

MYTH AND POPULAR CULTURE

Widely-applied and accepted falsehood

This term “myth” includes both the inaccuracy and its persistence in use.

- Examples: the myth of original races, the myth of American Exceptionalism; in popular culture, the myth of the seal of the confessional, the myth of the ninja.

Mythological content

This term “myth” means recognizable names, characters, plot points, and ideas from an older culture showing up today. Here are three different kinds, i.e., it’s not a progression.

- Use in entertainment and toys with minimal content
 - Examples: Ialdabaoth in Super Robot Fighter, The Mighty Thor in Marvel Comics; also, team names in sports
- Presumed continuity of name and specific imagery (meanings change)
 - Examples: Jesus Christ, Hippocratic Oath
- Presumed continuity of meaning (names and imagery change)
 - References regarding superheroes: Simcha Weinstein’s *Up, Up, and Oy Vey!*; more broadly, A. David Lewis’ blog *Sacred and Sequential* and his book with Christine Hoff Kraemer, *Graven Images*; even more broadly, John Shelton Lawrence’s and Robert Jewett’s *The Myth of the American Superhero*.

Myth as cosmology

This term “myth” means a, even *the* construction of reality at the cultural and personal levels

- Mystical: Jungian symbols, including the terms archetype and the collective unconscious
 - References: Carl Jung’s *Man and His Symbols* (the relevant part for popular culture is Aniela Jaffé’s chapter), Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (which is not in fact about popular culture but rather the ancient myths themselves)
 - Applications I tagged as positive: literary, Robertson Davies’ Deptford trilogy (*Fifth Business, The Manticore, World of Wonders*); therapeutic, Robert Bly, *Iron John*
- Semiotics: signs as shapers and reinforcers of social power structures
 - References: Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* (he is not the originator of the discipline, but in my view its strongest contributor), Dick Hebdidge’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (regarding 1970s music); for superheroes, Adilufu Nama’s *Super Black*, Deborah Elizabeth Whaley’s *Black Women in Sequence*; also, Eric Greene’s *Planet of the Apes as American Myth*
 - The cinema scholars I am not citing, because I think the work is poor, begin with Christian Metz.
- Alan Moore provides an example of explicitly using both concepts, whether in parallel, in combination, or simply separately.