
REDEFINING THE SUPERHERO THROUGH SELECTIVE READING

by Martin Lund





Arnaudo, Marco. *The Myth of the Superhero*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-1421409535. 206 pages.

Gavaler, Chris. *On the Origin of Superheroes: From the Big Bang to Action Comics No. 1*. Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1609383817. 295 pages.

Fawaz, Ramzi. *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*. New York, New York University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1479823086. 316 pages.

Much has been written about the superhero and the genre it inhabits, though the issue of definition has continued to plague the field in spite of its increasing growth. Richard Reynolds articulated his famous seven features of the superhero in 1992.¹ In 2006, Peter Coogan argued that the three central aspects of the superhero are superhuman powers, a prosocial mission, and a secret identity.² Karlaine McLain singled out six “essential features” that for her define superheroes in 2009: “extraordinary powers, enemies, a strong moral code, a secret identity, a costume, and an origin story that explains how the hero acquired his powers and sets forth his motivations.”³ Still, what the superhero actually is remains slippery, and it is unlikely that any final definition will ever be arrived at. This has caused some writers on superhero topics to throw out attempts at definition, claiming that superheroes “defy conventional definitions because they contain too many conventions.”⁴

The “classic” definitions, however, are not meant to be all-encompassing, the way some of their detractors caricature them. They are attempts at capturing the superhero that are entirely sufficient for any study of their exploits, if one keeps in mind what scholar of religion Bruce Lincoln has noted: language is imperfect and definitions cannot ultimately escape their own origin as “the historical product of discursive processes.” This, Lincoln concludes, “hardly renders

¹ Reynolds 1992, 12–16. As Reynolds saw them, superheroes are marked out from society, often growing up without their parents; at least some superheroes are like earthbound gods in power, while others consort easily with these earthbound deities; superheroes have a devotion to justice that overrides their devotion to the law; superheroes’ extraordinary nature contrasts with their ordinary surroundings; this extraordinary nature also contrasts with the mundane nature of the superheroes’ alter egos; superheroes are capable of considerable patriotism and moral loyalty to the state; and superhero stories blend science and magic indiscriminately. I want to thank Sean Guynes for his helpful comments and suggestions on this piece.

² Coogan 2006, 30–43.

³ McLain 2009, 1.

⁴ Gavaler 2015, 3. More on this book below.



futile all efforts at definition, however, particularly when one understands these as provisional attempts to clarify one's thought, not to capture the innate essence of things."⁵

A few recent books have taken a different road, and have instead tried to define superheroes through a focus on what they *do* and what they *say*, arguing in their own ways for a different sort of definition. This is a review of three such books and a chronicle of their failure to move the field or the question of definition forward in any significant, constructive way.

MYTH OF THE SUPERHERO

To begin, Marco Arnaudo's *The Myth of the Superhero* exemplifies everything that is wrong with the study of superheroes – the book's stated purpose – and the subfield that studies comics and religion, my particular professional interest, on which I will focus here. Put simply, *Myth* is a rapid progression of strained over-interpretations; drawing "parallels" with little critical payout and unsourced grand claims.

Claiming there is a vast array of scholarship on superhero comics – but not citing a single example – Arnaudo intends the book to address the superhero genre's relationship to myth, religion, society, literary genre, and epistemological frameworks. Rather than setting out to offer a "crib note," or a presentation of "common knowledge" about the superhero genre, he wants to "construct a discourse that builds on all the aforementioned (and oft-discussed) topics in order to identify certain symptomatic characteristics of the superhero comic that converge in my overall thesis" (p. 2). It is Arnaudo's self-expressed belief that this "thesis" provides a deep understanding of the nature of the superhero comic and its role in contemporary society. What his thesis is, however, remains undisclosed: "As in the best 'cliffhanger' tradition so dear to comics, I won't disclose this thesis here and will instead let the reader discover it over the course of the book" (p. 3).

Addressing the issue of superhero seriality, Arnaudo conflates form with function and perception with historicity. He claims, for example, that the Batman and Superman comics that have been published since the 1930s constitute a singular narrative, or "*one story*," as he puts it. He writes that the way some people react with shock when they find out that the Golden Age Superman killed people "wouldn't even be imaginable if the character narrated in the stories of the twenty-first century weren't perceived as being the same individual as before" (p. 4). That might well be true of fans, but for scholarship, we must be able to bracket the claims that we are reading "*one*

⁵ Lincoln 2006, 2.



story” and see characters like Superman and Batman for what they are, patchwork products of numerous and often competing creative visions and ideologies. Not so according to Arnaudo, who at one point concludes, in a highly counterproductive way, that the fact that there have been different iterations of Superman published makes it “necessary to consider the character’s chronology as a whole in forming judgments of him” (p. 102). In a baffling formulation, Arnaudo writes about the different version of Superman’s adoptive parents: “Even if we can distinguish the most enduring and successful versions of the character, ultimately, all the variations are equal in terms of their degree of reality in the narrative universe that they belong to” (p. 138). In the spirit of disclosure, I should mention that I have elsewhere argued the exact opposite, that for the same reason – that there are different versions of Superman, or of almost any character – it is incumbent upon us as scholars to clarify which version of the character we are working with, so as to be able to properly contextualize and historicize our text and to avoid ahistorical projection or blending of vastly different ideas into a single entity.⁶

Conversely, Arnaudo selects one cultural moment and uses that as his baseline, often regarding other configurations as deviations, rather than as different iterations with their own framing and characterizations. The superhero’s power as myth and allegory, the very power Arnaudo is trying to convince us of, is thus weakened by being divorced from the time in which it was articulated. On the basis of this view, Arnaudo treats superheroes as if they were real people, able to make decisions on their own, without the guidance of the writers, artists, and editors who tell their stories at any given time. Superheroes might form the center of a “collective narrative millions of pages long,” but it is not a cohesive or unbroken one. Seriality no doubt affects how stories are told, but it does not divorce the storytellers or characters from history; nor are the characters and their pasts safe from changing circumstances, as the frequency of retcons attests.⁷ Every new creative team is beholden to previous continuity, but those same people bring new perspectives, and contexts change, meaning that every character-iteration has its own unique genealogy that cannot be ignored if cultural analysis is to properly “respect the historical, formal and material components of its object” (p. 3).

By treating the characters as cohesive wholes, where elements from different decades and creators are treated as equal and not distinguished, the historicity of the characters becomes blurred and their presentation ahistorical (as on p. 65–66, where Superman is presented as an immigrant figure in an argument that is impossible to support, since it freely mixes character iterations).

⁶ Lund 2015; 2016.

⁷ Captain America, for example, was famously retconned in the 1970s, and the failed 1950s “Commie Smasher” version was made into a different person to fit both with current continuity and politics. The coexistence of different versions of Superman was even made into a central plot point in DC’s 2005–2006 Infinite Crisis.



Furthermore, Arnaudo does not hold himself to his own selection criteria very well; although limited series and alternative continuities are said to be bounded out, such series are discussed several times, as are film versions of the characters, which are even further removed from the “one story” he purports to study (cf. pp. 5, 23-25, 44-49, 85, 91-95, 130).

Comics scholar Jean-Paul Gabilliet warns against studying comics as existing *sui generis*, as does Russell McCutcheon about his own field of religious studies⁸; Arnaudo often treats both comics and religion as *sui generis*, as when he builds up the idea that “shamanistic” elements are inherent to the genre and then reads a Batman retcon in a supposedly “shamanistic” style as revealing “something previously latent in the series” (p. 24). But the book loses all scholarly credibility with the heading “New Golems,” which signals Arnaudo’s treatment of Judaism and comics. In discussing the process of selecting material for the study, Arnaudo calculates that he would have needed to read over two million pages of comics to cover everything that has been published; true enough, but his explanation for how he chose his few examples is not convincing: his methodological “take” can be likened to the historical map, “which marks solely those components of the landscape that enable the representation of the dynamics of past events” (p. 8). From this starting point, he unselfconsciously cherry-picks examples that fit the image he wants to present.

This selectivity, it seems to me, counteracts the explicit intention to cover the superhero in the *longue durée*, as it were (cf. p. 5). Especially since Arnaudo in several critical instances does not even provide a single textual example of his chosen series or character. Instead he often relies on secondary literature, which in some cases is highly flawed.⁹ The back cover promises close readings of comics, but the author’s presentation of Superman and his supposed connection to Judaism is entirely based on a popular, ethnically celebratory literature.¹⁰ The same old tired “points of contact” are restated by Arnaudo as fact, in a run-through riddled with anachronisms and assumptions; indeed, the destruction of Krypton and the threat of murder directed at the children of the people of Israel are used as a basis for the claim that “Superman’s Kryptonian origins echo the Moses story *so precisely* that it seems highly likely that, whether consciously or

⁸ Gabilliet 2010, xv; McCutcheon 2003.

⁹ In his treatment of Magneto, for instance, Arnaudo relies on Malcolm (2010), an article that makes grand claims about forty years of publication history on the basis of about a dozen comic books, cherry-picked evidence, and distorted quotes. I have discussed Malcolm’s piece in Lund 2015, paras. 28-30.

¹⁰ Weinstein 2006; Fingerroth 2007; Kaplan 2008. The book also uncritically uses normative Christian theologies, such as Skelton 2006.



otherwise, the Jewish background of the authors had at least some measure of influence” (p. 30; my emphasis).¹¹

And, as in so much previous writing, Superman’s “original” Kryptonian name, Kal-El, is put forward as proof of his Jewishness, because it contains “El,” a Hebrew name for God. Never mind that even a cursory investigation of the comics will show that Siegel and Shuster never used that name, or that it is easy to find out that it was Superman radio show producer and announcer George Lowther who introduced it in his 1942 Superman novelization. Further deepening Arnaudo’s ahistorical impression, the lone comic book used to support this argument is a 1998 60th anniversary story that made explicit homage to Siegel and Shuster and called Superman a golem and an angel; from this story, Arnaudo, like so many other writers on the subject, draws the conclusion that Superman was likely derived from golems and angels (p. 30). These “parallels,” and a few other forced ones culled from the same literature, later morph into a claim about how the suddenly “profound Jewish roots of the superhero comic” have been “recodified” into Christian models (p. 47).

Arnaudo, like all other writers who have claimed that Superman’s origin reflects Moses’ story fails to mention what it would actually *mean* if such is the case. Here, and throughout most of the book, he is content to point out “similarities” and move on. His method of choice is to draw broad parallels between the superhero genre and earlier myth on the basis of superficial similarities and refracting them through the highly abstracted and generalized world of myth as presented by comparative myth scholars like Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade, who themselves made broad generalization that are difficult to prove empirically or, indeed, to tease any real meaning out of.

This goes on through two more chapters after Arnaudo is done with religion, one about “ethics and society” and one about “epic and neobaroque,” neither of which diverges much from the established model of using outdated theories to draw simplistic parallels between superheroes and some other aspect of culture writ large. Ultimately, instead of providing a grounded, critical survey, the book reads like a love letter to superheroes, an attempt to prove that they come from respectable (religious and mythical, epic and baroque) roots rather than popular ones, and that they foster a positive ethics and sociability in their readers. In claiming so often that superhero comics are unique in how they do this, Arnaudo’s book is far from unique; it now rests on my shelf next to the large number of comics theologies, mythologies, and ethics books that have come out in recent years to propose the same thing. Indeed, Arnaudo’s *Myth* not only fails to offer anything new, but at best treads familiar waters, and at worst pulls the field down.

¹¹ I address this and many other similar example at length in Lund 2016.



ON THE ORIGIN OF SUPERHEROES

Released a couple of years after Arnaudo's book, Chris Gavaler's *On the Origin of Superheroes: From the Big Bang to Action Comics No. 1* is the latest in a series of books that try to speak in broad terms about where the superhero came from and what it means as a cultural figure. Unsurprisingly, it leaves much to be desired.¹² Overall, the book is a cherry-picked collection of overused (and often mixed) metaphors and judgments of personal taste. It has a chatty and disjointed style that at times comes close to stream-of-consciousness writing, and lacks much in the way of scholarly rigor. This is not what one would expect from a university press offering. Indeed, after reading the disavowal of academic stricture in the opening chapter (p. 9), I could not help but wonder *why* an academic press published it at all.

The problems start early on. After creating a straw man out of earlier attempts to define superheroes, Gavaler rejects them, replacing definition with a disingenuous but supposedly "common sense" perspective, described as a series of "boxes" (p. 3) to be ticked off on a "census bureau checklist" (p. 31). This is a good trick, but a circular one: with "checklist" in hand, anything Gavaler regards as belonging to the superhero gets its box, and then, by checking that box, Gavaler's pet characters or texts confirm that the boxes are part of the superhero make-up as he sees it. It is also self-serving, since it allows Gavaler to shoehorn anything and everything he wants into the book, because... I honestly could not tell you why. The purpose of the book is never really made clear.

Although the title explicitly references *Action Comics #1*, cover-dated June 1938, there is no framing in this book, no context, and no historical grounding. Gavaler's "census" flows back and forth in time, projecting things from years or even decades after whatever he is currently writing about onto his definition in order to make his claims. Further, in making the argument that there were things floating around in the cultural stew before *Action Comics #1* that would later become central conventions among superheroes, he lumps together any and all stories – comics, literature, mythology – that he wants to use as examples, and builds his house of cards from that. This, of course, is a form of cherry-picking that cannot actually prove or illustrate anything other than that if there is nothing that defines or frames the superhero, anything can define or frame the superhero. But still, one example after another is cemented as central to the genre, more often than not without actual examples from any comic enlisted in support, before the author moves on to the next grand claim.

¹² Arnaudo's book is another example, as is Marc DiPaolo 2011. I cannot discuss DiPaolo here, but I can at least make an observation: it suffers from many of the same major historical and methodological defects as Gavaler and Arnaudo's books.



There is also a highly problematic essentialism running throughout the book: if one text that Gavalier personally likes can be said to have inspired another text (and his own preference seems to be the primary guide here, as in all aspects of the book), which then perhaps inspired another text, then that is somehow proof enough that a particular character was inspired by *the first text*; there is an imagined wholesale transferal of properties from the first text through all other variations that can also be seen in much writing about superheroes and golems (the worst precedent for this is probably Thomas Andrae's essay in *Siegel and Shuster's Funnyman*, where the golem is traced from a movie through numerous different vehicles before landing in Superman).¹³ This transferal of properties is how Jane Austen becomes part of Gavalier's Superman genealogy: Jerry Siegel supposedly liked the Scarlet Pimpernel, and, well, Gavalier notes that the Pimpernel's author had probably not read Austen either, but other people at the time had, so Austen's ideas were in the air when the Pimpernel story was written, and so therefore Jane Austen inspired Jerry Siegel's Clark Kent (207–208). And because one author might have read a story that was then possibly read by another author, whose own story was then perhaps read by one of Batman's co-creators, "Batman is the KKK in a cooler costume" (189-190). This is not scholarship; it is a fannish game of six degrees of separation.

One of the most egregious abuses of history I have come across (time and again) in my work on Jewish American history and superhero comics is the repeated use of a piece of Nazi propaganda published in 1940, in response to a Superman comic strip. According to this piece, Superman's Jewish co-creator Jerry Siegel saw the "resurgence of manly virtues" in Germany and decided to steal it ("there is nothing the Sadducees won't do for money," wrote the Nazis, leaning on anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews as greedy cultural parasites).¹⁴ All too often, the piece becomes ground for claims that the Nazis acknowledged Superman's Jewish roots; most recently, this happened in an article in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*.¹⁵ Although he includes a work that makes this claim in his bibliography, Gavalier chooses instead to give the Nazis credit in a different way. Because he does not like the ideology he sees promoted in superhero comics today (and I cannot fault him for seeing highly questionable mythologies and ideologies being perpetuated on the comics page), Gavalier brushes past the actual comic strip the Nazis objected to with a single sentence and without a moment's pause to explain or historicize it. Instead, he quotes the Nazis and then concludes: "Americans are still swallowing massive doses of that superhero morality, *only now Nazi German isn't left to complain*" (p. 199; emphasis added). Yes, Gavalier wrote this: a violently

¹³ Andrae 2010, 38–41.

¹⁴ Bytwerk 1998.

¹⁵ Anderman 2016; see also Weinstein 2006, 25–26; Tye 2012, 66.



anti-Semitic piece of propaganda published by the SS is somehow used in a positive sense, because a highly abridged version of it supports his own ideas. Bad scholarship does not even begin to describe what is happening here.

I would not recommend Gavalier's book to anyone. Its methodology is highly flawed, its reading of its chosen texts far too loose and unstructured to be of much use, and its attempt to define the superhero genre signals a step or two backward, at the very least. It is starting to become a hackneyed cliché that comics studies is a field still in its infancy. By now, the field has been around long enough that it should have started to show signs of maturity. And it has. There is good work out there. A lot of it. But books like Gavalier and Arnaudo's show that the field still has a long way to go.

NEW MUTANTS

Finally, there is Ramzi Fawaz's *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*. "In *The New Mutants*," writes Fawaz, "I argue that Superman's death [in 1992] and the subsequent fracturing of his identity bookended nearly three decades of creative innovation in American comics that transformed the superhero from a nationalist champion to a figure of radical difference mapping the limits of American liberalism and its promise of universal inclusion in the post-World War II period" (p. 3). *The New Mutants*, he adds, "narrates the history of this creative transformation by showing how the American superhero, once an embodiment of nationalism and patriotic duty, became a popular fantasy of internationalism and the concept of universal citizenship in the second half of the twentieth century." This is a bold claim, and one that utterly fails to convince me.

Rather than engage with previous attempts to define superheroes, and going somewhat against the notion of transformation that he claims as central, Fawaz makes up his own pseudo-definition:

In its commitment to protecting the political interests of these alienated social groups the superhero had the potential to redefine the meaning of political freedom in America by recognizing the rights of those excluded from the national community. The lack of definition surrounding the superhero's ethical purview—whether her commitments ended at the borders of the nation or the broader sphere of humanity or included all life in the cosmos—and to whom the superhero was ultimately accountable in the use of her powers made the figure a generative site for imagining democracy in its most radical form, as a



universally expansive ethical responsibility for the well-being of the world rather than an institutional structure upholding national citizenship (p. 7).

This ad hoc definition of the superhero – a “generative site for imagining democracy in its most radical form” – requires a flattening of the history of superhero comics over several decades of tumultuous political, social, and cultural life. Nonetheless, it is operationalized and used by Fawaz as his perennial measuring stick, against which, curiously, the first generation of superheroes does not measure up. As the next sentence reads: “During World War II this creative potential was mitigated by the superhero’s affirmative relationship to the state.” The racism and misogyny of the original Superman, as well as the jingoism and racism of the World War II era more generally, is seen as aberrant, rather than constitutive; the first superheroes did not live up to what superheroes, in Fawaz’s view, would become and simultaneously have always been.

Admittedly, Fawaz’s reading goes against the grain, and as such could be refreshing. But this is also one of the book’s biggest issues. *New Mutants* has a sense of tunnel vision to it. Starting in the late 1950s, Fawaz writes, superheroes changed from nationalist do-gooders into “cultural outsiders and biological freaks capable of upsetting the social order in much the same way that racial, gendered, and sexual minorities were seen to destabilize the image of the ideal U.S. citizen.” He goes on:

Rather than condemn these figures, superhero comics visually celebrated bodies whose physical instability deviated from social and political norms. Consequently they produced a visual lexicon of alliances between a variety of ‘inhuman’ yet valorized subjects as a cultural corollary to the cosmopolitan worldviews of movements for international human rights, civil rights, and women’s and gay liberation [...] In the chapters that follow I show how postwar superhero comics made fantasy a political resource for recognizing and taking pleasure in social identities and collective ways of life commonly denigrated as deviant and subversive within the political logics of cold war anticommunism and an emergent neoconservatism (p. 4).

There exists an extensive literature that argues the exact opposite of what Fawaz claims here and in much of the rest of the book, but he does not engage with it. Throughout the book, Fawaz asserts a “radical” politics in his chosen comics, giving example after example, but fails to convincingly argue for almost all of his interpretations. Moreover, he rarely engages with previous research on superheroes or on comics at all (but he makes several unsourced and general claims about what others have said about them; e.g. 4, 6, 29, 96-97). When writing about the Cold War, Fawaz ignores an extensive literature that roots the Marvel Age in the exact politics that he



dismisses.¹⁶ When writing about the X-Men, he barely mentions the series' frequent use of ethnoracial metaphors, and does not consider the possible problems this use might cause.¹⁷ No consideration is given to the myriad scholars who have tried to illustrate US superhero comics' historical problems with race, gender, and sexuality, nor with those who have engaged with other issues of power or cultural history.¹⁸ The few examples from the existing scholarship that he does cite are either buried in footnotes or engaged selectively.¹⁹ Moreover, scholarship that problematizes Fawaz's overarching theory of development and transformation, notably claims about the conservatism built into the superheroes' seriality or their heroic work, is never considered.²⁰

These criticisms are not to suggest that Fawaz has to agree with previous research, but ignoring the larger scholarly tradition to which they belong goes completely against the core of what scholarship is supposed to be. Instead of a critical engagement with scholarly precedent, Fawaz repeatedly offers sweeping claims about postwar comics in general, about the comics industry, and about US culture, with very few sources to back them up and with very little context to link comics to the history they are placed in.

That said, the book is not without merit. Each chapter provides some new insight into the series discussed. Chapter five is particularly good. I hasten to add that I say so not because of its part in making the larger argument, but because it deals with its period in terms of developments within the industry; the conclusion that "where the urban folktale [one of Fawaz's subcategories of superhero comics] emerged out of the conditions of and against the corporate restructuring of the comic book industry, it ultimately devolved into a celebration of the neoliberal politics of personal responsibility grounded in bootstrap individualism" (p. 198) is among the most insightful in the book. It follows on a multifaceted discussion that touches on issues of diverse representation, class politics, and creators' self-interests in a (for the book) particularly complex way.

¹⁶ E.g. Genter 2007; Costello 2009; Capitanio 2010.

¹⁷ These issues are addressed, for example, in Shyminsky 2006.

¹⁸ A few examples include Murray 2000; Gordon et al. 2001; Smith 2001; Johnson 2011; Strömberg 2011; Pustz 2012; Phillips and Strobl 2013; Magnussen et al. 2015.

¹⁹ Yockey 2005, an article that directly challenges Fawaz's reading of the Fantastic Four, is buried on 71013; Wright 2001 is cited throughout the book, but only when a claim supports one of Fawaz's.

²⁰ E.g. Eco 1981; Brown 2011, 78; Lewis 2014, 25–26.



Ultimately, however, in spite of providing some insights, the small selection of comics that Fawaz discusses cannot possibly illustrate what he sets out to show. Even if one does agree with any single case study – or with all of them – no sample is even remotely large enough to be as representative as Fawaz claims it is. Even if one accepts Fawaz’s claims about any single text of his, the “radical” politics that he claims are his texts are only a drop in an ocean full of other political counter-currents that are completely ignored, as if they play no role in the history of US superheroes. One cannot generalize about superhero comics in a given period from so small a sample and then claim that what is said applies to everything being published at the time, as Fawaz repeatedly does throughout his introduction and within the separate chapters. In the final analysis, the superhero has always been and will continue to be far bigger than *The New Mutants* ever lets on. Once one tries to generalize the claims it makes, they begin to tear at the seam and rip, as any too-constricting garment will do.

All three books discussed in this review article share the same overarching problems. They all establish their own definitions of superheroes that pass over the general, structuring function of definitions to instead make claims about what superheroes say or do. They do so not as a result of an investigation of a representative sample of comics, but are asserted as the starting point (even in Arnaudo’s book, which withholds its main thesis as a cute gimmick), and then proceed to present small selections of examples that conform to this definition, as if that were enough to bound in eighty years of continuous publication. And they do all of this with casual disregard for almost all previous scholarly work on superheroes and with little regard for context, whether creative, historical, or cultural. As a result, each author myopically makes their own perception of superheroes stand for the whole. Inadvertently, the three books end up emphasizing the need for inclusive but structured definitions of the superhero. The force and pull of gravity is a good metaphor here, for two reasons: first, without determining every move we make, gravity keeps us grounded and pulls us towards a concrete center, rather than floating around aimlessly in the vastness of space; and second, it helps us appreciate what, exactly, is so special about anyone who can defy it.

I have made no secret of my opinions about the type of writing these books represent.²¹ The drive to make grand claims that these books evince goes against what I regard as cornerstones in superhero studies. They do not pay nearly enough critical attention to history, context, or creator biography, and they do not let the size of their material sample determine the scope of their

²¹ Cf. Lund 2015, wherein I present an abridged version of my research on the X-Men and contrast it with other recent writing on that series; and Lund 2016, in which I discuss recent writing about Superman.



conclusions. If these books are indicators of where superhero studies is heading, then it is a subfield that is in serious danger of becoming irrelevant.

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