Logan: Generic Mutancy in the X-Verse

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Prologue

This study explores the themes of somatic, familial, and generic transformation in James Mangold's (2017c) X-Men superhero film *Logan*. Juxtaposing the "natural" transformation of mutancy with technological metamorphosis – including scientifically engineered births, surgical alterations, and targeted gene therapy – the X-verse explores the evolution of identity for those whose bodies and powers do not fit within the norm. How do they create new families, and how do these clans develop? Furthermore, how do the genre conventions of this cinematic world reflect and inform these changes?

The X-Men franchise is culturally and commercially significant, currently the seventh-highest cumulative international box-office grossing film series. The top ten are dominated by superheroes, with the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) at #1 (The Numbers, n.d.). Although the X-Men characters were initially introduced to Marvel Comics in 1963, the film rights were licensed to 20th Century Fox in 1994; the X-Men then developed within their own cinematic X-verse, which is now being re-integrated with the MCU following the acquisition of 21st Century Fox by The Walt Disney Company in 2019. Thus *Logan* arrives at a transitional time and is a highly unusual film in the series in many respects, not least of which is its apparent finality, inviting reflection on its distinctive characteristics.

Over the course of the film, the titular character, having already transformed from superhero Wolverine into a weakened and decrepit Logan, continues to change – back into a superhero, and then into accepting his role as a father, finally, and into death. In a sense the arc of the narrative is predictable as we are indeed offered a new beginning, but its familiarity masks something more significant at play in the way the film treats its cinematic forebears, principally George Stevens' (1953) classic Western *Shane*, as well as its own evolving superhero film genre. Here the transformation of bodies, identity, technology, family, and genre is interwoven. I propose that *Logan*'s challenge to conventions of the X-verse and the superhero film genre suggests a new conception of "generic mutancy." Such meta-reflection on mutancy, itself proliferating from characters' superpowers to generic evolution, reflects the ever-accelerating pace of social and technological transformation.

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Beginning with an Ending

The character Logan, also known as Wolverine, is a key figure in the X-verse, the setting for the X-Men comic books and juggernaut cinematic universe. The films offer several versions of his origin story, including (appropriately enough) in the first scene of *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (Hood 2009) which depicts a violent quasi-Oedipal drama of complex social and biological ties: when the young James Howlett's (Troye Sivan) loving father is murdered by a neighbor, James sprouts claws from his knuckles and slays the intruder, only to learn that he is his genetic parent. Seeing his talons, his mother recoils in terror and revulsion, crying, "*What are you?*" James flees with his newfound mutant brother and re-names himself Logan after his biological father's surname. Eventually scientists lace the adult Logan's (Hugh Jackman) bones and claws with an indestructible metal, "adamantium," which, in combination with his mutant regenerative healing factor, renders him seemingly immortal. For the next two centuries Logan's mother's question remains, and remains unanswered: what *is* he – man, animal, machine? Moreover: what must he sacrifice in order to form a new family?

Logan joins a clan when he is found and taken in by Professor Charles Xavier (Patrick Stewart), patriarchal headmaster of the School for Gifted Youngsters and leader of the X-Men team, assuming the moniker of Wolverine and fighting for peace and justice alongside other mutants. Many of them, too, have been cast from their homes, their difference regarded as threatening, and they form new kinship bonds under Xavier's wise leadership. Yet Logan remains troubled and troublesome, something of an outsider even within the tribe. As the most prominent anchor character of the X-Men film series with his own dedicated titles, his journey figures the formation of identity alongside an ongoing search for belonging. His quest unfolds in the spectacular realm of the superhero genre, with the first nine X-Men films highlighting the squad's mutant powers including teleportation, telepathy, telekinesis, cryokinesis, materiokinesis, atmokinesis, and magnetism, among others. The action often produces dramatic visual spectacles such as the levitation of bridges in *X-Men: The Last Stand* (Ratner 2006) and stadiums in *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (Singer 2014).

Logan signals a dramatic break from this legacy, a change both in the formation of the family and the genre itself, purportedly the last installment featuring Jackman in the titular role after a 17-year run and Stewart as Xavier. It is a commercially successful tentpole title, grossing the fourth-highest opening weekend for an R-rated movie in the US at its release (Hughes 2017), yet it presents a surprising turn in the X-verse, challenging the audience's escapist expectations of the series with its dark themes, lacking clearly otherworldly exploits such as matter-transformation and time-travel. Stylistically it is much more of a gunslinger/road-trip mashup, featuring a sandy pilgrimage through the American West far from the classic urban superhero setting. We begin off Route 54 near El Paso, Texas, by the US-Mexico border, where a weary limo-driver Logan wakens drunkenly in the back seat of his '24 Chrysler to persuade a band of would-be hubcap thieves

to desist: "Ah, Guys. Those are chrome-plated lugs. You're gonna strip 'em. The plating flakes off." When they shoot him point-blank in the heart, he sighs, curses, and rises to remonstrate with them again: "Ah, guys, guys…guys, seriously, you don't wanna do this." It is only when they shoot toward the car that he flies into a berserker rage and slays them with his retractable metal claws. The violence is in a sense more gruesome than in the previous films – the R-rating allows for grisly decapitations and such – yet also more reluctant. And we soon learn why.

It is 2029, and the plating is flaking off the mutant family. We're not sure if we wanna keep doing this. Logan is clearly unwell, coughing and haggard; he can still recover from a deadly wound with his recuperative powers, but not fully. He lives in hiding in an abandoned, moldering smelting plant in Juárez, Mexico with a debilitated Xavier suffering from a disease that has corrupted his telepathic abilities. They are tended to by Caliban (Stephen Merchant), a pale, ghostly mutant who can sense and track other mutants and is injured by exposure to sunlight. Their powers have become self-destructive, turned against themselves and mutantkind: Logan is being poisoned by the adamantium metal lacing his skeleton, losing his capacity to heal himself and suffering an agonizingly protracted death; Charles, unable to control his potent psychic powers, suffers devastating telepathic seizures that have killed seven of his students and X-Men, while Caliban's mutant-tracking abilities are eventually appropriated to pursue his fellow mutants. Mutants appear to be on the brink of extinction, and the three believe themselves to be among the last surviving. This pattern of self-destruction and threatened annihilation is unrelenting, the suffering nearly unremitting throughout the film. We witness the failing bodies and powers of the ailing adult mutants alongside the apparent erasure of mutantkind, the erosion of the family unit, the degradation of society as a whole, as well as the seeming dissolution of the superhero genre itself. All the formerly formidable X-Men can seemingly hope for is a peaceable end to their story, free from persecution. Their plan, such as it is, is to live on a boat and leave civilization behind entirely.

With such a forbidding beginning, the final curtain seemingly descending and the film punctuated by funerals, *Logan* poses the question of what will become of these characters, the mutant family, and the super-genre. If death is nigh, what sort of re-formation or rebirth might we expect, if any? Indeed, a characteristic duality inheres in the X-verse wherein an agent of destruction may also offer salvation, and vice-versa – the age-old Frankensteinian dilemma of scientific research as both promise and peril. Here it is apparent in the double effects of technological interventions such as Logan's *adam*antium-laced skeleton (source of indomitability and now toxic mortal threat) and the green serum (strengthens but kills if taken in higher doses) while mutancy itself is both the vehicle of evolution and superpowers and, when unchecked, becomes deadly cancer (an illicit child-mutant breeding program is officially termed "pediatric cancer research"). In keeping with this pattern, while much of *Logan* is a merciless progression of dissolution and threatened obliteration, ultimately it is a redemptive suffering and self-sacrifice – following the allegorical exemplar of its primary cinematic reference, *Shane* – for the sake of rebirth of the mutant family in the Edenic woods.

Yet, significantly, *how* is this rebirth enacted in *Logan*? What new form does the clan take, and how does it inform our understanding of mutancy, identity, and family? Following the evolution of family structure in the X-Verse and *Logan* in particular, we will compare such shifts with the film's use of various cinematic sources. What sort of common mutation – in kinship roles and in genre alike – does it portray, and to what end?

Stage I: Found X-Family

As Logan's origin story in *X-Men Origins* signals, the mutant family embodies new configurations of biology and kinship. The first significant familial stage in the X-Verse is that of found or created family for mutants, a significant and pervasive theme in the comics and films forming the backstory to *Logan*.[1] *Uncanny X-Men* comic book writer Chris Claremont, who created many of the core characters and crafted key story arcs, specifically "wanted to include flawed individuals who find a way to struggle through life in an adopted family," as Joseph Darowski describes (2014, 77). Claremont explains that the series is "a quest for family. It's a quest for a place to belong….*The X-Men* works best when it says to the reader, 'You are welcome here. We are your guides. You're an outcast, we're outcasts – let's bond!'" (Darowski 2014, 77). Indeed, many readers have responded to this call, such as Bryan Hutchinson writing of his undiagnosed ADD and sense of shame and alienation in childhood, describing his view of himself as "an outcast or a mutant such as the ones in the X-Men comic books" (2008, 53). This sense of shared alienation is perhaps a key factor in the success of the X-franchise.[2]

Reflecting this theme of estrangement and found family, many of the students in Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters have been rejected by their parents and must conceal their mutancy from the world at large for fear of harm – hence the academy's euphemistic name. In *The Last Stand*, after Xavier's "death," the students reflect that the school is their only home. As Storm (Halle Berry) explains in her eulogy, standing by Xavier's tombstone, inscribed, *Father Teacher Leader*: "When we were afraid, he gave us strength. And when we were alone, he gave us a family." In this film the threatened "cure" for mutancy represents the desire on the part of the families of origin to eradicate difference, while the found family of mutants celebrates and protects them, affirming that mutancy is not itself a disease.

Andrew Solomon terms such kinship "horizontal identity," often characteristic of gayness, Deafness, Down syndrome, unusually high intelligence, autism, etc. In contrast with traditional "vertical" families of origin, horizontal identity may occur when

> someone has an inherent or acquired trait that is foreign to his or her parents and must therefore acquire identity from a peer group….such horizontal identities may reflect recessive genes, random mutations, prenatal influences, or values and preferences that a child does not share with his progenitors.
>
> (2012, 2)

While present-day random mutations do not enable people to walk through walls or levitate cars, the dilemmas of the X-verse echo real life. For example, in *X2: X-Men United* (Singer 2003), Bobby Drake/Iceman (Shawn Ashmore), accompanied by fellow X-Men, reveals his powers to his family of origin in a classic "coming-out" scene, drawing a parallel between mutancy and homosexuality. His mother responds, "We still love you, Bobby. It's just, this mutant problem is a little…*complicated*." She continues: "So, when did you first know you were, a… [mutant]? [*Anguished*] This is all my fault…[*Plaintively*] Bobby, have you tried… *not* being a mutant?"

While the horizontal mutant family celebrates and nourishes members' talents and is often essential for their survival, ultimately it is no less *complicated* than the traditional vertical unit and faces many of the same quandaries. For example, might the norms of the mutant family require a collapse of difference there as well? Discussing Bobby's "coming out" scene, Jason Smith (2016, 184) proposes that the other mutants' presence moves it "from an individualistic decision to a collective grievance…[highlighting] the reworking of the gay and lesbian experience into the trilogy's own civil rights narrative, in which all mutants face the same challenges" – suggesting a conflation of diverse identities. In addition, how are the norms of the mutant family policed, its own boundaries enforced, as when members of a clan forged by shared physical characteristics change? Bucciferro (2016, 214) observes that "when Magneto tells a 'cured' Mystique 'You are no longer one of us' (*The Last Stand*), he effectively alienates her from his Brotherhood of Mutants," indicating that normative exclusionary criteria remain. Moreover, who will enforce the roles of the modern mutant family, and what values will they uphold? In this sense Xavier and Magneto are competing patriarchs split by ideological differences, as illustrated by their conflict over Jean Grey in *The Last Stand*, as well as their divorce at the close of *X-Men: First Class* (Vaughn 2011) when the mutant "children" must choose sides, dividing the tribe. Such challenges to the found/created family of mutants raise the question of its composition and criteria for inclusion as it evolves. Will the family remain intact or disintegrate over time – or will it reform yet again in a different manner?

Stage II: Aging Family, Aging Genres

With these questions in mind, we enter the next familial stage in *Logan*, that of *aging family*. As discussed, the broader mutant family is nearly extinct and the adult mutants are deteriorating. Charles is a shadow of his former self, seemingly afflicted with dementia, emaciated, while Logan is unkempt, his beard shaggy, and unwell – coughing, in pain, his regenerative powers diminishing.

The characters' decline is a shock, as aging super-bodies are particularly disquieting. José Alaniz begins *Death, Disability, and the Superhero* with a discussion of the unsettling aspects of Gilles Barbier's 2002 *Nursing Home* installation featuring a pot-bellied Captain America lying on a gurney with an IV alongside elderly and exhausted-seeming Wonder Woman, Mister Fantastic, and Superman, using a walker. According to Alaniz, the piece's disconcerting irony speaks to "the

super-body as a site of elaborate, overdetermined signification," a "super-signifier [which] reifies nations, death-denying vigor, and sexual potency" (2014, 4–6). Charles and Logan's deterioration, then, can be understood in the context of the genre's characteristic elision of physical decay, predicated on "an always-erased though always-implied disabled/dying/dead body" (Alaniz 2014, 25). Moreover, superhero films can be said to offer a de-materialized experience; Scott Bukatman juxtaposes Anthony Mann's Westerns – "characterized by a strong identification with the body of the protagonist…[obsessively revolving] around the fractured, punctured, trampled, and wounded body" – with the superhero film that "gives us corporeality without *corpus*…by removing the body from space, it removes meaning – lived meaning – from the body" (2011, 120). In contrast, *Logan* offers the return of *corpus,* bringing the vulnerable disabled/dying/dead super-body clearly into view.

To the degree that *Logan* is a Western, too, the aging hero references the "post-heyday Western," as Jean-Christophe Cloutier terms it: "a narrative mode featuring epic yet elderly protagonists" (2012, 110). It is exemplified by Don Siegel's (1976) *The Shootist* and Clint Eastwood's (1992) *Unforgiven*, where we first encounter the legendary gunslinger Will Munny (Clint Eastwood) falling repeatedly in the muck of a pig pen. The audience's familiarity with the characters' history and potency in previous films informs their reception of the aging heroes, highlighting the characters' awareness of their own decline and increased vulnerability – a shock in a genre seemingly predicated upon eternal youth. As Cloutier describes, classic Western heroes are perpetually ageless:

> To meet Shane years after he's disappeared into the horizon, to meet him wearing dentures, wincing as he saddles his horse, rubbing his arthritic hands before turning in early in his stained long johns – this would go against the audience's expectations and even the demands of the genre.…yet this kind of ill-fitting, almost parodic union of genre and age is precisely what the post-heyday Western achieves.
>
> (2012, 111)

It is no accident that Cloutier cites *Shane* as a hypostasized exemplar of the timeless Western, what Will Wright identified as the "classical plot" of the genre (1977). As Robert Warshow wrote in 1954, "Stevens has tried to freeze the Western myth once and for all in the immobility of Alan Ladd's countenance" (1979, 150–51). Cloutier points out, however, that the seemingly ageless qualities of the classic Western characters contradict the elegiac nature of the genre, while the aging of the always-already-archaic hero in late Westerns represents a more authentic synchronicity between character and form and "an occasion for thinking about the evolution of the genre more generally" (2012, 128).

As we will see, *Logan* explicitly figures Logan as the aging post-heyday Shane, wrapping his bloody knuckles before collapsing in bed, and the question of whether and how he will follow Shane's sacrificial exemplar in his weary state becomes a central propellant of the film. By the same token, these decaying super-bodies

and stylistic shifts offer an opportunity to contemplate the evolution of the superhero genre more generally, and to consider whether it is following the arc of the post-heyday Western. For example, another characteristic of the late Western that Cloutier highlights is self-referentiality, exemplified by writer characters in both *The Shootist* and *Unforgiven* who are eager to pen the story of the Western hero. As Cloutier (2012, 119) notes, both films "suggest that the 'true' gunslinger would have no interest whatsoever in having his actions dramatized into exaggerated stories" – indeed, in *Unforgiven* Little Bill derisively reads aloud from *The Duke of Death*, W.W. Beauchamp's account of legendary gunslinger English Bob, and enumerates the story's errors while Beauchamp and English Bob are locked in the jail cells behind him. Similarly, in *Logan* the titular "true" superhero brandishes the X-Men comic books, disparaging them as "bullshit": "Maybe a quarter of it happened, and not like this," he growls derisively. "In the *real* world, people *die*."

In this "real world" of *Logan*, then – a world where superheroes, too, age and die – the dynamics within the family of mutants change as well. The found family of Charles, Logan, and Caliban exhibits the shifting roles wrought by illness and aging, including the inversion of parent/child responsibilities as a parent declines. Xavier is frequently carried in Logan's arms, and they must dampen his telepathic powers with medication to keep his destructive neurodegenerative disease in check. Thus Logan becomes the patriarch, but an absent, alcoholic, failing one, coming home to Caliban playing the role of domestic partner, mostly confined to the interior, ironing Logan's shirts and entreating him to talk about issues Logan would prefer to ignore. If Logan is the new head of the family it is clear that it will not survive if things continue apace, for he cannot care for his kin properly. When Charles informs Logan that he has sensed a new "speciation" – the presence of a new young mutant – Logan dismisses him; Xavier tells Logan he has been a disappointment: "You're waiting for me to die."

Stage III: Sacrifice, New Family, and New Cinematic Combinations

This conversation takes place 15 minutes into *Logan*, and simply waiting for Xavier and the others to die surely would not make for much of a superhero (nor Western) flick. As we soon learn, Xavier is correct about the new speciation, and we enter the next familial phase, that of *new family*, with the introduction of an unexpected generation of mutant children accompanied by their own origin story and familial narrative.

When Logan is beseeched to assist a young girl named Laura (Dafne Keen), they learn that she is his genetic daughter; with retractable claws and an adamantium-laced skeleton like her father, she was bred and engineered by the US biotechnology corporation Alkali-Transigen as part of a secret program led by Dr. Zander Rice (Richard E. Grant) to create mutant "weapons" in Mexico. Laura's caretaker, Gabriela Lopez (Elizabeth Rodriguez) – a nurse at Transigen Research who helped Laura and other children escape – implores Logan to bring her "daughter" to safety. She explains that the company decided to terminate the program along with Laura (known to them as X-23) and the other young mutants after it developed "something

new, something they think is better than the children. Something they say is without a soul" – an adult Wolverine clone, X-24 (Hugh Jackman), who can be fully controlled. After Transigen and its band of cyborg enforcers, the Reavers, kill Lopez in pursuit of the escaped mutants, Xavier, Logan, and Laura flee together, embarking upon a road trip toward a spot in North Dakota called Eden, where they hope to reunite with the other children. The three stay briefly with the Munsons, a loving family whose farm is threatened by the forces of large-scale techno-agribusiness. The Munsons and Charles are massacred by X-24, and only Logan and Laura escape. By the finale the remaining adult mutants – Charles, Caliban, and Logan – have all sacrificed their lives so that Laura and the other mutant children can reach the meeting point and cross the border into Canada, promised to be a safe haven. Thus the X-story, which seemed to be nearing its close at the start of the film, now begins anew. Along the road, however, the mutant family becomes reconfigured, and in telling the story the film gestures toward a number of different cinematic exemplars, reconstituting them in its own fashion.

To begin with, family is vitally important for the survival of these new mutant children. While previous mutants were considered to be naturally occurring (as in Logan's reference to mutants as divinely ordained, either "part of God's plan" or "God's mistake") the Transigen children are specifically engineered in a laboratory. As Dr. Rice tells Caliban, "Unlike you, [Laura] isn't pure. She was not made by nature. She's a mistake of my own." While the mutants at Xavier's Academy found a loving home, the Transigen mutants were created specifically to be weaponized and thus familial ties are cruelly proscribed in the sterile, prison-like laboratory in which they are confined. As Rice reprimands one of the nurses: "Do not think them as children. Think them as things, with patents and copyrights. *Comprende*?" The "mistake" of their conception, however, is that the children are not "things," and they resist becoming trained killers. It is family that saves some of them from being murdered – Gabriela's motherly love and self-sacrifice – and they need a father's protection in order to escape from danger. As Gabriela explains to Logan: "[Laura's] not my child, but I love her. You may not love her, but she's your child. Please. I beg you…take her to safety." Here we find the juxtaposition of shifting familial bonds of care, love, and biology which her entreaty expresses so movingly.

It is obvious to Xavier as well as the audience that Logan must recognize this familial duty of care toward Laura. While Logan steadfastly resists the responsibility at first, Charles welcomes her into the group, assuring her she will be safe. As the three of them embark on their journey in the gunshot-riddled limousine they clumsily try on kinship roles, Logan holding Laura back from using her claws on the change box of a child's horsie ride as well as on a rest-stop convenience store employee ("*Not OK*!" he reprimands), socializing her in his inimitably gruff fashion. With the clan re-forming, *Logan* becomes a dark and quirky family road-trip movie for stretch, explicitly modeled after *Little Miss Sunshine* (Dayton and Faris 2006). Among their many parallels are complex alienated families with a mute child traveling in falling-apart vehicles to reach climactic finales, one set in a children's beauty pageant where father and daughter dance together to "Super freak," and the other an acrobatic fight scene in which

engineered-mutant father and daughter gruesomely slay their enemies together with their adamantium claws, affirming the cohesion of the idiosyncratic family unit. As Mangold pitched the film to the studio: "It's *Little Miss Sunshine* meets *Scarface*" (Mangold 2017a).

Before we reach our destination, however, it is at this point in the film that it tries on yet another cinematic exemplar. When Laura stops in the Oklahoma City casino to gaze at a set of father/daughter mannequins in Western garb holding hands, they purchase the outfits and copy the Western familial model. As they are changing into the clothing during a rare peaceable interlude in the hotel room, Charles and Laura raptly watch *Shane*. We see their reflections in the screen as it plays, and in case we were to miss its significance Charles emphasizes its importance to Laura: "This is a very famous picture, Laura.…I first saw this picture in the Essoldo cinema in my home town when I was your age." In the film, Shane (Alan Ladd) arrives on horseback in an idyllic Wyoming valley, a depiction Lloyd Baugh (1997, 160) describes as "an earthly paradise, a new garden of Eden…enhanced by appropriately pastoral music." Shane stays with the welcoming Starrett family – Joe, Marian, and little Joey (Van Heflin, Jean Arthur, and Brandon deWilde) – only to find that they and the other homesteading farmers are threatened by a cattle baron, Ryker (Emile Meyer) and his enforcers, who are attempting to hound the "sodbusters," as they call them, off the land. Shane becomes the protector of the Starrett family, mentoring their son Joey and guarding them from harm, preventing Starrett from perishing in a gunfight by going in his place. Alongside Charles and Laura we watch the film's climax wherein Shane kills Ryker and his henchmen in a shoot-out but is injured himself, followed by Shane's final speech to Joey: "A man has to be what he is, Joey…there's no living with, with a killing.…right or wrong, it's a brand, a brand that sticks." At the end of the film a wounded, bleeding Shane rides off through a graveyard as Joey implores him to "Come back!" – an iconic moment in cinematic history.

Many critics have noted that the Christ allegory of the film is unmistakable; as Michael Mardsen explains, "the Savior-like nature of the Western hero is nowhere more clearly manifested…[Shane] is the new Christ, the frontier Christ, coming down from a western Olympus to help the cause of the farmers against the ranchers," sacrificing himself and anointing Joey as his apostle (1984, 398–400). Logan has long exhibited many Shane-like qualities vis-à-vis the mutant family, his lone-gunman character and rugged individualism a recurrent point of tension with the other X-Men, raising the stakes for his acts of sacrifice. Here the comparison is extremely explicit, and once the sartorial congruence is established, the mutants' visit to the Munson family of Will, Kathryn, and young Nate (Eriq La Salle, Elise Neal, and Quincy Fouse) offers an unmistakable parallel and, in the context of *Shane*'s salvific themes, sets the expectation for Logan's own redemptive sacrifice. The loving, hard-working, and pious Munson parents and son are under siege from the modern-day ranchers – now in the guise of corporate techno-capitalism – enveloping their farm and attempting to drive them out. The mutants are welcomed into their home, a poignant tableau of domestic life which Laura absorbs intently. When the water is shut off that night, Logan accompanies Will to the pump station

to fix it, echoing the Shane/Joe Starrett stump-uprooting scene; Logan is wearing a nearly exact replica of Shane's "farm-rig" work clothes and strips off his shirt, just as Shane does. A band of men arrives to threaten them, and Logan fends them off, standing up to danger in Will's place. Meanwhile, back at the house, Laura gazes at Nate's cowboy posters and borrows his phone, listening to Raury's "Devil's Whisper": *You better run, run from the devil*….

The Munsons are an unequivocal echo of the Starretts and clearly in need of rescue, yet *Logan* dramatically deviates from *Shane* as these visitors imperil them. As Logan pointedly reminds Charles, they are taking a risk spending the night (they are not running nearly fast enough from the devil) and when their pursuers arrive the Munsons are all gruesomely murdered by X-24. Instead of salvation there is shocking carnage, entering what writer-director Mangold describes in the audio commentary as "the emotional and style space of a horror film" and severing the symbolic head of *Shane* with its adamantium claws. For in *Logan* the family that must be saved is the family of mutantkind, which is at risk of being driven not just out of the valley but off of the earth entirely. After Charles and Caliban both perish, Logan carries Laura to safety. Now the question of whether Logan will recognize his duty of sacrifice for Laura and the family of mutants becomes even more stark, and more inevitable. Yet complicating the matter is the question of whether he is physically capable of protecting her, as he appears closer and closer to death.

When the dramatic finale arrives in the verdant woods of Eden after the long dusty journey, it offers the anticipated redemptive restoration of duty and familial love, with the expected violence as well. Just as Shane "struggles mightily with his fate and wishes it were otherwise" yet in the end accepts "the burden of being a savior" (Mardsen 1984, 399), Logan's resistance finally crumbles and he accedes to his destiny, knowingly sacrificing his life so that Laura and her friends may live and find a new home together. He injects the green serum to give him temporary strength, and when Dr. Zander Rice explains he will not survive further wounds he continues to fight, and to fight savagely and well. Thus the salvific allegory of Shane is a specifically violent one, as Mardsen explains: The Western Savior "could not be the loving and forgiving and merciful Christ of the New Testament….this time he wears the garb of the gunfighter, the only Savior the sagebrush, the wilderness, and the pure savagery of the West can accept" (1984, 395).

For the X-fan it is a purgative scene, the return of the beloved ageless warrior Wolverine after so much decrepitude and suffering. The violence can be enjoyed with impunity, for Logan's ferocity is necessary. His reluctance in the opening sequence to combat the hubcap-thieves sets the tone, appropriate to the Western, of what Warshow describes as a drama of "self-restraint: The moment of violence must come in its own time and according to its special laws, or else it is valueless" (1979, 153). And it presages the finale, in which he is left, unequivocally, with no choice – he is most likely dying regardless, his father has just been slain brutally, and he has no home to return to. Moreover, if he does not act the children's torturers will slaughter them and mutantkind itself will be extinguished, with the exception of Logan's murderous soul-less clone X-24 and his ilk – hardly a fitting legacy.

According to Jane Tompkins such justification of violence is a familiar trope of Western films, as we see when Shane only acts after he is goaded multiple times by Ryker's gang:

> At this juncture, the point where provocation has gone too far, retaliatory violence becomes not simply justifiable but imperative: Now, we are made to feel, *not* to transgress the interdict against violence would be the transgression.… there's a tremendous feeling of relief at the moment of discharge, relief from the tension that holding back the urge to strike has built up.
>
> (1992, 228)

Logan's audience understands the familiar genre code of justified violence, and, having suffered alongside the ailing and dying heroes and with the moral certitude that the evil techno-corporate scientists must be driven out of the valley, it can finally enjoy with impunity an ending awash in what Tompkins terms the "moral ecstasy" of warranted carnage (1992, 229).

With such violent catharsis comes emotional release as well: a resolution of the family and a restoration of father-daughter love. When Logan is mortally injured by his evil clone, Laura kills X-24 with the adamantium bullet Logan had saved for his own suicide. Logan tells her that she doesn't have to fight anymore – "don't be what they made you" – renouncing the violence and putting it in the past. The two experience a tearful scene of mutual recognition as he takes his dying breaths. Laura is crying, calling him "Daddy" as they clasp hands; Logan, gazing at Laura, smiles and utters his last words: "Ah, so this is what it feels like." For the first time in the film we see the tormented Logan in a state of peace, his face unfurrowed. "You know, Logan, this is what life looks like," Charles had said in the Munson household. "You should take a moment and feel it." Now, literally in his last moment, Logan finally heeds this fatherly advice.

After the unrelenting destruction and ever-shifting family structures within the film, this reconciliation offers a unification of familial bonds. As Logan had read Laura's Transigen file in the Oklahoma City hotel room, it confirmed her genetic connection to him and shared mutancy as well as their common trauma of having been scientifically engineered; at the same time, *Shane* played in the background, superimposing the scripts of biological family, found family, and ethical duty toward her. When he willingly gives his life for Laura, Logan recognizes her as both genetic child and found family. Thus horizontal and vertical identities unite in this final, Edenic moment, when the bonds of biology, care, and love converge, at long last. Logan has responded to the call for sacrifice, and in the end he does experience this redemption, ensuring the survival of the family of mutants. While the evening with the Munsons offered a tantalizing glimpse of the tenderness of family life, it is a family Logan can only save in death, for *a man has to be what he is, and there's no living with a killing*. As he is dying from a (Shane/Christ-like) wound in his side, he and Laura finally clasp hands, and she becomes the apostle.

Ending with a Beginning: Re-Figuring Family, *Shane*, and Genre

As we re-play *Logan*'s sacrificial-road-trip script, however, we find a quite bumpy and unsettling stretch of off-roading (both literally and figuratively) between Charles' death and the finale offering crucial insight into *Logan*'s re-figuration of both familial and generic structure.

For one thing, if the first familial stage in the X-verse is the search for found family while *Logan* introduces the second stage of aging and role-reversal, this cycle begins to accelerate with bewildering rapidity at this point in the film. After the massacre at the Munsons', Logan rescues Laura, carrying her in his arms as he had earlier carried Charles, and he reluctantly agrees to bring her to "Eden"; yet the parent–child inversion occurs in fast-forward as Logan declines quickly, unable to fully recuperate following his fight with X-24. Laura steals a car and drives him to a small-town doctor and then, after he collapses again, through the wilderness to the meeting point where she and her friends lift him, helpless, up a cliff-face – this time literally carrying *him*. "You had a nightmare," she tells him, when he wakes up thrashing, the sort of reassurance a parent offers to a stricken child who rises, frightened, in the middle of the night. Little Joey certainly never needed to comfort Shane nor nurse him back to health, and this series of inversions is exhausting and destabilizing. Will the family ever cohere again? Who is its leader? Will it survive? Who must sacrifice for whom?

The finale offers an answer of sorts, as in the end Logan does indeed offer his life in dramatic fashion for his daughter's survival. Yet following the pattern of parent–child role-inversion, Laura has also liberated her father with the characteristic X-blend of care and gore as she fights at his side, finally vanquishing Logan's violent youth by killing his evil twin and giving him the opportunity to die with meaning, dignity, and familial love. When she quotes Shane's parting words to Joey at Logan's grave – "Now you run up home to your mother…tell her everything is alright…there are no more guns in the valley" – Logan is both the self-sacrificing Shane and the child who can finally return home, liberated from the killing, relieved of his immorality and immortality and buried at the border of his native Canada, at peace, at long last. Correspondingly, Laura is both a protected child and a fierce warrior and nurturer, able to offer a eulogy while Logan was unable to do so at Xavier's graveside, and then walking out of the last frame of the film and leaving the valley. Here the boundary between parent and child is both restored and breached, just as the distinction between vertical and horizontal identity dissolves in these final moments. The new configuration cannot be plotted on the familiar stages of the development from genetic to found family in the X-verse, but instead disrupts the categories of parent/child as well as biological/constructed kinship ties. Thus *Logan* offers us a return to family, but it is not the restoration of a fixed formation; it has been sacrificed to generate a new configuration containing the inevitability that boundaries will shift and change, that the stages will continue to succeed one another, to both repeat and evolve. It is appropriate, finally, that the mutant family will never cease to mutate – it's in its DNA, after all.

Just as *Logan* follows *Shane*'s mythic sacrificial exemplar yet complicates and disrupts familial boundaries in the process, it mimics and then re-figures its historical alignment with family as well. The homesteading families in the classic Western represent Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis ascribing American democracy and unification to Westward expansion and colonization. As Turner wrote at the close of the 19th century, "In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants [are] Americanized, liberated and fused into a mixed race" (1894, 20–21). Accordingly, Shane exhorts the "diverse" group of (white European-descended) farmers – the Swede, the Yankee, the ex-Confederate southerner – to fight in order to protect their kin and form a new American clan: "[Starrett] wants you to stay for something that means more than anything," he tells them. "Your families. Your wives and kids…they've got a right to stay here and grow up and be happy. It's up to you people to have nerve enough to not give it up." And sure enough, Shane himself sacrifices for the Starretts' rights to their property, guaranteed by Lincoln's 1862 Homestead Act, against the ranchers' threats; in this sense the film aligns the settler family's goals with those of the purportedly lawful young nation. Yet both the ranchers' and farmers' claims are predicated upon their collective theft of the land, as their argument reveals. "*You* in the right?" – Ryker remonstrates to Starrett:

> I got a bad shoulder yet from a Cheyenne arrowhead. We made this country, we found it and we made it, with blood and empty bellies. Cattle we brought in were hazed off by Indians and rustlers. They don't bother you much anymore because we handled 'em. We made a safe range out of this.

In other words, genocidal expropriation from Native Americans is the basis for "rights" to the land, and it subtends *all* of the competing claims and modes of production of the European settlers, ranchers and sodbusters alike.

In slaughtering the Munson/Starrett family, then, *Logan* breaks from *Shane* and the Turner thesis and aligns with New Western History, illuminating the effects of Western expansion: massacre and insatiable commercial exploitation. As Ruth Griffin explains, from this perspective

> "a safe range" is only the starting point in a "civilising" chain of events which may begin innocuously enough with cattle rearing but has the potential to lead to exploitation of land (over-cultivation, deforestation), the wholesale slaughter of inhabitants and animals ("Indians" and buffalo), and the plunder of natural resources such as gold and oil, at its extreme resulting in environmental disaster. (2007, 31)

In *Logan* the exposure of American triumphalism's dirty underbelly is shocking and perplexing, as the Munsons are figured *both* as sympathetic victims/heroes (corresponding to *Shane* and the frontier thesis) and historical perpetrators (per New Western History). According to the traditional script they are the family whose survival demands sacrifice: loving, welcoming, generous, pious, hard-working,

unjustly persecuted, and in this case, African-American – historical victims of enslavement, inequity, and prejudice. Yet they occupy the role of settlers in the American west, and so what they are threatened by is also what their presence invites, insofar as they represent a stage of capitalist production and exploitation. *Shane*'s ranchers are superseded by family farmers who are displaced by *Logan*'s agribusiness, and Will Munson nods to the conflation of the threats to his farm from past and future when he mocks Canewood Beverages' enormous mechanized harvesters encircling his land as "dinosaurs with their 20-ton bodies and tiny little brains, shucking their cloned super-corn." These are the Rykers' prehistoric symbolic livestock risen to threaten his family's livelihood, but they are also the inescapable technological sequelae of the Munsons' presence, following Turner's explanation of the inevitable "modes of advance" in which the pioneers arrive, followed by the settlers, and then "the men of capital and enterprise come" (1894, 19).

After all, if the sodbusters win out over the ranchers, the result is capital and enterprise – Canewood Beverages and Alkali-Transigen, both seeking to "control" mutancy in the population toward their own ends. As Will Munson explains to Logan, the cloned super-corn surrounding his farm becomes corn syrup in Canewood's beverages made for people "to stay awake, cheer up, feel strong, sexy, whatever," and Rice draws the connection to Transigen's programs, telling Logan that "the goal was not to *end* mutantkind, but to *control* it," first by "distribut[ing] gene therapy discreetly through everything, from sweet drinks to breakfast cereals," and finally growing their own mutants. Reflecting this alliance, Canewood and Transigen's enforcers arrive simultaneously in the dead of night – just as the Rykers appear in the darkness to menace the Starretts – wielding shotguns and a genetically engineered weaponized mutant, respectively, to massacre the Munsons, who have resisted their advances.

Mutancy, in its ever-shifting symbolic significance, here comes to symbolize the honorable individual fighting against the forces of control and conformity in order to protect the independent family. But the Munsons must be sacrificed in shocking and horrifying fashion in service of a new beginning; the old family and the cycle of capitalist exploitation with which it was aligned must make way for the new mutant family harkening symbolically to the Native Americans who came before – people of color walking through the Edenic woods. In making this shift, the brutality of the Munsons' sacrifice and the showdown between scientists and mutants affirms another frontier myth at the root of the American psyche that "represented the redemption of American spirit or fortune as something to be achieved by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or 'natural' state, and *regeneration through violence*," as Richard Slotkin (1973, 5, 12) proposes. In forcefully re-figuring the alignment of the family from the Starrett/Munsons to the mutants, *Logan* employs such regenerative violence to save the new generation of laboratory-bred racially diverse mutants-of-color, hoping for a new beginning in a seemingly new, or at least different, world – Canada, in this case – sacrificing the vision of American exceptionalism so integral to the US comic book genre.[3]

Moreover, just as the parent/child familial roles are subverted and re-formed in *Logan*, here the categories of nature/civilization are hopelessly intertwined as Logan, a "natural"-born mutant dying from the adamantium scientists laced into his skeleton, joins his scientifically engineered biological daughter in battle, shedding the significance of such distinctions. A new alignment between biology, culture, and technology emerges as the young mutant family goes forth into the woods, reborn, reenacting and also re-figuring the (not-unproblematic) narrative of the violent and regenerative frontier. It is both old – Turner's (1894, 2) description of America's "perennial rebirth" at the frontier, "its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, [furnishing] the forces dominating American character" – and new, preserving some myths and genre characteristics while sacrificing others.

In re-drawing familial roles and the *Shane* narrative, *Logan* also re-figures genre conventions, assembling a bewildering bricolage of cinematic body parts, prompting the audience to question just what genre we are in, if any, and what the significance of genre is at this point (if any). *Logan* is certainly not alone in deploying what John Cawelti (2012, 287, 296) describes as generic transformation, "set[ting] the elements of a conventional popular genre in an altered context, thereby making us perceive these traditional forms and images in a new way," responding to the inadequacy both of traditional genres and "the cultural myths they once embodied." Cawelti outlines four modes of such transformation: *Cultivation of nostalgia*; *demythologization*, which "invokes the basic characteristics of a traditional genre in order to bring its audience to see that genre as the embodiment of an inadequate and destructive myth"; *affirmation of myth for its own sake*, in which "a traditional genre and its myth are probed and shown to be unreal, but then the myth itself is at least partially affirmed as a reflection of authentic human aspirations and needs," and *burlesque* (2012, 290, 294). As Cawelti notes, films utilizing these modes tend to employ more than one, and indeed *Logan* mixes several.[4] It certainly *cultivates nostalgia* for the Western ("This is a very famous picture, Laura. It's almost a hundred years old. I first saw this picture in the Essoldo cinema in my home town when I was your age") and was even released in a black-and-white cut as *Logan Noir*. It also *demythologizes* the classic Western frontier thesis and the superheroes' invulnerability, while *affirming the myths* of perennial rebirth and regenerative violence central to both genres. (For *burlesque*, look to the Deadpool series – see Epilogue.)

Combining several of these transformations and modeling itself partially after post-heyday Western films – their stars' exhaustion mirroring that of the genre – *Logan*, with its truly depleted adult protagonists, becomes a self-aware post-heyday superhero film, raising the question of what will come next, and how. And in effecting such transformation while drawing upon multiple genres, I propose that it prompts a new self-reflexive addition to Cawelti's typologies, that of *generic mutancy*. *Logan* mediates yet another new relationship between genres – another step of hybrid generic evolution, with transformation in the DNA of the X-franchise. For the genre itself is still relatively young; as Scott Bukatman wrote in 2011, "superhero films remain something of a provisional genre, still in a state of becoming" (118) – but it is developing quickly, and dominating the box office.

Echoing the acceleration of the familial cycle in *Logan*, by 2017 the generic evolution cycle is enhanced as well, changing and mutating rapidly. And just as the post-heyday Western realizes what Cloutier (2012, 111) describes as a "kind of ill-fitting, almost parodic union" of aging heroes with an elegiac genre, *Logan* achieves a kind of bewildering synchronicity between the genetic mutancy of its protagonists and its rampantly multiplying generic mutancy.

After such proliferating generic mutancy, in its finale *Logan* appears to resolve its allegorical and stylistic references to its primary Western exemplar, signaling a return to the X-Verse. Earlier in the film the X-identity signals danger, as when Reaver leader Donald Pierce (John Byrne) ominously reveals Logan's identity as Wolverine, adding, "I'm a fan, by the way." And mirroring the disparaging self-referentiality of the post-heyday Western, as we have discussed, the X-Men story itself makes a simultaneous appearance beside *Shane*; when Logan discovers the comic books in Laura's satchel he stands next to the television as Laura and Charles watch the film, brandishing them angrily:

> Do you read these in your spare time? Oh yeah, Charles, we got ourselves an X-Men fan. [To Laura:] You *do* know they're all bullshit, right? Maybe a quarter of it happened, and not like this. In the *real* world, people *die*.

Thus with a metafictional flourish the X-Men narrative has been sacrificed, derided by Logan as factitious drama and tossed to the side in favor of another tale in another genre, moving into the Starrett/Munson story. Yet in the closing moments after Laura recites Shane's parting speech to Joey at Logan's grave – not the Lord's prayer, as she had witnessed in Torrey's funeral scene – she turns the wooden crucifix on its side, forming an X. It is last image in the film, as the children exit the valley and cross the border to safety in the background.

The shift represents the chiasmus between the intertexts: after a temporary adoption and reconfiguration of *Shane*, the transformation reconciles the two and restores the X-identity both to Logan and to the film itself. For Logan's part, he is X-1 of the Weapon X program while his daughter is X-23, and thus X is the family name, finally bestowed after two centuries of searching; it is also that of the X-Men family more broadly – its meaning suitably shifting and changeable, as X is a variable, itself signifying mutability. And as for the film, the gesture demonstrates that we have not been thrust into a menacingly profligate multiplication of exemplar narratives and genres after all, much as it may have seemed. As Rice explains to Logan, the scientist-creator's goal is to *control* mutancy, not to allow it to bourgeon unchecked, and here we have simply journeyed into a provisional appropriation of *Shane* and its Christian salvific symbolism. Indeed, with the turning of the crucifix the icon of sacrifice is itself sacrificed alongside the Starrett-like Munson family and their belief in providential protection, exposed as a transitory vehicle in service of the survival of the X-story. In the end Logan's Western clothing is shed, his trademark undershirt and muttonchops are restored, and the X-Men narrative is reinstated as the real. "Eden" – the coordinates of which Gabriela had found in an X-Men comic book – *does* exist and is the portal to safety (*affirmation of*

myth), and in this X-Men film, people *do* indeed die – all of the characters we have known through the film series are sacrificed for the sake of the children – this is the measure of its veracity. The X-Verse is the true universe of the film, finally, and Logan is an X-Man again, now and forever. *It's a brand that sticks*, to quote Shane, and through the cycle of destruction and rebirth in Eden the audience is assured of its future.

Speaking of brands that stick, the pattern of sacrifice and regeneration may well be writ large for the X-Men film series itself, which had seemingly exhausted the dialectic between peaceable assimilation and militant resistance represented by Xavier and Magneto. Perhaps the weary superheroes in *Logan* speak to the enervation of the stories in the post-heyday superhero flick and the limitations of their narrative framing. To this point, writer Maggie Nelson recounts a debate with her partner about the Xavier/Magneto conflict in *X-Men: First Class*, noting that

> we…somehow allowed ourselves to get polarized into a needless binary. That's what we both hate about fiction, or at least crappy fiction – it purports to provide occasions for thinking through complex issues, but really it has predetermined the positions, stuffed a narrative full of false choices, and hooked you on them, rendering you less able to see out, to *get* out.…*The aim is not to answer questions, it's to get out, to get out of it*.[5]
>
> (2015a, 82)

As Nelson acknowledges elsewhere, however, "good fiction is expert at demolishing false choices" (2015b). And speaking of demolition, in its apparent subversion of genre conventions, is *Logan* attempting to *get out* of the tired genre itself – or any genre in particular – in order to ask the questions we need to be asking ourselves? As Mangold describes: "I was trying to figure out genre templates I could jam these characters into that would force the kind of change I was looking for in the movie" (2017b). Does its generic mutancy open new possibilities or simply retread familiar ground?

However it evolves, perhaps the series required a dramatic self-immolation in order to transform. Comparing *The Wolverine* (Mangold 2013) with *Logan*, screenwriter Scott Frank noted that in the former, his

> favorite part is where [Logan is] in the middle of rural Japan and with this woman and being a human being and feeling what it's like to be a human being.…and then it becomes just another superhero movie with a lot of CG stuff. And we were trying to avoid that this time around…the only way these movies have value is if they become about something else. They can't all be about saving the world.
>
> (2017)

Indeed, *Logan* offers a return to vulnerable, "real" bodies, and it does become about something else – about the challenges we face as real human beings in a time of rapidly accelerating change. For the transformation of family and the generic

mutancy in *Logan* reflect the swift evolution of identity itself in our precipitously shifting real world. Indeed, the X-films inform Zingsheim's notion of "mutational identity theory" as "kinetic, diffuse, embodied, and contextual" (2010, 24). In light of this dynamism, he proposes that

> the struggle…is not to find ourselves, as so many have sought to do, but rather to mutate with awareness into embodied practices that (re) create ourselves (and by extension our communities) in ways ever more just and ever more variable. (2010, 35)[6]

Experiencing *Logan* – which explores the interwoven transformation of identity, bodies, technology, family, and genre – helps us to mutate (from Latin *mutare*, to change) with awareness. It compels its audience to reexamine existing cultural narratives and to ask how we might truly alter them, or whether we are simply rewriting them, putting old clothes on new bodies, or new clothes on older bodies, as the case may be. As Xavier explains at the beginning of the first X-film, *X-Men* (Singer 2000), mutation "is the key to our evolution," and in this sense we are all mutants: our genes mutate, our differences both unite and divide us, and our culture and technology evolve at an ever-accelerating pace. Mutancy itself becomes a fittingly variable metaphor for many types of otherness and difference, and for the entwined evolution of family, society, and artistic forms, as we have seen. In this context *Logan* speaks to the larger project of contemplating diverse forms of kinship and prompts us to ask what will merit our *own* sacrifice for the family of living beings as we evolve into the future. In the end – or in the beginning of a new era – it may just be about saving the world.

Epilogue

The finality of Logan's death in *Logan* becomes comedic grist for parodical X-verse films *Deadpool 2* (Leitch 2018) and particularly *Deadpool & Wolverine* (Levy 2024), which opens with Deadpool (Ryan Reynolds) digging up Logan's grave in hopes of resurrecting him and saving their universe, only to find his adamantium skeleton. Here the demise of an "anchor being" was "an act of self-sacrifice so *epic* that it sent shivers down the timeline" and portends its ending, per Mr. Paradox (Matthew Macfadyen), who replays *Logan*'s death scene, mouthing his last words ("so this is what it feels like"), eyes glistening with tears.

If *Logan* offered some metafictional self-awareness vis-à-vis the X-Men comics upon which the films were originally based – a metaleptic shift with the fiction-within-a-fiction proving to be "real" within the film – *Deadpool & Wolverine* extends the slippage outward, bringing the real world of the viewer squarely into the movie frame. It springs open the narrative coffin of the X-films, breaking all four walls to dig out the surrounding sedimentary layers, from details of the actors to deep-cut X-fan discourse allusions to dramas of the corporations circumscribing the tales – notably Disney's acquisition of the X-Men franchise from Fox, opening the portal to its integration with the broader Marvel Cinematic Universe, described

here as the "sacred timeline." Sitting next to Logan's skeleton, Deadpool mimics Hugh Jackman's Australian accent while wagging his metal jawbone: "'G'day mate. There's nothing that'll bring me back to life faster than a big bag of Marvel cash.' [Without accent:] Me too, Hugh. But no. No, no, no. You had to get all noble and die *for real*." Of course Wolverine is indeed resurrected (albeit a different version from a different timeline in the multiverse), again to meet Laura (played by an adult Dafne Keen), again to be convinced by her to step up and join the team to save the (or at least a) world, and again to be played by Jackman. As Deadpool deadpans, "Fox killed him. Disney brought him back! They're going to make him do this until he's ninety." Or is Deadpool the world/franchise savior? "I…am… Marvel Jesus," he intones, resurrecting the salvific themes of *Shane*/*Logan* and raising the Calweltian burlesque to epic meta-proportions.

This is what it feels like to pick the bones of the story clean, my friends. What in the paradoxical worlds will save this transforming world from extinction after all? It turns out that it is only by working together that they – and we – have a chance. *For real*.

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Notes

1 The primary comic book series is *The X-Men*, later re-titled *Uncanny X-Men* (Marvel Comics, 1963–). Myriad imprints and series explore alternate storylines and particular characters in the X-verse, including *Wolverine* (Marvel Comics, 1982–) and *Wolverine: Old Man Logan* (Marvel Comics, 2015–), a particularly significant influence for *Logan*. In addition, there are many X-Men graphic novels, novels, animated television series, video games, etc.
2 Speaking to connections between the X-verse and our world, see "Everyone Is a Tomato: Metagnostic Narratives of Genetic Revelation," supporting the relevance of X-verse tales to the field of genetic counseling (Spencer 2024).
3 See Asif et al. (2019, 151–55).
4 For an excellent video essay on Cawelti's modes of generic transformation employed in *Logan*, see Nerdwriter's analysis (Puschak 2017).
5 *The aim*…is a quote from Gilles Deleuze/Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (1977, 1).
6 See also Zingsheim (2011) and Spencer (2021, 185).

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