How to Write About Superheroes

Stephanie Burt

All New, All Different? A History of Race and the American Superhero, Allan Austin and Patrick Hamilton. University of Texas Press, 2019.

The Superhero Symbol: Media, Culture, and Politics, Liam Burke, Ian Gordon, and Angela Ndalianis, editors. Rutgers University Press, 2019.

Unstable Masks: Whiteness and American Superhero Comics, Sean Guynes and Martin Lund, editors. Ohio State University Press, 2020.

Uncanny Bodies: Superhero Comics and Disability, Scott T. Smith and José Alaniz, editors. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019.

Superheroes are likely more popular now than at any time in the past 60 years. The Marvel Cinematic Universe rules the box office (or did, back when there were box offices). Comic books about superheroes lack the popularity they had in the 1940s, or even the 1980s, but they have picked up critical cachet. A trickle of academic studies—starting with Richard Reynolds's *Super Heroes* (1992)—has become a lake, if not a flood. Attention to comics as a medium has encouraged attention to superhero stories, even as the comics expertswith the greatest influence have largely attended to other genres.[1]

There's now a clear line of must-read books for people who study the superhero. Some come with scholarly apparatus.[2] Some do not.[3] These books are serious, well-researched, and rarely tendentious; they demonstrate not just familiarity with but, often, admiration for theirsubject. Yet those produced within academia are too often stuck in the mode of critique. They evaluate superhero comics thematically, by how well they handle one or another issue: they complain that the comics fall short of a specific social goal or castigate them for embodying their time. We can—and at their best, critics already do—see those comics in other ways. We can also ask what fans see in them and why.

What are superheroes? Peter Coogan defined them by their "selfless, pro-social mission," unusual powers, and "dual" (not necessarily secret) identity (30). Superman, Spider-Man, and Storm of the X-Men make good examples; Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. (not powered, not dual) and the Hulk (not necessarily pro-social)

*Stephanie Burt is professor of English at Harvard. Her most recent books are *After Callimachus* (Princeton UP, 2020); *Don't Read Poetry: A Book About How to Read Poems* (Basic, 2019); and *Advice from the Lights*, an NEA Big Read selection (Graywolf, 2017).

less so. You can tell any kind of story about superheroes—a low-stakes love triangle, for example, or a door-slamming farce—but in mainstream comics, such stories almost always end up intertwined with Coogan's core elements: the selfless or self-sacrificial mission; the use of powers; and the conflict between one identity and another. Comics, the medium, need not contain superheroes, the genre. Non-anglophone comics—Franco-Belgian *bandes-dessinées*; Japanese manga—have never depended on them. Yet the affordances of comics books lent themselves uniquely to superheroes. Before modern digital postproduction effects, the only credible way to show somebody flying through a nebula, or becoming a ball of flame, involved combining words with hand-drawn pictures. And, as Douglas Wolk writes, "[s]uperhero cartoonists can present narratives whose imagines and incidents are unlike our own sensory experience of the world (and totally cool-looking) but can still be understood as a metaphorical representation. . . . That's very easy to do in comics and very hard to do in any other medium" (92–93).

Because they have been going on for so long, with such rich backstories provided by multiple writers, superhero comics would seem to provide an idea space for theories of narrative and genre. To some extent, they have. Coogan's *Superhero* (2006) and Geoff Klock's *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* (2002) model superhero stories as genres. Both Coogan and Chris Gavaler (*On the Origin of Superheroes* [2015]) trace out the prehistory of the kind, from Gilgamesh through 1920s pulp heroes. Though all three cover moral and political dilemmas, none zeroes in on a particular real-life social or ethical problem nor attempts to judge how well superhero stories, in general, so far address it.

Most of these new books focus on such attempts. All contain discoveries, though none rise to the gold standard of Ramzi Fawaz's *The New Mutants* (2016). All demonstrate, without overcoming, what Rita Felski has labeled as *The Limits of Critique* (2015), in their evaluating of a series of fictional works according to how well they (the works, not the characters) represent and how well they subvert or resist injustice.

Often they don't push back hard enough. Allan Austin and Patrick Hamilton's *All New, All Different* (2019) traces the 80-year history of race in mainstream US superhero comics, from the so-called Golden Age (beginning with Superman in 1938) to the present day. Till recently, Austin and Hamilton find that history is a nearly constant failure: failure to recognize and to contest stereotypes like the Yellow Peril villain and the hypermasculine black man; failure to center heroes of color or to develop them adequately; and failure to diagnose white supremacy as systemic, instead blaming "individual racists and discrete acts" (91). Marvel's Luke Cage

(initially called Power Man, as in Black Power) duplicates the weaknesses of the 1970s blaxploitation film. Storm of the X-Men displays a "stereotypical affinity with nature," while the celebrated X-Men spinoff *New Mutants* "continue[s] an unsuccessful commitment to diversity," since its Brazilian hero is hotheaded, its Cheyenne team leader Dani Moonstar sometimes unclothed (138, 203).

Things begin to look up during the 1990s, when a black villain-turned-hero like the Marvel Comics cyborg Deathlok could "assert[] his control over his destiny" (244) and the black-owned Milestone Comics (supported and distributed by DC Comics) published high-quality comics about black superheroes (one property, *Static Shock*, made it to television). *Truth: Red, White & Black* (2003) merged Captain America's origin story with a black would-be captain, Isaiah Bradley, and both with the real history of the Tuskegee Experiment: *Truth* became one of the first popular comics to consider the tenacity of white supremacy. Finally, during the 2010s, new heroes—most of all Marvel's Kamala Khan—could bring readers of color the representation they have long deserved.

Austin and Hamilton's thick survey will be required reading for future scholars, though those scholars might skim the first half of the volume, wherein flat characters replicate—without saying much more about—the egregious failures of a larger society. While DC Comics's business model remains harder to study, Austin and Hamilton might have taken advantage of Sean Howe's terrific *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story* (2012) to say more about who was making the comics and how. It's no accident that Dwayne McDuffie, one of the founders of Milestone, created that praiseworthy Deathlok plot, nor that Robert Morales and Kyle Baker—later the creator of a stunning graphic novel about Nat Turner—wrote and drew *Truth*. Dani Moonstar—whose Native representation other critics (among them the Métis writer James Leask) debate—has never been scripted by a Native writer; no wonder her well-meaning, often moving stories leave aspects of her identity out.[4]

Austin and Hamilton take on a wide range of comics but judge them on a narrow, linear scale: open bigotry at one end, Kamala Khan at the other. That scale leaves out a lot. Can Storm be at once an aspirational figure and a too-perfect, unattainable model, a charismatic original made partly out of pseudo-African clichés? She could be and she was—and she changed and grew, shedding her flowing white hair and her ease in midair for a leather vest, a tall white Mohawk, "multiple embodiments over time," and a determination not to be pigeonholed (carrington 96).

Superhero stories normally take place in a contemporary society that looks somewhat like our own. (Where the setting is something else—say the techno-utopian thirtieth century for DC's Legion

of Super-Heroes or the late Victorian moment of the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen—we understand the book as a hybrid genre: superhero space opera; superhero steampunk.) Because US society has long been shot through with the logic of white supremacy, superhero stories take place in a world organized by white supremacy too; because superheroes are by definition more powerful than most real humans, they may seem especially complicit wherever they fail to challenge white supremacy directly. Frederick Luis Aldama's foreword to *Unstable Masks*: *Whiteness and American Superhero Comics* (2020) proposes simply that "today's creators can do better" (xvi); Noah Berlatsky argues instead that "superheroes can't exist without. . . . the logic of whiteness," because it's whiteness that lifts some people above the rest (263). (So much for the Talented Tenth.)

There's a cleaner version of this argument, and Osvaldo Oyola, in the same volume, makes it about black versions of Captain America. Because superheroes can't transform society wholesale without becoming supervillains, and because our own society embodies, alas, white supremacy, an antiracist superhero in any halfway realistic America can't win for losing. The structural transformations required to combat systemic oppression would destroy the shape of the tale. Oyola calls it "the impossibility of black liberation within the context of the superhero project" (28); a black Cap "is set up for failure" (31) or else (like President Barack Obama) for a frustrating series of incremental, reversible wins. Yet *Captain America: Sam Wilson* (2015–17; the best-known black Cap) is not, for Oyola, an aesthetic or intellectual failure, but "a profound work of Afropessimist critique" (34): the limits of Sam's powers are also the limits of our world. Other superhero stories can escape this trap by taking place outside America: in the Wakanda where Black Panther rules or on the X-Men's island ethnostate of Krakoa.

Oyola is one of several contributors to *Unstable Masks* who really seem to appreciate the comics they critique, to show why these comics might be worth rereading, not just as symptomatic but as artistic achievements. Jeremy Carnes explains how the 1980s vintage *New Mutants* (1983–1991)—the first superteam in mainstream comics with a majority–minority cast—shows "the push and pull between decolonial rhetorics and the colonial structures we are continually working" to take apart (70). Yet other contributions have the aspect of shooting fish in a barrel. The Cloak and Dagger comics of the 1980s, teaming a white rich girl who incarnates light with a young black man who represents darkness, cannot escape racist clichés (the recent television show is a different matter). Martial arts comics of the 1970s incorporated "certain stereotypes of Asian peoples and cultures" along with "faux Chinese" names and

language (Pustz 219, 218). The synthetic android superhero Vision, one of the saddest figures in mainstream comics, tries and fails to perform white middle-class masculinity, marrying and raising artificial or imaginary children: his "search for white domesticity," as Esther De Dauw writes, never works out (139). And the often goofy, over-the-top X-Men comics of the 1960s, as Martin Lund says, "followed a liberal assimilationist line rather than a radical one" (145).

More complicated stories get a raw deal. Superpowers usually create what Andrew Solomon calls "horizontal identities" (most superheroes have nonsuper parents), and they are physically meaningful even outside society (you can fly even if nobody else thinks you can) (2). Race, in contrast, is normally inherited (most black kids have a black parent), and it arises from social conventions. Powers thus make bad metaphors for race: if you want to use superheroes to tell a story about blackness, or South Asian identity, you need to create a hero who is literally black or South Asian. Yet for Neil Shyminsky in *Unstable Masks*, "mutancy is more often than not a metaphor for racialized Otherness" and one that fails to recognize oppression (161). A 2010 X-Men villain named Kaga "makes a point that the X-Men are loathe to concede, namely that these mansion-dwelling and physically attractive heroes have more privilege than other and Otherized"—physically unattractive or impoverished—mutants (162). But multiple stories by multiple authors have multiple X-Men conceding exactly this point. See any 1980s plot involving the sewer-dwelling, self-exiled Morlocks, or *X-Men Unlimited* #22 (1999), written by Bryan Vaughan, about the grotesque, bone-encrusted mutant Marrow.

Superheroes do much better as metaphors for disability: from the 1960s on they became, as Fawaz put it, the only popular genre that "visually celebrated bodies whose physical instability deviated from social and cultural norms" (4). Fawaz in *The New Mutants* and José Alaniz in *Death, Disability, and the Superhero* (2014) explored the work done by those fictional bodies. The writers of *Uncanny Bodies* (2019) continue that project, attending not only to physical disability but to neurodiversity, in Jonathan Lethem's and Steve Gerber's "characters whose psyches confound notions of the 'normal'" (Alaniz 50), and to psychological atypicality, as when the Marvel hero Moon Knight, who has multiple personalities (or dissociative identity), chooses not to eliminate his alters (75).

Some essays amount to straightforward, edifying appreciations for single characters. Barbara Gordon (Operator or Oracle), from the Batman comics, who uses a wheelchair, gets two; Clint Barton (Hawkeye) of Marvel's Avengers, often represented as deaf or hard of hearing, gets three: "Barton defines himself as a 'defective'

superhero, one lacking genuine superpowers"; both "disability" and lack of ability become "component[s] of Barton's own sense of identity" (Pinti 130). A wordless issue of the *Hawkeye* comic by Matt Fraction and David Aja welcomes d/Deaf—and intentionally alienates hearing—readers: Naja Later writes that its "empty [speech] bubbles draw our attention to how seamlessly the language of comic books had been accessible until now" (150). Later and Sarah Gibbons stand out for the way they describe comics form, at once visual, narrative, and characterological.

If *Uncanny Bodies* does justice to certain characters, the 15 contributors to *The Superhero Symbol: Media, Culture, and Politics* (2019) try to do justice to the whole genre. Salubriously, the volume spans many disciplines: literary and cultural analysis, business history, legal interpretation, musicology, video game design, and interview-based social science. Henry Jenkins's opening essay shows how twenty-first-century superheroes offer "resources for the civic imagination." Acting in advance of, or in lieu of, insensitive or ineffective governments, bringing together real-life readers and in-universe allies, heroes like Kamala Khan or Storm may "develop a compelling vision of freedom and equality before they are directly experienced" inour world (33). Of course, "there is nothing inherently progressive" about them, any more than there is something inherently reactionary (39). One superhero symbol can work many ways, as Neal Curtis's examination of *Truth* and other Captain America stories shows: Cap has repeatedly fought off right-wing doubles, alternatively costumed versions of himself who aspired to make America white again.

Though he steers into a more complex argument involving Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben, Jason Bainbridge's piece of superhero theory also shows why the metaphor can speak to real-life civic need. Any superhero who is not a government agent allegorizes the need for civil society, volunteer efforts, and local replacements in cases where the "state … has failed to intervene" (71). The COVID-19 crisis in the US, with its hapless, self-dealing federal government, makes an all-too-obvious example, but smaller scale real-life problems abound. Some even require the threat of force. In the independent comic *Strong Female Protagonist* (2012–18), superheroes organize a network to protect survivors of domestic violence from their perpetrators: where restraining orders do not work, perhaps superspeed will. The closer villains get to real-life evils, the more a superhero story reveals the limits of real-life law. The manipulative Killgrave in the comic *Alias* (2001–04) and the television show *Jessica Jones* (2015–19) became hard to distinguish from Harvey Weinstein, and equally hard for state power to contain.

One superhero symbol can work many ways, as Neal Curtis's examination of Truth *and other Captain America stories shows: Cap has repeatedly fought off right-wing doubles, alternatively costumed versions of himself who aspired to make America white again.*

If you want to know what effect superhero stories, or any stories, can have on hypothetical, perfectly alert readers, you can use literary analysis like Bainbridge's (or Oyola's or Later's). If you want to know what effects they have had on real readers, you might want to interview those readers. And if they dress up as their favorite characters, or imitate those characters by patrolling the streets, you might ask them how and why. Claire Langsford takes that approach with people who dress up as Batman: some (often cisgender white men) display or seek "epic feat[s]" of virtuosity in crafting a costume and shaping their fit bodies, while others (whose Batman may be black or a woman) pursue a symbolic "quest for justice" (183). As for members of "the real-life superhero (RLSH) movement" (189), according to Vladislav Iouchkov and John McGuire, far from dispensing vigilante justice, many of these costumed would-be heroes seek a "prosocial mission ... beyond the limitations of the state," inspiring neighborhood cleanups and food drives or playing with kids (193). The missions are literal, the violence figurative.

Comic book superheroes make meaning at many levels, some common to many genres and media and some unique to the domain: visual components (such as coloring or lettering), drawn panels, single pages, issues or physical books, story arcs, long-running company-owned characters, shared universes, transmedia franchises, audience, community. Ideally, scholars should ask—as Fawaz did in examining 1970s comics' letter columns—how fans would read or rewrite a situation, not just how a comic presents it. We can and should ask—to quote Felski's recent work—what modes of attachment, attunement, and identification a given panel, arc, character, universe offers, and how, and to whom; we might ask what's beautiful and strange in its visual world, as well as what's politically advantageous (or progressive), and for whom (*Hooked*).

And the more interest we take in comics' political effects (rather than, say, their aesthetic innovation), the more we might want to see how they were actually read. Austin and Hamilton, and Shyminsky, denounce the infamous "M-word" speech from *Uncanny Avengers* #5 (2013) in which the mutant Havok rejects the label *mutant*: writer Rick Remender's dialogue embodies the dubious argument that real-world people should try not to notice race. But these industrious scholars do not seem to have noticed another mutant's de facto reply, identified by many fans as such: Kitty Pryde's speech against passing, and for visibility, in *All-New X-Men* #13 (2013), penned by Brian Michael Bendis. "I am Jewish," she says. "I am a mutant. And I want people to know who and what I am." Adding insult to injury, Shyminsky portrays recent versions of Havok's brother, the X-Man Cyclops, who really did try to start a

revolution, "as a mutant terrorist and villain" (168). That is—to put it mildly—not how fans saw him.[5]

The wealth of informal, nonacademic comics criticism makes the head spin, and it's hard to collate, in a way that (say) Mark Twain scholarship has not been. Much of it shows up a thousand words at a time, on websites that may not exist next year. These characters *already* mean a great deal to people, especially to people who do not feel seen or recognized or understood by other popular media. "[T]he superhero's very ubiquity and recognizability," as Alaniz says in *Unstable Masks*, "has also made it available to ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups" (104). And they mean a great deal not just through what they represent but through the ways that they do so: through tone, style, artistry, and command of comics both as a verbal and as a visual medium.

The very first writers on superhero comics—say, Jules Feiffer in his introduction to *The Great Comic Book Heroes* (1965)—had to contend not only with the large number of mid-twentieth-century titles but with their relative sameness: they were suited mostly for examinations by historians, as well as being objects of nostalgia.[6] But we now have a vast set of superhero comics worth teaching and examining at length, not just for their historical importance or their symptomatic nature but for their ability to solicit sustained attachment and attunement, their craft, psychological insight, narrative intricacy, or even their spectacle. As with classic Hollywood film, also popular before it gained respect, there's a canon belatedly coalescing, and it's exciting (it includes, for example, the Fraction/Aja *Hawkeye*), but it's limited.[7] The most frequently taught and praised superhero book may still be Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen* (1986–87), a bleak and expertly executed, heroism-free tour de force, perfectly suited to a hermeneutics of suspicion.

Fans whose imaginative lives take place within the superhero genre—who are, like the readers Felski chronicles, reading for identification, for spectacle, and for insight into how real people behave—have formed their own canons, sometimes in conscious opposition to the "dark" prestige comics of the late 1980s, *Watchmen* among them. Many support the lovely and influential series *Marvels* (1994), by Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross, retelling early adventures of Spider-Man, Iron Man, and the like from the point of view of a nonsuperpowered photographer; Busiek and Brent Anderson used *Marvels* as a springboard to the thoughtful, and very teachable, *Astro City* (1995–present), with its small-scale, slice-of-life, non-combat-oriented stories about superheroes and the people who live among them. Marjorie Liu's *Astonishing X-Men* and *X-23* (2010–13) are latter-day standouts among mutant comics, elaborate and focused on trauma recovery or on queer and nonwhite

characters. Comedic depictions and deconstructions of superheroes, complex enough to teach, include McDuffie's own *Damage Control* (1988–91) and the more recent *Hellcat* (2015–17), *She-Hulk* (2014), and *Gwenpool Strikes Back* (2019–20).

And for nonironic, nondeconstructed pinnacles of the genre, critics and teachers could do far worse than the Dark Phoenix Saga, *Uncanny X-Men* #128–137 (1980), by Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and collaborators. Its iconic final cover shows Cyclops and Phoenix side by side, making an X-shape, their bodies—both, in a sense, disabled—supporting each other against all enemies, systemic and individual. Both the plots and the panels include compositional stunners, points of view varied both visually and emotionally, sympathetic figures and tragic choices, and metaphors for neurodiversity and for emotional and physical disability. They show a young white character confronting her own implicit biases, a black one excelling (though in a supporting role), and nostalgia for an older, whiter order as a literal tool of evil mind control. They also (as Fawaz has shown) pursue a deeply conflicted view of female sexuality, which "patriarchal economic forces" imagine—with good reason—might overturn their world (222). But those arcs are only suggestions. Future studies of superheroes have plenty of other places to start. They have come far since Reynolds, not to mention since *Action Comics* #1 (1938) and the debut of Superman. But they still have places to go.

Notes

1. See Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (1992) and Hillary Chute, *Why Comics?* (2019).

2. See Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity* (2003); Peter Coogan, *Superhero* (2006); Ramzi Fawaz, *The New Mutants* (2016); Geoff Klock, *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* (2002); and Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation* (2003).

3. See Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics* (2007).

4. See James Leask, "'Those Are White Man's Totems': The Complex Identity of Dani Moonstar," *Jay & Miles X-Plain the X-Men*, 18 June 2015, web.

5. See Daniel Amrhein, "Rick Remender, the Mutant Oppression Metaphor, and the 'M-Word,'" *Journey into Awesome*, 10 Apr. 2013, web and "Kitty Pryde Responds to Havok's 'M-Word' Speech," *Journey into Awesome*, 9 July 2013, web; Chan, "Why Cyclops Was Right," *ComicNewbies*, 28 May 2015, web; Sean Ian Mills, "Cyclops Was Right Yet Again, Let Me Count the Ways," *Henchman-4-Hire*, 2 Dec. 2016, web.

6. See Wright.

7. See Chute.

Works Cited

Alaniz, José. "'Mechanical Boys': *Omega the Unknown* on the Spectrum." Smith and Alaniz, pp. 35–58.

——. "Whiteness and Superheroes in the Comix/Codices of Enrique Chagoya." Guynes and Lund, pp. 103–25.

Aldama, Frederick Luis. "Unmasking Whiteness: Re-Spacing the Speculative in Superhero Comics." Guynes and Lund, pp. xi–xvi.

Austin, Allan and Patrick Hamilton. *All New, All Different? A History of Race and the American Superhero*. U of Texas P, 2019.

Bainbridge, Jason. "'This Land Is Mine!' Understanding the Function of Supervillains." Burke, Gordon, and Ndalianis, pp. 63–78.

Bendis, Brian Michael, writer. *All New X-Men*, vol. 1, no. 13. Marvel Comics, 2013.

Berlatsky, Noah. "Empowerment for Some, or Tentacle Sex for All." Guynes and Lund, pp. 258–64.

Burke, Liam, Ian Gordon, and Angela Ndalianis. *The Superhero Symbol: Media, Culture, and Politics*. Rutgers UP, 2019.

Carnes, Jeremy. "'The Original Enchantment': Whiteness, Indigeneity, and Representational Logics in *The New Mutants*." Guynes and Lund, pp. 57–71.

carrington, andré. *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction*. U of Minnesota P, 2016.

Christie, Charlie. "Sane Superheroes: Mental Distress in the Gutters of

Moon Knight." Smith and Alaniz, pp. 59–78.

Coogan, Peter. *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre*. Monkeybrain, 2006.

De Dauw, Esther. "Seeing White: Normalization and Domesticity in Vision's Cyborg Identity." Guynes and Lund, pp. 127–41.

Fawaz, Ramzi. *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*. New York UP, 2016.

Felski, Rita. *Hooked: Art and Attachment*. U of Chicago P, 2020.

——. *The Limits of Critique*. U of Chicago P, 2015.

Gavaler, Chris. *On the Origin of Superheroes: From the Big Band to Action Comics No. 1*. U of Iowa P, 2015.

Guynes, Sean and Martin Lund, editors. *Unstable Masks: Whiteness and American Superhero Comics*. Ohio State UP, 2020.

Iouchkov, Vladislav and John McGuire. "From Pages to Pavements: A Criminological Comparison between Depictions of Crime Control in Superhero Narratives and 'Real-Life Superhero' Activity." Burke, Gordon, and Ndalianis, pp. 189–220.

Jenkins, Henry. "'What Else Can You Do with Them?' Superheroes and the Civic Imagination." Burke, Gordon, and Ndalianis, pp. 25–46.

Klock, Geoff. *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*. Continuum, 2002.

Langsford, Claire. "Being Super, Becoming Heroes: Dialogic Superhero

Narratives in Cosplay Collectives." Burke, Gordon, and Ndalianis, pp. 171–88.

Later, Naja. "The Deaf Issue: *Hawkeye* #19 and Deaf Accessibility in the Comics Medium." Smith and Alaniz, pp. 141–56.

Lund, Martin. "'Beware the Fanatic!' Jewishness, Whiteness, and Civil Rights in *X-Men* (1963–1970)." Guynes and Lund, pp. 142–57.

Oyola, Osvaldo. "Marked for Failure: Whiteness, Innocence, and Power in Defining Captain America." Guynes and Lund, pp. 19–37.

Pinti, Daniel. "'Okay . . . This Looks Bad': Disability, Masculinity, and Ambivalence in Matt Fraction and David Aja's *Hawkeye*." Smith and Alaniz, pp. 125–40.

Pustz, Matthew. "'A True Son of K'un-Lun': The Awkward Racial

Politics of White Martial Arts Superheroes in the 1970s." Guynes and Lund, pp. 212–25.

Reynolds, Richard. *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*. UP of Mississippi, 1992.

Shyminsky, Neil. "Mutation, Racialization, Decimation: The X-Men as White Men." Guynes and Lund, pp. 158–73.

Smith, Scott and José Alaniz, editors. *Uncanny Bodies: Superhero Comics and Disability*. Pennsylvania State UP, 2019.

Solomon, Andrew. *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*. Simon & Schuster, 2012.

Wolk, Douglas. *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*. Da Capo P, 2007.