

A promotional image for the character Wanda Maximoff, also known as the Scarlet Witch. She is shown from the chest up, wearing her signature red and black patterned turtleneck sweater. Her long, wavy red hair is styled down. She has a serious, focused expression and is looking slightly to the left of the camera. Her right hand is extended forward, with her index and middle fingers pointing towards the viewer, as if casting a spell. A vibrant, glowing red energy emanates from her hand, swirling and radiating outwards. The background is a dark, moody space with bright, curved lines of light in shades of purple and blue, suggesting a high-tech or magical environment. The overall lighting is dramatic, highlighting her face and the intensity of the energy she is projecting.

How Women in Comic Books Teach Us About Societal Values

Megan Miller

Captivity Narrative Heroes = Comic Book Heroes

- Idea of people, functioning outside of society, becoming heroes reminded me of comic books
- I wanted to know how these two connected
- Propp's theory helps connect story themes



Captivity Narratives

“As [a] popular genre, [captivity narratives] come to have a kind of incidental literary value, ...and functions as a popular vehicle for various *historically and culturally individuated purposes*. **What is important is what the narrative was for the reader for whom it was written.**” –Roy Harvey Pearce

A Notable Exploit by Cotton Mathers, 1702

- Hannah Duston – 1697
- Violently taken from home
- Kids killed by “savages”
- Held captive
- Planned an escape for her and the other prisoners
- Violently killed her captors
- Made her way home
- Received a hero’s welcome



Propp's Morphology

- 1st Sphere: Introduction

- Introduces the situation and most of the main characters, setting the scene for subsequent adventure

- 2nd Sphere: The Body of the story

- The main story starts here and extends to the departure of the hero on the main quest.

- 3rd Sphere: The Donor Sequence

- In the third sphere, the hero goes in search of a method by which the solution may be reached, gaining the magical agent from the Donor. Note that this in itself may be a complete story.

- 4th Sphere: The Hero's Return

- In the final (and often optional) phase of the storyline, the hero returns home, hopefully uneventfully and to a hero's welcome, although this may not always be the case.

What do we learn from the 4th sphere?

- This is where legends are born
- This is where we learn about society:
 - Values
 - Anxieties
 - Worries
 - Concerns, etc.



Sphere 4: The
Hero's Return

One example of comic books mirroring societal anxiety:

- Batman, American comic strip superhero, debuted in May 1939
- The term "latchkey kid" first appeared in the 1940s to describe young children taking care of themselves after school while dad fought in the war and mom went off to work. The anxiety over latchkey kids really exploded in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s.



What women in comic books tell us about our society.



Wanda Maximoff, The Scarlet Witch (2021)

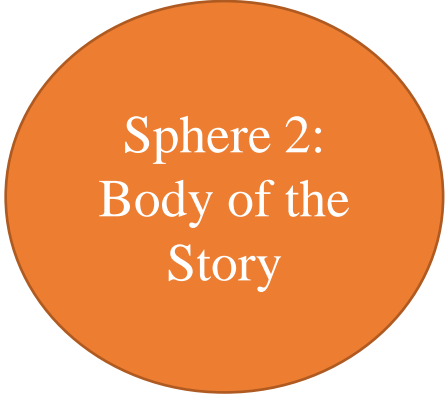
- Parents killed in a bombing
- Witnesses societal uncertainty
- Wanted to change the world
- Loses everyone she loves
- Creates her perfect version of life





Sphere 1:
Introduction

1. Absentation: someone goes missing
 - Hannah is taken from her home
 - Wanda loses her parents



Sphere 2:
Body of the
Story

8. Villainy and lack: the need is identified
 - Hannah makes a plan to escape
 - Wanda realizes the need for action in the world



Sphere 3:
The Donor
Sequence

12. Testing: Hero is challenged to prove heroic qualities
13. Reaction: Hero responds to test
 - Hannah kills her captors and escapes
 - Wanda becomes a superhero

Sphere 4: The Hero's Return

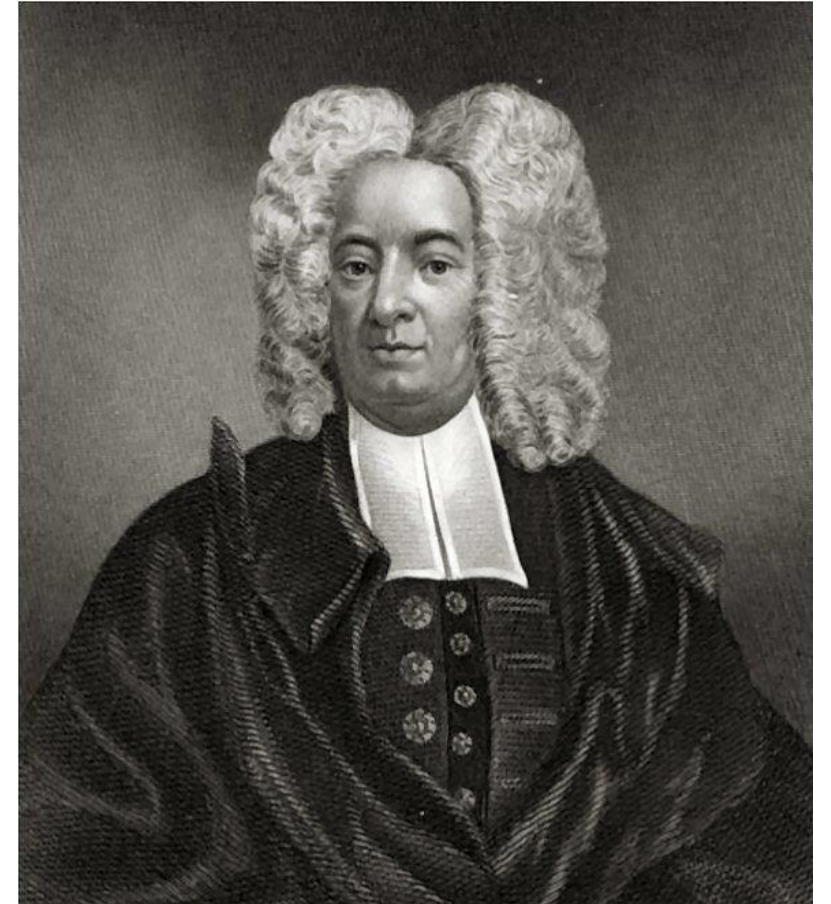
- 20. Return: Hero sets out for home
- 23. Arrival: Hero arrives unrecognized
- 27. Recognition: Hero is recognized
- 29. Transfiguration: Hero is given a new appearance

How do these women accomplish this?

How do these women reenter society despite everything they have done?

Hannah's Return to Society (Sphere 4)

- Cotton Mather was “the most celebrated of all New England Puritans” (Britannica).
- Likened Hannah's actions to Bible when he said she, “took up a resolution to imitate the action of Gael upon Siberia” (Mather).
- Published in *A Notable Exploit* (1702)



Cotton Mather

Wanda's Return to Society (Sphere 4)

- Built her version of her “perfect life”
- Examined elements of trauma
- Grief
- Government power and control

- Will she be welcomed back in or has she gone too far?



Conclusion

- Captive Narratives and Comics books flow through the spheres of Propp's functions in the same way
- They take regular people and turn them into heroes
- They take societies anxieties, concerns, values, worries and turns them into a productive and understandable thing
- They are stories we can sympathize with as an individual and as a society
- Comic books and the women in them tell us more than just a simple story. They teach us about ourselves.

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