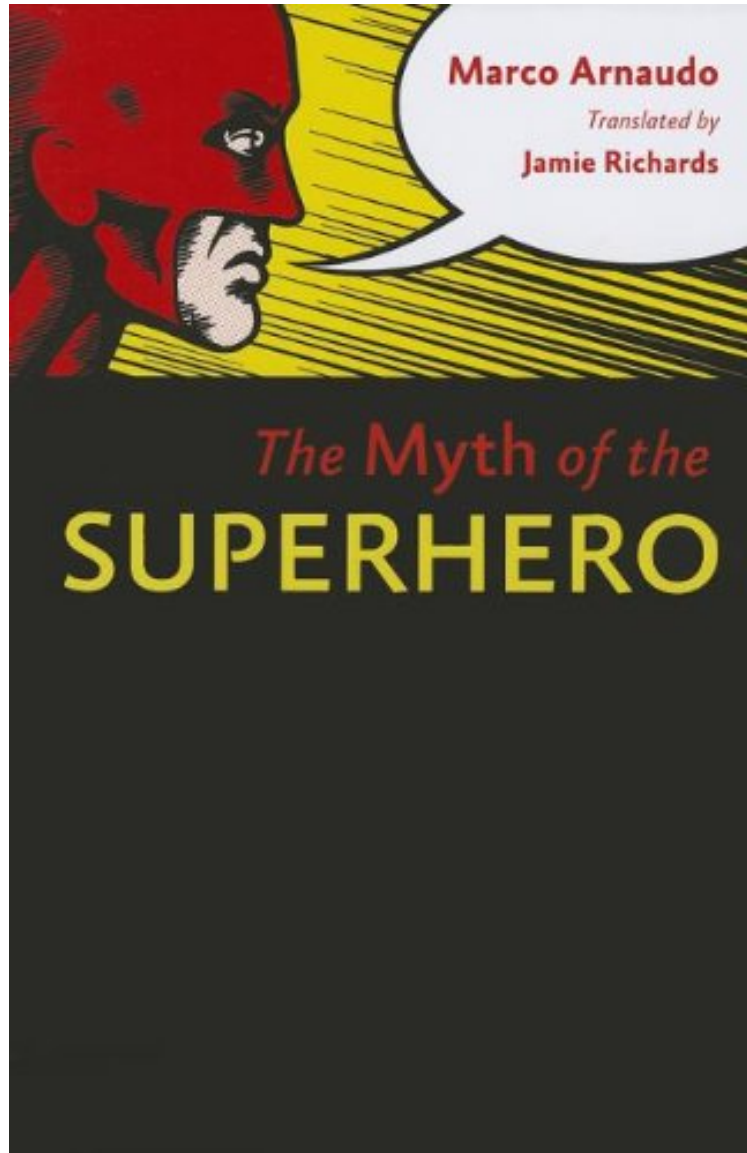


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The Myth of the Superhero

Marco Arnaudo

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Marco Arnaudo : The Myth of the Superhero before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Myth of the Superhero:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Arnaudo superhero comics as something worthy of study and offers an excellent, thoughtful overview of the genre. By Benton Grey Arnaudo does what has very rarely been done; he treats the vast corpus of American superhero comic books as something worthy of study in-and-of-itself, and he does it with a light touch and a clever tone. This book is, essentially, just an overview of the evolution of superhero comics and

their role in and reflection of society, a subject that has been tackled before, but the author asserts that these stories of heroes and villains are actually of literary value all on their own, and not just as a contrast to the "serious" literature of books like *Maus* or *The Watchmen*. Usually, when literary scholars, myself included, deign to study comics at all, there is a tacit acknowledgement that only such "elevated" examples of the form are worthy of attention, yet, as Arnaudo compellingly illustrates in his introduction, the sprawling shared universes of mainstream superhero comics have accomplished something that is completely unique in human history. They have given birth to massive, decades-long stories of intricate complexity, penned by hundreds of authors, illustrated by hundreds of hands, and yet all part of the tapestry. It is an undertaking on the scale of the myth cycles that gave us the Arthurian stories, yet they outnumber those tales, and they share a unity that would only come to exist in Arthurian myth when Malory cobbled together his book, and they share that unity almost from the start. The end result, though occasionally, or even often, silly, light, and disposable in the individual instance, is an immense metanarrative through which one can chart the growth, change, and struggles of American culture over the course of the 20th Century, as well as the creation of a heroic myth that is uniquely American. In superhero comics, because they are simpler, because they are drawn in brighter, more vibrant colors and the stories told in more strident tones, one can trace even more clearly the trajectory of America over these years. While Arnaudo doesn't develop this idea as much as I might wish, he does frame his work in these lofty terms, and this gives his study of the arc of the American superhero a very interesting context. I highly recommend his book to anyone interested in the genre or in the literary history of America's 20th Century.

A refugee from his broken planet who saves earth (more than once), Superman was sent to America as his father's final act before dying. Does this make him the ultimate immigrant success story? Disillusioned with a crime-filled world, Bruce Wayne seeks guidance from a shaman and transforms himself into the flawlessly moral Batman. Through a series of close readings of DC and Marvel comics, Marco Arnaudo explores the influence of religion and myth on superhero stories as well as their relationship to the classical epic and baroque style. Superheroes embody the most positive and inclusive aspects of American culture. Arnaudo asserts that, amidst the exciting action, tender love stories, and tales of self-sacrifice, superheroes are role models for tolerance and moral decision making. Translated for the first time into English, *The Myth of the Superhero* looks beyond the cape, the mask, and the superpowers, presenting a serious study of the genre and its place in a broader cultural context.

"A very original and valuable contribution to the field of American pop culture." (Giancarlo Lombardi, The College of Staten Island, CUNY)"Best suited for students of literary studies looking for cultural and ideological analysis; the general reader will glean useful insight into Superman's psyche." (Library Journal)"Even though this is a rather thin volume, it refers to a multitude of aspects that place the superhero in the role of a fighter for tolerance, diversity and justice; the blueprints of their actions, however, were designed hundreds of years ago." (Dr. A. Ebert PopCultureShelf.com)" *The Myth of the Superhero* is a work that should stand as a touchstone within institutional comics studies, while at the same time being an accessible and highly relevant text for casual and fanboy/girl readers." (Derek Royal Comics Alternative)"Arnaudo's book is an interesting analysis of some of the commonly overlooked significances of one of the most important media in modern pop culture. The criticism of the superhero comic book in regard to its dialogues with mythology is particularly perceptive, and sets up Arnaudo's discussion of the ways in which it can be used to portray and challenge ethical and cultural ideas." (Jason Archbold Media International Australia)About the AuthorMarco Arnaudo is an associate professor of Italian and director of graduate studies in Italian at Indiana University. He has published several books in Italian, including *Il trionfo di Vertunno: Illusioni ottiche e cultura a letteraria nell'Etdella Controriforma*.