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Feminist Issues and Gender Roles in the Wonder Woman Comics

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Z á s a d y p r o v ý p r a c o v á n í :

Závěrečná diplomová práce se bude věnovat americkému komiksu Wonder Woman. V úvodu práce studentka charakterizuje žánr komiksu, stručně nastíní jeho historii, zvolenou komiksovou postavu do tohoto kontextu zařadí a objasní její původ a výskyt v komiksech. Vysvětlí rovněž pojem superhrdina (super-hero). Dále představí feminismus, především jako formu literární teorie a kritiky (a specificky ve vztahu ke kritice komiksu) a bude definovat pojmy jako gender, maskulinita a femininita (opět především ve vztahu ke zvolenému žánru). Jádrem práce bude analýza zvolené postavy, jejich prezentací a rolí v různých příbězích, způsoby, jimiž tato postava představuje či naopak zpochybňuje a odmítá genderové stereotypy a stává se prostředkem společenské reflexe či kritiky. Studentka bude využívat především postupy feministické literární kritiky. Své vývody bude diplomantka vhodně ilustrovat primárními texty (komiksy) a konzultovat se sekundárními zdroji. Porovná rovněž komiksovou a filmovou podobu zvolené postavy. Závěrem své analýzy přehledně shrne a vysloví obecnější závěry o způsobu zobrazení problematiky genderu, genderových rolí a společenských otázek v postavě Wonder Woman.

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ANNOTATION

The paper analyzes the Wonder Woman comics in terms of feminism and gender roles. The comics are examined from the viewpoint of the feminist literary criticism in several aspects, themes of war and mythology, bondage, her appearance, origin, and characters. It also studies its further development in the Silver, Bronze and Modern Age of comic books.

KEYWORDS

comics, gender, feminism, femininity, masculinity, Wonder Woman

NÁZEV

Feminismus a gender v komiksu Wonder Woman

ANOTACE

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou komiksu Wonder Woman z hlediska feminizmu a genderových rolí. Práce analyzuje komiks z pohledu feministické literární kritiky a studuje několik aspektů, témata války a mytologie, svazování, její vzhled, původ a postavy komiksu. Rovněž se zabývá dalším vývojem tohoto komiksu ve stříbrné, bronzové a moderní éře komiksu.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

komiks, gender, feminismus, ženskost, mužnost, Wonder Woman

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INTRODUCTION

In November 11, 1937 in *The New York Times*, William Moulton Marston stated that “the next one hundred years will see the beginning of an American matriarchy—a nation of Amazons in the psychological rather than physical sense,” and that “women would take over the rule of the country, politically and economically.”¹ This psychologist and professor strongly believed in the power of women and created a character that many people know from the media, but her true purpose and origin are unknown to the general public. She is supposed to be a symbol of feminists and a fighter for justice. This paper aims to analyze her true personality, origin and function in terms of the feminist literary critique and gender roles. It studies if Wonder Woman acts according to Marston’s ideology and how this beliefs are demonstrated in the *Wonder Woman* comic books. It aims to explain the use of various themes and behavior of certain characters, such as her friends and foes. It analyzes Wonder Woman’s behavior in terms of gender and if she conforms to those prescribed roles.

Firstly, the paper briefly introduces the comic book genre and the superhero comic book genre which originated prior to World War II thanks to which it became popular and it describes its further development. It defines the cult of superhero and describes the characteristics that define a superhero. Then, it briefly explains the concept of feminism and gender roles. As next, masculinity and femininity are defined. Based on the concept of feminism, the paper presents what the feminist literary critique analyzes in relation to the *Wonder Woman* comics.

Secondly, this paper describes the creation of the *Wonder Woman* comics and the events that were crucial for its introduction and the aspects that affected its form. It introduces Marston’s life that influenced the personality of Wonder Woman and that affected further development of the *Wonder Woman* comics until his death.

The following part of the paper focuses on the analysis of the Golden Age *Wonder Woman* comics by William Moulton Marston that was issued in certain comic books. The paper deals with *All Star Comics*, *Sensation Comics* and especially with the regularly issued *Wonder Woman* comic book that has been issued until nowadays.² This analysis is focused on several features of the comics. Firstly, the use of the themes of war and mythology are studied from the

¹ Les Daniels, *Wonder Woman: The Complete History* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000), 19.

² Note: Marston’s *Wonder Woman* stories were usually issued without a title. The titles have been assigned to the stories later on. Also, the cover date and the actual release date usually do not match. For the purposes of citation, the paper refers to cover dates and story titles listed in the Amazon Archives database, available at <https://www.amazonarchives.com/>.

viewpoint of gender issues. Then, the analysis focuses on the controversial feature of bondage and studies its implementation into the comics that is intended for young male readers. It deals with the metaphor of men's submission to a loving authority. Then, the analysis examines Wonder Woman's accessories, costume and her origin, which are inherent parts of her personality and these aspects are studied with regard to their symbolism. It also analyzes the ambiguous use of femininity and masculinity in Wonder Woman through these features. The following chapter deals with Wonder Woman's alter-ego which represents the type of a woman that Wonder Woman aims to reform, and also the relationship with Steve Trevor that is directly influenced by her double identity. The following chapters study Wonder Woman's enemies and the difference between treating male and female villains. Lastly, the paper focuses on the analysis of her female companions, representing ordinary women who can become powerful by Wonder Woman's side.

The final part of the paper is devoted to the development of the *Wonder Woman* comics after Marston's death and is divided into the Silver and Bronze Age and in the Modern Age. In the Silver and Bronze Ages, Wonder Woman underwent changes that brought her popularity but also significant critique. She underwent crisis which she, however, was able to overcome. The comics had to adapt to the readership in order to survive and not many changes were in accordance with Marston's original concept of a female feminist fighter. The last chapter that deals with the Modern Age Wonder Woman studies Wonder Woman in other media, especially in movies and compares the modern violent and sexualized Wonder Woman with the original.

In sum, this paper aims to present Wonder Woman as a symbol of feminists and a fighter for justice in the patriarchal world, whose feminist approach and ambiguous character are defined by several features that are studied in this paper. It also examines the development which Wonder Woman underwent in terms of feminism and gender roles that undermined her role as a feminist. It aims to prove that she is still perceived as a feminist symbol even after many years of development.

1 THE COMIC BOOK GENRE IN THE U.S. AND THE CULT OF SUPERHERO

When speaking of comics, one probably imagines a set of pictures with incorporated text bubbles with some exclamation such as “Oh!” or “Boom!” Nevertheless, the definition of comics art is more complex than that. Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith define a comic book as a form of a “sequential art.” In contrast with other artistic forms that display “static” situations, a comic book is “concerned with storytelling.” They also claim there is no such “medium” as “comics. Comics is a useful general term for designating the phenomenon of juxtaposing images in a sequence.” The term is used to describe a set of forms of the sequential art, such as “comic strips, comic books, cave paintings, Grecian urns, tapestries, stained glass windows, and more.”³ In layman terms, comics represents what is generally known as a comic book. Nonetheless, according to Duncan and Smith, “a comic book is a volume in which all aspects of the narrative are represented by pictorial and linguistic images encapsulated in a sequence of juxtaposed panels and pages.” Volume, in this case, stands for “a collection of sheets of paper bound together. So a comic book might be as brief as only a few sheets or as expansive as a several-hundred-page omnibus edition.”⁴ When speaking of comics, a comic book is the form that people probably imagine, but comics represent rather an umbrella term for all the forms of cartoons, illustrated images going one after another that tell a story to the reader.

Comic is a unique literary and artistic medium that merges these two formulae of art and creates a specific literary genre that gained popularity among many readers in the 20th century and got richly diversified since then. Firstly, it is exceptional in its form. As Monica Germanà cites Will Eisner, a cartoonist, “comics use a specific [...] code of visual conventions to support the basic elements of storytelling: point of view, setting, time, action and dialogue appear on the page with or without the use of actual writing.” These elements are framed by the basic unit of comics writing, which is a “panel” that decides what is going to be at the margins and what should the readers focus on.⁵ Another prominent feature of comics, according to

³ Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, *The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 3.

⁴ Duncan and Smith, *The Power of Comics*, 4.

⁵ Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1985, as quoted in Monica Germanà, “The Coming of Age of Graphic Narratives,” in *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Popular Fiction*, ed. Christine Berberich (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 169.

Petersen, is a “speech balloon.” It is “a placeholder for a type of information that is understood as an indicator of sound or thought.” According to Petersen, speech bubbles help the reader to imagine the situation and “take on all kinds of shapes, or no shape at all, and by their design can change the way the text is read.”⁶ These two features together, panels, representing the story itself, and the balloon, accompanying the story by a kind of a formulaic language that represents characters’ words and thoughts, create what is generally called comics.

1930s in the United States was a period of the Great Depression when the country struggled economically, politically as well as socially. Many Americans lost their job and a part of the country fought with the so-called Dust Bowl in the Southwest. As Jeffrey K. Johnson suggests, the crucial problem was people’s lack of trust in the state institutions, which “left many Americans feeling isolated and defenseless.”⁷ People needed some impulse that would revive their belief in their country as well as themselves as a nation. The nation needed someone to look up to, they needed a hero. From this need, superheroes emerged.

As Stephen Weiner suggests, “[t]he comic book came into existence in 1933 and was a longer, more involved format than its predecessor the cartoon panel, or newspaper cartoon strip. Comic books embraced the hero story naturally, and many hero tales appeared during the 1930’s.” Will Eisner is typically considered as the creator of the action comics and the graphic novel form of storytelling that appeared in 1930s. However, the comic book genre significantly changed when Superman was introduced in *Action Comics* in 1938.⁸

As Brian J. Robb writes in *A Brief History of Superheroes*, the first superheroes that appeared on the American newsstands, “Superman and Batman, gave rise to an all-conquering genre. Most superheroes fall somewhere on the scale between those two, who are in so many ways natural opposites.”⁹ As Stephen Weiner notes, “Superman was so successful that the term ‘superhero’ was coined in an effort to describe the parade of costumed adventurers that followed in his wake.” There were heroes before who performed extraordinarily when the situation required it, but they were lacking some kind of power that would make them “‘super.’” Therefore, these heroes with extraordinary powers started to be called superheroes in 1930s.¹⁰

⁶ Robert S. Petersen, *Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Narratives* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), xix.

⁷ Jeffrey K. Johnson, *Super-History: Comic Book Superheroes and American Society, 1938 to the Present* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012), 7.

⁸ Stephen Weiner, “Introduction,” in *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels: Heroes & Superheroes*, ed. Bart H. Beaty and Stephen Weiner (Ipswich: Sale Press, 2012), xiii.

⁹ Brian J. Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes* (London: Robinson, 2014), 15.

¹⁰ Stephen Weiner, “Introduction,” xiii.

Robb also lists some characteristic features that a superhero should possess. Firstly, a superhero is usually forced to leave his or her home, or his or her parents unfortunately die which makes the hero more “vulnerable.” Robb suggests that a superhero being an orphan is essential for superhero’s self-reliance.¹¹ For instance, Superman is sent from Krypton to the Earth to be saved and is adopted. Batman becomes an orphan when his parents are murdered during a robbery. Similarly, Iron Man’s parents die when he is a young boy. Superheroes usually meet some obstacle in life that they are forced to overcome.

Another key feature of a superhero is a “super-power.”¹² For example, Batman is unusually strong, he can fly and even has an x-ray sight. But as Robb suggests, “[s]ome superheroes simply rely on perfecting their unique human skills or attributes, as in the case of Batman, Iron Man, or Green Arrow.”¹³ Batman’s superpower is not flying or super-strength. He is extremely rich, which is useful when obtaining weapons and equipping his lair. Similarly, Iron Man’s wealth is indispensable when inventing new technologies that help him develop new prototypes of the iron suit. Green Arrow’s fate is unfortunate and filled with pain, as his parents died and then he had to survive as a castaway on his own on an abandoned island. These characters rely on their wealth and their human abilities, such as strength or fast reflexes that they train and try to improve them to be good enough to become their super-powers.

Other attributes of superheroes are their weapons and accessories. Thor, a god superhero has a lightning hammer in his possession, Green Lantern has his power ring.¹⁴ Iron Man must wear his iron suit to become the actual Iron Man. Green Arrow uses his bow and arrows to capture his enemies and Batman has his cave full of modern technology, such as the Batmobile. Wonder Woman also uses weapons that help her to fight villains, the magic lasso and bracelets, as well as a magical plane. Accessories and weapons are important features of superheroes and are often crucial for fighting enemies. Similarly, superheroes’ appearance is usually somehow typical. As Robb notes, “[m]any adopt specific costumes with distinctive insignia or themes, such as Superman’s shield-encased S-symbol, Batman’s identification as a bat-like figure, or Spider-Man’s web symbolism woven across his outfit.”¹⁵ Captain America is dressed in an outfit with the motif of the American flag denoting patriotism. Also Wonder Woman appears

¹¹ Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 16.

¹² Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 16.

¹³ Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 16.

¹⁴ Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 17.

¹⁵ Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 17.

in the colors of the flag, as she came to the man's world to help fight the Nazis and promote patriotism.

Next characteristic of superheroes is their "strong moral code and a selfless dedication to the public good." They are willing to "do the right thing" even if they gain nothing in return and the action may harm them. This attitude is usually rooted in their personal experience, such as the death of Spider Man's or Batman's parents. Others like Superman simply do what they are meant to do, it is their essence of life. For Wonder Woman, it is her duty, as she is an Amazon, a fighter and protector. Superheroes also usually create their alter-ego, a "secret identity" that helps them to operate in the world of ordinary people without noticing.¹⁶ Superman presents himself as Clark Kent, a news reporter who wears glasses to cover his super-sight. Green Arrow acts in the public as Oliver Queen, a millionaire and entrepreneur. Wonder Woman introduced herself to the man's world as Diana Prince, a secretary. In addition, it is typical for superheroes that they fall in love and have complicated love relationships which usually result from their secret identities.¹⁷ Diana Prince is in love with Steve Trevor, but for him she is only a secretary and does not seem to be interested in her, as he ironically fell for Wonder Woman.

The next prominent attribute of superheroes are their sidekicks, colleagues, friends and other characters that create a special relationship with them, including anti-heroes and villains.¹⁸ For example, Batman is accompanied by Robin, his sidekick. Green Arrow works with Speedy, his companion. But besides sidekicks, there are anti-heroes, such as Joker in the *Batman* comics or Cheetah in *Wonder Woman*. The superheroes' companions and villains are an inherent part of superhero comic books, together with their accessories, complicated relationships, alter-ego, special super-powers, disturbed past and specific costumes that, put all together, create the characters that are well-known by the public and generally defined as the superheroes.

As Weiner suggests, "[s]uperheroes [...] provided a vibrant metaphor during World War II. While the United States was at war, superhero comics were extremely popular."¹⁹ But after the end of the war, popularity of comic books decreased, and many superheroes were forgotten until their revival in the era of 1960s called the Silver Age of comic books. Superheroes that were popular in 1940s were given a new story of origin and variously adjusted and their focus

¹⁶ Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 17.

¹⁷ Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 17.

¹⁸ Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 17.

¹⁹ Weiner, "Introduction," xiii.

from magic and supernatural sphere shifted to the science fiction. At that time, Marvel, the major competition of DC Comics, a most influential and successful comic publishing company, introduced its signature characters, such as the X-men or the Fantastic Four. Then in 1980s another adjustment was needed in response to aging readers as well as their demand for “more sophisticated stories.”²⁰ Also, it was a time when graphic novels were popular and superheroes were given a chance to develop. As Brian Doherty suggests, superhero comics were until 1980s somehow “creatorless” due to ownership rights that publishing houses applied to their comics, they were a „brainchildren not of artists with something meaningful to say but of cash-conscious companies trying to squeeze one more dime out of a child’s sweaty palm.“ Therefore, if critics eventually happened to approach these comics, they „dismissed them as junk, an unlikely place for anything approaching serious artistic effort.“²¹ The comic book genre diversified since the end of the World War II, as other sub-genres appeared, such as Western, detective, or horror comics and these genres became widely “popular.”²² Nonetheless, as Doherty admits, “[t]he superhero rules to this day, at least among comics publishers with titles that regularly sell in the tens of thousands of issues.” There are many comic book genres other than superhero comics that have been published but “hardly anyone wants to buy them.”²³ Whatever the reasons, superhero comics still dominates the comic book industry until nowadays.

Regarding the expansion of the comic book genre, many authors and theoreticians are uncomfortable with the chronological categorization that the comic book genre was ascribed, nevertheless, as any other form of literature, comics was generally divided into certain stages regarding its development and popularity among readers. According to Robb, the stages of the development of comics are usually referred to as “‘ages’: the Golden Age is from 1938 to the mid-Fifties; the Silver Age from the mid-Fifties to 1970; the Bronze Age from 1970 to the mid-Eighties; and the Modern Age from the mid-Eighties to the twenty-first century.”²⁴ In this paper, in order to define the margins of certain eras that characterized Wonder Woman during the course of time, it shall be referred mainly to the Golden, Silver and Bronze, and Modern Age of comics.

To sum up, the comics is an umbrella term for all comic writing, such as comic books, comic strips or even cave paintings. It is a medium that merges visual art with literature. Its

²⁰ Weiner, “Introduction,” xiii.

²¹ Brian Doherty, “Comics Tragedy: Is the Superhero Invulnerable?,” in *The Best American Comics Criticism*, ed. Ben Schwartz (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2010), 25.

²² Doherty, “Comics Tragedy: Is the Superhero Invulnerable?,” 27.

²³ Doherty, “Comics Tragedy: Is the Superhero Invulnerable?,” 28.

²⁴ Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 19.

characteristic form includes certain features, which are speech bubbles and panels. Panels decide what is important for the narration and put individual pictures into chronological order to create a developing story. Speech bubbles are used to express characters' thoughts, feelings and a language that gradually developed into a simplified comic form. This form of literature mixed with art emerged in 1930s and developed into many genres which are read until nowadays.

The superhero comics appeared in 1930s when the United States needed a hero after the Great Depression and other significant events that decreased country's morality and confidence. From this need, a new kind of heroes was born. The first of them was Superman followed by Batman and many other characters that are well-known until nowadays. Also, during World War II, comic books were widely read because they presented superheroes fighting the enemies, which helped to instill patriotic values in Americans. Since 1930s, a pattern that characterized superheroes was developed. The pattern includes certain features, such as the superhero's super-power that makes him or her not just a hero but the superhero. That means he or she has an ability that ordinary people cannot develop, such as the x-ray sight, flying or super-strength. There are other features that characterize a superhero, such as a costume, special weaponry, difficult childhood, complicated love relationships and the need to selflessly help others. As next, a superhero usually has an alter-ego which protects his or her true identity. A superhero also usually has a colleague that helps the superhero fight crime and finally, there is usually also an antagonist, a villain, an anti-hero.

2 FEMINISM, FEMININITY, MASCULINITY, AND GENDER

What is feminism? According to Professor Chris Weedon, “[f]eminism is politics.” It is a political struggle that aims to change “relations between men and women in society.” These relations define how we behave in terms of culture, education, family life, politics and they even shape our free time. They essentially define who we are.²⁵ But why should these relations be changed? That is because these relations are not supposedly in balance, they are not equal. Sarah Gamble provides a general definition of feminism that takes into account the inequality between men and women:

it is the belief that women, purely and simply because they are women, are treated inequitably within a society which is organised to prioritise male viewpoints and concerns. Within this patriarchal paradigm, women become everything men are not (or do not want to be seen to be): where men are regarded as strong, women are weak; where men are rational, they are emotional; where men are active, they are passive[.]²⁶

In other words, feminism deals with relations between people, relations that shape our everyday life; specifically, it revolves around the two binary opposites, men and women. Feminism subscribes to the view that women are seen as the opposite of what men represent, with the society preferring the men’s opinion and putting it on the first place before women’s beliefs.

In understanding the concept of feminism, one should consider what men’s and women’s qualities are or who they are. To both sexes, certain qualities are stereotypically assigned, the femininity and masculinity, where masculine qualities are ascribed to men and feminine qualities to women. Catherine Villanueva Gardner describes what is defined as femininity:

the ideology that dictates appropriate gender behavior for women through a system of rules (such as those that govern personal appearance), roles (such as the role of wife), and socially valued traits (such as nurturance and empathy). The ultimate purpose of the ideal of femininity is to make women pleasing to men.²⁷

Thus, according to the definition, being a woman and being feminine means to take care of self, others in terms of a family, and to satisfy men.

The opposite of femininity is masculinity. Gardner defines masculinity as “the ideal of the appropriate gender behaviors, traits, and roles for men.” Characteristics associated with men

²⁵ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 1.

²⁶ Sarah Gamble, “Editor’s Introduction: The Controversies of Feminism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, 2006), no pagination.

²⁷ Catherine Villanueva Gardner, *Historical Dictionary of Feminist Philosophy* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 88-89.

are assertiveness, rationality, and to be “the primary wage earner.” Gardner suggests that “[w]ithin patriarchal society, masculinity is seen as the norm and is constructed against a negative, inferior ‘Other’: femininity. Thus both masculinity and femininity serve to oppress women, whereas men are only subject to the ideology of masculinity.”²⁸ According to these definitions, women are disadvantaged by both, femininity and masculinity. This notion is connected to what is generally denoted as patriarchy.

As the term masculinity is closely related to patriarchy and the patriarchal structure of the Western society, its definition should be provided as the term is frequently referred to in following chapters concerning Wonder Woman’s involvement in the American society. Chris Weedon defines patriarchy in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*:

The term 'patriarchal' refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organization of procreation to the internalized norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference. In patriarchal discourse the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm which is male.²⁹

Generally, in patriarchal society, male is the norm and female is derived from it. She depends on men’s power and is subordinate to it.

As next, when trying to understand the concept of feminism, one should understand the difference between sex and gender. In 1960s, there was a shift in what these two terms denoted. According to Gardner’s definition, “[t]he sex of an individual was seen as determined by a set of fixed biological characteristics, whereas gender was seen as a set of mutable social characteristics that were the result of socialization.” She then explains that “[t]his distinction challenged biological determinism, the dominant scientific and popular view that the biological differences between the sexes determined the different social and cultural roles of men and women, as well as the relations between them.”³⁰ In other words, gender was no more seen as predetermined by our sex, rather it was a result of social activities associated with one’s biological sex. On the contrary, unlike sex, gender was not predetermined biologically and therefore could be altered.

²⁸ Gardner, *Historical Dictionary of Feminist Philosophy*, 140.

²⁹ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1987), 2.

³⁰ Gardner, *Historical Dictionary of Feminist Philosophy*, 209.

Similarly, Sophia Phoca paraphrases Kosofsky Sedgwick, claiming that “gender is shaped by gender and power relations. She therefore refutes the notion of biologism or the ‘natural.’ Gender is determined by the binary framework of masculinity and femininity.” As she suggests, on the contrary,

‘[s]exuality [...] is determined by its slippage from semantic meaning, traversing both sides of the sex/gender dyad, but also exceeding them. However, she argues that, although sexuality and gender are informed by one another, they must also exist as distinct from one another.’³¹

In sum, feminist belief of 1960s is that gender is malleable, in contrast to sex that is inborn. Women were no more determined to behave according to a pattern that was ascribed to them for centuries by their male counterparts.

These feminist ideas shaped itself into certain political streams that started to be prominent since the 19th century. Gardner suggests that “[t]he feminist movement of the United States and Western Europe is typically divided into three periods or waves” and the purpose of these movements was “the elimination of the social, political, economic, and cultural oppression of women.”³² The first of the three mentioned periods is called “the first wave feminism (or old wave feminism)” and it was a period when women questioned the differences between men and women in the legal and social sphere from 1850s to 1920 mainly in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. In this period, suffragettes, besides fighting for their right to vote, were fighting for their property rights, changes in the schooling system and marriage.³³ The term “second wave feminism” then describes the period of 1960s and 1970s in Europe and the United States in which feminist political movements began to appear. Even though women rights in both countries changed for the better, women still did not feel fully equal to men. At this period, there was no united movement, rather a set of various movements, which are generally regarded as either the “liberal” or “radical feminist” movement.³⁴

When describing feminism, theoreticians and feminist thinkers, including authors of works analyzing *Wonder Woman* such as Zanin or Hanley, refer to Simone de Beauvoir, a French author, existentialist philosopher and creator of some feminist concepts articulated mainly in 1970s during the second wave feminism. In 1949, Beauvoir published *The Second*

³¹ Sophia Phoca, “Feminism and Gender” in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, 2006), 52.

³² Gardner, *Historical Dictionary of Feminist Philosophy*, xxiv.

³³ Gardner, *Historical Dictionary of Feminist Philosophy*, 93.

³⁴ Gardner, *Historical Dictionary of Feminist Philosophy*, 207-208.

Sex, a work in which she contemplates on what it means to be a woman, her position in the world, her position in relation to men and the ambiguity of her character. This book became an inspiration for many feminist theoreticians.

Beauvoir suggests that “there have always been women; they are women by their physiological structure; as far back as history can be traced, they have always been subordinate to men[.]”³⁵ But man is also dependent on woman, that is, in terms of biological needs. However, as Beauvoir admits, “[b]iological need—sexual desire and desire for posterity—which makes the male dependent on the female, has not liberated women socially.”³⁶ According to Beauvoir, even after centuries later since the beginning of the binary man-woman relationship, “this world still belongs to men: men have no doubt about this, and women barely doubt it. Refusing to be the Other, refusing complicity with man, would mean renouncing all the advantages an alliance with the superior caste confers on them.”³⁷

The most important idea that Beauvoir articulated in her work is that woman is perceived as “the Other” in society. Man is independent of woman, but concerning woman, she is always spoken of based on the “relation to man.” Beauvoir quotes Julien Benda’s *Uriel’s Report* and writes:

‘Man thinks himself without woman. Woman does not think herself without man.’ And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called “the sex,” meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute. She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other.³⁸

Also, when analyzing young women’s behavior in various literary works where girls are involved, Beauvoir comments that “[t]o be feminine is to show oneself as weak, futile, passive, and docile.”³⁹

Wonder Woman, the warrior princess from Paradise Island is both. She is female by nature and possesses some feminine characteristics. She is beautiful as Aphrodite, loving and caring, which could be paraphrased as a passive quality. But she is masculine as well, as she is strong as Hercules and swift as Mercury, but also wise as Athena, which is another masculine

³⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 28, https://uberty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/1949_simone-de-beauvoir-the-second-sex.pdf.

³⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 29. pdf.

³⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 30. pdf.

³⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 26.

³⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 402.

trait.⁴⁰ She is also aggressive because she fights against villains. Her body is athletic, which is usually defined as the male body type. Wonder Woman represents a clash of these two attributes, masculinity and femininity, and is ambiguous in many ways. These facts result in questioning whether Wonder Woman should be perceived as a symbol of feminists and rights of women, as her ambiguity hinder a clear-cut definition who she really is. This raises questions whether Wonder Woman is feminine or masculine, whether she is a feminist, and if she really represents what feminists believe in. Many literary theorists tried to answer similar questions, thus, feminist literary theory started to pose these questions to various literary works in many literary genres.

⁴⁰ William Moulton Marston, "Wonder Woman: Who is she?," *Wonder Woman* No.1., Summer 1942, no pagination.

3 FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Feminist literary criticism as a form of literary critique appeared after the second wave feminism in 1960s and its purpose is the literary criticism of literary works from the feminist point of view. Lois Tyson defines feminist literary critique: “feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women.”⁴¹ In other words, it studies how literary works illustrate how women are treated in the society. As defined by J.A. Cuddon, “[i]t is an attempt to describe and interpret (and reinterpret) women’s experience as depicted in various kinds of literature – especially the novel, and, to a lesser extent, poetry and drama.”⁴² Also, Jonathan Culler describes feminist literary theory. According to Culler, “feminist theorists champion the identity of women, demand rights for women, and promote women’s writings as representations of the experience of women.” Additionally, they also “undertake a theoretical critique of the heterosexual matrix that organizes identities and cultures in terms of the opposition between man and woman.”⁴³ To sum up, feminist literary criticism analyzes literary works to identify the position of women in the society and seeks an explanation of the dual heterosexual relationship of men and women that creates women’s experience and situation in certain cultural backgrounds.

However, trying to articulate a precise definition of what this form of literary critique studies is complicated. As Tyson states, because “feminist issues range so widely across cultural, social, political, and psychological categories, feminist literary criticism is wide ranging, too.” Therefore, regardless of the main intention of the analysis, “the ultimate goal of feminist criticism is to increase our understanding of women’s experience, both in the past and present, and promote our appreciation of women’s value in the world.”⁴⁴

Tyson refers to the fact that even today after many years of practice of the feminist theory, people tend to view feminist beliefs negatively. She tries to demonstrate that this bias is rooted deeply in our history and culture; for example, she refers to the use of the inclusive pronoun “he,” by which one refers to both males and females. One might claim that it is just a conventionalized expression, someone else might consider it as oppression of women or exclusion of women from the society. Similarly, Tyson views the literature prior to 1960s, when

⁴¹ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 83.

⁴² John Anthony Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 273.

⁴³ Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 126.

⁴⁴ Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 119.

“the literary works of (white) male authors describing experience from a (white) male point of view was considered the standard of universality—that is, representative of the experience of all readers—and universality was considered a major criterion of greatness.” The white male point of view was considered as a standard of literature. Thus, even some white female authors were popular among readers, they were not included in the literary canon. Moreover, even when women’s writing started to appear in the school libraries in 1970s, they were not treated equally as the works by white male authors.⁴⁵ All in all, women were treated very similarly both in life and in literature.

Even nowadays, when female authors are in question, there is a tendency to lessen their impact and contribution. As Tyson claims, even in the movies, “the point of view,” “the camera eye” is usually male and females are viewed and usually “eroticized” by male protagonists.⁴⁶ Similarly, according to Culler, “[f]eminist criticism has been especially interested in the way that European and American narratives frequently posit a male reader: the reader is implicitly addressed as one who shares a masculine view.”⁴⁷ In other words, both perspectives, the point of view of the protagonists and also the point of view of the reader is commonly considered as male. Correspondingly, Cuddon suggests that feminist criticism “questions the long-standing, dominant, male, phallogocentric ideologies (which add up to a kind of male conspiracy), patriarchal attitudes and male interpretations in literature (and critical evaluation of literature).” He claims that “[i]t attacks male notions of value in literature – by offering critiques of male authors and representations of men in literature and also by privileging women writers.”⁴⁸ Therefore, feminist criticism is the reaction to this biased point of view and tries to equalize the role of women in literature by even favoring them.

As Tyson suggests, the main interest of feminist literary critics in 1970s was the analysis of the patriarchal society illustrated in “literary works in the male canon,” either intentionally or not. Usually, one has to search for a hidden message covered by the “text’s apparent intention.” That is because the author is aware of the patriarchal tone, or even encourages it as he or she agrees with the ideology. That is because, as Tyson notes, “patriarchal literature sees nothing wrong with its own sexism.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 83-84.

⁴⁶ Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 84-85.

⁴⁷ Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, 87.

⁴⁸ Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 273.

⁴⁹ Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 117.

Feminist literary criticism does not focus only on one aspect. It is a complex study of human behavior in terms of women's oppression in literature. To summarize what feminist literary criticism deals with, Tyson presents several ideas of what can be analyzed in literature from the viewpoint of feminist literary critique. Firstly, it deals with the portrayal of women in the patriarchal society and analyzes the patriarchal society in terms of politics, society, economics and psychology, and how these matters are linked to the gender issues of a given period. Secondly, it might also examine the importance of race or class in connection to gender issues. It can also study how the work is "gendered," that is, if the characters behave according to their prescribed gender roles and their masculinity or femininity, and if they conform to these roles or reject them. As next, it can analyze the "possibilities of sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy and/or about the ways in which women's situations in the world—economic, political, social, or psychological—might be improved[.]" It may also investigate how the work was perceived throughout the literary history, if it was criticized in the past and how it is perceived nowadays; lastly, it may examine the author's motivation for writing the work and the influence of her environment, when speaking of female authors, and also the role of the work in terms of "women's literary history and literary tradition."⁵⁰

In relation to comics, Sherrie A. Innes comments on the comic book genre and the gender roles. As she suggests, the comic book genre is unequally gendered. Women in comics generally play supplementary roles to their male opposites. There are few female characters in the "superhero universe," such as Batgirl, Elektra, Catwoman, Black Canary, and Supergirl, but they are "largely outnumbered by the hordes of males." When women are at scene, they usually play a supplementary role to male superheroes. "[T]hey are generally helpmeets to more important males or play clearly subordinate roles."⁵¹

Wonder Woman is subject to the feminist literary criticism of many authors, as she is supposed to represent the ideal of a strong emancipated woman and as she is considered a feminist icon. The fact that Wonder Woman is written as comics provides additional aspect for analysis, such as the visual feature, which is essential for comic books. Her visage has been examined and criticized by many authors throughout the years, together with her appearance on the television and in movies, with the critics claiming that she is either too masculine or too eroticized, depending on the period, as Wonder Woman changed, which depended on who

⁵⁰ Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 119-120.

⁵¹ Sherrie A. Innes, "'It's a Girl Thing': Tough Female Action Figures in the Toy Store," in *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*, ed. Sherrie A. Innes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 78.

illustrated her in that time period. The *Wonder Woman* comics has been studied from various points of view with the emphasis on different features, be it her costume, the environment, patriotism, other characters or relationship with men. Additionally, Marston incorporated the bondage theme into the *Wonder Woman* comics, which also raised a wave of feminist criticism and is being frequently discussed in analyses of the *Wonder Woman* comics. Also, the fact that the creator of Wonder Woman himself was an atypical author of comic books, as he was a psychologist, inventor and came from an uncommon family environment, provides space for the analysis of the influence of his life experience on the creation of Wonder Woman.

This paper aims to pose and answer these questions about her visage, other media appearance, the erotic aspect and bondage in terms of feminism and gender roles. It tries to discover how women are displayed in the patriarchal society in the comics and also if the comics supports or denies patriarchal ideology. It aims to explore how femininity and masculinity are depicted in the comics and if the characters, especially Wonder Woman, follow the roles that the society prescribed to them. It discovers if Wonder Woman is perceived as “the Other” or if she wants to reverse this stereotype. From the viewpoint of feminist literary criticism, it also tries to describe how the *Wonder Woman* comics was perceived by the patriarchal society itself. Lastly, it discovers if the comics supports feminist beliefs or undermines them.

4 CREATION OF WONDER WOMAN

Wonder Woman appeared for the first time in *All Star Comics* No. 8 issued in October 1941. She was introduced together with her mythical origin and was supposed to attract readers to buy the new *Wonder Woman* comics. She was supposed to be the first female superhero ever to have its own comic book on the newsstands. Her creator, Charles Moulton, with his original legal name Charles Moulton Marston was a Harvard-trained psychologist with a law degree and the inventor of the systolic blood pressure test and the lie detector. Marston taught at respected and well-known colleges and universities, but after some time he became a consulting psychologist and tried to promote his ideas via entertainment industry rather than teaching. He was primarily known thanks to the mass media and popular press due to his invention of the lie detector but after the introduction of *Wonder Woman*, also for the creation of the first well-known female superhero who deserved her own comics that was regularly issued.

According to Tim Hanley, “William Moulton Marston was most definitely not a typical comic book creator.” Unlike Marston, other comic book authors were young men – Jerry Siegel, Bill Finger, or Joe Simon were all under thirty years old and they hoped that writing comics could help them to find a work in the advertising industry, unlike Marston who was already employed and his motivation for writing was of a different kind.⁵² As Les Daniels, American writer and one of the earliest historians of comics says, “Marston was rare among the intellectuals of his era in accepting both the fantastic plots and the image-driven narratives of comic books, at least in part because he thought he saw a chance to do some good.” Marston not only wanted to entertain, but mainly to educate children. He recognized the significance of the newly introduced superheroes such as Superman and Batman, because, quoting Marston, ““feeling big, smart, important, and winning the admiration of their fellows are realistic rewards all children strive for. It remains for moral educators to decide what type of behavior is to be regarded as heroic.””⁵³

Marston might be considered controversial or revolutionary by some critics due to his atypical family relationships. In 1920s, he lived in a polyamorous relationship with his lawful wife Elisabeth and Olive Byrne, a woman who was helping him with his research. Both were, according to Hanley, “well-accomplished women” who “embodied the feminism of the day.”⁵⁴

⁵² Tim Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound: The Curious History of the World's Most Famous Heroine* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014), 10, <http://gen.lib.rus.ec/book/index.php?md5=9E03289B5B38EDCD6902FF82C758F340>.

⁵³ Les Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 12.

⁵⁴ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 12.

Together they raised four children and even after his death, Elisabeth and Olive remained together in a common household and lived together for next four decades. The fact that he loved two women and lived with them both together in one household influenced his works. In the *Wonder Woman* comics, as Hanley suggests, his feminist thinking might be also reinforced by the fact that Olive's mother was actively involved in operating the first birth control clinic in America.⁵⁵ Marston's relationship to women was rather positive, it is a generally known fact that he was a feminist and also a visionary in the feminist terms. According to Hanley, Marston "wanted to impart to his readers a specific message about female superiority." Unlike other heroes of that era, such as Superman, Batman or Captain America, whose motivation to fight crime was their previous tragic experience, Wonder Woman's battle against evil "was rooted in a feminist utopian vision."⁵⁶

As Daniels suggests, it is obvious that Marston's "utopian philosophy" influenced the creation of Wonder Woman, which Daniels labelled as "simultaneously daring and touchingly naïve," as this philosophy is based on the presupposition that women are capable to "control the comparatively unruly male sex by alluring them," suggesting not women's "equality", but rather their "domination." All in all, Marston according to Daniels believed that "women could and would use sexual enslavement to achieve domination over men, who would happily submit to their loving authority." As a result of sharing his ideas of women's power and future superiority, he accepted a job at the Family Circle, a magazine for women that indirectly led to the creation of the character of Wonder Woman. In the magazine Marston discussed feminist issues and advocated why reading comics is beneficial for children readers. His operation in the magazine resulted in DC and All-American Comics hiring Marston as a member of the Editorial Supervisory Board, which was the last step to the birth of Wonder Woman.⁵⁷

At last, in a world torn by the hatreds and wars of men, appears a woman to whom the problems and feats of men are mere child's play – a woman whose identity is known to none, but whose sensational feats are outstanding in a fast-moving world! With a hundred time the agility and strength of our best male athletes and strongest wrestlers, she appears as though from nowhere to avenge an injustice or right a wrong! As lovely as Aphrodite – as wise as Athena – with the speed of Mercury and the strength of Hercules – she is only known as Wonder Woman, but who she is, or whence she came, nobody knows!⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 11.

⁵⁶ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 2.

⁵⁷ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 19-20.

⁵⁸ William Moulton Marston, "Introducing Wonder Woman," *All Star Comics* No. 8, December-January, 1941, no pagination.

That is how Charles Moulton Marston introduced the character of Wonder Woman, an Amazon princess warrior, for the first time in October 1941. Marston wrote the script but the one who illustrated her and gave her the Golden Age appearance that one imagines when speaking of the Golden Age comics was Harry George Peter who remained her illustrator until 1958 even after Marston's death a decade earlier. These two authors laid the foundations of how public views the Wonder Woman nowadays. Many readers are well-aware of Wonder Woman's existence, but her true identity and origin is not very well-known.

As Marston introduces Wonder Woman in the *All Star Comics* No. 8, Diana is a princess warrior that was sculpted from clay by her mother Hippolyte, the queen of Amazons, who lives happily on the Paradise Island, where only women live together in harmony until their peace is disrupted by a handsome man who crashes at the coast of the island by plane. Thanks to the young man, Hippolyte explains Diana and the readers the origin of the hatred and absence of men on the island. The story goes that Amazons once ruled over the land of Amazonia in Ancient Greece centuries ago until Hercules, the strongest man on the Earth, took the Hippolyte's magic girdle that made her invincible and enslaved the nation of Amazons. That drove Amazons to leave the man-ruled world and settle at the hidden Paradise Island out of the reach of men. To remember their failure, they are told by Aphrodite to wear the bracelets "as a reminder that [they] must always keep aloof from men."⁵⁹

After Hippolyte sees in her magic mirror what is happening in the war driven world, she announces a competition, the victor of which will go to the man's world to end this war. Even the queen does not want her to, Princess Diana attends the competition under cover. Despite her mother's lamentations, she wins the combat and is entitled to go to the war world and is given her costume together with her magic accessories. She has the bracelets and now even the magic lasso of truth, which probably indirectly refers to Marston's invention of the lie detector. "And so Diana, the wonder woman, giving up her heritage, and her right to eternal life, leaves Paradise Island to take the man she loves back to America – the land she learns to love and protect, and adopts as her own!"⁶⁰

That is how Marston with Peter depicted Wonder Woman for the first time in *All Star Comics*. In his letter to Coulton Waugh, a comics historian, Marston explained his intentions and motivation for the creation of Wonder Woman:

⁵⁹ Marston, "Introducing Wonder Woman," 3.

⁶⁰ Marston, "Introducing Wonder Woman," 9.

‘Among other recommendations which I made for better comics continuities was a suggestion that America’s woman of tomorrow should be made the hero of a new type of comic strip. By this I mean a character with all the allure of an attractive woman but with the strength of a powerful man. The publishers insisted that woman leads in comics had always been flops. But Mr. Gaines, who discovered Superman, offered to publish the proposed woman strip in a comics magazine for six months if I would write it. [...] Frankly, Wonder Woman is psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who should, I believe, rule the world.’

Marston continues claiming that males aren’t capable of the same amount of love as females and “[w]hat woman lacks is the dominance or self assertive power to put over and enforce her love desires.” Marston says he equipped Wonder Woman with “this dominant force but have kept her loving, tender, maternal and feminine in every other way.” As Marston claims, her bracelets help her to protect herself from bullets and “represent the Amazon Princess’ submission to Aphrodite.” Her lasso helps her to control the person bound by it, so the person does as she says, which was also a gift from Aphrodite and “represents woman’s love charm and allure by which she compels men and women to do her bidding.”⁶¹

When explaining the creation of Wonder Woman, the term “first well-known superhero” was used intentionally because there was another woman in the superhero comic book genre four years before the introduction of Wonder Woman, however, she was not that interesting for the industry and readers to survive as long as the mythical princess. In 1937 *Spicy Mystery Stories* presented a strip called “The Astounding Adventures of Olga Mesmer, the Girl with the X-Ray Eyes.” The protagonist Olga Mesmer was a daughter of a mad scientist who gained a super-human strength and could see through solid objects. Her story did not last long though as she appeared in October 1938 for the last time and was never heard of again by the public.⁶² Why Olga was forgotten, and why Wonder Woman remains well-known among audience even nowadays and her comic book is still being issued continuously after more than 70 years is a subject matter to be investigated in this paper.

⁶¹ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 22-23.

⁶² Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 18.

5 ANALYSIS OF THE WONDER WOMAN COMICS

5.1 The Role of Women in World War II and Patriotism in *Wonder Woman*

Comics was a media that responded to social changes and ideologies similarly as any other literary form, be it visual art or literature. Therefore, when 1930s approached, superheroes in costumes fought criminals and corporations and brought them to justice in response to “Roosevelt’s New Deal social reforms” and in 1940s, comics started to reflect patriotic tendencies and war propaganda together with the “anti-foreigner” attitude targeted mainly to Germans and Japanese.⁶³ As Daniels suggests, Wonder Woman’s first appearance was partly “a piece of flag-waving propaganda, perfectly timed to coincide with the attack in Pearl Harbor that brought Americans into World War II.”⁶⁴ Thus, one could claim that American comics was like a mirror that reflected events and ideologies of that time, be it war or political reforms.

Wonder Woman was created in the wartime when there was shortage of workforce. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, men went to fight overseas and it was women’s responsibility to fulfill the duties of mothers as well as to work at factories to support their husbands at war. As Zanin explains, they were encouraged by Rosie the Riveter who “represented the rights of millions of women performing jobs previously reserved for men, rights that lost momentum when Hitler was defeated.”⁶⁵ Lepore cites May who describes the situation as that when the war came to an end, “three-quarters of working women hoped to keep their jobs” but not many of them were able to do so. They were supposed to return to their households to free their positions for men returning from war. Their salary was lowered and benefits such as child care were no more supported. Women were supposed to become wives again and produce children.⁶⁶

As Jill Lepore notes, *Wonder Woman* No. 5 contains a story called “Battle for Womanhood” where Mars appears irritated because “so many American women are helping with the war effort.” As Lepore suggests, “[b]oth the story and the drawings borrow heavily from suffragists’ use” of Mars “as a stock character in cartoons from the 1910s, in which Mars appears regularly” causing pain to women who suffer due to the war.

⁶³ Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 107-108.

⁶⁴ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 25.

⁶⁵ Andrea Zanin, “Wonder Woman: Feminist Faux Pas?,” in *Wonder Woman and Philosophy: The Amazonian Mystique*, ed. Jacob M. Held (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 62.

⁶⁶ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988; repr., New York: Perseus, 2000), chapter 3. *Fortune* quoted in Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 221, as quoted in Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), Chapter 29, <http://gen.lib.rus.ec/book/index.php?md5=4D390694F01001838213C94F12CA08AC>.

In the First World War, suffragists suggested that war was keeping women in a state of slavery. In the Second World War, Marston suggested that women's contributions to the war effort were helping emancipate them, much to Mars's dismay."⁶⁷ Thanks to the war, women were given a chance to act independently, at least until the end of the war. Anyway, despite the consequences, patriotism in the Golden Age Wonder Woman is echoed not only in her symbolic costume representing the colors and stars of the American flag, but also in her actions as well as personality which urges her to fight selflessly against crime and injustice of all kinds and makes her the superheroine many readers admire.

However, as Hanley suggests, besides Wonder Woman, other leading superheroes such as Superman or Batman illustrated the war too "but the stories inside the comics had nothing to do with the war at all. While Batman and Superman used their covers to promote war bonds and stamps, they never actually fought the war themselves." On the contrary, Wonder Woman's stories were centered on fighting evil Germans and Japanese and at the end of an issue she would invite the readers to buy war bonds with the attitude of Rosie the Riveter.⁶⁸ At the cover of the first issue of *Wonder Woman*, the princess is depicted riding a horse and leading a U.S. cavalry against Nazis who can be recognized due to the typical moustache reminiscent of Hitler himself⁶⁹ (see Appendix A). The war motif appears throughout the issue, for instance, when Wonder Woman compels a Japanese spy to reveal secret information to Steve Trevor, an officer in the U.S. Army.⁷⁰ Similarly, the theme of war was present in every number until the end of the war when it was no more relevant.

When speaking of patriotism, America as a country with much shorter history than European countries had no common heritage. Roots of original ethnic groups were usually excluded from the discussion about American history, as they were outnumbered by the majority of immigrants from Europe and other parts of the world. People's origins were mainly at the continent; thus, it seems natural that Americans wanted to develop a mythology of their own. As Robb writes, "[s]uperheroes are the American equivalent of the ancient Greek or Roman mythologies. It is no coincidence that they first became popular between the Depression and the Second World War, when America was in need of heroes."⁷¹ Wonder Woman is partly

⁶⁷ Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, Chapter 26.

⁶⁸ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 28.

⁶⁹ *Wonder Woman* No.1, Summer 1942, cover page.

⁷⁰ William Moulton Marston, "The Origin of Wonder Woman", *Wonder Woman* No. 1, Summer 1942, 13A.

⁷¹ Brian J. Robb, *A Brief History of Superheroes*, 359.

a deity herself as a daughter of the mythological queen of Amazons gifted with super powers that no man has ever inherited in the real world.

The patriotic motif and mythology are closely interconnected in Marston's *Wonder Woman*. As Marc DiPaolo comments on this relations, the mythology and war are embodied by the deities introduced in Marston's *Wonder Woman* No.1, where Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love and Beauty, representing the femininity and female gender stands against Ares, the God of War, aggressive and masculine, represented as the one responsible for World War II, therefore, the villain⁷² (see Appendix B). DiPaolo concludes that "[t]he image strikingly crystallizes Marston's view of the world as defined principally by gender conflict, as opposed to by class, religious, or cultural strife, all of which would be equally valid ways of understanding the history of civilization and of warfare."⁷³ Marston illustrates the inequality of sexes and the two opposites of the male and female gender not only through the gender itself, but masters to depict it through mythology interconnected with the military background, as if men were the evil ones responsible for causing the war and women those who are supposed to overrule them as the ones in the right and with good intentions. As Zanin notes,

Wonder Woman's Amazonian ancestry emphasizes the power struggle between the sexes in World War II America. Although feminism is not about hating men, in a world where men are revered and women are suppressed, men will become an unavoidable ideological foe.⁷⁴

Patriotism, war, and the involvement of women in the war are part of the development of the *Wonder Woman* comics in 1940s. The themes of mythological origin and war are closely interrelated, Marston depicted the binary opposites of men and women as interconnected with the theme of war. The war was caused by Mars, the God of War, representing men and masculinity as the evil. Women and femininity, on the other hand, led by Aphrodite, as the "good" side, the ones who are supposed to overrule the evil men. Marston was considerably symbolic in illustrating his ideology, but his message is very clear, which is understandable, considering that the target audience were young male readers.

⁷² William Moulton Marston, "The Origin of Wonder Woman," *Wonder Woman* No. 1, Summer 1942, 2A.

⁷³ Marc DiPaolo, *War, Politics and Superheroes: Ethics and Propaganda in Comics and Film* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2011), 73.

⁷⁴ Zanin, "Wonder Woman: Feminist Faux Pas?," 61.

5.2 Bondage and Submission in *Wonder Woman*

According to Hanley, Marston was “a kinky bondage enthusiast.”⁷⁵ His theories of human behavior and the ideology were progressive for that time, considering that the proper feminist movement appeared a generation after the Golden Age *Wonder Woman*. It is a known fact that Marston included the theme of captivation and bondage in his comics and its illustration in *Wonder Woman* is a frequently discussed topic.

Geoffrey C. Bunn who studied Marston’s work, as quoted by Daniels, came to conclusion that

‘despite claiming that his ‘elementary units’ were rigorous scientific categories free of literary meaning, Marston was constantly forced to employ literary language to render them intelligible. Not only was he unable to prevent the political and sexual connotations of dominance and submission from emerging, but he even encouraged them.’⁷⁶

As Tim Hanley proposes, the additional implicit essence of *Wonder Woman* is based on Marston’s “DISC (dominance, inducement, submission and compliance)” theory published in *Emotions of Normal People* in 1929 which categorizes human relationships into two groups – “active versus passive and antagonistic versus favorable.” In this theory Marston suggests that “[i]n an antagonistic relationship, the active participant was dominant, forcing the passive participant into an unpleasant compliant role. [...] In a favorable relationship, the active participant induced the passive participant into pleasant submission.” Marston’s idea was that “men were more likely to be dominant, while women were more likely to excel at inducement and submission, though they were by no means submissive.”⁷⁷ This subtext might be the explanation for Marston’s frequent involvement of bonding *Wonder Woman*, as women, according to his belief, are more likely to be compliant.

One would argue that bondage is casual in superhero comics, as all superheroes need to capture their enemies. That might be true, the question is, what amount is in moderation and usual and what is the excessive amount that could eventually suggest some implicit meaning. Hanley presents a chart as a result of research conducted to analyze the percentage of how often *Wonder Woman* is being tied up in comics in comparison to *Captain Marvel*. The *Captain Marvel* comics had been chosen on the basis of comparison with other comics and were rated

⁷⁵ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, xi.

⁷⁶ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 13.

⁷⁷ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 15.

with the highest percentage. The highest occurrence in *Captain Marvel* was compared with Wonder Woman's lowest occurrence of bondage and the results were significant.⁷⁸ Due to these results, it might be concluded that bondage in *Wonder Woman* is not just a regular phenomenon of the comic book genre, but it might suggest that the bondage occurs for a certain reason, which is connected to Marston's psychological belief in the theory of submission.

Marston's special interest in bondage is obvious and as Zanin notices in her essay, Marston does not use simple terminology including words such as "ropes" or "cuffs". He occasionally uses specific vocabulary to describe accessories involved in bondage, such as in *Wonder Woman* No. 6, where Marston uses words as "'brank' – a leather mask worn by women prisoners in St. Lazare prison, France"⁷⁹ (see Appendix C) and also gives the reader a background information about the object, which highlights his interest in this subject matter.⁸⁰

However, nowadays, once the word bondage is said, one probably tends to imagine the modern subculture usually called BDSM, "[b]ondage, discipline (or domination), sadism, and masochism (as a type of sexual practice)"⁸¹ which is closely related to the erotic subtext. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the abbreviation as a "sexual activity involving such practices as the use of physical restraints, the granting and relinquishing of control, and the infliction of pain."⁸² It may be considered inappropriate and unacceptable by the general public, all the more if children are supposed to be involved in terms of reading the comics. Nevertheless, as Hanley says, "[f]or Marston, bondage was about submission, not just sexually but in every aspect of life. It was a lifestyle, not an activity, and he used bondage imagery as a metaphor for this style of submission."⁸³ Thus, Marston obviously used the bondage theme as a metaphor, but his specialized interest in bonding instruments, as Zanin suggested, proves that Marston not only speaks metaphorically, but also involves his own psychological beliefs in the series as well as his own personal interests.

For instance, in *Wonder Woman* No. 3, Amazons on the Paradise Island are playing a "deer game" in which Diana wears a mask and her companions are supposed to recognize who she is. Diana gives the girls presents from the man's world to give them a hint, one gets "a dress

⁷⁸ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 45-46.

⁷⁹ William Moulton Marston, "Wonder Woman and the Cheetah," *Wonder Woman* No. 6, Fall 1943, 4A.

⁸⁰ Zanin, "Wonder Woman: Feminist Faux Pas?," 60.

⁸¹ "BDSM," English Oxford Living Dictionaries, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/bdsm>.

⁸² "BDSM," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/BDSM>.

⁸³ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 47.

from the world of men” but “another girl misunderstands the use of a tennis racket” exclaiming “Oh, girl, what a spanker!” while spanking another girl who says that “[i]t doesn’t hurt – It’s a sissy spanker from the man’s world.” At the same page, an Amazon girl wants willingly and consciously Diana to tie her up due to the game they play.⁸⁴ According to Hanley, “[t]he Amazons incorporated bondage into their society as an expression of trust to emphasize that their utopia was based on kinship with a hierarchy of submission. All of the Amazons were committed to their patron goddess, Aphrodite; love was their very foundation.” The queen would rule with the holy permission of the Goddess of Love and Beauty. Amazons would also willingly obey Diana, “but through bondage she regularly surrendered to them in return, promoting mutual respect and love.”⁸⁵ Therefore, bonding but also spanking were, according to Marston’s idea, a type of a game that Amazons played to express their submission to each other and their mutual love. The idea hidden in the story was probably well-intended, but Marston’s bonding and spanking was not perceived by the public as he would probably desire.

As Daniels suggests, there are feminists who claim that the bondage theme is not highlighted, but the publisher and editor were aware of it, as well as the public. Marston received most of the critique from Child Study Association which was supposed to control the content of the comics to be appropriate for children. Namely, it was Josette Frank who wrote a letter to M. C. Gaines, the publisher, in 1943 stating that the Association is concerned with the “Wonder Woman feature,” which “lay [Marston] open to considerable criticism” because of the lack of Wonder Woman’s clothes and “on the basis of sadistic bits showing women chained, tortured, etc.” Then she urged Marston to “consider these criticisms very seriously because they have come [...] now from several sources.”⁸⁶

Marston strictly refused comments raised against him by Josette Frank saying that “binding and chaining are the one harmless, painless way of subjecting the heroine to menace and making drama of it” and that “confinement to WW and the Amazons is just a sporting game, an actual enjoyment of being subdued.” Marston claimed that “[t]he only hope for peace” was to “teach people [...] to enjoy being bound.” He then emphasized that “women enjoy submission, being bound.” Believing that his ideology is based on his elaborated psychological research, Marston thought he was authorized to depict in his comics what he considered necessary and the only way to teach young men to submit to women in order to

⁸⁴ William Moulton Marston, “Doom on Diana’s Day,” *Wonder Woman* No. 3, February-March, 1943, 7A.

⁸⁵ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 50.

⁸⁶ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 61.

establish peace.⁸⁷ But Josette Frank struggled with the theme in *Wonder Woman* till the end of her career in the advisory board. As Hanley writes, at the beginning of 1944, Josette Frank resigned from her post at the advisory board claiming that “the strip is full of significant sex antagonisms and perversions’ and that she “would consider an out-and-out strip tease less unwholesome than this kind of symbolism.”⁸⁸

Marston also highlighted the fact that even though Wonder Woman is being chained countless times, she always breaks free. Hanley quotes Marston: “My Wonder Woman often lets herself be tied into a bundle with chains as big as your arm. But in the end she easily snaps the chains.”⁸⁹ In spite of the fact that Wonder Woman appeared countless times in these situations, she could always free herself because Marston believed that women possess the power to escape the patriarchal establishment of society when fighting for it. By this argument he could have also excused the extensive use of bondage in the comics, because Wonder Woman could escape every time unharmed.

As next, Hanley suggests that Marston’s metaphors of submission were unequally distributed and majority of cases focused on a woman unwillingly tied up, apparently feeling no pleasure. These situations were supposed to symbolize oppression of patriarchy but “they were shown ridiculously disproportionately to the rest of his theories. All of the pleasant, positive aspects of submitting to women were shorted. Instead, readers were presented with a lot of very unhappy, very tied-up women.”⁹⁰ Any Marston’s *Wonder Woman* issue could be mentioned as an example, but to name some, in *Wonder Woman* No. 2, a college nurse is tied up against her will.⁹¹ In another story, Wonder Woman infiltrates to the place where Mars gathers his prisoners and lets herself capture. There are chained prisoners, men and women but the prominent figures with whom Wonder Woman talks and who are illustrated in more colors are women, powerless and captured unwillingly.⁹² Many other examples could be presented, all of them demonstrating the same idea, that Marston depicts women in unpleasant situations in which they appear helpless and submissive.

Comic books were also a media that entertained soldiers in the war. One military officer, John D. Jacobs, wrote a letter to Marston, expressing his enthusiasm in reading his comics full

⁸⁷ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 63.

⁸⁸ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 55.

⁸⁹ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 53.

⁹⁰ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 61.

⁹¹ William Moulton Marston, “The Supreme Ordeal of Wonder Woman,” *Wonder Woman* No. 2, Fall 1942, 11B.

⁹² Marston, “The Supreme Ordeal of Wonder Woman,” 4A-7A.

of bondage and thus, highlighted the fact that Wonder Woman could evoke strong erotic feelings in readers:

‘The comic magazine, Wonder Woman, interests me as no other “reading material” which I have ever been able to find in such volumes. I am one of those odd, perhaps unfortunate men who derive an extreme erotic pleasure from the mere thought of a beautiful girl, chained or bound, or masked, or wearing extreme high-heels or high-laced boots,—in fact, any sort of constriction or strain whatsoever. Have you the same interest in bonds and fetters that I have?’

He also wanted to know if Marston own any of the accessories mentioned in the comics: “the leather mask, or the wide iron collar from Tibet, or the Greek ankle manacle? Or do you just ‘dream up’ these things?”⁹³ Bondage and captivity were more than symbolic, it was present in the comics and everybody realized it, Marston, editors, and the readers included.

As Daniels suggests, Marston claimed that he used the theme of bondage and submission “to cut down on violence”⁹⁴ that was frequent in comic books of that time, especially because of the war and fighting derived from it. By bonding and captivating, Marston supposedly avoided violent scenes, which is questionable in certain cases. Daniels notes that in *Wonder Woman* No.1 Wonder Woman shoots her friend Mala in a contest called Bullets and Bracelets in which two contestants are supposed to shoot at each other until one of them is hurt.⁹⁵ Even though it is just a game, Amazons can get hurt, in this case, they can be shot. This and other incidents in the comics, according to Daniels, undermine Marston’s statement that Wonder Woman is against violence.⁹⁶

If Marston believed that “submission to loving authority”⁹⁷ is the key to satisfied and peaceful society, and claimed that he wanted to teach young men to behave with love and respect to women and teach them to willingly submit to them, the majority of individuals chained and captivated in his comic books being mainly women weakens this statement. Daniels suggests that approximately 90% of readers were males.⁹⁸ Based on the definition of BDSM, bondage is connected to erotic pleasure, therefore, it seems that the erotic undertone was unavoidable if Marston wanted to use the symbol of submission through bondage. As Chavez, Gavalier and Goldberg conclude, Marston “wanted to re-educate women and men to

⁹³ John D. Jacobs to “Charles Moulton,” September 9, 1943, WW Letters, Smithsonian, as quoted in Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, Chapter 27.

⁹⁴ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 59.

⁹⁵ Marston, “The Origin of Wonder Woman,” *Wonder Woman* No. 1, 11A.

⁹⁶ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 27.

⁹⁷ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 36.

⁹⁸ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 33.

willingly embrace loving submission through eroticism.”⁹⁹ Therefore, the erotic aspect when using bondage as a metaphor was necessary to reach the desired purpose. Despite concerns raised by Comic Code Authority and other commenters, Marston kept the theme of bondage in his comic books until his death in 1947.

In sum, Marston believed in the other extreme, that women should overrule men, which is not what feminists fight for. What feminists seek, generally, is equality of sexes, not another form of superiority. Marston used bondage as a metaphor of the patriarchal society because he wanted to teach young boys to submit to the loving authority, that is, to women, but it were mainly women, especially Wonder Woman, who appeared in chains. He believed that the only way to establish peace in the society was through submission. Even though feminists who favored Wonder Woman claimed that the use of bondage was not excessive, from the feminist point of view, bonding women in chains, either willingly or unwillingly would not probably work as a way of empowerment of women, as feminists seek equality, not submission. Therefore, in this matter, Wonder Woman is an ambiguous figure. Nonetheless, Marston kept the bondage theme in the *Wonder Woman* comics until he passed away, as he strongly believed in his philosophy of submission and loving authority.

5.3 Wonder Woman’s Characteristics: Costume, Accessories, and Origin

When imaging a superhero, be it Superman or Batman or any other character, one imagines a figure dressed in a characteristic costume. As Daniels proposes, “[a] super hero’s uniform is more than just a set of working clothes; these gaudy garments are a calling card, and provide the wearer with an identity that goes far beyond the ordinary fashion statement.”¹⁰⁰ A costume is an important part of every superhero, as it creates a part of his or her personality. For instance, Batman wears a black suit as he operates at night like a bat. Wonder Woman’s suit is no exception.

In *All Star Comics* No. 8 in which Wonder Woman’s origin is introduced, Wonder Woman is given her symbolic costume. Hippolyte gives her a dress saying: “[a]nd here is a costume I have designed to be used by the winner, to wear in America.”¹⁰¹ As Dennis Knepp states, “Wonder Woman might have the smallest costume in the comics, but it is the richest in

⁹⁹ Maria Chavez, Chris Gavalier, and Nathaniel Goldberg, “Loving Lassos: Wonder Woman, Kink, and Care,” in *Wonder Woman and Philosophy: The Amazonian Mystique*, ed. Jacob M. Held (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 190.

¹⁰⁰ Daniels, *Wonder Woman: The Complete History*, 151.

¹⁰¹ Marston, “Introducing Wonder Woman,” *All Star Comics* No. 8, no pagination.

symbolism.”¹⁰² According to Allie and Jill Hernandez, “[t]he first images of Wonder Woman in the 1940s featured a solidly built, muscular, and tall princess. Her costume, despite its changes, is iconic[.]” Even if the costume changed during the eras, it has always contained blue, red and white color that were supposed to evoke patriotic tendencies in readers. Although Wonder Woman wore knee high boots and briefs or a short skirt, which are typically associated with sexualization of women, she had no provocative cleavage. In comparison to other “swimsuit starlets of that period,” she was quite modest in her outfit. (See Appendix D) Her dress has undergone certain changes, but they were minor in comparison with the portrayal of Wonder Woman in 1990s when the whole superhero comic writing underwent sexualization of characters.¹⁰³ Even after many years, Wonder Woman’s costume remains iconic, just like Wonder Woman herself.

Even though the Golden Age Wonder Woman was modest in her costume, some people in the lead with Josette Frank complained about the lack of Wonder Woman’s clothes in relation to the bondage theme. As Hanley suggests, there were more of these complaints about Wonder Woman’s lack of clothes and bondage, thus, Dorothy Roubicek, an assistant editor was supposed to solve this criticism and offered Marston some alternatives on Wonder Woman’s costume, but Marston refused them same as any other changes suggested.¹⁰⁴

Nonetheless, she was still considered a symbol of feminist movement, especially in the second wave era of feminism. In 1982, Wonder Woman’s costume was upgraded and the adjustment remained a symbol of Wonder Woman ever since. The symbolic eagle on her chest transformed into an emblematic letter W. More importantly, as Daniels writes, this transformation was introduced in *Wonder Woman* No. 288 in 1982 where Wonder Woman received the new costume from ordinary women. The purpose of this was the celebration of 40-year anniversary of the creation of Wonder Woman and creation of the Wonder Woman Foundation whose funds were meant to appreciate inspirational women of that time. This award was unique, as it awarded women over 40 for their mental development and distinctive personality.¹⁰⁵ This was one of the demonstrations of the importance of Wonder Woman during the second wave feminism, which importantly affected her suit. However, the suit itself is not

¹⁰² Dennis Knepp, “Merciful Minerva in a Modern Metropolis” in *Wonder Woman and Philosophy: The Amazonian Mystique*, ed. Jacob M. Held (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 160.

¹⁰³ Allie Hernandez and Jill Hernandez, “Wonder Woman vs. Harley Quinn,” in *Wonder Woman and Philosophy: The Amazonian Mystique*, ed. Jacob M. Held (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 32.

¹⁰⁴ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 53.

¹⁰⁵ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 151.

the important matter, it is the story that is connected to it, that is, the appreciation of women in general.

Wonder Woman's costume is iconic as it is an integral part of her. She is portrayed in a top and short briefs or a skirt and high boots thanks to which she looks feminine, but at the same time masculine thanks to her muscular body that her lack of clothes reveals. The colors used on her costume remind the reader of the American flag and promoted patriotism mainly during the war time. She is illustrated as a slim fashionable woman, but at the same time as a strong muscular guardian. Her suit has a symbolic significance for the feminist movement. This supports Marston's belief that women can rule the world, be strong, but still remain feminine at the same time.

As next, another common superhero attribute is that every superhero should possess accessories and weapons that form the superhero's personality. Wonder Woman's golden lasso, bracelets and tiara constitute who she is and the moment she loses them, her abilities are weakened. That applies not only in the literal sense, but also in the metaphorical sense. Marston gifted Wonder Woman with her accessories for a certain reason.

In *Wonder Woman No. 1*, Wonder Woman receives a magical golden lasso together with her costume from her mother when she wins the competition and is sent to the man's world.¹⁰⁶ The golden lasso compels everyone bound by it to do as Wonder Woman commands. As Hippolyte declares, "The magic lasso carries Aphrodite's power to make men and women submit to your will! Whomever you bind with that lasso must obey you!"¹⁰⁷ Marston was obviously inspired by his invention of the lie detector and incorporated it into the comics in the form of the golden lasso, because if Wonder Woman says so, the trapped person must speak the truth. Wonder Woman was thus given the power to subdue any enemy and anyone who would protest to submit her loving authority.

However, the golden lasso represents also something more significant in terms of feminist critique than just the invention of the lie detector. As Marston admitted, the golden lasso is a metaphor of femininity. As Tim Hanley notes, Marston claimed that "he created Wonder Woman as a 'dramatized symbol of her sex. She's true to life—true to the universal characteristics of women everywhere. Her magic lasso is merely a symbol of feminine charm, allure, oomph, attraction every woman uses.'" According to Hanley, "[e]very woman could be

¹⁰⁶ Marston, "The Origin of Wonder Woman," *Wonder Woman No. 1*, 11A.

¹⁰⁷ Marston, "The Origin of Wonder Woman," *Wonder Woman No. 1*, 12A.

a Wonder Woman and every woman had her own lasso. It wasn't a lie detector test; it was her sexuality."¹⁰⁸

Similarly, as James Edwin Mahon suggests, the golden lasso is not the kind of weapon that is used with the intention to destroy, rather it is used to subdue the victim. He writes in his essay:

[t]he power of the magic lasso is not the power to force someone to obey you. That is masculine power, or domination. The magic lasso is not like a loaded gun pointed at someone's head. The power of the magic lasso is the power to captivate someone. That is feminine power, or inducement (allure). The magic lasso is like a beautiful face, or an attractive perfume. It enchants, like a love potion.¹⁰⁹

Other weapons such as bows and arrows, shotguns and other similar combat weapons are meant to harm, which, according to Mahon, is a feature of domination that is typically ascribed to masculinity. The golden lasso, on the other hand, is meant to captivate but make no harm. This captivation, as he suggests, is usually connected to women's allure by which they want men to subdue. By the use of the golden lasso, Marston wanted to promote women's femininity and the fact that women are able to control men in a non-violent way.

However, some authors such as Melanie Johnson-Moxley doubt the harmlessness of the use of the magical lasso. She supposes that the use of the lasso is not always "necessarily non-violent," as some of Wonder Woman's victims find it "torturous." As Johnson-Moxley states, "[f]or the Amazons, the judicious use of violent force to prevent further violence is pragmatically permitted." If Wonder Woman must use violence in order to avoid even greater violence, she will do so.¹¹⁰ This undermines Marston's original intention to create a character who would compel men to subdue non-violently to women. The original idea is to succumb willingly and with pleasure but if Wonder Woman needs to prevent great violence, she is willing to use force as well.

Even though the lasso was supposedly used with the intention to give Wonder Woman the power to capture her enemies and make them subdue to the feminine power that Wonder Woman represents, as Hanley suggest, "when the golden lasso was used in the examined issues, it involved Wonder Woman tying up someone else only 52 percent of the time. The other 48

¹⁰⁸ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 51.

¹⁰⁹ James Edwin Mahon, "The Lasso of Truth?," in *Wonder Woman and Philosophy: The Amazonian Mystique*, ed. Jacob M. Held (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 183.

¹¹⁰ Melanie Johnson-Moxley, "Bound to Face the Truth: The Ethics of Using Wonder Woman's Lasso" in *Wonder Woman and Philosophy: The Amazonian Mystique*, ed. Jacob M. Held (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 100.

percent of the time, Wonder Woman was tied up in her own lasso.”¹¹¹ Therefore, it is arguable whether the lasso was really used for displaying Wonder Woman’s and generally women’s power to dominate men or it was a tool to capture Wonder Woman herself. It seems that capturing Wonder Woman by her own lasso is the demonstration of women’s submission to patriarchal society and simultaneously, it might be Marston’s way of teaching young boys to subdue to women by illustrating Wonder Woman herself captured. The real intention of the use of the lasso in Marston’s comics is unclear, as Marston claims to teach boys to subdue willingly to women, but ties women, especially Wonder Woman, instead of bonding men.

Other handy accessories that she wears are her bracelets that can deflect bullets. They might be the metaphor of men’s domination over women. Amazons wear these bracelets as a reminder that they should not leave men to enslave them. These bracelets once used to be chains by which they were bound by Hercules and since they are free, they wear these bracelets to remind them of their former submission.¹¹² For example, in *Sensation Comics* No. 4, Wonder Woman is captured by Baroness von Gunther, a Nazi cooperater, who ties her bracelets together by chains and Wonder Woman finds herself helpless and remembers the words of her mother Hippolyte: “Daughter, if any man weld chains on your bracelets, you will become weak as we Amazons were when we surrendered to Hercules and his Greeks.”¹¹³ Wonder Woman is not invincible, she is powerless when her bracelets are tied together. Once Wonder Woman lets men to bind her bracelets, she is helpless. Therefore, she must not let men to tie her so she can fight their domination.

As Lepore quotes Marston, Marston explains the use of bracelets in the press release that firstly introduced him as the author of Wonder Woman:

‘Like her male prototype, ‘Superman,’ ‘Wonder Woman’ is gifted with tremendous physical strength—but unlike Superman she can be injured. ‘Wonder Woman’ has bracelets welded on her wrists; with these she can repulse bullets. But if she lets any man weld chains on these bracelets, she loses her power. This [...] is what happens to all women when they submit to a man’s domination. ‘Wonder Woman’ was conceived [...] to set up a standard among children and young people of strong, free, courageous womanhood; and to combat the idea that women are inferior to men, and to inspire girls to self-confidence and achievement in athletics, occupations and professions monopolized by men.’¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 60.

¹¹² Marston, “Introducing Wonder Woman,” *All Star Comics* No. 8, 3.

¹¹³ William Moulton Marston, “The Coming of Paula Von Gunther,” *Sensation Comics* No. 4, April 1942, 9-10.

¹¹⁴ William Moulton Marston, “Noted Psychologist Revealed as Author of Best-Selling ‘Wonder Woman,’ Children’s Comic,” press release, typescript [June 1942], WW Letters, Smithsonian, as quoted in Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, Chapter 26, no pagination.

Wonder Woman according to Marston's idea represents the female sex that can overrule men because of their strength of their femininity but they cannot forget about their abilities, as once they let themselves to be bound, they remain under men's domination.

The bracelets also have another power over Amazons. As Mahon suggests, when an Amazon takes off "her bracelets, she loses all control, becomes consumed with rage, and goes berserk, destroying everything in her path—that is, attempting to dominate everything. She effectively becomes masculine, like Ares."¹¹⁵ For instance, in *Sensation Comics* No. 19 Wonder Woman, with her bracelets removed, exclaims: "I'm completely uncontrolled! I'm free to destroy like a man!"¹¹⁶ She acts wildly because she lost her bracelets that forwarded her extreme strength to do good and instead, she is free to behave as a violent man, which is a trait that is usually ascribed to masculinity.

Marston incorporated a lot of symbolism into the Wonder Woman's outfit and accessories. Her costume is not just an ordinary costume, it is a symbol of patriotism and strength, but also the support of feminism, as it was in 1980s in the creation of the Wonder Woman Foundation. Thanks to her high boots, short skirt or briefs and small top, she can be beautiful and feminine, but due to her muscular body she is also masculine and strong. Her weapons are not used only to fight enemies, they are used as metaphors. The golden lasso is supposed to teach men to submit to women and to show that there is a better way of dealing with issues than violence. Her bracelets should remind not just Wonder Woman but all the women that they cannot subdue to men if they want to rule the world. All the symbolism is meant to uplift women's significance, to free them from patriarchal domination and to prove them they are stronger and more capable than men, thanks to their femininity.

As next, another significant feature of Wonder Woman that the feminist literary analysis should discuss is her origin. Superheroes are usually characters that experienced some trauma that influenced them, which caused they became superheroes in adulthood. They sometimes also come from unusual family setting, such as Superman who is an alien or Batman who comes from an extremely rich family. Wonder Woman is neither particularly rich nor her parents were murdered. However, her origin is important when defining her character, beliefs and the attitude towards the world from the feminist point of view. In the first story where Wonder Woman is introduced, it is said that Wonder Woman comes from the Paradise Island, which is an island

¹¹⁵ Mahon, "The Lasso of Truth?," 179.

¹¹⁶ William Moulton Marston, "The Unbound Amazon," *Sensation Comics* No. 19, July 1943, 10.

hidden from the sight of men, where only women live in peace. These strong emancipated women are called the Amazons. In the comics, Amazons are presented as loving creatures, their society is based on love and wisdom. However, the real Amazons from ancient Greek legends were not as much well-behaving. The origin of the legends about Amazons is uncertain. According to Sigrid King, the Amazons can be either just a myth created by men or their origin can be based on real tribes of women. These women worshipped female gods and lived in North Africa. Also, the word amazon comes from the word “mazos,” which means “breastless.” The story goes that Amazons used to remove one of their breasts to operate their weapons with greater precision and ease.¹¹⁷

Daniels questions the real nature of Amazons in comparison with the Amazons introduced in the *Wonder Woman* comics. According to Daniels, Marston idealized Amazons to suit his purposes and to show the better side of these warriors. He reveals the real character of Amazons and comments on the removing of breasts claiming that “generations of female archers have shown that such sacrifices are unnecessary, and might have been invented to show that these women warriors detested their own femininity. They lived without men except for mating, and killed any male offspring.” Daniels quotes feminist historian Abby Wettan Kleinbaum who states that “‘the Amazon is a dream that men created,’ the equivalent of what debaters call ‘a straw man,’ an imaginary opponent set up to prove one’s own prowess. In every old tale the Amazons were defeated, and the point was that women should know their place.” Correspondingly, Daniels refers to an old Greek legend in which Amazons fight in the Trojan War. When Achilles fatally hurts Amazon leader Penthesilea, he is dazed by her beauty. The suggestion of this story apparently is that “women were more likely to overcome men through erotic enslavement than through violence,” which is closely related and what Marston believed in. Marston created his own story presenting Hippolyte and Hercules and invented more idealized ending to suit his purposes. Finally, Daniels suggests that the feminist Amazon ideal may be based rather on the comics than on the ancient Amazons.¹¹⁸

However, regardless of Marston’s idealization, Amazons are generally viewed positively by feminists. According to King, even if Amazons may have been a male invention, nowadays they represent role models for modern feminists, as they are presented in literature as independent and strong women.

¹¹⁷ Sigrid King, “Amazon,” in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), 16.

¹¹⁸ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 23.

The Amazon provides contemporary feminists with a model of 'political power, of military prowess, and a role model of autonomy and hence dignity.' [...] Although in its earliest stages the image of the Amazon may have been used by men to reinforce their own heroic myth, it has since been appropriated by feminists to express women's 'independence and power.'¹¹⁹

Marston draw inspiration from this ancient tribe of warrior women when inventing Wonder Woman. They are supposed to be strong, fearless and independent of men. By implementing the Amazons into the Wonder Woman comics, Marston expressed his belief in matriarchal society that should replace the patriarchal model according to which the American society works. As Marston believed, Amazons are the tool to express that women should be independent of men and what more, that they should rule them. In the society of Amazons, there is no Other, as defined by Beauvoir. In the Amazon society, there are no men who would be the measure with which women should compare. In the Amazon society, women are those to whom men should relate. As Daniels notes, in an interview to the *New York Times* Marston stated that women would overrule the world with their Amazonian attitude in a political and economic sense as well.¹²⁰ But in contrast to the original Amazons, who fight and kill, which is a characteristic of masculinity, Marston wants women to rule the world in more feminine fashion, that is, by their allure and beauty. Marston does not want women to fight like men, he wants them to use their natural traits, that is, their femininity.

¹¹⁹ Sigrid King, "Amazon," 16.

¹²⁰ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 19.

5.4 Characters

5.4.1 Wonder Woman's Alter Ego and Relationship with Steve Trevor

Superheroes invent their alter-egos to cover their true identities to protect themselves from enemies and to have some personal life. As the defenders of justice, they do not have much time for relationships, as they are too occupied saving the world. The first superhero, Superman, has his alter-ego alias Clark Kent. Bruce Wayne behaves as a careless millionaire to cover his late-night activities when he wears the black cape of Batman. To protect her identity, Wonder Woman as a proper superheroine invented her alter-ego as well. Interestingly, these two characters behave quite differently when it comes to the relationships with men. Diana Prince tries to fit in the society and be as unnoticeable as possible to cover her true self. As Gladys L. Knight writes, “[b]oth Clark Kent’s and Wonder Woman’s alter ego, Diana Prince, wore glasses to obscure their appearance, to signify weakness (both superheroes had perfect vision), as well as to project the stereotypical persona of the smart but socially awkward person[.]”¹²¹ Wonder Woman, on the contrary, is being herself and does not try to pretend anything, as she is an Amazon warrior who came to help the war-driven man’s world.

In *Sensation Comics* No. 1, Princess Diana obtains her secret identity. She meets a nurse from whom she obtains her new credentials as Diana Prince, the nurse. Princess Diana offers money to the nurse so she can travel to her beloved and Wonder Woman can stay close to Steve Trevor: “Look – by taking your place I can see the man I love and you can marry the man you love!” When Wonder Woman introduces herself, the nurse is surprised: “Why, that’s an amazing coincidence! I’m Diana too! Diana Prince! And you’d better remember the last name – because it’ll be yours from now on.”¹²² Since then, Wonder Woman is disguised as Diana Prince, the nurse, and then as a secretary of Steve Trevor’s colleague officer to stay close to her love and to be close to any potential danger that Wonder Woman should face.

As Hanley writes, Diana Prince, Wonder Woman’s alter-ego, was the exact opposite of Wonder Woman.

While Wonder Woman was strong, Diana was weak. While Wonder Woman was colorful and bold, Diana was a dull wallflower. They even looked completely different;

¹²¹ Gladys L. Knight, *Female Action Heroes: A Guide to Women in Comics, Video Games, Film, and Television* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010), 308.

¹²² William Moulton Marston, “Wonder Woman Arrives in Man’s World,” *Sensation Comics* No. 1, January 1942, 8.

Wonder Woman was flamboyant and agile, with long flowing hair, while Diana was reserved and bespectacled, with her hair tied up neatly in a bun.¹²³

Wonder Woman is dressed in her revealing costume, whereas Diana Prince is neatly clothed in the uniform of a nurse and later as a secretary according to the contemporary fashion. Diana Prince looks like a woman that is expected to look that way by the society. By being clothed according to the social standards, wearing glasses and neatly styled hair bun, she covers the fact that she is actually the opposite, a wild and free Amazon, a female fighter. But not only she covers her true identity, she represents everything the Amazon princess fights against. Diana Prince complies with the patriarchal society to fit in to have cover, which is the exact opposite of independent Wonder Woman.

As Hanley suggests, in contrast to Wonder Woman, “Diana was inept and hapless, much like a damsel in distress.” When she occasionally tried to protest and fight back, she was bound and the only way of saving was to transform into Wonder Woman who could break free.¹²⁴ In *Sensation Comics* No. 7, Diana Prince reads a title in newspapers celebrating Wonder Woman’s accomplishment and complains: “I’m almost jealous of myself as Wonder Woman—nothing I do as a normal woman, Diana Prince, ever impresses anybody—I have to become the sensational Wonder Woman before any body notices me!”¹²⁵ As Hanley proposes, “Diana was a far cry from her superpowered alter ego, and such a contrast suggests that Diana Prince was more than just a secret identity.” As Hanley concludes, “[t]he personality of Diana Prince exemplified what an Amazon princess thought of American women.”¹²⁶ That is, that women were seen as inferior to men by that time. They lacked their own will to stand against patriarchy.

Mitra C. Emad analyzes the double personality of Wonder Woman alias Diana Prince from the viewpoint of masculinity and femininity. She describes the combination of private and public personality that merged in the person of the Amazon princess;

This trickster female – female personality of “Diana Prince” is one historical attempt to resolve the oppositional tension inherent in the character of Wonder Woman: How to synthesize the public realm of masculinity/nation with the private realm of femininity/sexuality? In the person of “Diana Prince,” femininity wins out and the powerful superhero pretends weakness and submission in order that the separate spheres remain unchallenged. The public and private realms collide in the body of Wonder

¹²³ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 30-31.

¹²⁴ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 30-31.

¹²⁵ William Moulton Marston, “Wonder Woman: The Milk Racket of Paula Von Gunther,” *Sensation Comics* No. 7, July 1942, 13.

¹²⁶ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 31.

Woman who resorts to trickery and covert action to protect the discrete realms of national interests and feminine submissiveness.¹²⁷

In other words, Wonder Woman is a combination of two spheres, the private feminine and the national masculine. Marston merged these two identities into one and created a combination of masculine female fighter disguised as a damsel in distress in order to cover her true self.

This ambiguity of Wonder Woman's identity provides space for analyzing what the double identity symbolizes. Some authors question Marston's intended female superiority in the character of Wonder Woman. J. Lenore Wright suggests that "Wonder Woman's life mirrors this two-sphere model of society." She abandons the female utopian world and goes to the evil male's world. She says that "Wonder Woman writers attempt to resolve the ambiguous identity of Wonder Woman in the person of Diana Prince" and continues by claiming that "this resolution undermines Wonder Woman's power and reinforces female inferiority generally, further relegating women to the status of Other."¹²⁸ Not Wonder Woman, but Diana Prince is seen as the ordinary helpless woman by the society. She is "the Other." But as an alter-ego, she is a part of the Wonder Woman's character.

As next, the differences between Wonder Woman and her alter ego also influence their relationships with others. Wonder Woman's relationship with Steve Trevor was also very different from that of Diana Prince. Diana Prince cannot imagine being without her beloved, while Wonder Woman's main concern is well-being of Americans. Steve Trevor is an ordinary man of the 1940s. He does not have a high opinion of women. He is satisfied with the established patriarchal social system. In *Wonder Woman* No. 10, he thinks to himself: "Blistering blazes! Why will that beautiful gal always invite trouble? If she'd only married me, she'd be home cooking my dinner right now!"¹²⁹ But Wonder Woman cannot marry, as she would lose her Amazonian strength and does not want to, as she would lose her independence. On the other hand, as Diana Prince, she would be happy if Trevor expressed his affection to her.

In the first story where Diana obtains her secret identity, she tries to persuade Steve Trevor, her love, that Wonder Woman is only a dream: "All right, I believe you! Anyway,

¹²⁷ Mitra C. Emad, "Reading Wonder Woman's Body: Mythologies of Gender and Nation," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 39, No. 6 (2006): 965.

¹²⁸ J. Lenore Wright, "Becoming a (Wonder) Woman: Feminism, Nationalism, and the Ambiguity of Female Identity," in *Wonder Woman and Philosophy: The Amazonian Mystique*, ed. Jacob M. Held (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 14.

¹²⁹ William Moulton Marston, "Wonder Woman and the Invasion from Saturn," *Wonder Woman* No. 10, Fall 1944, 12A.

Captain.... You don't need Wonder Woman now – You've got me!” But Steve is not very enthusiastic about Diana Prince, as he fell for Wonder Woman: “Listen, Diana! You're a nice kid, and I like you. But if you think you can hold a candle to Wonder Woman You're crazy!” Wonder Woman is upset by what her love told her. What more, she is upset because of herself and of what she allowed a man to do to her, to an independent Amazon fighter: “So I'm my own rival, eh? That's funny... If mother could only see me now.... as a very feminine woman... a nurse, no less, in a world full of men, and in love, too – with myself for a rival!”¹³⁰ At the end of the next episode, Diana Prince seems to be even jealous of herself: “I saw your Wonder Woman. I don't think she's very pretty.” But Steve advocates Wonder Woman with whom he is in love: “Hush, Diana! Wonder Woman is the most gorgeous being in the world!”¹³¹ As next, in the following story, Diana Prince is even crying because Steve is healthy and leaving: “Oh, Steve is going! I'll never see him again! I can't bear it!” As a result of her cry, she stays close to him by becoming a secretary of Steve's colleague.¹³² Wonder Woman is aware of her double identity and even despises the way Wonder Woman behaves when she becomes Diana Prince. When she plays the role of Diana Prince, she is vulnerable. She behaves as an ordinary woman that is subject to patriarchal social norms. She is in love with a man who seeks a housewife like any other young women in that time period and is desperate for mutual affection.

Opposing to Diana Prince's affection to Steve Trevor, Wonder Woman behaves coldly to her loved one. Steve loves Wonder Woman and she loves him too, but the duty and responsibility are more important for her than her personal well-being. On the contrary, Diana Prince would love Steve Trevor to show her his affection, but he fell for Wonder Woman, who is strong and independent unlike the submissive nurse, Diana Prince. Steve Trevor is enchanted by Wonder Woman. Every time he is in trouble, Wonder Woman is close by to save him. Trevor shows Wonder Woman his affection but Wonder Woman is not like any other ordinary woman from this world. She does not want to be subdued to a man, she wants her equality. Wonder Woman's message is clear, she will not be treated as the women of the man's world. In *Sensation Comics* No. 2, Steve Trevor says to Wonder Woman after she saves him: “Wonder Woman! My beautiful angel –” but her reply is: “What's an angel? I think I'd rather be a woman.”¹³³

¹³⁰ Marston, “Wonder Woman Arrives in Man's World,” *Sensation Comics* No. 1, 13.

¹³¹ William Moulton Marston, “Wonder Woman: The Menace of Dr. Poison,” *Sensation Comics* No. 2, February 1942, 13.

¹³² William Moulton Marston, “Diana Prince – Framed For Espionage,” *Sensation Comics* No. 3, March 1942, 1-2.

¹³³ Marston, “Wonder Woman: The Menace of Dr. Poison,” *Sensation Comics* No. 2, 11.

5.4.2. Villains

Given the pro-feminist nature of Marston's conception of the *Wonder Woman* comics, one would expect that men would be the ones who would oppose and fight Wonder Woman. This may be true considering the nature and reason of their criminal behavior. Although there are also female villains who fight Wonder Woman and the reasons for their actions are usually rooted in their past. Considering male characters, Lepore claims that what "all villains in Wonder Woman share is their opposition to women's equality. Against each of them, Wonder Woman fights for a woman's right to work, to run for political office, and to lead."¹³⁴

One of the first and prominent enemies of Wonder Woman is Ares, later called Mars, the god of war, and his fellowmen, the Earl of Greed, the Duke of Deception and the Count of Conquest.¹³⁵ All of them are men, presenting males as cruel, evil and eager for battle, the opposite of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, who wants nothing but peace and well-being. Ares is the stereotypical representation of all men and the man's world which Wonder Woman aims to overrule by loving submission. Mars and his companions are usually illustrated as masculine, that is, violent and angry, wearing an armor and ready to go to war with women, represented by Aphrodite. Mars sincerely despises and hates women, but is also aware of their capabilities, as suggested in *Wonder Woman* No. 5. "If women gain power in war they'll escape man's domination completely!" Mars complains. "They will achieve a horrible independence! [...] Women are the natural spoils of war! They must remain at home, helpless slaves for the victor! If women become warriors like the Amazons, they'll grow stronger than men and put an end to war!"¹³⁶ All in all, women are "the Other" for Mars and his companions, they despise them and believe their place is at home, not in the war, fighting for their rights. Wonder Woman has no desire to reform men, as they are beyond reformation, they cannot be reformed for what they are. They are men, therefore, the evil ones that have to be overruled to stop the war and all the violence.

Superheroes fight evil and injustice typically represented by villains that superheroes are supposed to defeat. They fight using their wit, power and weapons, which means the use of violence. But as Hanley suggests, "[a]lthough they regularly used force to stop villains, violence wasn't the only option. Wonder Woman frequently tried to talk to criminals and show them that another path would be a better choice." Wonder Woman's approach to villains is different from

¹³⁴ Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, Chapter 25, no pagination.

¹³⁵ Marston, "The Supreme Ordeal of Wonder Woman," *Wonder Woman* No. 2, 7A.

¹³⁶ William Moulton Marston, "Battle For Womanhood," *Wonder Woman* No. 5, June-July 1943, 2A.

the approach of other superheroes. In the case that the criminal is a woman, Wonder Woman treats her differently than a man. Instead of simply punishing or imprisoning the criminal, “Wonder Woman’s general approach to women was to encouragingly point out their own strengths and set them free of the dominant men in their lives.”¹³⁷ As Robinson explains, female heroes such as Cheetah are “clearly capable of rehabilitation and redemption,” unlike the “male villains” including Ares, his companions and the Nazis and Japanese under their control. “Coexisting with these archvillains is a series of malevolent, woman-hating industrialists and the misogynist shrink Dr. Psycho.”¹³⁸ All in all, male enemies are in the *Wonder Woman* comics presented as hateful and sexist. There is no chance for their reformation, contrary to women who can be sent to Reform Island and enjoy the Amazonian life afterwards.

For example, in *Sensation Comics* No. 22, Wonder Woman confronts her notorious enemy, the Cheetah or Priscilla Rich, a girl with double identity, whose Cheetah personality forces her to do harm. When Wonder Woman sees Cheetah dancing, she exclaims: “It’s superb! You’re a born dancer—your dancing could attract millions of admirers! Oh, Cheetah, why don’t you dance and make people love you?”¹³⁹ Other superheroes usually do not offer encouraging words to their enemies, but Wonder Woman believes in a better world and especially in women. No other male superhero would probably treat his enemies like this. Thanks to Wonder Woman’s kindness and feminine traits, such as compassion and faith in people, her female enemies are given a chance to reform. Thanks to her feminine qualities, enemies are given a second chance.

Male villains are usually handed over to the military or police, but women, on the other hand, are treated directly by Wonder Woman herself. She sends them to the so-called Reform Island or Transformation Island that is supposed to transform villains into orderly citizens of the U.S. Reform Island appears for the first time in *Wonder Woman* No. 3 and Wonder Woman’s enemies like Paula von Gunther, a Nazi supporter, or Cheetah are sent there to learn to live the Amazon way of life. They are taught to submit to the loving authority. In *Wonder Woman* No. 26, Wonder Woman captures Tigra Tropica, an exotic woman who can control tigers, and when Tigra inquires what Wonder Woman will do to her, the reply is: “I’ll fly you to Transformation Island where the Amazons’ll teach you to trust humans and obey loving

¹³⁷ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 21.

¹³⁸ Lillian S. Robinson, *Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 44.

¹³⁹ William Moulton Marston, “The Secret Submarine,” *Sensation Comics* No. 22, October 1943, 11.

authority!”¹⁴⁰ Instead of simply putting criminals to prison to punish them, Wonder Woman sends her female enemies to the Amazon prison which teaches them to be better and to submit willingly and with love. The Marston’s message that men must submit to women, that is, to the loving authority, is ever present in the comics. Wonder Woman always looks for a better way of dealing with her enemies than just punishing them, as she believes in the good in people. Even if she fights like a man, looks and acts in a masculine way, she is still a woman. She has feminine characteristics that force her to be compassionate and moderate when it comes to violence and punishment.

In conclusion, male villains in the *Wonder Woman* comics are generally presented as evil and are beyond redemption. Their nature is evil. Mainly under the leadership of Mars, they look at women from the above and their goal is to keep women in place, that is, in the household and without their rights to equal opportunities. Female villains are no exception in the comics, they are quite frequent enemies of Wonder Woman, but unlike male villains, they are believed to be capable of change. Wonder Woman looks for other ways of dealing with her enemies than just violence. In case of female villains, Reform Island is the solution to their bad behavior. Wonder Woman believes that women can be reformed and subdued so they can worship their loving authority, that is, Aphrodite. This generally refers to Marston’s belief that women should rule the world and that men need to submit to their loving authority. Reforming female villains seems to be a metaphor of men submitting to women.

5.4.3 Wonder Woman’s Companions

Superhero’s adventures usually gradually become more and more epic and he or she needs help. Therefore, superheroes are often assisted by companions. Batman has Robin by his side, Green Arrow has Speedy to help him. Wonder Woman was not given a companion in its proper sense, there is no masked hero with a hood or cape. Rather, Wonder Woman has a whole sisterhood of young girls helping her in her adventures. These are the Holliday Girls, a sorority at Holliday College. The girls firstly appeared in *Sensation Comics* No. 2, where they helped Wonder Woman to distract a group of Nazis by dancing with them. Holliday Girls occur frequently in the Marston’s *Wonder Woman* comics. Usually, when Wonder Woman needs help, she summons her little helpers by the mental radio and Holliday Girls are always willingly at hand. These girls are led by Etta Candy, a corpulent girl who loves everything sweet. She is the very

¹⁴⁰ William Moulton Marston, “The Mistress of the Beasts,” *Wonder Woman* No. 26, November-December 1947, 12B.

opposite of Wonder Woman in terms of appearance. Wonder Woman is presented as athletic, muscular but at the same time beautiful woman, whereas Etta is an obese girl with swollen cheeks and her only passion is her candy. As stated by Daniels, “Etta Candy filled a standard role, that of the super hero’s comedy sidekick, and her short, rotund shape had echoes in figures like Plastic Man’s Woozy Winks or Green Lantern’s Doiby Dickles, yet even by their standards she was a bit bizarre.”¹⁴¹

Etta Candy plays a usual role of a companion, but also helps Wonder Woman in lecturing the young generation how to behave. In *Wonder Woman* No. 1, Diana Prince advises Etta to restrict her sweets to be attractive to men. “You know, Etta, you ought to cut down on the candy. It will ruin your constitution.” Then, Wonder Woman urges her, saying: “But Etta, if you get too fat you can’t catch a man.” From Etta’s reply it is clear that she prefers candy before men: “Who wants to? When you’ve got a man, there’s nothing you can do with him – but candy you can eat!” Diana Prince behaves like an average girl: “But don’t you like to be admired? [...] Taking off weight will make you feel better and besides it’s unpatriotic to hoard even fat!”¹⁴² In this case, Etta Candy behaves more like a feminist than Diana. Diana behaves like a typical conformist woman of that time who wants to be admired by men through her beauty and moreover, considers excessive eating unpatriotic.

As Babic suggests, “[t]hese sidekick gals serve as reminders for gendered behavior as they valiantly put their own needs aside to aid Wonder Woman.”¹⁴³ Instead of enjoying their carefree college lives, they sacrifice their time for Wonder Woman’s crusades. Wonder Woman could have chosen a male sidekick but rather she chose a group of young women who are not afraid to stand against enemies by Wonder Woman’s side, even if they have no superpowers. Marston’s message probably is that women are strong enough to stand against the patriarchy and to fight for their rightful place in the society.

It is obvious why Wonder Woman has a group of women following her steps. Etta Candy and Holliday Girls represent Marston’s feminist belief in women’s power. They are ordinary women but by the side of Wonder Woman, they have enough self-confidence to stand against the enemies. Through the sidekicks, Wonder Woman also lectures how to behave properly, even though the sidekicks, in some instances, behave in more feminist fashion than

¹⁴¹ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 35.

¹⁴² William Moulton Marston, “The Greatest Feat of Daring In Human History,” *Wonder Woman* No. 1, Summer 1942, 3D-4D.

¹⁴³ Annessa Ann Babic, *America’s Changing Icons: Constructing Patriotic Women from World War I to the Present* (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018), 63.

Wonder Woman herself. Together with Wonder Woman, Etta Candy and Holliday Girls compound a group of fearless women who are willing to fight for the good, which is equality, or according to Marston's ideology, women's superiority.

6 DEVELOPMENT AFTER MARSTON'S DEPARTURE

6.1 Wonder Woman in the Silver and Bronze Age

After Marston's death in 1947, comics, including *Wonder Woman*, underwent various changes. New screenwriters and pencilers continued writing the *Wonder Woman* comics, under the leadership of Robert Kanigher, a new screenwriter and editor. As Daniels writes, "[s]uper heroes, so closely associated with World War II, had taken a peacetime nosedive, and other genres, including crime and westerns, were sky-rocketing." *Sensation Comics* was struggling with lack of readership and editors tried to save the situation by implementing a new trend of romantic stories. This trend influenced the *Wonder Woman* comics as well. *Sensation Comics* No. 94 shows "Steve Trevor carrying a simpering and seemingly helpless Princess Diana across a narrow stream." (see Appendix E) "This dramatic change in her personality inaugurated a pattern that was to continue for decades."¹⁴⁴ *Wonder Woman* changed significantly from a feminist fighter into an ordinary young woman seeking love and safety by her lover.

In order to save *Sensation Comics* and "[i]n an apparent attempt to attract female readers, *Wonder Woman* was depicted as everything from a model showing off the latest fashions, to a 'lonely hearts' newspaper columnist."¹⁴⁵ For example, in *Wonder Woman* No. 90 from 1957, *Wonder Woman* is presented strolling with a stroller under the title saying, "*Wonder Woman*, Amazon baby sitter!"¹⁴⁶ *Wonder Woman* started to engage herself in activities that are generally connected to women's conformity to the society, such as house chores and raising children.

Despite all the changes happening in the comic book industry, *Wonder Woman* survived and managed to keep her own comics during this depression of comic books. However, she had to undergo certain alterations to keep its readership. As an example of changes in 1950s, Daniels highlights the exchange of the section called "Wonder Women of History," in which successful and famous women were presented, for a section titled "Marriage a la Mode," which showed "wedding customs around the world." According to Daniels, "Kanigher's *Wonder Woman* was more traditionally feminine than William Moulton Marston's, both in her fascination with marriage and in her attitude toward conflict." *Wonder Woman*, for example, presented a new way of settling the love relationship with Steve Trevor. In 1950, she explains that as *Wonder*

¹⁴⁴ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 93.

¹⁴⁵ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 97-98.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman – Amazon Baby-sitter," *Wonder Woman* No. 90, May 1957, no pagination.

Woman, she cannot marry as she would lose her powers. But if Steve would fall in love with her as Diana Prince, they could be wed. The problem is that Wonder Woman protects her identity very carefully. Similarly, in 1954 Steve reminds readers that they cannot be wed as long as Wonder Woman is needed by the society.¹⁴⁷ All in all, Kanigher's Wonder Woman was more feminine than Marston's, but not more feminist.

As Hanley suggests, Kanigher's Wonder Woman differed from Marston's Wonder Woman in several aspects, one of them was the issue of her alter-ego and the love relationship with Steve Trevor. "In the Golden Age, Wonder Woman and Diana had always been separate personalities, one the real woman and the other merely a disguise. In the Silver Age, the two sides conflated and Wonder Woman wanted Steve to appreciate both sides of her personality."¹⁴⁸ For instance, in *Wonder Woman* No. 130, Wonder Woman bursts out: "The nerve of Steve! Always praising Wonder Woman in my presence as if I were just a wooden post! He never says a single nice thing about my eyes—or my hair—or my figure!"¹⁴⁹ The Golden Age Wonder Woman would not care about what Trevor thinks of her eyes or hair. She also realized that Diana Prince is only her secret identity. The Silver Age Wonder Woman, on the other hand, behaves more like an average housewife of 1950s, dependent on what men think of her in terms of her appearance.

The comics continued to change in the following era as well. In 1968, Women's Lib Movement started to protest against The Miss America Pageant, "an institution that symbolized women's enslavement to beauty," which is generally considered as the beginning of the feminist movement in the U.S. This movement "sought a holistic transformation of society, one that would do away with male dominance in every sphere (public and private) and challenge old gender patterns."¹⁵⁰ By this time, denoted as the Bronze Age, Wonder Woman underwent another transformation. New writer and penciler, Dennis O'Neil and Mike Sekowsky, "transitioned Wonder Woman from Amazonian warrior to human being, from costumed crime fighter to mod heroine." As Zanin sees it, "[t]his new era of Wonder Woman was a way of trying to fit the heroine into a contemporary world of women's lib and mod fashion, but it was misguided. Feminists were fighting against enslavement to beauty" and Wonder Woman "open[ed] a fashion boutique." Zanin notes that it does not mean that fashion was not of high

¹⁴⁷ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 101-102.

¹⁴⁸ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 111.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Kanigher, "The Mirage Mirrors," *Wonder Woman* No. 130, May 1962, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Dorothy Sue Cobble, Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry, *Feminism Unfinished: A Short, Surprising History of American Women's Movements* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2014), 70, as quoted in Zanin, "Wonder Woman: Feminist Faux Pas?," 64.

importance to feminists. “It most definitely was, but the aim was to redefine traditional concepts of beauty. It was about celebrating real women’s bodies and encouraging women to ‘dress to express’ as opposed to conforming to the gender dictates of society.” According to Zanin, “[f]eminists encouraged women to engage with their natural physicality.” As she sees it, “[t]he boutique storyline twisted Wonder Woman into something that contravened her natural femininity.”¹⁵¹

Similarly, the beginnings of this transformation can be seen, for example, in *Wonder Woman* No. 178. The cover page exclaims: “Forget the old... The new Wonder Woman is here!”. Diana Prince undergoes a transformation in order to attract Steve Trevor. One page shows Diana visiting a hairdresser and shopping new fashionable clothes, exclaiming: “Wow! I-I’m gorgeous! I should have done this ages ago!”¹⁵² As Daniels cites O’Neil, the writer, he and Sekowsky intended to free Wonder Woman of her divinity and transform her into an independent feminist who is strong because of her femininity, not because of supernatural abilities. ““I saw it as taking a woman and making her independent, and not dependent on super powers. I saw it as making her thoroughly human and then an achiever on top of that, which, according to my mind, was very much in keeping with the feminist agenda,”” O’Neill argued. However, according to Daniels, feminists did not agree. They saw it as that “DC had weakened an important symbol.”¹⁵³

Wonder Woman’s feminist personality was revived in July 1972, when Gloria Steinem, a well-known leader of the feminist movement and a friend of Steve Ross who was contemporary editor of *Wonder Woman*, put Wonder Woman on the cover page of the *Ms.* magazine, which was a publication that dealt with topics such as politics and feminist lifestyle. It was something new in comparison with other regularly issued women’s magazines about typical housewife activities such as house chores or cooking.¹⁵⁴ On the cover page, Wonder Woman is illustrated in her original blue, red and white outfit. The title reads: “Wonder Woman for President!”¹⁵⁵ (see Appendix F), which highlights how deeply Steinem and editors believed in her. Jeffrey A. Brown suggests that the reason of her success was the fact that all the editors

¹⁵¹ Zanin, “Wonder Woman: Feminist Faux Pas?,” 64-66.

¹⁵² Dennis O’Neil, “Wonder Woman’s Rival,” *Wonder Woman* No. 178, October 1968, 10.

¹⁵³ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 126.

¹⁵⁴ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 197.

¹⁵⁵ *Ms.*, July 1972, cover page.

of the magazine remembered Wonder Woman positively from their childhood.¹⁵⁶ Thus, Wonder Woman was supposed to be revived to her former glory.

After that, there appeared some efforts to profit on Wonder Woman in the movie industry, until Lynda Carter was introduced as Wonder Woman and became an embodiment of Wonder Woman in a “successful television series.”¹⁵⁷ According to Brown, “[t]he fact that a single character could simultaneously epitomize both female strength and sexual objectification some thirty years after her creation is remarkable.” She would then become an inspiration for many actresses to come. As Brown states, “[i]n the cyclical lineage of action heroines, this repopularized moment of Wonder Woman in the 1970s would eventually inspire the kick-ass women of modern film and television.”¹⁵⁸ According to Daniels, “[f]or millions who had never read the comics, Lynda Carter became the living, breathing embodiment of Wonder Woman.”¹⁵⁹ As Daniels quotes Carter, she herself viewed Wonder Woman as a symbol of feminism and female power: ““I think [...] that she represents everything good in a woman: strength, beauty, intelligence, and compassion. She was like the ideal woman.””¹⁶⁰

Wonder Woman’s approach to the man’s world changed, as the writers and pencilers altered. The Silver Age Kanigher’s Wonder Woman is generally considered as the weakest character in terms of feminist approach. She was more feminine than the older version, but she was conventional and subdued to the conformist society where women are the housewives and their primary concern is their appearance and the level of appeal to men. Similarly, despite the efforts of the Bronze Age writers to free Wonder Woman of her divinity and make her more humane and up-to-date modern fashion diva, they weakened her as a feminist symbol. Her feminist personality that was the closest to the original Marston’s idea returned in 1972 in the *Ms.* magazine. Lynda Carter followed thanks to whom Wonder Woman is well-known even among audience that never read comic books and is identified as a feminist fighter and the symbol of feminine power.

¹⁵⁶ Jeffrey A. Brown, *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 237.

¹⁵⁷ Sherrie A. Innes, “It’s a Girl Thing,” 82.

¹⁵⁸ Brown, *Dangerous Curves*, 237.

¹⁵⁹ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 138.

¹⁶⁰ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 148.

6.2 Wonder Woman in the Modern Age

Wonder Woman of the Modern Age, which is commonly dated since mid-1980s, differed from the Golden Age Amazon in many aspects as well, especially, in terms of her appearance. The Modern Age of comics is generally known for its detailed depiction of violence and eroticization. Daniels quotes Kupperberg, a Modern Age editor of Wonder Woman, who claims that “she’s mirrored the evolution of women and attitudes toward them,” also stating that she was successful by this time because of her being “a tough hero for the guys...and she’s not bad to look at!” In order to refresh Wonder Woman’s look, Kupperberg hired Mike Deodato as a penciler who created “the most overtly eroticized version of Wonder Woman to see print: a long-legged, full-bosomed, sloe-eyed beauty who may have been an impossible caricature of a woman but by the same token was powerful cartooning”¹⁶¹ (see Appendix G). Deodato’s Wonder Woman “raised the ire of some readers while simultaneously boosting *Wonder Woman*’s sales.”¹⁶²

Before and after Deodato, there appeared other writers and pencilers of Wonder Woman, such as George Pérez, Michael Straczynski or the first regular female writer, Gail Simone. However, according to Hanley, this era was not very successful for Wonder Woman and its creators changed quite often. “By the mid-1990s, the series had settled into a middling quality with middling sales, and it never came back in any lasting way.”¹⁶³ She was able to survive in her comics but could not compete with her colleagues Batman or Superman who already had their own brand. Hanley suggests that “[m]aybe it was better that Wonder Woman faded into the background for most of the Modern Age.” As he sees it,

[w]henver a woman took center stage in a DC comic, she was killed or turned evil or sexualized. The choices were death, scorn, or objectification. While there were several good moments for women at DC over the years, the ‘women in refrigerators’ plot device best encapsulates the era. Women were disposable and malleable, and everything revolved around male characters and their stories.¹⁶⁴

It can be said that since the Silver Age and especially in the Modern Age Wonder Woman has been concerned with the third option, she was objectified. Wonder Woman never turned evil nor died permanently. She wears even less clothes in comparison with her older versions, she has full lips, unusually long legs, full chest and overall perfect figure. As Robinson suggests,

¹⁶¹ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 184-186.

¹⁶² Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 191.

¹⁶³ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 232.

¹⁶⁴ Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, 242.

“[a]ll of the modifications in the superhero’s appearance made her more beautiful and more overtly sexy.”¹⁶⁵

Similarly, according to Innes, “[e]ven today, the makers of female action figures struggle to balance beauty and sex appeal with toughness.” It reflects the “larger cultural battle about tough women in the popular media.” Even though the image of heroic women frequently appears in the media, heroines cannot “appear too masculine and tough; in order to be marketable, they are frequently presented as feminine and heterosexually desirable.”¹⁶⁶

However, as Behm-Morawitz and Pennell conclude, this aspect of female superheroes is contradictory. “[F]emale superheroes may be empowering via the power and strength they exhibit;” but they also “may be disempowering due to the objectification of these characters. But research suggests that the mere sexualization of powerful female characters may negate the potential positive effects of such characters.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, regardless of Wonder Woman’s effort to fight for justice, she may not be perceived seriously due to her sexualized appearance. The overt sexualization of Wonder Woman may undermine her personality of a feminist but feminine warrior.

Sexualization of characters and increased violence can be seen, for instance, in Deodato’s *Wonder Woman* No. 100 from 1995, where her Amazon sister, Artemis, who won the right to become a new Wonder Woman, is killed by enemies¹⁶⁸ (see Appendix H). As Daniels notes, in this issue Artemis is “being pummeled, punctured, and pulverized in what may have been DC’s most violent death scene.”¹⁶⁹ In this example, objectification, that is, eroticization and increased violence are presented together as an example of the trend of the Modern Age comic writing.

Nevertheless, despite the overt sexualization, Wonder Woman is still generally believed to be a feminist female fighter. Morrison, a contemporary writer of the *Wonder Woman* graphic novels, believes in Wonder Woman as a feminist symbol, describing her in an interview for *The Daily Beast* as a “counterculture, feminist heroine.”¹⁷⁰ According to Brown, the fact that Wonder Woman is still very popular after decades signifies that her presence is not limited only

¹⁶⁵ Lillian S. Robinson, *Wonder Women*, 87.

¹⁶⁶ Innes, “It’s a Girl Thing,” 83.

¹⁶⁷ Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Hillary Pennell, “The Effects of Superhero Sagas on Our Gendered Selves,” in *Our Superheroes, Ourselves*, ed. Robin S. Rosenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 83.

¹⁶⁸ William Messner-Loebs, “Blank Madness,” *Wonder Woman* No. 100, July 1995, 18-38.

¹⁶⁹ Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, 191.

¹⁷⁰ Melissa Leon, “Comics Legend Grant Morrison on His Queer, Kinky Wonder Woman,” *The Daily Beast*, June 4, 2016, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/comics-legend-grant-morrison-on-his-queer-kinky-wonder-woman>.

to comics. “As a property of the media conglomerate Time-Warner, Wonder Woman is the subject of substantial commercialization.” Her illustration can be seen on clothing, school tools, posters, toys and similar products. “Because of her longevity, Wonder Woman merchandise is marketed to older fans and young consumers alike. She is equally popular with middle-aged feminists [...] and little girls.”¹⁷¹

One of the latest results of commercialization of Wonder Woman was her presence in movies, *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice* in 2016, *Wonder Woman* (see Appendix I) and also *Justice League* in 2017. In one interview Morrison expresses his disappointment he sees in *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice*. He believes that modern movie Wonder Woman changed her approach from a peacekeeper to a fighter, in comparison to Marston’s Wonder Woman:

[The warrior woman thing is] not what [Wonder Woman’s creator] William Marston wanted, that’s not what he wanted at all! His original concept for Wonder Woman was an answer to comics that he thought were filled with images of blood-curdling masculinity, and you see the latest shots of Gal Gadot in the costume, and it’s all sword and shield and her snarling at the camera. Marston’s Diana was a doctor, a healer, a scientist...¹⁷²

On the other hand, Gal Gadot, the actress who embodied Wonder Woman in the latest films defends Wonder Woman, claiming that she is a feminist and highlights the fact that the feminism and her goodness are rooted in her oblivion to gender roles: ““It was important to me that my character would never come and preach about how men should treat women. Or how women should perceive themselves. It was more about playing oblivious to society’s rules.”¹⁷³ All in all, various opinions appear regarding the movies and not all of them agree. But the basic rules according to which Wonder Woman acts still remain the same. She is beautiful, fights for justice and defends the weaker ones.

Similarly, Patricia Jenkins, the director of the *Wonder Woman* movie in an interview with *Entertainment Weekly* discusses Wonder Woman’s and Amazons’ appearance. She believes that Amazons should not be dressed in armor like men, as they should be “authentic and real — and appealing to women.”¹⁷⁴ This idea is closely related to the message Marston

¹⁷¹ Brown, *Dangerous Curves*, 239.

¹⁷² Chris Agar, “‘Wonder Woman’: Grant Morrison Criticizes Gal Gadot Movie Version,” *Screen Rant*, July 16, 2015, <https://screenrant.com/grant-morrison-gal-gadot-wonder-woman-movie/>.

¹⁷³ Nicole Sperling, “Gal Gadot: ‘Of course’ Wonder Woman is a feminist,” *Entertainment Weekly*, May 18, 2017, <https://ew.com/movies/2017/05/18/gal-gadot-wonder-woman-feminist/>.

¹⁷⁴ Nicole Sperling, “Wonder Woman: Gal Gadot, Robin Wright, Connie Nielsen first look,” *Entertainment Weekly*, March 24, 2016, <https://ew.com/article/2016/03/24/wonder-woman-first-look-gal-gadot-robin-wright-connie-nielsen/>.

wanted to pass on his readership through Wonder Woman. That is, that women should show the world their strength, but they should do so through their femininity. Jenkins and Lindy Hemming, a costume designer, created a kind of character which showed “women’s ripped shoulders and toned legs, in outfits that looked practical but that still featured the tropes of the comic book, in particular the braces on their wrists and, yes, even the high heels.” Jenkins is fond of high heels, and defends Wonder Woman wearing them. She thinks that Wonder Woman can fight enemies and look attractive at the same time, same as men want Superman to look masculine.¹⁷⁵ Jenkins’ Wonder Woman, in conclusion, is not that far from the original Marston’s idea of feminine strength, that is, superiority of women to men due to their femininity.

Lastly, although the opinions on Wonder Woman of different eras change, Wonder Woman as a symbol is generally viewed correspondingly with regard to her ambiguous character. As Brown concludes on the characteristics of the Amazon princess, she is a figure full of ambiguity.

Wonder Woman can be, and is, understood as alternately a model of female strength, a performance of masculinity, a dominatrix, a feminist avenger, a post-feminist Girl Power avatar, an example of feminine masquerade, a product of male creators, and/or a successfully active looker. And, like all the heroines who followed her, Wonder Woman is a contestable figure because she embodies all of these conflicting attributes simultaneously.¹⁷⁶

To summarize how Modern Age Wonder Woman differs from the Golden Age Amazon, it is her eroticization that is omnipresent in the superhero comic book industry, together with increased violence that changes Wonder Woman as a peacekeeper into a warrior. Also, due to the objectification, there is a danger that her feminist message may not be taken seriously. However, this message, including the *Wonder Woman* movie remains the same. She is a female warrior who fights enemies using her femininity, which is her actual super power. There is an apparent effort of the contemporary creators of Wonder Woman to imitate Marston’s original design of Diana, which is, however, accompanied by the contemporary trend of eroticization and violent scenes.

¹⁷⁵ Nicole Sperling, “Wonder Woman: Gal Gadot, Robin Wright, Connie Nielsen first look.”

¹⁷⁶ Jeffrey A. Brown, *Dangerous Curves*, 240-241.

7 CONCLUSION

Wonder Woman is an ambiguous character in many ways. Her creator, William Moulton Marston was a progressive pro-feminist, which is manifested through various features of the comics, such as the topics of war and mythology. Marston interconnected these two themes through the mythology where women are presented as the rightful winners and the good and men as the evil ones who want to destroy humanity, which seems to be a metaphor for the patriarchal society. The war had an effect on women in the comics thanks to which they were able to emancipate and free themselves from the patriarchal society, under the leadership of Wonder Woman who symbolizes this belief.

Marston's feminist thinking is also noticeable in his use of bondage as a metaphor of submission, even though in his own way. The exaggerated use of bondage that is supposed to symbolize submission of males to females thanks to which the society could reach peace had its critics, especially the Child Study Association, even though feminists supposedly defended Wonder Woman as their symbol. Marston disagreed claiming that bondage was used to avoid unnecessary violence but it did not apply in all the cases. Marston also argued that Wonder Woman always escaped, which also symbolizes the women's capability to escape the male patriarchy. However, bondage is closely related to eroticism, which means that the use of bondage, whatever its real purpose, has sexual undertone and could be considered inappropriate for young comics readers. The bondage used on especially women also undermines Marston's statement that men should subdue to women, which creates the first aspect of Wonder Woman's ambiguity.

Another ambiguous feature is her appearance. She is beautiful as Aphrodite, wears feminine clothes, a short skirt and high boots and a sleeveless top, but at the same time she has an athletic figure and overall muscular and strong body, which supports Marston's opinion that women can be strong as men but remain feminine.

Accessories are other means of presenting Marston's metaphor of submission. The golden lasso by which Wonder Woman captures her enemies represents femininity by which women should seduce and capture men. Although the use of the lasso is, in certain cases, questioned if it is really a way of capturing men when majority of time Wonder Woman is the one bound by it. Then, the golden bracelets are another metaphor. They symbolize men's domination and masculinity. If Amazon lets someone to tie the bracelets together, she becomes powerless. If she takes the bracelets off, she becomes furious and masculine as a man. All of

these features are supposed to remind not only Wonder Woman but also the readers that women are capable to rival men thanks to their femininity.

Another feature by which Marston presented his ideas is the creation of Amazons who were idealized in comparison with the original concept of Amazons, the breastless warriors invented by men. He adjusted them to suit his purposes to create a race of strong but still feminine female warriors, by which he presented his belief in the matriarchal society that should replace the patriarchy in the U.S. In this society, there would be no “Other,” as women would be equal, even superior to men.

Her ambiguity is mirrored also in her alter-ego. Her personality is split into two, Wonder Woman representing the nation and masculinity, Diana Prince representing privacy and femininity. Wonder Woman is powerful, whereas Diana is only an ordinary woman, which is demonstrated through various features, such as her outfit or relationship with Steve Trevor. Both of her personalities love him but only Diana as a conformist inferior woman seeks his affection. Wonder Woman, on the other hand, is not willing to give up her freedom for a man, representing Marston’s belief in strong emancipated women.

Marston believed in the female power and Wonder Woman believes in it too. Her female villains are given a chance to reform at the Reformation Island, as a metaphor of men submitting to the loving female authority, whereas men are handed over to the police, as they are beyond redemption. Men, under the influence of Ares and his companions, are depicted as the evil, the ones who have to be defeated in contrast with women represented by Aphrodite, who are supposed to defeat men and rule the world. Similarly, Wonder Woman is accompanied by Holliday Girls and Etta Candy, ordinary girls who, by Wonder Woman’s side, are capable to prove they are strong women who can stand for themselves. Through the companions, Wonder Woman also educates children how to behave, even though her advice is not always pro-feminist.

As next, Wonder Woman’s feminist approach changed with the arrival of the Silver Age. After Marston’s death, Wonder Woman changed her personality in various aspects. The Silver Age Wonder Woman is generally considered more feminine and less pro-feminist. She became conformist to the society of 1950s when being interested more in her appearance and love relationships. Her fascination with fashion undermined the feminist idea that women should dress according to their own decision and not according to societal standards. In the Bronze Age, authors tried to transform her personality back into the original concept of a

feminist fighter by depriving her of her superpowers which had the opposite effect. Later in 1970s, she became the symbol of feminine power again when she was put on the cover of *Ms.* magazine and when Lynda Carter starred as Wonder Woman in a popular TV series, thanks to whom her popularity had increased.

In the following Modern Age of comics, Wonder Woman has been sexualized together with implementing more violence into the comic books and other media in which she started to appear. This sexualization is thought to undermine the empowering effect Wonder Woman could have on readers. Her attitude in movies is questioned, as she is supposedly more violent in comparison to the Golden Age Wonder Woman. Over the years, Wonder Woman transformed in many ways, however, she is still believed to be a feminist symbol of feminine power. Despite the changes, creators of Wonder Woman try to keep Marston's original idea that women are powerful thanks to their femininity.

8 RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce představuje americkou komiksovou postavu Wonder Woman a studuje její feministický postoj a genderové role, které v komiksu zaujímá. Práce má za úkol dokázat, že Wonder Woman je i po mnoha letech neustálých změn a vývoje stále vnímána jako feministický symbol a bojovnice za svobodu v americké patriarchální společnosti.

V úvodní části práce je popsán americký žánr super hrdinského komiksu a jeho vývoj. Ten se začal v USA vyvíjet od roku 1933 a za jeho zakladatele je považován Will Eisner. První super hrdinský komiks byl představen v roce 1938, kdy se na stáncích poprvé objevil Superman. Kvůli hospodářské krizi ve 30. letech 20. století a druhé světové válce se komiks ve válečných letech těšil velké oblibě, jelikož superhrdinové dávali lidem v beznadějných časech naději. Po skončení války však potřeba superhrdinů pominula a jejich zájmy přešly z boje s nacisty na více tradičnější témata. Žánrů komiksu také začalo přibývat a objevily se žánry jako Western, detektivka nebo romance. Avšak i přes tuto diverzifikaci si komiks dodnes dokázal udržet své čtenáře.

Dále je vysvětlen pojem superhrdina, který je definován jako hrdina obdařený super schopnostmi, které však nutně nemusí být nadpřirozené. Batmanova nebo Iron Manova super schopnost je například jejich bohatství. Superhrdina musí mít určité vlastnosti, jako například mít těžké dětství, například osiřet. Nadále má obvykle oblek, který je pro něj typický a symbol, jako například Supermanovo logo na hrudi a červenomodrý oblek s kápí. Společně s oblekem má také obvykle výzbroj, která je pro něj typická. Jeho vztahy také často bývají komplikované, obzvláště ty milostné. Dále musí mít své typické nepřátele a anti-hrdiny, jako má například Batman Jokera. Superhrdinové obvykle mívají i pomocníky, jako například Batman Robina. Neodmyslitelnou vlastností superhrdiny je v neposlední řadě jeho silná morálka, oddanost veřejnému blahu a přesvědčení, že dělá správnou věc.

Poté práce stručně definuje feminismus a roli feministické literární kritiky ve vztahu k tomuto komiksu. Feminismus je definován jako politická snaha změnit vztahy mezi muži a ženami ve společnosti, jenž definují naše kulturní, rodinné, politické chování, a i chování v rámci vzdělávání nebo volného času. Je to zároveň přesvědčení, že ženy jsou ze své podstaty považovány za podřazené ve vztahu k mužům a že muži jsou středem zájmu, zatímco ženy jsou vždy hodnoceny v poměru k mužům. Muž je považován za subjekt a žena je ve vztahu k němu ta druhá, nebo ta ostatní. Dále je důležité rozlišit pohlaví a „gender“, jelikož pohlaví je vrozené, zatímco „gender“ je kulturní předpoklad. Těmito dvěma pohlavím jsou stereotypně přiřazovány

vlastnosti, které toto pohlaví stereotypně definují, ženskost a mužnost. Mužnost je obvykle definována jako dominance a síla, zatímco ženskost je definována jako krása, ale také podřazenost a slabost. Ve vztahu k feminismu je představena feministická literární kritika, která má za cíl analyzovat tyto vztahy v literární tvorbě, jako například komu daná práce patří, jestli mužům nebo ženám, jestli je zaujatá, a jak se vztahy mezi muži a ženami na daném díle podepisují.

Nadále práce stručně představuje Williama Moultona Marstona, autora Wonder Woman, a její vznik a stručně nastiňuje její původ, který je klíčem k její osobnosti a analýze z hlediska feministické literární kritiky. Marston byl psycholog a profesor, který měl progresivní vizi, že ženy budou vládnout mužům jak v politice, ekonomice, tak v jejich životě. Věřil, že ženy jsou nadřazeny mužům a že by se jim muži měli podvolit skrze lásku a svádění. Tuto vizi chtěl mladým čtenářům předat skrze postavu Wonder Woman. Ta pochází z Rajského ostrova, kde žijí jen bájně Amazonky v klidu a míru bez zlých mužů. Wonder Woman ale musí vstoupit do světa mužů, tedy světa lidí, aby ukončila válku a přinesla mír.

Své feministické ideály Marston zakomponoval do komiksu skrze různé aspekty, jako třeba témata války a mytologie. Amazonky, tedy ženy pod vedením bohyně lásky Aphrodite jsou prezentovány jako vítězná strana, kdežto muži, a obzvláště nacističtí nepřátelé pod vedením Arese, boha války, jsou prezentováni jako ti, kteří by se měli podříditi milující autoritě. Dalšími aspekty jsou její doplňky a oblek a celkově její vzhled, ve kterém se mísí jak její ženskost, tak i síla a mužnost. Díky svému obleku je ženská a atraktivní, zároveň není nijak vyzývavá a má atletickou postavu jako muž. Její zlaté náramky jí mají připomínat, že se nikdy nesmí podvolit mužům, což je metafora pro ženy, které by se neměly podvolovat patriarchátu. Nadále její zlaté laso, díky němuž donutí nepřítel říct pravdu, polapí ho, ale neublíží mu, což symbolizuje mírumilovné podvolení ženám. Téma podvolení a svazování je dalším aspektem, skrze které chtěl Marston mladé čtenáře naučit, aby se podvolili ženám. Paradoxně však místo mužů svazoval právě ženy a nejčastěji samotnou Wonder Woman, která se však vždy z okovů dokázala vymanit.

Nadále práce analyzuje alter-ego Wonder Woman, Dianu Prince a milostný vztah se Stevem Trevorem. Diana je opakem Wonder Woman a metaforou pro ženy, které jsou pasivní a podléhají pravidlům patriarchální společnosti. To souvisí se vztahem Wonder Woman k Trevorovi. Ten paradoxně miluje nepoddajnou Wonder Woman, která ho jakožto silná žena

odmítá, aby neztratila své schopnosti, zatímco Diana Prince jakožto obyčejná žena touží po jeho pozornosti.

Nepřátelé a společníci jsou dalšími tématy této práce. Nepřátelé Wonder Woman jsou jak muži, tak i ženy. Muži jsou ale většinou předáni státnímu orgánu, jelikož jsou nenapravitelní, zatímco ženy dostávají šanci se napravit na ostrově, kde se učí láskyplnému podvolení autoritě. Wonder Woman se vždy snaží v nepřítelkyni najít dobrou stránku, kterou se jí snaží ukázat. Společníky Wonder Woman jsou pouze obyčejné ženy, děvčata z univerzity, Holliday Girls, pod vedením Etty Candy, korpulentní a komické postavy. Ty mají dokázat, že i obyčejné ženy po boku Wonder Woman dokáží neobyčejné věci.

V následujících kapitolách se práce věnuje vývoji komiksu *Wonder Woman* po smrti jejího autora. Komiks je dodnes vydáván, ale v takzvané stříbrné éře komiksu si prošel krizí. Robert Kanigher přetvořil Wonder Woman, aby vyhovovala soudobým požadavkům, odstranil svazování a přidal více konformních prvků. Wonder Woman si otevřela módní butik, začala se zajímat o rodinu a módu a její feministická povaha byla potlačena. Byla více ženská, ale méně feministka. Následní tvůrci se jí v bronzové éře komiksu snažili navrátit její původní feministický přístup tím, že odstraní její super schopnosti, čímž údajně pouze oslabili velký feministický symbol. Slávu Wonder Woman vrátilo až 1. vydání pro-feministického časopisu *Ms.* v roce 1972. Nadále to pak byla Lynda Carter v televizním seriálu, kterou si Amerika oblíbila a Wonder Woman si tak našla nové publikum.

V moderní éře komiksu prošla Wonder Woman dalšími změnami. Kreslíř Mike Deodato vytvořil nejvíce sexualizovanou verzi Wonder Woman. Díky této erotizaci by Wonder Woman mohla ztratit svou důvěryhodnost a její pozitivní vliv by mohl být vyrušen. Její povaha se také pozměnila, jelikož se již nebála použít násilí, což je považováno spíše za mužskou vlastnost. Někteří autoři zpochybňují její poselství jakožto feministické bojovnice za spravedlnost. Tvůrci filmů, ve kterých účinkuje Wonder Woman, kterou ztvárnila Gal Gadot, ji však brání s tím, že žena může být atraktivní a tím pádem i sebevědomá a zároveň bojovat za feministické hodnoty. Celkově je Wonder Woman i po mnoha letech vývoje považována za symbol feminizmu a velkou bojovnici za spravedlnost, o čemž svědčí i její přítomnost jak ve filmech, tak i seriálech nebo i na oblečení.

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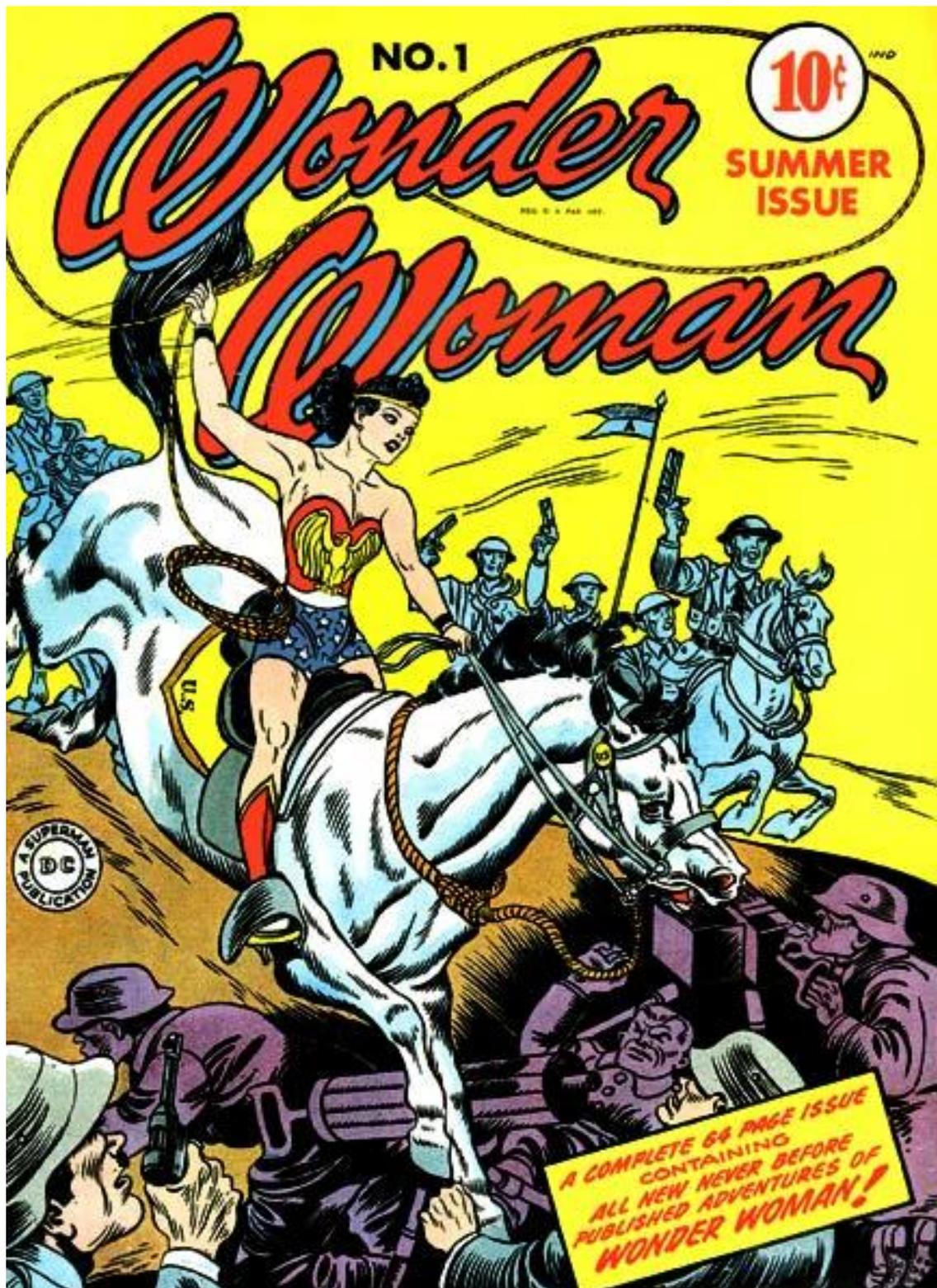
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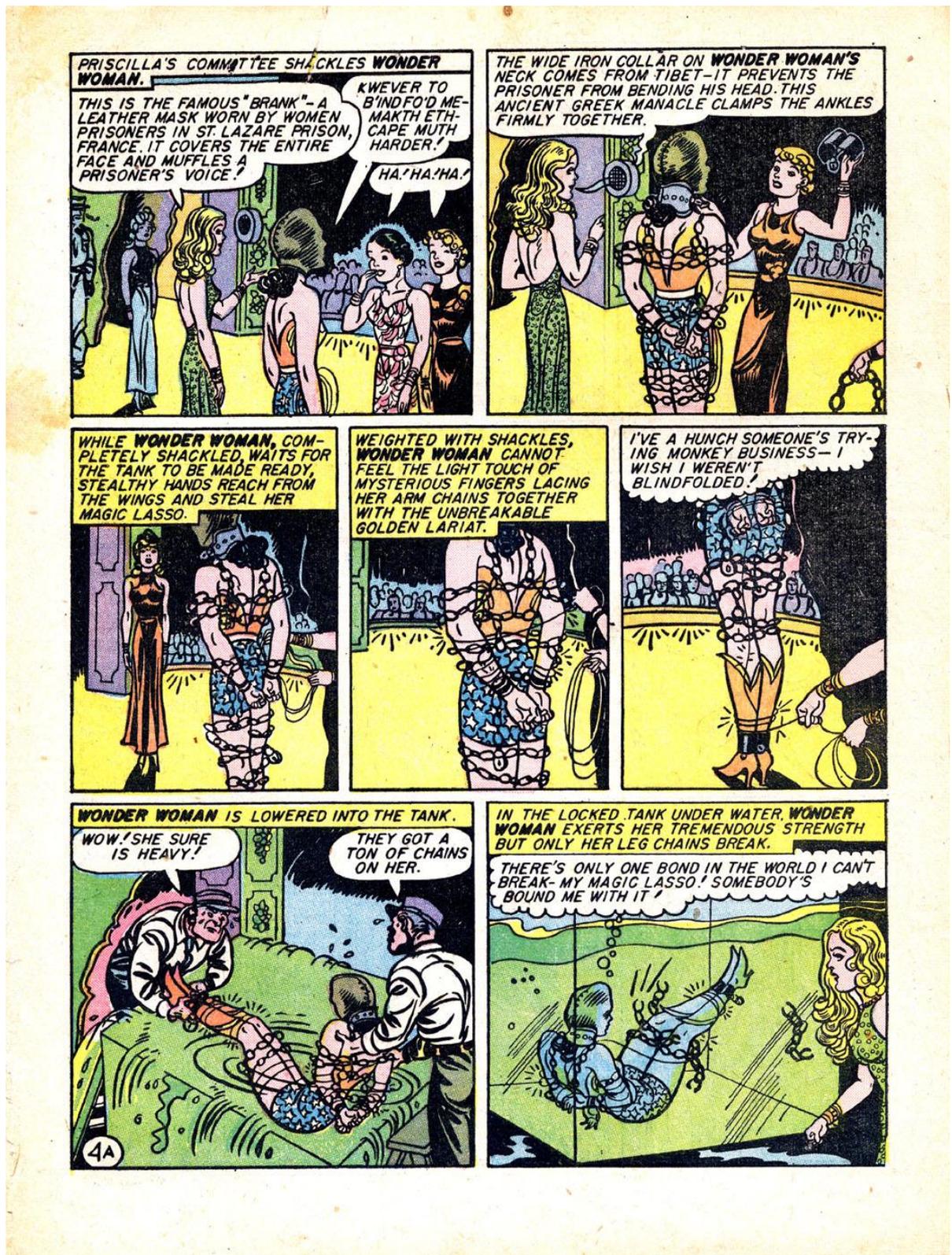
Appendix A – Cover page of Wonder Woman No. 1¹⁷⁷



¹⁷⁷ "Wonder Woman vol. 1, 1," Fandom, accessed March 7, 2019, https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Wonder_Woman_Vol_1_1.



¹⁷⁸ William Moulton Marston, "The Origin of Wonder Woman," *Wonder Woman No. 1*, Summer 1942, 8A, <https://readcomiconline.to/Comic/Wonder-Woman-1942/Issue-1?id=15220>.



¹⁷⁹ William Moulton Marston, "Wonder Woman and the Cheetah," *Wonder Woman* No. 6, Fall 1943, 4A, <https://readcomiconline.to/Comic/Wonder-Woman-1942/Issue-6?id=15285>.

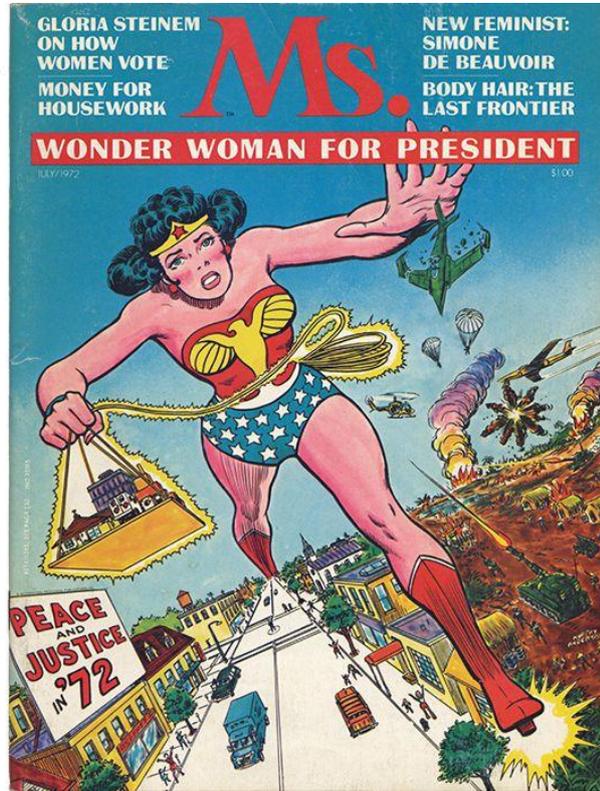


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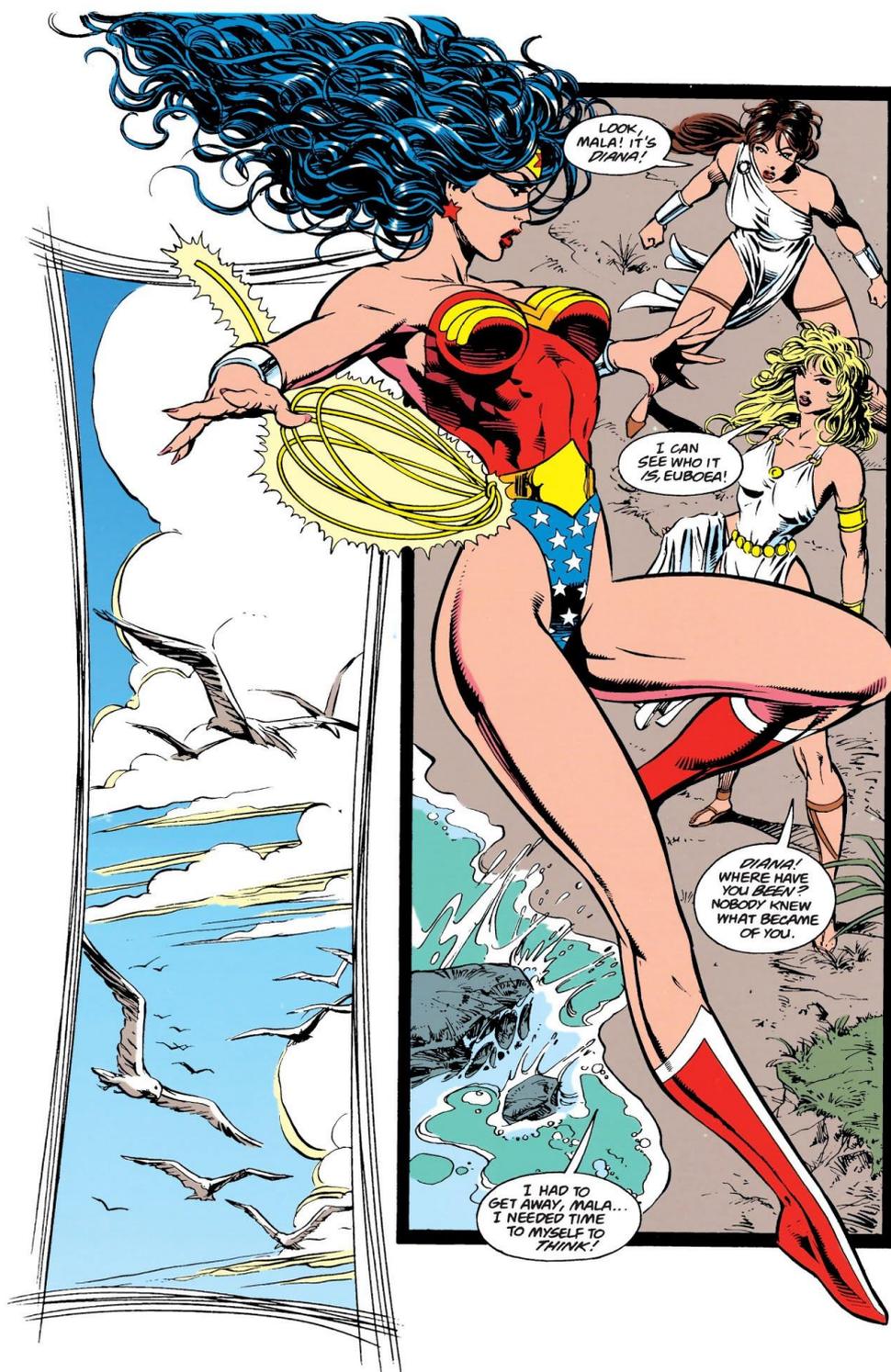


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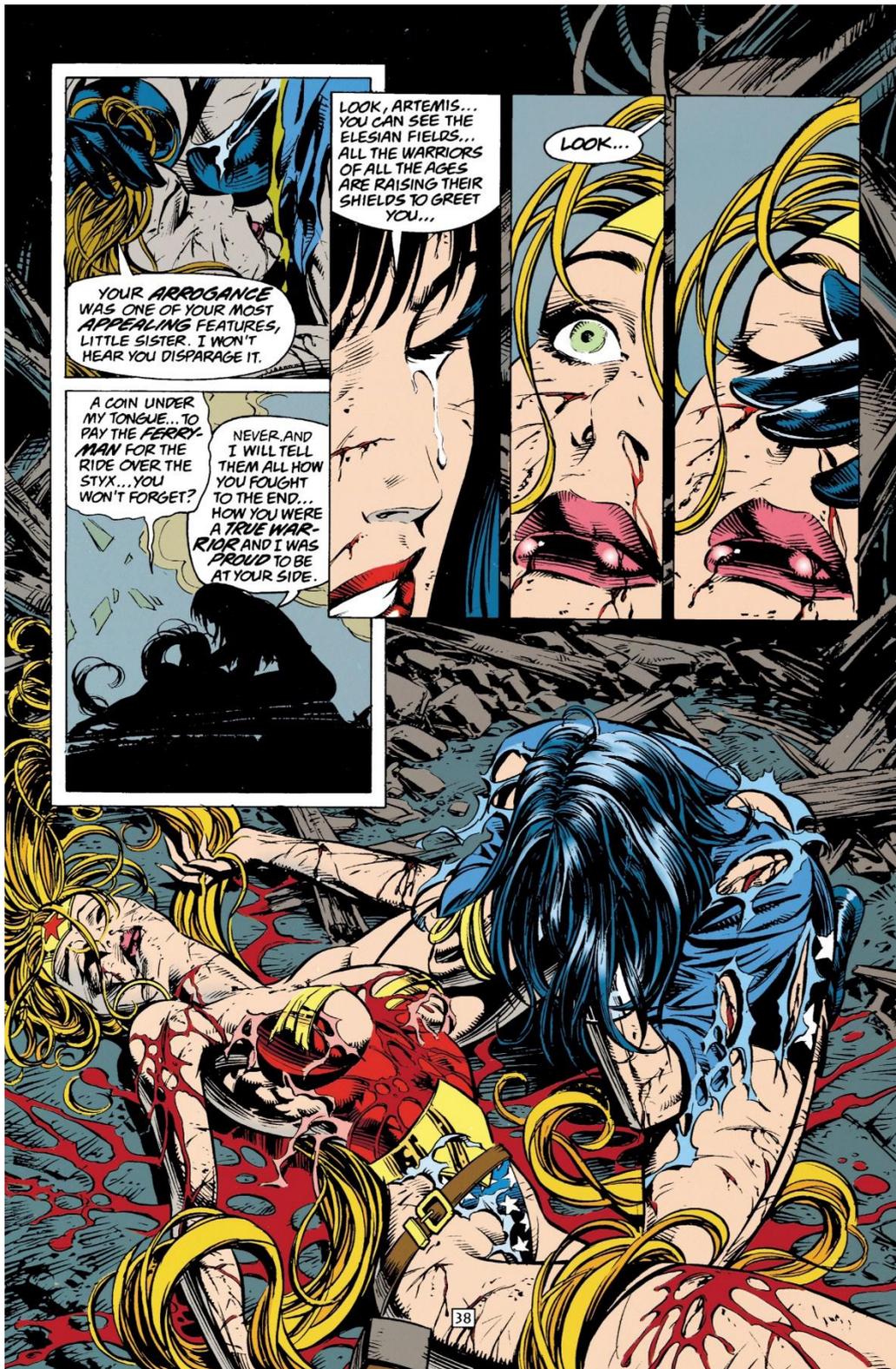
Appendix F – *Wonder Woman on the cover of Ms. magazine*¹⁸²



¹⁸² “The Surprising Origin Story of Wonder Woman,” Smithsonian, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/origin-story-wonder-woman-180952710/>.



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¹⁸⁴ William Messner-Loebs, "Blank Madness," *Wonder Woman* No. 100, July 1995, 38, accessed January 8, 2019, <https://readcomiconline.to/Comic/Wonder-Woman-1987/Issue-100?id=6990>.

Appendix I – Official poster of the Wonder Woman movie, starring Gal Gadot¹⁸⁵



¹⁸⁵ “Wonder Woman,” Warner Bros, accessed March 10, 2019, <https://www.warnerbros.com/movies/wonder-woman/#gallery>.