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Stuller, Jennifer K. *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors : Superwomen in Modern Mythology*. London, I.B. Tauris, 2010.

Forward, Introduction, Section 1: Standing on the Shoulders of Amazons

Jennifer Stuller's book entitled *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors* queries "what happens to our social consciousness if the presence of our mythic hero is - and has always been - overwhelmingly male?" To answer this question Stuller chronicles a comprehensive history and critique of American and British pop culture Superwomen, starting in the 1930s and working up to the 2000s. Examining fictitious characters from modern mythology like Wonder Woman to Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Stuller connects these heros to both historical and cultural contexts. She provides an in-depth look into the evolution and contribution these heroic, heel wearing, and gender-bending women had on women's empowerment, social ideals, and feminism of the time. In section one, titled *Standing on the Shoulders of Amazons*, Stuller focuses on the evolution from the creation of Wonder Woman to the post-war 1950s ideals.

Proclaiming that American modern mythology is held by and within the stories of comic books, and later after the invention and widespread commodification of television sets in the 1950s, Stuller identifies a cycle of appearance, copy cats, backlash, and disappearance that follows the chronology and evolution of the women heros (Stuller, 3). Starting with the mother of modern myth, Wonder Woman, created by Dr. William Moulton Marston with its official debut in 1941, Stuller calls attention to the fact that most narratives are written by and for men; creating a monopoly on the perspectives and stereotypes utilized in the reflected narratives.

Stuller specifies the role of modern mythology as congruent with ancient mythology, to teach us lessons, values, and acceptable social roles (Stuller, 3-4). The power of narratives to reframe and reflect on our cultural values and identities allows us to interrogate the meaning of ideas like, good versus evil, morality, justice, community, power, and love. Just as ancient mythology morphed and changed with the culture, so too has our modern mythology adjusted with our culture, or has it? Stuller proposed that women's roles in modern mythology have not changed as often or as drastically as our male counterparts. Women are still primarily filling supportive roles. "We're shown too many images of us as beauty queens, femme fatales, vixens, girlfriends, mothers,

and damsels in need of rescuing. We can be these things, but we can also be more," (Stuller, 2-3).

With America entering WWII after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, we see a rise in media images promoting women's empowerment. These promotions were practical and also psychological propaganda (Stuller, 15-19). With men shifting to the war effort and leaving home, women needed to take up the mantle of industrial work to keep American economics from tanking, supplying the army, and to keep patriotism and morale up for the American society. For the first time in history, women were not only allowed into public industrial positions, but were also encouraged by the Office of War Information (Stuller, 18). Wonder Woman was designed to be a lasting symbol of female power, independence, and sisterhood and was adopted by the Office of War Information as a symbol of American patriotism, and justice (Daniels, 22). After WWII, the Great Depression, and polio outbreaks the American people needed to believe in warriors and superheros, and Wonder Woman was the woman for the job. Her mythos borrowed from conventional and universal Greek and Roman mythology intertwined with American values, making her the perfect figurehead for American Patriotism during war-time (Stuller, 16).

If Wonder Woman represented ideal American patriotism, Lois Lane in the *Superman* comics represented society's true feelings towards women's role in the workforce. Lois Lane first appeared in *Actions Comics* in 1938, three years before Wonder Woman. Although she predates Wonder Woman, Lois Lane filled the archetype of gutsy reporter, and is a supporting character for the male lead Superman (Gustav, 3-4). In fact, Lois Lane is frequently portrayed as gutsy, ambitious, and a go-getter in the workforce, all attributes that are portrayed as reckless, dangerous, and comical to the rest of the Daily Planet staff, and the male population. During the beginning of WWII women were allowed a more active role in journalism by securing frontline stories before the drastic change during the Great Depression where women were then encouraged not to take jobs away from men (Stuller, 19-23).

Furthermore all of Lois Lane's success within her career field is linked in later issues to Superman's behind the scenes journalistic and super masculine help (Stuller, 20). This infantilization of women with power reinforced the superiority of the male hero and the paternalism that would plague the end of the 1940s and much of the 1950s media sphere (Stuller, 24).

Post-war 1950s culture sees a rise in technology, and the lifting of bans on manufacturing goods which leads to the mass production and commodification of television sets, and the creation of an information economy (Stuller, 26). Comic books begin to decline as they are replaced by radio and television programming. Comic icons were adopted as radio and television icons, and are again controlled, written, and produced by those in power; men.

In the 1950s, once kick-ass women like Wonder Woman and Lois Lane see drastic changes in their narratives and are returned back to the domestic sphere, of home, and marriage as viable options for life's fulfillment. This shift reflects the end of WWII, and the return of male soldiers to the workforce. Wonder Woman loses her female friends, protégées, and collaborators; Etta Candy and the Holliday Girls while Lois Lane becomes Superman's girlfriend, losing her identity to that of her new supportive role (Gerald, 270-70). Women's roles focus on three themes in the 1950s. Women are now obsessed with finding a husband; are dangerous to themselves if left alone and therefore must be watched; and are rivals who get into catfights with each other and can never have authentic friendships with other women. These themes, stories, and interpretations reflected the cultural trends as well as influenced them (Stuller, 29). Take for example Mrs. June Cleaver from *Leave it to Beaver*, she still stands for the era of family values and cultural ideas with her tiny waist, ironed aprons, and gleaming pearls. Although she was a mix between a real actress and fictional character, she represented an ideal that all women were supposed to strive for, if they wanted to conform to social standards of the time (Douglas, 29).

This imagery still persists today, as we romanticize and idealize the standard 1950s suburban nuclear housewife with super powers of patience, pearls, and frilly aprons (Douglas, 30). These gendered stereotypes contributed to the socially acceptable role of women at the time, and fictional characters like Wonder Women who had larger than life origins, played an important role in enforcing these identities. Although Wonder Woman and Lois Lane fell into line in the 1950s, second wave feminism would help liberate both fictional and real women within society.

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