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### The Duality of Wonder Woman: A progression or a degression through the ages?

In the world of comics and fictional narratives, being a superhero stands for so much more than being a bearer of justice and having super strength. It stands as a symbol for leadership, courage, resilience, and unique individual traits that elevate the superhero from the natural population. Through this essay, I would like to argue that although both the comics successfully incorporate feminist ethics in the character of Wonder Woman, *Wonder Woman #179* fails to represent her as a conventional superheroine whereas *Wonder Woman #3* does, in contrast, show her to be one. My purpose is to evaluate Wonder Woman's status as a superheroine in both the comics and to argue for the existence of her dual nature crafted by different authors through the Golden to Silver ages.

As defined in the book *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (2006), a superhero is "A heroic character with a selfless, pro-social mission; with superpowers – extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume...Often superheroes have dual identities, the ordinary one of which is usually a closely guarded secret." (Coogan 30)

When looking at the comic *Wonder Woman #3* written by Alice Marble and William Moulton Marston, the portrayal of Wonder Woman captures her identity as an Amazon warrior with godlike strength, speed and the supernatural ability to fly. This description, along with her distinct costume throughout the comic, gives her character the foundation of being a superheroine. As seen in the beginning of the book, her character is shown to be driven and curious about changing the dissatisfying defaults in the world. In the first scene of the comic, Wonder Woman heeds to Etta Candy's request to ensure justice for two innocent girls and even goes as far as to the FBI for an interrogation into the matter. By recounting the traditions of the Amazons family in specific instances of the comic, we are given an insight into Wonder Woman's origin from a separate race of people which makes her power greater than most of humankind.

However, these are external traits that create a typical superheroine. Internal characteristics that define a superheroine include being courageous, being dedicated to the protection of people, being a leader who instills the feeling of individuality in their followers instead of a feeling of collectivism and having a highly resilient mind. These traits are evident in the character of Wonder Woman as conveyed through many scenes throughout the comic.

One scene that displays the courage and sense of duty instilled in Wonder Woman's character is when she is bounded to a tree by one of Gunther's slaves Keela and she is shown to be, without a single doubt, ready to sacrifice herself for the greater good, as she requests her mother, "Come on, mother, grab her! The magic girdle's more important than my life." (Marble and Marston 15). Further, her strategic planning in capturing the Baroness and freeing the two innocent girls in prison for her mistakes shows Wonder Woman's ability to lead and her extraordinary physical capacities, with which she can even pull trees out of the ground, making

her character come across as someone qualified to be the protector of the world and to fight with great evils like the Baroness and the Nazi's.

Her unwavering drive for justice and willingness to get into danger, by taking the risky opportunity to give herself away to the mind games of the Baroness to ensure the criminal's captivity and save Steven Trevor in the second book of the comic is another quality that makes her character fit the label of a superheroine. Additionally, with her idea in the third book to help the slaves escape the hypnotic influence of the Baroness by diverting their loyalty to a good person like Mala, Wonder Woman effectively employs her role as a leader and expresses her character's inner moral goodness through her words, "Love is always stronger than fear." (Marble and Marston 38) This inner morality is enhanced in her character by her willingness to forgive and understand Paula's criminality instead of punishing her for her past deeds and Wonder Woman's dedication to save Paula's daughter from the Nazi's further shows her passion and urge to ensure justice for all, which undoubtedly makes her character come out as heroic and fierce.

In the fourth book of the comic, we again see the courage in Wonder Woman's character in mindlessly walking into a fire to protect the ones who are trapped inside. Moreover, her defence in court for, and blind faith in, the Baroness, despite other people's warnings transforms the previously criminal nature of Paula, not just externally but internally through the power of Wonder Woman's influence and her strong sense of identity and drive to maintain peace and order. She becomes a symbol of hope for Paula, the people of the world shown in the comic and for the readers of the comic as well.

Wonder Woman's acknowledgement to herself at the end of the book, "I command you, Diana Prince – Wonder Woman, never to use your influence over Paula for your own selfish

purposes or to make yourself feel smart. It is a tremendous responsibility to shape another girl's life and I must do it right." (Marble and Marston 38), further confirms Wonder Woman's identity in this comic as a true superheroine. By infusing her character with an inner moral code and core feminist values of trusting, loving and being oriented towards people's welfares along with magical and exceptional physical strength, the authors perfectly create the ideal model of a superheroine with their version of Wonder Woman in the comic.

According to an article published by Bethel University, in regards to the motives behind the creation of Wonder Woman's character, "The lesson that Marston wanted to get across to America's youth was one of female empowerment: the belief that women were "less susceptible than men to aggression and acquisitiveness" and could bring global peace through love." This stresses on my argument that *Wonder Woman #3*, while conforming to previous notions of a conventional superhero when presenting the character of Wonder Woman, aligns these superhero traits to feminist values, successfully bringing out a creative and unique superheroine.

Comparatively, when considering the Wonder Woman crafted by Dennis O'Neil in *Wonder Woman #179*, her character is shown to be more consumed by her emotions and more personal in her intentions to destroy the villain of the comic, rather than being concerned for, or dedicated to, the safety of the public. Towards the beginning stage of the book, it is seen that Wonder Woman is summoned to her home to her Amazons family, and when they tell her about their plan to leave, she takes the decision to go back to the modern world instead of accompanying them. Her reason for this is not because she wishes to protect the world, but because of her own personal attachment to Steven Trevor, who she thinks is in desperate need of her help. When considering conventional definitions of a superhero, we picture someone dedicated to the protection of the world because they possess a greater strength that makes them

fit for this role over others. A conventional superhero would be someone hidden in a costume, a symbol of hope for the people, a human who is strong and passionate about the need to ensure justice for the world.

However, in Neil's Comic, the character of Wonder Woman is presented as an emotional powerful woman who is concerned with her own thoughts most of the time and allows her emotions to consume herself instead of being practical. After she comes back to the modern world, she is faced with actual real-life dilemmas that most people find relatable. When Mr. Ching approaches Wonder Woman for assistance, she responds, "I was Wonder Woman, Mr. Ching! Now.." (Neil 13) to which he resonates with her, "Now you have lost strength, swiftness and magic! You wish to aid Steven Trevor but you don't know how.....the lines of our fates converge! For the enemies of Steve Taylor are also my enemies and the enemies of mankind!" (Neil 13). This communication between the characters shows us that Wonder Woman is no longer a superhuman with abilities or strengths beyond those of others. She has lost her powers in the comic and is now like a normal human. Further, we can also deduct from Mr. Ching's words that her intentions are only to aid Steven Trevor and the fact that she is saving mankind by helping him is only an external bonus and not something that she feels passionately about, as we've seen in the way her character is portrayed. This goes against what a superheroine is defined by and what she should stand for.

Her lessons in Karate with Mr. Ching show her strength and her ability to adapt to new techniques but not any superhuman abilities that would qualify her as greater than most ordinary individuals. Moreover, her reaction to Steve's story when he's wounded from a gunshot, portrays her nature as too caring and emotional, crying about how she might lose everyone she loves. According to typical standards, superheroes are supposed to have this sense of duty to the world

to use their strengths to protect the public and to do it because of the inner moral code they have within themselves and not by any external influences. However, in this scene, as she goes through feelings of sadness, grief, hate and revenge, Mr. Ching is shown to have to advise Wonder Woman to get her back on track and to focus on what matters, “This must stop. We have job to do. Soft emotions cloud intellect! Grieve when we are finished, if you must!” (Neil 18)

In this way, the comic portrays her character as mentally weak and defeated by her emotions rather than by her urge to ensure justice. She is portrayed to look like an inexperienced child in front of the wise Mr. Ching which is evident in the comic as he constantly has to mentor her mindset and her physical abilities throughout the text. Further, Wonder Woman getting distracted in the middle of the fight with Doctor Cyber’s followers to admire Mr. Ching and his incredibility in fighting so actively, even though he’s blind, is a testament to her conformity to human nature and not any superheroine standards, which would require her to be focused on the protection of the public from evils rather than any other external impotent thoughts.

Moreover, the lack of any special costume for her character adds to her lack of a superheroine identity. Therefore, I would like to put forth that the *Wonder Woman #179* comic, although incorporating feminist ethics into Wonder Woman’s character like making her ‘other-oriented’, trusting, emotional and rooted in reality, fails to show her as a unique individual with unique abilities and hence, fails to show her as a conventional superheroine. Her ordinary identity in the comic is not a closely guarded secret but rather the whole of what her character is portrayed to be like; an ordinary powerful woman instead of a superheroine with great strengths or sense of justice.

Lastly, to conclude, this transition of Wonder Woman from being a superheroine to becoming an ordinary human losing her powers through the ages, brings evidence for my argument by portraying how Wonder Woman's progression has led to a diminishing of her essence and her role as a superheroine. The different understanding of her character by different authors has led to a complicated version of Wonder Woman who can not easily be labelled into the superheroine category, and hence, emphasises and enhances the duality of her character.

Works Cited

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