of Superman!” (Jurgens, Frenz & Rubinstein #112 15/2, emphasis in the original). But no sooner does Superman receive a call for help than all his intentions go up in smoke, and Lois Lanes agrees to his leaving with tears in her eyes, “I know you want to be just plain Clark Kent from Smallville, Kansas. I know you want to be normal... but you can’t! You’re Superman by choice... and by birth!” (Jurgens, Frenz & Rubinstein #112 16/2, emphasis in the original). Finally, she decides to leave Metropolis as a foreign correspondent for The Daily Planet, and while she is abroad, she realizes that she does want to marry Clark Kent, “Guess I was so afraid of losing my individuality, of becoming a subordinate Mrs. Superman-- that I acted like a jerk and an idiot!” (Jurgens, Frenz & Rubinstein #118 22/2, emphasis in the original).

Analysis of the Comics Story

The image on the splash page of “The Wedding Album” is Lois Lane in a wedding dress ready to start the ceremony. With the cover, the title, and the splash page, it seems that we have been transported directly to her wedding, but when we turn over the page expecting to see Clark Kent in a suitable attire, we are disconcerted by the appearance of three total strangers (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 2). As a matter of fact, on her way back to
Metropolis, Lois Lane has got involved with an international drug-smuggling operation, and in order to save herself, she has promised to marry the leader of the drug ring. Visually, readers can see her false “sugary” statements, since in addressing the drug-ring leader, her balloons are heart-shaped and pink in color, both characteristics totally alien to Lois Lane’s personality (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 2-3).

When she appears at *The Daily Planet* in a ragged wedding dress, in order to write the story in which she breaks up the drug ring, she learns about the changes that took place in her absence: Clark Kent as acting managing editor until Perry White recovers from chemotherapy to treat his lung cancer, and Superman without his powers (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 11, 13; Fig. 55). Superman lost his powers during an adventure when his energy drained like an exhausted battery because the sun, which is the source of his powers, went out for a while, and he has not been able to recharge at the level of a superbeing since then. Supposedly, a native from a planet with a red sun like Krypton would “absorb and convert solar energies for biological use” in a more efficient way under a yellow sun like ours, hence his superpowers (Wolverton 62). An extreme close-up of Clark Kent’s bleeding finger when he tries to pick up the pieces of a
broken glass, next to Lois Lane’s white gloved hand, is a powerful visual reminder of his new human weakness (see Fig. 55).

As we saw in the previous section, Lois Lane has come to pick up their relationship where she left it off, and when she takes his handkerchief out of his pocket to use it to staunch his blood, she finds her engagement ring (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 14/3-4). She, then, realizes that everything can go back to the way it was, and obligingly, Clark Kent proposes again, with a culminating splash page of a kiss (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 16/1-2, 17). Although there are problems for a Superman without powers to protect the city, Batman brings in a lot of superheroes on a magnificent double-page spread that shows them flying against the Metropolis sky to help Superman in his hour of need (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 67-68). The rest of the comic book is devoted to all the traditional rituals that revolve around an American wedding, especially the bridal shower, the bachelor and bachelorette parties, but also several other stages in the process to get to the wedding proper, which will be mentioned below.

Lois Lane and Martha Kent go on apartment hunting for the couple, but they find it very difficult to get a suitable place, since the only one Lois Lane likes has a long waiting list (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 36-37). The solution for this will come as a wedding present for the couple from Bruce Wayne, the multimillionaire alter ego of Batman, who owns the building, and moves them to the top of the list as the new tenants of the place (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 69/2-4). After the apartment hunt, Lois Lane and her future mother-in-law have a talk over coffee, and Lois Lane can explain her confidence about the marriage: “I did some soul-searching while I was overseas, and clarified my priorities. I realized the
love Clark and I share is stronger than anything else—*including* his fear that being ‘killed in action’ would leave me a widow, and my fear that my *individuality* could become lost. I know now that I can still be who I *am*, that we can both be whatever we *want* to be—as long as we’re *together*” (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 38/3-4, emphasis in the original).

Apart from apartment hunting, there are other tasks for the wedding. The bride and the mother’s bride choose the music, the food, the flowers, etc., but always bickering over everything (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 21). The groom, the groom’s father and the bride’s father try out and rent their tuxedoes that are measured and fitted exclusively for them (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 24, 27, 29). One of Lois Lane’s friends takes her to a bridal showroom, and there she tries out different styles of wedding gowns until she finds the one she wants, which is not revealed until the ceremony in church, on a wonderful splash page with the happy couple walking down the aisle (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 30/5-6, 31-33, ).

Lois Lane goes to the courthouse to get the wedding license from the license bureau (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 39/3). The men have their bachelor party with brawl included, when bikers gatecrash the event, and literally broke into the place with their motorcycles (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 52-56, 57/1-3).

Lois Lane’s sister organizes a surprise bridal shower with pot luck dinner (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 23, 25-26, 28, 30). The most interesting aspect of this bridal shower is the theme selected by Lucy Lane, “Domestic Bliss,” and she emphasizes, “It’s a *happy homemaker* shower,” which does not make Lois Lane very happy (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 28/1, emphasis in the original; Fig. 56). Fig. 56 shows Lois Lane’s annoyed expressions in contrast with the wide smiles that surround her, and the black backdrop of the page
where the panels are placed matches her mood and highlights her reluctance to be the homemaker all the women want her to be. The layout of the panels also represent the social pressure to conform to a domestic ideal with the Crock-Pot, a slow cooking device, center stage with radiance emanating from this wonder of “domestic bliss” (see Fig. 56). The bottom panel shows an even more annoyed Lois Lane, ironically thanking her sister for the recipes she finds inside the pot, “Great, Gosh... thanks, sis. And I cook so often too” (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 28/5, emphasis in the original). A whole range of appliances follows in the wake of the Crock-Pot (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 30/1). And Lucy Lane continues with the theme, “It’s like, good-bye blessed freedom... hello dish-pan hands!” (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 30/2, emphasis in the original). Obviously, Lois Lane does not agree at all, and neither do we!

Lucy Lane also organizes the bachelorette party, a counterpoint to the bachelor one, because it is a more sedate affair in a restaurant, with all the women sitting at a round table (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 57/4-5). Nonetheless, in a superhero comic book with Lois Lane in its midst, the sedate affair cannot last long. Soon a male chauvinist interrupts the event pestering her to go out with him in a non-too-delicate way, and being who she
is, Lois Lane deals with him in a very forceful way, by tripping him and making him fall face down into the cake on the table (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 58/1-5). Her actions prompt Lucy Lane’s comment: “Next to Wonder Woman, you handle yourself better than any woman alive!” (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 58/6). It is a funny moment, but we feel that perhaps the disposal of the “suitor” is a bit too aggressive, although as a comics story, it can act on female fantasies. The intruder, then, is thrown out of the restaurant followed by Lois Lane and two more women (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 58/6, 65/1-2). This scene outside the restaurant is witnessed by Superman and Batman from above. Just as Superman is praising his bride, “I have every confidence Lois can handle whatever comes our way,” Batman shows him the scene below, and says, “I don’t doubt that for a minute!” (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 64/4-5, emphasis in the original).

When the women reenter the restaurant, Lois Lane makes a very interesting comment, from the point of view of this study: “Wow! My last days as a single, crusading feminist reporter! You think Gloria Steinem will still talk to me after I’m married?” (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 65/4, emphasis in the original). There are two aspects to take into account. On the one hand, we have to interpret the first part of her statement as an assumption that she will end her single marital status, but not her status as a self-declared feminist crusader. On the other hand, the mention of the well-known American feminist, founder of Ms. magazine, cannot be considered anything but a reference to the 1970s controversy about the change in the comics character Wonder Woman, and the repercussions it had on feminist views about the most famous female superhero. As we mentioned in Chapter Three, during the 1970s there was a general updating of DC Comics’
Among them Wonder Woman suffered a demotion to mortal being, and thus, instead of her usual costume, she sported a black biker-girl outfit ("Wonder"). Gloria Steinem’s disapproval of this move made her place Wonder Woman in costume, adapted from the 1940s version, on the cover of the inaugural issue of Ms. in 1972 (Robinson 82; “Wonder”). By 1973 Wonder Woman’s powers and costume were restored by DC Comics, obviously not only because of Steinem’s gesture, but also because of the belief that there was a wide audience for an empowered female hero (Robinson 83; “Wonder”). Just like Wonder Woman, Lois Lane, as a character in the DC Universe, is going to change, and we believe that she wonders if she is going to be accepted or rejected as Wonder Woman was.

In the wedding rehearsal dinner, the idea of the father figure, which we saw developing in previous analyses, crops up again as a controversy about the traditional ritual of the father giving away his daughter in church (Fig. 57). Sam Lane tries to blame Clark Kent for his daughter’s refusal to perform this ritual in the church ceremony, but Lois Lane reminds him of his openly self-confessed heart’s desire for a son, not a daughter, and the impossible convention of giving a son away (see Fig. 57). A solitary elongated
female figure standing against a white background faces her father, and viewers witness the scene from above, with the impersonal distance of a full shot (see Fig. 57).

Then, the row breaks out between father and daughter, and Lois Lane angrily says, “Yes, you raised me! You tried your best to make me into the son you really wanted! Well, you did a good job, Sam—” (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 76/1, emphasis in the original; Fig. 58). Furiously he tries to leave with his wife — whose figure echoes that of her daughter, first with her crossed arms and then facing him alone—, but when she refuses and sides with her daughter, he storms out stating that he may not attend the wedding because he is considered superfluous in the ceremony (Jurgens, Kesel et al. 76/3; Fig. 58).

But in the end Lois Lane’s father sees reason, and comes to the wedding. While Lois Lane and Clark Kent are exchanging vows at the altar, they...
whisper to each other that they can see Sam Lane in
the church (see Fig. 59). It is worth noting that
visually this exchange takes place with a close-up of
the couple, but each of them occupying a single
panel with a continuous background, to show the
importance assigned to each character, and also to
their isolated statements (see Fig. 59). However, it
is the figure of Clark Kent who takes precedence, and in the last panel reproduced here,
we can see that although both share the same balloon, i.e. repeating the same words, the
actor is Clark Kent and the goal or passive recipient of the action is Lois Lane, who is also
seen almost from behind.

“Power Crisis!”

“Power Crisis!” was written by Karl Kesel, the pencil drawings were made by
comics artist Scot Eaton, and José Marzan, Jr. inked them. It is the first part of a story arc
that deals with changes in Superman’s powers. As we saw in “The Wedding Album,”
Superman has no power beyond ordinary human beings. Consequently, a series of four
issues at the beginning of 1997, with the banner “Power Struggle” at the top of the covers,
are devoted to the attempts he makes to regain his powers, and by the fourth number he
is fully restored to his usual superhuman powers. But in this later comics story we will
analyze in the next section, the physiology of his body starts to change, and his
superpowers are metamorphosed into pure energy.
Although it is not stated directly, the origin of the change can be traced back to an encounter with a kind of “sentient electricity” that was released while some scientists in Antarctica tried “to tap the massive reserves of geothermal energy at the Earth’s core” (Michelinie, Grummett & Rodier 6/2; 7/2, emphasis in the original). In other subsequent issues, Superman will be able to control his new powers, and in order not to disintegrate into atoms of energy, he will wear a new container suit made with a special fabric. Another important fact is that when he changes molecularly into Clark Kent, he becomes a normal human being. Within this narrative arc, he will be afterwards divided into two forces, Superman Blue and Superman Red, who will be eventually reunited and changed into the usual superhero everybody knows and expects.

On the upper right of the cover, below the series title, the subheading states, “New wife, new powers, new home...” and then going back, as if suddenly realizing what has been said, tantalizingly the information is readjusted on the lower left, “...New powers?! (see Fig. 61). In full view, the figure of Superman occupies the whole foreground with energy beams radiating from his head in a surge of pain (Fig. 61). The tightened muscles have been inflated to a great extent, and the chiaroscuro not only emphasizes them, but also the dramatic scene (Fig. 61). In contrast, the diminutive and wispy shape of Lois Lane...
seems paralyzed with terror, unable to react in any way before her husband’s ordeal (Fig. 61). This is surely unlike the Lois Lane we have come to see in one comic book after another. We presume that this image is the direct result of the conventional resort to the damsel-in-distress topos, which may be used on the cover to attract male readers. But as we will see, although there is a similar scene in the comics story we are going to analyze, Lois Lane’s reaction is not comparable to the one on the cover.

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

The story “Power Crisis!” starts in Lois Lane and Clark Kent’s apartment as he prepares to answer a call for Superman. Suddenly, a spark that seems to be static electricity becomes a shower of rays emanating from Superman’s head and hands (see Figs. 62 and 63). Fig. 62 shows a scene like the one on the cover, but with reversed positions. The figure of Superman in the background displays a similar heavily muscled build, but what is more relevant to our study is the titillating fragment of Lois Lane’s body with a rather prominent breast profile (Fig. 62). This has not been common so far, and in the rest of the story Lois Lane’s figure takes her usual slim but not highly sexual shape. However, as we will see in other stories we will analyze below, and as we acknowledged with studies by other researchers in Chapter One, there is a somewhat

![Fig. 62: Panel 5, page 2 of “Power Crisis!” (Kesel, Eaton & Marzan, The Adventures of Superman #545 2/5).](image-url)
inflationary development for both male and female bodily frames throughout these years. The development will be inconsistent, and somewhat fluctuating, because this will depend on the artists that take up the task of drawing the characters. Nevertheless, as we have seen, this was not common in earlier years.

Whereas in Fig. 62 viewers cannot clearly perceive Lois Lane’s reaction except for her hand, because of the perspective and angle which have been evidently selected for viewers’ contemplation of the fragmented body part that has been highlighted, in Fig. 63 we can see her despair, but not the paralyzing terror in which she has been depicted on the cover. The emotion displayed in this panel may be equated to impotence at not finding ways to help, and her posture indicates readiness to move, to do her part, rather than to remain immobile, inactive (Fig. 63). Moreover, her decisive action is shown in a following scene when Lois
Lane appears running into the street where Superman must have fallen through the wall, in order to do something for the superhero (see Fig. 64). Here it is worth highlighting the irregular shape of the panel without gutters; instead, just a black narrow line is used to show the overlapping of panel scenes in the upper left-hand corner (Fig. 64).

At this point, Superman’s lack of control of his new powers is going to create a lot of problems for Metropolis and its inhabitants (Kesel, Eaton & Marzan 5-7). When Superman produces a blackout in many parts of the city, the supervillain Atomic Skull, who is controlled by means of devices powered by electricity, finds his chance to escape from Stryker’s Island Penitentiary (Kesel, Eaton & Marzan 9). Before his transformation into this mad horrifying criminal, Atomic Skull was an ordinary human being, called Joe Martin (Beatty 100). As a result of being exposed to an alien gene-bomb, he became a walking nuclear reactor with invisible flesh (that is why only his skeleton is visible), superstrength “and the ability to emit blasts of radioactive energy” (Beatty 100). His subsequent head injuries “left him delusional believing himself to be the ‘Atomic Skull,’ a hero from his favorite 1930s movie serials” (Beatty 100). In a previous story, he became fixated with Lois Lane, mistaking her for Atomic Skull’s love interest, Zelda Wentworth (Beatty 100).

Resourceful as ever, Lois Lane, who is aware of Atomic Skull’s fixation with her, realizes she has no option but playing along with him...
(Fig. 65). In Fig. 65, she appears enthralled—even in an apparent hypnotic trance—by the crazy criminal, as she tells him what he expects to hear. As regards the panel montage, again the images are no longer restricted to the rectangular frames, but they spill their contents on the surrounding panels and background, because they are often located over larger panels used as backgrounds (see Fig. 65). Fig. 66 shows that her trancelike state was in reality a ruse, because no sooner does she see an opportunity to escape provided by Superman’s distraction of the criminal than she takes it and runs. The story ends with an apparent atomization of Superman, who will reappear somewhere else in the next issue, and he will finally vanquish Atomic Skull.

“DC Comics Presents Lois Lane”

In 1998 DC Comics decided to organize the fifth-week event Girlfrenzy!, which is focused on seven female heroes of the DC Universe related to their parent titles, but otherwise independent from one another (Arrant; “Fifth”; see Fig. 67). Fifth-week events were one-shot comic-book promotions needed by publishers to fill in the scheduling gap resulting from planning in advance the release of four titles every month on a certain day of the week—in DC’s case, on Wednesday (“Fifth”). The problem came up when a month
had five instead of the scheduled four Wednesdays, so an extra comic book used to be needed (since then, this practice was discontinued by DC Comics) (“Fifth”).

The *Girlfrenzy!* initiative produced mixed results, and DC Comics failed to promote the event with enthusiasm, since it was lukewarmly welcomed, “We don’t normally cover female heroes, but we’ll do it just this once!” (Arrant). Anyway, as a whole, *Girlfrenzy!* gave the female characters an opportunity “to break through that glass ceiling and deliver some more diverse storytelling” (Arrant). In the case of *Girlfrenzy! Superman: Lois Lane*, the story is an independent adventure of the character title written by comics writer-editor Barbara Kesel, and comics artist-illustrator Amanda Conner was in charge of the pencil drawings, while her husband, comics artist-writer Jimmy Palmiotti inked them (“Amanda”; “Barbara”; “Jimmy”). Fig. 67 shows all the protagonists in the *Girlfrenzy!* event, and Lois Lane is the third figure from the right, with the sleek attire conventionally associated with a spy, as we will see in the next section, but instead of the customary gun, she carries a photo camera and a video camera.

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

Lois Lane is alone in this adventure, although Superman has a token appearance at the very beginning (Kesel, Conner & Palmiotti 2-4). She was persuaded to go to Manitoba, Canada, in pursuit of a news story, in relation to a scientific research facility on the water
of the Hudson Bay, but her informant did not turn up at their meeting point (Kesel, Conner & Palmiotti 2/1, 5/3-4, 6, 8-9, 15/2). Trying to find him, Lois Lane discovers some unlawful genetic manipulation between polar bears and human beings, in order to get a super-soldier (Kesel, Conner & Palmiotti 10-11). Lois Lane rescues her informant spy, the missing children, who were kidnapped for the experiments, and the bears held in captivity, which in the end save the day by attacking the villains (Kesel, Conner & Palmiotti 14-21).

In this story, there are several intertextual references, both in image and text, especially to cinema and television, and even more than that, we can also speak about hipertextuality, in the way in which Gérard Genette explains the idea that we discussed in Chapter One. Therefore, the whole comics story can be said to be an indirect transformation, taking the model from the James Bond spy film genre, and this is even directly acknowledged by means of intertexts, such as the image on the splash page, and the customary introduction the famous spy uses in films, “My name’s Bond, James Bond,” which is converted into “The name’s Lane. Lois Lane” in the comic book (Kesel, Conner & Palmiotti 2/1, emphasis in the original; Fig. 68).

Lois Lane introduces herself in this way at the hotel reception desk because she wants to clear up an amusing confusion (Kesel, Conner & Palmiotti 2/1; Fig. 68). The receptionist mistakes her for Lucy Lawless, the protagonist of the renowned 1990s television series *Xena: Warrior Princess*, which is evidently another intertext (Kesel, Conner & Palmiotti 2/1; Fig. 68). Lois Lane tries to convince the receptionist of her error, and the shape of her balloon even displays the conventional stalactites to show her frosty
mood, insisting, “I’m a reporter, not a warrior princess,” but the receptionist adamantly refuses to believe her (Kesel, Conner & Palmiotti 2-3/3, emphasis in the original; Fig. 68).

This intertext creates a striking play on reality and fantasy, because the receptionist, a character in a comic book, mistakes another comics character for an actress in the real world, who is transformed by Lois Lane into a character in a television series, and responds to this reference, as if she, Lois Lane, a reporter in a comic book, were the real thing, while the real-life actress, the fantasy. Obviously, there is another subtext of a difference in professions dictated by social mainstream common sense. Hers is the “real” and “serious” job, not comparable to being a warrior princess in a television series. But in another turn of events, in this comics story, she is going to play the spy.

Let us go back and discuss other intertexts, which are not based on dialogue, but on the imagery depicted on the splash page, and on other pages in the course of the story itself (see Fig. 69). The image used on the splash page echoes the one that appears at the end of the opening theme of some of the most famous James Bond movies (Fig. 69). Instead of Superman’s muscled calves, which here frame Lois Lane, in those movies the
suggestive image of a sexy woman’s open long legs is presented with the male figure of James Bond in the middle (see Fig. 69). In Fig. 68 the inversion of this image can be appreciated on the right of the double-page spread, with Lois Lane’s legs in the foreground and Superman in the background. In spite of having a woman’s legs in the foreground, this inverted composition is not reminiscent of a James Bond film, but of the well-known poster of the lauded 1960s film *The Graduate*, with the consequent suggestion of an empowered woman (Kesel, Conner & Palmiotti 3/1; Fig. 68).

On the splash page, then, Lois Lane in a provocative posture looks directly into the viewer’s eyes from a high vertical angle emphasizing her imposing figure controlling an inferior observer (Fig. 69). Moreover, the oblique horizontal angle of Lois Lane’s representation, i.e. the profile of her legs and the top of her body turning towards the viewer, implies detachment in the relationship to the interactive participants, apart from the haughty gesture of her face and attitude (Fig. 69). But the tongue-in-cheek aspect of the image is that the spy’s gun has been changed into a journalist’s pencil and notepad, just as on the cover it has been converted into cameras (Fig. 69). What is more, James Bond’s stylized gun that usually appears next to the seven of 007 has been wittily and absurdly
transformed into a pen and notepad, the same tools she is holding in her hands, next to
the title name of our female hero at the top of the page (Fig. 69). And in order to
consolidate the idea of a film, rather than including the usual comic-book credits in the
indicia at the bottom of the page, film credits are listed (Fig. 69). Thus, the reader finds
that instead of writer, the credit states “screenplay,” instead of artist, “cinematography,”
instead of inker, “lighting,” instead of letterer, “subtitles,” and so on (Fig. 69).

The rest of the comic book is full of scenes that can be taken from a film. In a
double-page spread, of which we reproduce the bottom part in Fig. 70, we can see Lois

![Fig. 70: Panels 7-12, pages 8-9 of “DC Comics Presents Lois Lane” (Kesel, Conner & Palmiotti, Girlfrenzy! Superman: Lois Lane #1 8-9/7, 8/8-10, 9/11-12).](image-url)

Lane swimming underwater with scuba equipment towards the villains’ lair (Kesel, Conner
& Palmiotti 2-3/3). In the five bottom panels, she arrives and attacks one of the guards,
while in the yellow captions, she tries out several descriptions for her future article,
discard one because it reminds of The X Files television series and another of President
Nixon’s Watergate scandal, both obvious intertexts. In this story, captions are used in
imaginative ways. The ones we have just described are for Lois Lane’s thoughts; there are
others used to continue a dialogue when there is change of location, in this example, the top orange caption (Fig. 70); and still, there are others with the usual functions of voice-over narrator and relay (change of time or location), which we mentioned in Chapter Two.

Another spectacular page organized and displayed as a film scene is reproduced in Fig. 71. The first panel shows the two secondary characters, who act as Lois Lane’s companions, performing jerky movements in order to avoid the bullets, and her impressive jump in order to escape from the shots too, which are shown not only with colorful straight speed lines, but also with onomatopoeic sounds both for zooming past the bodies and for ricocheting on the ice (Fig. 71). The second inserted panel on the right employed to indicate the fall of the two characters into the icy waters with a conspicuous black gutter is followed by a magnificent middle panel with an extraordinary foreshortening perspective of Lois Lane aggressively shooting directly into the viewer’s space (Fig. 71). The two bullets that come out of her gun are imaginatively represented with two translucent circles (Fig. 71). Finally, the two bottom panels show the two sides of the same alarming scene: the sniper whose rifle barrel
aiming at Lois Lane intrudes into the space of the last panel that ingeniously concentrates the red shaded image of his prey through the telescopic sight with a black background (Fig. 72).

There is no doubt that the comic book in general and this page in particular demonstrate Conner’s artistic creativity and masterful craft. Although in this comics story there is more emphasis on sexually charged images, which is predominantly Conner’s typical style, especially in her treatment of female figures, Lois Lane is not presented with too exaggerated attributes, as many female superheroes are in other samples of Connor’s work. A case in point is Lois Lane’s fragmented profile in the second panel of Fig. 72, which resembles very closely her depiction in Fig. 62 in the preceding story analyzed, but it results less titillating than that one. Furthermore, since this image is the reversal of the left-hand panel, we do not consider it so negative a body fragment as the one we discussed in the previous analysis of “Power Crisis.”

“We’re Back!”

“We’re Back!” was written by Jeph Loeb, who is a film and television writer, executive producer and award-winning comic book writer (“Jeph”). The pictures were pencil drawn by British comic-book artist Mike McKone, and comic-book artist Marlo
Alquiza did the inking of the whole piece. As we stated earlier, in this chapter we only include the nationality of those newly-mentioned cartoonists who are not American.

The story is about the reopening of *The Daily Planet* after it was bought and closed by Lex Luthor, dismissing almost all its employees. The mystery of this story is why Lex Luthor now decided to sell the newspaper for one dollar to the Bruce Wayne Foundation (the foundation established by the multimillionaire alter ego of Batman). The mystery is not revealed until the end of the story when we learn that it was a deal Lex Luthor made with Lois Lane. Because of this transaction that resulted in the reopening of the newspaper and the rehiring of its employees, she will have to discard one news story of his choice (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 22). The story she is asked to bury will come much later on in this story arc, when Lex Luthor is president of the United States. After the Earth is invaded by aliens and a war breaks out, apparently he knew about the invasion in advance, but he failed to warn anybody on Earth, so his inaction prevented any preparation that could have saved thousands of lives. Instead of writing this story, Lois Lane informs her husband, and asks him to write it with his exclusive byline.

The reopening of *The Daily Planet* gives the opportunity to review all the history of Superman since its revamping by John Byrne over ten years before this issue. Thus, the cover is reminiscent of all the old aspects of the Superman mythos. The most important one of them, the superhero himself, appears in a stunning foreshortening perspective coming straight towards the viewer, with determination on his face, and in a way that implies superspeed with the blurring of his legs, and the accompanying bullets. In their wake, the speed lines bear the old phrase, “Faster than a speeding bullet,” which used to
open Superman’s 1940s radio serial, and also his 1950s television series (Fig. 73). The colorful background is just an allusion, part of a quotation, of the well-known S-shield that nobody needs to view in its entirety to recognize it with ease (see Fig. 73).

The other integrated images blend with this idea of going back to the beginning, and their color—or lack of it, for it is gray—is connected not only with the headlines and the traditional newspaper pictures in black and white that we will see in the story itself, but also with old photographs and the haziness of memories (Fig. 73). This is why there is a combination of personal and public images. The reading of the composition of these images starts on the top right with Superman’s adoptive parents, the Kents, and closely linked to them, below their smiling faces, the beginning of Superman’s story on Earth follows with the birthing matrix capsule that brought him from Krypton, designed by Byrne (Fig. 73). The pictures at the bottom of the cover serve as background to the full-shot figure of Lois Lane, who is depicted in a highly dynamic posture, even with a body language that implies readiness to fight, and without paying any attention to viewers (Fig. 73). In contrast, Lana Lang, in the right-hand background, has almost the same passive attitude and aspect, looking listlessly at viewers, which we saw in our first analysis (Fig. 73). The next picture to the left shows an adolescent Clark Kent lifting a truck, an image that cannot but make us think of the first Action Comics (see
Figs. 45 and 73). Finally, the last picture on the bottom left represents Superman’s first public appearance in Metropolis, when he saved the experimental space shuttle, and with it, Lois Lane, who was there on a news report, and got the exclusive of the superhero, naming him “Superman” (Fig. 73).

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

After the pure action of the previous comic book, this comics story comes to be as sedate as a millpond with panels equally distributed horizontally or vertically, and a very organized story. Even the lettering is consistent with this soothing style, because unlike other Superman titles, the lettering of this story seems to have been machine-made—until now an uncommon practice for comics in general, but it seems to become more widespread in later comic books. The usual block letters are used for the balloons, but the captions imitate a typewriter with the underlining of words to show emphasis, instead of changing to italics or bold fonts.

As noted earlier, this story revisits the main points of the Superman mythos, from Lois Lane’s point of view, and this is the reason why the title is in the first-person plural. Unlike the preceding story we analyzed, where most of the captions are related to the article Lois Lane is elaborating, in this story, all the captions appear as if they belong in her journal—her personal impressions on this first day of *The Daily Planet*, and her secret deal with Lex Luthor, at the end of the story, which makes her uneasy when compared with Clark Kent’s absolute honesty about his own secret before their marriage (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 22/2; Fig. 78).
There is a stable and orderly structure in this comics story, even with a color code as a backdrop for the panels, which can be seen as the color gutters of the comics layout, and which can be symbolically interpreted in relation to the locations or the characters that make up the different stages of the story. But interspersed throughout the comic book, there are pictures that merit a complete page without any frame or background, implying their expansiveness and limitless relevance, as we will see. Thus, the first part of the story when Superman rescues *The Daily Planet*’s globe and places it at the top of the building under Perry White’s supervision has a blue background, maybe because of Superman’s nickname, the Big Blue Boy Scout, although the speed lines of his flight trajectory are now creatively shown as a ribbon of blue between two red bands, i.e. the blue costume in the middle and the red cape on the sides (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 4/2, 16/2). As noted earlier, some images deserve a complete page, so the wonderful splash page covering a double-page spread with Superman carrying the globe has no frame at all.

All the activities taking place in relation to the Planet’s building have a warm green background, perhaps indicating new hope for the newspaper. The important events in the life of Superman are introduced by means of headlines. Fig. 74 shows the complete page of the initial three steps Lois Lane takes while coming into the newsroom for the first time after the closure. In the first panel, her left hand opens the swinging door, just with her wedding band and engagement ring on her finger, and no distracting nail polish color on her nails (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 6/1; Fig. 74). Shown in a full shot in the second panel, Lois Lane’s austere figure, wearing a simple black and white dress with vertical lines—reminiscent of Superman’s flight ribbon—and black boots, walks down the corridor
and takes her time looking at the framed enlargements of the Planet's greatest front pages hanging on its walls (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 6/2; Fig. 74). In the last panel, Lois Lane’s attention is attracted by her first exclusive on Superman, and on the following page, there is an impressive image without frame of Superman carefully depositing the space shuttle on the ground (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 6/2-3, 7; Fig. 74).

Structurally, the sequence of highlighted headlines goes from the public to the private, because the next framed front page —the death of Superman— is not on the walls of the corridor but on the wall of Perry White’s office (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 9/3; Fig. 75). While paying special attention to this headline, an extreme close-up of Lois Lane’s red lips reveals the only touch of color on her (Fig. 75). The
following page in this comics story shows Superman at his most dramatic in his battle to death with the monster Doomsday, without any frame containing the fierce fight (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 10). Finally, the last headline is the most private of all, just a clipping from the column of social events, unframed and only stuck with adhesive tape to Lois Lane’s desk (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 14/4-6; Fig. 76). The following page expectedly shows the kiss of the famous comics couple at the church on the day of their wedding, with an enclosing arch, but without any panel frame, just as the other two crucial moments in the life of Superman recorded on the pages of the newspaper (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 15).

In the middle of the day at the Planet, Superman takes an hour to visit his parents in Smallville, and these panels show a bucolic life and unspoilt countryside that call for a pure white background (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 16-17). Then, when he returns to the Planet, a new adventure begins with the falling from the sky onto a street of something that looks like a meteor, but in reality it is the son of an old vanquished supervillain called Mongul, and this event changes the panel background into a purple color (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 20-21). The last page of the comic book shows the end of Lois Lane’s day with a meeting at Lex Luthor’s office, and a new panel background in cold gray matches the pervasive color of the panels that show the stark environment of the multimillionaire’s
surroundings, where the secret of the sale of the *Planet* is revealed (see Fig. 77). The distress that Lois Lane feels because of keeping this secret is shown not only by means of the text in the final captions, with an increasing repetition like a refrain, “Perry can never know. Jimmy can never know. Superman can never know. And... Clark can never know,” but also in the troubled expression, and the dramatic chiaroscuro of her close-up image, representing the parts of light in her life, and the darkness of her secret (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 22/4; Fig. 77).

Everything is so circumspect in this comics story that there are few instances in which the content of the panel spills over the frames. Most of those instances are noises, but there are two more cases, one with a caption and the other with balloons, both related to Lois Lane. First, the sounds Superman makes when replacing the *Planet*’s globe are beyond the panel frames, and also the constant noises of keys struck by Clark Kent typing on his keyboard, while Lois Lane is taunting him because all he has to do as a reporter is writing about himself, a topic that has already come up in previous stories analyzed in this chapter.
(Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 1/2-4, 4/3, 8/2-3; Fig. 78). Then, the caption about her wedding—“... the biggest story of my career and I can’t tell anybody about it”—is located in the middle of two panels across the gutter separating them (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 22/4; 14/5-6, emphasis in the original; Fig. 76). Finally, just before the fall of the villain from the sky, Lois Lane’s balloons vertically connect the three horizontal panels, next to the resounding noise of the villain crashing into the street, which although louder and visually larger than the other noises, because it occupies a whole-page vertical panel, it is neatly enclosed within its frame (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 18/1-4).

As we have stated, the story is organized with panels meticulously containing the images, but there are two carefully conceived exceptions: the close-up faces of the two villains that appear in the comic book (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 18/1-4). First, when Lex Luthor comes to Perry White’s office to gloat, and almost to threaten the editor, his face appears at the bottom of the page with a devilish expression in a conventional red taint (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 12/5). The warm green of the Planet’s background is transformed here into a vertical black block surrounding this malevolent mask (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 12/5). Second, when the villain fallen from the sky informs Superman that he has come to ask for his help, the purple background is also transformed into a black stain, but without straight edges like Lex Luthor’s, maybe implying that this is an unknown villain, not clear-cut evil like the well-known multimillionaire (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 18/1-4).

Perry White assigns new jobs to his three friends: Jimmy Olsen is given his old job as a news photographer, and Clark Kent is offered a position as a foreign correspondent,
because he seems “so fond of disappearing for days on end—” (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 9/1, 9/3-4; Fig. 76). But just when the editor is going to tell Lois Lane her job, Lex Luthor’s visit interrupts him, so afterwards when the “meteor” strikes and Lois Lane doubts if she can cover the story, Perry White confirms her that she is “back on the Metropolis city beat”, (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 19/2, emphasis in the original). Because of her doubts, her boss adds, “for a darn good newspaperman you sometimes miss the easy ones” (Loeb, McKone & Alquiza 19/2, my emphasis). We can hypothesize that embedded in this criticism there is what an old-guard editor can consider a “compliment,” but the reality is that this is as sexist a form of address as the ones described in Chapter Two and Chapter Four.

“Kith and Kin, Part One”

“Kith and Kin” was written by comics writer-penciler-editor Joe Kelly, the pencil drawings were made by Spanish comics artist Kano, pseudonym of Miguel Ángel Cano López, and the inking was done by Marlo Alquiza (“Kano”). It is a two-part story about how family relations influence actions in a superhero’s world. In this story several supervillains appear, but the ones that perform the main roles are two women, and it is the cover that introduces them, though with misleading information, because although considered villains, in this story one of them helps Superman, and the other does not act voluntarily, as we will see in the next section. The cover has a structure that is not very common in western image organizations. As we described in Chapter Four, culturally there is a tendency in the West to use right-left patterns or top-bottom patterns, and to
avoid center-margin patterns, because they are too symmetrical for western taste. But this is what has been chosen for the cover, and it is even emphasized by the names of the characters written in a circle (see Fig. 79). Thus, the cover shows a center composition with two symmetrical represented participants on the margins, and one figure in the middle, which is considered the nucleus of information, but as noted earlier, a nucleus that does not contain accurate information. Talia al Ghul, a.k.a. Talia Head, is represented slicing Superman emblem (see Fig. 79), and although she may have an unspoken strong desire to destroy this enemy (also revealed when she steps on a Superman toy in Fig. 85), in this story, they are allies.

Not only does the center composition put all the represented participants at the same level, but also by using a circle and applying the word “Trouble” with an exclamation mark to the three women, they are united in the same notion that they are a source of problems for Superman (Fig. 79). What is extremely vexing is that Lois Lane has been associated with two villains and put at their level. On the one hand, she is a female hero, not a female villain, and on the other hand, she does not cause Superman trouble, in spite of the conventional damsel-in-distress constraint comics creators have tended to impose on her. As we will see in the next section, she prevents Jimmy Olsen from using his signal watch to call and distract Superman from his duties,
even when they are in dire straits, and besides, at the end of the story, her love saves the superhero (Kelly et al. 18/2-5; Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 19/3; Fig. 81). Nevertheless, the ending of the three strands led by the three women in the story—together with the title “Kith and Kin”—hints at still another reading of this composition. These three female figures represent the three family ties that are going to determine the outcome of this adventure (Kelly et al. 17-18).

Let us now review the background of the two women involved in this story, since our female hero Lois Lane is a well-known character in the Superman series. Talia al Ghul comes from Batman’s roster of adversaries, but there has been a crossover to the Superman series, because by the end of the second part of this story, she will start working as the C.E.O. for LexCorp, managing Lex Luthor’s empire, while he holds the office of President of the United States (Kelly et al. 22-23). For this position she uses the surname Head, but her original family name is al Ghul, since her father is Ra’s al Ghul, a name that can be literally translated into Demon’s Head or Head of the Demon, showing the evil personality of this supervillain. Indeed he is a supervillain who has achieved immortality thanks to the ancient Lazarus Pits he discovered centuries ago, places similar to the legendary Fountain of Youth, which can prolong life, but they can only be used once and can even resurrect the dead, as the name Lazarus suggests. Ra’s al Ghul is the leader of the League of Assassins, which, as its name implies, is an international criminal group bent on terrorism and assassination. One section of the League is headed by one of his followers, Scarlet Scythe, another villain that appears in this comics story.
Encantadora, a.k.a. Lourdes Lucero (note the L.L. initials, common to many female characters that have a connection with Superman) is in charge of the mystical Mists of Ibella, which help her develop some magical powers. As she is responsible for her ten-year-old brother, Victor, her motives do not seem so villainous as others’ and she is not portrayed as a hardened criminal. However, she almost succeeds in killing Superman with a kiss that introduced a microscopic robot with kryptonite into his body. But when she repents and helps to save him, her actions make her the target of her employer for the deadly deed that she has failed to accomplish.

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

The development of the story is rather intricate and mysterious, and it is only in the second part, appearing in the *Superman in Action Comics* issue of the following month, that the mystery is disclosed. As mentioned earlier, there are three threads tracing what happens to the three female protagonists, which converge in the second part of this story. Here we are going to concentrate on this first part, but we will include events from the second one in order to have the whole idea of the narrative.

Lois Lane starts a quest in Africa to discover who the mastermind behind Encantadora’s attempt to kill Superman with the nano-bot mentioned earlier was. All these incidents and how she follows the leads that get her to this point in her investigation are explained in a wonderful single-panel story, an example which is more often than not rejected by comics scholars from the definition of comics, as we saw in Chapter Two (Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 7/3). In this case, however, it is a remarkable resource
to bring together in a concentrated visual summary many episodes dispersed in preceding comic books, and it is suitably used in the context of retelling her African paramilitary guide what has happened so far and why they are going to be attacked by, at this point, unknown criminals (Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 7/3).

What is also remarkable is the opening of the story. It starts with an extreme close-up of Lois Lane’s eyes behind sunglasses looking directly into the viewer’s eyes in a demand-for-attention pattern, occupying a narrow horizontal panel with the whole width of the page (Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 1/1). The next four equal panels on the same page show larger parts of her, as if the camera were moving backward, taking up more of the setting to reveal that she is on the African savanna (Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 1/2-5). Finally, the double-page spread, except for a narrow band of panels on the right margin, shows her full-shot figure and her companions, Jimmy Olsen taking pictures, and several Africans waiting for her to finish her phone call to her husband, with the imposing figure of their leader that we may take for a mere guide, but we later learn that he is a “dashing paramilitary guru” (Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 7/4; Fig. 80).

In Fig. 80, we include part of page 2 and most of page 3 in order to display her complete figure, which has been sexually enhanced for the male gaze, but the male figures are also
blown up out of all proportion, as can be seen in the exaggerated build of the paramilitary guide (Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 3/3).

They are eventually attacked by a branch of the League of Assassins led by the flamboyant Scarlet Scythe (Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 8, 18; see Fig. 82). The paramilitary guide immediately realizes this, and he tells Lois Lane, “Apparently, you’re a much better reporter than you thought. You’ve steered us directly in the path of the League of Assassins (Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 18/2, emphasis in the original). Jimmy Olsen deems the situation so desperate that he wants to call Superman on his signal watch (Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 19/2; Fig. 81). But, as noted earlier, Lois Lane stops him, insisting that they can handle it, and she starts taunting the assassins as a journalist, “…thought you might want to make a statement detailing how you botched the assassination attempt on Superman so badly… a reporter managed to track you across the globe and expose your secret headquarters!”(Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 19/7, emphasis in the original; Fig. 81).

This abruptly finishes the battle, and Scarlet Scythe appears, because he wants to know about the failed attempt (Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 20/4; Fig. 82). Fig. 82 shows this scene placing the viewer in an assassin’s position with an extreme close-up view of a gun barrel in the foreground, reminiscent of a video game, aiming directly at Lois Lane’s head.
(Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 20/4; Fig. 82). This is a cliffhanger that is continued in the second part of this comics story, when she and her companions are captives, but her courage and determination facing Scarlet Scythe make him regard her with admiration, and in the end, they are all released, and end up at the Lazarus Pit, where all the strands in the story converge for the ending (Kelly et al. 13).

Although Lois Lane’s thread—with its opening, magnificent splash page, and the scenes we have just described—seems to be very important for the story, the central event is the attempt by Ra’s al Ghul to become an earth god (Kelly et al. 4/2). For this he enlists the help of Encantadora by kidnapping her little brother Victor, and hence forcing her to use her Mists of Ibella on one of his Lazarus Pits (Kelly et al. 8/4; Kelly, Kano & Alquiza 14, 17/1-3). In this way, he attracts Gaia, Mother Earth, to join with him (Kelly et al. 2/4). This is a very dangerous even fatal step against humanity that is considered superfluous both by Ra’s al Ghul and Gaia (Kelly et al. 2/2, 8/3). In order to break the spell, Superman lies to Encantadora and tells her that her brother is dead, but later, Talia al Ghul brings him to her sister, who rejoices to see him without any harm (Kelly et al. 9/4, 10-11, 15, 17/4-6). When Superman also jumps into the Pit to prevent the joining of Gaia and Ra’s al Ghul, Gaia prefers the superhero over the immortal villain, whom she ejects from the green goo that the Lazarus Pit has become (Kelly et al. 10, 14, 16). Talia al Ghul embraces her father,
who desperately wants to go back to Gaia, but with this embrace she saves him from dissolving, while Superman is asked by Gaia to do just that (Kelly et al. 17/1-3). Superman faces the temptation of becoming a god, but when Lois Lane shows him her wedding ring, he remembers his love for her and abandons Gaia (Kelly et al. 18-19).

Here goes in order one final note about the portrayal of the two villain women in this story, who have been undoubtedly designed for the male gaze. We have said that Lois Lane has been sexually enhanced, but that is nothing compared to the depiction of Encantadora, who has been enormously endowed and dressed in such a revealing outfit that makes one wonder how her top can be kept in place, since it seems on the verge of popping out at any moment (see Fig. 83). Fig. 83 shows her from above to increase even more the view of her low-cut décolletage, and to clearly identify the character, sensuous red serpentine streamers accompany her, representing the Mists of Ibella. Talia al Ghul, in her turn, although covered from head to toe, her skintight jumpsuit exposes every single detail of her voluptuous anatomy, making it almost as revealing as if it were transparent (see Fig. 84).
“Return to Krypton, Part One: Sliding Home”

“Sliding Home” is the first part of the five-part miniseries Return to Krypton, which includes a Prologue in the preceding Superman issue, and the rest of the parts subsequently follow, crossing over to the other three Superman titles that were regularly published in 2001 (see Appendix 3). This first part of Return to Krypton was written by Jeph Loeb, and comics artist-penciler Ed McGuinness drew the story, which was inked by British comics artist-inker Cam Smith. McGuinness’s art, as we will see in the next section, stands towards the center of McCloud’s triangle base, i.e. the images are depicted almost with the exaggeration of caricature, but with fresh, likable features. Apart from the obvious idea of going back home, the title “Sliding Home” refers to the American baseball game, when after going through the bases, the player may slide home, the final base, with a movement that makes his or her body touch the ground. The connection with baseball is mentioned by Lois Lane at the beginning of the story in the captions, where she, as the narrator, records her ideas and her point of view while retelling the story (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 1/2).

So far we have been following Kress and van Leeuwen’s concepts to analyze images, and we have accepted and applied their idea, based on Michael Halliday’s systemic functional grammar mentioned in Chapter Two, that some images present a left-right pattern with the information value of Given-New related to the position of the elements in the picture. However, when we are faced with this cover (Fig. 85), our first reaction is that we have to discard that conception, since how can we accept that Lois
Lane and Superman, the most famous couple in the comic-book lore, are new information?

But once we start putting this notion into perspective, we realize that it is not the couple who is presented as new information but the couple in the location presented as given information. Thus, the established information in this image is that there is a return to Krypton, as the top banner states even before the issue title Superman (Fig. 85). Below it, the caption that names the image on the left presented as given information is “The Wonders of Kryptonopolis!” leaving no doubt about the location (Fig. 85). However, we positively know that Krypton was destroyed and Superman’s biological parents perished in the cataclysm, so how can Lois Lane and Superman be part of this setting? They do not — cannot belong in Krypton, but they do in this impossible adventure.

That is the reason why in this context they are on the right, the new addition to this lost planet they are visiting, and just as the covers of The Man of Steel miniseries we examined in our first analysis, they are presented for the viewers evaluation in a pattern of conceptual representation. But they are not represented at eye-level with viewers, implying equality, they are seen from a low angle, becoming awesome figures to be admired (Fig. 85). Their representation is not like McGuinness’s figures inside the comic book; rather it seems to go back to a previous era, a prior continuity in the DC Universe.
This is even emphasized by the image of Jor-El, Superman’s Kryptonian biological father in the small picture of Kryptonopolis on the left (see Fig. 85), since his is not the canonical figure introduced by John Byrne at the beginning of this new continuity with a toga-like attire in a sterile, cold world (Byrne & Giordano #1 [1-8]; Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 9).

What is more, in the Prologue to this comics story, many aspects of Superman’s origin story change back to the previous continuity (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 8-17). Thus, in this introduction to the miniseries Return to Krypton, a new rocket lands on the Kents’ yard, carrying a Kryptonian recording on a green rod called “isobar,” and with the help of scientific genius Professor Emil Hamilton, assisted by scientist and engineer Doctor John Henry Irons, a.k.a. African-American superhero Steel, Superman is able to receive the mental images that make up Jor-El’s message (Beatty 47, 52; Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 5-7). In this new message sent to his son in a way calculated to arrive on Earth years later than him, Jor-El explains that the memory implants he put into Superman’s birthing matrix are false, and McGuinness’s art style is perfect to show the transformation from Byrne’s hieratic, inscrutable personage to a lively, lovable character (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 8-9). According to this new message, then, the reality is that Krypton was a beautiful planet, full of technological and natural marvels, Lara Lor-Van, Superman’s biological mother, had her child in a natural way after a nine-month pregnancy, and both parents were not deter by cultural constraints, as Byrne’s version, to express their emotions and their love for each other and their baby (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 10; Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 21/1).
Moreover, this means that Superman was born in Kryptonopolis, and not on Earth, as Byrne designed it for the revamping of the superhero (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 10; Byrne & Giordano #1 [1-8]). Jor-El explains why he lied to his son, “I decided that it was best that you not long for the past and look only toward the future. Thus, all you have known before today were false memories, given to you to forget Krypton and embrace Earth. By now, you’ve found a better life there, and while you can never come back to Krypton, you will know your true heritage...” (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 17, emphasis in the original). As we mentioned in our first analysis, this is a crucial change, because now again Superman becomes the ultimate immigrant on Earth, just as Siegel and Shuster created him.

However, throughout this adventure there is an underlying doubt whether this is true Krypton, a dreamlike illusion, a fictitious creation, or an alternate reality. This doubt is even emphasized by the phantasmagorical light gray depiction of Kryptonopolis on the cover (Fig. 85), and the fact that the journey is made through the Phantom Zone. As noted earlier, the Phantom Zone was a Kryptonian prison, a ghostly extra dimensional invention that dates from the days of Superman’s editor Mort Weisinger. Whether this Krypton is a reality or a fantasy in this continuity of the DC Universe, none of the characters can confirm. Even Jor-El, who at the end of the miniseries recognizes Superman for who he is, asks him if this reunion is real, and though there are no clear answers to the question, all three, parents and son, embrace in a last farewell.

In any case, Professor Emil Hamilton offers Superman to “go home again” through the Phantom Zone portal, a doorway opened in the Fortress of Solitude, which is located
near the Arctic Circle (the one in Antarctica was destroyed in one of Superman’s countless battles) (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 18/4, emphasis in the original). But before deciding, Superman asks his wife for advice, “there might be a way that I could journey back to Krypton-- to see the home of my parents and my birthworld. Do you... do you think some things are better left buried in the past?” (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 22/1, emphasis in the original). It goes without saying that Lois Lane enthusiastically answers as a reporter, “What are you, an idiot? This is the biggest story of your career! If you don’t go. I’m going. In fact, that’s just what we’re going to do” (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 22/3, emphasis in the original). And when he wonders whether she has said “we,” she confirms her idea, “Yep. You’re going to Krypton and I’m coming with you!” (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #166 22/3, emphasis in the original). Thus it is arranged that they are going to spend some days experiencing life on Krypton about nine months before its destruction, because at the end of this miniseries we witness Lara Lor-Van telling her husband that she is pregnant. One interesting outcome from this adventure is that Krypto, Superman’s famous pet superdog, follows Lois Lane and him through the Phantom Zone portal to Earth — another addition from Weisinger’s era.

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

As mentioned earlier, the story “Sliding Home” is retold from Lois Lane’s point of view, which is presented in the captions, where she compares parents — hers, specifically her father’s well-known desire for a boy, the Kents, and the Kryptonians (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 1/2, 2-3, 4/3, 5/1, 14/4). Since this story is about meeting
Superman’s Kryptonian parents in the past, Lois Lane naturally mentions the DeLorean car in an intertextual reference to the film *Back to the Future*, in which the protagonist goes back in time to meet his parents (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 3, 5/1, 6/1). There is another intertext also introduced by Lois Lane. When they arrive in Kryptonopolis, she playfully repeats the famous words Judy Garland says in *The Wizard of Oz*, “I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore...,” but literal-minded Superman does not get the allusion, and even forgetting that they did not start their journey from Kansas but from his Fortress of Solitude, in the Arctic, he unimaginatively answers, “What? No, of course we’re not in Kansas. This is Kryptonopolis-- and it looks just like Jor-El showed me” (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 6/2, emphasis in the original).

Following Professor Emil Hamilton’s theory, Lois Lane and Superman are provided with belts that can reverse the process and allow them to return to Earth, but as expected in an adventure of this kind, the belts are destroyed in the course of their fights against all types of adversaries, and they have to struggle to solve this problem (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 1/3). The first battle happens once they are beamed into the Phantom Zone, when they are attacked by some kind of Superman ghosts with ragged blackened bodies and costumes (Fig. 86). The idea of whether this is reality or fantasy pervading throughout this comics story is here used in a rather amusing episode. While fighting, Superman somewhat indifferently observes, “Part of the mystery of the Zone is we don’t know what is real and what isn’t” (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 4/1, emphasis in the original; Fig. 86). But when Lois Lane tells him that it is real enough for somebody to grope her, he reacts with fury as a stereotypically jealous husband knocking down all the
ghosts that surround her with his heat vision, and shouting, “Nobody gropes my wife!,” while she ironically comments, “Not a lot of places you get to scream that, Smallville” (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 4/2-4, emphasis in the original; Fig. 86).

With the theory that Superman is a natural battery with accumulated energy from our yellow sun, he keeps his superpowers for a while as long as he is charged. Here it is interesting to notice that the ribbon that indicates Superman’s flight trajectory appearing in a previous issue, now displays grainy colors instead of compact ones, which seem to represent the movement of molecules of air as he zooms by to accomplish his first feat in Kryptonopolis: to save his own parents from a collapsing roof (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 10/4, 11, 12/1). Before this accident, the dog Krypto, owned by Lara Lor-Van and Jor-El, has run to greet Superman outside. Later, while Superman repairs the beam that has given way in his parents’ house, Lois Lane hurries up in order to check that everybody is all right, but he scolds her, “I thought I told you to stay on the street” (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 12/1). Unabashed, she answered, “I thought you were talking to the dog” (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 12/1, emphasis in the original).
Soon after the men make the introductions, the two couples stare at each other in an awkward moment (see Fig. 87). The statue-like figures of the men looking fixedly at each other seem to imply lack of communication skills, or perhaps stunned silence, one because of meeting his biological father, the other because of the superhuman deed (Fig. 87). It is the women who save face by using their common sense and start talking, especially Lara Lor-Van, who promptly thanks Superman for saving their lives (Fig. 87). Not in this issue, but during this adventure, several times Superman does not let Lois Lane speak freely, because supposedly she is going to reveal something unsuitable for the Kryptonians to know (Schultz, Mahnke & Nguyen 7/2, 7/5). The implication is that he has the power of speech on Krypton, while she has to obey what he thinks is proper on his apparent home planet.

The following feat Superman pulls off in this issue, worthy of Weisinger’s most outrageous gimmicks, is powering a giant space engine to move the planet Krypton out of its present orbit in order to save it...
from crashing into its red sun (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 18-20). Lois Lane rejoices at the achievement, and she remembers the Kents would be proud of him, but immediately she realizes she, as his wife, should be encouraging him, and cries, “Ha! Forget them. I’m proud of you!” (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 21/2, emphasis in the original; Fig. 88).

Unfortunately, with this monumental effort, the solar cell batteries in his body become exhausted, and he remains floating unconscious in space without managing to do anything (Loeb, McGuinness & Smith #167 22). In order to save him, Lara Lor-Van, who is an astronaut, has to rescue him, setting off a chain reaction that will endanger every one of them, because there is a dark evil side to this apparent idyllic planet. Echoing our twentieth-century terrible past of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, Kryptonians have strived for a pure race, and in order to achieve just that, they have done away with almost all the aliens on the planet, only remaining some hidden in the wilderness. Fortunately, Jor-El is part of a rational minority helping those surviving aliens, and supporting integration and racial harmony on the planet. But the powerful racial zealot General Zod wants, ironically enough, to exterminate the new aliens, Superman and Lois Lane. He is eventually defeated, and Kryptonians see the error of their ways, electing Jor-El president. Finally, Superman and Lois Lane manage to return to Earth, with Krypto following hard on their heels.
“The Last Supervillain”

“The Last Supervillain” was written by Joe Kelly, the pencil art was created by comics artist-writer Duncan Rouleau, and the inking was done by Marlo Alquiza. It is the conclusion of the eight-part miniseries *Ending Battle*, which appeared on all four Superman titles that were issued in 2002 (see Appendix 3). The title of the miniseries is an allusion to the usual quotation in connection with Superman “the never-ending battle for truth and justice,” as it was, before the phrase “the American Way” was added during World War II, and then again, in the 1950s television series (Lundegaard), or simply “the never-ending battle between good and evil.” Both refer to the fact that villains are always cropping up in the world and he has to fight them without respite. But in this miniseries, there is a definitive battle that defines Superman again, and although it seems that in the previous issues of *Ending Battle* he fights more supervillains than ever before, it is in this last comic book that that definitive battle takes place, when this ultimate supervillain strikes where he can hurt Superman most — by killing his wife Lois Lane.

For this reason, this battle is not really a physical one, but one about moral issues. As a matter of fact, even beyond the surface idea of defining Superman as a superhero respecting life at all costs, there may be the underlying interpretation that “The Last Supervillain” is a poignant powerful plea for the rejection of capital punishment. It may come as a surprise for a popular-culture medium such as comic books to present this notion in a country where only “19 states currently do not have an enforceable death penalty statute,” and seven of them have abolished capital punishment in these first years of the twenty-first century (“Capital”), but such is the power of comics creators who now
have the possibility of expressing their beliefs and ideas even in this artistic but basically commercial medium.

As we have mentioned, during the previous issues that end up in the present comics story, all the most well-known supervillains of Superman’s roster start attacking the people that know Clark Kent, leaving for the penultimate issue an all-out offensive of some the most dangerous supervillains altogether united against the superhero. But the first strike is against Lana Lang, Pete Ross, and their son, and although at this point in the development of the DC Universe in this continuity, they have a higher level of security than any ordinary citizens, since Pete Ross is vice president to now President of the United States Lex Luthor, they would have been killed if Superman had not intervened.

Unlike another villainous attack we discussed in the previous analysis of “Hard Decisions!,” when Superman’s enemy Conduit started targeting people close to Clark Kent, this time supervillains not only go after his family, close friends and acquaintances, but even professional connections, such as his dentist (strange for Superman, but maybe only for checkups), his accountant, his physician, his former coach at high school, one of his professors at university, etc. The superhero has a hard time trying to be on top of all the strikes and save all the people, but he manages to do so. When Superman connects all the acts of aggression and realizes that the targets are Clark Kent’s acquaintances and relations, the superhero calls them all together, and explains the situation (naturally, without revealing his secret identity). Since this time he has been prepared for an event of this sort, he asks them to put themselves under the protection of Steel in a security chamber of this superhero’s fortress Steelworks, built precisely for this kind of emergency.
Another difference from Conduit’s attack is that the supervillains are compelled to launch their assaults on certain people in order to defeat Superman, but they do not seem to know why, which means that none of them knows his secret identity. Later, we learn that one specific supervillain is manipulating their minds to get at Superman, who first thinks that Lex Luthor is behind everything, but he soon realizes that, although Lex Luthor now knows his secret identity thanks to the unknown adversary, he has not acted on it yet. The actual supervillain behind this concerted effort to destroy not only Superman’s body but more importantly his mind and heart as well is Manchester Black, a Briton who is a telepath and telekinetic that can create illusions and control people’s minds, even Superman’s (“Manchester”). He started his career fighting crime as the leader of The Elite, a team of vigilantes, but they were too ruthless for Superman with his idealism and morality to accept, because they killed the villains they captured instead of turning them over to the authorities (“Manchester”). Superman defeated them in a battle, and showed them that murder was not the solution to end evil, since it makes heroes no better than villains, but unrepentant, Manchester Black assured Superman that he would always come after him as long as he was alive (“Manchester”). Manchester Black was sent to the special prison for supervillains, but Lex Luthor got him out and used him for his ends, not realizing that even he could be subject to Manchester Black’s mind manipulating powers.

In Steelworks security chamber, Clark Kent’s relations and acquaintances are safe during this crisis, but Lois Lane cannot reconcile herself to wait for the situation to go away without reporting it. Accordingly, her journalist’s instinct makes her leave the safety of the chamber in order to find out what is happening outside. In this way, she is captured
in the apartment she shares with her husband, and tortured with distorted images from her childhood. Meanwhile, as stated above, Superman is kept occupied fighting against several of his most powerful opponents, and although he vanquishes them, unknowing to him, this is unrecoverable precious time that is not used to rescue Lois Lane. It is only when Steel warns him that Lois Lane has disappeared from the safe house that Superman goes directly to their apartment to find Manchester Black there with her dead body.

The cover represents the scene when Superman realizes that Lois Lane is dead, although instead of the interior of an apartment, the setting seems a kind of cave, which upon detailed scrutiny turns inside out, because the rain is falling in what seems the inside, but if this is the outside, then light comes through the opening from the inside (Fig. 89). Another possibility is that the setting is the remaining debris from a building destroyed in a battle, and symbolically, this may be so, although it does not happen in the story (Fig. 89). But it does not really matter, since we have seen that covers are designed to attract readers, and on many occasions, at best, they only hint at what the story is about. In this case, the reference to the comics story is indisputable. Not only does the image show the limp body of Lois Lane in Superman’s arms, with his bent back and distorted features implying abject misery, but also the banner at the bottom of the cover screams, “The Death of Lois Lane!” (Fig. 89).
It is a remarkably beautiful image in a melancholic, mournful way, emphasized by the pathetic fallacy of nature “weeping,” and the despondent, subdued blue coloring everything (Fig. 89). Superman appears to epitomize the tragic hero, visually, with his downcast posture and his drooping cape (Fig. 89), but we also know that “he is of higher than ordinary moral worth,” and since “his misfortune is greater than he deserves,” he “moves us to pity” (Abrams 202). Lois Lane here, and in the whole story, remains as a passive catalytic agent for the strong emotions evoked by the clash between the hero and the antagonist. Nevertheless, the high ideals revealed in the story are also shared by the female hero, as we will see in the next section.

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

Just as the cover, “The Last Supervillain” is a beautifully crafted and sadly emotive comics story. Also, blue is the color that pervades all the images of the evolving conflict with Lois Lane’s death at its center. The pictures are impressive and convey the intense suffering and explosive painful impotent rage felt by Superman, who, as the most powerful man in the world, becomes more of a pathetic figure. During the whole story there is a yellow line imitating the electrocardiogram tracing of a heart beating. This line appears twice on the first page, and then, it continues at the bottom of each page, except for the images that do not belong in the apartment. At first, Superman clings to this, because he is sure that he is listening to Lois Lane’s heartbeat (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 1/3). Since it is not necessary to speak to a telepath, these ideas, and many others in this story, are conveyed in balloons representing his thoughts without the traditional pointer,
and with the shape of rounded rectangles with a shadow-like effect that has Superman’s blue and red emblem colors. Reading these thoughts, the supervillain dashes all his hopes, by saying that the heartbeat is not Lois Lane’s, but his, Manchester Black’s, and then, he adds, “Lois is dead” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza, emphasis in the original).

As may be expected, Superman’s first reaction is denial (Fig. 90). He cannot accept that truth, and a hunched shadow looking down at Lois Lane with the big S-shield on his chest quietly repeats, “No. No” (Fig. 90). Fig. 90 shows the panel depicting this dramatic scene. The viewer is literally in the supervillain’s boot, which is shown in an extreme close-up on the right, and from this very low angle, Lois Lane’s body rests on the floor in a complex foreshortening perspective, while the shadowy figure of Superman in denial is in the dead center, a place usually associated with lack of movement, the static symmetry of death (Fig. 90). In the last panel of the following row, with a cynical smile on his face, Manchester Black taunts Superman that he lost too much time fighting his enemies (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 4/4). At this, the tormented superhero is so shocked that he becomes speechless —he finds no suitable
answer in his terrible pain, even when he tries, “I...” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 4/5; Fig. 91). The panel at the bottom of that same page shows the three shadows in three different positions: Superman kneels in agony before Lois Lane’s dead body, and the gloating standing figure of his enemy surveys his despicable deed, while the yellow heartbeat line runs across them (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 4/6; Fig. 91).

There follow two magnificent full page stories that summarize the shared history of these two foes, from The Elite confrontation until Superman’s battles against supervillains on the previous days. The actions presented there are introduced by Manchester Black stating with heavy sarcasm, “You see it all now, don’t you? The absurdity of who you are and everything you’ve ever done?” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 5, emphasis in the original). The villain uncovers the reason for his appalling act, expressing his unbearable rancor against Superman for his noble standards of behavior, “Because I hate you. Because you’re stupid. Because I wanted to pull you out of your tower and show you beyond question how the bloody world works for real people!” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 7/1, emphasis in the original).

Manchester Black relishes the superhero’s failure at saving the one he cherishes most, “Not a single life lost... except one. The most important one of them all. Your life... is now a tragedy. Your life is no longer fair” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 7/2, emphasis in the original). Superman reacts to his goading, furiously shouting, “I’ll kill you!” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 11/1, emphasis in the original). And the next page is full of his wrath annihilating the villain with his heat vision... but he is only fantasizing (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 12). When he looks at the imagined remains, he thinks (no need to speak to the
telepath), “I have never been more filled with rage. I am an animal. I am a hurricane. I feel life shudder into nothingness before me and I laugh” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 13/1). The echo of these words transpires in the images, and the feelings are infinitely stronger when one thinks that they come from a superhero that has always been the beacon for righteousness. But then he adds, “And Lois is still dead. And my heart is still filled with hate. The only thing I have accomplished... is to kill myself” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 13/1-2, emphasis in the original).

In a single scene divided into two panels to show the passing of time, the villain cannot believe that he failed to make Superman react violently, and the superhero’s answer is a rejection of murder, “I said I’m not going to kill you. If that’s what you wanted... you lose” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 14/3-4, emphasis in the original; Fig. 92). We think that the expression “you lose” belittles the drama of the situation a little, but in the next panel on the following page, he carefully picks up Lois Lane from the floor, and then, in an emotive close-up of Superman crying inconsolably and tenderly holding his beloved, he does declare a simple brief powerful sentence, “Vengeance is not justice”
(Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 15/1, emphasis in the original; Fig. 93). This kind of image of a superhero with tears streaming down his cheeks is not very common in the comics stories of this kind, hence its intensity (Fig. 93).

But not killing does not mean that the villain is not going to meet his punishment. So Superman tells him, “Soon as I put Lois somewhere safe, it will become my life’s ambition to ensure you never taste fresh air ever again” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 15/3). When Manchester Black realizes that Superman holds fast to his principles, even in the face of such tragedy, with a gesture he destroys the illusion he has created with his mind control, and dead Lois Lane dissolves into thin air (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 15/6, 16/1; see Fig. 94). Another illusion is shattered (the one created by the comics artist) — all the time the heartbeat tracing was Lois Lane’s, since the line ends in her standing figure (see Fig. 94). When Lois Lane recovers, she explains, “He wanted you to kill him, even though I wasn’t dead. But you wouldn’t. He couldn’t beat you” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 17/1). In another emotional scene, this time both Superman and Lois Lane are crying but out of joy, with the
villain in the background still musing on Superman failing to react in the manner he expected (Fig. 95).

 Alone in his own decrepit apartment or hotel room, Manchester Black reflects on what has happened and comes to a startling conclusion: although he began his career as a crime fighter, he has become a supervillain (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 20/4). And he commits suicide (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 20/7). But before that, he does not forget the weapon he gave another supervillain; thus, he erases all Lex Luthor’s confidential files on Clark Kent, and he makes the president forget Superman’s secret identity (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 18/4-5, 19/1-2).

 The second-to-last page in this comics story shows the couple embracing in bed after the nightmare is over. This return to normalcy is represented visually with a radical change in color, from the gloomy cold blue to these warm mauves and pinks (Fig 96). At last, they can put everything behind, and Lois Lane absolutely agrees with what Superman did, “You were right to walk away. Even if he had... done it... you were right... That’s who you are. That’s the man I love” (Kelly, Rouleau & Alquiza 21/1-2, emphasis in the original; Fig. 96). Symbolically too, they spend three days in bed;
then, Superman rises at her insistence, and on the following page, a lighthearted Superman returns to his never-ending battle.

“**Prestidigitation Nation**”

“Prestidigitation Nation” is the first issue of a two-part story, both appearing in two consecutive numbers of *The Adventures of Superman*, written by comics writer Joe Casey and illustrated by comics artist Derec Aucoin. The story is about the manipulation of the public, or the electorate, as regards politics, in order to gain advantages in elections. But in a parallel thread, it is also about the use of distraction to have Superman out of the way, while a villain commits an assassination. Both strands, then, are related to the idea suggested by the title—the magician’s sleight of hand that hides the truth.

The hint given by the cover is that *The Daily Planet*’s star reporters Lois Lane and Clark Kent are going to work on a news story, which inside the comic book is specified as that of a politician challenging President Lex Luthor (Fig. 97). That they are going to work on a news story is conveyed by the subheading, “Lois & Clark on the Job!,” and also by the *Planet*’s globe in the background, which encircles both reporters (Fig. 97). Although Aucoin was in charge of the whole story, this illustration is not his. According to the signature that can be clearly seen at the bottom of the cover, this is a picture made by Kevin Nowlan, another comics creator, who has an established reputation in the industry, especially as a talented cover artist (Fig. 97). In fact, this cover is wonderfully crafted both in drawing design and color (Fig. 97). Even so, from our point of view, it is a throwback to more sexist periods, not only because of the hat that echoes the 1950s, but also and more
importantly, because of the organization of the protagonists, or represented participants, and their attitudes toward each other and toward viewers (see Fig. 97).

If we consider all the comics stories we have analyzed so far, we will find a similarity between the present cover and that of the comics story “Hard Decisions!,” a cover we discussed in a distinctly positive light (Fig. 51). This may make us mistakenly believe that we are before the same kind of image. In both Clark Kent is opening his shirt to reveal his costume, while Lois Lane is helping him uncover his superhero persona, and there are legends stating their two first names “Lois & Clark” together, with appropriate complements according to each story. But there are completely different frames of reference (Figs. 51 and 97). On the cover of “Hard Decisions!,” the couple is deeply involved with themselves in a loving kiss, there is no interference from the outside world except for the fact that the superhero has apparently been called, and Lois Lane is actively deciding that Superman’s duties are as essential as Clark Kent’s (Fig. 51).

In contrast, on this cover, Superman is looking toward the right, and although he is not involving viewers by looking directly at them, he seems to be preparing for an enemy, since his serious, earnest expression may mean that he is determined to avert a possible crisis (Fig. 97). Thus, this suggests that he is intent on going outside, toward the public
sphere, leaving Lois Lane behind without even a sidelong glance (Fig. 97). Meanwhile, she appears completely dependent on him, and although she is dressed in a tailored suit that may imply her preparation to go to work, the whole structure of the image does not indicate this (Fig. 97). She is behind the superhero, so that the position of the two figures is reminiscent of the saying “behind every great man is a great woman” (Fig. 97). Some may want to mask this saying as a feminist phrase, but we do not uphold that notion. Firstly, we may ask why the position of the woman should be “behind” the man. Secondly, we may think that this shows a supportive partner, but why should that role be assigned exclusively to women? Thirdly and finally, this idea of support apparently implies inaction, the submissive ideal of domesticity.

A case in point is Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracey’s film Woman of the Year. Appropriately enough for our purposes, in this film the iconic movie couple plays two reporters, who, after their marriage, find out the incompatibility of domestic life and work, obviously, only in the case of the woman (Woman). In the “happy” ending, then, she resigns her job as an outstanding foreign affairs reporter involved in the worldwide conflict which, at the moment of the film in the early 1940s, implied fighting Adolf Hitler in World War II, and she meekly remains in the kitchen as a homemaker, albeit an incompetent one, but one who wants to learn how to please her man (Woman). In the case of the present cover too, he is the actor, and although she is taking off his hat, her whole posture seems to indicate that she remains expectantly inactive, looking at him with awe, and wearing a silly smile that evokes 1950s advertisements of household
appliances (Fig. 97). The woman on this cover has nothing to do with the daring reporter that appears in the story that will be analyzed in the following section.

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

The first page gives us a view of the most powerful man in the United States, President Lex Luthor, and just a peek at his innermost thoughts (Casey & Aucoin #619 1). He considers the possibility of neutralizing a political competitor with a dirty trick, and he singles out one that actually happened in American real-world politics in the early 1970s, a “Canuck letter” (Casey & Aucoin #619 1/6, emphasis in the original). “Canuck” is an offensive term to name Americans of French-Canadian descent, and the letter referred to was a forged one that purported to demonstrate that the most popular Democratic candidate in the primaries at that moment was prejudiced against that sector of American society (“Canuck”). This political sabotage prematurely terminated the Democrat’s possibilities as a viable candidate against Richard Nixon in the election that won him a second term in the White House, a turbulent term that included the Watergate scandal (“Canuck”).

The mention of this dirty trick sets the stage for the comics story, and on the following page, Lois Lane and Clark Kent are depicted heading for a political rally in a Metropolis arena, which has all the trappings of a rock concert. The representation of the Candidate —not even a name is needed, since he is the self-proclaimed “People’s Candidate”— is revelatory (Casey & Aucoin #620 2). His body is just a white suit without any detail, which resembles a kind of ghostly figure, with no substance at all, just as his
speeches, his non-existent platform, and his political “show,” with colorful lights, live music, and fireworks (Casey & Aucoin #619 4-5). As he vacuously states, “We’re gonna change this nation, people! I’m gonna take you to the Promised Land! We can achieve!” (Casey & Aucoin #619 5/5).

Later Clark Kent summarizes the political rally for his boss, Perry White, “I think it’s just an exercise in rhetoric, Perry. Certainly an exercise in spectacle…” (Casey & Aucoin #619 6/2, emphasis in the original). In front of their boss, Lois Lane and Clark Kent start bickering with each other over who is going to interview the Candidate. Thus, when Lois Lane says that the story is hers, Clark Kent pointedly responds, “Oh? You’re assigning stories now? Does Perry know you’re doing his job for him...?” (Casey & Aucoin #619 6/6, emphasis in the original). As bold as brass, Lois Lane cockily answers, “Hey, all I know is, he wanted me to teach you how to do yours...” (Casey & Aucoin #619 6/6, emphasis in the original).

Faced with this squabble, Perry White tells them that they have five days to get the interview, and the one who gets it first gets the byline (Casey & Aucoin #619 7/1; Fig. 98). The first panel in Fig. 98 shows the Planet’s editor’s point of view from behind separating both spouses and giving those terms of the arrangement. In the following panel, from Clark Kent’s perspective in an extreme close-up of the back side of his head, Lois Lane with a bit of mockery on her face but resolutely adds, “A little intramarital competition. Just the way I like it--” (Casey & Aucoin #619 7/2, emphasis in the original; Fig. 98).
Lois Lane goes to Pittsburg to report on another political rally by the Candidate, while Superman is busy elsewhere. Later over a drink, she promptly sums up what has happened to Clark Kent, “Lots of empty promises... and then the pyro goes off. The crowd loves it” (Casey & Aucoin #619 15/1, emphasis in the original). Fig. 99 shows the following panel as she continues with her perception of the events, “Show biz politics. Perfect for modern voters. They don’t have to think...” (Casey & Aucoin #619 15/2, emphasis in the original). Clark Kent taunts her because she has not gotten the interview yet, but she retorts that she was a reporter on the city beat, while his mother was making his costume, and she assures him that she will get it (Casey & Aucoin #619 15/2-3; Fig. 99). A reminder of the first comics story we analyzed, “The Story of the Century,” ensues—an allusion that can be seen as a reward for loyal readers who keep up with the series after nearly twenty years. Thus, Clark Kent ironically recalls, “Are you going to drown yourself again to get his attention...? I mean, it worked before...” (Casey & Aucoin #619 15/4, emphasis in the original).

As soon as they get to their hotel room, Lois Lane imposes some “ground rules” for their competition, “We do this the old-fashioned way. No using superpowers to get this interview, okay?” (Casey & Aucoin #619 16/2, emphasis in the original). Her husband answers, “Scout’s honor. May the best reporter win” (Casey & Aucoin #619 16/2). After that, a remarkable sequence of four silent panels represents the way in which she concocts the idea of leaving her husband sleeping while she gets her interview (see Fig.
A bird’s eye view perspective shows them sleeping; then, the camera focuses on an extreme close-up of her face, her eyes open, and she checks her husband still sleeping; and finally, again the bird’s eye view perspective, but this time, Superman is in bed alone (see Fig. 100).

This is followed by another silent sequence of the strenuous efforts she makes in her determination to get the interview (Fig. 101). In the end, she is captured, but she gets a moment at least to get some words from the Candidate’s Campaign Manager (see Figs. 101-102). This man states that “The Candidate doesn’t need to sell himself in the press. He’s the people’s choice. Now, please run along, dear…” (Casey & Aucoin #619 18/4, emphasis in the original; Fig. 102).

Using “dear” as a form of address shows the total disregard for her status as a star reporter in one of the most prestigious newspapers in the world.

Fig. 100: Panels 3-6, page 16 of “Prestidigitation Nation” (Casey & Aucoin, The Adventures of Superman #619 16/3-6).

Fig. 101: Page 17 of “Prestidigitation Nation” (Casey & Aucoin, The Adventures of Superman #619 17).

Fig. 102: Panels 3-4, page 18 of “Prestidigitation Nation” (Casey & Aucoin, The Adventures of Superman #619 18/3-4).
The only thing he is considering with this sexist address is precisely that she is a woman, because evidently he would not have used this word if the interlocutor was another man. But Lois Lane’s response can be seen in the sneer on her face (see Fig. 102). Then, while everybody is distracted she steals the Campaign Manager’s PDA before she leaves, an unlawfully imprudent act which cannot be condoned, but it is in keeping with her audacious personality (Casey & Aucoin #619 19/2).

When she returns to the hotel room, she finds a note from her husband —and it certainly is a visual note, instead of a caption, as can be seen in Fig. 103. With this, he lets her know that he is busy again, but also that he was not fooled by her secret nocturnal actions trying to interview the Candidate (Fig. 103). Finally, when she gets the help of a hacker to break into the PDA, she learns that the Candidate’s entourage has evidence that someone has contracted a killer to have the Candidate murdered (Fig. 104). Fig. 104 shows her amazement at the information, and she suspects that they have not warned their boss that he is in mortal danger. This panel ends this thread in this first part, but there are two more strands that are intertwined, and all three are going to come to fruition in the second part of this comics story.

Consequently, the other thread parallel to all that we have mentioned so far follows the alien murderer as he (it is represented as an insect, but he refers to himself as
the “assassin lad”) prepares his assassination of the Candidate by reading his *Bad News Bible* (Casey & Aucoin #619 8/4, 9/4). This book is a kind of instruction manual for contract killers, imitating the style of old translations of the *Bible*, using “he who,” instead of non-sexist possibilities, such as “whoever,” “those who,” “one who,” or even “if you,” as shown in translation comparisons of the *Bible* (Casey & Aucoin #619 9/1-2; “Compare”).

He launches himself from “The opposite side of the universe” to arrive on Earth, and the arrival appears on the last page of this first part of the comics story, in a similar way as the Terminator in his eponymous film, but dressed in his red space suit (Casey & Aucoin #619 8/1, 9/4, 22; *Terminator*).

As we have stated, there is yet another strand that deals with a global climatic change on Earth, which makes Superman go from one point to another of the world in order to prevent disasters (Casey & Aucoin #619 10-13, 14/1, 20/2). In the following issue, this takes an even nastier turn when temperatures start getting freezing point in a kind of nuclear winter (Casey & Aucoin #620 8/6-9, 14/1-3). In the end, this is the result of the assassin trying to distract Superman by introducing a Cannibal Planet in our solar system, which starts devouring our sun (Casey & Aucoin #620 1, 21/2-3). Therefore, the loss of solar energy has made Earth’s temperatures plummet (Casey & Aucoin #620 8/6-9, 14/1-3). Superman intervenes in time destroying the threat and reheating the sun with his heat vision, another of those godlike feats mostly favored by 1950s editor Mort Weisinger (Casey & Aucoin #620 6, 9, 12, 14/4-6, 16-17).

After a failed assassination at his last rally, the Candidate mentions four famous places in the history of the United States: “A Dallas motorcade. The Embassy Ballroom of
the Ambassador. The Lorraine Motel in Memphis. The Ford Theatre [sic]. These are the unlikely locations where legends are forged in fire” (Casey & Aucoin #620 18/3, emphasis in the original). In other words, these refer to the locales where the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Abraham Lincoln, respectively, took place. Apparently, he wanted to emulate these unfortunate personages by getting himself killed, because when Lois Lane saves him from a second and final attempt, slightly wounded he confesses that it was he who hired the alien assassin that almost exterminated life on Earth (Casey & Aucoin #620 19/4, 22/1). As the Candidate explains his muddled ideas, “… Martyrdom is the final act of political legend. Social action through social trauma… The object of government is to prey on the ignorance of the masses… They want it simple… Heroes who will die for them… And now it’s all gone… Who’d vote for me now…?” (Casey & Aucoin #620 22/2-3, emphasis in the original). Thus, what is not clear is whether he really wanted to be assassinated or not. On the one hand, he laments the failure by the assassin, but on the other hand, he also laments that that failure will make him unsuitable to be elected. Even Superman complains about his obscure objective, “Politics… a beast practically beyond my comprehension. His distraction almost ended life on Earth. Is this really the new model of heroism?” (Casey & Aucoin #620 22/4, emphasis in the original).

“Battery, Part Five”

It is difficult to establish “Battery, Part Five” within a narrative frame because there are two separate strands in this issue that do not finish at the same time. On the whole,
we can include “Battery, Part Five” in a very long story arc with all its parts exclusively appearing in *The Adventures of Superman* from April 2004 until March 2006, involving the mysterious supervillain Ruin, who surprisingly turns out to be Superman’s trusted scientific adviser Professor Emil Hamilton. Just as the literary technique of Chinese boxes that sometimes is used as a frame narrative, this long narrative arc has stories within stories (“Chinese”). Although there is no named global narrator, sometimes a character takes the narrator’s voice, at least for a while, as we have seen in previous analyses (“Chinese”). There is, however, a sole writer for this complete Ruin saga. It was written by comics writer-novelist Greg Rucka, but several artists took their turn at interpreting his vision.

Within that long story arc, therefore, “Battery, Part Five” is the end of a five-part miniseries in which Ruin tries out a kind of battery weapon that is charged with the solar energy drained from Superman’s body, in order to deprive him of his powers, and hence, to be able to kill him. At the same time, “Battery, Part Five” is the penultimate part of a six-issue miniseries, which, coinciding with the same issues as the battery miniseries, is a thread that follows Lois Lane on an assignment in a war zone, a plot line that instead of finishing here in this fifth part of the battery miniseries is going to end in the following issue of *The Adventures of Superman*, in which she is saved from the almost fatal wound she receives in the present story that we are going to analyze later (Rucka, Pelletier & Magyar [19-22]). Since there are these two distinct strands in this comic book, one related to Superman and the other to Lois Lane in contrasting locations —urban areas in Metropolis and the war zone of an imaginary country in the Middle East called Umec—,
each one is illustrated by a different artist who follows a distinctively personal style: artist-illustrator Matthew Clark and Brazilian comics artist Renato Guedes. But all the pencil drawings by both comics artists in this comic book were inked by British comics artist-writer Andy Lanning.

“Battery, Part Five,” then, is the end of a section in the Ruin saga because his battery weapon fails, and he is captured. In the following issue, before he escapes, he explains that he is trying to kill Superman in order to save the world (Rucka, Pelletier & Magyar [8/5, 9/1, 9/4]). His idea is that by taking his power from the sun, Superman is depleting it from energy with every minute he is on this planet (Rucka, Pelletier & Magyar [9/4]). At first, it might seem reasonable, although we know that the sun itself is burning out its own energy ceaselessly, but rather than an exhausted sun, the Earth is going to face a more pressing danger, since before that, the sun will become a red giant engulfing Mercury and Venus, and maybe even the Earth, and scientists believe that within a billion years the sun will be so strong that all our oceans will dry up. Thus, when Ruin says that according to his calculations the sun has four point nine billion years to extinction, we cannot but agree with his interlocutor that first remains speechless, and then, he confidently tells him that he is “totally insane” (Rucka, Pelletier & Magyar [9/5-7], emphasis in the original).

The other parallel six-part miniseries is about Lois Lane’s adventure in Umec, which was invaded by a coalition headed by the United States, an apparent reference to the early 1990s Gulf War, but in the comics story there is no clear explicit motive for this American intervention. Lois Lane wants to go solo to cover the military action for The
Daily Planet, because she complains that when military commanders embed reporters in a unit to go to the combat zone, the government controls the news that can be reported, perhaps another reference to the Gulf War media broadcast (Rucka, Clark & Nelson #627 [8-9]). Almost as a foreshadowing, before leaving for Umec, her husband tells her that she has to take good care of herself because once the shooting starts, Superman cannot appear in a war zone, since it would look like he is fighting for one side or another, and he does not want to play politics (Rucka, Clark & Nelson #628 [20/2-5]).

At first, Lois Lane’s shooting is attributed to the conflict between Umec and the United States, but after recovering from her near-death wound, Lois Lane suspects other underlying reasons and starts investigating. Overcoming her apprehension (and her husband’s), she returns to Umec in order to learn the truth about who really shot her (Rucka, Defilippis et al. [8]). She finds out that there were no American military snipers in Umec at the time of the invasion, and her attempted killing “looks too professional to be an Umeci shooter” (Rucka, Defilippis et al. [8/2], emphasis in the original). Moreover, an Umeci source confirms that they would have never tried to shoot her because, from the very moment she arrived in Umec, they knew that she was Superman’s girl friend, and as the Umeci informant continues to assure her, “The last thing any of us wanted was to bring the anger of your friend down upon us,” besides they “surrendered when he came” (Rucka, Defilippis et al. [9/4], emphasis in the original). Finally, her investigation led her to meet the American female cyborg sniper who shot her, following the orders of yet another supervillain who wanted to control Superman (Rucka, Kerschel & Faucher [16-17]). Therefore, the assassination attempt was just an experiment to manipulate
Superman, and as Lois Lane puts it, “Playing with my life to see if it would influence his” (Rucka, Kerschel & Faucher [17/4], emphasis in the original). The conclusion is that the Umeci conflict had nothing to do with the failed assassination of Lois Lane; rather it was about pulling Superman’s strings, and he reacted as expected by appearing on the war zone.

Although, as we have stated, the title of the story to be analyzed deals with Superman’s fight against Ruin, the cover of the issue, as can be seen in Fig. 105, is related to Lois Lane’s shooting. As usual, the image on the cover does not belong exactly in the story, but it gives hints about it. Thus, the graffiti on the wall behind the figure of Lois Lane reads, “US out of Umec,” which evidently refers to the invasion of this country by the coalition headed by the United States (Fig. 105). Another indication of what happens in the story is the subheading, “Casualty of War,” which appears to the left of the image of Lois Lane, a clear sign that she is the victim (Fig. 105).

Furthermore, the posture and expression of the image itself indicate that she has been shot — her posture bent double with pain, her hand covering a bleeding wound, and her agonizing facial expression (see Fig. 105). On the ground next to her feet, in a direct diagonal line that connects with her figure, there is a discarded Umeci newspaper with a clear picture of Superman on the front page, which seems to remind viewers that she is not alone, and
in spite of his warning about Superman’s nonintervention, she can count on him, as we will see in the story.

On the whole, the cover shows a very distressing picture, but it is not gory (see Fig. 105). The blood spilling through her fingers is not very red, and in general it is a clean picture without the expected sensationalist bloodshed in a popular medium such as comics (Fig. 105). In the analyses so far, we have tried to clearly separate comments on the paratexts from the specific analysis of the text itself. In this case, however, we are going to include a comparison of the cover with the last page of the comics story, because we think they are closely related (Fig. 106).

Our speculation is that the last page of the story may have been designed as a possibility for a cover. Apart from being a full-page image, the most important clue that makes us believe that this page might have been a potential cover is that it does not follow the sequence of the preceding page (see Figs. 106 and 107). As can be seen in Fig. 107 that shows the page preceding the one in Fig. 106, the last three panels show an already wounded Lois Lane falling in slow motion to allow for Superman to arrive, so that the splash of blood that shows the impact of the bullet penetrating her flesh in Fig. 106 cannot be happening while Superman has Lois Lane in his arms. What is more, its gore is reminiscent of the 1950s horror comic books, which provoked the American public outcry.
and the US Senate investigations discussed in Chapter Three. Therefore, the image in Fig. 106 may have been discarded as a cover in order to avoid some controversy, although obviously not at the level of the McCarthy era. As we have stated, the actual cover of this comics story shown in Fig. 105 has almost no gore to speak of, while this last page of the comic book shown in Fig. 106 is full of it, with Lois Lane’s blood gushing from her chest and nose, and her wide-open eyes showing just the white in a ghastly expression of death. This has nothing to do with the preceding almost faintly delicate falling of our wounded female hero (see Fig. 107).

**Analysis of the Comics Story**

In this analysis we are going to concentrate on Lois Lane’s thread, but we would like to mention one more time in which Superman refuses to kill an adversary, even a murderous one. From the very beginning of the *Battery* miniseries, this evil supervillain Ruin has been controlling others by brutal mental and physical torture, in order to attack Superman. In this comics story, the remaining member of a family of three used by Ruin for his own lethal ends is able to flout his mind restraint, and he intends to take revenge on the supervillain by killing him (Rucka et al. [18]). When a weak wounded Superman
asks him not to do it, he responds, “You see what he did to me! He *killed my father!* He *murdered my sister!*” (Rucka et al. [19/1]). Superman softly answers, “And taking his life doesn’t change any of that” (Rucka et al. [19/1]). The other still insists on his reasons, “If it was your father? Your sister?” (Rucka et al. [19/2]). When Superman confirms that in spite of those terrible personal crimes, he would not take the life of the murderer — and from previous stories, readers know that it is true —, he does not believe the superhero at first, but in the end he desists from his deadly intention (Rucka et al. [19/2-5]).

The first page of the comic book sets the scene of Lois Lane’s strand, implying that a nearby sniper is looking through the telescopic sight of her rifle trying to have a clear shot at the journalist, her intended target (Fig. 108). Although the identity of the sniper is not specified here, as we mentioned in the previous section, from other later stories we have learned that she is a female cyborg. The arrangement of the images displayed as the field of view of the sniper’s rifle scope also serves to show the setting as a camera approaching from a long shot of an overview of the location, to the middle distance identifying participants, up to the close range of the protagonist (Fig. 108). Also, on this first page of the comic book, Lois Lane takes the narrator’s voice in the
captions, which form a letter addressed to her husband, in a rather contradictory visual way, because they look like scattered pieces of paper and the lettering imitates handwriting, but in the last panel of the page, Lois Lane is typing on her laptop (see Fig. 108). On the scraps of her letter, Lois Lane mentions what can be interpreted as some kind of reason for the American intervention in a foreign country, with the idea of Umeci insurgency and national unrest (Rucka et al. [1/5]).

Moreover, the letter also introduces the other two characters in this story: another war correspondent, and a very young marine, who is compared to Jimmy Olsen, perhaps in order to understand her deep involvement in her risky attempt to save his life (Rucka et al. [1/2-3]). The first page, then, ends with her as a target, as if the sniper were going to take a shot at her, but on the following page, the young soldier warns her not to be in the open, and instead it is he who takes her place and gets shot (Rucka et al. [2]; Fig. 109). As soon as she sees this, she hurries to help, even under fire, which is depicted with the blood red onomatopoeias of a machine gun, while the other journalist tries to get medical help (see Fig. 109). This three-page episode ends with the scope view still trying to focus on her in order to shoot her (see Fig. 109).
After this introduction to Lois Lane’s thread, the splash page follows with the title of the story and Superman badly hurt (Rucka et al. [4]). Thus, the comic book has the two strands intertwined but clearly separated by the very different styles of the two artists.

After another section of Superman’s bloody battle, there are four more pages of Lois Lane’s story line (Rucka et al. [8-11]). Help for the wounded soldier arrives, but when the team tries to carry him and lead them to a place of safety, a bomb goes off and all seem to have been killed, except for the two journalists who were in the rear (Rucka et al. [9-11]; Fig. 110). Still, the sniper, as can be seen in Fig. 110, is prepared to fire a shot with her scope rifle when she finds her target. Believing they are all dead, Lois Lane and the other correspondent are ready to wait safely for more help to come, but when Lois Lane sees that the young soldier is still alive, she risks her life to help him (Fig. 111).

This is an intensely dramatic sequence with Lois Lane’s coworker trying to stop her and make her see reason reminding her of her husband, “What would I say to Clark if I let you die?” (Rucka et al. [16/4]; Fig. 111). The left-hand bottom panel of Fig. 111 shows her reaction to this: her face seems to reflect the realization that her husband is a hero risking his life for others in his never-ending battle against evil, and that she has to measure up to his actions. This may be the reason why she answers, “Clark would understand” (Rucka et

Fig. 110: Panels 2-5, page 10 of “Battery, Part Five” (Rucka et al., The Adventures of Superman #631 [10/2-5]).
And she hurries out of the shelter to try and save the young dying soldier (Fig. 111). The outcome of her action is again suspended by still another section of Superman’s battle, until the page that joins both threads in a magnificent display of both artists’ illustrations side by side, shown in Fig. 112.

We can see the characteristics of both artists’ distinct styles and even coloring. Thus, Lois Lane’s strand has a serene clear line and subdued cold grays and greens with an occasional red accent to add an emotional charge to some dramatic incident. For instance, the close-up of Lois Lane’s face has a red background when she makes up her mind to save the young soldier’s life, or later when she is hit, the last three panels we commented on in the preceding section all have a red background (see Figs. 107 and 111). In contrast, Superman’s thread has an expressionist modulated line and the colorful style of his costume. This does not mean that it is upbeat, but the bloody battles are displayed in bright shades of red, with other dramatic intense colors, as can be seen in the left-hand panels of Fig. 112. These panels show the moment when Superman hands over the two prisoners to the police trying to play down the role of Ruin’s poor puppet, although unfortunately the woman in charge does not accept this (Fig. 112). On the same page, the first two right-hand panels show a clear shot at Lois Lane through the sniper’s...
rifle scope, and then, in the last panel, the darkly menacing barrel of a gun again against a red background (Fig. 112).

Finally, at the bottom of the page without any frame and with black rays, there is a close-up of Superman’s startled, horror-stricken face, just as his superhearing captures the sound of the shot which is subtly represented with the white letters of the onomatopoeia on the left, next to his ear (Fig. 112). This takes him beyond all his surrounding concerns—he forgets his defense of Ruin’s victim, he forgets his accusation of the murderous supervillain, he forgets his own painful wounds, he forgets everything, except for what is happening to his wife, the sequence of events that can be seen in the following page when she is falling to the ground (see Fig. 107). The first page of the following issue shows a yellow lightning bolt crossing the skies of the Earth towards the Middle East (Rucka, Pelletier & Magyar [1]). When he arrives, he carefully picks her up and tenderly wraps her in his red cape, in order to fly her to the closest military field hospital, where he remains standing outside the operating room for nearly five hours until doctors manage to stop her bleeding and save her life (Rucka, Pelletier & Magyar [2-6, 10-11, 16, 20]).
CONCLUSION

As stated in the Introduction, with this study we have been focusing on the status of Lois Lane as a female character in Superman comics stories, and through this, we have had an overall view of American society’s perception of the role of women over the twenty years of American history that span the comic books selected. Specifically, this study consists in a feminist semiotic analysis of the fictional character Lois Lane, starting where Jeanne Williams’s 1986 dissertation on a similar topic left off. That was considered a suitable initial point because DC Comics began a new continuity with the 1985 cosmic event Crisis on Infinite Earths, which ended almost fifty years of an unwieldy multiverse full of doppelgängers of the same characters that were developed according to the needs of each historical period, since the debut of Superman, Clark Kent, and Lois Lane in 1938. With that series, then, everything shrank to only one set of characters on one earth in one universe. Furthermore, in 2005 the company issued another crisis in its fictional universe, considered the sequel to the 1985 series: Infinite Crisis. Although this latter crisis did not finish the continuity of the characters’ stories in DC Comics’ universe, which came to an end and was relaunched in 2011, twenty years seemed a suitable time for analysis.

Our design for this study followed the usual working approach from a general literature review and a general framework to a feminist viewpoint for the analysis of the selected comics starred by our focal fictional character Lois Lane. Therefore, we reviewed the most relevant literature available about comics starting with the European influential pioneers Umberto Eco and Román Gubern, and we followed them with more
contemporary researchers Miguel Ángel Muro Munilla and José Luis Rodríguez Diéguez, including the relevant contributions of Gérard Genette and Hans-Heino Ewers, which, though not specifically comics-related, were suitable for the type of multimedia and multimodal texts so closely related to the comics we were dealing with. We also selected three renowned comics researchers and artists on the American side of our inquiry, Will Eisner, Scott McCloud, and Robert Harvey, because their seminal books, like the European ones, are still a source of significant discussion in relation to comics.

When we turned to the feminist approach to the study of comics, we unfortunately found it wanting. There were very few relevant sources. From media studies, we were able to rescue an article by Jeffrey Brown dealing with the revealing topic of bad girl genre in comics (and films), and also, a paper by a group of undergraduate students that was helpful because they studied over seven hundred covers of comics to accomplish a gender-based analysis of their images. But the two most eminent scholars in this particular aspect of our review were Trina Robbins and Lillian Robinson. Both authors’ treatises were a source of significant research from a feminist perspective on this undervalued topic of comics. Nevertheless, the last part of our literature review that specifically focused on comics character Lois Lane would bring surprises. Since the year 2013 celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the publication of the first issue of Action Comics, where Superman, Clark Kent, and Lois Lane were introduced, Nadine Farghaly edited a commemorative anthology with academic essays on the fictional character Lois Lane, and the key word was “academic.” However, there were only three articles on comic books, because most of them focused on films and television series where the
comics character appeared, but those three resulted crucial to review the character and also some relevant points of study, especially the one by Bobby Kuechenmeister and Elizabeth Kuechenmeister, who analyzed the first ten years of this DC Comics’ continuity, from John Byrne’s reboot in 1986 to the two comics characters’ wedding in 1996, coinciding with the first half of our own analysis. What is more, in another general compilation of academic articles on comics we found a study of *Lois Lane* comic books by Jennifer Stuller that gave us more specifically feminist tools to work on comics. Finally, it goes without saying that Williams’s comprehensive dissertation covering Superman comics from 1938 to 1986 was the most important part of this section, but we also included some insights from Amanda Parkinson, who, in her senior thesis, examined the 1960s-1970s *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* series, adding some new perspectives to Williams’s research on this period.

In Chapter Two we dealt with the theoretical framework for comics studies and feminist analysis. We discussed the definition of comics, with its controversy specially stirred up by McCloud and Harvey, and we tried to find a middle point with Neil Cohn’s and Antonio Altarriba’s insights, eventually settling on Gubern’s comprehensive definition. To develop the characteristics of comics, we followed Rodríguez Diéguez’s didactic guidance, and Daniele Barbieri gave us a broad view of the relationship between comics and other languages. The classification of comics presented an introduction to the historical overview because it closely follows their historical development. In order to study the language of comics, we followed Eco’s proposal of eight significant aspects he recommended in a semiotic analysis of this kind: iconography, balloons, panel grammar,
montage syntax, narration, plot, character typology, and ideology (see Appendix 7). These categories were enlarged with contributions by many scholars, from Erwin Panofsky to Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, and also from the above-mentioned authors, especially Muro Munilla, Rodríguez Diéguez, McCloud and Gubern. Finally, we reviewed the idea of genre and formula story with John Cawelti’s and Thomas Schatz’s works, very important topics for this popular medium, which in a subsequent chapter were narrowed down to the study of the superhero genre. In the last part of the chapter, we revisited our basic ideas of feminism, and particularly and more extensively, feminist criticism and analysis. Since we had already verified that there was very little literature in relation to feminist criticism and analysis of comics, we introduced Sara Mills’s fundamental feminist work for linguistic analysis, and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen’s for the semiotic analysis of images, although not specifically feminist, its foundation on critical discourse analysis was essential for a gender-based approach.

The historical overview in Chapter Three took us to tap the valuable historical work on comics carried out by Javier Coma and David Kunzle, accompanied by Gubern’s ideas on the development of comics. Thus, this encompassed a history of comics from antecedents in the history of painting and writing, the proto-comics in Europe, to the modern idea of comic strips at the turn of the twentieth century in the United States, with the subsequent emergence of syndicates that standardized and censored comics in such a way that made them suitable to be sold not only to American newspapers across the country, but also to the press overseas. After all these developments, an incipient comics industry started with the final appearance of comic books, first as advertising give-away
premiums with reprints of comic strips, and later including both reprints and new material, as products in their own right to be purchased from newsstands.

But what managed to consolidate comics publishing companies as a thriving industry was the appearance of Superman in 1938, and the development of the superhero genre that even today is the mainstay of mainstream American comics, no longer available on newsstands but in direct sale comic-book specialty shops. Lastly, we ended the chapter with the concrete historical creation of Superman and Lois Lane by the two adolescents Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, and the later evolution of DC Comics, as the publishing company that remained the exclusive proprietor of the rights to the world famous character, and together with him, his everlasting companion Lois Lane. As background events influencing DC Comics’ operations in relation to its flagship character, we mentioned World War II in the 1940s, the McCarthyist persecution of comics in the 1950s, the development of new superhero types by Marvel in the 1960s, the emergence of the direct market in the 1970s and 1980s, the burst of the comics collectors’ bubble in the 1990s, and to conclude, a reflection on the Twin Towers terrorist attack in 2001 and its response by the comics world.

Chapter Four reviews all the extra-textual aspects we worked on so far; that is to say, the contexts of production and reception of the comics under study. To this we added Peter Coogan’s significant work on the superhero genre based on the ideas developed by Cawelti and Schatz, in order to perceive more clearly the type of texts we were going to analyze. Then, we saw the feminist tools to analyze comics mentioned by Stuller, with the caveat that some of them are not specifically academic in origin. The
most important part of the chapter comes next with the in-depth examination of Mills’s ideas as regards direct and indirect sexism, which were set to work on the feminist analysis of texts, and finally, the semiotic tools presented by Kress and van Leeuwen, in order to examine images with a genre-based approach (see Appendix 7). The last section of the chapter is devoted to the parameters used to select the corpus for analysis. Accordingly, we compiled all the regular comics in the main DC Comics’ universe since Byrne’s relaunch of Superman’s cast of characters for this new continuity in the 1986 The Man of Steel miniseries until the above-mentioned 2005 Infinite Crisis crossover event (see Appendices 3 and 4). From this total number, we first selected those comic books with Lois Lane on the cover, and then, following Williams in a general way, we reduced those to a more manageable quantity of one per year, by choosing the ones in which Lois Lane is an active participant in the story or plays a major role (see Appendices 5 and 6).

The last chapter has all the analyses of the eighteen stories selected covering the twenty-year range we set to analyze. The analyses include an introduction dealing with the comics artists and writers that created the comics stories, and also their paratexts, and intertexts, if applicable, and even in one case, “DC Comics Presents Lois Lane,” a hypertext based on James Bond spy films, following Genette’s definitions of those terms. Apart from these, as most of the stories belonged in rather long narrative arcs, and most of the last comics dealt with were parts of miniseries, also in the introduction, we had to present the plot lines sometimes before or after the comics stories under study, in order to have the appropriate background.
Therefore, as obvious paratexts, the covers were meticulously analyzed using Kress and van Leeuwen’s semiotic tools always with a feminist point of view in mind. As we mentioned several times in the analyses, broadly speaking, the covers were designed to attract male readers, so they used resources that at times could be considered sexist, such as the damsel-in-distress topos. But this was not often used as a flagrant contrivance as in other periods of comic-book history, and at times, it could be considered very subtle indeed; for instance, the cover of “Survival!,” where a hovering Superman is not acting, but just keeping Lois Lane under surveillance, although the image shows her in real danger, since she is precariously grasping the top of a fast moving army truck. More obvious is the action on the cover of “Echoes,” where Superman puts himself in harm’s way in order to save not only Lois Lane but also Cat Grant, doubling the number of damsels. Additionally, two similar covers but with totally different conceptions are “Hard Decisions!” and “Prestidigitation Nation,” since on both Clark Kent is taking off his clothes to reveal Superman’s costume underneath with the accompaniment of Lois Lane. But whereas the first one could be considered a representation of Lois Lane actively participating in the decision of Clark Kent becoming Superman, in the second one, she only serves as a subservient satellite to the superhero. As regards these two covers, what is interesting, too, is that the less sexist is previous to the other one by eight years.

As can be seen, some covers lean toward one extreme or the other in a continuum from non-sexist texts to sexist texts, and one cannot be certain that improvements in relation to sexism were achieved as years went by. There is, however, a 1988 cover that can be surely categorized as indirectly sexist, in Mills’s sense. Thus, the comic book
“Visitor” has a legend on the cover saying that the scene depicted does not appear in the story, so the image is presented as a kind of joke or something that it is not “true,” but the fact is that the image of the two women, Lois Lane and Lana Lang, supposedly fighting over Superman who is mockingly separating them, certainly is on the cover of that issue. Confronted with this, as Mills asserts, viewers’ response can be rejection or acceptance of the picture, but even if the former is chosen, it is difficult to accuse it of sexism when the image pretends to be “non-existent.”

Unlike the covers, the stories are more consistently trying to show Lois Lane as a powerful character in her own right. It is true that after the revelation of Superman’s secret identity in “Secrets in the Night,” during some issues she is transformed into a woman with a passive timid personality, which sharply contrasts with the purposely striding figure in “The Story of the Century.” But this does not last long. After a month, a story was published where she shakes off that out-of-character attitude, realizing that her core is the daring reporter that does not flinch from going out to get a scoop even if it means performing some dangerous act.

In this connection, there is a thread about her competition for news stories with Clark Kent, which appears in many narratives before and after their wedding. What Lois Lane realizes after Superman’s secret is out is the unfair way in which he can scoop her because of his superpowers. Even before that, when in “Visitor” she learns that Clark Kent and Superman are almost like “stepbrothers,” it suddenly becomes clear that she has depended on them to receive any story related to Superman’s feats. What is more, in “We’re Back!,” when she gently teases Clark Kent that he is only writing about himself, we
can remember that his position in *The Daily Planet* was achieved by getting Superman’s interview before Lois Lane in “The Story of the Century,” a plainly unfair scoop. This work competition is not related to the so-called battle of the sexes, because it is not a metaphor for the only possibility of relationship that they can have, as has been proved by many stories where they work side by side, supporting each other to achieve an end, for example, “Hard Decisions!,” “Swan Song,” “Power Crisis!,” and “Return to Krypton, Part One: Sliding Home.” And in most of them, it is Lois Lane who supports, or even influences, the superhero not only in his endeavors but also in his intentions and decisions.

Although on many occasions female comics characters can be regarded as peripheral to the main story of superheroes’ exploits and battles, in this twenty-year period, Lois Lane was protagonist of stories without depending on Superman. In a story such as “Survivall,” she acts on her own, tracking down some army thefts, and in “Prestidigitation Nation,” she works hard to interview a recalcitrant show-biz politician. Both narrations and images show her determination to try everything in pursuing a news story without any help.

In the story “Return to Krypton, Part One: Sliding Home,” she is given the narrator’s voice-over in the captions to start the narrative from her perspective, and since the story is about visiting Superman’s biological parents, she takes the opportunity to compare them not only with the Kents, Superman’s adoptive parents, but also with her own. Although in “Visitor” and “Survivall” there are few captions, the stories are presented through her thought and speech balloons, and even the writing on her laptop in the first one. Also, the captions of “DC Comics Presents Lois Lane” include her ideas about
the news report she is elaborating in her mind according to the events that are happening, while those of “We’re Back!” seem to belong in her personal journal, and the beginning of “Battery, Part Five” depicts them as scraps from a letter to her husband.

When we consider her heroic traits, we find them in stories such as “Swan Song,” in which she risks her life to save Jimmy Olsen’s, or “Battery, Part Five,” in which she eventually gets shot because she goes out of a shelter in order to help a wounded young soldier. Moreover, she can also measure up as a female action hero à la Rambo, as can be seen in “Survival!” where she does not look out of place vis-à-vis paramilitary survivalists, and she can hold her own having all of them prisoners, while the authorities arrive. And in “DC Comics Presents Lois Lane,” she plays the role of a film spy à la James Bond, discovering a secret genetic laboratory, rescuing the hostages, and destroying the facilities.

Lois Lane has been characterized as a military brat, because of her fighting skills, which are so remarkable that her sister compares her ability to defend herself to Wonder Woman’s. But they have come at a prize, since she had a very difficult childhood. Having a father, an army man, who had always longed for a son and had no qualms in openly rubbing it in even when she was a very small child, she tried to exceed his expectations without ever coming close. Thus, this is a strand that appears in the stories “Visitor” and “Survival!” as flashbacks, which seem to go in crescendo, because in the former, she just lowers her head and accepts the abuse, but in the latter, she answers her father back, albeit already as a young woman. No longer as a flashback, the last actual confrontation with her father we saw takes place in “The Wedding Album.” On this occasion, it is
because Lois Lane refuses her father the possibility of giving her away at church, and he takes offense at this. This offered an ideal situation in which a gender-free strategy could be presented, and that is exactly what comics creators decided to do, because she tells her father that if she were the son he had wished her to be during her whole life as he emphatically repeated over and over again, he would not have dreamed of giving “him” away, so he has to think of her as a son.

As regards the two non-academic tools of comics analysis mentioned by Stuller, the Bechdel Test and the Women in Refrigerators Syndrome, we can state that “Visitor” may fall into the former category, although the two women’s dialogue at the end of the story do not pass the test. But this is no wonder, since the whole objective of Lois Lane paying a visit to Lana Lang in Smallville is to talk about events related to Clark Kent in Metropolis. On the other hand, in relation to the latter tool, there are especially two stories that can be said to be suitable for that analysis, since Lois Lane’s suffering is a motivation for Superman’s reactions: “The Last Supervillain” and “Battery, Part Five.” Moreover, both may be seen as distorted mirrored structures, because in the first story, Lois Lane’s death serves as a catalyst for the superhero to react, or not react as it was the case, to the supervillain, but in reality nothing has happened to her, she is not really dead, whereas in the second story, although her near-fatal wound seems, within the story analyzed, to be unrelated to the superhero, when the longer story arc is considered, in the end, it revolves around his reaction too. However, in reality, neither of them is about the real death of the character, as in the case of the story that originated the idea of the Women in Refrigerators Syndrome.
In relation to Lois Lane’s appearance in the comics selected, it can be said that it has been sexualized with enhanced attributes and revealing outfits for the sake of the male implied viewer’s gaze to a certain extent, especially in stories such as “Kith and Kin” and “DC Comics Presents Lois Lane,” but, on the whole, the global style of graphic representations shows great restraint. Thus, this ranges from the subtle feminine figures with decorous attire in “The Story of the Century” and “We’re Back!” to the exaggerated expressionist figure of “Stormy Weather,” and from the lovely nearly caricatures of “Return to Krypton, Part One: Sliding Home” and “Prestidigitation Nation” to the delicately realistic image of “Battery, Part Five.”

Elsewhere we stated that “The Wedding Album” might be a turning point in the stories selected, but apart from this story that neatly halves that sequence of comic books into two, there is another momentous event to take into account —the revelation of Superman’s secret identity that takes place in 1991, after only one fourth of the whole period under study. However, when considering the whole evolution of the character during these twenty years, neither of these two crucial events in the lives of these characters greatly modified the status of Lois Lane. She remained the superhero’s companion, and the only real difference is the couple’s intimate and domestic moments included in the adventures. Another aspect that does not change is Lois Lane’s maiden name after her marriage. It may be hard to understand because of the conflicting relation with her father, but we can assume that it is easier to keep it as her unchangeable nom de plume.
Although these things do not change the character per se as much as may be expected at first, there is some kind of shift in the narrative but not necessarily related to those two events. Therefore, during this period there are some comics stories that do not seem to belong in the typical superhero genre. Among them, “The Wedding Album” itself appears to be a collection of American wedding traditions, and the melancholy beauty of “The Last Supervillain” may have been put forth as an earnest appeal to abolish capital punishment, whereas “Visitor,” which is an earlier story that cannot have been affected either by the disclosure of Superman’s secret or the comics couple’s marriage, seems a description of the personal feelings of the two women close to Superman.

It should finally be noted that even with ups and downs, on the whole, the character seems to live up to the ideals of feminism, since comics creators, for their most part male, appeared to have made real efforts to show a powerful woman dealing with an unearthly situation as it is to have a relationship with a being as different from ordinary life as can be imagined. She may be said to serve as a link between these two worlds. To conclude, we deem appropriate here to state that this analysis can only be considered a first approach to a highly wide-ranging subject, since in these twenty years there are many more stories worthy of examination apart from our selected corpus, and these may prove rewarding indeed to get more deeply into the intricacies of such an appealing female comics character as Lois Lane.
GUIDELINES FOR DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

General Discourse Analysis

Introduction
Definitions of discourse analysis

Bibliography

Basic Information
Bibliographical reference

Bibliography

Contextual Framework: Communicative Dimension

User’s Language: Dialects
- Geographical dialect
- Temporal dialect
- Social dialect
- Standard
- Idialect

Language Use: Register

Field
- Setting: time co-ordinate (today)
- Setting: place co-ordinate (here)
- Possible-world co-ordinate (state of affairs)
- Speech event

Mode
- Code (language & medium)
- Cchannel (physical medium)

Tone
- Addressee
- Addressee
- (Non-intended addressee)
- Formality
Bibliography

Topicalization
- Topic entity (indicated object co-ordinate)
- Topic framework (assignment co-ordinate) → topic-shift markers

Bibliography

Genre
Research Paper (IMRD pattern / model)

Introduction (CARS pattern / model)
- Move 1: Presentation of background research / establishing a territory
- Move 2: Review of previous research / establishing a niche
- Move 3: Presentation of new research / occupying the niche

Methods
- Move 4: Description of data gathering procedure
- Move 5: Description of experiment procedure
- Move 6: Description of data analysis procedure

Results
- Move 7: Observations during analysis
- Move 8: Explanation of research results

Discussion
- Move 9: Presentation of research conclusions

Popularization article (hourglass pattern / model)

Introduction
- Move 1: Presentation of background research
- Move 2: Review of previous research
- Move 3: Presentation of new research

Results
- Move 7: Observations during analysis
- Move 8: Explanation of research results

Discussion
- Move 9: Presentation of research conclusions
Report

Introduction
- Move 1: Situation

Body
- Move 2: Problem
- Move 3: Solution or response

Termination
- Move 4: Evaluation

News report

Summary
- Headline → “surprise value”
- Lead or “intro”

News Story (inverted pyramid: general → specific; summary → expansion; preview → detail)
- Move 1: Main event / solution
- Move 2: Background / situation
- Move 3: Consequences & reactions / problem
- Move 4: Comments / evaluation

Opinion article / leading article / editorial
- Move 1: Case / actual world
- Move 2: Argument / alternative worlds
- Move 3: Verdict / desired world
- Move 4: Action / how desired world can be realized

Bibliography

Textual Typology & Structure

Exposition
- Conceptual exposition (assertions): scene-setter → aspect 1 of the scene (assertion) → aspect 2 of the scene → etc.
- Narration (events): scene-setter → aspect 1 of the scene (event) → aspect 2 of the scene → etc.
- Description (attributions): scene-setter → aspect 1 of the scene (attribution) → aspect 2 of the scene → etc.

Argumentation
- Through-argumentation (thesis cited to be argued through): thesis to be argued through → substantiation → conclusion
- Counter-argumentation (thesis cited to be opposed): thesis cited to be opposed → opposition → substantiation → conclusion

Instruction
- With option: step / point 1 → step / point 2 → etc.
Without option: step / clause 1 → step / clause 2 → etc.

Bibliography

Language Functions
- Emotive
- Vocative
- Referential
- Poetic
- Phatic
- Meta-lingual

Bibliography

Pragmatics
Reference & Deixis

Person Reference
- Referring expressions: topic entity → definite / indefinite → explicit / implicit
- Referring expressions: implied reader → definite / indefinite → explicit / implicit
- Referring expressions: others → definite / indefinite → explicit / implicit

Social Reference
- Absolute reference
- Relational reference

Spatial Reference
- Absolute reference
- Relative reference: co-textual (cohesive) reference
- Relative reference: contextual (definitic) reference

Temporal Reference
- Absolute reference
- Relative reference: co-textual (cohesive) reference
- Relative reference: contextual (definitic) reference

Discourse Reference (temporal or spatial)
- Absolute reference
- Relative reference: co-textual (cohesive) reference
- Relative reference: contextual (definitic) reference

Presupposition Pools

Conventional presupposition
- Existential
Cohesion

Grammatical Cohesive Relations
- Reference
- Substitution
- Ellipsis
- Conjunction

Lexical Cohesive Relations
- Reiteration
- Collocation

Bibliography

Speech Act Theory

Components
- Locutionary act
- Illocutionary force
- Perlocutionary effect

Types
- Direct speech act
- Indirect speech act
Functions
- Directives
- Commissives
- Representatives
- Declaratives
- Expressives

Bibliography

Information Structure

Theme
- Unmarked theme
- Marked theme

Theme Types
- Textual
- Interpersonal
- Ideational

Rheme
- Open rhyme
- Open-close rhyme
- Close rhyme

Thematic Progression
- Chain \([T_i \rightarrow R_i / T_j \rightarrow R_j]\)
- Theme bunch \([T_i \rightarrow R_i / T_j \rightarrow R_j]\)
- Rheme bunch \([T_i \rightarrow R_i / T_j \rightarrow R_j]\)
- Crossed theme/rheme \([T_i \rightarrow R_i / T_j \rightarrow R_j / \{T_i}\}\)
- Hierarchical patterns from theme
- Hierarchical patterns from rheme

Bibliography

Intertextuality & Semiotics

Manifest Intertextuality
- Discourse Representation: direct discourse, free direct discourse, indirect discourse, free indirect discourse
- Use of inverted Commas: suspension of responsibility, displaced words
Guidelines for Discourse Analysis

- Presuppositions, negation
- Metadiscourse
- Irony

Constitutive Intertextuality or Interdiscursivity
- Genre
- Activity type
- Style
- Discourse

Transtextuality
- Intertextuality
- Paratextuality
- Metatextuality
- Hypertextuality
- Architextuality

Bibliography

Staging

Page layout

Graphological Features
- Type of letter: print-type, dot-matrix, letters, typewriting, handwriting
- Typeface: design, size, emphasis

Thematization: Titles / Headlines / Headings
- Lexical selection: loaded words
- Word play: homophones, homonyms & polyseme
- Sounds: alliteration & rhyme
- Repetition

Text layout
- Sections, subsections
- Paragraphing
- Numbering
- Bullets

Visual space (⇒ textual)
- Ontological judgments: top section (ideal) or bottom section (real)
- Status of Information: left (given) or right (new)

Images

States of affairs in the represented world (⇒ ideational)
- Representation of (inter)action
Representation of states of affairs

Social relations of viewer and image (≠ interpersonal)
- Social distance: proximity or distance
- Attitudinal relations: lateral or frontal position
- Relations of power: top-down or bottom-up views
- Forms of factuality: photographs, pictures, drawings, diagrams, etc.

Visuals
- See Visual-Verbal relationships

Bibliography

Techno-Scientific Discourse Analysis

General Overview of EST Text

Field
- Mechanical engineering
- Civil engineering
- Electrical engineering
- Electronic engineering
- Computer science
- Mining
- Medicine
- Social sciences
- Forestry
- Dietetics
- Nursing
- Others [state]

Type of Source
- Academic
- Professional
- Technical
- Popular

Type of Readership
- Expert
- Educated layperson
- Uninformed

Stylistic Scales

Formality
- Colloquial
- Informal
- Neutral
- Formal
Generality or Difficulty
- Popular
- Neutral
- Educated
- Technical

Emotional Tone
- Intense
- Warm
- Factual

Bibliography


EST Conceptual Paragraph Analysis

Conceptual Paragraph to Physical Paragraphs
- One-to-one correspondence
- One-to-more-than-one correspondence

Type of Paragraph
- Deductive
- Inductive
- Hybrid
- Implicit

Core Generalization
- [State, if applicable]

Core Statement
- [State]

Bibliography

EST Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical Functions

Description
- Physical description (general and specific)
- Function description (purpose and functioning)
- Process description

Definition
- Simple definition (formal, semi-formal and non-formal)
Complex or expanded definition (stipulatory, explicated, others)

Classification
- Complete classification
- Partial classification
- Implicit classification

Instructions
- Direct instructions
- Indirect instructions
- Instructional information

Visual-Verbal Relationships
- Type of visual
- Visual determined by text
- Text determined by visual

Rhetorical Techniques

Natural Patterns
- Time order
- Space order

Logical Patterns
- Causality and result
- Order of importance
- Comparison and contrast
- Analogy
- Exemplification
- Illustration

Bibliography

Grammatical Aspects in EST

Syntax in EST Representation of Reality
- Transitivity
- Passive constructions
- Nominalization
- Ergative verbs
- Personification
- Reflexion
- Modality

EST Syntactic Preferences
- Simple sentence structure
- Parataxis & hypotaxis
- Syntactic expressions

Problems in Rhetorical-Grammatical Relationships
- Passive constructions
• Sative constructions
• Modals
• Definite article
• Non-temporal use of tense

Bibliography


**Lexical Aspects in EST**

Word Meaning
• Definition
• Extension and intension
• Denotation and connotation
• Reference and meaning
• Collocation
• Polysemy, monosemny, and homonymy

Neologisms
• Neologisms in form
• Neologisms in meaning

Sub-Technical Vocabulary
• Technical meaning (field)
• General meaning

Noun-Compounds
• Simple
• Complex
• More complex
• Very complex

Bibliography


APPENDIX 2
APPENDIX 2: Lenguaje Visual 2001

LENGUAJE VISUAL 2001

Guía de Análisis de Obra

El texto

Datos básicos
- Título
- Autor
- Medidas
- Técnica
- Fecha de realización

Lo plástico (signo o enunciado)

Expresión (significante)

Dispositivo
- Soporte de impresión
- Soporte de proyección
- Otros soportes
- Matericidad, técnica y tecnología

Plano
- Soporte
- Forma
- Figura / fondo

Forma (contorno o borde)
- Posición
- Dimensión
- Orientación

Trazo
- Punto / Línea
- Contorno o borde

Color
- Mufiz
- Saturación
- Valor

Valor (luminosidad)
- Alto
- Medio
- Bajo

Textura (microtopografía)
- Grano
- Mácula (mancha)

Materia
- Matérico
- No matérico
- Desmaterialización
Contenido (significado)
- Denotación
- Connotación (símbolo, metáfora)

Lo icónico (signo o enunciado)

Expresión (significante)
- Entidades y marcas
- Subentidades y marcas
- Supraentidades y marcas

Contenido (significado → referente y tipo)
- Denotación
- Connotación (símbolo, metáfora)

El espacio

Espacio espectatorial (concreto)
- Incidencia del tipo de obra
- Incidencia del tamaño de la obra
- Incidencia de las reproducciones

Espacio plástico (obra)

Espacio de representación (superficie)

Obras tridimensionales
- Elementos plásticos materiales
- Organización topológica
- Espacio transitible
- Espacio semi-transitible
- Espacio escenográfico

Obras bidimensionales
- Elementos plásticos materiales
- Espacio genético de la organización topológica (táctil)

Espacio representado (ficticio)

Perspectiva geométrica
- Perspectiva con centro; perspectiva artificial (espacio cerrado / social)
- Perspectiva sin centro; perspectiva caballera (paralelo)
- Perspectiva con eje de fuga central
- Perspectiva invertida
- Perspectiva múltiple o simultánea
- Perspectiva sintética

Superficie y profundidad
- Perspectiva aérea o atmosférica
- Perspectiva jerárquica
- Espacio abierto
- Multivisión o simultaneísmo (tiempo sintetizado)
- Campo (resultado de encuadre)
- Fuera de campo
- Profundidad de campo
El tiempo

Tiempo espectatorial (concreto)
- Incidencia del tipo de obra (bidimensional / tridimensional / temporalizada / secuencial)
- Incidencia del tiempo en la obra

Tiempo de la obra

Tipología temporal de las imágenes

Imágenes no temporalizadas
- Tiempo de la imagen (diacrónico)
- Tiempo en la obra (sincrónico)
- Tiempo implícito en el dispositivo de la imagen (producción)

Imágenes temporalizadas
- Imagen móvil
- Imagen motora

Otros tipos
- Imagen fija versus imagen móvil versus imagen motora
- Imagen única versus imagen múltiple
- Imagen autónoma versus imagen en secuencia

Tiempo representado
- Instante esencial
- Instante cualquiera
- Tiempo sintetizado (acumulación de instantes)
- Imagen-movimiento (anulación del instante)
- Imagen-duración (tiempo presentado)
- Tiempo diegético (tiempo narrativo ficticio)
- Secuencia e intervalo (salto entre dos planos sucesivos)

El marco

Marco-límite (contorno → signo (percepto) y enunciado)
- Norma
- Supresión

Marco-objeto (reborde → índice enunciado)
- Norma
- Supresión
- Adjunción
- Supresión-adjunción

Fuera-de-marco (contexto)
- Encuadre (acentamiento)
- Desencuadre (descentramiento)
- Sobreencuadre

El contexto

Contexto local

Emisor
- Aspectos pertinentes de la vida del autor
• Aspectos de la realidad física, cultural e ideológica de la época que se identifican con el autor
• Competencia enciclopédica
• Connotaciones simbólicas y asociaciones sinestésicas establecidas

Espectador
• Destinatario implícito y “real”
• Aspectos de la realidad física, cultural e ideológica de la época que influyen en la interpretación
• Competencia enciclopédica
• Connotaciones simbólicas y asociaciones sinestésicas establecidas
• Características de la interacción con la obra

Emplazamiento de la obra
• Lugar de exhibición (institución u otro)
• Ubicación o disposición específica
• Entorno
• Iluminación
• Identificación o rotulación

Contexto global

Contexto institucional
• Características de la institución
• Normas que rigen la institución

Contexto histórico
• Normas aceptadas en determinado momento histórico

Contexto sociocultural
• Normas aceptadas en determinada sociedad y cultura

La intertextualidad

Cita literal parcial o completa (apropiación)
• Obras plásticas
• Obras literarias
• Otros

Aliusión
• Obras o géneros plásticos
• Obras o géneros literarios
• Otros

Paratexto
• Beetros, proyectos, diseños
• Títulos, datos complementarios

Metatexto
• Crítica, análisis, comentario

Hipersexto
• Transformación global de un hipertexto (obra total apropiada)

Archiexto
• Referencia al género
Bibliografía

APPENDIX 3: Complete Compilation of Superman Comics 1985-2005

Complete Compilation of Superman Comics 1985-2005

Superman Comics 1985
Twelve issues of a twelve-part miniseries (compilation) — Crisis on Infinite Earths.
There is then, a total of 12 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1986
Six issues of a six-part miniseries — The Man of Steel.
One graphic novel of an imaginary story — Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?
There is, then, a total of 9 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1987
Thirty-six regular issues — twelve Superman v.2 #1-12, twelve The Adventures of Superman #424-435, and twelve Action Comics #584-595.
To complete some of Superman’s stories, four issues of the following comic books: one Hawkman #10, one Booster Gold #10, and two Legion of Superheroes v.3 #37-38.
Three stand-alone annuals, one of each regular series — Annual Superman v.2 #1, Annual The Adventures of Superman #1, and Annual Action Comics Superman #1.
One special issue Superman: The Man of Steel v.2.
Four issues of a four-part miniseries — World of Krypton.
Four issues of a twelve-part miniseries — Legends #3-6. [The other six issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #1-4, and The Adventures of Superman #426, and Action Comics #586.]¹
[A four-part miniseries — A Twist in Time. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular and crossover titles: Legion of Superheroes v.3 #37-38, Superman v.2 #6, and Action Comics #591.]
There is then, a total of 52 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1988
Thirty-three regular issues — fourteen Superman v.2 #13-26, fourteen The Adventures of Superman #436-449, and five Action Comics #596-600.
To complete some of Superman’s stories, two issues of the following comic books: one Wonder Woman #16, and Doom Patrol #16.
One stand-alone Annual Superman v.2 #2.
Four issues of a four-part miniseries (the first issue published in 1987) — World of Smallville.
Four issues of a four-part miniseries — World of Metropolis.
Eight issues of a thirteen-part miniseries — Millennium #1-8. This is an eight-week crossover miniseries compilation. The miniseries issues appeared in the regular Superman titles and in other titles, such as Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern, Batman, etc. [In the related Superman titles, it only appeared in Superman #13 & #14 (Week 2 & 6, respectively), The Adventures of Superman #436 & #437 (Week 3 & 7, respectively), and Action Comics #596 & #597 (Week 4 & 8, respectively).]
Four issues of a four-issue miniseries — The Weird #1-4.

¹ The issues in square brackets are miniseries made up of regular titles that are mentioned and counted in the first part of the compilation summary of the year.
[A three-part miniseries — Supergirl Saga. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #21-22, and The Adventures of Superman #444.]

Three 80-page issues of an eight-part miniseries — Invasion #1-3. The miniseries issues appeared in the regular Superman titles and in other titles, such as Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern, Batman, etc. [The other five issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #26-27, The Adventures of Superman #449-450, and the special issue Daily Plant Special Invasion Edition.]

One graphic novel — The Earth Stealers.

There is, then, a total of 60 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1989

Thirty regular issues — twelve Superman v.2 #27-38, twelve The Adventures of Superman #450-461, and six Action Comics #643-648.

One stand-alone Action Comics Annual #2.

As it has been mentioned in the 1988 list, the final issue featuring Superman in Action Comics was #600 (May 1988). The title returned to Action Comics featuring Superman with issue #643 (July 1989).

[A fourteen-part miniseries — Superman in Space #1-14. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #28-33, The Adventures of Superman #451-456, Action Comics Annual #2, and Action Comics #643.]

[A twelve-part miniseries — Day of the Krypton Man #1-12. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: The Adventures of Superman #450-461, 464-466, Action Comics #646, 651-653, and Superman v.2 #41-43.]

[A three-part miniseries — Brainiac #1-3. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Action Comics #647-649.]

There is, then, a total of 31 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1990


One stand-alone The Adventures of Superman Annual #2.

[A three-part miniseries — Dark Knight over Metropolis #1-3. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #44, The Adventures of Superman #467, and Action Comics #654.]

[A four-part miniseries — Soul Search #1-4. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Action Comics #656-657, Superman v.2 #47, and The Adventures of Superman #470.]

[A seven-part miniseries — Crisis of the Crimson Kryptonite #1-7. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #49-50, The Adventures of Superman #472-473, and Action Comics #659-660.] To complete the miniseries, one issue of Starman v.1 #28.

There is, then, a total of 37 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1991

Forty-two regular issues — twelve Superman v.2 #51-62, twelve The Adventures of Superman #474-485, twelve Action Comics #661-672, and six Superman: The Man of Steel #1-6.

To complete some of Superman’s stories, one issue of Flash v.2 #53.

Three stand-alone annuals, one of each regular series — Superman Annual v.2 #3, Action Comics Annual #3, and The Adventures of Superman Annual #3.
An eight-part miniseries —Time and Time Again #1-8. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: The Adventures of Superman #476-478, Action Comics #663-665, and Superman v.2 #54-55.

A three-part miniseries —Red Glass Trilogy #1-3. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #59, The Adventures of Superman #479, and Action Comics #666.

A nineteen-part miniseries —Revenge of the Krypton Man #1-19. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman: The Man of Steel #1-5, Superman v.2 #57-61, The Adventures of Superman #480-483, Action Comics #667-670, and Flash v.2 #53.

A six-part miniseries —Blackout #1-6. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: The Adventures of Superman #484-485, Action Comics #671-672, Superman: The Man of Steel #6, Superman v.2 #62.

One graphic novel Superman for Earth.

There is, then, a total of 47 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1992
Forty-eight regular issues —twelve Superman v.2 #63-74, twelve The Adventures of Superman #486-497, twelve Action Comics #673-684, and twelve Superman: The Man of Steel #7-18.

To complete some of Superman’s stories, five issues of the following comic books: one Justice League Spectacular #1, three Justice League of America #61-62, #69, and one Justice Society of America #1.

Four stand-alone annuals, one of each regular series —Superman Annual v.2 #4, Superman in Action Comics Annual #4, The Adventures of Superman Annual #4, and Superman: The Man of Steel Annual #1.

One issue of Superman Special #1.


A two-part miniseries —Crisis at Hand #1-2. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman: The Man of Steel #16, and Superman v.2 #72.

An eight-part miniseries —The Death of Superman. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman: The Man of Steel #17-19; The Adventures of Superman #496-497; Action Comics #683-684 & Justice League of America #69.

There is, then, a total of 58 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1993
Forty regular issues —ten Superman v.2 #75-84, ten The Adventures of Superman #498-507, ten Action Comics #685-694, and ten Superman: The Man of Steel #19-28.

To complete some of Superman’s stories, two issues of the following comic books: one Justice League of America #70, and one of Green Lantern #46.

Four stand-alone annuals, one of each regular series —Superman Annual v.2 #5, Superman in Action Comics Annual #5, The Adventures of Superman Annual #5, and Superman: The Man of Steel Annual #2.
Three issues related to *The Death of Superman*: one *Legacy of Superman*, one *Supergirl* and *Team Luthor*, one with a news magazine format *Newstime: The Life and Death of the Man of Steel. World without a Superman.*

[Three issues of a three-part miniseries — *Death, Funeral, and Return of Superman* #1-3. The issues have the following titles: *Death of Superman* (compilation in book form of the eight-part miniseries): *Superman: The Man of Steel* #17-19; *The Adventures of Superman* #496-497; *Action Comics* #683-684 & *Justice League of America* #69), *Superman Funeral for a Friend (Superman: The Man of Steel* #20-21; *The Adventures of Superman* #498-500; *Supergirl* in *Action Comics* #685-686; *Superman* #76-77 & *Justice League of America* #70), and *The Return of Superman* (compilation in book form of the eight-part miniseries): *Superman: The Man of Steel* #22-26; *The Adventures of Superman* #500-505; *Action Comics* #687-691; *Superman* #78-82 & *Green Lantern* #46.]

One graphic novel *Superman: Speeding Bullets.*

One *Superman Gallery* (dedicated to the memory of Joe Shuster).

There is, then, a total of 51 compiled issues.

**Superman Comics 1994**

Forty-four regular issues — eleven *Superman* v.2 #85-95, eleven *The Adventures of Superman* #508-518, eleven *Action Comics* #695-705, and eleven *Superman: The Man of Steel* #29-39.

To complete some of Superman’s stories, seven issues of the following comic books: two *Spectre* #21-22, *Wonder Woman* #88, and four *Supergirl* #1-4.

Four stand-alone annuals, one of each regular series — *Annual Superman* v.2 #6, *Annual Superman in Action Comics* #6, *Annual The Adventures of Superman* #6, and *Annual Superman: The Man of Steel* #3.

Four issues of the *Zero Hour* crossover event: one *Superman* v.2 #0, one *The Adventures of Superman* #0, one *Action Comics* #0, and one *Superman: The Man of Steel* #0.

Three issues of a three-part miniseries — *Legends of the World’s Finest.*

Three issues of a three-part miniseries — *Superman Doomsday: Hunter/Prey.*

One issue related to *Superman Doomsday: Hunter/Prey* — *Superman Doomsday Is Coming.*


Three issues of the four-part miniseries — *Peer Pressure* #1-4. [The fourth issue appeared in the title *Action Comics* #0, leading to the miniseries *Dead Again.*]

[A twelve-part miniseries — *Dead Again* #0-11. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: *Action Comics* #0, 704-705, *Superman: The Man of Steel* #38-40, *Superman* v.2 #94-96, and *The Adventures of Superman* #517-519.]

Four issues of a four-part miniseries — *Guardians of Metropolis* #1-4.

Four issues of a four-part miniseries — *Metropolis Special Crimes Unit* #1-4.

One graphic novel *Superman under a Yellow Sun.*

There is, then, a total of 78 compiled issues.

**Superman Comics 1995**

Fifty regular issues — twelve *Superman* v.2 #96-107, twelve *The Adventures of Superman* #519-530, eleven *Action Comics* #706-716, twelve *Superman: The Man of Steel* #40-51, and three *Superman: The Man of Tomorrow* #1-3.
To complete some of Superman’s stories, two issues of the following comic books: one The End of the Outsiders #24, and one Steel #22.

Four stand-alone annuals, one of each regular series — Superman Annual v.2 #7, Superman in Action Comics Annual #7, The Adventures of Superman Annual #7, and Superman: The Man of Steel Annual #4.

Three issues of a three-part crossover miniseries — Superman versus Aliens.

[A nine-part miniseries — Death of Clark Kent #1-9. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #100-102, The Adventures of Superman #523-524 Action Comics #710-711, and Superman: The Man of Steel #45-46.]


[A six-part miniseries — Return of Luthor #1-6. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman: The Man of Tomorrow #1-3, 5, The Adventures of Superman #535, and Superman v.2 #113.]

One graphic novel Elseworlds: Superman Kal.

One Superman: The Man of Steel Gallery.

There is, then, a total of 61 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1996

Forty-nine regular issues — eleven Superman v.2 #108-118, eleven The Adventures of Superman #531-541, twelve Action Comics #717-728, twelve Superman: The Man of Steel #52-63, and three Superman: The Man of Tomorrow #4-6.

To complete some of Superman’s stories, two issues of the following comic books: one Legion of Superheroes v.4 #85, and one The Power of Shazam! #20.

Four stand-alone annuals, one of each regular series — Annual Superman v.2 #8, Annual Superman in Action Comics #8, The Annual Adventures of Superman #8, and Annual Superman: The Man of Steel #5.

One-shot Superman/Tyoman.

Four special issues: three Eradicator and one Alpha Centurion.


Four issues of a four-part miniseries — Elseworlds: Kingdom Come.

Four issues of a four-part miniseries — Elseworlds: Superman - Wonder Woman, Whom Gods Destroy.

Three issues of a three-part miniseries — Eradicator #1-3.

One issue (compilation in book form) of a five-part miniseries — Final Night #1-5. [The other four issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #117, The Adventures of Superman #540, Action Comics #727, and Superman: The Man of Steel #62.]

[A four-part miniseries — The Wedding Album #1-4. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: The Adventures of Superman #541, Action Comics #728, Superman: The Man of Steel #63.] One special issue Superman: The Wedding Album.

There is, then, a total of 76 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1997

Forty-nine regular issues — eleven Superman v.2 #119-130, twelve The Adventures of Superman #542-553, twelve Action Comics #729-740, eleven Superman: The Man of Steel #64-74, and three Superman: The Man of Tomorrow #7-9.
To complete some of Superman's stories, three issues of the following comic books: one Supergirl v.3 #6, Batman Chronicles #7, and Sovereign Seven #24.

Four stand-alone annuals, one of each regular series — Superman Annual v.2 #9, Superman in Action Comics Annual #9, The Adventures of Superman Annual #9, and Superman: The Man of Steel Annual #6.

One special issue DC Universe Holiday Bash!
Special one-shot Superman Plus Legion of Superheroes.
Four issues of a four-part miniseries — Genesis.
Two issues of a two-part miniseries — Elseworld’s Finest.
Three issues of a three-part crossover miniseries — The Superman-Madman Hullabaloo!
Five issues of a twelve-part miniseries — The Kents #1-5.
One crossover graphic novel Silver Surfer / Superman.
One graphic novel Superman’s Metropolis.
There is, then, a total of 74 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1998
Forty-one regular issues — ten Superman v.2 #131-140, ten The Adventures of Superman #554-563, nine Action Comics #741-749, ten Superman: The Man of Steel #75-84, and two Superman: The Man of Tomorrow #10-11.
To complete some of Superman’s stories, seven issues of the following comic books: one Aquaman #43, one Challengers of the Unknown #15, one Teen Titans #19, one Supergirl v.3 #20, one Steel # 50, one Green Arrow #137, and one Jack Kirby’s Fourth World #20.
One stand-alone annual of Superman Annual v.2 #10.
Nine issues of the One Million crossover event: DC One Million #1-4, Superman One Million, The Adventures of Superman One Million, Action Comics One Million, Superman: The Man of Steel One Million, and Superman: The Man of Tomorrow One Million.
Three special one-shots: Superman Red Superman Blue, Superman Forever, and Superman Save The Planet.
Three special issues: Girlfrenzy! Superman Lois Lane, New Year’s Evil: Mr. Mxyzptlk, and New Year’s Evil: Gog.
Four special issues of Legends of the DC Universe — Legends of the DC Universe: Superman #1-3, and Legends of the DC Universe: Robin and Superman.
Two special issues of Secret Files and Origins — Secret Files and Origins: Superman #1, and Secret Files and Origins: Superman Villains #1.
Four issues of a four-part miniseries — Superman for All Seasons.
Three issues of a three-part miniseries — Superman The Dark Side.
Three issues of three-part miniseries (compilation) — Superman The Doomsday Wars.
Seven last issues of a twelve-part miniseries — The Kents #6-12.
One issue of a two-part miniseries — Superman: Silver Banshee #1.
[A fifty-six-part miniseries —Superman Blue and Red #1-56. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles (to complete the miniseries, some issues are from the previous year): Superman: The Man of Steel #67-79, Superman v.2 #123-135, The Adventures of Superman #545-557, Action Comics #732-744, Superman: The Man of Tomorrow #9-10, Superman Red Superman Blue, and Superman Forever.]

[A five-part miniseries —Dominus #1-5. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #138-139, The Adventures of Superman #561, Action Comics #748, and Superman: The Man of Steel #83.]

[A four-part miniseries —Kandor #1-4. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Action Comics #749, Superman: The Man of Steel #84, Superman v.2 #140, and The Adventures of Superman #563.]

Two graphic novels —Elseworlds: Superman Distant Fires, and Elseworlds: Superman War of the Worlds.

There is, then, a total of 91 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 1999

Forty-seven regular issues —eleven Superman v.2 #141-151, ten The Adventures of Superman #564-573, eleven Action Comics #750-760, and eleven Superman: The Man of Steel #85-95, and four Superman: The Man of Tomorrow #12-15.

To complete some of Superman’s stories, eleven issues of the following comic books: two Wonder Woman Trinity (two parts) v.2 #140-141, one Hitman #34, one Superman versus de Power of Shazam #46, one Aquaman v.3 #53, one Impulse #47, one Nightwing #30, one Robin #63, one The Titans #2, one Batman #566, and one Batman: Shadow of the Bat #92.

Three special issues of Legends of the DC Universe —Legends of the DC Universe: Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen #14, and Legends of the DC Universe: Superman #22-23.

Two special issues Superman 80-Page Giant #1-2 (incomplete).

One special issue Superman of America.

One special one-shot: Team Superman.

Special issue Secret Files and Origins: Superman #2.

One special crossover issue Superman/Fantastic Four: The Infinite Destruction.

One stand-alone Superman Annual v.2 #11.

One last issue of a two-part miniseries —Superman: Silver Banshee #2.

Four issues of Elseworld’s miniseries —Superman & Batman Generations 1: An Imaginary Tale #1-4.

Ten issues of a ten-part miniseries —Batman & Superman: World’s Finest #1-10.

Two special issues of Elseworlds two-part miniseries —The Kingdom #1-2 (sequels to Kingdom Come).

Four issues of a four-part miniseries —Superman’s Nemesis Lex Luthor #1-4

Four issues of four-part miniseries —A. Bizarro #1-4.

One issue of a four-part crossover miniseries —Superman versus the Terminator: Death to the Future #1.

Five issues of a five-part crossover miniseries —Day of Judgement #1-5.

[A sixteen-part miniseries —King of the World #1-16. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman: The Man of Steel #86-89, Superman v.2 #142-144, The Adventures of Superman #565-567, Action Comics #752-754, Superman: The Man of Tomorrow #13, a special issue Superman of America, and another special issue Superman King of the World.]
[A four-part miniseries —One Man Justice League of America #1-4. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v2 #147, The Adventures of Superman #570, Action Comics #757, and Superman: The Man of Steel #92.]

[A four-part miniseries —Strange Visitor #1-4. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v2 #149, The Adventures of Superman #572, Action Comics #759, and Superman: The Man of Steel #94.]

Three graphic novels —Superman The Odyssey, Superman The Last God of Krypton, and Superman & Savage Dragon: Metropolis.

Four graphic novels of Elseworlds: Superman: A Nation Divided, The Superman Monster, Superman Inc., and Son of Superman.

One special graphic novel —Superman Peace on Earth (trying to solve humankind’s hunger).

One crossover graphic novel The Incredible Hulk versus Superman.

There is, then, a total of 108 compiled issues.

**Superman Comics 2000**

Forty-eight regular issues —twelve Superman v2 #152-163, twelve The Adventures of Superman #574-585, twelve Action Comics #761-772, and twelve Superman: The Man of Steel #96-107.

Two special issues Superman for the Animals, and Superman Jr. & Superboy Jr.: Sins of Youth.

One stand-alone annual of Superman Annual v2 #12.


Four special issues of Silver Age —Silver Age #1, Silver Age: Justice League of America #1, Silver Age: Secret Files and Origins #1, and Silver Age: 80-page Giant #1.

One special issue Superman: Emperor Joker.

One special 80-page giant issue Superman: I, Witness #3.

Special one-shot Superman: Blood of My Ancestors.

Six issues of a six-part miniseries —Supermen of America #1-6.

Three special crossover issues Superman / Gen 13 #1-3.

Four special issues of 1,000,000 event: The Adventures of Superman #1,000,000, Superman: The Man of Steel #1,000,000, Superman v2 #1,000,000, and Superman: The Man of Tomorrow #1,000,000.

[A five-part miniseries —Y2K #1-5. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman Y2K #1, Superman v2 #154, The Adventures of Superman #576, Superman: The Man of Steel #98, and Action Comics #763.]

[A nine-part miniseries —Critical Condition #1-9. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v2 #156-158, Superman: The Man of Steel #100-102, Action Comics #766-767, and The Adventures of Superman #580.]


[A six-part miniseries —Luthor’s Election #1-6. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: The Adventures of Superman #581-586.]

Four graphic novels: Superman End of the Century, Realworlds: Justice League of America, Realworlds: Superman, and Mann and Superman.

Four issues of a crossover four-part miniseries —Superman and Bugs Bunny #1-4.
Three issues of a crossover three-part miniseries —Superman versus Predator.

Three last issues of a four-part crossover miniseries —Superman versus the Terminator: Death to the Future #2-4.

Two issues of a two-part miniseries —Elseworlds: Superman Last Son of Earth.

There is, then, a total of 89 compiled issues.

**Superman Comics 2001**


To complete some of Superman’s stories, seven issues of the following comic books: one Detective Comics #756, two Wonder Woman v.2 #170-173, one Superboy v.3 #89-91, one Young Justice #35-36, one Batman #593-594, Impulse #77, and three Supergirl #59-61.

Eight special issues of Our Worlds at War —World’s Finest: Our Worlds at War, Green Lantern Our Worlds at War, Batman Our Worlds at War, Young Justice Our Worlds at War, Justice League of America Our Worlds at War, Nightwing Our Worlds at War, Justice Society of America Our Worlds at War, Flash Our Worlds at War, Harley Quinn Our Worlds at War, and Wonder Woman Our Worlds at War: One issue of Our Worlds at War Promotional Checklist.

Three special issues of Secret Files and Origins —Secret Files and Origins: Superman Our Worlds at War #1, Secret Files and Origins: President Luther #1, and Secret Files and Origins: Joker: Last Laugh #1.

Three special issues —Superman: Lex 2000 #1, Legends of the DC Universe: Superman Sole Survivor of Earth #39, and Just Imagine Stan Lee’s Superman.

Five issues of a six-part miniseries —Joker’s Last Laugh #1-5.

Two issues of miniseries —Elseworlds: Superboys Legion #1-2.

Three issues of a four-part Elseworlds miniseries —Superman & Batman Generations 2: An Imaginary Tale #1-3.

Three issues of a three-part miniseries (compilation) —Superman: Where Is Thy Sting?

[A five-part miniseries —Return to Krypton #1-5. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #166-167, The Adventures of Superman #589, Superman: The Man of Steel #111, and Action Comics #776.]

[A two-part miniseries —The Ring #1-2. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #168, and Detective Comics #756.]

[A four-part miniseries —Our Worlds at War 0 – Prologue to War #1-4. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #151-159.]

[An eleven-part miniseries —Our Worlds at War 1 – Prelude to War #1-11. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular and special titles: Superman v.2 #171, Green Lantern Our Worlds at War, The Adventures of Superman #593, Batman Our Worlds at War, Superman: The Man of Steel #115, Young Justice Our Worlds at War, Superboy v.3 #89, Action Comics #780, Supergirl v.3 #59, Wonder Woman v.2 #171, and Superman Our Worlds at War – Secret Files and Origins.]

[A thirteen-part miniseries —Our Worlds at War 2 – All-out War #1-13. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular and special titles: Superman v.2 #172, Justice League of America Our Worlds at War, Young Justice #35, The Adventures of Superman #594, Nightwing Our Worlds at War, Superman: The Man of Steel #116, Superboy v.3 #90, Action Comics #781, Justice Society of America Our Worlds at War, Batman #593, Supergirl v.3 #60, Wonder Woman v.2 #172, and Wonder Woman Our Worlds at War.]

[A thirteen-part miniseries —Our Worlds at War 3 – Casualties of War #1-13. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular and special titles: Superman v.2 #173, Young Justice #36, The Adventures of Superman #595, Flash Our Worlds at War, Impulse #77, Superman: The Man of Steel #117, Harley Quinn Our Worlds at War, Superboy v.3 #91, Action Comics #782, and Secret Files and Origins.]

Three issues of a crossover three-part miniseries —Superman versus Predator.

Three last issues of a four-part crossover miniseries —Superman versus the Terminator: Death to the Future #2-4.

Two issues of a two-part miniseries —Elseworlds: Superman Last Son of Earth.

There is, then, a total of 89 compiled issues.

**Superman Comics 2001**


To complete some of Superman’s stories, seven issues of the following comic books: one Detective Comics #756, two Wonder Woman v.2 #170-173, one Superboy v.3 #89-91, one Young Justice #35-36, one Batman #593-594, Impulse #77, and three Supergirl #59-61.

Eight special issues of Our Worlds at War —World’s Finest: Our Worlds at War, Green Lantern Our Worlds at War, Batman Our Worlds at War, Young Justice Our Worlds at War, Justice League of America Our Worlds at War, Nightwing Our Worlds at War, Justice Society of America Our Worlds at War, Flash Our Worlds at War, Harley Quinn Our Worlds at War, and Wonder Woman Our Worlds at War: One issue of Our Worlds at War Promotional Checklist.

Three special issues of Secret Files and Origins —Secret Files and Origins: Superman Our Worlds at War #1, Secret Files and Origins: President Luther #1, and Secret Files and Origins: Joker: Last Laugh #1.

Three special issues —Superman: Lex 2000 #1, Legends of the DC Universe: Superman Sole Survivor of Earth #39, and Just Imagine Stan Lee’s Superman.

Five issues of a six-part miniseries —Joker’s Last Laugh #1-5.

Two issues of miniseries —Elseworlds: Superboys Legion #1-2.

Three issues of a four-part Elseworlds miniseries —Superman & Batman Generations 2: An Imaginary Tale #1-3.

Three issues of a three-part miniseries (compilation) —Superman: Where Is Thy Sting?

[A five-part miniseries —Return to Krypton #1-5. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #166-167, The Adventures of Superman #589, Superman: The Man of Steel #111, and Action Comics #776.]

[A two-part miniseries —The Ring #1-2. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #168, and Detective Comics #756.]

[A four-part miniseries —Our Worlds at War 0 – Prologue to War #1-4. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #151-159.]

[An eleven-part miniseries —Our Worlds at War 1 – Prelude to War #1-11. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular and special titles: Superman v.2 #171, Green Lantern Our Worlds at War, The Adventures of Superman #593, Batman Our Worlds at War, Superman: The Man of Steel #115, Young Justice Our Worlds at War, Superboy v.3 #89, Action Comics #780, Supergirl v.3 #59, Wonder Woman v.2 #171, and Superman Our Worlds at War – Secret Files and Origins.]

[A thirteen-part miniseries —Our Worlds at War 2 – All-out War #1-13. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular and special titles: Superman v.2 #172, Justice League of America Our Worlds at War, Young Justice #35, The Adventures of Superman #594, Nightwing Our Worlds at War, Superman: The Man of Steel #116, Superboy v.3 #90, Action Comics #781, Justice Society of America Our Worlds at War, Batman #593, Supergirl v.3 #60, Wonder Woman v.2 #172, and Wonder Woman Our Worlds at War.]

[A thirteen-part miniseries —Our Worlds at War 3 – Casualties of War #1-13. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular and special titles: Superman v.2 #173, Young Justice #36, The Adventures of Superman #595, Flash Our Worlds at War, Impulse #77, Superman: The Man of Steel #117, Harley Quinn Our Worlds at War, Superboy v.3 #91, Action Comics #782, and Secret Files and Origins.
One graphic novel Elseworlds: Superman and Batman: World’s Funnest.

One graphic novel (prize-winner anthology) Bizarro Comics #1.

There is, then, a total of 84 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 2002


To complete some of Superman's stories, three issues of the following comic books: one Batman: Gotham Knights #27, one Green Lantern v.3 #149, and one Supergirl v.3 #75.


Two special issues of DC First—DC First: Superman / Lobo #1, and DC First: Superman / The Flash #1.


One issue of a six-part miniseries—Joker's Last Laugh #6.

Three issues of a crossover three-part miniseries—Superman / Tarzan: Sons of the Jungle #1-3.

Three issues of a crossover four-part miniseries—Superman versus Aliens II: God War #1-3.

[A three-part miniseries—Gangs of Metropolis #1-3. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman: The Man of Steel #123-125.]

[A three-part miniseries—Mirror Mirror #1-3. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: The Adventures of Superman #603-605.]

[A two-part miniseries—Pantheon #1-3. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman: The Man of Steel #126-127.]

[An eight-part miniseries—Ending Battle #1-8. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #186-187, Superman: The Man of Steel #130-131, Action Comics #795-796.]

One graphic novel Superman & Savage Dragon: Chicago.

There is, then, a total of 63 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 2003

Thirty-eight regular issues—eleven Superman v.2 #188-198, twelve The Adventures of Superman #610-621, twelve Action Comics 797-808, three Superman: The Man of Steel #132-134.

Three issues of Superman-Batman #1-3.

Twelve issues of a twelve-part miniseries—Superman Birthright #1-12.

Three issues of a three-part miniseries (compilation) —Batman - Superman – Wonder Woman: Trinity #1-3.

Three issues of an Elseworlds three-issue miniseries—Superman Red Son #1-3.

Twelve issues of an Elseworlds twelve-part miniseries (compilation) —Superman Metropolis #1-12.

Four issues of a four-part miniseries—Day of Doom #1-4. The issues have the following titles: Doomsday, Superman’s Death, Funeral for a Friend, and World without a Superman.

Two issues of two-part miniseries—The Kansas Sighting #1-2.
[A four-part miniseries —Lost #1-4. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #189, The Adventures of Superman #611, Superman: The Man of Steel #133, and Action Comics #798.]

[A thirteen-part miniseries —Superman’s Daughter #1-13. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #190-201, and Action Comics #808.]

[A five-part miniseries —Fall of Zod #1-5. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Action Comics #801-805.]

One Elseworlds graphic novel —Superman Blood of My Ancestors.

One graphic novel —Superman President Lex.

There is, then, a total of 78 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 2004

Thirty-six regular issues —twelve Superman v.2 #199-210, twelve The Adventures of Superman #622-633, and twelve Action Comics #809-820.

Twelve issues of Superman-Batman #4-15.

Four issues of a four-part miniseries —Secret Identity #1-4.

[A six-part miniseries —Godfall #1-6. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Action Comics #812-813, The Adventures of Superman #625-626, Superman v.2 #202-203.]

[A twelve-part miniseries —For Tomorrow #1-12. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Superman v.2 #204-215.]

[A twenty-one-part miniseries —Ruin Saga #1-21. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: The Adventures of Superman #625-648.]

[A thirteen-part miniseries —For Tomorrow #1-13. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: Action Comics #812-825.]

[A six-part miniseries —Battery #1-6. The miniseries issues appeared in the following regular titles: The Adventures of Superman #627-632.]

One issue of The DC Comics Encyclopedia: The Definitive Guide to the Characters of the DC Universe.

One graphic novel —Superman True Brit.

There is, then, a total of 54 compiled issues.

Superman Comics 2005

Seven issues of a seven-part miniseries (compilation) —Infinite Crisis.

There is, then, a total of 7 compiled issues.


### APPENDIX 4: Compilation Table of Regular Comics and Selection of Other Titles

A selection of miniseries and other related special issues are listed on the first column, and the other five columns show a total compilation of Superman regular comic books from the DC continuity bearing the titles of the issues at the top. This compilation does not include stand-alone annuals, one-shots, graphic novels, crossover events, Elseworlds, or other publications (for the complete title compilation, see Appendix 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Selected miniseries &amp; other related special issues</th>
<th>Action Comics: Superman (v.2)</th>
<th>The Adventures of Superman: The Man of Steel</th>
<th>Superman: The Man of Steel</th>
<th>Superman: The Man of Tomorrow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Crisis of Infinite Earths (12)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>The Man of Steel (6)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>The World of Krypton (6)</td>
<td>#584-595 (12)</td>
<td>#1-12 (12)</td>
<td>#124-135 (12)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>The World of Smallville (4)</td>
<td>#596-600 (9)</td>
<td>#13-16 (14)</td>
<td>#436-449 (14)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>#643-648 (10)</td>
<td>#27-38 (12)</td>
<td>#50-61 (12)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>#699-700 (12)</td>
<td>#39-50 (12)</td>
<td>#462-473 (12)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>#747-752 (12)</td>
<td>#51-62 (12)</td>
<td>#474-485 (12)</td>
<td>#1-6 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Superman Special #1 (1)</td>
<td>#73-74 (12)</td>
<td>#63-74 (12)</td>
<td>#486-497 (12)</td>
<td>#7-18 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>The Death of Superman (8)</td>
<td>#685-694 (10)</td>
<td>#75-84 (10)</td>
<td>#498-507 (10)</td>
<td>#19-28 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Superman under a Yellow Sun (1)</td>
<td>#695-705 (11)</td>
<td>#65-75 (11)</td>
<td>#508-518 (11)</td>
<td>#29-39 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>#796-716 (11)</td>
<td>#96-107 (12)</td>
<td>#519-530 (12)</td>
<td>#60-51 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>The Wedding Album (1)</td>
<td>#717-728 (12)</td>
<td>#108-118 (11)</td>
<td>#531-541 (11)</td>
<td>#52-63 (12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>#729-740 (12)</td>
<td>#119-120 (12)</td>
<td>#542-553 (12)</td>
<td>#64-74 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Superman for All Seasons (4)</td>
<td>#741-749 (9)</td>
<td>#131-140 (10)</td>
<td>#554-563 (10)</td>
<td>#75-84 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Secret Files and Origins: Superman #2 (1)</td>
<td>#750-760 (11)</td>
<td>#141-151 (11)</td>
<td>#564-573 (10)</td>
<td>#85-95 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Secret Files and Origins: Guide to the DC Universe 2000 #1 (1)</td>
<td>#761-772 (12)</td>
<td>#152-163 (12)</td>
<td>#574-585 (12)</td>
<td>#596-617 (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Elseworlds is a title or imprint of "imaginary" stories taking place in alternative realities outside the main DC Universe continuity, for instance, 1995 Superman: New (re-reprint setting) or 2000 Superman: Red Son (comixx setting).
2. Superman: The Man of Steel has a similar title to the 1986 miniseries which re-defined Superman's origins and history, but this was a regular comic book appearing between 1993 and 2000 (Issues #1-156).
3. Twelve-part miniseries which brought about the end of the DC universe and re-launched it with revamped characters and settings.
4. Six part miniseries which re-defined Superman's origin and history.
5. The final issue featuring Superman in Action Comics was #600 (May 1988). From #601 the title changes to Action Comics Weekly with a 2-page Superman adventure continued in each week's issue through #643 with art by Curt Swan and story by Roger Stern. The rest of the contents of each issue had stories with other characters. The last weekly issue is #642, and the title returned to Action Comics featuring Superman with issue #643 (July 1989).
6. As mentioned above, the final issue featuring Superman in Action Comics was #600 (May 1988). The title returned to Action Comics featuring Superman with issue #643 (July 1989).
7. The Death of Superman appeared as a compilation of the following 1992 comic books: Superman: The Man of Steel 17, 18, 19; Adventures of Superman 496, 497; Action Comics 685, 684 B. Justice League of America 69.
8. This issue initiates the format of a news magazine such as Time and appropriately the chosen name was Newsweek. The main feature of this fictional magazine is the subtitle of the cover: "The Life and Death of the Man of Steel: World without a Superman."
9. Superman under a Yellow Sun is a graphic novel that includes another fictional graphic novel written by Clark Kent.
10. Superman Secret Files and Origins is organized in part as a comic book, in part as a magazine and also, as its title suggests, as films on many characters of the Superman cast.
11. The title was discontinued in Fall 1999.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>#773-784 (12)</th>
<th>#164-175 (12)</th>
<th>#586-597 (12)</th>
<th>#108-119 (12)</th>
<th>+++</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td></td>
<td>#797-808 (12)</td>
<td>#188-198 (11)</td>
<td>#610-621 (12)</td>
<td>#132-134 (8)</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td></td>
<td>#809-820 (12)</td>
<td>#199-210 (12)</td>
<td>#622-633 (12)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Infinite Crisis (?)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\[11\] The title was discontinued in March 2003.
## APPENDIX 5: Selection of Comics with Lois Lane on the Cover in Chronological Order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Story title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td><em>Man of Steel</em> miniseries #2</td>
<td>“The Story of the Century”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), and Dick Giordano (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td><em>Man of Steel</em> miniseries #4</td>
<td>“Enemy Mine...”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), and Dick Giordano (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987 May</td>
<td><em>Superman</em> v.2 #5</td>
<td>“The Mummy Strikes”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), and Karl Kesel (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987 June</td>
<td><em>Superman</em> v.2 #6</td>
<td>“The Last Five Hundred”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), and Karl Kesel (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987 Oct.</td>
<td><em>Superman</em> v.2 #10</td>
<td>“Menace of Metropolis!”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), and Karl Kesel (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987 Nov.</td>
<td><em>Superman</em> v.2 #11</td>
<td>“The Name Game”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), and Karl Kesel (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 Feb.</td>
<td><em>Action Comics: Superman</em> #597</td>
<td>“Lois Lane and Lana Lang in ‘Visitor’”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), Leonard Starr (i), and Keith Williams (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 Mar.</td>
<td><em>Action Comics: Superman</em> #598</td>
<td>“Checkmate!”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), Paul Kupperberg (w&amp;s), and Ty Templeton (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 Apr.</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of Superman</em> #439</td>
<td>“Tin Soldiers”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w), Jerry Ordway (w&amp;p), and John Beatty(i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 May</td>
<td><em>Action Comics: Superman</em> #600</td>
<td>Short story featuring LL without title in anniversary issue</td>
<td>John Byrne (w), Kurt Schaffenberger (p), Roger Stern (s), and Jerry Ordway (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 [n.d.]</td>
<td><em>Superman</em> v.2 #25</td>
<td>“Head Trips”</td>
<td>Roger Stern (w), Kerry Gammill (p), and John Beatty(i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 Aug.</td>
<td><em>The World of Metropolis</em> miniseries #1</td>
<td>“A Reporter’s Story”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w), Win Mortimer (p), Frank McLaughlin (i), and Dick Giordano (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 Sept.</td>
<td><em>The World of Metropolis</em> miniseries #2</td>
<td>“How I Spent My Summer Vacation”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w), Win Mortimer (p), Dick Giordano (i), and Sai Trapani (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 July</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of Superman</em> #456</td>
<td>“Redemption!”</td>
<td>Jerry Ordway (w), Dan Jurgens (w&amp;p), and Art Thibert (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 Aug.</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of Superman</em> #457</td>
<td>“Echoes”</td>
<td>George Pérez (w), Roger Stern (s), Dan Jurgens (p), and Ty Templeton (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 June</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of Superman</em> #467 Dark Knight over Metropolis* miniseries #2 out of 3 (not clear if it is Lois Lane on the cover, but they use similar brown hair)</td>
<td>“Dark Knight over Metropolis” Your two favorite heroes Superman and Batman in one adventure together</td>
<td>Dan Jurgens (w&amp;p), and Art Thibert (i)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Key to abbreviations: (w) = writer; (s) = scripter or script writer; (a) = artist; (p) = penciler; (i) =inker.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title/Source</th>
<th>Story/Arc/Event</th>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>Artists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990 July</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #655</td>
<td>&quot;Survival!&quot;</td>
<td>Roger Stern (w), Bob McLeod (a), and Brett Breeding (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 Feb.</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #662</td>
<td>&quot;Secrets in the Night&quot;</td>
<td>Roger Stern (w), and Bob McLeod (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 Sept.</td>
<td>Superman v.2 #59</td>
<td>&quot;Superman's Fiancée Lois Lane&quot;</td>
<td>Dan Jurgens (w&amp;p), and Brett Breeding (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 Dec.</td>
<td>Superman v.2 #62 Blackout miniseries #4 out of 5</td>
<td>&quot;Wedding Daze&quot;</td>
<td>Dan Jurgens (w&amp;p), and Brett Breeding (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman Annual #3 (Lois Lane's tombstone)</td>
<td>&quot;Beyond the Reach of Time&quot;</td>
<td>Louise Simonson (w), Bryan Hitch (p), James Sanders III (l), Joe Rubinstein (l), Ray McCarthy (l), Nick Napolitano (l), Jerry Acerno, and Dick Giordano (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 Jan.</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Steel #7</td>
<td>&quot;Stormy Weather&quot;</td>
<td>Louise Simonson (w), Jon Bogdanove (p), and Dennis Janke (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 Feb.</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Steel #8</td>
<td>&quot;Power Trip!&quot;</td>
<td>Louise Simonson (w), Kieron Dwyer (p), and Dennis Janke (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Superman v.2 annual</td>
<td>&quot;Enduring the Night!&quot;</td>
<td>Dan Vado (w), Scott Benefiel (p), and Trevor Scott (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 June</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #700</td>
<td>&quot;Swan Song&quot;</td>
<td>Roger Stern (w), Jackson Guice (a), Denis Rodier (a), Curt Swan (a), and Murphy Anderson (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 July</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #514</td>
<td>&quot;Dangerous Visions&quot;</td>
<td>Karl Kesel (w), Peter Krause (p), and Ron McCain (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 Sept.</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #514 Zero Hour cross-over miniseries</td>
<td>&quot;The Hero of Metropolis&quot;</td>
<td>Karl Kesel (w), Peter Krause (p), and Jackson Guice (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 Sept.</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #703 Zero Hour cross-over miniseries</td>
<td>&quot;Chronocide!&quot;</td>
<td>David Michelinie (w), Dan Jurgens (w), Jackson Guice (a), and Denis Rodier (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995 June</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #710</td>
<td>&quot;Men of Different Mettle&quot;</td>
<td>David Michelinie (w), Jackson Guice (a), and Denis Rodier (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995 July</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #525</td>
<td>&quot;Hard Decisions!&quot;</td>
<td>Karl Kesel (w), Stuart Immonen (p), and José Marzan, Jr. (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Apr.</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #720 (an engagement ring with the Superman symbol on the stone and the banner &quot;The engagement is off!&quot;, the banner of the next issue of the same title is &quot;The heat is on!&quot;)</td>
<td>&quot;Love Breaks&quot;</td>
<td>David Michelinie (w), Kieron Dwyer (a), and Denis Rodier (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 June</td>
<td>Superman v.2 #112</td>
<td>&quot;Superman's Ex-Girl Friend Lois Lane&quot;</td>
<td>Dan Jurgens (w), Ron Frenz (a), and Joe Rubinstein (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 June</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #535</td>
<td>&quot;Love and War&quot;</td>
<td>Karl Kesel (w), Stuart Immonen (p), and José Marzan, Jr. (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Story Title</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1996 Aug. 28</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #724</td>
<td>“Losing Brawl!”</td>
<td>David Michelinie (w), Tom Morgan (p), and Denis Rodier (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Aug. 29</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Steel #59</td>
<td>“Prey”</td>
<td>Louise Simonson (w), Jon Bogdanove (p), and Dennis Janke (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Sept. 30</td>
<td>Superman v2 #115 (a banner above the usual Superman title reads “Lois Leaves Superman”)</td>
<td>“Love Hurts”</td>
<td>Dan Jurgens (w), Ron Frenz (p), and Joe Rubinstein (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Dec. 31</td>
<td>Superman v2 #118</td>
<td>“From the Heart”</td>
<td>Dan Jurgens (w), Ron Frenz (a), and Joe Rubinstein (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Dec.</td>
<td>Superman: The Wedding Album special issue #1 (white cover with grey letters)</td>
<td>You are cordially invited to a major turning point in the life of Superman... “The Wedding Album”</td>
<td>Dan Jurgens (w&amp;a), Karl Kesel (w), David Michelinie (w), Louise Simonson (w), Roger Stern (w), John Byrne (a), Terry Austin (a), Kerry Garnimill (a), Murphy Anderson (a), Gil Kane (a), Bob McLeod (a), Stuart Immonen (a), José Marzan, Jr. (a), Paul Ryan (a), Brett Breeding (a), Jon Bogdanove (a), Dennis Janke (a), Kieron Dwyer (a), Doug Hazelwood (a), Tom Grummitt (a), Denis Rodier (a), Dick Giordano (a), Art Thibert (a), Jim Mooney (a), George Pérez (a), Curt Swan (a), Jackson Guice (a), Nick Cardy (a), Al Plastino (a), Barry Kitson (a), Ray McCarthy (a), Ron Frenz (a), Joe Rubinstein (a), and Jerry Ordway (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Dec. 32</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #541</td>
<td>“Happily Ever After”</td>
<td>Karl Kesel (w), Stuart Immonen (p), José Marzan, Jr. (l), and Joe Rubinstein (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Dec. 33</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #728</td>
<td>“I Killed Superman!”</td>
<td>David Michelinie (w), Tom Grummert (a), and Denis Rodier (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Dec. 34</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Steel #63</td>
<td>“Fireworks”</td>
<td>Louise Simonson (w), Jon Bogdanove (p), and Dennis Janke (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997 Winter 35</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Tomorrow #2</td>
<td>“Hero or Villain?”</td>
<td>Roger Stern (w), Paul Ryan (a) and Brett Breeding (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997 Apr. 36</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #545</td>
<td>“Power Crisis!”</td>
<td>Karl Kesel (w), Scot Eaton (p), and José Marzan, Jr. (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997 Nov. 37</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #739</td>
<td>“Party Trappings”</td>
<td>Stuart Immonen (w&amp;p), and José Marzan, Jr. (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>Story Arc</td>
<td>Credit Creditation</td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Superman: Man of Steel annual (Banners: “Pulp Heroes” and “Suspense Detective”)</td>
<td>“Pierced”</td>
<td>Louise Simonson (w), Tommy Lee Edwards (p), Dennis Janke (i), Robert Campanella (i), and Shawn C. Martinbrough (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998 Jun</td>
<td>Girlfrenzy! Superman: Lois Lane #1 (Banner: “Girlfrenzy!”)</td>
<td>“DC Comics Presents Lois Lane”</td>
<td>Barbara Kesel (w), Amanda Conner (p), and Jimmy Palmiotti (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998 Sept.</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #748</td>
<td>“Chasing the Ancient of Days”</td>
<td>Stuart Immonen (w&amp;p), and José Marzan, Jr. (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998 Oct.</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #562</td>
<td>“End of an Era”</td>
<td>Karl Kesel (w), Jerry Ordway (s), Tom Grummett (p), and Denis Rodier (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998 Nov.</td>
<td>Superman One Million</td>
<td>“DC One Million”</td>
<td>D. Agnett (w), A. Lanning (w), N. Breymoog (p), and S. Koblish (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 Jan.</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Steel and Jimmy Olsen #85</td>
<td>“Creative Differences”</td>
<td>Jon Bodganove (w&amp;p), and Dennis Janke (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 May</td>
<td>Superman v.2 #144</td>
<td>“Up in Smoke”</td>
<td>Dan Jurgens (w), Steve Epting (p), and Joe Rubinstein (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 May</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #567</td>
<td>“The Pathway to Oblivion”</td>
<td>Karl Kesel (w), Jerry Ordway (s), Paul Ryan (p), and Denis Rodier (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 June</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Steel #89</td>
<td>“Prelude to a Coronation”</td>
<td>Mark Schultz (w), Doug Mahnke (p), and Tom Nguyen (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 Fall</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Tomorrow #15</td>
<td>“Heart of Hell”</td>
<td>J.M. DeMatteis (w), Ryan Sook (a), and Jeff Gan (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 Dec.</td>
<td>Superman v.2 #151</td>
<td>“We’re Back!”</td>
<td>Jeph Loeb (w), Mike McKone (p), and Mario Alquiza (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 Dec.</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #573</td>
<td>“Higher Ground”</td>
<td>Stuart Immonen (w), Mark Millar (s), Steve Epting (p), and Denis Rodier (i)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Superman v.2 annual #11</td>
<td>“The Apes of Wrath”</td>
<td>Dan Abnett (w), Andy Lanning (w), Joe Phillips (p), Rich Faber (i), and Rob Stull (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 May</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman with Lois Lane #578</td>
<td>“Getting Away from it All”</td>
<td>J.M. DeMatteis (w), Pablo Raimondi (p), José Marzan, Jr. (i)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2000 June</td>
<td>Superman vs. Lois Lane v.2 #157</td>
<td>“Superman’s Enemy Lois”</td>
<td>Jeph Loeb (w), Ed McGuinness (p), and Cam Smith (i)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2000 June</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #766 (only a half-buried female hand, but the banner reads &quot;The search for Lois ends!!!&quot;)</td>
<td>“D.O.A.” [Death on arrival]</td>
<td>Joe Kelly (w), Cary Nord (p), and Jason Brumgartner (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 Dec.</td>
<td>Superman in Action Comics #772</td>
<td>“Kith and Kin, Part One”</td>
<td>Joe Kelly (w), Kano (p), and Mario Alquiza (i)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Superman vs. Predator miniseries #3 of 3</td>
<td>Ditto</td>
<td>David Michelinie (w), and Alex Maleev (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Storyline</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2001 Feb.</td>
<td>Superman v.2 #165</td>
<td>&quot;Help!&quot;</td>
<td>Jeph Loeb (w), Ed McGuinness (p), and Cam Smith (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 Feb.</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Steel #109</td>
<td>&quot;World without Superman&quot;</td>
<td>Mark Schultz (w), Duncan Rouleau (p), Jaime Mendoza (i), and Marlo Alguina (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 Apr.</td>
<td>Superman v.2 #167 Return to Krypton miniseries #1 of 5</td>
<td>&quot;Return to Krypton, Part One: Sliding Home&quot;</td>
<td>Jeph Loeb (w), Ed McGuinness (p), and Cam Smith (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 Apr.</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Steel #111 Return to Krypton miniseries #3 of 5</td>
<td>&quot;The Most Dangerous Kryptonian Game&quot;</td>
<td>Mark Schultz (w), Doug Mahnke (p), and Tom Nguyen (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 May</td>
<td>Superman v.2 #168</td>
<td>Superman and Batman in the Same World's Finest Adventure! &quot;With This Ring...&quot;</td>
<td>Jeph Loeb (w), Ed McGuinness (p), and Cam Smith (l)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2001 June</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Steel #113 Infestation miniseries #3 of 4</td>
<td>&quot;Infestation: Chapter Three&quot;</td>
<td>Marv Wolfman (w), Paco Medina (p), and Walden Wong (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 Aug.</td>
<td>Superman: The Man of Steel #127 Pantheon miniseries #2 of 3 (Banner: &quot;Lois Lane: Goddess of Retribution&quot;)</td>
<td>&quot;Scenes from a Marriage between Heaven and Earth&quot;</td>
<td>Mark Schultz (w), Yvel Guichet (p), and Walden Wong (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 Dec.</td>
<td>Superman: Action Comics #796 Ending Battle miniseries #8 of 8</td>
<td>&quot;The Last Supervillain&quot;</td>
<td>Joe Kelly (w), Duncan Rouleau (p), and Marlo Alguina (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 Jan.</td>
<td>Superman #188</td>
<td>&quot;Kicking the Dog&quot;</td>
<td>Chuck Austen (w), Tom Derenick (p), and Raymund Mendoza (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 Oct.</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #619</td>
<td>&quot;Prestidigitation Nation&quot;</td>
<td>Joe Casey (w), and Derek Aucin (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Superman: Birthright miniseries #4 of 12</td>
<td>&quot;Superman: Birthright, Part Four of Twelve&quot;</td>
<td>Mark Waid (w), Leinil Francis Yu (p), and Gerry Alanguilan (l)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Superman: Birthright miniseries #5 of 12</td>
<td>&quot;Birthright&quot;</td>
<td>Mark Waid (w), Leinil Francis Yu (p), and Gerry Alanguilan (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 Jan.</td>
<td>Superman: Action Comics #809 (Banner: &quot;The Creeping Death' A Clark Kent Mystery&quot;)</td>
<td>&quot;Creeping Death&quot;</td>
<td>Joe Kelly (w), Pascual Ferry (p), Cam Smith (l), and Andy Owens (l)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2004 Apr.</td>
<td>Superman v.2 #202 Godfall miniseries #3 of 6</td>
<td>&quot;Godfall, Part Three: Goddess&quot;</td>
<td>Jow Kelly (w), Michael Turner (w), Talent Caldwell (p), and Jason Gorder (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 June</td>
<td>The Adventures of Superman #627 &quot;Girls, Guns &amp; Replicants&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Battery, Part One&quot;</td>
<td>Greg Rucka (w), Matthew Clark (p), and Nelson (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Story Arc</td>
<td>Authors Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Oct. 64</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of Superman</em> #631</td>
<td>“Battery, Part Five”</td>
<td>Greg Rucka (w), Matthew Clark (p), Renato Guedes (p), and Andy Lanning (l)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Nov. 65</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of Superman</em> #632</td>
<td>“Time Elapsed”</td>
<td>Greg Rucka (w), Paul Pelletier (p), and Rick Magvar (l)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Superman: Secret Identity</em> mini-series #2 of 4</td>
<td>Ditto</td>
<td>Kurt Busiek (w), and Stuart Immonen (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Superman: Secret Identity</em> mini-series #4 of 4</td>
<td>Ditto</td>
<td>Kurt Busiek (w), and Stuart Immonen (a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand total of compiled regular titles 1985-2005 (see Appendices 3 and 4): 763 issues.

Grand total of regular titles with Lois Lane on the cover: 65 issues.

Percentage of covers of regular titles depicting Lois Lane: 8.52%.

Grand total of compiled issues 1985-2005 (see Appendix 3): 1,220 issues.

Grand total of all compiled titles with Lois Lane on the cover: 81 issues.

Percentage of covers of all compiled titles depicting Lois Lane: 6.64%.
APPENDIX 6
APPENDIX 6: Selected Comics for Analysis in Chronological Order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Story title</th>
<th>Author(s)^1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td><em>Man of Steel</em> miniseries #2 (Banner: “Introducing Lois Lane!”)</td>
<td>“The Story of the Century”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), and Dick Giordano (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987 Nov.</td>
<td><em>Superman</em> #2 #11</td>
<td>“The Name Game”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), and Karl Kesel (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 Feb.</td>
<td><em>Action Comics: Superman</em> #597</td>
<td>“Lois Lane and Lana Lang in ‘Visitor’”</td>
<td>John Byrne (w&amp;p), Leonard Starr (i), and Keith Williams (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 Aug.</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of Superman</em> #457</td>
<td>“Echoes”</td>
<td>George Pérez (w), Roger Stern (s), Dan Jurgens (p), and Ty Templeton (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 July</td>
<td><em>Superman in Action Comics</em> #655</td>
<td>“Survival!”</td>
<td>Roger Stern (w), Bob McLeod (a), and Brett Breeding (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 Feb.</td>
<td><em>Superman in Action Comics</em> #662</td>
<td>“Secrets in the Night”</td>
<td>Roger Stern (w), and Bob McLeod (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 Jan.</td>
<td><em>Superman: The Man of Steel</em> #7</td>
<td>“Stormy Weather”</td>
<td>Louise Simonson (w), Jon Bogdanove (p), and Dennis Janke (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 June</td>
<td><em>Superman in Action Comics</em> #700</td>
<td>“Swan Song”</td>
<td>Roger Stern (w), Jackson Guice (a), Denis Rodier (a), Curt Swan (a), and Murphy Anderson (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995 July</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of Superman</em> #525</td>
<td>“Hard Decisions!”</td>
<td>Karl Kesel (w), Stuart Immonen (p), and José Marzan, Jr. (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Dec.</td>
<td><em>Superman: The Wedding Album</em> special issue #1 (white cover with grey letters)</td>
<td>You are cordially invited to a major turning point in the life of Superman... “The Wedding Album”</td>
<td>Dan Jurgens (w&amp;a), Karl Kesel (w), David Michelinie (w), Louise Simonson (w), Roger Stern (w), John Byrne (a), Terry Austin (a), Kerry Gammill (a), Murphy Anderson (a), Gil Kane (a), Bob McLeod (a), Stuart Immonen (a), José Marzan, Jr. (a), Paul Ryan (a), Brett Breeding (a), Jon Bogdanove (a), Dennis Janke (a), Kieron Dwyer (a), Doug Hazelwood (a), Tom Grummett (a), Denis Rodier (a), Dick Giordano (a), Art Thibert (a), Jim Mooney (a), George Pérez (a), Curt Swan (a), Jackson Guice (a), Nick Cardy (a), Al Plastino (a), Barry Kitson (a), Ray McCarthy (a), Ron Frenz (a), Joe Rubinstein (a), and Jerry Ordway (a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^1 Key to abbreviations: (w) = writer; (s) = scripter or script writer; (a) = artist; (p) = penciler; (i) =inker.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Issue/Title</th>
<th>Title/Story</th>
<th>Writer(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997 Apr.</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of Superman</em> #545</td>
<td>“Power Crisis!”</td>
<td>Karl Kesel (w), Scot Eaton (p), and José Martínez, Jr. (l)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998 June</td>
<td><em>Girlfriend / Superman: Lois Lane</em> #1 (Banner: “Girlfriend!”)</td>
<td>“DC Comics Presents Lois Lane”</td>
<td>Barbara Kesel (w), Amanda Conner (p), and Jimmy Palmiotti (l)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 Dec.</td>
<td><em>Superman</em> v.2 #151</td>
<td>“We’re Back!”</td>
<td>Jeph Loeb (w), Mike McKone (p), and Marlo Alquiza (l)</td>
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<td>2000 Dec.</td>
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<td>2001 Apr.</td>
<td><em>Superman</em> v.2 #167 <em>Return to Krypton</em> miniseries #1 of 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003 Oct.</td>
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<td>“Prestidigitation Nation”</td>
<td>Joe Casey (w), and Derec Aucoin (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 Oct.</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of Superman</em> #631</td>
<td>“Battery, Part Five”</td>
<td>Greg Rucka (w), Matthew Clark (p), Renato Guedes (p), and Andy Lanning (l)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 7: Outline of Basic Analytical Concepts

OUTLINE OF BASIC ANALYTICAL CONCEPTS

THE LANGUAGE OF COMICS

Semantics (Eco)

Visual content (Rodríguez Diéguez, Eco’s iconography)

Panofsky’s analytical system of images

- Pre-iconographical description: Primary or natural subject matter (Rodríguez Diéguez’s representation)
- Iconographical analysis: Secondary or conventional subject matter (Rodríguez Diéguez’s representation)
- Iconological interpretation: Intrinsic meaning of content (Rodríguez Diéguez’s expression)

Verbal content (Rodríguez Diéguez, Eco’s balloon and sound effects)

Shape or outline of balloons, and pointers or tails

- Straight line (Rodríguez Diéguez’s conventional shape): certainty in speech (Fresnault-Deruelle)
- Wavy line and bubbles: psychic emanation of thoughts (Fresnault-Deruelle), and electronic communication (European comics)
- Zigzag line: energy release of emotions (fear, anger, excitement, etc.) (Fresnault-Deruelle), and electronic communication (American comics)
- Iconic line (Rodríguez Diéguez): meaningful shapes (tears, stalactites, etc.)
- Zero-balloon (Fresnault-Deruelle) (absent line (Rodríguez Diéguez)): uncontrollable emotion (anxiety, fear, pain, etc.), and noise (avalanche, explosion, engine, etc.), i.e., sound effects or onomatopoeic resources
- Multiple balloons with one pointer (Rodríguez Diéguez’s complex conventional shape): sequence of speeches
- Multiple pointers with one balloon (Rodríguez Diéguez): several speakers with the same speech

Content of balloons (Rodríguez Diéguez)

- Types of verbal content: conventional lettering, special lettering (e.g., Gothic font showing tradition), paralinguistic elements (swearing or visual metaphors), onomatopoeias or sound effects
- Suprasegmental features of speech (Fresnault-Deruelle): larger typeface size, boldface, italics, etc., representing louder voice or different intonation
- Types of iconic content: panels, images, swearing, visual metaphors, etc.
- Mixed content: iconic and verbal content

Captions

- Characteristics of captions of diegetic spaces (Fresnault-Deruelle): voice-over narrator, i.e., indirect style, usually with no emphasis in typeface, and specifying spatial and temporal modalities (see “Montage syntax,” below)
- Functions (Rodríguez Diéguez): relay (adapting or changing the temporal rhythm) or anchoring (reducing the information uncertainty of certain images)
Panel or frame

Definitions of panels
- Meaningful unit (Gubern)
- Spatiotemporal unit, meaningful unit, montage unit, and unit of differentiating perception (Rodríguez Díaz)
- Attention unit (Cohn)
- Framing device (Eisenberg)

Containers of panels (Rodríguez Díaz)
- Line:
  - Types: straight line, curve, wave, etc.
  - Meaning: different lines for non-"real" time (flashbacks or flashforwards)
- Shape:
  - Types: rectangle, square, triangle, circle, etc.
  - Meaning: vertically implies instability and rhythm; horizontally implies serenity and relaxation
- Size:
  - Types: absolute size (panel in isolation) or size relative to other panels, page, etc.
    limited by page size or publication restrictions

Content of panels (Rodríguez Díaz)
- Iconic content:
  - Substantival aspect (substantivation or representation, i.e. what is represented):
    - Degrees of iconicity (Rodríguez Díaz: five degrees: McCrae’s triangle with many more degrees); photograph, realist drawing, caricature, humanized animals, and nonfigurative illustration (usually single panels in comics, e.g. onomatopoeias in physical fights)
  - Adjectival aspect (modification or qualification, i.e. how images are represented):
    - Shots (selection of information to be displayed): long shot (establishing shot), full shot, medium shot, close-up shot, and extreme close-up shot
    - Camera angle (point of view): eye-level angle, high angle, low angle, bird’s eye view or top-down angle, and worm’s eye view or bottom-up angle
    - Horizon (point of view): neutral (horizontal) shot or tilt (slipping) shot; high horizon (more land than sky), and low horizon (vice versa)
  - Movement:
    - Trajectory or path: simple line, motion lines (McCrae), color line, and vibration
    - Secondary effects from movement: impact, speed, clouds, kinetic distortion, and visual breakdown (McCrae’s multiple images, photographic streaking, subjective motion, and polyptych)
    - Snapshot: image at the moment of an unstable position
- Gestural aspects:
  - Gestures and audience; gestures addressed to the implied reader and gestures addressed to the other characters
  - Types of expressions: elementary feelings (fear, anger, etc.), interpersonical behavior (conversation, attack, help, derision, etc.), frequent actions without outward emotions (walking, reading, running, etc.), and unusual complex emotions (extrapolation of flying from swimming)
  - Facial gestures: four basic facial expressions (cheerfulness, anger, sadness, and serenity) plus two derivations (naïveté and malice); features and meaning (dark nose equaling inebriation or cold or grinning mouth showing teeth equaling hypocrisy or cunning)
- Verbal content:
  - Caption (see above)
  - Balloon (see above)
Grammar and syntax (Eco)

Panel grammar (Gubern’s meaningful units and microunits; Barbieri’s polyphony and harmony)

Relationships between text and image
- Complementary association (McCloud’s word specific combination): words expressing what pictures cannot
- Speech redundancy (McCloud’s duo-specific combination): words expressing what pictures already show
- Ironical independence (similar to McCloud’s parallel combination): words telling the opposite story pictures show
- Plain independence (McCloud’s picture specific combination): pictures showing more than necessary
- Picture-word fusion (Harvey’s visual-verbal blending; McCloud’s interdependent combination): words and pictures combining messages
- Additive combination (McCloud): words amplifying or elaborating on pictures or vice versa
- Montage combination (McCloud): words are part of the picture
- Zero-word panels (Fresnault-Deruelle): initial images (presentation), picturesque images (setting), check images (details), and gag-images (short sequence)
- “Rich” image (Fresnault-Deruelle): words playing a repressive role, guiding the reader
- “Poor” image (Fresnault-Deruelle): words playing a compensatory role, informing the reader
- Complementariness of text and image (Fresnault-Deruelle): 
  - Repetition: simultaneity (Eco’s picture-word fusion)
  - Relay: delayed or advanced transmission of information
  - Mixture: words as commentaries or explanations of images (McCloud’s additive combination)

Montage syntax (Gubern’s meaningful macrounits)

Captions or diegetic spaces (Fresnault-Deruelle)
- Functions of captions or diegetic spaces in montage syntax (see “Verbal content” above): highlighting separation but also bridging images in continuity

Balloons (Fresnault-Deruelle)
- Functions of balloons in montage syntax (see “Verbal content” above): flat-surface shapes emphasizing the falseness of the perspective code in the panel, but functioning as a cohesive vehicle or connecting thread at the level of continuity and global perception

Panels and montage syntax
- Panels: real discontinuity of action divided into essential elements (Eco), essential instants (Aumont), encapsulations (Eisner), micro-stories (Muro Munilla), or meaningful units (Gubern)

Classification of montage macrounits (Gubern)
- Physical units (graphic or formal criteria): comic strips, comic page, etc.
- Narrative units (narrative criteria): comics sequence, comics episode, etc.
- Narrative montage unit: scene

Classification of analyses of scene montage: content (Gubern)
- From the point of view of raccords or unions: through cuts, consecutive spaces, fusions, captions or voice-over
• From the point of view of spatial structures: amplification, concentration, and analytical montage
• From the point of view of temporal structures: slow-down, flashback, and flashforwards
• From the point of view of psychological structures: dreams, subjective perceptions, and psychological flashback and flashforward

Classification of analyses of panel montage: closure (McCloud)
• Transitions: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, non-sequitur

Narration (Eco)

Units of narration
• Sequence (more related to semantics): logical succession of nuclear units in a relation of solidarity; scene: basic narrative montage unit (Gubern); panel: phase; sequence (Cohn)
• Canonical narrative arc (more related to syntax): generative schema in which any constituent can be recursively organized into a narrative arc of its own (Cohn)
• Panel: micro-sequence (Muro Munilla); panel: narrative unit (Cohn)

Classification and sequence of panels or panel phase within a canonical narrative arc (Cohn)
• Establisher: presentation of interaction, i.e., topic or framesetter
• Initial: tension starter
• Prolongation: tension follow-up
• Peak: climax
• Release: coda or punchline

Two basic rules of combinatory structures in narrative arcs (Cohn)
• Conjunction: multiple panels in the same narrative category
• Embedding: hierarchical layers with phase(s) inside a broader structure

Generative structures resulting from the two rules (Cohn)
• Left-branching: each phase can serve as an initial for the following one
• Alternating initial: an “on-off” pattern can be a conjunction initial for a final phase
• Center-embedded phases: a complete phase can be one of the categories (peak, etc.)

Levels of narration (Muro Munilla)
• Story (deep structure): logical or “natural” chronological order of events
• Plot (deep structure): narrator’s order of events
• Discourse (surface structure): visual/oral presentation in comics

Elements of narration (Muro Munilla)

Components of action (Muro Munilla)
• Time: at the level of story, strict succession and development
• Place or space: in general, not as essential an element as time, but important in journey or quest pattern, and in comics, temporality is based on spatial situation of panels
• Events: three paradigms: adventure, romanticism and learning (Muro Munilla)
  - Two master patterns for romance or fantasy based on the idea of change (Scholes):
    • Patterns of education: rise in society (harmony)
    • Patterns of expulsion: fall in society (disharmony)
  - One master pattern for romance or fantasy based on the idea of movement (Scholes):
    • Patterns of quest: neither rise nor fall but a journey (importance of adventures and encounters)
• Realism: more complex structures (Scholes)
• Characters: characterization is important at the level of plot and can be achieved by
direct definition or indirect presentation (Muro Munilla)
• Typology of characters (Muro Munilla):
  • Flat character: configured around one feature without evolution, a kind of
    stereotype
  • Round character: configured around several features with evolution
  • Protagonist or lead: focal point of action (localization and typification are very
    important for comics, since they are based on character recognition)
  • Supporting characters: less physically present than the protagonist

Other elements (Muro Munilla)
• Theme: general abstract idea that emerges by eliminating circumstantial elements
• Narrator: subject of enunciation or origin of information; comics have two, i.e. verbal
  narrator (like novels) and visual narrator (like films)
  • Basic functions of narrator:
    • Narrative function: story creation and transmission
    • Administrative function: control over discourse
  • Optional functions of narrator:
    • Communicative function: narrator orientating discourse towards narratee
    • Testimonial function: narrator showing its presence
    • Ideological function: narrator’s and characters’ comments, interpretation and
      evaluation of the story
• Participants in narrative message:
  • Real author and real reader: actual people in the real world, outside the message
  • Implied author: conception of the real author through the message
  • Implied reader: subject-position that the text offers the reader, whether or not it is
    taken up (Price): the type of reader or viewer the text presupposes (Muro Munilla)
• Narrator: see above
• Narratee: figure that addresses a “you” or speaks directly to the reader (Price):
synonym for implied reader (Muro Munilla; Goddard & Patterson)

Ideology (Eco)

Ideological statement
• Ideology related to the universe of values
• American comics: allegiance to the values of the American Way of Life, emphasis on
  conformity and conventionality
• Narrations not centered on the comics hero; possibility of opposition to the status quo
  (Eco; Coma)
• Feminist analysis: see below

Genres (Cawelti; Schatz)

Characteristics of genre works (Cawelti)

Standardization
• Essential part of all communication establishing common ground between producers and
  audiences
• Within standardization, originality (limited by standard conventions of genre) is important
  and can be achieved by
  • revitalization of stereotypes: including conflicting qualities or complex personalities
  • plot or setting uniqueness: including new components or creator’s personal vision
Escapism
- Escape can be achieved within the order and limit of formulaic structures, confronting ultimate themes of love and death with security (like games)
- Address to two contradictory psychological needs:
  - escaping from the boredom of routine and security in life
  - escaping from the ultimate uncertainty and insecurity in life

Repertition
- Repetition of successful works with similar qualities implies establishment of genres by audience’s consensus and producers’ profit

Devices of genre works (Cavelti)
- Suspense: fear and uncertainty about a character’s fate within secure generic framework
- Identification: emotional effect achieved by relating to character through emphasis on action and the use of stereotypes
- Imaginary world: allowing for escape and identification through willing suspension of disbelief to follow the rules of imaginary world sufficiently removed from our ordinary life

Typology of genres (Schatz)

Narrative strategy: genres of order (Western, gangster, detective)
- Individual traditionally male protagonist or redeemer figure
- Setting of contested or ideologically unstable space
- Externalized conflicts translated into violence
- Resolution with the elimination of the threat to the social order, death of a character
- Lack of assimilation of the hero to the values and lifestyle of the community
- Themes: mediation-redemption, macho code, isolated self-reliance, utopia-as-promise

Narrative strategy: genres of integration (musical, screwball comedy, family melodrama)
- Doubled (romantic couple) or collective (family) hero
- Setting of civilized or ideologically stable space
- Internalized social conflicts translated into emotion
- Resolution with rejection of interpersonal antagonism, final embrace
- Assimilation of heroes into the values and lifestyle of the harmonious community
- Themes: integration-domestication, maternal-familial code, community cooperation, utopia-as-reality

Sociocultural functions of genres (Cavelti)

Four hypotheses for the functions of genres
- Maintenance of the status quo: Imaginary world responding to the interests and attitudes of society
- Harmonization of social conflicts: resolution of tensions created by conflicting cultural groups or ambiguous attitudes towards certain values
- Exploration of the forbidden: experience within carefully controlled environment
- Assimilation of new values: internalizing and naturalizing new meaning, facilitating transition between the old and the new, and thus contributing to cultural continuity

Evolution of genres (Schatz)

Experimental stage
- Isolation and establishment of conventions
- Straightforward message without stylistic embellishments or formal convolutions
Classic stage
- Conventions reach their equilibrium and are mutually understood by artist and audience
- Formal transparency, i.e., straightforward storytelling, idealized cultural or social image, social value

Refinement stage
- Formal and stylistic details embellish the form
- Parodies and subversion of the genre

Baroque stage
- Form and its embellishments are accented to the point where they themselves become the substance or content of the work
- Formal opacity, i.e., self-conscious formalism, formal aesthetic value

Methodology for Comics Analysis

Contexts and texts

Global context
- Sociohistorical factors: events in the late 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, influencing the comics industry
- General language/discourse constraints: language of comics (image and text)
- Textual antecedents: history of Superman comics
- Publishing and distribution practices: 1980s changing publishing and distribution practices in comics industry affecting both production and reception
- Comics conventions: changing trends influenced by changing situations in the decades under study

Context of production
- Producer: DC Comics, leading American mainstream comics company
- Implied author: to be analyzed in the actual text
- Actual author: collectively produced, but usually with named writer-artist; growing importance of comics creators to the detriment of "house style"
- Assumed affiliations: mainly male gender, American values and beliefs

Context of reception
- Intended audience: specialized readership and active comics fandom
- Actual reader: possibly broader than the intended audience (female readers not generally taken into account as intended audience)
- Assumed affiliations: mainly male gender, American values and beliefs

Text
- Medium: comics
- Genre: superhero
- Status: popular

Superhero genre (Comics)
- Conventions: mission, superpowers, superhero identity (codename and costume) and secret identity, urban setting, analogical science, supporting cast, love interest, limited authorities, super/mundane split, supervillain, slugfest, sidekick, superteam, and continuity
Treatment of criminals: divide between the worlds of law-abiding citizens and lawbreakers

Development of superhero genre:
- Golden age or experimentation stage (1938-1956): formal transparency with straightforward stories of good versus evil; from social reform and patriotism in World War II to support of status quo and authority
- Silver age or classic stage (1956-1971): innovations of continuity and troubled superheroes; less transparency with virtuous villains and selfish heroes; relevance with controversial political and social issues, resisting status quo and authority
- Bronze age or refinement stage (1971-1980): embellishment of formal and stylistic details; even less transparency of ideals and values with ageless characters

Ages under study:
- Iron age or baroque stage (1980-2000): imbalance of content and form, the latter becoming the main objective, i.e., self-reflexivity; attempts at revitalizing superhero conventions (Crisis on Infinite Earths)
- Renaissance age or reconstruction stage (1995-present): a new round of evolution with intertexts referring to the past

Analytical tools

Feminist general comics-related analysis (Stulter)
- Male gaze (Mulvey) or focalization (male point of view):
  - position and outfits of women characters (Stulter)
  - fragmentation (Stulter, Mills): representation of women as body parts
    + depersonalization and erasure of women’s experiences
  - juxtaposition (Mills): association of female bodies with an object
- Male/female reversal (Pollock): technique to reveal underlying meanings in gender representation

Women in Refrigerators Syndrome (Simone): female comic book characters used as a mere plot device in superhero comics

Peripheral female roles in superhero comics (Stulter): nemesis, temptation, love interest, damsel in distress, daughter, mother, sidekick, spin-off

Bechdel Test (Bechdel): unbiased gender representation if two women talk to each other about something other than men

Feminist linguistic analysis (Mills)

Overt or direct sexism: explicit gender discriminatory language

- Words and meaning:
  - Naming: words describing and classifying women in derogatory ways
  - Dictionaries and grammars: gatekeepers of the language, filtering words and structures, supporting or rejecting them
  - Generic pronouns and nouns: using gender-specific male pronouns or nouns for both men and women, resulting in marked female reference and invisibility of women
  - Insult terms for women: sexualized insult terms for women
  - Semantic derogation: gender-specific terms associated with women or femininity becoming derogatory through time (mistress) or in contexts where women are majority (lollipop lady)
  - First names, surnames and titles:
    - use of first name for women even in formal contexts
    - English-speaking dilemma of accepting husbands’ surnames or retaining fathers’, both cases evidencing androcentrism
    - introduction of mrs. to avoid classification of married or unmarried
  - Processes beyond words:
  - Transitivity: “who does what to whom,” i.e., syntax reveals who is the agent or active doer (subject position) and who is the goal or passive recipient (object position)
• Indirect or reported speech: avoiding giving voice to women by mediating statements; when direct style is used, female voices associated to the private sphere
• Jokes: explicit sexist jokes based on the exclusion of women as a minority group or out-group by means of stereotypes and prototypes which go back to traditional roles and spheres of men and women
  • stereotypes of gender: conflicting views about women and femininity, thus considered only sexist when negatively evaluated

Indirect sexism: gender discriminatory language masked by certain strategies
• Humor: based on the exaggeration of stereotypical features related to a certain group by using sexist irony or parody, a strategy that serves as an disclaimer of responsibility
• Presupposition: remarks embedded within the background knowledge of the communicative event (Have you women finished gossiping?)
  • underlying assumptions related to gender stereotypes, i.e. MAN (Man As Norm) principle (Brown): for genderless nouns you choose the masculine unless stereotypes lead you to choose the feminine (doctor vs. nurse)
• Conflicting messages: sexist and anti-sexist messages in the same text (omission of housewife and full-time careers listed as unemployed)
• Scripts and metaphors: gendered metaphors and scripts (extended metaphors) drawing on a body of thought or background knowledge related to gender stereotypes
• Calocation: association of words with negative connotation when related to some aspects of female experiences (working mother)
• Androcentric perspective: texts with embedded ideas given from the point of view of traditional male beliefs

Image semiotic analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen)

Participants in the semiotic act
• Interactive participants: those taking part in the act of communication (producer and receiver)
• Represented participants: subject of communication (named according to the type of representation)
  • Secondary represented participants: circumstances (setting, means, accompaniment)

Representational structures (Halliday’s ideational or referential metafunction, i.e. representation of objects and their relations, interactions and conceptual relations between represented participants)
• Narrative patterns or patterns of narrative representations: actions, events, processes or transitory spatial arrangements, i.e. vector and dynamic composition
  • Types of narrative patterns and participants:
    • Action (movement vector):
      • Main participants: actor (agent: vector or vector origin), goal (recipient: aim of vector and action)
      • Sub-categories: transactive (two or more participants), non-transactive (one participant)
    • Reaction (eye-line vector):
      • Main participants: reactor (agent: eye-line vector origin), phenomenon (recipient: aim of eye-line vector)
      • Sub-categories: transactive (two or more participants), non-transactive (one participant)
    • Conversion (chain of transactive narrative structures involving conversions or transformations):
      • Main participants: relays (with both roles actor and goal)
  • Conceptual patterns or patterns of conceptual representations: class, structure, meaning or stable and timeless essence, i.e. no vector and static composition
Types of conceptual patterns and participants:
- Classificatory or classificational structure (taxonomy of participants)
  - Main participants: subordinates organized in relation to at least one superordinate
  - Sub-categories: overt (explicit superordinate), covert (implicit superordinate)
- Analysis or analytical structure (part-whole structure):
  - Main participants: carrier (the whole), possessive attributes (parts)
  - Sub-categories:
    - Spatial analysis: unstructured (carrier not present), structured (both types of participants present); exhaustive structured (all the possessive attributes present); inclusive structured (only some possessive attributes present)
    - Temporal analysis (timelines): unstructured (carrier not present), structured (both types of participants present); topographical (to scale), topological (not to scale)
- Symbolical or symbolic structure (meaning or identity of participants)
  - Sub-category: symbolic attributive (meaning or identity by surrounding elements)
    - Main participants: carrier (established meaning or identity), symbolic attribute (meaning or identity itself)
  - Sub-category: symbolic suggestive (meaning or identity from participant's inner qualities)
    - Main participant: carrier (meaning or identity established by mood or atmosphere)

Interactive or interactional structures (Halliday's interpersonal metafunction, i.e. relations between the producer, the receiver, and the object represented, or interaction between interactive participants)
- Patterns of interaction between producers and receivers
  - System of offer and demand: relations established between represented participants (only people) and receivers
    - Demand (represented participants looking at the viewer's eyes): direct address defining the viewer as object of the gaze and placing the viewer in some category (inferior or superior, etc.)
    - Offer (represented participants not looking at the viewer's eyes): indirect address defining the viewer as subject and represented participants as objects of information or contemplation
  - System of frame distance: relations established between represented participants (people, objects, landscape) and receivers
    - Frame distance or size and social distance or proxemics (Hall and Grosser):
      - Personal or intimate distance (friends and intimates): close-up shot
      - Social distance (acquaintances): full shot, medium long shot (American shot)
      - Impersonal or public distance (strangers): full shot, long shot
    - Frame or shot distance or size (objects)
      - Close distance: object used
      - Middle distance: object within viewer's reach, but not used
      - Long distance: object for contemplation
  - Frame of shot distance or size (buildings and landscapes)
    - Close distance: related to some participant or action
    - Middle distance: identifying destination
    - Long distance: overview
- System of perspective (involving choosing an angle or point of view): relations established between represented participants (people, objects, landscape) and receivers
  - Subjective image (subjective attitude towards represented participants):
    - Naturalistic central perspective and built-in point of view imposed on the viewer independent of the environment (window on the world)
  - Subjective camera or shot angles:
- Horizontal angles:
  - frontal in relation to the viewer: involvement with the represented participants
  - oblique in relation to the viewer: detachment from the represented participants
- Vertical angles:
  - high angle implying superiority: making the represented participants small and insignificant
  - low angle implying inferiority: making the represented participants imposing and awesome
  - eye-level angle implying equality: without power difference
- Narrativization of the subjective image: implied viewer in the image, i.e., imposition of a fictional viewer between the represented participants the interactive participants.

- Objective image (subjective attitude towards represented participants): significance or salient perspective related to social or religious hierarchy and the environment
  - Camera or shot angles (producing objective attitude that neutralizes subjective perspective):
    - Directly frontal angle: angle of maximum involvement and oriented toward action (how to do something)
    - Perpendicular top-down angle: angle of maximum power and oriented toward theoretical knowledge (contemplative point of view)
    - Cross-section or X-ray view (diagrams): revealing hidden aspects beyond superficial appearances
- Non-centralized perspectives:
  - Frontal-isometric perspective (neither involvement nor detachment): frontal view with parallel horizontal lines instead of convergence towards a vanishing point
  - Angular-isometric perspective (detached meditative distance): angle view with parallel horizontal lines instead of convergence towards a vanishing point
  - Inverted perspective: both sides of an object are show with divergent perspectival lines, i.e., neither parallel or convergent
  - Cubist perspective: multifaceted points of view
- Modality (reliability of messages, i.e., truth value or credibility): depending on social judgments of what is considered real or not
  - Modality markers (amplification or reduction according to an anchoring point of naturalism or some other type of realism concerning the genre and addressees):
    - Representation: from maximum representation of naturalistic detail to maximum abstraction
    - Color saturation: from full color to black and white
    - Color differentiation: from diversified colors to monochrome
    - Color modulation: from fully modulated color to plain unmodulated color
    - Contextualization: from fully articulated and detailed background to absence of background
    - Depth: from maximally deep perspective to absence of depth
    - Illumination: from light and shade to absence of light and shade
    - Brightness: from a maximum number of different degrees of brightness to just two degrees (black and white, etc.)

Textual structures (Hollyday’s textual metatfunction, i.e. coherent and cohesive texts)

- Meaning of composition: integration code of the representational and interactive elements in the text or image, by means of three interrelated systems or principles of composition:
- Information value attached to the placement of the represented participants on the image (directionality):
  - Left-right pattern (emphasis on horizontal axis):
    - Left: elements to the left of the center presented as given information, i.e., known and familiar, point of departure of the message
    - Right: elements to the right of the center presented as new information, i.e., unknown and to be agreed upon, special attention must be paid
  - Top-bottom pattern (emphasis on vertical axis):
    - Top: elements on the upper part presented as ideal, i.e., idealized or generalized essence of information (salient part)
    - Bottom: elements on the lower part presented as real, i.e., specific information (details), down-to-earth information (evidence), practical information (directions)
- Center-margin pattern (uncommon in contemporary compositions):
  - Center (element in the middle of the composition): nucleus of information
  - Margins (similar elements around the center): elements dependent on the centered information
  - Cross pattern: center-margin combined with ideal-real pattern and new-given pattern
- Triptychs:
  - symmetrical structure: margin-center-margin
  - polarization structure: with horizontal axis, given left-non-salient center (mediator)-new right; or with vertical axis, ideal top-non-salient center (mediator)-real bottom
- Salience (weight in the composition): hierarchy of elements according to
  - Visual factors:
    - placement in the visual field: elements appear heavier at the top or on the left
    - perspective: foreground objects are more salient than background objects
    - relative size: larger objects appear heavier than smaller objects
    - contrasts in tonal value: darker objects appear heavier than light objects
    - contrasts in color: saturated colors appear heavier than dull colors
    - differences in sharpness of focus: sharp lines are more salient than blurred ones
  - Cultural factors:
    - human figure
    - cultural symbol
  - perspective relation of viewers to the composition: viewers becoming the center
  - non-perspectival relation of viewers to the composition: internal viewpoint
- Framing (connection or disconnection of elements in the composition by means of presence or absence of framing devices): strong frame implying unit of information, absence of frame emphasizing group identity
  - Framing devices: objects, frame lines, discontinuities of color or shape, empty space, etc.
  - Weak framing:
    - usually horizontal and circular compositions
    - drawing and painting styles: blurred definition of elements
  - Strong framing:
    - usually vertical compositions
    - drawing and painting styles: sharply outlined elements
- Connectedness: emphasized by vectors guiding the reading of the composition
- Types of reading paths in compositions:
  - Linear compositions (syntagmatic imposition, strictly coded): to be read from left to right and from top to bottom in a predetermined order
  - Non-linear compositions (paradigmatic logic, more interactive, not strictly coded): not necessarily read in linear order, but selectively and partially
    - Circular reading path: outward pattern following concentric circles
    - Horizontal reading path: progression forwards towards the future or backwards towards the origin
- Vertical reading path: showing hierarchy, i.e., from the general to the specific (headline to footnote)
- Materiality of texts (result of representational practices that use multiple signifying systems); inscription (semiotic variable)
  - Surfaces to make inscriptions on: paper, etc.
  - Substances to make inscriptions with: pencil, ink, paint, etc.
- Modes of production or production technologies for inscription:
  - Technologies of the hand (manual mode): pencils, brushes, etc.
  - Technologies of the eye and ear (recording mode): based on naturalized referentiality, i.e., photography, film, audio tape, etc.
- Synthesizing technologies (digital recording mode, reintroduction of the hand by interface, i.e., keyboard, mouse, etc.): undermining referentiality and replacing it with signification, i.e., new signs; breaking down the identity of representation and reference
- Modes of reception:
  - Public reception: walls, cinema screens, etc.
  - Private reception: pages, computer screens, etc.
- Effects of the physicality or tangibility of the surface on the recipient: transcodings from one mode to another
REFERENCE
REFERENCE

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