

Tensions Between Tradition and Innovation in *Kingdom Come* and *The Avengers*

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ABSTRACT

Our contemporary cultural climate is shaped in large part by superheroes and our interactions and thoughts on superheroes. Joss Whedon's 2012 film *The Avengers* is a great example of how one film about superheroes would become one of the highest grossing films of all time. *The Avengers* is a very clever film in how it deals with and balances the tensions of action spectacle and deeper self-conscious themes. In doing this, the film draws in popularity not only from action fans, but also from people who would otherwise not follow superheroes. However, addressing the tensions between commercial spectacle and deeper thematic elements is not new to superhero narratives. Mark Waid and Alex Ross's 1996 graphic novel *Kingdom Come* establishes the binary tensions between superheroes in terms of their commercial appeal, as seen in the materialistic superhero-centric restaurant Planet Krypton, and in terms of the consequentialist aspect of superheroes, evident in the human character Norman McCay. Through an understanding of both works, we can better understand each work and how superheroes have historically played a role - and continue to play a role - in our culture.

KEYWORDS

action, Alex Ross, *The Avengers*, comics, culture, Joss Whedon, *Kingdom Come*, Mark Waid, self-consciousness, spectacle, superheroes, Superman

When Joss Whedon's film *The Avengers* came out in the summer of 2012, *Rolling Stone* film critic Peter Travers started his review by stating simply: "Let me sprint right to the point: *The Avengers* has it all. And then some" (Travers). A mere glimpse into Samuel L. Jackson's Sergeant Nick Fury's one eye in *The Avengers*, the posthumous Oscar for Heath Ledger's Joker in *The Dark Knight*, or the slick tech mechanics of Robert Downey Jr.'s Tony Stark show the current cultural paradigm of superheroes. When considering *The Avengers* - the film soon to become one of the highest grossing films of all time - one cannot help but consider the extent of the film's popularity, which requires an investigation in its own right. Therefore, considering a film like *The Avengers* enables an investigation on the popularity of superheroes in general in contemporary culture.

The final paragraph of Travers's 2012 review of *The Avengers* proclaims arguably the most important binaries in the film. Travers writes:

Whedon, a filmmaker who knows that even the roaringest action sequences won't resonate without audience investment in the characters. Whedon is not afraid to slow down to let feelings sink in. Fanboy heresy, perhaps, but the key to the film's supersmart, supercool triumph. In the final third, when Whedon lets it rip and turns the battle intensity up to 11, all your senses will be blown. (Travers)

This statement highlights the extremely well-balanced binaries that make *The Avengers* a truly awesome film experience. *The Avengers* achieves a mere perfect balance between commercial image/spectacle and deeper thematic elements, which play out as a sense of self-consciousness in the superhero characters themselves and as signs of deeper humanistic themes. Action-packed entertainment and comedy consume audiences that watch Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow disarm Russian terrorists with her arms tied to the back of a chair. But these scenes of action and comedy come right alongside the death of S.H.I.E.L.D. member Phil Coulson, whose Captain America "fanboyism" comes to the advantage of Sergeant Fury as he uses Coulson's Captain America trading cards as a prime motivator to keep the Avengers striving strong; super "humans" are motivated by the death of a human life, just as humans are motivated by the super qualities of superheroes. When

Fury tells the Avengers that he found vintage Captain America trading cards in Coulson's jacket pocket as a motivator for the superheroes, audiences see deeper, self-conscious, and more human thematic elements at work – it is not Captain America, the man that inspired Coulson's fanboyism, but Captain America's cultural image. This balance of action spectacle and deeper themes carries for the entire two-and-a-half hour film, and makes *The Avengers* a joyride of both near-flawless entertainment and deeper meaning.

The Avengers is an exemplar of the interplay between the commercial CGI spectacle and the self-conscious/humanist themes in superhero narratives. The tensions between these two types of devices brings forth an appreciation of continuity within the comic-book world that is delectable for the fanboy, as well as an appreciation of deeper themes that is important to the film critic and/or the non-comic reader. Yet these tensions are not limited to Whedon's *The Avengers*. Mark Waid and Alex Ross's 1996 superhero graphic novel *Kingdom Come* creates a world of similar tensions between spectacle/commercial appeal (sans CGI, of course) and deeper, humanistic and self-conscious themes. *Kingdom Come*'s thematic elements derive from the sense of tradition that has been embedded in superhero comics over time (similar to the fanboy's regard for continuity in *The Avengers*). While *The Avengers* successfully delineates this spectacle/insightful binary tension for 21st century moviegoers, *Kingdom Come* delineates this tension in graphic narrative form, keeps alive the sense of tradition that has permeated superhero comics for generations, and looks towards a future for superhero comics that will be both innovative and respectful of tradition – a future of superhero narratives that we now know, of course, through films like *The Avengers*. Audiences of superhero narratives can thus understand each piece through the other, and I aim to show how an understanding of *Kingdom Come* can elucidate a better understanding of *The Avengers*, and vice-versa. At least within the realm of popular culture, superheroes are very culturally relevant, and the box-office boom that was *The Avengers* highlights the cultural relevance of superheroes. With an understanding of *Kingdom Come*, we can better understand the cultural significance of superheroes exemplified by *The Avengers*, and a consideration of a

contemporary superhero narrative like *The Avengers* can better inform our understanding of a 1990s superhero novel like *Kingdom Come*.

Kingdom Come is set in the near future. The once-classic DC superheroes Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman, and the ensemble Justice League have been shadowed by a proliferating amoral and destructive generation of younger “superheroes.” The reckless tendencies of the new generation of superheroes, who are now called “metahumans” – a term that implicitly denies any “heroic” qualities – orient humanity towards impending doom. It is up to the classic and now aging DC superheroes to come out of retirement to chastise the younger generation of metahumans in the hope of preserving humanity or, in the novel’s terms, “human achievement” (Waid and Ross 17), indicating the contemporary generation’s absence of restraint and lack of consideration for humans. When the metahumans continue their reckless ways despite the Justice League’s admonitions, the Justice League impound the delinquent metahumans in a gulag to temporarily halt the incessant destruction of humanity. The final judgment comes, however, in the cataclysmic war between the Justice League and the metahumans at the destroyed gulag. When a bomb dropped by the United Nations jeopardizes the fates of both the super-humans and humanity, Captain Marvel – the “world’s mightiest mortal” and the perfect compromise between the human and super-human worlds – sacrifices himself to the incoming bombs (dropped by Dick Grayson), killing himself and countless metahumans and superheroes, to preserve humanity. World order is restored; Captain Marvel, whose cape is flown alongside the flags at the United Nations, is revered as a martyr for humanity; and superheroes no longer rule “above” humans, but live “among” them, “earning” human trust in the process (Waid and Ross 195). The story, despite its constant apocalyptic visions and explicit references to the *Book of Revelations*, ends on a happy note, and looks towards a future that can once again embrace the tradition of superheroes as “super” Samaritans and citizens.

In *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*, Geoff Klock recognizes the tradition of the superhero comic delineated in *Kingdom Come*, and places the 1996 novel in chronological relation to 1987’s *The Dark Night Returns* by Frank Miller and *Watchmen*

by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. Klock writes that these two pieces are “instances of a kind of literature” that he identifies “as the revisionary superhero narrative” (Klock 25). Klock defines the “revisionary superhero narrative” as the “birth of self-consciousness in the superhero narrative” and the “culmination of the silver age [of comics]” and that these two novels are the first instances in which the “superhero narrative becomes literature” (Klock 3). These two works serve as turning points within the medium of comics. *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* transformed the traditional superhero narrative – that is, the popular American superhero comics of the “golden” and “silver” ages of comics that came before *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* – into deeper, literary fiction by utilizing the medium’s historical conventions to compose works in which the “building of tradition becomes anxiety” (Klock 3). Klock argues that *Kingdom Come* focuses on the contemporary state of the superhero comic (contemporary state for *Kingdom Come* being 1996) through an examination of the genre’s tradition in conjunction with the fallout of non-traditional superhero comics spurred by Miller’s and Moore’s comics. Yet, realizing that *Kingdom Come* was written close to twenty years ago, I argue that today the novel can serve as a bridge for the tradition on which superhero comics were created, and what the future would hold for superhero narratives that we now know in the form of the 21st century superhero movie. Therefore, *Kingdom Come* is pertinent today in how we as a culture accept and confront a (possible) world of superheroes in terms of our desire for both spectacle/commercial entertainment and for deeper human sensitivity. *Kingdom Come* has the aesthetics of a full-packed action narrative – the novel arguably has the ultimate superhero-on-superhero battle in comics history – and yet, just like the deeper themes/meanings in Agent Coulson’s death and the man-versus-monster self-conscious drama of Bruce Banner versus the Hulk in *The Avengers*, *Kingdom Come* draws readers in through its precision in creating and exploring deep and truly human themes. Its pertinence lies in respect for audiences’ enjoyment of action and intellectual and affective stimulation.

The pertinence of *Kingdom Come* in terms of its relation to culture’s interaction with superheroes is displayed through a set of binaries that are implicit to the world of the

novel. We enter a world of irony, in which superheroes exist, yet can still be considered a commercially successful fantasy (similar to Captain America's WWII commercial celebrity in 2011's film *Captain America: The First Avenger*). We are acquainted with the embodiment of the commercial and material side of the superhero comic in "Planet Krypton" - the superfluous superhero "wax-museum-with-a-pulse" restaurant. Conversely, we are also introduced to the human Norman McCay, who acts as the reader's guide and eyes in the story. McCay is the only non-superhero human that readers are introduced to, and he is the only one to have direct access to the inner conflict between the worlds of the traditional superheroes and the metahumans. McCay seems particularly detached from the commerciality (and possibly the American-oriented nationalism) that a place like Planet Krypton seems to embody, and is instead at the center of the consequential effects of superheroes in real life. While we experience the commoditization of superhero popularity in Planet Krypton, Norman McCay allows the reader to share in the veridical consequences of superheroes existing in real life, creating a polarization of humans' interactions with superheroes/metahumans in *Kingdom Come*.

Planet Krypton creates the commercial superhero fantasy experience for humans in *Kingdom Come*. While it may not have as much comedic spectacle as the Hulk sweeping the floor with Loki in *The Avengers*, the idea of mass commercial appeal is the same - humans are entertained by the spectacle, action-based and commercial appeal of superheroes. Viewers of films like *The Avengers* are invited to suspend their sense of real, tangible aesthetic and enter a vastly commercial digitalized superhero world. In Planet Krypton, people are invited to an entertaining eating experience: an indoor "wax park" of human restaurant staff sauntering around waiting tables and hosting, garbed in traditional superhero uniforms, with old cartoons blaring on large television screens and iconic comic-book covers as menu designs. Furthermore, when reading Clark Kent's (Superman) and Diana Prince's (Wonder Woman) exchange as customers of Planet Krypton at the end of the novel:

SUPERMAN. You don't find any of this upsetting...
WONDER WOMAN. It's not a church, Clark. It's a
restaurant. Relax. (Waid and Ross 205)

Readers are hinted to that superheroes are becoming apotheosized figures through their commercial dominance. Being in Planet Krypton is also a chance to experience the aesthetic talent of illustrator Alex Ross. The art of *Kingdom Come* looks like American realism straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting – the characters and the world are depicted with physical verisimilitude. Yet when taken inside Planet Krypton, we are deluged with a contrast between the realistic art inherent to the world of the novel, and the 1930s/60s/70s cartoonishness of the memorabilia that coats the restaurant's walls and even the insides of menus (Waid and Ross 206). This contrast between traditional cartoonish superhero images and realistic, multi-dimensional illustrations – even within the same panel, such as page 207's realistic clinking of glasses, with a classic picture of a 1940s Captain Marvel on the glass – highlights Ross's ability as an illustrator, but also establishes an important way that humans interact with superheroes (through images built by tradition and the tradition of celebrity/commercial appeal). Even though a cynical Bruce Wayne refers to the interior of Planet Krypton as being “amidst all this tawdry bric-a-brac” (Waid and Ross 206), an experience such as visiting the Planet Krypton (as tacky as it might be) is not too different from experiencing superhero movies of the 21st century. With both, we humans are able to escape the confines of what we know as real and interact with a fantasy that is born from tradition and mass commercial appeal. In *Kingdom Come*, Planet Krypton is exemplar of superheroes' ability for commercialism and humans' source of escapism, and we see this paralleled today with films like *The Avengers*.

Whereas Planet Krypton addresses man's capacity for superhero commercial inundation, the character of Norman McCay brings to light an alternative way of seeing superheroes, which is based less in the iconographic spectacle of Planet Krypton and more on the consequential and self-conscious realities that take place when regarding superheroes. McCay is the voice and guide for the novel, and narrates early in the novel

the history of superheroes and the problem of metahumans. Consider McCay's narration at the novel's start, stretching from pages 17 to 24:

[The Sandman] mocked their worth, these newcomers [the metahumans]... and spoke instead of legends gone. Of costumed champions who had, in his day, inspired human achievement... not belittled it... According to the word of God, the meek would someday inherit the earth... But God never accounted for the mighty [i.e., the superheroes or metahumans]... They [the metahumans] no longer fight for the right. They fight simply to fight, their only foes each other... I tell myself that this, too, shall pass...that humans still have a chance to reclaim a world rightfully theirs while it still exists.

McCay speaks of a superhero world where it is now not uncommon to see graphic fights between Batman and Superman (mastered in Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*), and where reckless conflicts between metahumans harm humans (such as the unreasonable cable car fight scene on pages 50 through 54). After McCay envisions presaging Armageddon, he is linked with DC's Hand of God character, Spectre. As a godly anchor, McCay is chosen to act as judge to punish the evil (the humans or the superheroes/metahumans) to prevent a forthcoming apocalypse. McCay serves a crucial role when examining *Kingdom Come*, for he acts as a consequential anchor for man and his relation to superheroes. McCay is less concerned by the material kitsch that superheroes have come to embody and is more focused on superheroes' consequences in the real world - how they come to affect our lives, the damage they can do, and the lives they can save. McCay brings a sense of self-consciousness to the superhero genre that we are not strangers to today. Consider some of Norman McCay's final lines to Superman and some of Superman's final lines at the end of *Kingdom Come*, respectively:

NORMAN. Listen to me, Clark. Of all the things you can do... all your powers... the greatest has always been your instinctive knowledge... of right and wrong. It was a gift of your own humanity. You never had to question your choices. In any situation... any crisis... you knew what to do. But the minute you made the Super more important than the Man... the day you decided to turn your back on Mankind... that completely cost you your instinct. That took your judgment away. (Waid and Ross 193)

SUPERMAN. As we [the Superheroes] saw ourselves. And we were both wrong. But I no longer care about the mistakes of yesterday. I care about coping with tomorrow... together. The problems we face still exist, we're not going to solve them for you [the humans]... we're going to solve them with you... not by ruling above you... but by living among you. We will no longer impose our power on humanity. We will earn your trust... in the hope that your world and our world could be one world once again. (Waid and Ross 195-196)

These two passages offer an instance of how McCay acts as a self-conscious lens on the purpose of superheroes and on the genre of superhero comics. Let us compare these lines with Sergeant Nick Fury's final lines to Agent Maria Hill at the end of *The Avengers*:

AGENT MARIA HILL. Sir, how does it work now? They've gone their separate ways, some pretty extremely far. We get into a situation like this again, what happens then?

NICK FURY. They'll come back.

AGENT MARIA HILL. Are you really sure about that?

NICK FURY. I am.

AGENT MARIA HILL. Why?

NICK FURY. Because we'll need them to.

When these lines from *Kingdom Come* and *The Avengers* are compared, it becomes clear that self-consciousness in the genre of superhero narratives is nothing old, or nothing new, depending on how you look at it. Norman McCay defines to Superman his signature quality that truly enables him to be a superhero. Similarly, Superman explicates to humans

(who readers may or may not want to see as contemporary superhero comics readers) how superheroes exist in relation to humans, and that he looks towards a better future, where man and superheroes will work with each other towards a common good. Sergeant Fury's discourse with Agent Hill openly predicts that the Avengers will be needed again because of mankind's need for them. These three passages state the self-awareness of superheroes within the superhero world/narrative. All three passages directly indicate how superheroes will exist with each other: for the characters of *Kingdom Come*, it is co-dependence and co-operation; for the people in *The Avengers*, it is man's inability to protect itself from evil/destruction. Sergeant Fury may even parallel McCay as the main human who has access and influence on superheroes. Sergeant Fury is the organizer and disciplinarian of the Avengers, and McCay is the arbiter on the fate of superheroes/metahumans. Both humans have direct access to superheroes, and through doing so, both see the consequentialist aspects of superheroes – morality, destruction, and elixirs for evil – and can serve as the tropes of self-consciousness and deeper themes for both narratives.

Planet Krypton and Norman McCay serve different functions for *Kingdom Come*, and express separate sentiments on the superhero narrative. While Planet Krypton embodies a tradition of superhero comics based on the hackneyed, fantastical, and material/commercial nature of the genre, the character of Norman McCay is a lens into the self-conscious, consequential, and moralistic themes behind superhero narratives. What *Kingdom Come* does with these tensions is nothing out of the ordinary and is still seen today in superhero narratives, most popularly, Joss Whedon's film *The Avengers*. However, *Kingdom Come* is set apart from narratives like *The Avengers* because when seen from a chronological standpoint, the novel responds to the state of other superhero comics at its time.

Isaac Cates, in "On the Literary Use of Superheroes; or, Batman and Superman Fistfight in Heaven," claims that *Kingdom Come*'s metahumans could have developed from the "frustration with the genre tics that writers of the Image generation [the 1990s] (Todd MacFarlane and Rob Liefeld, for example) absorbed from Moore and Miller in the 1980s," and therefore the novel is "an attempt to re-assert the pre-*Dark Knight* heroes of

Super Friends as forbears in a lineage of literary influence” (Cates 846-847). While Cates explicitly addresses the progeny and parental intervention involved with *Kingdom Comes*, whereas Klock does not, the novel’s plot nonetheless confronts the issue of a new and challengingly ebullient generation of superhumans that can only be “controlled” through the intervention of tradition. For my purposes, I will consider Klock’s argument with respect to the “revisionary superhero narrative” more than Cates’s claims on the parental aspect of *Kingdom Come*; however, I greatly appreciate Cates’s explicit mention of 1990s Image Comics serving as the “fallout” of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* that *Kingdom Come* seems to address.

Readers of *Kingdom Come* get a feel for the “fallout” that *Kingdom Come* attempts to respond to in the character Magog. Magog, a non-traditional superhero, was responsible for the nuclear devastation of the Midwest, when a reckless battle led by him resulted in the superhero the Atom being split, with a resulting nuclear holocaust of the Midwest region. Magog recounts his story to Superman, enumerating that at one point Superman was the central figure in the world of superheroes. However, as times changed and violence became increasingly tolerable, Superman did not adapt to the times and instead maintained the tradition of superhero stature within the realm of law and order. When Magog recounts his killing of the arch-villain Joker to Superman, he sets forth the argument that superheroes in the new times require violence to go about their business, and how humans first accepted the violent responses to villains (humans being metaphorical of the comic readership in the post-Miller/Moore age). Magog tells Superman:

Joker’d been deserving worse than ‘cuffs for years. So I took it on myself to lay him down... I was a hero... You [Superman] were afraid... that I was the Man of Tomorrow. You were afraid of the future I represented... The world changed... but you wouldn’t. So they [the humans] chose me. They chose the man who would kill over the man who wouldn’t... and now they’re dead. (Waid and Ross 97-100)

For Klock, Magog is representative of superhero morale after *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*, and the destruction of Kansas (the birthplace of the traditional superhero

comic being the childhood home of Superman) is allegorical of the state of the superhero comic in the post-Miller/Moore era. Whereas Miller and Moore revised the tradition of the superhero narrative to create works of literature, the superhero writers to come after sought only the violence and the “break with tradition” that Miller and Moore initiated and perfected. *Kingdom Come* hopes to mollify the drastic response to the revisionary superhero narrative by reminding readers and writers of comics in the post-Miller/Moore era of the tradition that enabled the revisionary superhero narrative to occur in the first place. Its futuristic setting and conflict become metaphors for the “infertile” superhero narrative. By the novel’s end, Superman (an emblem for traditional superhero comics) tells the humans that in fact they are no different and that superheroes will live among humans, earning their trust. With this conclusion, *Kingdom Come* brings life back to Kansas and to the tradition the region was evocative of in order to generate a brighter future for the superhero narrative: a future that does not forget the tradition from whence it originated.

Geoff Klock’s argument on *Kingdom Come* is derived from the influence of *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*. This shows the multiplicity of arguments around *Kingdom Come*. When the narrative is considered, one can pose an argument on the theological and Nietzschean aspects and themes of the novel: the idea of power and an examination of the split between humans and superhumans (who have been deified). However, when going beyond the ostensible narrative and its themes, and looking at the work from a more symbolic vantage point, one can argue that *Kingdom Come* is a comment and critique on the new superhero narrative that uses the future of traditional superheroes as the vessel for expressing its message. Yet even within the novel’s realm of being a critique on comics, there are several arguments as to how this is achieved. When first considering the novel as a critique, I only saw it in relation to the commercial growth of the corporate superhero comic starting in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s: the 1980s-90s Batman franchise, action figures, lunch boxes, pajamas, animated series, etc. I argue that *Kingdom Come* responds to the commoditized state of superhero comics: what was once a story has now become a product and an icon without much depth - the

superhero image becomes an iconographic vessel of making money and ignoring the deeper themes that make superhero narratives like *Kingdom Come* and *The Avengers* so clever and enjoyable. Furthermore, superhero comics – which were once based in tradition – became more based in banal violence during the “Image generation,” as Cates would claim. *Kingdom Come* is the need to purge the new amoral superheroes (the contemporary corporate management of superhero comics, as well as the “reckless” comic artists who are not based in tradition) from the genre, to make room for creativity, originality, character-building, and actual stories in the superhero genre. Geoff Klock makes a similar case that *Kingdom Come* is a critique on contemporary superhero comics, yet he holds a different argument. Instead, Klock uses the term “revisionary superhero narrative” to indicate the type of superhero narrative that came about with the publications of *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*. Klock sets up the argument that both pieces were turning points in the medium of comics, and because their influence was so great and their substance was so hard to top, the superhero narrative “after these works had no direction” (96). *Kingdom Come*, for Klock, is superhero comics’ means of reestablishing its sense of direction – within the narrative – by firmly cementing the role that traditional superheroes played in even allowing the birth of the revisionary superhero narrative to take place, and to move “the revisionary superhero narrative forward to the new age” (Klock 97). Even though Klock’s argument narrows the novel’s critique to the precise chronological moments of the publications of Miller’s and Moore’s novels and the superhero comics to come after, *Kingdom Come* remains a vital critique on comics that addresses issues such as over-commoditization and needless violence as “narrative.”

Geoff Klock’s critique on *Kingdom Come* relies on the publication of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* to be compelling and original. However, regarding and critiquing the novel is not limited to a reliance on these two preceding novels. Rather, *Kingdom Come*, having been published close to twenty years ago, is now the tradition as opposed to a narrative responding to tradition. With a contemporary film like *The Avengers*, audiences are invited to engage in grand and stunning displays of action spectacle and self-conscious thematic elements, which in many ways parallel the superhero action

and the deeper themes in *Kingdom Come*. The final fight scenes in both narratives, for example, are suspenseful and catastrophic – or as Travers wrote, “brings the battle intensity up to 11” – and emphasize the importance and mass cultural appeal to action and destructive spectacle in superhero narratives. Similarly, Agent Coulson’s death and Bruce Banner’s classic line regarding his secret to becoming the Hulk (“That’s my secret, Captain; I’m always angry”) show the more genuine and self-conscious themes that allows *The Avengers* to find and supremely actualize a balance between commercial spectacle and deeper meaning. With respect to *Kingdom Come*, readers see this same tension between commercialism and insightful meaning in the forms of Planet Krypton and Norman McCay, respectively. While the two narratives are sixteen years apart, these tensions are still salient in both pieces and enable the reciprocity of understanding for the two works – they each reciprocate a better understanding of the other. Through understanding the salience of these tensions in *Kingdom Come*, we as a 21st century audience can appreciate the self-conscious wit inherent to superhero narratives like *The Avengers*. Similarly, by understanding these same tensions in *The Avengers*, we realize that deeper and self-conscious themes in superhero narratives is nothing old, and we realize that works like *Kingdom Come* are now tradition; works like this are the work that inspires the mass cultural enjoyment of the smart and action-packed superhero narratives of today. As we are now in an age where narratives hit the big screen that we would never have imagined to hit the big screen, we can see that it was a tradition and history of comics that inspired *Kingdom Come*; and now it is works like *Kingdom Come*, with its balance of commercial appeal and deeper meaning, that serve as tradition, as models for the superhero narratives of the future, narratives that can now hit the big screen and can still awe-inspire audiences with a successful balance of these two tensions. From this, it is safe to argue the reality of the moral of *Kingdom Come*: tradition inspires the future.

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