

Stan Lee

1922-

(Born Stanley Lieber) American comic strip writer, editor, and publisher.

Lee's creation of comic book characters and situations with both relevancy and depth has been instrumental in revitalizing the comic book industry. His characters, such as the Amazing Spider-Man, the Incredible Hulk, the Fantastic Four, and Doctor Strange, are invested with super powers and human problems. Their super powers are sometimes natural, as in the case of the Fantastic Four, whose members are able to turn into fire, become invisible, throw out force fields, or stretch. Other times, the powers are the result of unsuccessful scientific experiments, as with Peter Parker, who can use his web-spinning abilities at will to become Spider-Man, or David Banner, who uncontrollably changes into the monstrous Hulk and uses his immense strength to aid innocent victims.

Spider-Man is perhaps Lee's most popular character. He has a special appeal for young people since his counterpart, Peter Parker, is himself a teenager who is still subject to adult authority. Parker has all the problems of the average high school senior, but as Spider-Man he is the superior of any middle-aged person. Readers are able to empathize and sympathize with him, as well as appreciate the excitement of his adventures.

Lee bases his stories on contemporary themes: the heroes battle drug pushers, organized crime, and racial bigotry. His sophisticated plots are centered around the age-old conflict of good against evil, the villains always defeated by their morally upright adversaries. All of these factors have generated new interest in the comics among more mature readers and critics generally agree that Lee's contributions to the comic book have made the genre more acceptable as a legitimate art form.

ROBIN GREEN

Marvelmania is a subculture, a living-breathing-changing-happening art form, a fantasy world in which millions live, some of them most of the time. The fans participate in the process of creating the comic fantasy world. They send in their ideas and criticisms and Stan listens to them. The comic world has a language and logic of its own, even a whole technology that works for it, and the books have to be consistent, letters will pour in about a mistake. (p. 31)

Stan Lee revolutionized the comic book industry ten years ago by deciding to let his superheroes live in the real world: his real world. He made Spiderman a neurotic, guilt-ridden, insecure superhero with romantic problems, financial problems, sinus attacks and fits of insecurity, embarrassed about appearing in public in a costume. Lately Spiderman's life has become almost unbearable. Peter Parker is committed to his role of Spiderman, fighter for justice and good, and yet it is this role which has alienated him from the world he seeks to help. His girl Gwen hates Spiderman for killing her father, and he's so busy playing "Web-Spinner" he hasn't time for anyone who really matters, like his Aunt May who smothers him with motherly attention and can't be told about his secret identity because she would die of a heart attack. The public thinks he is a thief and murderer. He can't win. If he should forsake his super-powers and try to be just Peter Parker, he feels guilty for not fighting crime and doing the good he knows he can do. (p. 34)

Robin Green, "Face Front Clap Your Hands! You're on the Winning Team!" in Rolling Stone (by Straight Arrow Publishers, Inc. © 1971; all rights reserved; reprinted by permission), Issue 91, September 16, 1971, pp. 29-32, 34.

ARTHUR ASA BERGER

The machines and monsters found in *The Fantastic Four* have direct relevance to the relationship existing between technology and American culture, a subject of considerable importance. A glance at *The Fantastic Four* shows that the creators of these works are fascinated with large, hulklime creatures as well as fantastic machines. The pages abound with "Hulks" and "Things"—grotesques which are unnatural in shape and appearance—ugly, fantastic and incongruous.

On the visual level alone the grotesque is significant. Its ugliness is an affront to society and suggests that something is wrong with the social order. Just as a caricature is an attack on an individual, by means of distorting some feature of a person (while keeping resemblance), so is a grotesque an attack upon society. The distortion and ugliness of the grotesque symbolizes all that is wrong and ugly in the society which created the grotesque. (pp. 199-200)

[The] various monsters we find in *The Fantastic Four* pro-

vide us with the means for working through our aggressions in a rather sophisticated manner. Comic books are not exactly like films, but they function in much the same way. (p. 202)

In Marvel Comics we find a curious tendency to merge the human and the machine into super-technological entities. The powers of *The Fantastic Four* tend to be natural: The Thing supposedly has the "greatest human force" in the universe; other members of the team can turn into fire, become invisible, throw out fields of force or stretch—though Reed Richards is himself a scientific genius and can come up with devices to counter the various mad scientists who appear from time to time.

The villains generally cannot match the natural power of *The Fantastic Four* and are forced to rely on technology. Such is the case with Dr. Doom, whose mother was a witch and who learned strange mystic secrets from Tibet as well as the scientific knowledge of the Western world. Quasimodo, a machine who is made human by The Silver Surfer, and Psychoman are further examples. (pp. 202-03)

Novelists and poets generally see science and technology as a threat to humanity and recoil against it almost in panic. Thus most contemporary utopian novels are *dystopies* which see societies of the future as totalitarian and anti-human.

This is due, in part, to a bias in our higher arts, which have traditionally looked toward nature for a source of inspiration and wisdom. *The Fantastic Four* reflect a much different attitude toward science. Although the various villains are able to use science and technology for their evil purposes, they are always defeated by heroes who are superior morally and technologically. Rather than refusing to see the possibilities opened by technology, literary forms such as comic books use science for their subject matter. The victories of the good guys express a fundamental American optimism and reflect an awareness of the potentialities for good and evil in machines and a belief in man's ability to control them. Thus, comic strips have a realistic awareness of the moral dilemma posed by science and technology. (p. 203)

But what relation do these machines and monsters have to the myth of America? . . . *The idea that America represents a new start, where history, institutions, and complexity can be left behind seems to be the essence of our myth.* An antithesis is established between what America stands for—innocence, hope, individualism, simplicity, will, equality, democracy, etc.—and Europe. How do the machines and monsters in *The Fantastic Four* relate to the myth of America? What do they tell us about this myth as far as the viewpoint of the millions who read Marvel Comics is concerned?

For one thing we find in *The Fantastic Four* a recognition of the inadequacy of innocence as a stance—and of its high social cost: namely paralysis. This means that nature is not seen as beneficent in all cases, and goodness is not to be measured solely in terms of closeness to nature. How can it, when nature can produce *monsters* or men who will create monsters? These comics reflect an ambivalent feeling about nature: it is the source of evil as well as good, it is necessary (the power of *The Fantastic Four* tends to be natural) but not sufficient (Reed Richards is a technological genius).

Second, these works are intellectual (to the degree that science fiction can be intellectual). . . . A radical cube may be bad science: however, it reflects an attitude about science that is quite positive but not worshipful! Progress is a function of intelligence as well as moral character, and not simply a matter of rejecting European culture and society.

Third, we find a definite expression of optimism in these stories—both in the events which take place and in their very form. In Joseph Frank's celebrated essay, "The Meaning of Spatial Form," there is a discussion of the theories of Wilhelm Worringer, whose ideas are relevant to this discussion. According to Worringer, there is a continual alternation of naturalistic and non-naturalistic art styles, which are determined by man's sense of his place in the cosmos. In naturalistic periods man feels himself part of nature and able to dominate it, and his art work reproduces the forms of nature. When man feels he is not in harmony with nature he develops nonorganic, linear, and geometric forms. If Worringer is correct, the comic books (as well as Pop Art, for instance) reflect a basic confidence in man's ability to dominate the forces of technology and industrialization. For every fantastic monster or problem we find an ingenious solution and hero. Despite the violence and terror in the comics they display an underlying optimism about man's possibilities. We may question, then, whether this really is an age of the antihero? It may be for many writers and artists, but it does not seem to be the case for millions of Americans. (pp. 204-07)

Arthur Asa Berger, "Marvel Comics: Machines, Monsters, and the Myth of America," in his *The Comic-Stripped American* (copyright © 1973 by Arthur Asa Berger; used with permission from the publisher, Walker and Company), Walker Publishing Company, 1973, pp. 199-207.

Marvel Comics, and more particularly their editor, Stan Lee, are assured a prominent place in American popular culture for their revolution of the comic book. Lee was the first to utilize contemporary and relevant themes in the stories; he created superheroes that were far more human than most, with realistic character flaws; he expanded the audience of comic books to include college students and, eventually, their professors. The impact of the Marvel line on the comic book industry was total. No one would seem to be better qualified to relate the history of this revolution than the man who started it all. Yet for all his protestations of seriousness, Lee was apparently unable to write anything above the level of the huckster's gush that characterizes the promotional "editorial" page of the actual comics. Any account of the actualities of the development of the unique stories is absent [from Lee's *Origins of Marvel Comics*]; the reader learns almost nothing of the effort that went into the revolution.

"General: 'Origins of Marvel Comics,'" in *Choice* (copyright © 1975 by American Library Association), Vol. 11, No. 12, February, 1975, p. 1760.

DAVID KUNZLE

[The] interest of Stan Lee's anthology of the comics he himself writes, lies primarily in the light shed on the psychology of the comics producer. The spirit in which Lee discusses the evolution of his comics is similar to that in

which he originally made them. He thinks of himself as mover and destroyer, god of the media and the childish imagination. With genial bluster and biblical phrases, he simultaneously regenerates, distorts and parodies ancient mythological material. The creative self-consciousness is manifested in the Marvel comics through various devices to establish esthetic distance between the product on the one hand, and its creators and consumers on the other. Narcissus withdraws, the better to jump into his own reflection. But this is accompanied by an extraordinary degree of self-deception. Lee candidly states his purpose (which is that of so many other comics producers), "to relieve the awesome affliction that threatens us all: the endlessly spreading virus of too much reality in a world that is losing its legends." In fact it is the comics' manichaeistic dissociation of myth (good) from reality (bad), and their ignorance or denial of that vast historical process by which myth grows out of reality, which is the "awesome affliction" threatening our culture.

Comics historians . . . take as their task the dispelling of the illusion that comics are "pure entertainment" irrelevant to social reality. One can shoot Lee's claims to "pure mythic fantasy" clear out of the sky simply by pointing to the stereotype he rehashes even now of vicious Communist spies trying to steal US secrets and take over the world. Elsewhere he casually has "America's mighty defense structure" unleash its "fantastic arsenal" at an "unidentified" (thus not necessarily enemy) missile. Marvel's almost abstract joy in the physical destruction of bodies and things is a reflection of a greater and more sinister reality, that of the adult media's attitude to our recent wars. (p. 27)

David Kunzle, "Self-Conscious Comics," in *The New Republic* (reprinted by permission of *The New Republic*; © 1975 *The New Republic, Inc.*), Vol. 173, No. 3, July 19, 1975, pp. 26-7.*

SALVATORE MONDELLO

Why did Spider-Man merit such a large, diverse, and enthusiastic audience, including many college students? From the start, Spider-Man was given unique characteristics for a superhero, human characteristics and problems with which readers could identify. He always finds it hard to make ends meet. . . . [As] Peter Parker, he must work for a pittance as a part-time photographer for *The Daily Bugle*. That newspaper's publisher, J. Jonah Jameson, pays him little for his action-filled photographs of Spider-Man in deadly combat with supervillains. And, to add insult to injury, Jameson detests Spider-Man, considering him a glory-hound and criminal.

The Amazing Spider-Man has found an enthusiastic young audience because it deals fundamentally with titanic battles between a teenage superhero and middle-aged supervillains—an impressive rogues' gallery which includes such memorable knaves and grotesques as the Vulture, Doc Ock, the Sandman, Kraven the Hunter, Electro, the Evil Enforcers, Mysterio, the Green Goblin, the Scorpion, the Rhino, the Shocker, the Kingpin, the Lizard, Hammerhead, and the Jackal, names which shake the very soul of every True Believer. With each battle between Spider-Man and one of his tormentors, we enter the realm of high adventure, knowing full well that the hero's victory will only be temporary, for the villain will return time and again to haunt and pursue him.

Many of the supervillains degenerate into knaves as a result of scientific accidents. (p. 233)

Now Spider-Man himself is the result of a scientific mishap. But what is incontrovertible is that the accident brought out Peter's best attributes, including his willingness to question power and to assume public responsibilities, while the accidents which befell the others brought out their evil side. We must especially ask why the sensitive Dr. Connors becomes a misanthropic grotesque [the Chameleon] while the less sophisticated Peter Parker becomes a crusader for social justice.

The answer is found in the age of the protagonists. *The Amazing Spider-Man* appeals to the young. As Peter Parker, he must accept abuse from Jameson, must not miss any more classes or his teacher will fail him, must call his cloying Aunt May to assure her he will take his vitamin pills. And what has he gained from all this? An ulcer. But as Spider-Man, he is the superior of any middle-aged person. He can swing freely with his webbing from rooftop to rooftop without giving his aunt a second thought, or he can playfully suspend himself on his webbing outside Jameson's office window and taunt him mercilessly. Through Spider-Man, Stan Lee has brought redemption to America's Peter Parkers.

But Lee tried to do more than that, and *The Amazing Spider-Man* was used skillfully to bridge the generation gap which was tearing the nation apart in the late sixties and early seventies. He introduced Captain George Stacy, a retired policeman who understood teenagers, all this at a time when our more radical youth were calling cops "fascist pigs." He introduced Joe Robertson, a black journalist, who also tried to relate to young people and who fought for responsible reporting of the news at a time when many Americans believed our journalists were concerned only with sensational headlines calculated more to sell newspapers than to report events accurately. *The Amazing Spider-Man* was intended to find an irenic solution to the challenges facing America.

While many novelists have bemoaned the growing pervasiveness of urbanization and technology upon American society, *The Amazing Spider-Man* treats these as controllable forces. Spider-Man does not work in some fictionalized urban centers like Metropolis or Gotham City, but lives and goes to school in New York City. He is New York's Tarzan swinging from rooftop to rooftop as the Lord of the Jungle swings from tree to tree. (p. 234)

Spider-Man deals with supervillains possessing considerable technological skills. He manages to more than hold his own against their mechanical devices. On occasion, he uses technology to fight technology. Discovering that the Vulture can fly because he has harnessed magnetic power, Spider-Man invents an anti-magnetic inverter. At other times, he relies on Yankee ingenuity or just plain common sense to thwart the nefarious designs of his enemies. He once defeated the mighty Electro by spraying him with a water hose. And when all else fails, Spider-Man, like John Wayne, still knows what to do with his fists. He once floored Doc Ock with a smashing right to the jaw. In this case, human, not super-human powers, triumphed over the mechanical tentacles of his opponent. Morally superior to his adversaries, Spider-Man can always beat them even when they match his scientific genius. Even the Shocker's

two vibro-smashers are unequal to Spider-Man's powers, which are not artificial but an integral part of his very being.

Spider-Man has mastered his technology and crippled that of his opponents because he has learned to control his emotions. If this were not the case, Spider-Man would have long been driven to insanity by the diabolical Mysterio, who fights him by creating illusions. (pp. 234-35)

Spider-Man's greatness [is] his ability to control his emotions, his ability to dominate himself. Since Spider-Man has mastered himself, he can master the technology around him.

The Amazing Spider-Man is a historic document that reflects three periods from our recent past. From 1962 to 1967, Spider-Man mirrored an era still dominated by Cold War diplomacy and a citizenry still concerned more with personal gratification than public service. In 1963, Spider-Man foiled the Chameleon's attempt to turn over secret documents from an American defense installation to the Communists. In that same year, he fought the Vulture for personal gain—to pay his aunt's mortgage—not to rid society of a public menace. The July 1967, issue of *The Amazing Spider-Man* is an important historical document, for it marks a significant turning point in the development of the superhero and perhaps of his nation. Peter decides to abandon his career as a crime fighter. . . . When the Kingpin learns that Spider-Man has become inactive, he unleashes a reign of terror upon New York City. Peter, rescuing a security guard who is being manhandled by two thugs, realizes that he must continue as Spider-Man as long as people need his assistance.

From 1967 to 1973, Spider-Man addressed himself to every important issue confronting American society. He fought drug abuse and drug pushers, organized crime, pollution, and racial bigotry. It was in this period that superheroines made their appearance in the periodical, compelling Spider-Man to deal with the feminist movement. In 1970, he battled the glamorous Black Widow, who at first wanted to imitate his style as a superhero but finally decided against it, noting that she had her own special destiny to fulfill.

In an era demanding relevance, few magazines were more typical or current than Lee's comic book. It was in this period that *The Amazing Spider-Man* became popular on college campuses throughout the United States. Once contemporary issues were discussed, *The Amazing Spider-Man* became a subtle persuader, fashioning and reflecting public and popular attitudes under the rubric of entertainment. During World War II, comic book superheroes, such as Superman, Batman, and Captain America, to name only the most celebrated, had come to the assistance of our government and its armed forces as we engaged the Germans, Japanese, and Italians in combat. At that time, comics were doing more than simply entertaining the young. But our early superheroes were presiding over a united people, all intent upon defeating the Axis powers. Spider-Man's stand on crucial issues during the late sixties and early seventies could bring him not only supporters but critics, for America was divided on every public question. Superman came to us in a period of consensus; Spider-Man had to find consensus in an era of conflict.

In 1971, Stan Lee was quoted as saying that he was neither a hippie nor a conservative. The same may be said for

Spider-Man. During the late sixties and early seventies, we learned that the young man behind the mask was a resolute defender of traditional American liberalism, especially the liberalism fashioned by Franklin D. Roosevelt and other New Dealers. (pp. 235-36)

Peter Parker believes in equal justice for black Americans, but he has never joined a protest movement to defend that principle. Like his fellow liberals, he feels that blacks will attain full social and political parity with whites by working in the system. (p. 236)

In the late sixties and early seventies, Spider-Man confronted the problem of drug abuse as energetically as Captain battled the Red Skull during World War II. . . . He became so enraged that as Peter Parker, he beat to a pulp three drug pushers. (p. 237)

[By] 1970, Spider-Man seemed worried about political extremism, especially from the right. . . . The danger from the extreme right to America's freedoms was as evident to Spider-Man as it was to Pogo.

Since 1973, Spider-Man has been locked in combat with such villains as the Jackal, Tarantula, the Cyclone, and the ever popular Doc Ock, among others. Occult themes have become popular. But, Spider-Man as an embattled defender of American liberalism, as a hero trying to update and revise that political ideology, ended with the termination of our involvement in the war in Southeast Asia. By the mid-1970's, Americans, Spider-Man included, had grown weary of crusades and crusaders.

Since 1962, *The Amazing Spider-Man* had helped to shape and reflect the American character and deserves special attention from students of American history because it has enjoyed a popularity and thus an influence second to no other comic book. Like the McGuffey readers and the *New-England Primer* of earlier times, *The Amazing Spider-Man* had helped to educate America's young people. During the 1960's, many older Americans feared the teenagers in their midst, stereotyping them as flag burners, pot smokers, and police baiters. By the mid-1970's, however, most of our young adults—former members of the so-called lost generation of the sixties—were responsible, moderate men and women, bringing up families, putting in a full day of work at the office, taking their children on patriotic pilgrimages to Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., to celebrate their country's two-hundredth birthday. Such behavior was only natural from a generation that had been educated by superheroes like Spider-Man. During the late sixties and early seventies, Spider-Man had helped to keep alive American liberalism among the young, a tradition stressing cooperation among individuals and minorities rather than conflict, moderation in politics rather than extremism, and the right of each American to social recognition and economic opportunity.

After Watergate and Vietnam, Americans found themselves plagued by serious economic ills. Little wonder that they wanted Spider-Man to take them away from harsh social realities and transport them into the world of fantasy, circuses, and the occult. But a people and a superhero who had confronted the great social problems of the sixties with courage and decisiveness may have been so changed by that experience that they could hardly be expected to dwell in a fantasy world for very long. (pp. 237-38)

Salvatore Mondello, "Spider-Man: Superhero in

the Liberal Tradition," in Journal of Popular Culture (copyright © 1976 by Ray B. Browne), Vol. X, No. 1, Summer, 1976, pp. 233-38.

PETER FREEDBERGER

Stan Lee, the industry's reigning superstar, has provided an interesting look into the inner workings of the Marvel machinery in *Bring on the Bad Guys*. The formula stories themselves are an exercise in overkill, containing more than anyone except the most fanatic comic book buff would want to know about the origins, fixations, and feeding habits of the Marvel villains. Like the comics they come from, these stories are filled with the adolescent enthusiasm that is Marvel's stock in trade, but the machinations never keep up with the fast-moving art work and soon become repetitive and boring, bogged down in the formula of their own success. Both the stories and the background info preceding them are obsessively larded with praise for Marvel's most important heroes . . . its reader/fans. . . . This won't bother fans who take Marvel's energy-charged, good-humored fantasy formula on faith. Marvel Comics is, after all, an adolescent Elk's Club. (pp. 93-4)

Peter Freedberger, "Book Reviews: 'Bring on the Bad Guys: Origins of Marvel Villains,'" in School Library Journal (reprinted from the January, 1977 issue of School Library Journal, published by R. R. Bowker Co./A Xerox Corporation; copyright © 1977), Vol. 23, No. 5, January, 1977, pp. 93-4.

STAN LEE

It was vitally important to me that Spider-Man be the kind of character with whom any ordinary Joe could identify. . . .

Our villains would no longer necessarily be the epitome of evil incarnate; our heroes had not only feet of clay, but kneecaps and thighbones as well.

But how could the reader learn what motivated them? . . . Those of you who are steeped in Marvel lore, who have faithfully followed the adventures of our amazing arachnid, how well you know our penchant for thought balloons wherever we have the slightest millimeter of empty space within a panel. Our characters soliloquize enough to make Hamlet seem like a raging extravert. Never before have comic books exhibited such interminable soul-searching; such agonizing reappraisals on the part of hero and villain alike; such a dogged quest for truth, understanding, and basic motivation, even while Spider-Man is getting his lumps.

Thus, for the first time, comic book stories began to be written with the same concern for human speech and characterization as movies, novels, and plays. (p. 34)

To me, the most gratifying result of our new approach was a startling change in the comic book audience. The age range of our readers—previously six to about 13—suddenly zoomed to college age and beyond. In fact, the additional sales were coming mainly from older readers, and the beauty of it was that we were gaining those older readers without losing the younger ones.

It seems that *Spider-Man* and other Marvel Comics titles were being accepted and enjoyed on two levels. For the

younger reader, there were colorful costumes, action, excitement, fantasy, and bigger-than-life adventures. For the newly proselytized older reader, we offered unexpectedly sophisticated plots and subplots, a college-level vocabulary, satire, science fiction, and as many philosophical and sociological concepts as we could devise. In the beginning, the satire wasn't completely intentional. I merely tried to imagine what would happen if someone with superhuman power really existed, and if he dwelled—for example—in Forest Hills, New York. Then I tried to confront him with real-life situations and problems. I thought I was being realistic; older readers thought I was waxing satirical. . . .

I was also delighted to discover that our younger readers were not turned off by the college-level vocabulary we were dishing out. They seemed to absorb the meaning of words like cataclysmic, misanthropic, subliminal, phantasmagoric. . . .

Beyond grownup language and drawing, there seems to be something about Peter Parker and his costumed alter ego that mesmerizes his millions of admirers, including myself. . . .

For all his power, brains, and fame, the poor kid has far more problems, far more hang-ups than a sterling soul like you. As you read his weird and wondrous adventures, even as you thrill to his superhuman process, you find yourself pitying the guy, sympathizing with anyone who can have as many tough breaks and as much crummy luck as he does. Sure, he's a superhero. Sure, he's a regular one-man army. Sure, he's practically indestructible. But you're a lot better off. You seem to handle life's little vicissitudes far better than he can. Even though he's a living legend, you can feel superior to him. Now, how can you help but love a guy like that?

And perhaps, when all is said and done, that's what Spider-Man is telling us about ourselves and our time. Even though it is fashionable to lament our lack of heroes—the vanishing of our Joe DiMaggios or Winston Churchills—it's just possible that the day of the bigger-than-life hero is gone forever. We've grown too sophisticated. We've become too cynical. . . .

So here's to Spider-Man. Here's to the new breed of superhero. He'll never disillusion us because we'll never expect too much from him. We can understand him and sympathize with him. If his powers are greater than ours, so are his problems. He's our kind of guy. (p. 36)

Stan Lee, "How I Invented Spider-Man," in Quest (copyright QUEST Board 1977), Vol. 28, July-August, 1977, pp. 31-6.

CYRISSE JAFFEE

Only one or two of the Super-women represented here [in *The Superhero Women*] could qualify as independent, liberated, untraditional heroines. Lyra the Femizon, for instance, is a princess who lives in a future world where women rule and, yet, she must fall in love with a man "with fire in [his] veins" in order to become "a woman—fulfilled." The concluding line in the episode: "What good is a kingdom . . . which has no king." Although all the heroines possess unusual powers and physical prowess, the dialogue, plot, and especially the artwork (the women are generally described as gorgeous or luscious) all too often fall

into the same clichés and stereotypes that Lee asks readers to believe no longer exist in the merry Marvel comic book menage.

Cyrisse Jaffee, "Books for Young Adults: 'The Superhero Women,'" in School Library Journal (reprinted from the March, 1978 issue of School Library Journal, published by R. R. Bowker Co./A Xerox Corporation: copyright © 1978), Vol. 24, No. 7, March, 1978, p. 144.

PATTY CAMPBELL

Stan Lee's *Superhero Women* is a collection from Marvel Comics that provides some glorious role models for young women's fantasies. Ms. Marvel, Hela, Red Sonja, Lyra the Femizon, Shanna the She-Devil, Medusa—all of them use their awesome power without shame. . . .

It could be argued that these superheroes are sex objects for boys rather than role models for girls. They have long legs, neatly rounded rumps, taut muscular bellies, and enormous sculptured breasts—but their male counterparts have amazing bodies, too, and nobody ever accused them of being sex objects. In a naive way these comic superheroes are idealized human beings, and while their sexuality is exaggerated, so are their muscles. Realistic role models these are not, but they *can* reinforce a young girl's dawning awareness that it's O.K. for women to be powerful. (p. 180)

Patty Campbell, "The YA Perplex," in Wilson Library Bulletin (copyright © 1978 by the H. W.

Wilson Company), Vol. 53, No. 2, October, 1978, pp. 180-81.

MEGHAN POWELL

[The] universe Lee helped bring into being is the one filled with the utterly fantastic, yet very human characters of Marvel superhero-dom.

Like the Amazing Spider-Man, web-slinging crimefighter with a problem. The Incredible Hulk, rampaging green Hyde to a meek scientist's Dr. Jekyll. The Silver Surfer, lyrical space rider trapped on the mad mudball that is Planet Earth. And Dr. Strange, magician and mystic fighting other-dimensional menaces. . . .

Marvel characters change. They age, graduate from school, marry, divorce, have kids. Sometimes, they die. Always they remain fallible and human, whether or not they can send out optic beams, read minds, climb walls or whip up storms. Though other comic book companies use this approach today, Lee takes credit for starting the trend toward relevance and realism.

Another part of the Marvel style has been Lee's characteristic satiric sense—a good-natured, naturally humorous bent that expresses itself both in sharp dialogue and admittedly slapstick situations.

Meghan Powell, "Comic Books: The Epitome of Fantasy," in Contra Costa Times, January 11, 1980, p. 22.