Twitter Thread by Jeet Heer

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1. Now that Stan Lee is being eulogized far and wide, it's important to remember how marginal Stan Lee and his collaborators (Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko) were in the 1950s and 1960s.

2. Marvel Comics (before that Atlas) was just a cog in the machine of a bottom pulp publisher run by Martin Goodman, the husband of one of Lee's cousins. It was the lowest of the low in the publishing world.

3. Now Mario Puzo (not yet the author of the Godfather) shared offices with Stan Lee in the 1950s and 1960s. Puzo wrote for garrish men's adventure magazines and, like Lee, dreamed of writing a novel & breaking out. But Puzo looked down on Lee.

4. Flo Steinberg, 1960s secretary at Marvel: "They were always making jokes about us. They'd come in and giggle. mario Puzo would look in and would see us all working on his way to the office and say, 'Work faster, little elves. Christmas is coming.'"

5. When JFK was killed, the whole office of Magazine Management was stunned and quiet. Except Lee. He continued working. "He was still working on the comic books," Puzo said. "Like that was the most important thing in the world."

6. How do we locate the achievement of Stan Lee? I think one place to start is that even when he was despised by the likes of Mario Puzo Lee took his work very seriously, It was, for him, "the most important thing in the world."

7. Lee's legacy, at least among the comics cognoscenti has become clouded by debates over authorship. Many, me included, now think that the many creator of the 1960s books were the artists (Kiby & Ditko but also Wally Wood, Gene Colan etc).

8. I think one way to recast Lee's legacy is to think of him as an Editor who added dialogue more than a writer. And he was an editor of genius, far better than his peers in terms of recognizing the talent of Kirby & Ditko, giving it room to breathe.

9. It was Lee who first conceptualized the Marvel line as a coherent universe (an outgrowth of encouraging his artists to put in cameos to cross pollinate the titles). And his carnival barkers voice, sometimes grating, gave the Marvel titles a tonal unity.

10. The framing of the Marvel books as a coherent interlocking universe was the key shift. We're very used to this now in pop culture. Even frigging Lego has their own cinematic universe! But Lee in 1960s (perhaps influenced by sci-fi) was pioneer https://t.co/q8DbtCTKcj

11. The key to Stan Lee's life is that he wanted originally to be a novelist (Stanley Leiber!) and did comics as a day job & pen name (Stan Lee). By the time he was 39 he realized the novel wasn't coming and so threw himself into the day job with a passion.

12. My more extended thoughts on Stan Lee and his legacy here: https://t.co/UcwrGbrgnc

13. My Lee piece should be read in conjunction with my earlier Kirby piece https://t.co/THtOKcrVt7

14. And also my Ditko obituary: https://t.co/7fg65diYqK