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Woman or warrior? How believable femininity shapes warrior women

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WOMAN OR WARRIOR?
HOW BELIEVABLE FEMININITY SHAPES WARRIOR WOMEN

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

**Woman or Warrior? How Believable Femininity
Shapes Warrior Women**

by

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My dissertation is an exploration of how femininity is constructed in the characters of warrior women. I define and apply my theory of believable femininity: the notion that in order for characters gendered female to be accepted by an audience, specific textual markers must render them submissive to a dominating male figure. I examine the following warrior women at length: Britomart and Radigund from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*; Christine de Pizan's treatment of Amazons in her *Book of the City of Ladies* and Hippolyta's specific portrayal by de Pizan in comparison to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the modern recreation of Hippolyta in DC Comics' *Wonder Woman* series; Joan of Arc as she appears in Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI* and Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*; the figure of Wonder Woman herself as a comic book and cultural phenomenon. My purpose is to illuminate what I feel is an unexamined requirement in warrior women that their strength always be subsumed by their femininity.

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DEDICATION

This one is for my grandparents. To Grandma and Grandpa McCall and Grandma and Grandpa Wallace—I love you all.

And for my parents, Mike and Jeanette, I never would have made it here without you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The notion that women possess inherent qualities of femininity has dominated much of human history. Because patriarchal societies have objectified women as Other, specific traits--nurturing, passivity, and emotionality--have come to signify the *feminine*. *Feminine* denotes the weaker, more unstable side of humanity, a necessary but unfortunate set of emotions that require masculine virtues to balance them out. Due to this bifurcating of emotion as masculine and feminine, good and bad, many adolescent females face an identity crisis as they attempt to fulfill the role of a “real” woman. The feminine qualities are negative but seem necessary to one’s identity, not as a female, but as a heterosexual woman--a fully functioning, fully feminine, heterosexual woman.

In recent decades, different feminist theorists have worked to disprove this notion of the universality of an inherent femininity. Monique Wittig, in her essay, “One Is Not Born a Woman,” argued in September of 1979 that lesbians who refused the social label of “woman” and all its inherent meanings were accused of not being “real” women (546). This experience, states Wittig, is similar for every woman who refuses to personify the “classic” feminine virtues as defined by patriarchal society. Females are caught in the trap of proving themselves to be “real” women, but this trap is constructed, not destined. As Wittig points out, if one has to question how to be a woman, then being a woman is not a universal state of being. Simone de Beauvoir, from whom Wittig gets her title, succinctly described the problem of being a woman in 1949: “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this

creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (267). According to de Beauvoir, to be a woman, as constructed by society, is to exist as an Other that personifies all the constructed meanings, good and bad, of femininity. *Woman* does not mean the same thing as *female*; *woman* signifies gender, while *female* signifies sex. One is biologically born a female, but, as de Beauvoir states, one becomes a woman.

This difference is an important one, especially in the reading of literature; characters in texts possess no physical body to identify them biologically as female, resulting in their possessing a “constructed status of gender,” which Judith Butler demonstrates destroys the meanings of *woman* and *feminine*. Redefining notions of gender in 1990, Butler claimed, “when the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (9). Specific textual signifiers, therefore, must identify characters as feminine women proving their sex through their gender. It is through the signifiers in the text of the character’s femininity that her existence as woman is qualified. There is only text and her creation through it that allows her to *become* a woman, with all the feminine qualities that word implies, to the reader.

This pressure to create a female character that fulfills the patriarchal definition of *woman* gives birth to what I have named *believable femininity*, by which I mean the presence of specifically feminine traits—submissiveness and a yearning to surrender and be dependent on a dominant masculine figure—that work in a text to create a satisfactorily feminine character. Believable femininity is the result of requiring females

to exist as “real” women, “real” being defined as the patriarchal myth that has defined Woman as Other.

No text is as ripe with examples of believable femininity as modern U.S. cinema. Among these, the James Bond franchise has succeeded in identifying and defining the extreme masculinity of its main character, James Bond, by presenting him opposite believably feminine “Bond Girls.” In the 1964 film, *Goldfinger*, Pussy Galore, the erstwhile Bond Girl, is more independent and more resistant to Bond’s sexual seduction than any previous love interest. James Bond wrestles her into submission before kissing her. Pussy Galore feebly attempts to strangle Bond as he slowly, inexorably descends for the kiss. She is helpless once he dominates her feminine body with his masculine one. His face smashes into hers, and her expression changes from one of resistance to one of pleasure in a matter of seconds. Pussy Galore for the remainder of the movie is more passive, more tender, and more dependent on Bond. She is the Amazon happily domesticated post-heterosexual encounter and—forced or not—his domination identifies female independence as the assumed role of a social outcast instead of an expression of subjectivity.

But Bond is not the only franchise to emphasize the power of its male characters at the expense of its females. Jean Grey, a founding character of Marvel’s *X-Men* series, has died four times, held the power of a god, and sacrificed herself to protect the world. *X-Men 3: The Last Stand* was released in 2006, and it rewrote Jean Grey, the lead character and both hero and villain of Chris Claremont’s *Dark Phoenix Saga*. In Claremont’s original text, Dark Phoenix, an anti-hero caught in the beguiling seduction of too much power, stops herself from destroying the universe. When her lover, Cyclops,

pleads: “Jean—Wait!! You’re not giving us any choice!” Jean Grey—Dark Phoenix—replies, “The choice was never yours to begin with” (181). Unable to contain her cosmic powers, she controls herself by killing herself; it is a powerful moment for women in literature—she is a chaotic goddess but also a hero through her fight for self-control when faced with absolute power. *X3*, by contrast, changes Jean Grey’s choice to stop herself from murdering everyone around her into Wolverine’s defeat of her and the visual depiction of his power as stronger than hers. Grey, overcome by the lust for destruction, is stopped only when Wolverine—her partner and the one male who can dominate her—gets close enough to stab her in the abdomen with his claws.

Each of these films represents the believably feminine heroine in popular U.S. culture. The believably feminine warrior woman is a character who chooses to quest for a “love” that is defined by its construction as a hierarchal heterosexual relationship. She is rendered believably feminine through her craving and desire for a male who is stronger than she and her quest for containment in a dominating marriage. Believable femininity operates primarily in the warrior woman to define her as the female hero within the compulsory heterosexual matrix and to refigure the male hero quest into its female counterpart—what Pierrette Daly labels the “double quest for love and knowledge” (13). Daly, writing in 1993 in the shadow of Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, recognizes the compulsory heterosexual requirement placed on warrior women, but fails to consider the ramifications of the female hero quest as a “double quest.” The double quest is actually a husband quest. The requirement of the warrior woman to contain herself in a dominating male love relationship centers female maturity within a patriarchal marriage and restricts female heroism through compulsory heterosexuality. Adrienne Rich labels the institution

of female compulsory heterosexuality as “the assumption that ‘most women are innately heterosexual’ and declares that it stands as a theoretical and political stumbling block for feminism” (1774). Compulsory heterosexuality isn’t only expected of the warrior woman; it is her quest.

In the male hero quest, the hero gains mastery over himself and his surroundings; like King Arthur or the more modern hero, Luke Skywalker, the male hero represents wisdom and power represented by extreme independence and “inner strength.” The male hero, from his unique birth to his apotheosis, always has the power he needs--his questing simply allows him to discover it within himself. The warrior woman, on the other hand, is questing not for wisdom and apotheosis, but for love and knowledge--the love is primary and defines whatever knowledge she gains within its parameters and her submissive relationship to the superior male hero. Like Britomart, her power is located outside of herself in a magical spear, sword, or god-imbued talents. The male hero simply *is*--his power comes from inside himself and whatever magical help he receives in his quest enhances his already remarkable strength. The warrior woman, however, borrows power for the duration of her quest, giving it back once her husband has been found and his love secured.

This refiguring of the hero quest into the husband quest means the warrior woman can only achieve ultimate apotheosis (Campbell 148)--her full potential as an adult, as well as iconic status--after being validated by her male romantic interest, a male who is her superior in strength and power. Because masculinity is constructed as stronger, more aggressive, and more heroic than femininity, a male who can physically defeat the warrior woman forces acknowledgment of her femininity by conquering her. Her

validation comes in the form of the heterosexual union of marriage. Once married, she completes the husband quest and gains mastery over her two worlds: the domestic and the feminine.

This redefines the apotheosis of the female hero quest from self-enlightenment to the warrior woman's attainment of femininity through a superior male force that accepts, justifies, and names her *Woman*. While the ultimate construction of the male hero is to find inner strength and wisdom over self and the world, the ultimate construction of the warrior woman is to find containment in marriage to a male who is stronger, smarter, and wiser than she.

Unlike the warrior woman who, like Britomart, is considered a positive example of femininity within the patriarchal structures of history, the Amazon refuses to quest for completion of herself in a dominating husband and instead fights for her own independence. The warrior woman's husband quest supports the naturalization of male over female and female completion in the male and for the Amazon a powerful line is drawn between those that accept domesticity and settle down with a husband and family, and those, like Radigund, who refuse to submit. The choice for domesticity is naturalized as the correct choice and domestic life is always figured within a male dominant structure, while the choice to live independently becomes labeled monstrous and immoral despite the powerful subjectivity found in Amazons such as Radigund and Hippolyta. Believable femininity resists the Amazon's independence. Believable femininity defines the Amazon as a character who is fighting against her inherent femininity; in refusing to accept her "natural" sexual desires for a man who can and will dominate her, she makes herself unhappy and in turn unleashes that unhappiness on men

through war-acts. Like Bond domesticating Pussy Galore, the Amazon needs merely to be shown the happiness that awaits her in patriarchal containment and she will assume her proper role as a submissive and loving male reflection.

The problem is precisely this Western patriarchal notion of “love.” It is a necessary love that ensures that the warrior *must* succeed in her husband quest and hierarchical love that domesticates the Amazon. According to Rich and Robinson, Western romance places women as always forced to choose submission to a dominant male figure and wanting that forced choice. This is the problem with representations of heterosexual romantic relationships: how can a strong female, aware of compulsory heterosexuality and the constructs of gender and femininity, willfully engage in a romantic, heterosexual relationship without falling, however slightly or unintentionally, into one of these same ideologies of constructed femininity she is struggling to escape?

This problem plays itself out with current representations of warrior women and Amazons in film, television, and literature; these women represent the shifting cultural attitudes towards empowered women and what such empowerment must look like. Dawn Heineken, in her book, *The Warrior Women of Television*, states, “Looking at how popular media like film and television represent gender relationships, women, and the female body can thus tell us much about the governing ideologies of the culture itself” (3). Heineken examined warrior women on television in 2003 at the height of the cultural revolution spawned by such characters as Xena and Buffy. The reemergence of the warrior woman figure and what it reveals about underlying cultural constructions of femininity and romance reveal much about believable femininity.

Lillian Robinson examined female roles in comic books in 2004 in her book,

Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes. According to Robinson, the popular culture of comic books pulls from myth and reestablishes heroic qualities for modern society; Robinson states her purpose as a “plan to argue that stories of female superheroes make another, more transgressive use of mythological sources, borrowing from various traditions and creating new ones in order to tell different stories about gender” (6), but even while attempting this she acknowledges that the gender dichotomy is still extant in the works she is criticizing. As Robinson points out, “traditional gender roles are open to interrogation and challenge. The ambiguity has its limits, though, within which the polarities of Good versus Evil—now sometimes called Life versus Death—are still operative” (5). This seems to be a common problem among scholars, idio-symptomatic of the inability to conceive of warrior women as complete subjects capable of romantic, heterosexual relationships without male domination. Robinson, like others, can recognize the power dynamic between warrior women and their male counterparts, but cannot put forth, or perhaps even conceive, what a different dynamic in the case of heterosexual romance would look like.

When it comes to warrior women and Amazons, however, not all scholars agree that gender is a necessary ingredient for an examination of the female hero or warrior. In a 2005 anthology of essays on the philosophy of superheroes, Rebecca Housel’s essay, “Myth, Morality, and the Women of the X-Men,” states, “Female heroes are just as necessary as male heroes--in fact, according to Campbell’s conception of heroism, it lies within every one of us to be a hero” (81). This statement seems to acknowledge that female heroes have been short-shrifted in relationship to male heroes, but completely denies the gender politics underlying such a decision. Pierrette Daly had already looked

specifically at female heroes in her book, *Heroic Tropes: Gender and Intertext*, and found that “sexual identity of fictional characters is an important factor in the invention of narratives and that the esthetic of storytelling has been guided by sexual biases since the dawn of Western civilization” (13). The sexual identity of a fictional character decides whether that character undertakes a hero quest or a husband quest. What Daly recognizes that Housel does not, is that Campbell’s conception of heroism is gender specific, and “what lies within every one of us” is defined and limited by the gender of the character questing. Essays such as Housel’s attempt to nullify the gender inequalities by ignoring them, stating they don’t matter, but—as has been convincingly proved by Rich, Butler, de Beauvoir, Daly and others—ignorance of gender inequalities and social institutions does not negate the power they have on construction of identity within culture and the resulting power hierarchies. The creations of *woman* and *feminine* within text must be acknowledged and dealt with so that females, superheroes and otherwise, can self-create an identity instead of having one thrust upon them.

The problem with warrior women is that within modern notions of femininity their strength is constructed as dependent upon a masculine dominated existence. A character may be strong, but to be a natural, heterosexual, and feminine representation she must crave a man's domination. Dominique Mainon, writing in 2006, recognized the conflicting themes present in popular representations of warrior women; she states, "Many writers and filmmakers are torn between erotic fascination with the idea of powerful female warriors who don't depend on men and the threat of such a concept to a patriarchal society" (5). To deal with this tension, Mainon says, "We see numerous more 'comfortable' depictions of Amazon women on film as being wildly beautiful but with

rather childlike mentalities" (6). The socially constructed ideology of heterosexual feminism in Western culture depends on a woman who can "learn" from, submit to, or be dominated, sexually or physically, by a heterosexual man.

Jeffrey Brown argues against this paradoxical identity in female heroines. He states that, "The action heroine does enact both masculinity and femininity. But rather than swapping a biological identity for a performative one, she personifies a unity of disparate traits in a single feature. She refutes any assumed belief in appropriate gender roles via an exaggerated use of those very roles" (49). What Brown fails to realize, I would argue, is that all of the action heroines of modern culture that engage in successful heterosexual relationships with men are dominated by that man in some meaningful way. Because of that domination, her "unity of disparate traits" are contained and reinserted into the cultural ideology as typically feminine and safely controlled.

Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy state that point directly in their introduction to *Athena's Daughters: Television's New Women Warriors*, published in 2003. Early and Kennedy state, "acceptable boundaries for female violence constrained each [warrior] ... this version of the woman warrior was seldom given an existence independent of a male boss or protector ... In each case, the woman warrior's heterosexuality played a fundamental role in constraining her agency and liminality" (4). The question prompted by all of this scholarship, therefore, is what would a romantic, sexual, heterosexual relationship look like between a warrior woman and a male where domination did not exist? The idea of warrior women needing to be contained through heterosexual male-dominated relationships restricts female heterosexuality.

This notion of male-domination as necessary is not new to literature. By looking

back at Early Modern representations of warrior women, Lillian Robinson demonstrates the historicity of these myths. Robinson examines Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser in her study, *Monstrous Regiment: The Lady Knight in Sixteenth-Century Epic*, published in 1985; these authors' depictions of women warriors are startlingly similar to television's "new" women warriors. Robinson explains,

With the exception of Marfisa, who is not Ariosto's chief heroine, each of the knightly heroines engages her lover in battle, on terms approaching equality.

Where the military balance between the two combatants is imperfect, in fact, it is because of the disruptive effects of love itself. When a couple duels more than once, it is only the last time that the man wins, and, in any event, his victory is a narrow one. (3)

Robinson zooms in on the romance as the chief demonstration of male dominance as necessary. The warrior woman may be strong, but she may never be the strongest or she is an unnatural figure without male domination. The "heroine engages her lover in battle, *on terms approaching equality*" (emphasis mine). Approaching equality, but never achieved specifically because in the end, no matter how hard-fought the battle or narrow the victory, the man wins. These are the myths upon which modern representations of warrior women are founded.

Robinson looks at the political implications of these myths in her book; Early and Kennedy recognize the ongoing inequality between gender power dynamics in theirs. No study has yet to name this ideology of romantic depictions of heterosexual femininity as craving confinement in male-dominated relationships. This underlying ideology is so apparent in the case of warrior women because these women challenge the

unacknowledged requirements of believable femininity. Warrior women challenge femininity through their power and independence. Heroism is, therefore, not something every woman may aspire to; the more successful the warrior woman, the more necessary her defeat and containment.

Because of believable femininity, action heroines, warrior women and Amazons engaged in romantic heterosexual relationships never successfully personify “a unity of disparate traits in a single figure” or come closer than “approaching equality.” My research attempts to answer the question asked by Robinson, Mainon, Early, Kennedy, Heinecken, and others: what must women become, and what are they once that transformation is complete, to be strong, independent, free warriors? I take this question one step further to ask: what do we as readers demand of our female heroes as they represent cultural gender ideologies to accept them as “real” heterosexual women, and, most importantly, what have we *been* demanding of them?

In the chapters that follow, I attempt to define and apply my theory of believable femininity: the notion that for characters gendered female to be accepted by an audience, specific textual markers must render them submissive to a dominant male and contain them through their desire for that submission. I examine the following warrior women at length: Britomart and Radigund from Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*; Christine de Pizan’s treatment of Amazons in her *Book of the City of Ladies* and Hippolyta’s specific portrayal by de Pizan in comparison to Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*; Joan of Arc as she appears in Shakespeare’s *1 Henry VI* and Bernard Shaw’s *Saint Joan*, and the modern recreation of Hippolyta in DC Comic’s *Wonder Woman* series; the figure of Wonder Woman herself as a comic book and cultural phenomenon. My purpose is to illuminate

what I feel is an unexamined requirement in warrior women that their strength always be subsumed by their femininity.

My first chapter focuses on Britomart and Radigund from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and begins my exploration of believable femininity in earnest. Both female characters fight; Radigund is the Amazonian queen and Britomart assumes the mantle of patriarchal queen after defeating Radigund and completing her husband quest. My second chapter focuses on Hippolyta, a more fully realized Amazon character than Spenser's Radigund. Shepherd argues that in the Renaissance Spenser's Radigund changed the heteroglossia of "Amazon." He states that "with Radigund we encounter a new variant on the meaning of the word...it can indicate aggressive lust, unbridled will, disobedience" (14). While Shepherd is correct that Radigund is a far cry from the noble Penthesilea, he seems to discount the violence and bloodshed throughout Amazonian history. Radigund was not the first Amazon to be described as aggressive and lustful, as I hope my reading of Hippolyta and the larger Amazonian history that created her shows.

Chapter three leaves husband quests and Amazons behind for the virtuous saint as embodied by Joan of Arc. I examine her as she is portrayed by Shakespeare in *1 Henry IV* and Bernard Shaw in *Saint Joan*. In both texts, Joan of Arc fights alongside the French troops donning the armor of the male soldiers and refusing romantic or sexual encounters; her chastity leads her to being nicknamed "the Maid." This chapter demonstrates how warrior women can be recognizably women and escape containment in a patriarchal heterosexual relationship only if they replace their problematic female sexuality with a Christian chastity and piousness bordering on insanity.

My last chapter moves to the long-debated field of comic books, as I consider the

iconic figure of Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman stands apart from the other characters in my dissertation as the only one created in the twentieth century. Wonder Woman provides a vehicle for a broader cultural critique of how warrior women have always been problematic, and, furthermore, how they continue to be problematic in contemporary representations.

My goal is to trace the history of warrior women and prove the necessity of this recognition by realizing how believable femininity suffuses popular culture. This realization is necessary because contemporary culture and the mythology of warrior women are constantly in conversation with each other, each shaping how the other is read. It is important, therefore, to recognize the ubiquity of believable femininity in popular culture today.

CHAPTER 2

BRITOMART: BELIEVABLE FEMININITY AND THE WARRIOR WOMAN

The myth of the believably feminine Warrior Woman operates primarily to redefine the female hero within the compulsory heterosexual matrix and to refigure the female hero quest into what Pierrette Daly labels the “double quest for love and knowledge” (13). Historically, the hero quest has culminated in the mastery of self and surroundings. The hero, almost exclusively gendered male, is an iconic character because of his attainment of knowledge and independence. The refiguring of the hero quest into the double quest, however, means the Warrior Woman only achieves ultimate apotheosis (Campbell 148)—her full potential as an adult and iconic status--after being validated by her male romantic interest--a male who is her superior in strength and power—and this contains her in an appropriate heterosexual union. The double quest, therefore, is actually a husband quest.

The Warrior Woman and her husband quest stands in opposition to the Amazon who—especially in Spenser—is depicted as monstrous, scornful of heterosexual desire, and constantly seeking to prove female dominance over the male. Whereas the Warrior Woman quests for love and a husband, the Amazon willfully fights against male control. The Amazon must then be broken and conquered; she realizes once her domination is complete that she always craved the male superiority and her power is constructed as discontent stemming from her independent lifestyle. The Amazon is the Warrior Woman’s darker half, the expression of uncontrollable femininity that must be defeated and contained in order for the Warrior Woman to successfully control herself in anticipation of her husband.

For the Warrior Woman, her quest for love has naturalized the proof that women need heterosexual marriage to be complete, adult, and happy. Adrienne Rich argues that this lie “asserts that women are inevitably, even if rashly and tragically, drawn to men; that even when that attraction is suicidal ... it is still an organic imperative” (1778). This nebulous myth of love perpetuates the belief “women *need* men as social and economic protectors, for adult sexuality, and for psychological completion” (Rich 1778). When the Warrior Woman quests for love and knowledge she is actually questing for her completion in the male hero, the physically superior character who will marry her. Through this female heroism is always constructed as less powerful than male heroism and incomplete without a dominating heterosexual love.

In the case of Britomart and Radigund, Britomart’s quest is completed only when she meets and defeats the Amazon; Radigund is not simply the villain of Britomart’s quest, she is her dark side, her untamed femininity that must be defeated and controlled in the completion of the husband quest. According to Simon Shepherd, the term ‘Amazon’ generally denoted “Amazons of classical antiquity, virtuous fighting women” (1-2). However, as Shepherd goes on to explain, “The Amazon that constitutes a harmful antithesis to the warrior woman, the figure such as Radigund, was a coinage peculiar to the period” (13). Where the Amazon seeks autonomy and independence, two characteristics historically attributed to men, the Warrior Woman seeks only a man who will dominate her and in so doing, justify her submission. Britomart and Radigund represent the barely controlled femininity believed to be inherent in every woman. Carol Rupperch argues the duel between Britomart and Radigund is Britomart’s “confrontation with her shadow, the unacknowledged and undermining tendencies within herself” (581),

and Britomart must defeat Radigund because Radigund is anarchistic sexuality. She represents the fear of the Amazon who is “the image of female masculinity precipitating a crisis at the intersection of sociality and sex” (Schwarz 6); Amazons perpetuate female masculinity and work against the husband quest representing historically male traits such as independence, wisdom, and self-knowledge. The culmination of the husband quest—the finding and securing of a husband—is only satisfying if it fulfills the requirements of love and believable femininity. The Warrior Woman, already contrasted to the Amazon by questing for a husband is still in danger of devolving into Amazonian behavior; questing grants her independence, fighting grants her strength, and in learning to accept her husband, she might throw away the husband quest entirely for self-knowledge. By defeating the Amazon as the ultimate trial of her quest, the Warrior Woman defeats her Amazonian possibilities and the completion of her quest naturalizes her need for domination.

The Amazon chooses liminality and demands equality, or sometimes superiority, over the male and this conscious fighting against believable femininity makes her the undesirable character; when the Amazon is the protagonist of her own story, she is beaten and broken by the male protagonist until she accepts and “loves” him. The Warrior Woman craves this “love” and accepts her “call to adventure” (Campbell) where her femininity, like Britomart’s in Book 3, Canto iii, must be subsumed beneath a warrior façade. This subsuming separates her femininity from her warrior qualities maintaining the separation of femininity as passive and masculinity as aggressive. Unlike the Amazon, her identity as a woman warrior is only useful in so much as it leads to love, a husband, and domination. The “assuming” of the warrior mantle keeps her power

carefully located outside herself.

The Husband Quest

Spenser's Britomart is the quintessential example of the Warrior Woman on a husband quest. After seeing Artegall's visage in a mirror Britomart is so overwhelmed with emotion she begins to die before her quest is undertaken. She needs Artegall for her survival, and once she sets upon the quest her health is rejuvenated by her mission of marriage. Britomart gains self-awareness as a result of Artegall appearing in the magic mirror his appearance defines her quest, even before the quest is undertaken, as a husband quest--one that begins and ends with Britomart's identity as necessarily completed and defined by Artegall. Britomart stares into the mirror:

One day it fortun'd, fayre *Britomart*

Into her fathers closet to repayre;

For nothing he from her reseru'd apart,

Being his onely daughter and his hayre;

Where when she had espyed that mirrhour fayre,

Her selfe awhile therein she viewed in vaine;

Tho her auizing of the vertues rare,

Which thereof spoken were, she gan again

Her to bethinke of, that mote to her selfe pertaine (3.2.22).

This canto is glossed by A.C. Hamilton as indicative of Britomart seeing in herself her love for Artegall: "Britomart's inward-looking gaze projects an image of beauty an idealized self-projection, which arouses love for Artegall; hence the vision of him that

follows” (305). And indeed, in the very next stanza, when Britomart does see Artegall, “Whom fortune for her husband would allot” (3.2.23.6), she is overwhelmed by his “Heroicke grace, and honorable gest” (3.2.24.8). Britomart is left “pallid” and “she did but wayle, and often steepe / Her dainty couch with teares, which closely she did weepe” (3.2.28) so overwrought was she by his majesty. From her traditional existence as a protected, cloistered female in her father’s castle, Britomart is forced to undertake a husband quest because even though she had not yet “lusted after any one;/ For she was pure from blame of sinfull blot,/ Yet wist her life at last must lincke in that same knot” (3.2.23.7-9). Her transition into sexual awareness and adulthood requires a husband; she cannot exist without Artegall. The requirement of marriage is placed on Britomart here and, because she first sees Artegall while examining herself, her identity is indelibly linked to him; indeed, her very happiness is impossible unless she may have him for a husband.

For Britomart’s husband quest, all the aspects sought after in the male hero quest—independence, strength, and a greater consciousness of the world—are reconfigured through the lenses of love and marriage. One of Britomart’s most believably feminine qualities is how much she wants to love and be loved by someone stronger than she. She is so incomplete without Artegall that she literally wastes away. She is rashly and tragically drawn to Artegall; her love for Artegall is killing her, so she must quest for him in order to achieve happiness, self-knowledge, and mastery over herself.

Because of Britomart’s extreme naiveté, “she was pure from sinfull blot” (3.2.23.7), her quest centers her discovery of self-knowledge in Artegall. It is through

Artegall that she will discover sex, motherhood, and adulthood; her self-identity is meaningless. Unlike the male hero quest, in which the culmination is the hero rising to become the master of two worlds, the physical and spiritual—completion of the husband quest culminates for Britomart in her mastery of the domestic world through the roles of wife and mother. She conquers herself through Radigund, and learns to see herself through Artégall's eyes; her acceptance of his perception is presented as successful self-mastery. That Artégall does not know she exists when she begins her quest does not matter; part of her quest is to make him aware of his love for her. Making Artégall love her through her beauty, her strength, and her love is the ultimate test of her believable femininity; he must define her as undeniably feminine through his possession of her with his superior male force. When finally Artégall and Britomart do meet “So well he woo'd her, and so well he wrought her,” that “to be his loue, and take him for her Lord,” (4.6.41.1-8) is Britomart's pleasure. By defeating her in battle he has earned the right to take care of her as her husband.

The husband quest, in combination with believable femininity, prevents Britomart's questing from becoming centered around her individual apotheosis; Spenser constructs a feminine hero in Britomart by emphasizing her beauty, her chastity, and her wasting away from unrequited love. As Robinson states, Spenser's epic “involves a fixed set of polarities between masculine and feminine qualities” and he “makes use of these concepts as if they were forces of nature” (314). Britomart's role as the Knight of Chastity is an assumed role, not a power she carries inherently, and her need for Artégall contrasts her femininity against his masculinity. Her autonomy as a questing knight is temporary from the first meeting with Merlin. Taken to see him by her nurse Glauce who

is so worried for Britomart's health—it is steadily disintegrating with her pining—that she takes Britomart to Merlin, he who tells Britomart “from thy wombe a famous Progenee / Shall spring” and “Therefore submit thy wayes unto his will, / And doe by all dew meanes thy destiny fulfill” (3.2.22-24). Merlin, here the wise old figure that often sets the young hero on her quest, forces Britomart into the liminal area where she will find the man she must marry and “submit [her] wayes unto his will.” This quest to submit stands in stark contrast to the Red Crosse Knight who quests to win “worshippe” (1.1.3.4) or Guyon's quest, which revolves around “sustained moral effort and eternal vigilance” (Evans 343). Britomart's undertaking of the husband quest establishes her as a Warrior Woman from the beginning and maintains her believable femininity by successfully containing her victory within Artegall's control. The surety of Britomart's nuptials removes any worries her power will continue after marriage (3.2) and defines her heroic nature as borrowed instead of inherent.

There is evidence that Spenser revised Britomart's motivations and later inserted the scene with Merlin. In 3.3.53 Britomart is convinced by her nurse Glauce to don the warrior façade: “feigned armes our selues disguzie,/ An our weake hands (need makes good schollars) teach/ The dreadful speare and shield to exercize” (3-5). This is in contrast to 2.6 when Britomart tells Redcrosse that she has “beene trained vp in warlike stowre,/ To tossen speare and shield, and to affray/ The warlike ryder to his most mishap” (3-5). This difference has been argued by Joseph Candido as evidence of revision on Spenser's part (Hamilton 320). A Britomart who was raised to fight versus a Britomart who dons a disguise and fights with a magic spear deriving its power from her chastity is the difference between a Warrior Woman and an Amazon; if she is set on her quest as a

Warrior Woman, she both seeks and craves the heterosexual domination found in Artegall. If she chooses her quest as an Amazon, Artegall must defeat her and force her to realize her love and happiness in containment. In order to prevent her quest from becoming reconfigured within her and focusing on her growth and power, her need to marry Artegall is her power. Kathryn Schwarz comments on this: “as Britomart’s self-sufficient doubleness might displace Artegall, not by drawing her into narcissism or monstrosity, but by making the quest irrelevant: What, unwary readers could be tempted to ask, does she need *him* for?” (144). By revising Britomart’s motivations, Spenser creates a Warrior Woman who becomes believably feminine through her need for Artegall.

But Britomart’s masculine qualities still contain the possibility of problematizing Spenser’s carefully constructed gender roles. Donning armor and fighting, even with a magic spear that places her power outside of herself, is a dangerous characterization for Britomart; she is only a believably feminine character if she craves the domination of a male. The myth is only effective if Britomart successfully destroys her Amazonian possibilities and reestablishes traditional gender roles by the end of her quest. Britomart’s masculine qualities, her strength, her fighting, and her mistaken appearance denaturalize masculinity (Schwarz 147) but “the revelation that one of those bodies is a woman’s gives desire an acceptable place to go” (Schwarz 146). The revelation of her beauty, always carefully calculated to lessen the importance of her victories of the male knights (3.1.4), reinforces her fighting skills as temporary and continuously defines her body as feminine. By giving Britomart power configured in a husband quest, Spenser creates the illusion of female agency. She can fight, she can travel, and she can quest but

only in as much as those things garner her Artegall; as Schwarz states, “the possibility of Britomart’s iconographic self-completion runs counter to her quest” (144). Her strength is merely a test of Artegall’s masculinity, never constructed or intended to upset him. The Amazon has no interest in heterosexual marriage and must be forced into acceptance at which point she is domesticated. The Warrior Woman is not forced into love; she is questing for it.

The Dark Amazon

Radigund is the perfect Amazon contrast to Britomart’s Warrior Woman, and this issue of domination is portrayed through their different responses to love for Artegall. Britomart was ordered to “submit thy wayes unto his will, / And doe by all dew meanes thy destiny fulfill” (3.2.22-24) and by the end of 5.7 it appears that she is following that order wholly; once Radigund is defeated, Britomart is set up as the Princess, but she is not an Amazon. Instead she begins to change the Amazonian society into something more appropriate: “During which space she there as Princess rained, / And changing all that forme of common weale, / The liberty of women did repeale, / Which they had long vsurpt; and them restoring to men’s subiection, did true Iustice deale” (3-6). Britomart’s complete surrender of autonomy to Artegall is directly challenged by Radigund, who is described as too prideful to submit: “Yet would she not thereto yeeld free accord, / To serue the lowly vassall of her might, / And of her seruant make her souerayne Lord: / So great her pride, that she such basenesse much abhord” (5.5.27.6-9). Radigund would rather maintain a liminal existence than submit to a love that eclipsed her own will. Britomart, however, is so happy to submit that she stops questing following the defeat of

Radigund:

There she continu'd for a certaine space,
Till through his want her woe did more increase:
Then hoping that the change of aire and place
Would change her paine, and sorrow somewhat ease,
She parted thence, her anguish to appease.
Meane while her noble Lord sir *Artegall*
Went on his way, ne euer howre did cease,
Till he redeemed had that Lady thrall:
That for another Canto will more fitly fall (5.7.45).

Radigund is Britomart's dark reflection, one she must destroy and, in doing so, contain herself; for Britomart, the road to love and knowledge involves the systematic defeat and triumph over her dark and vicious nature. In completing her husband quest, Britomart destroys her own agency.

The Warrior Woman (Britomart) learns subservience that allows her to love and be loved through the destruction and defeat of her unacceptable feminine traits: she is forced into the liminality (Faeryland) where she meets and defeats her inherent femininity (Radigund) and returns to society having proven herself an acceptable wife, and then marries the dominating male hero (Artegall). She comes full circle with a marriage and re-embrace into society as an exceptional woman; this marriage and acceptance is her "Ultimate Boon" (Campbell). Defeat of the Amazon by the more acceptable Warrior Woman allows Britomart's apotheosis.

Making Radigund a manifestation of Britomart's unchecked femininity raises the

stakes of her victory and increases the patriarchal containment of her character. While all “the enemies are revealed more often than not to be weirdly dissociated aspects of the knights themselves” (Logan and Greenblatt 714), Britomart’s victory makes her appear more “real.” This is the true horror of believable femininity; the more believably feminine a character is, the more realism she appears to represent. Judith Anderson states that Britomart “looks and is more human than her predecessors among the poem’s protagonists” (114) and Susan Woods claims “Britomart’s character is unusual in its fullness and centrality” and that “probably more than any of the other major *Faerie Queene* characters, she carries with her a resounding humanity” (115-2). Nor are they the only ones; Maurice Evans disturbingly argues that “Britomart must first lean to be a woman” (152) and Elizabeth Heale that Britomart’s difference from other knights “derives in part from the degree of idiosyncratic characterization Spenser gives her...Britomart’s emotions are handled with a degree of detail and humor which is unusual” (79). Believable femininity demands that all women, fictional and not, find satisfaction in heterosexual relationships only with a partner who can dominate them, and the more successfully Britomart is believably feminine the more she appears to be mimicking the actions of non-fictional women. Britomart’s quest for Artegall, her acceptance only of him, the one knight who can defeat her while she is powered by Chastity, and her defeat of Radigund is the victory of asserting power and finding a husband who is stronger yet. Believable femininity is the myth of agency; Britomart can be as powerful as she wants, as long as there is at least one man who can defeat her.

Surprisingly, Radigund’s bitterness over Belladant renders her as believably feminine as Britomart despite her status as an Amazon, and this believable femininity

supports the argument for Radigund as an aspect of Britomart's character instead of an autonomous creation or one more hurdle in her quest. As a monstrous representation of female sexuality, Radigund kidnaps knights out of jealousy:

The cause, they say, of this her cruell hate,
Is for the sake of *Belladant* the bold,
To whom she bore most feruent loue of late,
And wooed him by all the waies she could:
But when she saw at last, that he ne would
For ought or nought be wonne vnto her will,
She turn'd her loue to hatred manifold,
And for his sake vow'd to doe all the ill

Which she could doe to Knights, which now she doth fulfill (5.4.30).

Radigund is a woman scorned, lashing out in spite. Robinson states, "Radigund's vendetta against the male sex originates in a frustrated love that presumably remained unrequited because she pursued it too aggressively" (322). Radigund becomes believably feminine first through her love of Belladant and later through her love for Artegall (5.5.27) but remains monstrous because her love is aggressive, violent, and masculine. Hamilton glosses Spenser's depictions of Radigund as stemming from Ariosto and "sexual frustration" (535) and Robinson comments that "one reason it [Radigund's sexuality] is an illicit emotion is that her feelings do not subdue her "pride" and make her willing to be dominated by him, as is 'right'" (332-3). Radigund and the rest of her Amazons' sexual desire is twisted here by believable femininity and mutated from heterosexual desire into monstrous violence. Their powerful character subjectivity is thus

reduced to mere bitterness.

Radigund is also the cautionary tale of Britomart's husband quest. If Britomart were to fail in her quest to secure Artegall or to stray from her appointment as Chastity's Knight and become powerful in her own right, the monstrous Amazon always lurks as her unwanted fate. This tragic possibility for Britomart's future has been argued as Spenser's commentary on the *Querelle des Femmes* (Wynne-Davies 92). In 5.5.25 Spenser warns against female empowerment while simultaneously justifying Britomart's—and through Britomart, Queen Elizabeth's—actions. Spenser warns:

Such is the crueltie of womankind,
When they haue shaken off the shame fast band,
With which wise Nature did them strongly bynd,
T'obay the heasts of mans well ruling hand,
That then all rule and reason they withstand,
To purchase a licentious libertie.
But virtuous women wisely vnderstand,
That they were borne to base humilitie,

Vnless the heavens them lift to lawfull soueraintie (5.5.25).

What is particularly impressive here is the way women are declared virtuous only should they remain submissive, while offering a turnabout in the last line that excuses Britomart's questing and Elizabeth's rule.

Shepherd explains, "The habit of seeing Elizbaeth as a female warrior was quite common" (22). The *Querelle des Femmes*, a debate about the nature of women and the pamphlet wars of Renaissance England, saw an increase in both the attacks on and

defenses of women (Henderson and McManus 11). The ascension of Queen Elizabeth to the throne in 1558 directly challenged the myth of femininity and while destabilization had already started with the rules of Mary Queen of Scots and Mary I of England, Elizabeth compounded the problem by publicly refusing to marry. Because the religious basis for female subordination was so strong in the Renaissance, it was nearly impossible to argue against “accepted men’s rule over women as part of the God-given order of the world” (Henderson and McManus 27). Elizabeth ruled in direct contradiction to these naturalized truths and become a demythologizing force that directly challenged the historicity and naturalizing powers of the feminine myth; she was realistically a female without fulfilling the requirements of believable femininity.

The association of Elizabeth and Amazons was not, I believe, mistakenly overlooked by Spenser in his drawing of the Warrior Woman versus the Amazon. As Barthes explains, “the world supplies to myth ... an historical reality, defined, even if it goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a *natural* images of this reality” (142). The myth of femininity—that women were emotional, illogical, and ill-suited to rule—seemed both proven by history and the natural course of evolution. Spenser, who “says it is ‘wise Nature’ that binds women to obey men” (Shepherd 24), arguably crafted an epic that both supports Elizabeth’s reign while simultaneously warning against unchecked female power.

Believable femininity served Elizabeth well; as a warrior queen she could not be expected to marry a man who could not fulfill the requirements of protection through domination, and as the Queen she could not be dominated. In answer to this paradox she became the Virgin Queen and redefined her husband quest as saintly, thereby excusing

herself from marriage that “at last must lincke in that same knot” (3.2.23.9). Elizabeth Mazzola argues that “Elizabeth shaped a legacy of femaleness that continually undermined itself, a tradition that left no heirs but an ever-widening array of repressed material” (387). Elizabeth remythologized the myth of femininity while living it—an amazing act, but one that threatened the perceived stability of the society. Spenser’s choice in having Britomart replace Radigund at the end of 5.7 comments directly on Elizabethan politics. Britomart’s usurpation of Radigund’s Amazonian city where she “the liberty of women did repeale” and “restoring/ To mens subiection” (5.7.42.5-7) follows Spenser’s wisdom and reasserts the patriarchal reign over women. It also reframes Elizabeth’s rule as one that was merely holding England steady in between male kings. The historicity of England is preserved and the natural rule of men over women unbroken, merely paused.

Chastity as Power as Chastity

Britomart’s placement as the Knight of Chastity also comments on, and is commented on in turn, by Elizabeth’s assumption of the “virgin” mantle. While it is true Spenser held his male knights accountable to chastity as well, their power was not tied specifically to their sexuality. Britomart’s magic, arising from her sex, or in this case lack thereof, identifies her as a Mary figure. She will eventually birth the blessed progeny (3.3.22) and she is inhumanly powerful because of her chastity. The end of her quest signals the end of her association with the Heben Speare—the weapon that allows her to triumph over the male knights. Without it, Britomart would be as powerless and weak as any other woman in the epic. The spear will be given up as soon as she

completes her quest, however, because she cannot complete her quest without marrying Artegall and she cannot marry Artegall and still be a hero questing. Unlike Redcrosse, Guyon, or Artegall himself, Britomart is not an independent hero whose power is her own, but a hero whose power is constructed specifically to find containment in another: she is a temporary hero with temporary powers.

This is in some ways a scathing commentary on Elizabeth's reign and fashions in Britomart a type of chastity that is particularly feminine in nature. Kaske touches on the problematic nature of Spenser's construction:

In *The Faerie Queene*, the state of two kinds of chastity are seen in the two females who possess it: as a chaste wife, Venus possessed it; after her adultery, it devolved upon the virgin Florimell (IV V). Whether these two chastities represent two chronological stages of one life or two intrinsically different attitudes towards sex, is a matter of dispute (142).

Britomart and Radigund are the two representations of female sexuality; Britomart is chaste before marriage, and her repeal of Amazonian rule indicates she will be chaste following marriage. Radigund refuses chastity. More importantly, however, it is the chastity that gives Britomart her power, and that same power that defeats the Amazons. She may still be chaste once married, but not only will her duties as a wife and mother prevent her from adventuring, the power granted her by chastity will abandon her and be replaced by her husband's power. There will be no quest for her to fulfill as she will have already obtained her husband.

Britomart's extreme naiveté protects the power dynamic while wielding the spear as well. Because of the husband quest, a woman cannot be an adult without marriage and

consummation and because of believable femininity she cannot/should not marry a man who cannot dominate her. Self-awareness stands as one of the biggest identifiers of heroes; if a woman is sexually naïve, no matter how physically strong she is she remains childlike and therefore, no hero, and no real threat to the power structure. For Britomart, the implication is that once she marries and consummates her marriage with Artegall the spear will no longer need to serve her—the cause for her adventure, finding and securing Artegall as her husband, is fulfilled—and so the spear will pass to another single virgin. No one woman ever gains both power and enlightenment; Britomart is no real threat to any of the male knights in the epic.

This power portrayed through Britomart's wielding of the spear is yet another aspect of her believable femininity. When Britomart is first seen in the text through Guyon and Arthur in Book 3, Canto I, she and Guyon immediately joust; Guyon, though, is the loser (3.1.4). In the very next canto Spenser immediately assuages the reader while comforting Guyon:

ah gentlest knight
that euer armor bore,
Let not thee grieue dismounted to haue been,
And brought to gownd, that neuer wast before;
For not thy fault, but secret powere vnseene,

That speare enchanted was, which layd thee on the greene (vii 4-8).

Britomart's defeat of Guyon is not because she is a superior warrior, but because her spear is magical. Britomart's power is thus simultaneously presented and contained in the space of a few cantos. That her containment is made clear, even with Guyon, is proof

of Britomart's temporary heroic status and limited power. She is always imagined appropriately within the parameters dictated by the husband quest and believable femininity.

Britomart's defeat of Guyon sets up the contrast of Artegall's victory; her believability is powered through Chastity and the magic spear, but Artegall is proven to be her true match because no matter how powerful Britomart may be with the spear, she is still no match for him. Unlike the other knights of the epic, Britomart cannot best Artegall in battle; it is important that Artegall always be stronger than Britomart no matter the situation. Artegall's personification as a force of nature counteracts the independence hinted at by Britomart's questing:

Till that there entered on the other side,

A straunger knight, from whence no man could reed,

In quyent disguise, full hard to be descride.

For all his armour was like saluage weed,

With woody mosse bedight, and all his steed

With oaken leaues attrapt, that seemed fit

For saluage wight, and thereto well agreed

His word, which on his ragged shield was writ,

Saluagesse sans finesse, shewing secret wit (4.4.39).

Artegall is the "savage man" without refinement or art (Hamilton 442). His hair and beard are unkempt and he represents barely restrained power. He is Justice and he "neede haue mightie hands...For powre is the right hand of Iustice truly hight" (5.4.1.3-8). Artegall's domination of her begins with his physical superiority and is completed

through his raging masculinity.

When Artegall and Britomart fight in Book 4, Canto vi Britomart runs out of steam first (4.6.16) and Artegall presses his advantage (4.6.18). When he finally chops her helmet off her head in 4.6.18, he is rendered powerless when confronted by her beauty (4.6.21). Like Medusa having her head chopped off by Perseus, Britomart's power, unchecked up till now, is defeated by Artegall and even though Artegall stops fighting he has still defeated her. Schwarz states that "when Artegall strikes off Britomart's helmet with his sword, when sameness becomes difference and the martial body has a woman's face, he quite literally loses his grip" (147). Being overcome by beauty seems to be an especial weakness of Artegall; he fails to defeat Radigund for the same reason and Artegall "is less like Narcissus here than a victim of Medusa" (Schwarz 147). Choosing to have Artegall stopped not by their martial skill, but by their beauty, however, further refigures their power in their appearance and not their ability. Like Medusa, Britomart and her dark shadow Radigund are objects whose looks incapacitate Artegall, rather than warriors who successfully defeat him.

Britomart's beauty is the most powerful weapon she has; her beauty—described here through her hair, eyes, and skin, a beauty Shepherd describes as a "rose with thorns" (7)—renders her undeniably a woman and therefore believably feminine; Schwarz, however, argues that "if Medusa is both beautiful and deadly, Britomart possesses this doubleness as well, her body continuing to signify violence even as it is erotically transformed" (147). Britomart's violent doubleness, though, is shelved once she recognizes the superior male hero in Artegall; nine Cantos later after staring at each other, Britomart drops her arm and falls silent:

Yet she it forst to haue againe upheld,
As fayning choler, which was turn'd to cold:
But euer when his visage she beheld,
Her hand fell downe, and would no longer hold
The wrathfull weapon gainst his countnance bold:
But when in vaine to fight she oft assayd,
She arm'd her tongue not to her will obeyd,

But brought forth speeches myld, when she would haue missed (4.6.27).

Here is the greatest proof of Britomart's craved domination. As a Warrior Woman she seeks a husband and reinstatement into society; Artegall is her goal in both. While she wants to fight him, her independence and power is already faltering once Artegall enters her world. Lillian Robinson comments on this: "she was his equal in chivalry while her love remained one-sided, but, once her beloved shares her feelings and enters into an engagement with her, she sits quietly at home and awaits his return from active duty" (320). The transience of her power becomes apparent from the moment she and Artegall both recognize the other.

Artegall is also the catalyst for Britomart's fight with Radigund and the destruction of her darker self. A husband is the only motivation great enough to encourage such an act, as the husband quest does not allow for self-motivated actualization. Furthermore, while Radigund captures Artegall and Britomart saves him, even this apparent switch of roles does not actually change the power dynamic between them. Shepherd describes Artegall's imprisonment as "demeaning" and claims "his fate is decided by female warriors" (5). It is clear, however, in 5.4.44 that Artegall is a match

for the Amazons:

And euery while that mighty yron man,
With his strange weapon, neuer wont in warre,
Them sorely vext, and courst, and ouerran,
And broke their bowes, and did their shooting marre,
That none of all the many once did darre
Him to assault, nor once approach him nie,
But like a sort of sheepe dispersed farre
For dread of their deuouring enemie,
Through all the fields and vallies did before him flie.

It is only because Radigund calls for retreat that any Amazons survive that first battle. When Radigund and Artegall duel, Artegall tosses down his sword upon revelation of Radigund's face. "But when as he discouered had her face, / He saw his senses straunge astonishment, / A miracle of natures goodly grace" (5.5.12.1-3). This episode eerily parallels the fight with Britomart and is further proof of the Amazon and Warrior Woman as two sides of the same mythic female; the power of the female hero lies only in her objectification through beauty or monstrosity, not in her agency. Artegall's defeat by appearance shows the masculine force being defeated only by the deceitfulness of feminine appearance and not by greater power; it is clear here that Radigund is no more capable of defeating Artegall than Britomart.

Artegall, despite his clear advantage, tosses his sword down: "At sight thereof his cruell minded hart/ Empierced was with pittifull regard, / That his sharpe sword he threw from him apart, / Cursing his hand that had that visage mard" (5.5.13.1-4). Radigund's

beauty, like that of Britomart, identifies her as an obvious woman and stays Artegall's hand. That Radigund goes on to attack Artegall while he is defenseless and takes him hostage is not a sign of Artegall's weakness, but his virtue: "So he was ouercome, not ouercome, / But to her yeilded of his own accord" (5.5.17.1-2).

Artegall's captivity with Radigund does not feminize him, as critics such as Shepherd or Harvey argue; instead, it is one more instance of his astounding masculinity. Artegall is so noble, brave, and manly that Radigund begins to lust after him: "the warlike Amazon,/ Whose wandering fancie after lust did range, / Gan cast a secret liking to this captiue strange" (5.4.26.7-9). Artegall is so tremendous, in fact, that Radigund recognizes his surrender as the cause of his captivity: "thou seest yond Fayry Knight, / Whom not my valour, but his owne braue mind / Subiected hath to my vnequall might" (5.5.32.1-3). If the other descriptors of Radigund--that she is cruel, spiteful, and prideful—are true then she should not so freely admit her own failure in capturing the knight. That she does reflects on Artegall's power and further supports Britomart's believable femininity in being dominated by that power.

Artegall's capture also provides the opportunity for Britomart to come to Isis Church. Her stay in the church is her descent into the underworld, or the moment when she is destroyed and reborn anew as a master of two worlds (Campbell). However, because Britomart is on a husband quest instead of a hero quest, the scene in Isis Church is more similar to a descent into sensuality and her rebirth as a fully matured and sexual woman. Her virginity is not compromised in this episode, but her dream of fire and being impregnated by the Crocodile is the final step in preparing her for her position as wife and mother. Unlike Radigund, Britomart cannot lust, but her sexual awakening as a

goddess solidifies her sexuality as both chastely submissive and divinely inspired.

Britomart falls asleep “vnder the wings of *Isis* all that night” (5.7.12.2) and “in the midst of her felicity, / An hideous tempest seemed from below, / To rise through all the Temple sodainely, / That from the Altar all about did blow” (5.7.14.1-4). The Crocodile (5.7.15.1) wakes and “gaping greedy wide, did streight deuoure/ Both flames and tempest: with which growen great, / And swolne with pride of his owne peerelesse powre, / He gan to threaten her likewise to eat;” (5.7.15.5-8). Britomart is saved by the Goddess who “with her rod him backe did beat” (5.7.15.9). Once the Crocodile has returned to “humblesse meeke” (5.7.16.1) he places himself at Britomart’s feet “And gan for grace and loue of her to seeke :/ Which she accepting, he so neare her drew, / That of his game she soone enwombed grew, / And forth did bring a Lion of great might” (5.7.16.3-6). The Crocodile is glossed here as the dragon, typically the “guardian of chastity but here swollen with pride (in the sexual sense)” (Hamilton 556). This is the most powerful manifestation of femininity in Spenser’s epic, and the representation of the Goddess and Britomart’s communing with her possesses the power to completely alter Britomart’s quest.

While Spenser uses the pagan imagery to reveal Britomart’s future marriage and Queen Elizabeth’s ancestry (Davidson 408), the possibility exists in Britomart’s joining with Isis to give up her husband quest for her own exploration of self. Riane Eisler argues that when the “supreme power in the universe” is conceptualized as a Goddess women “tend to internalize a very different self-image” (67). For Eisler, the scene at Isis Church represents the possibility for Britomart to see herself as “competent” and “independent” (67); scholarship, however, reads this scene as Britomart’s recognition of

her place by Artegall's side.

Britomart meets and defeats (with the Goddess' help) the enemy of chastity and accepts him only after he has become humble and meek. She is prepared now for Artegall with whom she will be sexual only after he has married her and whose child she will bear from within the appropriate containment of that marriage. However, whereas the Crocodile is forced back by the Goddess, both the Crocodile and Artegall are stronger than Britomart and their meekness is merely the acceptance of Chastity's constraints, not their defeat by it. Davidson states that "Britomart appropriately enters 'with great humility,' an attitude that is also important for her role as the feminine liberator of Artegall, victim of the proud Radigund. Justice must be restrained from excess by the principle of equity" (408). Britomart's femininity will placate Artegall's masculinity in this reading, and the episode at Isis Church is read not as Britomart's gaining of power over Artegall, but instead her pilgrimage through self-awareness to accept that she will only achieve true heroism through her husband.

That even those instances in *The Faerie Queene* where interpretive possibilities for Britomart's agency exist have consistently been read as only proof of her acceptance of Artegall is the greatest proof of her believable femininity. The Warrior Woman has been ceaselessly embarking on the husband quest for centuries and that husband quest has successfully masqueraded as a hero quest for all that time. Simultaneously, believable femininity has convinced readers such a characterization is the only imaginative possibility. Female heroes must find and secure a husband or be perceived as unrealistic. Daly states that "scholars have assumed that their [women's] heroic tropes were simply a *revers* of men's" (11), but the recognition of Britomart's rendering as

believably feminine shows how the tropes of the Warrior Woman are much more than the reverse of the Warrior; they are the complete opposite.

Believable femininity has quietly subsisted as the truth behind the Warrior Woman myth. As Barthes states, “myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion” (129). Any attempt to disprove or illuminate believable femininity is stifled by the lack of other possibilities of romance and completion: “driven to having either to unveil or liquidate the concept [lack of ambiguity], it [myth] will *naturalize* it” (Barthes 129). The choice of heterosexual romanticism and the requirement of domination have become so intertwined that to criticize one is to criticize the other, and readers are left with no recourse to imagine a heterosexual female character in a romantic relationship that is not defined by believable femininity. Believable femininity has thus traveled quietly alongside the more noticeable husband quest, an impervious, unspoken truth. The result is that even when the husband quest has been revealed as myth and neither necessary nor natural, believable femininity has continued to limit the possibilities of remythologization. If, no matter the end game, a woman must still find romantic fulfillment in a heterosexual coupling based on the male’s ability to dominate the female, then the Warrior Woman is severely limited in her mythic, literary, and realistic embodiments.

What solution there may be must certainly include questioning Britomart’s heroic status instead of accepting it and consciously reading for new interpretive possibilities. Another path is the reexamination of the Warrior Woman and the Amazon; for that, however, a less constrained Amazon than Radigund is needed. To examine believable femininity and the Amazon one must turn to Hippolyta--a character spanning two

millennia--and through a survey of her stories and an analysis of believable femininity at work in her constructions the historicity and evolution of the Amazon becomes apparent.

CHAPTER 3

HIPPOLYTA: BELIEVABLE FEMININITY AND THE AMAZON

From *The Histories* of Herodotus to the television show *Xena: Warrior Princess*, the Amazon has resisted both control and domestication arguing for a louder, more violent breed of female who's power is configured as neither unnatural nor monstrous. Love--as a concept, an emotion, and a myth of completion--is always violent where the Amazon is concerned. Femininity is constructed as incomplete without the love of a dominating masculinity, and for the Amazon love is always violent. She is the unruly female, the figure who eschews the husband quest, and mocks the naturalized hierarchy of male over female, and must be forced into submission and acceptance of a love that contains her.

One powerful figure that predates Radigund is Hippolyta--she is sometimes the Queen of the Amazons or the sister to the Queen. In Penthesilea's story Hippolyta is killed by her fellow Amazon in a hunting accident, and in her own stories she doesn't fare any better. Kathryn Schwarz describes the variations in Hippolyta's story beautifully when she says: "depending on the source, Hippolyta might be conquered, kidnapped, traded or seduced" (209). Schwarz offers this summation of the myths of Hippolyta:

The Queen of the Amazons has a belt that gives her prowess in war. Hercules, as the ninth of his labors, goes to get that belt. The queen: fights Hercules but loses/surrenders out of fear/surrenders out of admiration. Hercules: kills her in battle/kidnaps her and gives her to his friend Theseus/tells his friend Theseus about her, thus inspiring him to kidnap her. The Amazon acquired by Theseus is: Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons/Hippolyta, sister of the queen of the

Amazons/Antiopa, sister of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons/Menalippe. The Amazons respond to Theseus's kidnapping/rape/seduction of Hippolyta/Antiopa/Menalippe by: successfully invading Athens/unsuccessfully attempting to invade Athens. In the ensuing battle Hippolyta: fights with the Amazons/fights against the Amazons/is killed in battle/is killed while negotiating peace/is already dead. (209)

Three things remain constant in all of these possibilities: Hippolyta fights, Hippolyta loses, Hippolyta dies. She is strong and fierce, but not as strong and fierce as the greatest of men. Furthermore, while in many of the stories she falls in love with either Hercules or Theseus--the silence of Hippolyta concerning her feelings has been accepted by critics as proof of these feelings in all texts. Reading Hippolyta's silence as acceptance of Theseus allows her supposedly inherent femininity to assert itself; believable femininity makes the domination by Theseus the required ending and believable femininity prompts the reader to expect and interpret this ending as a happy one.

There is disconcerting silence in Hippolyta's domesticity; the assumption that Hippolyta must desire Theseus's domination doesn't prove that she loves him. Rather, it only proves that believable femininity has made it impossible to imagine a female character who isn't thrilled by the sexual attentions of a dominant male; his love is accepted as positive because he verbalizes it to be so. Barbara Johnson discusses the "aesthetics of silence" and states that "male appropriation of female muteness as aesthetic trophy accompanied by an elision of sexual violence" eroticizes the silence (136). In the case of Hippolyta, the effect of Theseus's "love" on Hippolyta goes unexamined because historically a male-dominant love that masquerades as protection is always assumed to be

positive for the female and cause for great happiness but, more importantly, necessary. Believable femininity with the Amazon has a different job than with the Warrior Woman. Unlike the Warrior Woman the Amazon is not questing for love; she must be forced into it. Her resistance is always configured as pride and bitterness like Radigund or sheer stubbornness like Hippolyta. Hippolyta is beaten and captured by Theseus, and her apparent submission and eventual bearing of his son Hippolytus has been read and reread as proof of her domestication. Hippolyta has become proof that for the Amazon her success at being a woman is defined by her fulfillment of believable femininity.

Hippolyta is a perfect character for the investigation of this eroticized subjugation because she is remythologized at moments in history when gender issues are curiously at the forefront; Euripides's play *Hippolytus*, a dramatic tragedy where Hippolyta is already dead, says much about Hippolyta by saying nothing at all. Specifically, through its characterization of Theseus. Christine de Pizan, the first to imagine Hippolyta and Theseus as undeniably romantic in her *Book of the City of Ladies*, is writing in the late Medieval Period in response to the assumptions and behaviors about women she felt were utterly false (Pizan 4), and Shakespeare, who uses Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, writes from the middle of a pamphlet war over the very nature of women. In 1987 D.C. Comics used Hippolyta on the tail end of second-wave feminism. In this way Hippolyta is one mythic "footprint" across time. Through an examination of her permutations, the construction of the Amazonian myth and the ways that myth operates opposite the Warrior Woman myth becomes apparent. Hippolyta's stories also reveal the direct correlation between social forces pushing against the myth of believable femininity, and the myth constraining the possibilities for reinterpretation.

Euripides

In *Hippolytus*, Hippolyta is long dead by the start of the play; she receives little recognition beyond “the Amazon” (11) and Hippolytus’s outcry of “O Hippolyta, my unhappy mother, how bitter my birth! I pray no one I love may be a bastard” (1082). Hippolyta and Theseus never married following Theseus’s conquest of the Amazons, but Theseus is held up as a good man by Euripides in the play. The tragedy of the play, Hippolytus’s death because of the mistaken wish of his father Theseus, would hold no power if some amount of sympathy weren’t attributed to Theseus. This sympathy is supported by Hippolytus who forgives his father on his deathbed; Hippolytus tells Theseus, “I free you from the guilt of my death” (1449) and Theseus replies, “O dearest son, how plainly your father can see your nobility” (1452). Despite the sympathy drawn for Theseus, however, and Hippolytus’s obvious love and respect for his father, the gifting of Hippolytus’s nobility by his mother provides an interesting back drop to the play.

Morwood states that Hippolytus “inherits his rejection of sexual maturity, repudiation of marriage, and extreme antipathy to the opposite sex from his mother’s origin as queen of the Amazons” (xix). Hippolyta is a forgotten character in the tragedy referenced only through her male child, but her strength and power are constructed as tragic; Theseus’s kidnapping of her and subsequent relationship ended in her death, and her qualities of antipathy and wildness cause Hippolytus’s death as well. His aloofness drives Phaedra all the more mad when Aphrodite bespells her and it is his rejection of sex that becomes his tragic flaw. Theseus, even after kidnapping Hippolyta and killing his own son, is left with forgiveness and survival at the end of the play; like Apollo and

Daphne, Theseus's rape of Hippolyta "is coded as 'loss'" and the reader identifies with Theseus, not the missing Hippolyta (Johnson 135). His majesty as king and survivor trumps Hippolyta's silence, allowing believable femininity to construct the empty space of their relationship within the play as something Hippolyta should have liked, even if she did not. Tragically, Hippolyta's fate is not constructed as tragic within the play because she is dead long before Aphrodite puts her plan in motion. When Hippolytus cries "my unhappy mother" (1082) even as he is pulled down by his refusal to accept his role as a dominant sexual male, the Hippolyta constructed by Euripides is one who fought Theseus out of spite when her happiness with him as a more powerful heterosexual partner, and her role as mother would have provided her happiness had she allowed it. Theseus's treatment of Hippolyta is similar to what Catherine Mackinnon describes as "pornography's positive-outcome rape scenario: dominance plus submission is force plus consent" (172). Theseus's survival and forgiveness by Hippolytus absolves him of guilt, including the guilt of Hippolyta.

Christine de Pizan

Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*, written at the end of medieval period, offers the first attempt to retell the story of Hippolyta and Theseus as a romantic love match. De Pizan is careful to remove any hint of rape, and to clearly depict Theseus' love for Hippolyta. Earl Jeffrey Richards states in his introduction that Christine de Pizan, "within the context of her time...must be viewed as a revolutionary" (xxxiii). Christine de Pizan does achieve something extraordinary with her text; fighting against her reality of patriarchy, she astutely argues what men say women are with what

she knows herself to be in a way that predicts arguments like those of Virginia Woolf¹. As Richards states, “Christine expands her defense of women to the past and future so that she can expose the utter falseness of ‘masculine myths’ once and for all” (xxxiii). Christine set out to prove that the truth of women was much different than what was written and believed. As she says herself, “To the best of my knowledge, no matter how long I confronted or dissected the problem, I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and character of women” (4). In Christine de Pizan’s retelling of Hippolyta’s story she is not raped, but loved and seduced. She is not kidnapped but chooses to stay; at least, this is what is implied through Pizan’s text: “The wedding was solemnly celebrated, and then the Greeks departed. Thus did Theseus marry Hippolyta, who later bore a son by him called Hippolytus...And when it became known in Greece that they would have peace with the Amazons, never had there been greater joy, for there was nothing they feared as much as the Amazons” (47); this is a similar move to Herodotus. The Amazons are only a danger so long as they exist outside the bounds of patriarchal marriage. The marriage is discussed and the joy this marriage brought to Greece, but Hippolyta never states her love for Theseus. As Johnson states, “There seems, then, to be two things women are silent about: their pleasure and their violation. The work performed by the idealization of this silence is that *it helps culture not to be able to tell the difference between the two*” (136,

¹ Woolf states that “Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man twice its natural size” (*Room of One’s Own* 35). Christine creates women who are subjects, as opposed to objects.

emphasis hers). In Christine's text Hippolyta is disturbingly silent; whether it is love or rape is unknown beyond Pizan's own stated intent.

The closest thing Christine offers to an explication of Hippolyta's emotion or thoughts comes during the fight with Theseus and Hercules. Christine writes, "It was clear how angered they [Hippolyta and Menalippe] were, for regardless of the great strength, boldness, and courage of these men, so forcefully did these maidens attack them that each maiden struck down her knight, horse, and all, in one heap" (46). Christine simultaneously implies the Amazons would normally be awed by these men while also intimating their anger is an excuse for their refusal to submit immediately. Hippolyta here is impressively strong, but not obviously feminine. Because her anger is unnatural and she failed to recognize her attraction to the men, the reader is to understand that once Hippolyta has calmed down she will come to her senses. This sets the stage for her acceptance of Theseus's love. While as in Euripides Theseus's love is assumed to be a positive thing because he is stronger and dominant to Hippolyta, Christine's reimagining does attempt to provide some agency. She chooses to have Hippolyta desire Theseus and that desire makes her defeat and conquest proof of Theseus's worth rather than the destruction of Hippolyta's agency. But in the end, Christine makes Theseus's love the stated and, therefore, more important love than Hippolyta's. Believable femininity urges the belief that Hippolyta craves Theseus regardless of her feelings because of his strength; her natural femininity works counter to whatever other feelings she might have, trumping and overruling them as it demands her acquiescence to his strength. Only Theseus's love need be clarified then because Hippolyta's love is expected.

The raising of the men above the Amazons becomes evident as the narrative

continues. Christine tells the reader, “Hercules and Theseus considered themselves so greatly honored by this capture that they would not have preferred the captured wealth of an entire city ... They greatly honored the ladies, and when they saw that without their armor on they were so beautiful and comely, then their joy doubled; they had never captured prey which pleased them so much, and they looked at them with great satisfaction” (46). Hippolyta has quickly been moved from warrior, angry and fearsome, to prey, beautiful and vulnerable, and the story concludes with Hippolyta’s marriage to Theseus: “it greatly bothered Theseus to give up Hippolyta, because he loved her with a great devotion. So much did Hercules ask and petition the queen that she granted that Theseus could take her [Hippolyta] into his own country. The wedding was solemnly celebrated, and then the Greeks departed. Thus did Theseus marry Hippolyta” (47). The feelings of Theseus and the queen are described, but once Hippolyta is captured she is completely silenced. I believe Christine’s text shows a Hippolyta firmly in the grip of compulsory heterosexuality, a phenomenon that would not be named for five hundred and fifty years. However, reading Hippolyta’s silence as acceptance, Richards and other critics promote the assumption that Hippolyta is not only heterosexual and happier for being married but also craved Theseus from the moment he defeated her in battle.

In another context, Rich warns of the dangers of this unexamined assumption: “the failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness” (1774). Hippolyta is kidnapped and loved by Theseus in Pizan’s text, but only through reading the text of their “solemnly celebrated wedding” as a happy ending is Hippolyta’s

submission to Theseus understood to be her desired ending. Hippolyta is maintained as a believably feminine character through her defeat in battle and sexual submission to the heterosexual Theseus. It is a reading that goes largely unchallenged because the sublimation of constructed femininity by masculinity has been naturalized; women, as constructed by society, want and need to be dominated by men for a satisfactory heterosexual ending.

The myth of the Amazon creates containment through marriage the primary marker of woman over monster. The Amazon is violent and self-mutilates prior to being defeated. Once defeated she is calmer and less violent; the description of Amazonian activities as bloody, warlike, and angry creates a value system whereby her activities after her marriage are morally superior to the warrior lifestyle led before. Christine de Pizan does not break away from breast mutilation as a marker of a femininity that is inherent and inseparable from biology. She provides a description of this mutilation earlier: “And in this way the women of Scythia began to carry arms and were then called Amazons, which actually means the ‘breastless ones,’ because they had a custom whereby the nobles among them ... burned off their left breast through some technique so that it would not hinder them from carrying a shield” (41). As a rite of passage, the burning of the breast shows strength through the withstanding of pain, ownership of the body, and agency by choosing the warrior lifestyle. However, the idea of burning off one breast is one perpetuated through male sources; the idea that the breasts would hamper the carrying of the shield or the shooting of the bow is a misogynistic one.

Jeannine Davis-Kimball, in her book *Warrior Woman*, discusses her research through the excavation of the remains of warrior women in the kurgan’s of eastern

Russia. Davis-Kimball not only found archeological evidence of women warriors, but discovered that the nomadic tribes of Mongolia are the modern descendents of the Sauromatian warrior women. Davis-Kimball states:

The authors of antiquity also delighted in recalling the Amazon's savagery and failings. Amazon mothers were said to either return their male infants to the children's fathers or to kill them at birth. The women were also reputed to sear or cut off the right breasts of their female children so they could better shoot a bow-- indeed, pundits including Herodotus insisted that the word *Amazon* stemmed from two Greek words meaning 'without a breast' (*a* = without; *mazos* = breast). But Amazons were never depicted with one breast in artistic renderings, and most modern linguists seem to agree that the word *Amazon* actually comes from a Proto-Indo-European term meaning 'no-husband one.' I had always thought that Herodotus's definition was suspect, but when I saw today's full-breasted Mongol women archers taking fine aim and marking the bull's-eye, I knew there was certainly no need to remove a breast (118).

Davis-Kimball provides archeological evidence of what modern Mongol archers clearly show: the myth of breast mutilation perpetuates the belief that the female body is ill-suited to physical activity and must be destroyed to better resemble the masculine one.

In the case of the Amazonian breast mutilation, depicted in Pizan, Herodotus, and others, the masculine traits destroy the feminine because the feminine is weak and prevents the masculine act of fighting. This description does not offer proof of the feminine body's inability to fight, but works to naturalize it. Not challenging the necessity of this mutilation allows the naturalization to be accepted and internalized.

Monique Wittig discusses the danger of accepting such a masculine over feminine dichotomy of ability when she states, “not only do we naturalize history, but also consequently we naturalize the social phenomena which express our oppression, making change impossible” (546). Christine de Pizan retells Hippolyta’s story as romantic within the confines of compulsory heterosexuality and domesticates her, but does not challenge the myth of Amazonian breast mutilation. So long as Hippolyta and the Amazons are seen as warriors who cannot fight without mutilating their breasts instead of women who are warriors, and domesticated Amazons are morally superior to wild Amazons, the naturalization of the myth continues.

The description of breast mutilation as the “history” of Hippolyta’s existence as an Amazon begins the defining of her character as believably feminine; she becomes a “real” woman in the destruction of her female body, a metaphor for the feminine self she suppresses until it is freed and made docile by Theseus’ defeat of her. Hippolyta stands as a warrior who can fight prior to her capture because she has mutilated her feminine side, leaving only the masculine in its place. This mutilation maintains the masculine over feminine hierarchy and illustrates that a woman can only be a warrior, an activity for male bodies, if she consciously destroys her female body. By accepting this myth literally as a simple case of body mutilation the metaphoric meaning, that the feminine--depicted here through the breasts--is inherently flawed in matters of strength and physical activity, becomes lost within the text and so naturalized.

The Amazon is a female force fully entrenched in liminality; she has excised herself from society and dismissed her need for a husband. The success of her myth as powerful, skilled, and independent individual is directly related to her ability to fight and

defend herself. Believable femininity works against the romance of the Amazon; the Amazon who resists “love” is monstrous and mutilates her body while Amazons who fall in love or accept marriage are heroines. This activity of labeling someone women “real” and others “unreal” is the same as what Monique Wittig describes; Wittig considers how lesbians who refused the social label of “woman” and all its inherent meanings were accused of not being “real” women (546). Believable femininity assures that the Amazon must merely be shown (forced) what she is and she will be happier, more satisfied, and more docile after her body has been used for sex.

Married Amazons, however, do not lose their problematic nature. Kathryn Schwarz points out, “Amazonian wives do not lose the adjective when they acquire the noun” and claims, “the point is not whether Amazons ‘win’ or ‘lose’ in their battles with men, but rather the difficulty of telling the difference” (3). But I think that in whichever way the Amazon being domesticated “attempts to naturalize the artifacts of gender and ends by interrogating the stuff out of which those artifacts are made” (Schwarz 11) the more insidious myth of believable femininity is still being perpetuated. Specifically, while I agree with Schwarz that the figure of the Amazon is one that disconcerts notions of domesticity and compulsory heterosexuality, I think specific Amazonian myths, like Hippolyta, counteract the disturbing presence of Amazons in the limen and inculcate it back into the social majority. Hippolyta, while strong and warlike, is happier once domesticated. She must, however, work against her “inherent” femininity to be an effective warrior prior to that domestication. These two factors keep her believably feminine and easily dominated.

This domestication of the Amazon elicits an acceptance of Hippolyta and

Theseus's love as textually supported. Christine's line, "when it became known in Greece that they would have peace with the Amazons, never had there been greater joy, for there was nothing they feared as much as the Amazons" (47), elevates the domestication and pacifying of the Amazon as morally superior. Because the world is happier after Hippolyta marries Theseus, Hippolyta must have made the right decision and, therefore Hippolyta must be happier. There is never, however, any indication that Theseus or Hercules will stop their warlike lifestyles or even that they should, nor are they chastised for attacking the Amazons.

The problem with the myth of believable femininity is the way it contracts the possibilities for Amazonian myths, and works to reinscribe them within naturalized femininity. In Christine, once Hippolyta and Menalippe are captured by Hercules and Theseus their femininity is free to exist under the comforting domination of Hercules and Theseus masculinity. The Amazon's beauty captures Hercules and Theseus, "when they saw that without their armor on they were so beautiful and comely, then their joy doubled" (Pizan 46). They are recognized as beautiful only after their masculine armor is removed; their femininity becomes paramount and the Amazons are reduced to the status of "captured prey" (46). Hippolyta is defeated in battle and her body shifts from masculine, strong, capable, and cut off from all femininity, into a feminized version; she is beautiful, vulnerable, and prey. Pizan is not working to reestablish the patriarchy here; by her own words she is consciously working for the opposite, but believable femininity does not allow for remythologization that does not reconfigure Hippolyta within the masculine/feminine hierarchy. As readers, a conscious effort must be undertaken to see both Pizan's own gendered assumptions in her text, and our unrecognized need to read

the very same gendering in order to fulfill the requirements of believable femininity; what is natural and possible must be exchanged for the unnatural and the impossible if the Amazons are to be read as women and *finally* Amazonian.

I do not believe that Christine could have written anything but a believably feminine figure in Hippolyta; furthermore, her readers--contemporary and modern--would have trouble accepting a character as feminine that did not silently submit to Theseus in the text. In order for Christine's story about Hippolyta to succeed, Hippolyta must be clearly defined as a woman. This means that while she is a warrior she must also be feminine and defined by feminine traits; she must exist opposite a man. As Judith Butler states: "one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair" (30). Hippolyta is a woman because she is not a man; she must, therefore, be feminine not masculine, nurturing not aggressive, yearning to receive love as portrayed through sex, not dominantly gifting it. Caught in a binary opposition, Hippolyta and Theseus must represent the either/or relationship of masculinity and femininity.

It is necessary, however, to recognize believable femininity at work in Pizan's text because the historicity of believable femininity is precisely what makes it so unnoticed in modern texts. It could be argued that D.C. Comics would not automatically imagine Amazons captured, raped, and punished in 1987 if that weren't one of the only ways to render them believable. A critique of accepted values read *into* works like Pizan's is valuable for the critical thought of modernity. As Judith Butler states in her introduction to *Gender Trouble*, "feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion" (viii).

If Hippolyta's domestication, breast mutilation, and love is accepted as fine--despite her silence--then the hierarchy of believable women over unbelievable women continues.

This hierarchical treatment of "types" of women is one more way that believable femininity is naturalized. This technique of naturalization is the same that was used to subordinate sexual practices discussed by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*. Foucault relates how the subordination of sex occurred through the guise of scientific truth:

Claiming to speak the truth, it [science] stirred up people's fears ... It thus became associated with an insistent and indiscreet medical practice, glibly proclaiming its aversions, quick to run to the rescue of law and public opinion, more servile with respect to the powers of order than amenable to the requirements of truth ... In the name of a biological and historical urgency, it justified the racisms of the state, which at the time were on the horizon. It grounded them in 'truth' (54).

The grounding of masculinity as superior for fighting to femininity in the "truth" of women's biology naturalizes the masculine over feminine hierarchy and so works towards creating an "inherent" femininity; the innateness of this femininity is never questioned following its naturalization, including in Christine. Women, both in life and in the text, must project these feminine "truths" in order to be what is imagined as "real" women and believably feminine. De Beauvoir debunks this naturalizing; she explains, "but I deny that they [biological facts] establish for her [woman] a fixed and inevitable destiny. They are insufficient for setting up a hierarchy of the sexes; they fail to explain why the woman is the Other; they do not condemn her to remain in this subordinate role

forever” (32-3). Reading Hippolyta’s character as believably feminine in opposition to Theseus’s masculinity is a fetishizing of science and Hippolyta’s love, defined through her submission and craved dominance for Theseus, is to be neither assumed nor expected. Her existence as a woman does not predispose her to bodily mutilation as a necessity for fighting or submission as a means of sexual happiness. It is Hippolyta’s existence as believably feminine that underlies the necessity of her story to end in a sexual relationship with Theseus.

Pierrette Daly, in her analysis of heroic tropes discovered that "the sexual identity of fictional characters is an important factor in the invention of narratives and that the aesthetic of storytelling has been guided by sexual biases since the dawn of Western civilization" (13). The naturalization of femininity by the patriarchal culture as subordinate to masculinity defines Western ideals of romance. As Rich explains, “within the institution exist, of course, qualitative differences of experience: but the absence of choice remains the great unacknowledged reality, and in the absence of choice, women will remain dependent upon the chance or luck of particular relationships and will have no collective power to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives” (1780). If Hippolyta is loved by Theseus, then Hippolyta's love for Theseus is assumed because femininity is incomplete without masculinity. This assumption removes her choice in regard to her own sexuality and relegates her to the status of Other.

Shakespeare

In Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hippolyta is presented on the eve of her wedding to Theseus. She has been defeated prior to the beginning of the play and her character has been assumed by many to be eagerly awaiting her marriage to Theseus. This presentation of Hippolyta is no less problematic. Schwarz sounds strangely tongue-in-cheek when she remarks that Hippolyta's presence in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "seems an odd place to tell stories about Amazons" (210). At first glance, Hippolyta doesn't seem to represent the stories of the Amazons at all in Shakespeare's play. Hippolyta has been read as the play's "dramatic theorist" (Schwarz 211) as she provides commentary about the play within the play: "This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard" (5.1.203). This commentary has led critics to see Hippolyta's words as representative of "Shakespeare's own view of how the play really hangs together" (Schwarz 206) but Hippolyta is listed as Queen of the Amazons; this would indicate that there is more to Hippolyta's role than simply to provide commentary.

Some critics, Schwarz chiefly among them, have recognized that Hippolyta plays a much more complicated part than a simple framing device. Hippolyta appears at the beginning of the play with Theseus, but while she comforts him on the passage of time until their wedding, she does not proclaim her love for him. Like Christine de Pizan's rendering, Shakespeare's Hippolyta is strangely silent about her own feelings; Hippolyta says, "Four days will quickly steep themselves in night; / Four nights will quickly dream away the time; / And then the moon, like to a silver bow / New bent in heaven, shall behold the night / Of our solemnities" (1.1.7-11). Theseus responds to her in a much debated retelling of his conquest: "Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword / And won thy

love doing thee injuries; / But I will wed thee in another key, / With pomp, with triumph, and with reveling” (1.1.16-19). He “won [her] love by doing [her] injuries.” Madelon Gohlke reads in these lines “the sword may be the metaphoric equivalent of the phallus in which love may be either generated or secured by hostility, and in which the two partners take up sadistic and masochistic postures in relation to one another” (151). Hippolyta has been defeated by Theseus--in battle, in bed, in society, and the metaphor of rape can be seen as the “masculine perception of femininity as weakness“ (Gohlke 162). Schwarz seems correct in her assertion that “as a defeated Amazon, Hippolyta validates the ordering principle that locates sexual authority in men” (207). By the beginning of Shakespeare’s play, Hippolyta has been domesticated, and made into a believably feminine character.

It is the domestication, this sense of conquest that Theseus holds over Hippolyta at the beginning of the play, that identifies her as feminine. Hippolyta’s presentation, one of assumed eagerness awaiting her marriage to Theseus, transforms her defeat into her erotic desire--she wants to be defeated by Theseus so that she may marry him. MacKinnon states that “force and desire are not mutually exclusive under male supremacy” and that “so long as dominance is eroticized they never will be” (177). Believable femininity turns defeat into foreplay and by eroticizing “dominance and submission” removes the possibility of force (MacKinnon 177). Schwarz remarks that “Hippolyta is always marked ... both as Theseus’s prize and as his mirror image. A *Midsummer Night’s Dream* might, in a teleological reading, prove that Hippolyta’s masculinity is specious, *her loss to Theseus demonstrating her essential femininity and her suitability as his wife*” (217, emphasis mine). She can only be feminine once she is

defeated. She can only be a believable woman if her compulsory heterosexuality overrules her warrior ways.

The urge to read Hippolyta's acceptance of Theseus as necessary and desirable is the urge to make the character of Hippolyta believable within the patriarchal lens. Schwarz points out that in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "Hippolyta herself never speaks of desire" (235). Her desire is assumed, accepted because this play is a comedy, and readers are most comfortable with a woman who is feminine--that is, a woman who has been defeated, and is now needful of a man. Gail Kern Pastor and Skiles Howard point this need out in their introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "From the opening of the play, Shakespeare hints at what troubles lovers in the passage from courtship to marriage. Theseus has had to conquer a woman's desire for autonomy--symbolized here by the Amazon Hippolyta" (2). What is forgotten in an understanding of Hippolyta's character is that, desirous or not, she was *conquered* by Theseus. Her very silence marks this conquering as complete, but I believe this silence is often misunderstood as a sign of her love, her choice, and her femininity. Schwarz, too, remarks on this: "Hippolyta is complacent, acquiescent, and above all silent, that silence turned to the advantage of heroes and readers who conclude that she has only gotten what she implicitly desired" (235). It is this belief in implicit desire that allows us to accept Hippolyta's defeat, even to revel in it and, finally, to see her as a believably feminine woman.

But accepting anything as implicit within a text is precisely what leads to the naturalizing of specific traits to specific genders. By normalizing Hippolyta's love for Theseus the reader takes part in her silencing. Theseus tells Hippolyta that "Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity/In least speak most, to my capacity" (5.1.104-105).

He is explicitly stating that love not spoken says more than love spoken. His conquest of her is more than physical; it is mental as well. He prefers her silence to her words. He controls her body and her words, and through her words, her reality. This control is seen in almost all their dealings with each other. Earlier in the scene Hippolyta and Theseus engage in the following exchange:

Hippolyta: I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharged,
And duty in his service perishing.

Theseus: Why, gentle sweet, you shall see no such thing.

Hippolyta: He says they can do nothing in this kind.

Theseus: The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing,
Our sport shall be to take what they mistake;
And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect
Takes it in might, not merit. (5.1.86-92)

Not only does Theseus discount what Hippolyta says to him, but he discounts the words of Philostrate earlier in the scene. Philostrate warned him of the play that "No, my noble lord, / It is not for you. I have heard it over, / And it is nothing, nothing in the world" (5.1.77-79). Theseus's patronizing role is here shown clearly. He silences Hippolyta and Philostrate, and orders them to take the play, not as it is presented badly, but to remake it in the mind into what it should be. This seems strangely similar to what he does to Hippolyta. Whatever her actual desires, Theseus shushes her, replacing what she says with what he wants to hear.

In Act 4, scene 1, Hippolyta presents the only memory of a time before Theseus. She states:

I was with Hercules and Cadmus once
When in a wood of Crete they bayed the bear
With the hounds of Sparta. Never did I hear
Such gallant chiding; for, besides the groves,
The skies, the fountains, every region near
Seemed all one mutual cry. I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder. (106-113)

But Theseus immediately overrides her memory, reminding her that "My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind, / So flewed, so sanded; and their heads are hung / With ears that sweep away the morning dew... A cry more tunable / Was never holloed to nor cheered with horn / In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly. / Judge when you hear" (114-122). His last statement, "Judge when you hear," sounds not so much like a challenge, as an order; his hounds after all have "a cry more tunable" than those which Hippolyta is so fondly remembering. Like his statement on how to take the play put on by the performers, Theseus is telling Hippolyta how to interpret her experiences.

His later words, mentioned earlier, "Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity / In least speak most, to my capacity" (5.1.104-105) now become burdened with even more meaning; Theseus does not only believe that "love" is most true when silent--he silences those who would speak too much and challenge his image of how things should be. My point here is not simply that Hippolyta is conquered and silenced by Theseus, nor that she illustrates one example of a female character taking part in compulsory heterosexuality, though she represents all of those things; rather, I wish to show that it is only through this conquering and silencing that Hippolyta, Amazon, warrior, and woman, can be

recognized by the reader as feminine. Her silencing is only complete by reading her acceptance of her submission as implicit in the text. Though she has few lines, she does speak, but by failing to see what is not said the reader assumes it does not need to be said. Hence the reading of her character as believably feminine and contained.

Amazons in general and Hippolyta in particular have been preserved with characteristics that are valued by the male tradition prior to their defeat. As Daly states: “the features of the Amazon archetype which have subsisted through the centuries, prowess and independence, are not its only characteristics. They have been preserved because they are recognized by men and are the ones that are valued in the male hero” (23). Hippolyta has prowess and independence in both Pizan and Shakespeare; in Pizan she unseats Theseus and nearly defeats him in battle (Pizan 46). In Shakespeare she references her days hunting with Hercules and Cadmus (4.1.107-114). In both instances she is shown as warrior, skilled and independent, prior to her defeat by Theseus.

But Hippolyta cannot exist as an independent, strong, autonomous being and remain believably feminine because “the sole earthly destiny reserved for the equal, the woman-child, the soul-sister, the woman-sex the woman-animal is always man!” (Beauvoir 249). She cannot exist independently of Theseus; she cannot be strong enough to survive without him because strength and independence are masculine traits. She must, instead, serve the purpose of the Amazon only in so far as she challenges Theseus, but, similarly, must always be ultimately defeated by him. Hippolyta exists as both real and mythical in the text, warrior and woman; she is Theseus’s game. Beauvoir identifies this role: “Woman is sport and adventure, but also a test. She is the triumph of victory and the more bitter triumph of frustration survived; she is the vertigo of ruin, the

fascination of damnation, of death” (197). In the first lines of Shakespeare’s play Theseus identifies Hippolyta as all of these things; he says:

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
Another moon; but, O, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a stepdame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man’s revenue. (1.1.1-6)

Hippolyta is his triumph and victory, as demonstrated by his impending marriage to her, but she is also his frustration--he is forced to wait for the completion of his conquest, even after the initial defeat in battle.

The recognition of Hippolyta’s femininity due to her conquest is an important one. This definition of inherent femininity is more insidious than a simple recognition of patriarchy, or woman as Other; the idea that femininity is only believable when it has been conquered, ruled by men is one that persists in modern representations of women. Femininity is constructed, not inherent, but it cannot be evaluated as a construct without also evaluating what aspects make a woman believably feminine.

D.C. Comics

In 1987, Hippolyta was remythologized as the mother of Wonder Woman--a modern comic book superhero icon; in this incarnation Hippolyta is the Queen of the Amazons and when Heracles appears seeking the girdle Hippolyta defeats him. However, his overwhelming masculinity entices her and Hippolyta falls in love with

Heracles in this incarnation: “Antiope fell helplessly in love with Theseus, and Hippolyta fell for Heracles pretty hard--too hard. In his madness, Heracles drugged Hippolyta, and when she awoke she was in chains. Heracles’ army bound, beat, and raped the Amazons, tearing down their city and stealing their treasures” (endcdatabaseproject.com/Hippolyta). Hippolyta is the proof of Adrienne Rich’s compulsory heterosexuality; Rich’s claim, “the lie ... that women are inevitably, even if rashly and tragically, drawn to men” (1778) is proven through Hippolyta’s inability to resist Heracles. Heracles arrives seeking the destruction of Hippolyta and after she defeats him--even though he is clearly a poor choice for heterosexual romance because he has already tried to conquer the Amazons once--she is powerless to resist her growing attraction.

D.C. Comics fully ensconces the Amazons in believable femininity by first having them defeated and raped, second through allowing them revenge, and, finally, by punishing them for that revenge:

After a vision of one of the goddesses let her find her strength, Hippolyta broke out of her cell and set to work freeing her sisters. Hippolyta watched as many of her sisters succumbed to bloodlust, enjoying the bloody slaughter of the men ... [Hippolyta] said that such a path of bloody revenge was not the Amazon way, and that to go down that way would lead only to destruction.

In the midst of the ruins, the goddesses now appeared again. They were displeased with the Amazons, declaring that they had failed in their sacred mission--now the very name “Amazon” would be associated with death and destruction, not peace and equality. The Amazons must have a penance. They were each given a pair of steel “bracelets” to wear at all times, forever a reminder

of their capture and humiliation. Then their bodies and souls were purified, and they began their journey.

http://en.dcdatabaseproject.com/Hippolyta_%28New_Earth%29

The Amazons are punished for seeking revenge against those that raped them and destroyed their city. Their bodies and souls are “purified” following the revenge, but not the rape. Both Heracles and Theseus survive the encounter with no punishment. The language used to describe Heracles versus the Amazons draws sympathy for Heracles’ actions while also invoking horror of the Amazons; Heracles suffered from “madness” while the Amazons “succumbed to bloodlust, enjoying the bloody slaughter.” This story, dated on the webpage to 1987, demonstrates how much the image of the Amazon was still dependent on the submissive, passive qualities of femininity at the forefront. Even though as Amazons they are warriors, their violence here is presented as unnatural and wrong; their feminine qualities of forgiveness are supposed to rule over their unnatural need for violent revenge.

This history of Hippolyta in the D.C. Universe has yet to be revised. This, in combination with the continuing prevalence of Amazonian women being dominated on film, demonstrates that, regardless of advances in feminist theory, mainstream U. S. still needs the Amazon to be subjugated and eroticized through that very subjugation

This understanding of *woman* and its inherent qualities of believable femininity is also important to an understanding of Hippolyta. An Amazon is a woman warrior, not a warrior woman and for a woman warrior a femininity that is dependent on her dependence presents a unique problem--she may be woman, and she may be warrior, but she cannot realistically be a success at both at the same time. I say success at both

because women have often been depicted as fighting next to men, but rarely are they depicted as fighting in a manner superior to men. If a woman is a superior fighter, often she is mistaken for a man and so not recognizable as a woman. In the D.C. Comics version of Hippolyta she defeats Heracles in battle and is recognized as woman, but cannot resist her own romantic love for him. If she is not defeated by her assumed biology then she is defeated by compulsory heterosexuality. The existence of compulsory heterosexuality then should be recognized, most obviously in the D.C. Comics telling, but also in Pizan and Shakespeare. Hippolyta's attraction to Theseus/Heracles is suicidal (Rich 1778). The end of the story told by Schwarz earlier is Hippolyta's death. This end is not revised by either Pizan or Shakespeare; both only tell Hippolyta's story up until her marriage to Theseus. Her end is romantic in Pizan and Shakespeare, tragic in D.C. Comics, but always, as Rich says, suicidal.

One may be an Amazon or Warrior Woman, but the ability to fight, no matter how great, will never overcome the believed inherent weakness in femininity. The assumption that Hippolyta chooses (wants to submit to) Theseus/Hercules is necessary for the story to provide a satisfactory revisionary ending. This is the most insidious aspect of believable femininity and the naturalizing of "woman" as possessing an inherent femininity--the western idea of romantic love. Love for a woman is a necessity, she is not complete without it; without marriage to a man and children, her life is lacking. Her own strength is insufficient to provide happiness, and her happiness with a man is impossible without her submission and disavowal of her strength. She is defined only by her role as dictated by the man. Beauvoir says, "the man who likes danger and sport is not displeased to see woman turn into an amazon if he retains the hope of subjugating

her. What he requires in his heart of hearts is that this struggle remain a game for him, while for woman it involves her very destiny. Man's true victory, whether he is liberator or conquerer, lies just in this: that woman freely recognizes him as her destiny" (184). Hippolyta then is not a person, or even a woman, but an Other, and, what is worse, she is only an Other that exists for Theseus/Hercules to play with, to test his strength against. Finally, she will only exist as a satisfactory Other, believably feminine, if he obtains the satisfaction of her surrender. Hippolyta must not only lose to Theseus/Hercules, but must want to submit to him as well. Her femininity must crave the domination of his masculinity.

What does this mean for the myth of the Amazon at large? Is Hippolyta one example as opposed to the rule? I think not; in both Pizan and Shakespeare her defeat is enough to reshape the entire Amazonian community, and in D.C. they chose Hippolyta, not Antiope, Menalippe, or Penthislea, to be Wonder Woman's mother. I think the result of believable femininity shaping Hippolyta's textual existence for so long is believable femininity shaping the myth of the Amazon as a whole. For women who refuse to quest for love like Britomart, for women who refuse to submit to sex like Radigund, the Amazon myth perpetuates the idea that, if they are real women, they are just being stubborn. A man can't have them if he's weak, but he can have them, even if they say no.

CHAPTER 4

JOAN OF ARC: BELIEVABLE FEMININITY AND THE SAINT

Leonard Cohen's song "Joan of Arc," released in 1971, plays like a sad love sonnet from Joan's dark man. By the end of the song it is revealed that Cohen has crafted protestations of love by anthropomorphizing the fire that burned her. The song begins slowly and ballad like, the simple guitar strain providing a basic foundation upon which Cohen begins speak-singing--a narrator introducing his story. As Cohen's deep voice swallows the guitar, a picture of a very tired Joan riding in the dark, the fires of her destruction chasing her down is created: "Now the flames they followed Joan of Arc / as she came riding through the dark; / no moon to keep her armor bright, no man to get her through this very smoky night." Cohen's Joan is lonely in a specifically heterosexual way; in wanting a "man to get her through this very smoky night," the implication is not a platonic or familial relationship. Instead, Cohen is creating a Joan that craves a heterosexual partner who can protect and make love to her.

When Joan speaks in the song, Cohen sings her words in a whiny voice that portrays a sense of yearning for a life defined by classic gender roles. "She said, 'I'm tired of the war, / I want the kind of work I had before. / A wedding dress, or something white, / to wear upon my swollen appetite.'" By the end of the first verse the picture that has been painted is a Joan desiring heterosexual companionship and craving the role of a wife. She isn't the warlike virgin, but is instead a woman in a nontraditional setting who wishes for the safety and enclosure of the patriarchy she left behind. As the second verse begins, the fire speaks back to Joan, a suicidal lover she's compelled to by her loneliness. Cohen's Joan is a compulsory heterosexual figure, one who is inevitably, "even if rashly

and tragically, drawn to men: that even when that attraction is suicidal ... it is still an organic imperative” (Rich 1778). Joan’s attraction to the fire is absolutely suicidal, but she realizes her destruction too late; her pride and her loneliness both draw the fire to her, and draw her, inevitably, into its flames.

The fire says to Joan, “Well, I’m glad to hear you talk this way, / you know I’ve watched you riding every day / and something in me yearns to win / such a cold and lonesome heroine.” The fire, representing the male gaze, is perplexed by Joan’s chastity and power. Her virginity keeps her perpetually from the entanglements of sex, and ability to lead and inspire makes her a powerful female, someone the fire can win-- someone the fire can dominate. When Joan asks, “And who are you?” the fire replies, “Why, I am fire ... And I love your solitude, I love your pride.” Joan then crawls inside the fire saying, “Then fire, make your body cold, / I’m going to give you mine to hold,” but the fire burns her--that is the nature of the fire--and the heat of its flames, destroys Joan of Arc in a powerful display of heterosexual destruction. Her loneliness makes her vulnerable, and her willful acceptance shows a Joan craving the domination and power of a superior male creation--something that she can give her body to be held.

The fire takes “the dust of Joan of Arc, and high above the wedding guests / he hung the ashes of her wedding dress.” As she’s burned to death Joan realizes, “if he was fire, / oh then she must be wood.” Cohen, praised for taking mythic characters like King David and Joan of Arc and bringing them “down to Earth” (youtube.com) through his songs like “Hallelujah” and “Joan of Arc,” succeeds magnificently in creating a believably feminine Joan. This Joan of Arc, dreaming of wedding dresses and sexual yearnings, is destroyed by the fire she loves. Her status as a Saint and a virgin works

against believable femininity to make Joan something more than Woman; she is a soldier of God without gender or sexuality, but Cohen replaces that sexuality, encompassing it in tragedy, and imagining a Joan who wishes not simply for peace, but for marriage, sex, and domination by a man. In bringing her “down to Earth,” Cohen has rendered her unequivocally believably feminine.

Believable femininity demands that all characters gendered female crave sexual domination by a male, but the saint figure precludes sexual relations. The Saint, as represented by Joan of Arc, is virginal--neither wanting nor seeking heterosexual romantic entanglements, but her virginity is not a positive alternative to suicidal heterosexual relationships. Joan of Arc, like all virgin figures, remains believably feminine because the threat of heterosexual domination always looms in her background. Simone de Beauvoir states, “The virginity of Mary has above all a negative value: that through which the flesh has been redeemed is not carnal; it has not been touched or possessed” (171). Joan’s power is constructed through her virginity and centered around her lack of heterosexual sex; once she has sex, believable femininity dictates her expectation and desire of domination. The only way to ensure that Joan of Arc remains independent and still believably feminine is to interconnect her power and virginity. Joan remains believably feminine even though she is not seeking heterosexual domination because her virginity is presented as an alternate choice: if she weren’t a virgin, she would seek submission.

1 Henry VI

Cohen opts to recreate a heterosexual Joan destroyed by her longings, but he was not the first to reimagine Joan in a sexualized way. In *1 Henry VI*, Joan's commitment to her god was reconfigured by Shakespeare as a demonic pact, and her sexuality revealed to be monstrous. Bernard Shaw imagined Joan in 1924 in his play *Saint Joan* as a tool of the historically patriarchal Christian society with no agency of her own. In every case the historic figure of Jeanne la Pucelle is transformed into the mythical and believably feminine character Joan of Arc through either the denial of her virginity or the exalting of it.

Born in 1412 to Isabella and Jacques d'Arc, Joan began to hear voices at the age of thirteen; she claimed they were from Saints Michael, Margaret, Catherine, and sometimes Gabriel. In 1428 and 1429 she convinced Robert de Baudicourt to provide her with a horse, an armed escort, and an audience with the Dauphin, Charles VII (Astell xiii). After being examined by Theologians, she was given command of an army and managed to raise the siege of Orleans. Following her defeat at Paris in September 1429, Joan of Arc was taken prisoner by the English and abandoned by Charles VII (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 252). According to Blumenfeld-Kosinski: "Her male dress and her claims to divine inspiration provided the pretext for her trial on charges of witchcraft. She was finally burned at the stake on May 30, 1431" (252). By the time of her retrial and declared martyrdom in 1456, and eventual canonization in 1920, Joan of Arc had become an indelible figure of the Catholic mythos and a representation of female empowerment.

Her continued popularity in both France and the U.S. shown by the release of

another major motion picture, *The Messenger* in 2009, provoked Françoise Meltzer to muse, “there is something about Joan of Arc that appeals to the present obsession with blurred boundaries, and thus with the collapse of “clear” categories (of subjectivity, gender, power, the historical Church, and so on)” (90). I agree with Meltzer; I would take it further, however, and argue that the immense popularity of Joan of Arc--from being the subject of songs to major Hollywood movies--arises not only because of her blurred boundaries, but also because the continued distancing of Western society from the traditional patriarchy. This has created a tension within the Joan of Arc myth; as Barthes says, “Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing; it distorts” (129). Shakespeare distorts Joan of Arc into a sexually monstrous being, while Shaw highlights her worth as directly tied to her virginity. Both maintain her believable femininity through the definition of her sexuality, and both examples maintain her status as Other. The Joan of Arc myth, however, is one place where believable femininity is being challenged. As the cult of saintly virginity is slowly brought down, a Joan of Arc who is only successful because she denies heterosexual longing and thereby escapes domination is unacceptable; readers, viewers, and listeners want a Joan of Arc whose independence exists separate from her sexuality.

So long as Joan is powered by her God she is more powerful than any man. The requirement that a powerful female character want seek domination, however, and wants to be dominated by a superior man stifles remythologization of Joan. The scholarship surrounding Joan of Arc often remarks on this conflict in some way; Stephen Richey states in his book *Joan of Arc: The Warrior Saint*, “she was a teenage farm girl who crowned a reluctant king, rallied a broken people, reversed the course of a great war, and

pushed history onto a new path. She was Joan of Arc--what are we to make of her?" (1). Even Bernard Shaw, who publicly stated his intent to create a feminist Joan said in his 1924 "Preface" that Joan "seemed neutral in conflict of sex because men were too much afraid of her to fall in love with her" (11). The asexuality in Joan's character is a destabilizing agent; she is ensconced within patriarchal medieval Catholicism, but her power is unchecked by a dominating heterosexual male. Shaw unintentionally recreates a Joan who is a Mary figure, and this stabilizes her character under the power of the her God. Shaw wanted to keep Joan powerful, but was unaware that in consciously denying the possibility of a romantic heterosexual relationship he was further ensconcing her within the male over female hierarchy, and his choice to have Dunois justify her abandonment supports the male dominated French hierarchy. Her virginity in Shaw is the tool by which she maintains independence, masking the lack of subjectivity. For Shaw, Joan of Arc cannot be the warrior saint and the heterosexual woman at the same time.

Shakespeare takes a remarkably different approach; while it is clear his Joan is an enemy of the English and the villain of *1 Henry VI*, the issue of her believable femininity is used to both define her villainy and simultaneously reduce her religious power to witchcraft. Shakespeare's first move to make Joan of Arc believably feminine is to recreate her character rather brilliantly, even down to her name, as one constant sexualized figure; he changes Jeanne la Pucelle--the French name of Joan of Arc--into Joan Puzel. Where Pucelle was the name Joan chose for herself, much like Queen Elizabeth, to illustrate her virginity as a sign of autonomous power, Puzel is a pun on Joan's name that means "whore." As Maria Warner illustrates, "*Pucelle* means 'virgin,'

but in a special way, with distinct shades connotating youth, innocence, and, paradoxically, nubility” (22), but “in English, ‘puccelle’ means virgin, ‘puzel’ means whore. The two English words can be used in performance to create a double perspective on Joan” (Burns 26). Her chosen virginity, a choice that removed Joan from the heterosexual gender hierarchy, is immediately thrown into question by the pun. Her character changes from Virgin to Whore as her believable femininity shifts from her submission to God to lying about her sexuality. In Shakespeare, Joan of Arc chooses to lie about her desire to be dominated and her disingenuousness leads to her mockery by Alencon, York, and Charles VII. Kay Stanton reads this phenomenon as the “English male characters, in rather pathetic attempts to deal with the power, military skill, superb rhetorical ability, and stunning charisma of virgin warrior Joan...labeling her as a witch and joking tirelessly in speculation about her sexual experience” (106). The doubled identity of Joan created by Shakespeare does illustrate the destabilizing effect she has on the English, but, more importantly, it reveals her desire for domination even as she protests against it. Joan is not superior to York, who defeats her; she is kept carefully ensconced in the patriarchal gender hierarchy by the stabilizing structure of patriarchy.

This reestablishment of Joan’s character is completed by Alencon’s words following her first appearance on stage: “These women are shrewd tempters with their tongues” (1.2.123). As Burns puts it, “Alencon subverts the sanctity of her initial self-presentation by sexualizing her rhetorical skills” (29). Joan is immediately aligned with “womankind” here; her vaunted station as a powerful virgin is forgotten as Alencon kindly reminds the reader that Joan is a woman above all. Alencon is also the first to question Joan’s power and motivation in 2.1. As Joan strives to prove herself among the

French, she is useful to them only so long as she remains their lackey. Through these moves, Shakespeare manages to transform Joan from an inaccessible, baffling figure into one who is a sexualized woman before her first scene is even complete. Joan's role, then, is not to be simply "a foil to set off the chivalric English heroes of *I Henry VI*" (Jackson 40), but to reinscribe the mythic character of Jeanne la Pucelle the Warrior Saint into Joan Puzel, the lying, deceitful whore. Her virginity was her key to escape from the patriarchy and provided her independence; as Stanton states, "it allowed her independence from male control" (113). By attacking her virginity first, Shakespeare reconfigures the male gaze, capturing Joan Puzel within it.

Shakespeare's choice to reimagine Joan Puzel's raging sexuality also comments on the contemporary issue of cross-dressing in Renaissance England. The *querelle des femmes*, in which the nature of woman was heatedly debated through pamphlets, ballads, and dramatic performances, expressed the rising tension over shifting gender roles. One result of this debate was the prevalence of cross-dressing women on stage; Gabriele Bernhard Jackson states that, "the interrelated types of the Amazon, the warrior woman, the cross-dressing woman, and the witch, [were] all figures that--for a variety of reasons--were at the end of the sixteenth century objects of... fascination both in England and on the continent" (44). Joan of Arc becomes a central character for representation of this debate as a cross-dressing woman warrior; for Shakespeare's Joan femininity becomes doubled "presenting femininity and masculinity not as oppositional or mutually displacing terms but as simultaneous performative effects" (Schwarz 142). Joan Puzel is a functioning representation of the Amazon myth, and a warning of unchecked female power similarly to Spenser's Radigund.

Jackson points out, “the Amazon and the warrior woman were already established as two of the most valued positive *exempla* of the controversy over women. Joan is identified with both immediately on her entry into the play’s action” (49) and that “the power of this combination reaches beyond the arena of the formal debate. Spenser had just used it in *The Faerie Queene*” (49). I agree with her that Joan’s characterization by Shakespeare is referencing Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, but while the warrior woman--a character sharing the virtue of Britomart and her positive representations of Queen Elizabeth--is a positive figure, I would argue that in Spenser and Shakespeare the Amazon was largely negative. Jackson states “*The Faerie Queene* contains an evil Amazon alongside its positive allusions” (51), and I would emphasize the point that Spenser’s Britomart is identified as a woman warrior while Radigund, the “evil Amazon,” is clearly depicted as the dark shadow of the warrior mayd. Shakespeare accomplishes a similar doubling by creating a sexualized, witch out of Joan--a dark opposite to the chaste heroines of the Bible.

While Joan is simultaneously labeled an Amazon and a warrior woman by her use of the “sword of Deborah” (1.2.104-5), I would argue that her use of a magic sword is not a positive allusion to warrior women like Britomart, but a tool to locate Joan’s power outside of herself, much like 5.2 when she pleads with the fiends to help her win Paris. Like Radigund, Joan uses a sword not a spear, and her dubious chastity in Shakespeare’s play powers nothing. Furthermore, issues of authorship aside, Joan is shown to be a witch of the devil, not a warrior of God. While I agree with Jackson that “from the very beginning... Joan’s ideological function is complicated to the point of self-contradiction” (51) I don’t agree that the Amazonian connotation of Joan is a positive one. I believe

Kathryn Schwarz is right when she states: “images of Amazons in socially conventionalized roles locate the strange--and, indeed, the terrifying--within the familiar, resulting in the anxieties of conflation, displacement, and loss” (141). Shakespeare introduces a Joan that is both witch and Amazon, strange and terrifying, and while a charismatic enemy of the English, a very particularly female enemy. Schwarz states that this conflation of the strange within the familiar is Freud’s uncanny effect and explains that this intersection is “a collapse of opposition into conflation at the level of language itself” (141). Joan Puzel, therefore, is the witch conflated with the Amazon: Joan can find power, but that power is inevitably and always destabilizing. And as powerful as she is, Joan cannot control her fiends nor successfully defend herself against York and the English.

Much like Spenser’s Radigund, Shakespeare’s Joan has a limited existence as an Amazon. She is revealed monstrous like Radigund; Peter Saccio argued that Joan was “revealed as a sorceress, a whore, and a vixen of monstrous pretensions and ingratitude” and that “Shakespeare [was] dramatizing a common English view of her” (110). Stanton responds by emphasizing that this characterization was “not the *only* ‘English view of her’” (107) but Joan Puzel of *1 Henry VI* is left a witch, a sexualized figure, and a liar. She is then, on the surface at least, drawn as monstrous by the end of the play. Shakespeare does not provide a Joan who signs a confession under duress, but one who is pleading for her life, at the cost of her reputation--the very thing by which she moves freely and powerfully through the world--within a few lines of her capture. Her lying is intensely problematic in 5.3 despite the clear motivation to save herself from the English. Establishing Joan Puzel as a liar, Shakespeare crafts the possibility of her sexual activity,

and it is precisely this possibility that discredits her and limits her power through believable femininity regardless of her reality.

Joan's claim of pregnancy at 5.3.62-85 has prompted much debate, as it has been seen as Shakespeare's "'attempt to blacken the reputation of Joan of Arc'--an easy task in the Elizabethan period, when women 'who refuse[d] the place of silent subjection' could, like Shakespeare's Joan in Act 5, be carted to execution as witches" (Jackson 41). I would agree with Jackson that Joan's reputation is being attacked but I think Shakespeare accomplishes something far more devious. As a Saint, Joan of Arc is a woman that fights, has the blessing of God, and defies gender roles; her story is remarkable because she was a girl, but she was a girl who failed to find containment in the heterosexual hierarchy and was still successful. Her claim of pregnancy in 5.3 is a masterstroke; Shakespeare transforms her religious power into witchcraft, throws her chastity into question with her name, and questions the truthfulness of her words by having her claim righteousness after calling on fiends for help. Jackson states, "it is a reflection as much on accepted critical standards of aesthetic unity as on the gullibility of individual critics that several have read this last scene as Joan's admission of sexual activity with the whole French camp" (42). I absolutely agree that unexamined acceptance of Joan's words, "I am with child, ye bloody homicides: / Murder not then the fruit within my womb" (5.3.62-3) reveals a failure to grasp the subtleties of Joan's character, but I also think the horror of this scene is precisely that it might be true.

The pregnancy scene arrives on the heels of Joan's denial of her father, and she screams contradictory statements at the English--this rhetorically complicates her character and raises questions about her trustworthiness. Stanton claims that "upon

closer examination” these problematic scenes “actually ameliorate Joan’s stance” (107). Stanton’s approach, while exciting, especially as it consciously avoids making the same mistakes of critics in the past by simply assuming that Joan is complicitous with evil, works against the mythos of the play. Stanton first argues that Joan saves her father by denying him (108) and while this is a powerful rereading of the scene, her argument that Joan’s fiends are actually representations of natural power as used in Wicca and not devilish as found in the Christian religion (116) is less convincing. Shakespeare crafts a particularly Christian Joan who credits “Heaven” (1.2.74) and “Christ’s mother” (1.2.106) throughout the play with her supernatural power. In 5.3 when her real spirits are revealed the blocking reads “*Enter Fiends,*” and she calls to them “Now help, ye charming spells and periapts, / And ye, choice spirits that admonish me / ...Under the lordly monarch of the north” (5.3.22-7). Burns glosses “the lordly monarch of the north” as the “name for the devil derived from Isaiah” (259) and while she has appeared to be a powerful Christian throughout the play, Shakespeare destroys the mystery of her character by revealing, unabashedly, that she is a witch in league with devilish fiends. The problem that I think Stanton explicates brilliantly is that so long as Joan is working within the Christian mythos she is trapped by historically patriarchal Catholicism. The only solution for saving her character in Shakespeare’s play is to imagine her as non-Christian; however, Shakespeare presents a solidly Christian world with a Joan powered by the Devil.

Her abandonment of her father, then, still shows a Joan that lies, even if she is saving his life. She is mad with power as she screams at the English:

First let me tell you whom you have condemned:

Not me begotten of a shepherd swain,
But issued from the progeny of kings;
Virtuous and holy, chosen from above
By inspiration of celestial grace
To work exceeding miracles on earth.
I never had to do with wicked spirits;
But you, that are polluted with your lusts,
Stained with the guiltless blood of innocents,
Corrupt and tainted with a thousand vices,
Because you want the grace that others have,
You judge it straight a thing impossible
To compass wonders but by help of devils.
No--misconceived, Joan of Aire hath been
A virgin from her tender infancy,
Chaste and immaculate in very thought,
Whose maiden-blood, thus rigorously effused,
Will cry for vengeance at the gates of heaven (5.2.34-53).

Only one scene before Joan is shown begging the fiends to help her as they walk away, despite her offerings of blood and body (5.3.35-42). When she yells at the English then, “You judge it straight a thing impossible / To compass wonders but by help of devils” (5.3.47-8), the audience knows that she is lying, claiming supernatural powers from God having just communed with the devil a moment ago. Her powerful critique of the English is subverted by her own claims of righteousness proving the domination of York,

and through him the domination of the English male.

Burns reads this scene as unique: “She asks ‘this once’, emphasizing that this is a unique and exceptional request” (38), but I disagree, arguing instead that Joan’s “this once” is a joke. As a female and, therefore, weaker than her male counterparts, the reader and Renaissance audience would recognize Joan had help from her fiends multiple times throughout the play. When Joan pleads with the fiends onstage she is seen as a needful enchantress who is powerless without her demonic help. Her powers of witchcraft are kept carefully regulated through the English capture and punishment of her.

As Joan proclaims her virginity since birth throughout the play, but most heatedly and recently in 5.2, her simultaneous claim of righteousness raises serious questions about all other claims. She clearly lied, or was somehow madly mistaken, about her dealings with God and so when she claims first virginity and then pregnancy there is an awful sort of tension as the reader or watcher of the play is left unsure of Joan’s sexual state. On the one hand, perhaps Shakespeare never intended for her words to be taken seriously; as Robert Ornstein states, “To save herself from execution, Joan declares herself pregnant by Reignier, Margaret’s father. But one would hardly expect an audience to make much of this accusation when Joan previously accuses the Dauphin and Alencon of being her paramours” (41). Joan’s claims, then, are a plea for her life, and this would certainly absolve the English of so viciously executing a pregnant woman while laughing at her words. However, because Joan is a witch and not a saint, virginity would not necessarily be a requirement for her power as she isn’t powered by the Christian God but the Christian Devil in Shakespeare’s play, and this means, I think, that it is as likely she is pregnant, as she isn’t. The real brilliance, however, is that it doesn’t

matter.

Whether she is pregnant or not, Shakespeare has crafted the possibility of pregnancy and successfully reintroduced the possibility of heterosexual domination back into Joan's character. Furthermore, when placed on the heels of her defeat by York, she is successfully dominated by a male and rendered believably feminine. When York enters after she loses her power, he immediately recognizes his victory: "Damsel of France, I think I have you fast. / Unchain your spirits now with spelling charms / And try if they can gain your liberty" (5.2.51-3). Once captured York shows her ugliness, the enchanted beauty falling from her face to reveal a hideous witch once more: "A goodly prize, fit for the devil's grace. / See how the ugly witch doth bend her brows / As if, with Circe, she would change my shape" (5.2.54-6). Joan's spite, "Changed to a worsen shape thou canst not be" (5.2.57) toward York, an anger yet to be hinted at in the play and her easy defeat by the superior male figure serves the obvious purpose--the female warrior-witch is defeated and subdued by the male hero and her defeat is recognized as always inevitable.

The issue of Joan's witchcraft also argues for a Joan Puzel who is something of a succubus. Gabriele Bernhard Jackson says that the three women of the play "have been seen as a trio of temptresses" (47) and Joan, with her talk of military victories and God-imbued power, tempts Charles VII into not only giving her leave to command the army, but to follow her advice, essentially making her the most powerful person in France while granting him national invincibility; even her beauty is false having been granted to her before the start of the play. Joan tells the Dolphin, "whereas I was black and swart before,/ With those clear rays which she infused on me,/ That beauty am I blest with,

which you may see” (1.2.84-6), but her beauty is revealed to come from witchcraft and not the Christian God. This deceitfulness of appearance seems a form of seduction which, especially when placed alongside her dealings with the fiends, places her in the same mythical neighborhood as two other famous witches: Circe and Medea.

Joan is likened to Circe by York following his defeat of her in combat (5.2.56) and while I think an argument could certainly be made that she has France under her control through Charles much like Circe takes control of Odysseus’s men, a more interesting parallel is made between Joan and Medea. Medea, filled with Aphrodite’s love, is unconditionally loyal to Jason at the expense of her family, her country, and her children. She denies her father, is complicitous in her brother’s death, and, after being used by Jason to gain the Golden Fleece and exacting revenge on his own family, she is abandoned for more attractive prospects and left an exile in Greece. Jason tells her that “he had always known how uncontrolled her spirit was” (176). In similar fashion Joan is charged by powers outside herself to aid France encompassed in the bodies of Charles VII, Reignier, and Alencon. It is her power that lifts the siege of Orleans and turns the tide of the war. Following the victory at Orleans, Charles praises Joan, saying, “’Tis Joan, not we, by whom the day is won” (1.5.56), promising her sainthood and celebration of her life when she is dead. This profusion of praise is eerily similar to Jason’s promises following Medea’s treachery of her father: “Never by night and never by day will I forget you” (172), and while Medea’s is a sexual love for Jason, Joan’s love of France, and Charles, is recreated with the plausibility of sexual relations by Shakespeare.

Joan’s praise, like Medea’s, is short lived. As she steadily gains more power over Charles and France, the noble males in control, like Alencon, push back against her,

turning her failures into proof of her unsuitability. After the English win a victory in 2.1 with a surprise attack, Charles is furious with Joan, saying, “Is this thy cunning, thou deceitful dame?” (2.1.50) and Alencon implies the fault belongs to Joan and Charles, intimating that everyone was not where they should have been, nor as watchful. Alencon states, “Had all your quarters been as safely kept / As that whereof I had the government, / We had not been thus shamefully surprised” (2.1.63-5), and Charles replies, “And for myself, most part of all this night / Within her quarter and mine own precinct / I was employed in passing to and fro / About relieving of the sentinels” (2.1.65-70). Alencon’s subtle blame and Charles’s quick accusation of Joan also demonstrates how insecure her position has always been; while she was accepted as a miracle worker so long as she was acquiring power and land for Charles and the French nobility, the surprise attack by the English Joan’s precarious position reveals the precariousness of her position. She is a treasured object of the French and not a valued soldier; her growing power and popularity within the French camp makes her a threat to the nobles, and Alencon uses her first loss to discredit her, attacking her virginity and her supernatural power. Furthermore, this scene hints at the possibility of sexual activity between Charles and Joan, as he was “within her quarter and mine own precinct.” Burns glosses this scene by stating that the dialogue continues “the vein of sexual innuendo set up by the other characters’ suspicion that Joan and the Dolphin have been sleeping together” (167). Reading this as a proof of sexual relations between Joan and the Dolphin, Joan becomes very like Medea--drawn to a man by supernatural forces, she is first used for her power, and then abandoned for his own personal gain.

Such a pairing by Shakespeare further lessens the religious historicity of Joan of

Arc; Medea is a problematic character in Greek mythology in part because she murders her children for revenge, but more so because she is so powerful. Likening Joan cements her place as a witch and not a saint, but also further problematizes her character by making everything she says unbelievable. If she has lied about her virginity, and she has lied about her power, then she is no hero rallying France to victory, but a deceitful witch.

Here the final associations of Joan of Arc and Christendom are destroyed. “The representation of Joan is thus ideologically useful in that it clarifies categorical and hierarchical structures by defining her against them” (Schwarz 145). As a witch, an Amazon, and a warrior of France, she is slowly destroyed in a symbol of English domination over the French and male domination of the female. Schwarz states that in the *Henry VI* plays, “the consolidation of power is marked by a movement of monstrous female agency from margin to center, a movement that begins with the claim that the enemy is an Amazon” (141). Schwarz goes on to say that women “destabilize male privilege through their appropriation of masculinity; at the same time, women sap male potency through their association with the feminized French” (142). Joan’s defeat of Charles in a duel disrupts the gender hierarchy, but her destruction by first York and then the English male court reestablishes order, power, and her believable femininity as a female in submission.

Saint Joan

Bernard Shaw, writing three hundred years later in the glow of her canonization, also crafts a Joan that is heterosexual, though not monstrous. His Joan is gently romantic in her hopes for France and her gentle love of Dunois. Like Shakespeare, though,

Shaw locates Joan's power outside of herself, proving her position as a Saint by making her wholly a tool of her god. Rather than rework Joan's power into something she achieved through evil means, he removes her agency entirely and reworks her without power of her own and "discovers a potential heterosexuality behind the veil of Joan's adolescent androgyny" (Astell 151). In Shaw's play, Joan of Arc becomes the Madonna reborn--a woman of God who is dictated by the patriarchal hierarchy and holds no power of her own. De Beauvoir states that, "the countenance of the Mother of Christ is framed in glory" (171) and that "since the appearance of Christianity the figure of woman has obviously been spiritualized" (177). This spiritualization, however, has been a glorifying of the maternal that maintains Woman as Other. Shaw failed to depict Joan with subjectivity when he chose to represent Joan as the vaunted maternal, an image supported by her wish to suckle Dunois (188). Blessed, noble, and maternal, Shaw's Joan is nonetheless powerless. While Shakespeare has her carving a bloody swath, Shaw doesn't even let her swing her magical sword. Even though Shaw attempts to maintain Joan's autonomy and individualized power, by recreating her so completely as an agent of the male Christian God who cannot fight despite her armor and sword, she is maintained within believable femininity as ultimately weaker than the men around her.

Shaw's Joan is almost obsequious in her treatment of the French nobility and her recognition of the Catholic Church. When she first meets Charles VII, the dramatic blocking has her "turning quickly, overwhelmed with emotion" as she exclaims: "Oh, my lord!" then falling "on both knees before him, with bowed head, not daring to look up" (168). She tells Charles, "My lord: I am only a poor country girl; and you are filled with the blessedness and glory of God Himself; but you will touch me with your hand, and

give me your blessing, won't you?" (168). An interesting power dynamic is created in this first visit: when Charles tells Joan of his political battles, Joan asks him, "Art afraid?" and Charles replies, "Yes: I am afraid. It's no use preaching to me about it. It's all very well for these big men with their armor that is too heavy for me, and their swords that I can hardly lift, and their muscle and their shouting and their bad tempers" (169-70). Charles is immediately revealed to be the weaker male, the effeminate man whom Joan must teach to be a "man."

But despite Joan's attempts at androgyny, the play continuously draws attention to her femininity; she is clearly recognized as The Maid in Shaw's dramatization, and must tell the men around her that she doesn't want to be thought of as a woman. After telling Dunois that she does "not want to be thought of as a woman. I will not dress as a woman" (175), Dunois replies "I welcome you as a saint, not as a soldier." Joan tells him "I am a servant of God. My sword is sacred: I found it behind the altar in the church of St. Catherine, where God hid it for me; and I may not strike a blow with it. My heart is full of courage, not of anger" (175). Dunois attempts to placate Joan in identifying her as a Saint not realizing he is still setting her apart from his soldiers. Joan's response isn't a defense, as she cannot be a soldier--she literally cannot fight.

When King Arthur found his magical sword, he did rule with the grace of God, but he didn't do so passively. To turn Joan into a figurehead, a leader who cannot act, a general who cannot fight, emphasizes her passiveness in the play; historically, action and domination have been considered male characteristics, and passiveness and submission female. By making it impossible for Joan to use her sword, she is more of a mascot for the soldiers than a soldier herself. Johan Huizinga praises Shaw's representation of Joan,

stating, “Shaw, in whose hands Caesar and ‘the man of destiny’ grew small and foolish, has now experienced the power of the heroic, and whether he would or no, has written in the humble service of his incomparable subject” (85). Joan is, without a doubt, heroic in Shaw’s dramatization, but she is also, without a doubt, feminine.

Shaw creates the hint of a romance between Dunois and Joan; in Scene III after the wind changes, Joan “bursting into tears and flinging her arms round Dunois, kissing him on both cheeks” says, “Dunois, dear comrade in arms, help me” (176). In Scene V when Dunois asks Joan if she is angry she tells him, “No: not with you. I wish you were one of the village babies.” (188). When Dunois asks “Why?” Joan tells him, “I could nurse you for awhile” (188). Dunois immediately replies, “You are a bit of a woman after all” and Joan quickly counters saying, “No: not a bit: I am a soldier and nothing else. Soldiers always nurse children when they get a chance” (188). Dunois replies with kind hearted laughter (188). In the Epilogue when Joan’s spirit appears to Charles while he’s sleeping, Dunois also appears; Joan asks him, “Wert thou God’s captain to thy death?” and Dunois replies, “I am not dead. My body is very comfortably asleep in my bed at Chateaudun; but my spirit is called here by yours” (221). While these scenes could be read as evidence of a strong friendship only, the possibility of a heterosexual romance between Joan and Dunois emphasizes Joan’s role as a woman fighting alongside the masculine Dunois. Astell argues that “Shaw represents Joan as an early feminist and overlooks entirely Joan’s statements that she had excelled at womanly household tasks, such as weaving, and that she had dressed as a man not only for practical reasons but also out of obedience to God’s command” (150). I would argue also that in his attempts to present an androgynous or manly Joan, Shaw succeeded only in emphasizing her

femininity. This is encapsulated in Joan's failure to recognize the disaster of Paris.

Before the assault on Paris, it is Dunois whose knowledge of war proves superior to Joan's, and it is revealed that without Dunois--despite her blessings from God--Joan would not have been victorious at all. In Scene V, Dunois states:

I know how many lives any move of mine will cost; and if the move is worth the cost I make it and pay the cost. But Joan never counts the cost at all: she goes ahead and trusts to God: she thinks she has God in her pocket. Up to now she has had the numbers on her side; and she has won. But I know Joan; and I see that some day she will go ahead when she has only ten men to do the work of a hundred. And then she will find that God is on the side of the big battalions. She will be taken by the enemy (192).

Through this speech Shaw downgrades Joan, however unintentionally from a soldier and a general, to an inspiration. She rallies the men and leads them to victory, but she would have no victory if Dunois and the others were not with her; she can have no victory no matter how much God is with her.

From a theoretical perspective, this scene illustrates Joan's pride and it is at this moment that she falls into tragedy; grown proud with her victories, Joan pushes onward toward Paris despite the warnings of her generals and her king. Her capture leaves her caught between the immovable forces of the Church and the State. This scene is more than a revelation of Joan's tragic flaw, however; this scene is the moment when Joan is unequivocally rendered believably feminine by Shaw.

Where Dunois does not sexually dominate Joan, he mentally dominates her; despite his love for her, despite his faith in her, he is still shown as a better strategist and

unwilling to risk the life of his men if her bravery gets her captured by the English: “the day when the enemy finds out that she is as vulnerable as I am and not a bit more invincible, she will not be worth the life of a single soldier to us; and I will not risk that life, much as I cherish her as a companion-in-arms” (193). Joan, even though she is a Saint in Shaw’s play, is still portrayed as foolish in this scene. She is naïve and her lack of knowledge of war effeminates her in yet another striking contrast to Dunois’ masculinity. At the end of Shaw’s play Joan is favored by God, but she isn’t the strongest, or the smartest, of the men she encounters; Shaw fails at creating an androgynous Joan because he so completely creates a believably feminine Joan.

Perhaps part of the problem is that Shaw saw Joan as “the sort of woman that wants to lead a man’s life” (“Preface” 20). For Shaw, despite his admirable intentions of creating a strong Joan and his feminist beliefs, Joan is still a woman, and the life a soldier is still very much that of a man’s. He crafts first a woman, then places her in situations with men instead of writing a Joan who is both strong and aggressive while still maintaining her faith and wisdom.

Joan of Arc is not a simple character; the tension between the historical figure and the literary myth is constantly exacerbated by the requirement placed on her by believable femininity to be dominated by at least one man. In an attempt to make her heroic, relatable, and believable, Shakespeare, Shaw, and Cohen sexualize and dominate her because her tragedy *as a woman* defines her myth. Both Shakespeare and Shaw locate Joan’s power outside of her; in Shakespeare her power comes from the devil and in Shaw it comes from God, but in both cases the majesty of Joan of Arc is something bestowed, not something inherent. Shakespeare trades in her virginal proclamations

for witchcraft and monstrous sexuality, but Shaw succeeds only in defining her power as naïve and patriarchal. Neither presents a Joan of Arc who possesses subjectivity, wisdom, and skill.

If she is allowed to be virginal, then she is still longing for a heterosexual relationship in suicidal ways; if her sexuality is called into question, it is, as with Shakespeare, proof not of the depth of her character but of her lies. Stanton's argument for a Wiccan Joan is the first to attempt to remythologize her as non-Christian, to imagine her power outside the bounds of the patriarchal Christian God. The possibilities explored by Stanton allow for a Joan that represents one of the best possibilities for female heroism, but the requirement that a female hero undertakes the double quest, the husband quest and her hero quest, has proven stifling to the textual imaginations of Joan's character. While she represents, in some very important ways, the possibility of a female hero whose heroism is truly asexual, male authors seem to be capable of constructing her as always only lonely and tired of the war, wishing she had a wedding dress or something white like she had before.

CHAPTER 5

WONDER WOMAN: BELIEVABLE FEMININITY AND THE SUPERHERO

Wonder Woman is a paradox in modern popular culture--she is an iconic figure of female empowerment, a figurehead for *Ms. Magazine*, and the necessary third of DC Comics's power trinity alongside Superman and the Batman. However, despite her fame and status as the best-selling female superhero, Wonder Woman remains to a large part of the readership no more than the "token female." While Wonder Woman is, theoretically, supposed to maintain the third leg of the superhero triangle, her unique characterization and literary identity is constantly vacillating. A few lone stories such as *A League of One* and *Infinite Crisis* have toyed with the idea of a Wonder Woman who is physically and mentally superior to Superman and Batman, but despite the incredible subjectivity and power attributed to her character in these stories, Wonder Woman remains an underdeveloped and underutilized superhero ideal. The requirement of believable femininity that she be dominated by a male stifles her power and leaves Wonder Woman shallow and uninteresting.

The question of what is Wonder Woman, then, remains a constant associate of any serious discussion of her mythos. In June of 2011, Wonder Woman finally received a costume change, and her identity was completely recreated along with her outfit. From the famous star-spangled swimsuit she was regressed in age to eighteen, given amnesia, a new history, and a pair of pants. Her new outfit consists of a biker jacket, a halter top, and black leather pants. Whereas before she hailed from Themiscyra, a paradise ruled by the benevolent Amazons and raised by her loving mother, Hippolyta, the new Wonder Woman arrives as a baby after Paradise Island is destroyed, a move that makes her "an

exact copy of Superman” according to Gloria Steinem (Zehner). The outfit change, on its own, would seem less egregious without the age and background change along with it. The choice to have Diana born of violence instead of growing up in peace, and to return her character to her teen years seems like a move to make her more “relatable” through lessening her stature, wisdom, and power, instead of continuing to struggle with the very real problem of creating a female superhero who doesn’t want or need to be dominated or protected by a Superman.

This is isn’t the first revamp for Diana Prince; in 1968, Wonder Woman lost her powers until *Ms. Magazine* lobbied for their reinstatement. J. Michael Straczynski, the newest writer and mastermind behind Wonder Woman’s pants, stated, “Wonder Woman is a strong, dynamic, vibrant character who should be selling in the top 20, and I’m going to do all I can to get her there” (Whittle). Wonder Woman’s lack of capitalist success is directly related to her contradictory existence; Straczynski’s decision to sell her comic book also destroys her independence and power. Steinem states the problems with this character change beautifully:

As in the late ’60s when Wonder Woman creators took away all her magical powers—and would have perished along with them, had not *Ms. Magazine* come to the rescue with a lobbying campaign to restore them—I wouldn’t be surprised if it happens again. The original Wonder Woman was changing the world to fit women. This one seems changed to fit the world. (Whittle)

Straczynski isn’t worried about preserving the character of Wonder Woman, only changing that character so that it is more palatable for the mass market; a change necessary because modern audiences expect female characters like Wonder Woman to be

weaker, less able, and more often in need of help because of her femininity. This expectation is particular to Wonder Woman--it would never affect Superman or Batman--and while all the characters have died and had their history rewritten during the various "crisis" storylines, neither Superman nor Batman have been reduced in age, power, or ability. Straczynski seems to be admitting that Wonder Woman's character isn't selling because she is too old and too self-sufficient.

While this change has been hailed by Dan Phillips as "the beefiest and most interesting" of the three anniversary issues surrounding Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, the choice to change her costume and mythos only affirms that something is different with Wonder Woman. She is a warrior and an Ambassador of peace; she is an Amazon and a woman seeking heterosexual romantic entanglements. She is a symbol of feminist hope, and a woman designed for male readership. Following the story arc of writer Gail Simone, Wonder Woman was also an impressive figure working against the naturalizing myth of believable femininity; Simone's Wonder Woman was portrayed as having emotions and agency without a defining femininity that weakened her or made her less able. Simone's Wonder Woman simply was, and for forty-four brief issues a new idea of female superheroism was on the shelves.

But Simone's Wonder Woman was also unmanageable, and with a new set of male writers her consistently low-selling character has been reworked and weakened until what is left is young, inexperienced, and not yet at her full power: the perfect example of a believably feminine character. Prior to this change Wonder Woman's existence as a warrior precluded her existence as a woman, and this made the Wonder Woman comic books a unique place for exploring the problems of female heroism because Wonder

Woman can never find a satisfactory identity until her status as superhero and woman is resolved. Believable femininity requires that Wonder Woman is only a woman if textual markers like her domination render her as such; however, because she is a superhero--a figure with inhuman strength, speed, and ability--her credibility is destroyed if she is shown constantly defeated by every male character she faces. As a superhero her power, agency, and characterization is directly challenged by the requirement of believable femininity. The writers of Wonder Woman have dealt with this paradox in two ways: her gallery of villains consists of women and emasculated men, removing the possibility of her confrontation with patriarchal masculinity, and they have, on limited occasions, depicted a triumphant and powerful Wonder Woman who possesses more wisdom, insight, and physical ability than any other superhero in the DC Universe.

The jokes surrounding Wonder Woman's sexuality and the popular belief that she must end up with Superman because he is the only character depicted as physically stronger than Diana--a belief supported by Alex Ross' *Kingdom Come*--is believable femininity attempting to remodel the superhero into the proper confines of contemporary Western's idea of "Woman." As Simone de Beauvoir succinctly states: "One is not born a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate, between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (267).

Believable femininity is the process, the way of being that creates a "woman" out of Wonder Woman. It allows her to exist in society as an Other, a construction within a construction--the woman within the superhero. Believable femininity is the presence, then, of specifically feminine traits--submissiveness, and a yearning to surrender and be

dependent on the dominant masculinity--that works in the text to create a satisfactorily feminine character. In the post-feminist world Wonder Woman is, in large part, the perfect example of believable femininity at work: she is expected to exist with all the strength of Superman and independence of the Batman while also craving and finding domination in a superior male.

Wonder Woman as Warrior

Wonder Woman was created in 1941 by William Moulton Marston as a figure to counterbalance the violence of men. According to Phil Jimenez, Marston "imagined her as a hero who could save the world from the hatreds and wars of men. She was an Amazon princess named Diana who traveled to America, bringing from her new home 'the eternal gifts of women: love and wisdom'" (6). Believable femininity is there from the beginning; Diana is a figure of femininity which happens to be a superhero, not a superhero which happens to be a woman. In recent years, Wonder Woman has doubted her mission, has even at times been accused of failure by her mother and fellow Amazons; the accusations of Wonder Woman's failure lead to her rejection of her quest followed by her attempts to reinvent herself. This is a move by DC Comics to update her mission and modernize the character. They remain unsuccessful; this original goal, along with the successful television series starring Linda Carter in 1975, has shaped Wonder Woman's character. Her mission is sexist and outdated, and yet synonymous with her cultural identity.

One graphic novel in the JLA line (Justice League of America), titled *A League of One*, reshapes the idea of Wonder Woman beautifully, but doesn't seem to have caught

on in popular canon. In *A League of One*, an ancient dragon awakes and begins terrorizing a small European town. Wonder Woman hears of this along with a prophecy that promises the dragon's defeat by the JLA and the death of all those who fight it. She systematically betrays each of her fellow superheroes to keep them safe; in a conversation that seems eerily to predate *Infinite Crisis*, Wonder Woman tells the Batman, "I'm sorry to have to do this, but there is no other way." The Batman replies, "There's always a way." Wonder Woman sees a reality that the Batman cannot accept; she sees, because of her Lasso of Truth, that the prophecy is unbreakable and unavoidable. This self-awareness matches the greatest heroes, and is enviable; it is also a constant torment for whichever character possesses it. Wonder Woman doesn't want to betray her friends; she doesn't want to die. But she sees the necessity of the actions--a moral quandary worth any philosophical treatise.

Moeller creates a Nietzschean Wonder Woman, a character that creates her own morality through her Lasso of Truth and follows it despite the apparent immorality of her actions. Nietzsche argues that the human being who decides his or her own fate is "evil" because "'evil' signifies the same as 'individual,' 'free,' 'capricious,' 'unusual,' 'unforeseen,' 'incalculable.'" (87). For Nietzsche and Wonder Woman "the free human being is immoral... because he is *determined* to depend upon himself and not the tradition" (87). Despite the pain that it causes her friends, despite their anger, Wonder Woman refuses to let them die and breaks the traditional superhero morality. The tradition is "a higher authority which one obeys, not because it commands what is *useful* to us, but because it *commands*" (87). She hurts her friends to save them.

The Batman is locked in tradition, the categorical imperative that he never kill,

and that his beliefs exist *a priori*. When he tells Wonder Woman “There’s always a way” he is refusing her solution because it doesn’t fit within his morality. As Kant states, “Everyone must admit that if a law is to have moral force... the basis of obligation must not be sought in the nature of man, or in the circumstances in the world in which he is placed, but *a priori* simply in the conceptions of pure reason” (147). Where Wonder Woman creates her morality from within herself through an unmitigated view of truth, the Batman holds his pure reason to be true, and rejects the Lasso, the fates, and Wonder Woman. But what the Batman doesn’t know is that pure reason is an impossible achievement; his biases, fueled the tragedy of his parents murder, restrict and shape his morality in the same way Superman’s upbringing as a boy scout from Kansas shapes his. The only superhero with the ability to break outside of her own perception is Wonder Woman *because* she has the Lasso of Truth and *because* she uses it on herself.

She’s proven right at the end. The dragon’s fire burns lies; any one of the other heroes, even Superman and Batman, would have perished. She is the only hero that could survive the dragon’s flame because she has ceaselessly sought self awareness. In a full page illustration Wonder Woman stands in the flames, her bracelets aglow from the fire, triumphant and “certain, utterly and completely that she has done the right thing.” This graphic novel is illustrated in rich, bold colors in a style that mocks the bright, flashy illustrations of typical superhero comics. A narrator’s voice speaks throughout the tale, introducing, commenting, and interpreting for the reader the moral of the story. The allegorical dragon and the themes of truth, morality, and friendship turn this graphic novel into a fable. Wonder Woman is drawn with a proportional body, the beauty of her face lined with weariness when she betrays her friends. The Wonder Woman created by

Moeller is the most capable of doing what must be done, regardless of the pain it causes others or herself.

The Batman's best argument criticizes Wonder Woman's interpretation of the prophecy; he tells her, "It names us all as a group, not you alone. By breaking up the league you've already defied the prophecy." Wonder Woman screams back, "NO! The JLA isn't just a collection of people! It's an ideal! An ideal any one of us can represent." Again she sees through the words of the prophecy and out thinks the Batman. In this graphic novel Wonder Woman becomes the greatest of Greek tragedians, as well as the highest form of hero. At the end of the novel Wonder Woman does die, and even though she is saved and revived by Superman, the corruption from the dragon and her betrayal of her friends changes her. As she wraps the Lasso around the dragon--the truth is the only weapon that can destroy its evil--she is transformed by the dragon's breath. The narrator tells the reader that "Diana's nerves are aflame. She can feel the dragon's poison defiling every cell in her body" but she grips the Lasso, holding on even as it burns her. She refuses to let go as "the cord of Hephaestus turn[ed] to fire in her hands ... turn[ed] against her." Fighting against the poison, the pain, and herself, Wonder Woman gathers her strength and sacrifices herself for the world:

Wonder Woman is many different things: an emissary of peace, a loyal friend, a loving daughter ... but first and always, she is an *Amazon*. A *Warrior*. And in this storm of corruption her cold warrior's heart alone stands inviolate ... Diana doesn't feel the corruption leave her body ... doesn't feel the long, spinning fall ... It is here, in the abrupt silence of the sun-dappled deep, that the prophecy is fulfilled. As her body sinks, revolving slowing into the wine-dark sea--the being

called Wonder Woman is released from the burden and promise of its life. A soul fluttering skyward ... rising in the tapering strand of bubbles that marks her passage into the dark.

When Superman streaks across the sky to her rescue, “a thunderbolt of sound and fury,” Diana’s rescue is the tragedy. She can’t die or rest because the world needs her, and as an avatar of truth she can never put down that burden. But, for one moment, she almost had peace.

Moeller’s Wonder Woman also remains unapologetic and strong until the end. When Superman tells her, “You were my friend, yet you broke faith with me. With all of us. We’re your comrades and you deceived us without remorse” Diana replies, “I did what I had to do! I didn’t do it out of pride.” Superman finally forgives her but begs, “never force such a choice upon me again. Promise me!” and Wonder Woman stands firm: “The League is my family Superman. I’ll do what I must to protect it. That is the only promise I can give. Take it or leave it.” Wonder Woman’s words end the story holding her in the place of righteousness at the end of this fable. *A League of One* is still the most powerful representation of Wonder Woman’s subjectivity, courage, and heroism.

This version of Wonder Woman, however, seems locked in the pages of the graphic novel and the few who read it; this version of her, a hero more self-aware and powerful than either Superman or the Batman, fails to shape her current storyline or to catch the interest of movie studios.

Much of the problem might be the sexist nature of Hollywood. Much of the problem might also be that Wonder Woman has had farther to travel than either

Superman or the Batman. In the early issues, William Marston promoted a less than subtle message of women's dominance through Wonder Woman to the "patriarch's world" as Marston puts it. She was unlike any heroine that had come before and infinitely more frightening. Marston was an unconventional man. His wife and mistress both lived with him and continued to live with each other after his death; he freely admitted that only by submitting to the loving domination of women could men be happy (Greenberger 17). Wonder Woman was an attempt to spread "psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who should, I believe, rule the world," (Greenberger 18). Her golden lasso was often depicted in scenes of bondage tying herself up or others. In remembering and discussing Marston's legacy, Greenberger claims, "Marston had created a cultural juggernaut ... William Moulton Marston attempted to change the world and did just that ... his philosophies and theories on the human condition reaching a far greater audience than any academic textbook could ever hope to" (18). Wonder Woman is instantly recognizable in America and elsewhere. But, as Mitra Emad points out, "Wonder Woman is forever being tied up, bound with ropes and chains, and tortured, as well as rescuing other women from the same scenarios with her famous golden lasso" (981). This is the problem with Marston's "cultural juggernaut." Marston's goals, while well intentioned, were nonetheless opposite of what Wonder Woman has grown to represent; Marston created a Wonder Woman constantly in bondage or instigating bondage--a view he held very personally to be positive. But Wonder Woman is more than one man's view--even her creator's. That Emad would still see only the bondage imagery in Wonder Woman's lasso shows that she has not come as far as a character as one might think.

I agree with Greenberger that Marston changed the landscape of popular culture, and presented the first heroine of her kind. But the birth of Wonder Woman and her early stories have limited her growth in ways no male superhero has faced. The Batman began a happy hero. He was farcical in the 1968 television series starring Adam West, and yet when Frank Miller penned *The Dark Night Returns* and effectively rewrote the Batman mythos, neither readers, writers, nor fans looked back. Wonder Woman, however, has never seemed to shake her position as a Woman in patriarch's world. Believable femininity will not allow it--Wonder Woman might be the best and most present threat to ideas of compulsory heterosexuality in popular culture, but her mythos seems locked in a battle with the myth of believable femininity. DC Comics own writers personify this battle in their conflicting stories.

In 2005, DC Comics began the build up to their remythologizing release, *Infinite Crisis*. Like the "crisis" stories before it, *Infinite Crisis* reset the DC Universe killing some characters while reshaping others. The events leading up to this seven-issue series rocked the comic book world as wives were raped and murdered, superheroes destroyed, and Wonder Woman revealed to be a killer. The events of the graphic novel, *Mission's End*, the compilation of *Wonder Woman #218-226*, alongside *Sacrifice*, the compilation of *Superman #218-220*, *Adventures of Superman #442-3*, and *Action Comics #829*, detailed the story of Superman's defeat by the villain Max Lord and his subsequent forced attack on both Batman and Wonder Woman.

Max Lord gained control of Superman's mind and convinced him that Batman was Brainiac, a fiendish villain in the Superman canon, attacking Lois Lane; Superman would have killed Batman if Wonder Woman had not arrived in time. Before the Justice

League could secure Superman, he attacked again, and Wonder Woman went after him. This fight is the first time readers have seen Wonder Woman and Superman use their full powers against each other; even though Wonder Woman is badly wounded, she fights Superman to a stand-still. Never before had the full extent of her power been seen-- Superman is more powerful than a nuclear bomb, and while he is stronger, perhaps even tougher than Wonder Woman, she is the better warrior. Her strategy allows her to be the victor despite his having superior force. The climax of the battle comes when Wonder Woman distracts Superman long enough to find Max Lord; getting the Lasso of Truth around him, she forces him to relinquish his control of Superman and demands that he never do so again. Wonder Woman says to Lord, "You will tell me how to free him from your control." Max Lord replies, "KILL ME." (*Mission's End*). The Lasso of Truth has always been accepted within the DC universe as trustworthy. This is reconfirmed by Max Lord's earlier words, "You think I've lied but I haven't. I CAN'T" (*Mission's End*). The next panel shows Wonder Woman's face as her eyes bore into Max Lord, her hands on both sides of his face. Without a word, she snaps his neck.

Superman is horrified, Batman is disgusted. Both are the voice of superhero *a priori* morality telling Wonder Woman she failed, that she should have found another way. During a fight Wonder Woman tells the both of them, "That maniac murdered Ted Kord, and he was going to use you [Superman] to do the same to Bruce. There was no choice." Batman growls back, "There's always a choice for people like us," and Wonder Woman immediately replies, "No, there isn't. Sometimes there is no other choice" (*Infinite Crisis*). Almost a carbon copy of *A League of One*, the Batman demands Wonder Woman accept his morality, but Wonder Woman rejects it as the more aware

and more moral of the two.

Superman and Batman lack the necessary self-awareness to examine and critique their own actions; just as with the dragon, Wonder Woman is the only hero who doesn't lie to herself. Jeph Loeb and Tom Morris encapsulate Superman and Batman's fears stating, "what was once completely unacceptable can quickly come to seem unfortunately necessary, however regrettable, and ultimately even perfectly fine, as you move forward more deeply into new territory" (18). However, Wonder Woman never becomes comfortable with her decision; rather, she sees the necessity of the action instead of the absolutist morality that demands another way. The fear of superheroes abusing their power is a real one; as Mike Alsford claims, "the truly heroic mode of engagement with the world, with the other, is one in which the other always presents one with an ethical responsibility irrespective of the ways in which that other might confront us" (37). Wonder Woman's actions prove that the danger is not only in becoming too comfortable with her powers, but also in being afraid to use them. Her ethical responsibility not to abuse her power is challenged by her ethical responsibility to protect. As a warrior and an Amazon she is not afraid to use lethal force and that bravery saves Superman, Batman, and the world. As Loeb and Morris explain, "Many of us fear what we may have to do to stand up to the evil in the world...but they [superheroes] know where to draw the line" (17). Superman and Batman punish Wonder Woman for her choice, believing she crossed that line, but I believe their fear is only of themselves. They convince themselves that if Wonder Woman becomes a killer it threatens the entire fabric of superhero morality, but the refusal to accept Wonder Woman's actions shows only the destabilization of their patriarchy through her actions. She is a better hero and a better

person than either of them, and their horror at her actions is only horror at themselves.

Wonder Woman is completely correct in her decision to kill Lord. Lord controlled Superman's mind--a control that could not be undone or guarded against. The proof of this is in the Lasso; especially when this story is read in the context of *A League of One*, it becomes clear that Wonder Woman recognizes the requirements of being a superhero more effectively than the Batman or Superman. She sees that to be able to direct Superman's actions is to be able to destroy the world, and that Max Lord would not stop, would never quit. The Lasso confirmed it; when Max Lord told Wonder Woman the only solution was to kill him, he wasn't being hyperbolic. He was telling the truth; he had to tell the truth. Wonder Woman's decision to choose to kill defines her as a warrior--a title that doesn't apply to either Superman or the Batman.

This is the most graphic representation of Wonder Woman's paradoxical existence, but previous to *Infinite Crisis* what being a warrior meant for Wonder Woman's character and her sense of morality and ethicality, the two most defining characteristics of any superhero, was unclear. Wonder Woman's decision to do what she must, a decision not colored by hate or revenge (as with the Batman) or a naiveté about the world (as with Superman), finally provided her with an originality and uniqueness of character that had heretofore been discussed but never shown. She was a warrior first, and it is through that complete faith to a necessary violence that Wonder Woman finds her strength and superhero status; this story line uses Wonder Woman to open a door that considers a new superhero morality and ethicality. This new morality owes nothing to gender biases, but instead raises Wonder Woman up as one of the most wise, brave, and strong characters of the DC universe. It also granted her absolute independence and

freedom from the patriarchy previously created by the Batman/Superman duo; it was, no doubt, an unintentional patriarchy, but the storylines of the Batman and Superman continuously presented them as superior to Wonder Woman in strength, heroics, and thought. This maintained her submissive position.

While anti-heroes like The Punisher explore the horrors of revenge and death, Wonder Woman's choice to kill Max Lord explores the mortal threat of some villains; they will never stop; the world will, literally, never be safe. This is a necessary part of the philosophical discussion surrounding superhero ethics and morality, and to have it explored through Wonder Woman, to present Wonder Woman as the ultimate warrior, renders the conversation gender neutral. It would have been a legendary moment in comics, if the writers had just let it be.

Wonder Woman as Murderer?

Everything changed with *Infinite Crisis*, and then, disappointedly, changed back. Allan Heinberg wrote the following storyline--*Who is Wonder Woman?*--a five-issue run that brought Wonder Woman back to the world as a superhero following her self-imposed exile after the events of *Infinite Crisis*. Heinberg's Wonder Woman questions her decision to kill Lord, but ultimately accepts it. In a moment of reconciliation with Batman, he asks her "So, killing Maxwell Lord was a mistake?" and when Diana replies, "Some people think so" Batman merely asks "What do you think?" Heinberg's choice to present a Batman that accepts Wonder Woman's judgment of her actions is an interesting one that promotes an evolution in the Batman's character along with Wonder Woman's. By the end of the graphic novel, Wonder Woman has faced and defeated Hercules--her

mother's rapist--and reclaimed her role as a superhero. She asks the government agent Nemesis if he thinks she could kill again, and he tells her, "In our line of work? You never know." Wonder Woman's neither agrees nor disagrees with his assessment, saying only, "Which is why Steel doesn't trust me." By the end, Wonder Woman is shown as critical of her decisions, but accepting of the necessity. She is crafted as a warrior and a hero. The next graphic collection, however, destroys all of that.

Jodi Picoult, writing issues #6-10 following the Max Lord/*Infinite Crisis* plot line, gave the readers a Wonder Woman who submitted to Batman and Superman; she agreed that she shouldn't have killed Lord. While fighting a resurrected Hippolyta, her mother, Diana says, "Once before I took a single life to save millions. I convinced myself it was the right thing to do. But even one life is too many" (*Love and Murder*). This move completely removes Wonder Woman's power and independence, demonstrating her weakness and immorality as compared to the Batman and Superman. This wasn't a simple moment of they were right, she was wrong, but was, rather, a surrendering of Wonder Woman's autonomy to the world view of Superman and the Batman.

This representation of Wonder Woman's strength followed quickly by its chastisement and reinscription in the Superman/Batman patriarchy keeps Wonder Woman under control. The *Infinite Crisis* plot line depicts Wonder Woman rescuing the Batman from Superman and then Superman from Max Lord; this grants her the mental and physical fortitude rarely attributed female characters, warrior or otherwise. Picoult's abdication of that power back to Superman and the Batman keeps Wonder Woman safely within the bounds of classic gender roles, and preserves the character of Wonder Woman for future, more easily gender-qualified story lines.

I am certainly not maintaining that Picoult meant to pen a patriarchal story or in any way diminish the power of Wonder Woman, but I think that she did is proof of believable femininity vying for Wonder Woman's character. As Barthes says, myth cannot be destroyed (135). When believable femininity is challenged by an imagining of Wonder Woman outside of its prescriptions it pushes back to reshape the myth. Picoult, no doubt, meant to comment only on the problems of using power to kill and the blurring of moral lines, but what is shown through this story is her incredible lack of understanding of Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman doesn't murder and she doesn't compromise her morals; rather, as a warrior she represents the code of a warrior, not the code of a pacifist. This is something easily overlooked; often in superhero tales there is a line drawn between those that kill, and those that don't--heroes and anti-heroes. But Wonder Woman is a more complex character who recognizes that, while a superhero should never abuse her power or kill a criminal who has broken a law, when fighting for self-defense sometimes it is kill or be killed. In the case of Max Lord it was self-defense, and world-defense. She is a genderless *ubermensch*.

Wonder Woman's easily acknowledged error as written by Picoult and others fulfills the second factor of believable femininity. She is often depicted as less fortified mentally than the Batman or Superman, and in constant need of their guidance and support. Barring a heterosexual romance, the yearning for domination is depicted in the case of Wonder Woman by Superman's superior morality and the Batman's superior reasoning skills; her yearning is her need for their guidance and support.

Much like her mother Hippolyta in the representations of Christine, Shakespeare, and DC Comics, Wonder Woman can be a warrior and a woman, but she cannot be both

at the same time. Believable femininity requires the possibility of Wonder Woman's defeat by a stronger male figure to lurk in the background of her story; Wonder Woman must be a heterosexual female to remain truly believably feminine because of compulsory heterosexuality, but heterosexuality is only acceptable if her partner is stronger than she. As a goddess and an Amazon this poses particular problems; Wonder Woman is super strong, super-fast, can fly, and fight--if any of those qualities are removed or played down she ceases to be a superhero. If her male sexual partner is not stronger, faster, and a better fighter she is not fulfilling believable femininity. This is the most insidious aspect of believable femininity--not only is the idea of Western love as it has been constructed by compulsory heterosexuality necessary for women, but women can only achieve that love--or it will only appear to be natural, realistic love--if the male she loves can dominate her. Her own strength is insufficient to provide happiness, and her happiness with a man is impossible without her submission and disavowal of strength. This is why Wonder Woman is almost always imagined paired romantically with Superman.

Wonder Woman as Lover

Justice League of America issue #90 explores the possibility of a relationship between Wonder Woman and the Batman, but Wonder Woman explores her subconscious without ever talking to Batman, a decision which de-intensifies the romantic possibilities, and then decides that any relationship between the two of them is doomed. The issue ends with no resolution of the Wonder Woman/Batman flirtation that has permeated the previous 89 issues and no reference is made in the following issues to

Wonder Woman's heterosexual romantic entanglements. Why is a pairing of Wonder Woman and Superman toyed with so often, while a pairing with Batman is quickly shown unacceptable and abandoned? I would argue it is because only Superman is stronger than Wonder Woman and, therefore, appropriately fulfills the requirements of believable femininity.

So long as she exists within the universe with Superman, Wonder Woman remains believably feminine. The first requirement--that it is *possible* for her to be dominated--is fulfilled by Superman's existence. Storylines that constantly place Wonder Woman and Superman in a romantic relationship, always in the future, or the past, or an alternate timeline, maintain the possibility of Wonder Woman craving Superman's domination. In the series *Trinity*, a retelling of Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman's first meeting, Superman is awed at his first sight of Diana. In his voice over he says, "I will always remember my first sight of her. Lois, you're the most compelling woman I've ever met, but this ... is the most magnificent" (42-43). Superman and Wonder Woman are drawn to each other's strength, but that strength is always loaded in the case of Wonder Woman--especially because men without superpowers deny romantic entanglements with her precisely because she is so powerful. Wonder Woman, prior to *Infinite Crisis*, served no real purpose to the stories of Superman and Batman, but their depiction next to kept her firmly ensconced in the reader's mind as beautiful and female; their leadership and skill was superior and that meant Wonder Woman was always believably feminine.

In Alex Ross's *Kingdom Come*, the setting is the future and the superheroes are lost in a dystopian future. This story focuses on Superman as the key protagonist, but

Wonder Woman is his first lieutenant and love interest. At the height of the final battle, Wonder Woman is depicted killing, a move that earns, once again, the judgment and censure of both Superman and Batman. Wonder Woman's status as a warrior is used against her, used to prove her need to be "controlled" in much the same way that engaging in battle has historically been used against Amazons. Women who can fight, must be shown to be too bloodthirsty, too weak, and generally too ill-suited for battle to promote the necessity of their control.

In the graphic novel compilation *Rise of the Olympians*, collecting issues #26-33 after *Infinite Crisis*, Wonder Woman is forced to fight the monster Genocide--a creature built from some future form of Wonder Woman and filled with Ares's hate and power. Genocide is Wonder Woman's dark shadow brought to life, and the creature lives up to her name, massacring people at a mall, kidnapping and torturing those closest to Wonder Woman, and nearly killing Wonder Woman herself. As Wonder Woman watches the creature, defeated and powerless, fall into the deepest part of the Atlantic ocean, she says, "All I wanted was to kill that monster. To let it drown, alone, in the dark. To have my revenge. And yet I find ... I am not that person. Thank Hera, thank all the Gods" (179-80). This creature is no less dangerous than Max Lord and easily as evil, but Wonder Woman is constructed as incapable of letting her die and being glad for it.

Twenty pages later, however, Diana, now on Themyscira, charges Ares and before anyone knows what is coming, cleaves his head in two with an axe. Ares asks, "... what have you done?" and Diana replies, "I want you to know, Lord Ares ... I did not do this for vengeance. But you declared this war. And war calls to blood like a child to its mother. And whatever nightmare future you created is done" (200). Why is it

acceptable to murder Ares but not Genocide? He is a God, but she slays him; certainly Genocide, as a created monster, is less natural or human than even Ares. And the rationale presented, that Ares started the war and the war demands blood, would hold true for Genocide as well. Wonder Woman's attitudes towards violence, war, and murder seem schizophrenic, her warrior nature at odds with itself as the Wonder Woman myth vies for freedom within its own stories.

In *The Hiketeia*, a graphic novel published in 2002, the plot revolves around a young girl pursued by the Batman who pledges Hiketeia to Wonder Woman. Hiketeia, according to the graphic novel, is an ancient ritual whereby the supplicant pledges fealty and the protector accepts. Despite the Hiketeia being situated as an ancient Greek tradition, medieval themes of courtly love and Petrarchan discourse abound in the ritual itself. The young girl, Danielle, has murdered the four men who raped, drugged, and murdered her sister. When she reaches Wonder Woman, she kneels and states, "I offer myself in supplication, to you, Diana, Princess of Themyscira, I come without protection. I come without means. Without honor, without hope, with nothing but myself to beg for protection." In accepting the Hiketeia, Wonder Woman loses her subjectivity and instead becomes the object protecting Danielle. Whatever Diana's desires, they are overruled by the requirements of the Hiketeia which demands that she offer her bed, her home, and, if necessary, her life. By seeking revenge Danielle has drawn the wrath of the Batman, and in seeking Hiketeia from Wonder Woman the two are now set at odds. The authors intended to pen a modern Greek tragedy centered around Wonder Woman, but the only real tragic figure is that of Danielle--the girl who has fallen before the story starts.

What is interesting about this particular graphic novel is that the Batman,

realizing Wonder Woman has granted Hiketeia, seeks it for himself. In their first meeting, Wonder Woman and the Batman fight; when he says, “Don’t make me go through you Diana,” she replies, “You can’t go through me, Batman.” And she is right; she defeats him, knocking him off her balcony onto the wet road below. Danielle eventually runs away leaving Wonder Woman to fight the Batman again as both vie to get to the girl. In what would become the most iconic panel of the graphic novel, Wonder Woman stands with her foot on the Batman’s head. She tells him, “Don’t. Get. Up.” He waits a moment and then replies, “All right. You win.” The next panel shows Diana’s shock and before she can stop him, the Batman begins the ritual of Hiketeia.

The image of the Batman, kneeling before Wonder Woman seeking her shelter, and abasing himself is a powerful one. The ritual objectifies Diana as the Batman speaks it. Assuming an obsequious position he attempts to control Wonder Woman through his pledge of fealty, not to gain her protection. When Diana tells him, “You abuse the ritual,” he states, “I use it as your ancestors did. I use it like Lykaon and Achilles.” In a moment that should demonstrate Wonder Woman’s power, the reader is instead presented with a demented picture of the Batman abasing himself--by perverting the ritual Wonder Woman’s power is constructed as unnatural. The graphic novel makes it appear that Wonder Woman has forced the Batman into this submission by denying him justice. When Wonder Woman says, “You do not understand Hiketeia, Batman. Had I accepted you, I still would have protected Danielle.” The Batman tells her, “Yes. But you would no longer have fought me. And now... now we fight over and over for her freedom.” With the Batman there are only two options: his independence is taken from him, or he fights for his perception of justice. For the usual reader of the Batman comics, there is

relief when Wonder Woman refuses his Hiketeia, and, at first, agreement with his worldview of only two options. Danielle, unwilling to see Wonder Woman and the Batman fight to the death releases Wonder Woman from her vow and throws herself from the cliff.

Again, even though it is technically Wonder Woman's graphic novel, the reader is given not her morality, but the Batman's. True to the tragic form, Danielle is a good woman who falls through her revenge. The only option as the furies dance around her is death. *The Hiketeia* would be a moving tragedy in the Wonder Woman mythos if it didn't assume a black and white morality, an inherently Batman/Superman and thus patriarchal morality, as the correct morality. Within the world of Greek tragedies murder is not necessarily wrong--patricide, infanticide, and matricide are wrong. When Danielle sought revenge from the men who murdered her sister, under Greek rules she would have been destroyed had she not. Therefore, the story contradicts the morality it sets out for itself; Danielle and Wonder Woman are not the ones who are wrong, and who are tragic--the Batman is.

According to Paul Roche, "The theme of all tragedy is the sadness of life and the universality of evil" (xvii). I would agree with that statement, but I would argue that within the world created by *The Hiketeia*, the Batman's morality becomes an agent of evil. Danielle is bound from the moment her sister is murdered and raped to seek revenge; perhaps, she is also doomed from that moment as violence calls to violence, but she is happy under Wonder Woman's protection. She is only haunted by her demons when the Batman refuses to cease pursuit. In this way the Batman becomes a fury, a representation of Fate that carries the story to its inevitable, sad conclusion. Wonder

Woman and Danielle are not doomed by Fate herself, they are doomed by the Batman.

The graphic novel never recognizes any of its self-contradicting moralities. The choice to have Danielle throw herself from the cliff to her death supports the Batman's position that all who break the law must pay through the law, and undermines the power presented as Wonder Woman's in the story. It is one more example of Wonder Woman being wrong, and the Batman being right.

Wonder Woman on the Big Screen

Wonder Woman can't be a superhero, a goddess, and a princess if she is weak. The character she has evolved into is at odds with societal expectations of femininity. The result is a character that cannot be seen as anything but a woman--from her name down to her giant eagle bustier--but that refuses to act in believably feminine ways. The most recent Wonder Woman movie, released in 2009, is fraught with this tension. The movie begins with the Amazons fighting to free themselves from slavery, this time from Ares. Ares says to Hippolyta, "You jump in battle as you once jumped in the bedroom." The camera then pans to Ares's top warrior cutting down Amazons and Ares then thanks Hippolyta for the great warrior she gave him. "Forced on me," she snarls at him. Without hesitation Hippolyta jumps a horse, rides to the warrior, her son by Ares through rape, and cuts off his head. Within the first five minutes of the movie Hippolyta is recognized as a warrior, raped, and willing to kill her male child gotten by rape. The movie then unwinds from there, transferring the believability of the mother onto the daughter, Diana, and the using Hippolyta and the Amazons as proof and foil for the believable femininity of Diana, now Wonder Woman. Steve Trevor first catches the

Amazons bathing nude and playing in the water with a particularly childlike soundtrack, then comments on Wonder Woman's "rack." The "arming of the hero" scene shows Wonder Woman donning her costume for the first time with a close up on her bustier as she pulls the yellow "W" up in a move accentuating her cleavage.

A line is drawn here between "good" Amazons and "bad" Amazons; Wonder Woman, an excellent fighter and less capable of taking care of herself than a child, is a good Amazon because she likes "Man's World"; this, in conjunction with her dependence on Steve Trevor for day-to-day survival—she doesn't understand crosswalks, furniture, or the technology—maintains and perpetuates her believable femininity despite her incredible powers and strength while simultaneously trivializing feminism and its rhetoric. This paradox of a childlike hero is a theme that only arises in the myths of warrior women. Diana becomes believably feminine because she fights against her mother who leads women in a war against men, and her "sisters" who hate and attack Steve Trevor, the wounded war hero who accidentally lands on Themyscira, Paradise Island. Any remaining anxiety about her power is relieved by her incompetence in the world.

Wonder Woman wouldn't still be such a popular character if she were nothing more than a glorified pin-up. She embodies this paradox of warrior and believable femininity, and through her stories female readers work through their own complicated existence. The philosophical questions of morality, power, and corruption are still there, just as they are in the Superman and Batman comic books, but every representation of Wonder Woman also comments on the reality of young girls in modern Western Society; whatever Wonder Woman represents becomes the cap on what modern girls can be.

Wonder Woman is the myth of the modern warrior woman and, as Coupe says, “while the myth may be paradigmatic, and while it may imply a given social and cosmic order, or perfection, it also carries with it a promise of another mode of existence entirely, a possible way of being just beyond the present time and place. It is not only foundational but also liberating” (9). Wonder Woman, limited and liberated in parts by those who write her comic books, also limits and liberates those who are naturalized and freed by her changing myth.

It is not my intention to promote an either/or approach to superheroes, morality, or ethics. It is not a zero-sum game requiring a choice between the superiority of Wonder Woman or the Batman, Wonder Woman or Superman. Nor is it a zero-sum game requiring a choice between the superiority of women or men. Rather, my goal is present the ways that the myth of believable femininity shapes the possibilities of stories in modern popular culture. Because the female hero quest requires women find love--preferably heterosexual love--and believable femininity requires women to crave, react to, and find domination, Wonder Woman’s mythos cannot be revised like the Batman’s or Superman’s. Until she is successfully presented without believable femininity shaping her stories, she will continue to be defined by her origin--her identity as an Amazon in the patriarch’s world. This dates Wonder Woman and limits the scope of her mythos severely.

It is worth consciously working against believable femininity because Wonder Woman can shape, in many meaningful ways, all other female heroines in popular culture. Because she was the first--the first woman with superpowers to fight on her own against male domination--she has, and still has, the trickle-down effect. If Wonder

Woman stands strong, independent, and confident despite criticism from Superman and the Batman, other female characters are accepted as standing strong, independent, and confident. If Wonder Woman is a warrior woman who obviously works against the myth of woman, believable femininity, and the female hero quest without also sacrificing her humanity in the fight against the patriarchy, every young girl that looks to her for identity, and asks “what would Wonder Woman do?” can begin to shape her own morality, ethicality, and being without answering to the myth. If Wonder Woman is allowed consistently to be a warrior and a woman, then old myths can be remythologized, and a new myth can be born.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Through an inquiry of believable femininity in warrior women I find myself with far more questions at the end of my examination than the beginning. All seem to revolve around my main questions: how has “love” been constructed in Western society for women? But, secondarily, I wonder where for warrior women and their sexuality the line is drawn between fantasy and destructive myth. Can female power and female love exist simultaneously in the same character? Where believable femininity limits ideas of female heroism, it appears to me now even more destructive to female heterosexuality. I know that a different sort of warrior woman is possible through the representations of characters such as Red Sonya, Xena, and Buffy, but the work of reclaiming female heterosexual desire and fantasy is something I cannot accomplish here. Instead, I can only begin to consider what the next step is after believable femininity through a brief survey of modern warrior women in popular culture since 1985, as well as the ways believable femininity has changed and stayed the same. I will put the warriors of the past--Britomart, Joan, and Hippolyta--in conversation with the warriors of the present--Red Sonya, Xena, and Buffy. Perhaps, once the evolution of believable femininity has been documented, the constructions of “love” can be considered.

Red Sonya, a little known barbarian movie released in 1985, is one example of a warrior woman who defies believable femininity. Starring Brigitte Nielson as the sword-wielding woman, Red Sonya takes a vow to lay with no man who cannot defeat her battle. Unless he was strong enough to defeat her, he was not strong enough to bed her. Halfway through the movie, Kalidor--the Conan reminiscent character played by Arnold

Schwarzenegger--challenges Sonya to a duel with the intention of winning her body. They fight to a standstill; both are exhausted and neither is the clear victor. And yet, after fighting beside him for the duration of the movie, the last scene shows them both lowering their swords and accepting each other as lovers without a battle.

Red Sonya is a forgotten gem that thwarts believable femininity, but its cult status makes it no less impressive. Sonya's strength is highlighted throughout the movie, and she never loses a battle. She and Kalidor are perfectly suited for each other as warriors, and the movie leaves them on an equal footing. In this way *Red Sonya* prefigures *Xena: Warrior Princess* and the latter's massive commercial success. *Red Sonya* crafts a space for a sword wielding she-demon free from believable femininity, and sets the stage a decade later for *Xena*.

Xena is widely acknowledged to have paved the way for television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and movies such as Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* or the more recent *Kick-Ass*. *Red Sonya* is an early version of *Xena*, and Wonder Woman predates them all. There is no one character, however, that destroys or perpetuates believable femininity. These characters should be seen not on a continuum, but constantly in conversation with each other. As Wonder Woman, Sonya, and Xena push against the myth of believable femininity, the myth pushes back. *Wonder Woman* and *Red Sonya* have found little commercial success and *Xena* was publicly ridiculed for its light-hearted approach.

I think *Xena* would have failed without its humor, though. Premiering in 1995, *Xena* was introduced in *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* during an episode titled, "The Warrior Princess." A warlord and a villain, Xena had been pillaging and murdering all

who came in her path until the arrival of Hercules. After she refuses to kill a baby, her army mutinies, claiming she's "gone soft." In an attempt to earn back their allegiance, she attacks Hercules with the intention of bringing back his head. Hercules defeats her, of course, and reveals to her another option for her martial skills; he tells her, "Killing isn't the only way of proving you're a warrior" ("The Gauntlet"). Xena forsakes her army, her fortune, and her marauding ways to travel the countryside protecting and helping those she comes across in a desperate attempt to make up for her sins of the past. The show has been criticized for its light treatment of history and campy nature, but as Dominic Mainon states, "*Xena* remains consistent in its attempt to create a genuinely feminist mythology based on a creative use of both fact and myth" (58). The humor of the show allowed it to straddle the genres of comedy, fantasy, and adventure. Pulling in elements of all three, the comedy deflected attention from Xena's power, and allowed the character to exist as an exaggeration and a joke. It was quickly realized by fans and critics alike, however, that *Xena* was no joke.

Xena did more to rewrite the mythology of the warrior woman than any that came before because its popularity allowed it to explode notions of what a warrior woman was. The story line of Xena eclipsed that of Hercules even though she was first presented in his show. Her quest for redemption was not a husband quest, her character was not naïve or child-like in its mentality, and Xena was sexually active without being labeled, even subtly, a whore. More widely viewed than *Red Sonya* and as well-known as Wonder Woman, Xena was a battering ram that destroyed preconceived notions of what a female hero could be.

In as much as Hercules's presence and Xena's beauty work to maintain her

believable femininity, Xena's journey, power, and heroism do far more to reshape the warrior woman myth than her believable femininity does to restrain it. Lillian Robinson states, "The wonder of the woman warrior represents recognition of achievement at what is, in any event, exception for women" (19). That Xena was imagined in the first place, let alone conceived within the patriarchal atmosphere of the Hercules myth, is amazing. That she is strong, skilled with the sword, and on a quest centered on her interiority--not her outward completion in a husband--was nearly unheard of before her. Xena forms a homosocial bond with Gabrielle, a young girl who is Xena's conscience and friend, and, while their relationship has strong homosexual overtones, Xena's heterosexual activities are highlighted in a way that prevents her sexuality from defining her. As Charlene Tung argues, "Xena is one of the recent nuanced examples of a heroine who crosses multiple boundaries ... this heroine does not need male saviors, is physically tougher than the men surrounding her, maintains a connecting to other women (Gabrielle), and does not focus on gaining male approval of desire" (99-100). Xena is sexual, powerful, heroic, and, most importantly, a representation of a human, not an Other. Yes, she is believably feminine, but her believability doesn't come at the cost of her heroism. It's a small step but an important one.

In rewriting the warrior woman myth, *Xena* showed a sexual, independent female who could outfight thirty men and outsmart a god; in the wake of Xena came Buffy, the Bride, Hit Girl, and countless other female heroes who have peppered popular culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. But, despite Xena's pioneering example and the many powerful female characters that have followed, the majority of warrior women are still shown seeking love, finding love, stumbling on love, and being

dominated by love--a heterosexual male dominant love that demands their submission. This naturalizing of feminine submission seems to argue for a world where being a woman warrior and being a woman in “love” is mutually exclusive. In Season 5, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* dealt specifically with this problem in the episode “Into the Woods.”

Buffy the Vampire Slayer debuted in 1997 on *Xena*’s heels. Joss Whedon credits *Xena* with blazing a trail for female heroes (Young) and the television series accomplished what the satirical, comedic movie *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* could not. The show was a dramatic and serious exploration of a teenage girl with supernatural powers and a life-threatening destiny. Again, *Buffy* doesn’t escape believable femininity entirely, but she is a female character on a hero quest, and it isn’t to find love, domination, or patriarchal containment. Where *Xena* is a comedic and sometimes tongue-in-cheek approach to the warrior woman figure, *Buffy* is a serious example of what female heroism could look like.

Buffy’s most believably feminine moment happens in her relationship with the character Riley Finn. Riley was the first “normal” human male *Buffy* had dated or would date in the show. In the first three seasons her main love interest was the brooding Angel, a vampire who had trouble keeping track of his soul, and by Season 6 she was involved with Spike, a vampire channeling Billy Idol. When *Buffy*’s relationship with Riley ends, it does so precisely because he is only human and neither as strong as she nor as capable of killing vampires and demons. Riley tells her, “You keep me at a distance *Buffy*. It’s about me taking care of you! It’s about letting me in so you don’t have to be on top all of the time.” *Buffy* replies, exasperated, “But I do! That’s what being a slayer is. And that’s what this is really about isn’t it. You can’t handle the fact that I’m

stronger than you.” Riley sighs, “It’s hard sometimes, yeah, but that’s not it” (“Into the Woods”). What Riley doesn’t acknowledge, however, and what the episode doesn’t seem to realize about itself is that in asking Buffy not only to open up to him but to *need* him, Riley is looking for something, anything, that will restore the stereotypical male-dominated hierarchy to their relationship and so provide him with a sense of empowerment.

Buffy rejects him, however, and an interesting duality is set up for her character. While her believable femininity is maintained through her failed relationships with men who are physically weaker, her agency and power is simultaneously highlighted through her refusal to assume a submissive role. Riley pleads for a more traditional female-needing-male relationship with Buffy, but Buffy’s status as a slayer--and the power and responsibility that come with it--removes the possibility of that tradition. Joss Whedon created a character that was a hero and a fictional woman whose desire for companionship is secondary to her mission as a slayer. Looking at love in *Buffy*, the question remains, does being a woman warrior preclude successful sexual relationships, or does it mean merely being a warrior?

In both *Buffy* and *Xena*, the strong female friendships that grow and evolve with the main character survive where heterosexual relationships do not. Sharon Ross reads these relationships as indicative of a new type of heroism. As Ross states:

The primary purpose of both *Xena* and *Buffy* is to be heroic and tough enough to fight evil forces, and because this becomes inextricable from their best friends’ purposes, Gabrielle and Willow become heroes, too ... The interdependency of these series’ titular heroines with their best friends refutes that heroes work best

alone; rather, women need other women. Second, in these series, Gabrielle and Willow shift from ‘sidekick’ status to heroes themselves, refuting a longstanding notion that female heroes are ‘exceptions to the rule’ of what women are able to do. In effect, *Xena* and *Buffy* demonstrate that many women can be tough and heroic when women come together in a supportive community. (232)

I take issue with Ross’s reading of these series because I think *Xena* and *Buffy* show not that women are most tough and heroic when encapsulated within a “supportive community” but instead that *heroes* are most effective when surrounded by friends and allies. To say that these shows show a particularly feminine idea of heroism and friendship is to say that male heroes are as incapable of community as female heroes are of power. I think Ross’s reading limits what both *Xena* and *Buffy* accomplish, which is not to present a particular type of female heroism that proves women *can* be heroes, but is instead a presentation of heroes that shows heroism is genderless. Heroes are imagined as loners not because they are literally alone, but because at the end of their journey the task of savior falls solely upon their shoulders. Like Frodo they may travel the whole way with a friend, but only the hero alone can save the world. A hero’s independence is a mental achievement, not a physical loneliness.

Ross is correct, however, that both of these shows allow for the ancillary characters to evolve into their own unique brand of heroism, which traditional presentations of male heroism rarely do. Gabrielle becomes an Amazon Queen and skilled fighter in her own right, while Willow grows into her own powerful abilities as a witch. But what I find interesting about these “sidekicks” is that their romantic entanglements, heterosexual and homosexual, steadily become more complicated as their

power increases. This would seem to argue that more than simply female heroes having difficulty balancing lover and power, modern Western notions of female love in general cannot coexist with female power. The hero's existence is often a lonely one, but male heterosexuality and "love" is made more desirable as the male gains in power. Female heterosexuality carries an inverse proportion between power and love. Like Riley, the male characters that might love a female hero are constantly perplexed and driven away when women like Buffy don't need them, but merely desire them.

One solution offered to the problem of love and power in women is what Dominique Mainon labels the fetishizing of female power. Xena in particular is indicative of a requirement of beauty in women warriors. Her opening credits are a montage of her getting dressed as the camera pans up from her feet over her leather-encased body before finally reaching her face. Most recently the movie *Kick-Ass* sparked intense debate after it featured Hit Girl, the twelve-year-old daughter of a vigilante cursing and killing her way through the movie. Hit Girl reads less like an idol of female empowerment and more like a pedophilic fantasy where sex is confused with violence. Dominique Mainon asks, "Could these portrayals actually be more of a double-edged sword, showing women as independent and powerful, yet fetishized for this display of phallic power, reduced by the male gaze to a live version of a one-sided video game character?" (xiv). Hit Girl slaughters drug dealers, mobsters, and henchmen without batting an eye, yet the movie never considers the repercussions her actions might have on her character. Where the main protagonist Kick-Ass is shown throwing up, shaking, and debating his vocation choice following Hit Girl's first appearance on screen, she is presented as a sociopath without any of the confused morality of her male counterpart.

She is Othered through her violence, even as that very same violence empowers her.

This issue of othering while empowering creates an interesting paradox for believable femininity. Especially in the case of Hit Girl, the thrill of her character--the power it represents on screen--occurs precisely because she is a girl. A young boy would be simultaneously expected and so not nearly as shocking. Hit Girl is unique on screen because she exists opposite the stereotype of passivity. Believable femininity becomes its own worst enemy with these characters. While it works to define Hit Girl, Buffy, Xena, and Wonder Woman as undeniably *woman*, that very definition simultaneously redefines possibilities for woman. Again, as Judith Butler states, "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (9). In requiring that these characters be feminine, but have the power, independence, and agency historically gendered as masculine, femininity becomes undone and the heroic attributes so long identified with the masculine become free-floating. The female body, then, is no longer defined by femininity. The myth, in attempting to ensure these characters are believably feminine, inadvertently destroys the naturalized idea of Woman as weaker, less able, and less independent from Man.

It's not a perfect destruction, of course, but the idea of a female hero as *powerful* remains, however confusing the collapse of her believable femininity and that power may be. This is why shows like *Xena* and *Buffy* were able to pave the way for an explosion of female action heroes in the early twenty-first century. As Lillian Robinson states, "What enchanted me about Wonder Woman was her physical power" (13). This power remains

despite the problem that “she’s fallen for a mortal male [Steve Trevor] and the Amazon may at any moment be eclipsed into the conventional wife and eventual mommy” (16). Xena cannot defeat Hercules, Buffy cannot date a mortal male, and Wonder Woman may or may not sacrifice her power for love and happiness in a patriarchal marriage to Steve Trevor, but the fact that they are undeniably female characters and powerful changes the possibilities for all the female heroes that follow.

As believable femininity defies recognition and notions of female heroism combat the fetishizing of female power, it is Western ideas of feminine love that remain as the next problem in the equation. Recognizing believable femininity’s presence in the history of the warrior woman makes it easy to understand why it is so prevalent in modern representations. Britomart, Radigund, Hippolyta, and Joan or Arc are indicative examples of what patriarchal writers, producers, and directors have believed would be popular, but Xena, Buffy, and Red Sonya are proof that there are creators and fans who are yearning for something greater.

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