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**THE AMAZON IN ANTIQUITY AND ON TELEVISION:
DEPLOYMENTS OF A FIGURE WITHIN GENDER
(RE)NEGOTIATIONS**

Sonia M.I Dumouchel Connock

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

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ABSTRACT

The Amazon in Antiquity and on Television: Deployments of a Figure Within Gender (Re)negotiations

Sonia M.I. Dumouchel Connock

Throughout history, the figure of the Amazon has captured the human imagination. In this study, I argue that the popularity of the Amazon is in large part due to her importance as a site of the continuous process of gender negotiation. After drawing upon the work of feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler in order to establish a position from which to address gender and the important questions of gender subversion and transformation, I examine, using the method of discourse analysis, the textual figure of the Amazon and its participation in the construction and deconstruction of gender identities and relations. Who are the Amazons? How does the figure of the Amazon, in its multiplicity, indeterminacy, and instability, play in ancient and modern discourses of gender? What investments has it borne in the past and what promises, if any, does it hold for a feminist political project of gender transformation and subversion? These questions guide my examination of the performance of the Amazon in the works of ancient Greek writers, artists, geographers and historians, and the American television show *Xena: Warrior Princess*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: Introduction - - - - -	pp. 1 - 11
* Organization - - - - -	pp. 8 - 11
Chapter II: Methodologies - - - - -	pp. 12 - 28
* The Amazons: Historical Material Subjects or Textual Figures? - - - - -	pp. 12 - 21
* Discourse: A Social Theory of Knowledge and Power - -	pp. 21 - 26
* Discourse Analysis - - - - -	pp. 26 - 29
Chapter III: Review of the Theoretical Debates - - - - -	pp. 29 - 49
* Subjugated Subjectivity: The Gendering of Women Under Patriarchy - - - - -	pp. 29 - 36
* Provocations and Transgressions: Feminist Strategies for Gender Subversion - - - - -	pp. 36 - 44
* Textual Production and the Promise of Subversion - - -	pp. 44 - 47
* Discourse of Gender: Sites of Conflict and Struggle over Meaning - - - - -	pp. 47 - 49
Chapter IV: Analysis 1	
* The Amazons in Ancient Greece: Heroes, Outsiders, Women - - - - -	pp. 50 - 97
Chapter V: Analysis 2	
* The Amazons in <i>Xena: Warrior Princess</i> : Subversive Fighting Women / Recuperative Barbies in Leather -	pp. 98 - 154
Chapter V: Conclusions - - - - -	pp. 155- 169
Figures: - - - - -	pp. 170 - 215
* Amazons in Antiquity - - - - -	pp. 170 - 191
* Television Amazons - - - - -	pp. 192 - 215
Bibliography - - - - -	pp. 216 - 223

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the figure of the Amazon has haunted the human imagination. In the mythic tales of the ancient Greeks, the oldest and perhaps originary representations of these warrior women, the Amazons were fierce, highly skilled warriors who lived together in all-female communities. They interacted very little with men, meeting them only for one-night sexual encounters which *they* initiated - for procreative reasons - and controlled, and in battle. Figures of excess, the Amazons illustrated male fears about female power and autonomy. The ancient Greek myths of the Amazons warned of the dangers presented by these "untamed" females who lived outside society without men, and reasserted the dominant social position of men by depicting the defeat and conquering of the Amazons by Greek heroes or armies.

Since her appearance in Greek myth, the figure of the Amazon has reappeared time and again in Western culture.¹ She enjoyed a widespread and deeply rooted popularity in the culture of ancient Rome: authors such as Ovid and Seneca wrote of the sexual conquering of Amazons; wealthy Romans adorned their sarcophagi and other funerary monuments with Amazonomachies, scenes of battles with Amazons that were violent and gory, showing Amazons being pulled off their horses by their hair and slaughtered.

(Figure 1)

1

The following brief history of the (re)imaging of the Amazon since ancient times is taken from Abby Wettan Kleinbaum's very interesting book, *The War Against the Amazons*, (New York: New Press / McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983).

The courtly literature of the Middle Ages also took up the figure of the Amazon. Here, she was presented as a sexless and cruel warrior who overstepped her boundaries when she entered into the masculine sphere and fought at the Battle of Troy. Because she dared encroach upon the male prerogative, she was not to be treated according to the knights' chivalrous code. In Benoît de Sainte-More's *Roman de Troie*, Joseph of Exeter's *Bellum Troianum*, and Guido de Colonna's *Destruction of Troy*, then, the "bold and brazen Amazons were dismembered by furious and avenging knights."²

The Amazon appeared again in the journalistic accounts of the exploration and conquering of North and South America and Africa. (Figure 2) European explorers reported hearing of and/or seeing "Amazons," women who carried weapons, lived without men, met with neighbouring men once a year to breed, and rejected or killed their male children.³ Interestingly, these are the same characteristics attributed to the Amazons by the ancient Greeks. Did the Amazons that had survived the Battle of Troy migrate to America and Africa, as some of the Renaissance Europeans believed, or were these Europeans perpetuating the prototypical Greek myth? Because of our inability to substantiate the material historical existence of the Amazons in Africa or American between 1400-1700, or in ancient Greece between 1500-100 B.C.E., the latter argument

2

Ibid., 61.

3

For a very detailed yet annoyingly sexist and ethnocentric account of the "Amazons" in Africa and America, see Guy Cadogon Rothery's *The Amazons*, (London: Senate, 1910/1995).

gains credence.⁴ The fantastic mapping of the figure of the Amazon on to the native Americans and Africans allowed the European explorers to both explain the women and the matrilineal societies they encountered, and affirm the righteousness of the colonial project. Just as ancient Greek men glorified themselves through the (re)telling and (re)drawing of their triumph over the Amazons, so the European explorers sought to glorify themselves by drawing parallels between the ancient Greek battles with the Amazons and their mastery of new found lands and peoples.

The Amazon was again popular during the nineteenth century. For Romantic playwright Heinrich von Kleist, she was the embodiment of the frighteningly enticing forces of “untamed nature.” His play *Penthesilea* presents a “rather perverse, offbeat, indeed necrophiliac [sic]”⁵ love story between Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons, and Achilles, a Greek hero, in which Penthesilea shoots her “lover” with an arrow then tears him apart with her hands and teeth. Horrified that her “kisses” killed Achilles, she then plunges a dagger into her breast. The association of women with Amazons and Amazons

4

Indeed, this view of the Amazons as textual figures rather than as material historical subjects will be adopted throughout this thesis. Though archeologists such as Jeannine Davis-Kimball have been searching and digging for ancient Amazon tombs for decades and, indeed, have come across the bodies of ancient women warriors, it is as yet unclear that these remains are Amazon remains. While we have very little archeological evidence of the material existence of the Amazons, textual “evidence” abounds and it is therefore more fruitful to explore the ways in which the Amazons have been (re)deployed as conceptual figures in these visual and written texts. This will be discussed in greater detail in the first section of the second chapter of the thesis. (Davis-Kimball has written about her work in her article, “Warrior Women of the Eurasian Steppes,” *Archeology Magazine*, January/February 1997). She also has a web page: <http://csen.org>.

5

Kleinbaum, 178.

with the bestial, the untamed, and the natural was further developed during the nineteenth century by Swiss social theorist Johan Jakob Bachofen. He argued that although “Amazonianism” is a regression and perversion in later, modern stages of humanity, during ancient times it was the first germ of matriarchy, a political system of interrelations that helped humanity emerge from its hitherto primitivism. As civilization progressed, Bachofen argued, mother right was overthrown by patriarchy, a more “evolved” political system that “liberated the spirit” from nature and the female principle.⁶

Though brief and incomplete, this history of the imag(in)ing of the Amazon demonstrates the popularity and continuing conceptualizing power of the figure of the Amazon. It is important to notice that with two notable exceptions, stories about Amazons produced after the Greeks were written or illustrated by men and, interestingly, reproduced two pivotal aspects of the Greek Amazon myth: the fascination with and critique of the “untamed,” “excessive” female; and the imperative that this female be conquered, subdued, and “put in her proper place.”⁷ Again and again, “the seemingly incorrigible Amazons must be opposed and overcome as a fresh contest in every age. [...]

6

Bachofen’s reading of the Amazons is discussed in: Andrew Stewart, “Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens,” *Poetics Today* 16:4 (Winter 1995): 572.

7

The two notable exceptions are: Christine de Pisan’s Amazon accounts written during the Middle Ages (*Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune* 1403-1404, and *La Cité des Dames* 1404-1405), and Marie Anne Fiquet du Boccage’s Enlightenment drama in verse (*Tragédie des Amazones* 1749) honouring Amazon victory over the Greeks. (Kleinbaum, 64, 160.)

..the tradition that men certify themselves as heroes defeating superlative *women* has remained immutable.”⁸

It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that a large number of women, many of whom identified as lesbian-feminists, began to take up and (re)deploy the figure of the Amazon. In the 1970s, many lesbian periodicals included “Amazon” in their titles⁹, and the first lesbian-feminist bookstore in the United States was called The Amazon Bookstore¹⁰. Though the ancient Greeks did not describe the Amazons as being sexually oriented toward women, lesbian-feminists employed the term “Amazon” to describe themselves. Experimental film maker Barbara Hammer’s 1975 film *Superdyke* illustrates very well this lesbian-feminist appropriation and incorporation of the figure of the Amazon into a modern lesbian identity. The film shows a group of women wearing the “70s lesbian uniform” (short cropped hair, jeans and t-shirt - here t-shirts saying “superdyke”) and carrying Amazonian paraphernalia (cardboard shields emblazoned with “amazon”)

8

Ibid., 2.

9

Amazon Quarterly West Somerville MA, c. 1972-1975; *Amazon Nation Newsletter* Chicago IL, c. 1972-1975; *Amazon* Milwaukee WI, c. 1974-1976; *Amazon Spirit* Helena MT, c. 1978-?; *Amazon Mime Grapevine* Burbank CA, c. 1979.

(Alan V. Miller, comp., *Our Own Voices: A Directory of Lesbian and Gay Periodical 1890-1990*, Toronto: Canadian Gay Archives, 1991.)

The first Montreal lesbian publication in French, *Amazones d’hier: lesbiennes d’aujourd’hui*, began circulation a little later, in 1982.

(National Museum and Archive of Lesbian and Gay History, comp., *The Lesbian Almanac*, New York: Berkeley Books, 1996: 22.)

10

The bookstore opened in Minneapolis MN in 1970. (*The Lesbian Almanac*, 14.)

running around San Francisco, flexing their muscles and being generally outrageous.¹¹

And finally, the weapon that in modern times has been most commonly associated with the Amazons - the *labrys* or double-sided ax - was adopted by lesbian-feminists in the 1970s as a symbol of lesbian power and self-sufficiency and continues to be worn as jewelry to this day.

Who are the Amazons? Why has the figure of the Amazon been taken up, time and again, by male authors and artists and why, in the twentieth century, have women - and most notably, lesbian women - decided to (re)deploy this figure of the woman warrior?

In this thesis, I wish to examine ancient and modern textual and visual representations of "the Amazon," focusing particularly on ancient Greek mythological accounts and American television (re)creations of these warrior women. I will argue that the popularity of the Amazon is due in large part to her importance as a site of the continuous process of gender negotiation, and I will endeavor to map out and compare the discourses of gender running through the depictions of these warrior women in the works of ancient Greek writers, artists, geographers and historians, and the American television show *Xena: Warrior Princess*. I have chosen to focus my attention on early Greek representations and modern representations on *Xena: Warrior Princess* because they are, respectively, the earliest extant and latest/current (re)presentations of the Amazons. Because one of the concerns of this thesis is the elucidation of notions of gender in and

11

Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1991): 197.

through the figure of the Amazon, I want to engage in a comparison of the patriarchal Greek imag(in)ings of the Amazons with a “post feminist” television imag(in)ing of the Amazons. Central to this investigation, then, are the questions: Who are the Amazons? In what ways do the (re)deployments of the figure of the Amazon examined maintain and perpetuate, or subvert and transform, the binary gender logic of patriarchy?

Such an exploration of the figure of the Amazon is interesting, and politically and intellectually relevant, I would argue, because this figure is an important and recurring site of gender conflict and struggle. Polysemic and allegorical in nature, the Amazon has, throughout history, been (re)defined and (re)employed in ways that reflect the image producers’ sociopolitical beliefs about how women and men should relate, as well as their desires for the future of gender relations. In trying to grasp (albeit tentatively and incompletely) the development of the figure of the Amazon and its participation in the discourse of gender, I hope to raise some provoking thoughts or reflections about the social construction of gender and the important part played by the production and reception of textual figures in ongoing gender struggles.

Underlying my investigation is a belief in the importance of “recalling” histories of communication as necessary conditions for the charting of political courses of action and the mapping of social identities.

Indeed, the ultimate goal of historical and theoretical insights into communication and society must be to help formulate a political agenda; these times require a type of communication research that addresses the definite conditions of social existence, including the need for change, and the potential contributions to building a better society. [...] ..the notion of change contains elements of remembrance and desire and an understanding of contemporary

conditions that relies on reacting to images of the past and prospects for the future.¹²

Before effective strategies of action can be advanced for a feminist project of emancipation, it is important that we be able to identify and articulate the conditions of social gendered existence in all its intricacies. A communication research project examining ancient and modern media texts participating in the discourse of gender strives to add to this feminist understanding of past and present by: i) exploring how, why, and in what forms oppressive binary gender norms are continuously (re)iterated, and ii) by examining how gender norms help constitute social knowledge and beliefs about historical subjects known as “women” and “men” and help structure relations between these social subjects, as well as by examining how gender norms are mapped onto and interpellated by social subjects.

Organization

This thesis is organized as follows: In Chapter II, I will outline the methodologies used to analyze the figure of the Amazon in the texts of the ancient Greeks and the television program *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Following the works of structuralist and poststructuralist classicists, I will argue that the Amazons are best examined as textual rather than material historical subjects. I will then adopt Norman Fairclough’s theory of discourse (which combines a concern for texts and the discursive and social practices

¹²

Hanno Hardt, *Critical Communication Studies: Communication, History and Theory in America*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992): 9.

within which texts are embedded) and his framework for discourse analysis in order to study the textual figure of the Amazon. I will argue that an analysis of the discourse of gender surrounding the Amazon in these texts necessarily involves examining both the texts (in order to explore *what* is said about the Amazons, as well as *how* it is said) and the sociohistorical and discursive contexts of production and reception (in an effort to explore *why* the figure of the Amazon is (re)presented and *how* the figure is used in the construction and deconstruction of gender categories).

In Chapter III of the thesis, several contentious theoretical “issues” will be discussed. The first issue concerns the much explored question: What is gender? Before a historical examination of the textual figure of the Amazon and its participation in the construction and deconstruction of gender categories can be undertaken, it is crucial to establish a position from which to address gender. To establish such a position, I will be drawing upon the work of feminist theorists Simone de Beauvoir, Teresa de Lauretis, and Judith Butler on gender construction, maintenance and subversion. Since one of the concerns of this thesis centers around the possibility of feminist (re)constructions of gender through feminist (re)writings of the figure of the Amazon, the second and third theoretical issues discussed center around feminist strategies for gender subversion and the central role of textual and visual media texts in the (de)construction of gender. Again, the work of de Lauretis and Butler will be drawn upon. The fourth and final section in this discussion of theory links the discussion of discourse presented in Chapter II with the discussion of gender presented in Chapter III by addressing the discourse of gender. Here, the dominant discourse of gender *as* sexual difference and the poststructuralist

feminist counter-discourse of gender as the *socially constructed* organization of sexual difference will be addressed.

Chapters IV and V of the thesis will be comprised of the analysis of the figure of the Amazon in the textual representations of the ancient Greeks and *Xena: Warrior Princess*. These analyses will focus particularly on how ideas about gender are communicated through these figurations. My objective is not to do an exhaustive discourse analysis of the figure of the Amazon - indeed, such an analysis would be an academic chimera as the polysemous figure of the Amazon is tantalizingly elusive, having been (re)deployed and (re)imaged countless times since antiquity. Rather, I view this thesis as a heuristic device for critically examining some of the ancient and modern portrayals of the Amazon and the ways in which these images of the Amazon figure speak to the thematic issues (and/or gaps) in current debates about the place of media figurations in the construction and deconstruction of gender.

Finally, the last chapter of the thesis will discuss the conclusions drawn from the analyses detailed in Chapters IV and V. I hope to be able to draw some tentative conclusions about the nature of textual figures (their historicity, their [re]iterability, the promises and risks associated with their [re]appropriation) and the role they play in the social construction and deconstruction of gender categories. While the researching and writing of this project was spurred by a hope of drawing some conclusions (albeit tentative ones) to the question, "Who are the Amazons?," it will be seen that as the project evolved, it became increasingly clear that efforts to neatly categorize or define this textual figure would meet with resistance from the figure itself, as well as from those who, across the

ages, have participated in the (re)presentation of the Amazons. Having been (re)imag(in)ed for centuries by different individuals with differing aims and ideological agendas, the figure of the Amazon has undergone many transformations, making simple definitions quite impossible. Perhaps, then, my initial question, "Who are the Amazons?," should be put aside and in its stead, the following be asked: How does the figure of the Amazon, in its multiplicity, indeterminacy and instability, play in ancient and modern discourses of gender? What investments has it borne in the past and what promises, if any, does it hold for a feminist political project of gender transformation and subversion? It is with these questions that the concluding section of the thesis will grapple.

CHAPTER II METHODOLOGIES

The Amazons: Historical Material Subjects or Textual Figures?

Did the Amazons actually exist, as the Greeks were firmly convinced, or should another meaning be assigned to the existence of the Amazons? In other words, did the Amazons constitute the unique community described in the Greek traditions, or do the latter present us with the kaleidoscopic projections of the imagination?¹³

Before undertaking a discussion of “how” the figure of the Amazon is to be studied in this thesis, it is necessary to circumscribe the figure - that is, mark off or delimit its periphery. More specifically, by engaging with a question central to the study of the Amazons - namely, were they a historical reality or were they a reality in the conceptual world only - I will be directed as to which types of material to look at - textual or historical/material.

Classicist Josine Blok argues that classical scholarship from the late eighteenth century onwards until recent decades assumed that the Greek myths about Amazons were evidence of their historical existence.¹⁴ The late nineteenth century saw the beginning of the discipline of history and the rise of historicism as the dominant approach to history. Historicism emphasized the importance of history as a determinant of events - including textual events. In this historicist approach, mythical texts were seen as being reflective of

¹³

Josine H. Blok, *The Early Amazons: Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth*, (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1995): 2-3.

¹⁴

Ibid., vii.

the sociohistorical context in which they were produced and circulated. In *Die Dorier* (1824) and *Prolegomena* (1825), for example, K.O. Muller argued that the Amazons (as well as other mythical figures) existed since myth was an expression of the historical experience of the people that created it. Myths recorded the earliest experiences of a people and then changed and mutated as they became part of the cultural history of the people, he argued.¹⁵

It was not until the 1970s, Blok states, that the influence of functionalism and structuralism was felt on interpretations of the Amazons and that a total review of the image of the Amazons was realized. The historical existence of the Amazons, as well as the historicist approach to the study of the Amazons, was questioned and, instead, arguments about the literary or textual character of the Amazons were advanced.¹⁶ The myths of the Amazons were viewed as creations of the Greek imagination that expressed the desired social ideals of their Greek male authors, as well as their tendency to create order through the use of polar concepts (structuralism).¹⁷ Additionally, myths were said

15

Ibid., 54.

16

Ibid., 107.

17

Structuralism can be understood as a theoretical framework which seeks to construct a relational model of the structure underlying the processes, institutions, and thought of the social, and which argues that meaning is generated by and through social structure(s). The anthropological structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that the generative, relational, underlying structure of the social could be defined as a logical grid of binary oppositions, and that these oppositions reflected a universal tendency toward the classification of socio-cultural things. (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, New York and London: Basic Books, 1963.) The later Marxist structuralism of Louis Althusser and Stuart Hall addressed the concept of ideology and the formative capacity of

to function as vehicles for social cohesion (functionalism).¹⁸ In his *Amazons: A Study of Athenian Mythmaking*, W. B. Tyrrell combines both of these interpretive frameworks. He argues that “[m]yths tend to deal with sources of conflict and tension in the social order and human condition. Their function is to elicit responses to their explanations in the minds and emotions of their receptors in order to obfuscate, circumvent, or mediate those conflicts and tensions.”¹⁹ He suggests that the function of the Amazon myth was to lessen the tension and anxiety between men and women and convince them of the necessity of marriage. The perpetuation of marriage would further institutionalize sexually dichotomous identities and roles and patriarchal social harmony would thus be fostered. Tyrrell interprets the myths of these warrior women as being the expression of, and mediation between, exclusively binary categories (man/woman, insider/outsider, civilized/barbarian) by which the Greek mind endeavored to create order out of chaos. As creatures who did not marry and assume the role of “woman”, the Amazons were

language and communication systems in the production and determination of accepted, normative meanings in society. (Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London: New Left Books, 1971; Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” *Culture, Media, Language*, Stuart Hall et al., ed., London: Hutchinson, 1980.)

18

Functionalism can be defined as a theory that stresses the linked and interdependent nature of the social processes and institutions of a society, and that studies how society’s various parts interact so as to bring about unity/order or disunity/disorder. (Hardt, 12-19.) The work of functionalists such as Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton underlined the important role of communication in the work of maintaining social cohesion. (Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton, “Mass communication, popular taste and organized social action,” *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, Wilbur Schramm, ed., Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1954.)

19

Wm. Blake Tyrrell, *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984): xiv.

presented as the threatening polar opposites of the Greek male citizen and his *polis* (city-state) and *oikos* (family unit). The very existence of the Amazons challenged the patriarchal Athenian social order; their necessary and inevitable vanquishment and/or ravishment at the hand of male warriors both restored binary gender identities and roles and the institutions (*polis, oikos*) structured and sustained by these binaries, and testified to the (supposed) futility of women taking up arms and living independently of men.²⁰

Following the interpretations of classical scholars since the 1970s, in this thesis I will approach the Amazons as textual figures rather than as material historical subjects. There is no way to prove or even convincingly argue the material existence of the Amazons. As noted earlier, little archeological evidence of warrior women exists - and it is as yet unclear as to whether this archeological material provides conclusive evidence of the existence of specifically *Amazon* warrior tribes. The ancient textual works (which will be more fully discussed in Chapter IV) claiming the existence of the Amazons are fraught with inconsistencies. The ethnographic histories of the Amazons and the geographical travel logs detailing encounters with the Amazons, for example, present widely divergent descriptions of the geographical location, ethnicity, and customs and practices of the Amazons. "The homeland of the Amazons is variously given: in Lycia and in Phrygia; to the north of Greece in Thrace and as far east as the Caspian; along the coast of Asia Minor; and, most commonly, on the southern shore of the Black Sea on the Thermodon

²⁰

Ibid., 66.

river.”²¹ The Amazons were attributed various ethnicities - in Herodotus’ rather complicated fifth century B.C.E. account, the existence of the Amazons was evidenced by the Sauromatians, a barbarian nomadic tribe created when captured Amazons escaped from Greek ships, landed on the shores of Skythia and met and were joined with a group of Skythian men²²; in the first century A.D., Strabo argued that the Amazons were originally from the Caucasus mountains and they mated with a neighbouring tribe of men, the Gargarians²³. In the visual representations of the Amazons on fifth and sixth century B.C.E. vase painting, the Amazons were linked with two other ethnic groups - the Thrakians and the Skythians. The Amazons were often represented in Thracian and Skythian clothing and armor - they donned pointed Skythian caps and jacket and trouser outfits, and Thracian animal skin capes and shields (*peltae*). And finally, the treatment of the customs and practices of the Amazons in the written ethnographic works also varied from account to account: the Amazons maimed or killed their male children²⁴ or gave

21

Roger Just, *Women in Athenian Law and Life*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1989): 241-242.

22

Herodotus, *Herodotus* vol II, with an English translation by A.D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1957): IV.110-117.

23

Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo* vol V, with an English translation by Horace Leonard Jones, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1961): XI.5.1-3.

24

Diodorus, *Diodorus of Sicily* vol II, with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1961): II.45.1-3; Hellenicus’ *Fragments* 16-17, quoted in: Lorna Hardwick, “Ancient Amazons: Heroes, Outsiders, or Women?” *Women in Antiquity*, Ian McAuslan and Peter Walcot, eds., (London: Oxford University Press, 1996): 161.

them to their father, thus only raising their female children²⁵; the Amazons were virgin warriors²⁶ or promiscuous, seductive barbarians²⁷;

the Amazons had knowledge of agriculture, a sign of civility in the eyes of the ancient Greeks²⁸ or they did not, eating meat instead of grains and drinking milk instead of wine²⁹.

Blok argues that these inconsistencies bear testimony to the literary or textual character of the Amazons. In her book *The Early Amazons*, she traces the development of the Amazon myth in archaic Greece and convincingly shows that “the Amazons were initially a representation, a name, an image before they acquired a more solid position within the Greek imagination.”³⁰ The Amazons first appeared in myths which were communicated orally; in these tales, they were little more than a name and an image (female warriors). As myths were written down, the stories of the Amazons were elaborated, and the figure of the Amazon given more detail. With the rise of prose (ca. 500 B.C.E.), writers sought to further round out the figure of the Amazon and straighten

²⁵

Strabo, XI.5.1-3.

²⁶

Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, with an English translation by James Scully and C.J. Herington, (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975): 410.5.

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Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives* vol I, with an English translation by Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1959): 410.5.

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Strabo, XI.5.1.

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Diodorus, III.53.4.

³⁰

Blok, 132.

out the inconsistencies in past accounts. They sought to accomplish this by revising and adding to the traditional, mythical accounts of the Amazons. Geographical, historical, and ethnographic accounts of the Amazons were created by reading other peoples' works and critiquing, contrasting and combining the different versions to arrive at a new text.³¹ In his accounts of the Amazons, the geographer Strabo consulted ancient authors such as Hecataeus, Herodotus, Hellanicus, and Ephorus.³² Diodorus attributes much of his material on the Libyan Amazons to second century B.C.E. novelist Dionysius Scytobrachion who "composed mythological romances by stringing together myths in a grand synthesis."³³

Because of the dearth of archeological evidence and because of the creative and ever-developing nature of the textual material on the Amazons, the notion of the Amazons as historical reality is best left aside. Since the material evidence of the Amazons cannot be conclusively proven - or denied, for that matter - the debate is moot. For this reason, the Amazons are best approached as textual figures.

As figures developed and repeatedly taken up and modified by the Greeks, the changing portrayals of these warrior women throw into relief the characteristics and values of their Greek creators.³⁴ Lorna Hardwick usefully identifies the Amazons as an artistic

³¹

Ibid., 92.

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Tyrrell, 43.

³³

Tyrrell quoting Diodorus IV.48.5: 43.

³⁴

Lorna Hardwick, 159.

topos, a rhetorical theme or topic: “The apparently chameleon-like presence of the Amazons in the written sources in a variety of contexts is explained partly by their status as an artistic *topos*. The balance changes between emphasis on status, race, social organization, or gender, according to the experience of the historical audience, and according to the context and purpose of the source.”³⁵

I would add to this the suggestion that the attribution of meanings to the figure of the Amazon continued into the modern period in the scholarly writings on the Amazons. Blok goes so far as to say that the modern (re)interpretations of the Amazons have been more influential than the ancient (re)interpretations in the creation of our image of these martial women:

More than other myths, the myth of the Amazons evokes associations which have more to do with modern interpretations than with what the Greeks themselves thought.³⁶

Anyone who has heard of the “Amazons” will tend to think in terms of the scholarly (re)constructions rather than of the ancient references.³⁷

And finally, we should note that the (re)imaging of the Amazons also occurs in the non-scholarly works. The portrayal of the Amazons as blond, buxom women with lots of gold in films of the 1970s is one of the many (re)writings of the Amazon myth produced by the modern media, for example. (Figure 3)

³⁵

Ibid., 167.

³⁶

Blok, 4.

³⁷

Ibid., 3.

The varying and contradictory nature of modern (re)imag(in)ings of the Amazons can be seen, firstly, as flowing out of the variable, ambiguous character of the ancient representations of the Amazons. Secondly, it should be noted that equally important in the ordering and shaping of the non-uniform modern portrayals of the Amazons are the different (modern and post-modern) frameworks of interpretation adopted in the study of these warriors. "Every approach to mythology applied its own interpretations to the materials that has been transmitted to us from antiquity."³⁸ My earlier discussion of the differences in the nineteenth century historicist approach and the twentieth century functionalist and structuralist approaches to the Amazons illustrates the importance of interpretive frameworks in the structuring of varying arguments about the Amazons - and highlights the need to be self-reflective about one's own approach. Thirdly, the notion that the figure of the Amazon has continued to bear ambiguous and multiple meanings in the modern period due to the changing ideological and rhetorical needs of image producers should be underlined.

Having established that the Amazon is usefully approached and studied as a textual figure and as an artistic *topos*, and underlined the import of interpretive frameworks as well as ideological and rhetorical need of image producers in the shaping of modern (re)articulations of the Amazons, I am now in a better position to determine *what* texts, or better, what *types* of texts will be looked at in this thesis. Both *primary texts* - that is, those texts about the Amazons produced by the ancient Greeks and by the producers of

³⁸

Ibid., 136.

Xena: Warrior Princess - and “secondary” texts - that is, interpretations of and commentaries on the primary texts produced by classicists, academics, feminists, non-academic journalists and lay-people. Again, it should be underlined that the distinction between primary and secondary texts is, here, a very tenuous one as modern secondary texts participate equally in the construction of the figure of the Amazon.

The following section will delve more deeply into how the figure of the Amazon is to be studied in this thesis. Specifically, I will discuss the utility and effectiveness of *discourse* as a theory and *discourse analysis* as a methodology for the study of the changing figure of the Amazon and the part played by this figure in (re)articulations of gender.

Discourse: A Social Theory of Knowledge and Power

What is “discourse”?

Drawing on the insights within linguistics and language studies, as well as the social and political insights of Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, Norman Fairclough argues that “discourse” has three interrelated and mutually constituting dimensions. Any discursive “event” - that is, any instance of discourse - is seen as being simultaneously a piece of *text*, an instance of *discursive practice*, and an instance of *social practice*.³⁹ The textuality of discourse refers to its being a written, spoken and/or visual product of language or other symbolic forms which communicates

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Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 1992): 4.

meaning through both its content and form.⁴⁰ The textual nature of discourse is intimately tied to the other two dimensions of discourse, Fairclough argues. Both the kinds of texts that are produced and the ways these texts circulate and are received are determined, in part, by “discursive practice.” This second dimension of discourse refers to the processes of text production, distribution and consumption that have been condensed into *conventions*. Texts accumulate “the force of authority through the repetition and citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices.”⁴¹ While innovation in textual content and form can and does occur, the more radical subversions tend to be challenged and often invalidated, appropriated or erased by those interested in preserving discursive conventions. The possibility of subversion and the conservative pressure to control and/or repress such innovations is well illustrated by the case of radical modernist Mina Loy. The English-born Loy produced (in the early decades of the twentieth century in Paris, Florence, and New York) works whose form and content challenged literary and social conventions. She was not often published by the (largely male-controlled) modernist presses interested in experimental writing because her subject matter was feminist and based on female experience, and because she engaged in the very “unfeminine” practice of highly experimental writing. Detractors shuddered at her elimination of punctuation marks and the radical spacing of her lines. However, when e.e. cummings appropriated this style and applied it to ridiculing petty, superficial ladies and detailing his encounters with

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Ibid., 74.

⁴¹

Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1997): 51.

prostitutes, he was lauded. While Loy has all but been completely forgotten, today cummings is read by students everywhere.⁴² “Loy’s publication record may suggest that the avant-garde effort to overturn the bourgeois and conventional may not have included an overturning of conventional male attitudes to female sexuality or have been comfortable with a woman poet who so persistently held up the contradictions of patriarchal sexual practices to inspection.”⁴³ The case of Mina Loy illustrates Fairclough’s argument that discursive practice is constrained by the third dimension of discourse: “social practice.” This third dimension concerns the ideological and structural circumstance of the discursive event and how that circumstance shapes the nature of the discursive event. Fairclough argues that processes of production, distribution, and interpretation are socially constrained in two important ways. Firstly, they are directly constrained by the social practice of which they are part in terms of the distribution of power. Those who are dominantly positioned on the basis of gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on, have greater access to the means of media production, for example. Secondly, they are indirectly constrained by the production and consumption practices of individuals which are, Fairclough writes, “effectively internalized social structures, norms and conventions.”⁴⁴ This internalization of social norms - norms which are reflective of the

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Andrea Weiss, *Paris Was A Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995): 201.

43

Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986): 387.

44

Fairclough, 80.

distribution of power in society - increases the likelihood that dominant textual meanings - meanings that help perpetuate the status quo - be (re)produced rather than challenged.

In this way, discourse is *ideologically invested* - it participates significantly in the signification or construction of reality, a construction which in turn contributes to the sustaining (or restructuring) of power relations or relations of domination. "Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning."⁴⁵ Fairclough distinguishes three aspects of the constitutive effects of discourse:

Discourse contributes first of all to the construction of what are variously referred to as "social identities" and "subject positions" for social "subjects" and types of "self". [...] Secondly, discourse helps construct social relationships between people. And thirdly, discourse contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief.⁴⁶

Importantly, however, discourse is not wholly socially determined by dominant ideologies. "The ideologies embedded in discursive practices are most effective when they become naturalized, and achieve the status of 'common sense'; but this stable and established property of ideologies should not be overstated because [the possibility of] 'transformation' points to ideological struggle as a dimension of discursive practice, a struggle to reshape discursive practices and the ideologies built into them in the context of the restructuring or transformation of relations of domination."⁴⁷ Individuals who produce

⁴⁵

Ibid., 64.

⁴⁶

Ibid..

⁴⁷

Ibid., 87-88.

and interpret texts are strongly affected but not captured by ideology, and “resistant” textual readings as well as texts whose content and/or form challenge, innovate, or oppose normative discursive practices, can therefore be seen to circulate. The work of Foucault has been instrumental in developing this view that discourse does not just reflect or represent social entities and relations but is itself an important force in structuring areas of knowledge and social practice.

To summarize, then, the relations between discourse and the social should be seen as mutually constitutive. This idea will be more fully drawn out and contextualized in the Chapter III. There, a discussion of gender discourse as both the vehicle that regulates and that contests the construction of social subjects, relations and knowledge, and the object that carries and communicates regulatory and transformative significations will be presented.

Why is it important to look at “discourse”?

Discourse is an important area of study since it is a consequential and struggled over site of power. As Foucault notes: “Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.”⁴⁸ Discourse is both the object that constitutes relations of power and the vehicle by which dominant groups try to perpetuate their positions of power and resistant groups try to destabilize and transform these relations and positionings.

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Michel Foucault, “The order of discourse,” *Language and Politics*, M. Shapiro, ed., (Oxford UK: Basil Blackwell, 1984): 110.

During the course of these discursive ideological struggles, social identities, social relations between these identities, and social systems of knowledge and belief are constituted (albeit incompletely and transiently). For researchers interested in how the identity categories “women” and “men” and the relations between these categories are produced, reproduced and possibly changed or resignified, the discursive field is thus a fruitful site of inquiry.

Having established a theoretical position on discourse and its central place in both the reproduction and transformation of social knowledge, identities and relations, I will now explore how the analysis of a specific discourse - the discourse of gender surrounding both the ancient and modern representations of the Amazons - can and will be undertaken.

Discourse Analysis

With the aim of exploring how ancient and modern text producers have engaged with the issue of gender identities and relations through the figure of the Amazon, I will, in this thesis, adopt Fairclough’s three-dimensional conception of discourse and his concomitant framework of discourse analysis. Fairclough’s framework for discourse analysis firmly situates discourse in a broader context of social relations. It ideally brings together the analysis of texts, the analysis of processes of text production, distribution and consumption/interpretation, and the analysis of those social structures and practices in dialectical relation to individual texts and discursive practices. Fairclough argues: “Research projects in discourse analysis are...most sensibly defined first in terms of questions about particular forms of social practice, and their relations to social structure;

given the focus I have been adopting, in terms of particular aspects of social or cultural change.”⁴⁹ Correspondingly, my research project addresses itself to questions about the gendering of social subjects in and through discourse. More specifically, it will look at how various text producers use the figure of the Amazon to try to create a sort of gender reality that appeals to them and serves their interests.

My analysis of the discourse of gender surrounding the figure of the Amazon will attend to the three dimensions of discourse elucidated by Fairclough. Ancient Greek and modern television texts (re)presenting the Amazon as *topos*, as topic for gender invention, will be examined with an eye to discerning *recurring themes* and their underlying assumptions and motivations. The role played by the *form* of the text in structuring the function and/or content of the text will also be explored. Secondary texts will be examined in order to shed light upon the discursive and social practices surrounding the texts in question. An effort will be made to specify the social communicative and ideological processes, structures and desires which are in relations of mutual constitution with the particular textual events addressing the figure of the Amazon.

An analysis of the discourse of gender surrounding the figure of the Amazon which attends to the three dimensions of discourse alternates the focus from the particularity of the discourse sample to the types of discourse which it draws upon and the types of discourse it seeks to perpetuate or create. Such an analysis should look at both the conservative and innovative tendencies in the texts analyzed. It should address the ways in

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Ibid., 226.

which the texts are marked by and take up the conventional figures, themes and dominant ideological beliefs and concerns circulating in the social setting, and/or the ways in which the texts analyzed seek to subvert dominant conventions and advance new figures (or new interpretations of past figures), themes and ideological beliefs and concerns or make themselves amenable to oppositional, resistant readings from receivers.

Before this analytic framework can be applied to a study of the participation of the figure of the Amazon in the discourse of gender, a position from which to address gender must be established. The following part of the thesis, then, will find a brief exploration of the notion of "gender." Various feminist theories of gender, as well as feminist strategies for the subversion of oppressive binary constructions of gender, will be presented and it will be argued that a poststructuralist feminist view of gender as construction and as representation, as articulated by Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler, is most helpful. A discussion of gender as discourse and the subversive potential of textual production and reception for the changing of discursive and social practices will then follow.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL DEBATES

Subjugated Subjectivity: The Gendering of Women Under Patriarchy

How has “gender” been theorized?

In the feminist theories and practices of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the notion of gender *as* sexual difference was central to the critique of the oppression of women by men. Feminists such as Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich insisted on a difference of women from men, female from male, and saw the (re)appropriation and valuation of a hitherto distorted or concealed female nature or essence based in biology as key to combating patriarchal oppression.⁵⁰ They argued that the oppression of women is rooted in the biological lack of the male (his inability to give birth, his lack of connection with the Earth and its energy flows, for example). This lack spurs men to persecute and parasitically feed on women by socially constructing and maintaining “the patriarchy,” a system of male social, ideological, sexual, political and economic dominance over women. Daly and Rich defined women as universally oppressed, as a unified category joined in oppression.

The view of gender as sexual difference was also advanced in feminist accounts of *écriture féminine*. Here, the autonomy and specificity of a female voice and the possibility of creating a female language that articulates a female essence in language was proposed.

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See for example: Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978/1990); Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1977).

Luce Irigaray, a proponent of such a position, wrote for example: “..by speaking (as) woman, one may attempt to provide a place for the ‘other’ as feminine.”⁵¹

The notion of gender as sexual difference and the elevation and celebration of characteristics associated with women played a central role in the political mobilization of women during the second half of this century as it fostered the development of a crucially needed group mentality. If significant numbers of women did not come together as a group before this time, it is because, as Simone de Beauvoir intimates, unlike other oppressed groups, women did not see themselves as linked (in oppression) with other women:

C'est qu'elles n'ont pas les moyens concrets de se rassembler en une unité qui se poserait en s'opposant. Elles n'ont pas de passé, d'histoire, de religion qui leur soit propre; et elles n'ont pas comme les prolétaires une solidarité de travail et d'intérêts; il n'y a pas même entre elles cette promiscuité spatiale qui fait des Noirs d'Amérique, des Juifs des ghettos, des ouvriers de Saint-Denis ou des usines Renault une communauté. Elles vivent dispersées parmi les hommes, rattachées par l'habitat, le travail, les intérêts économiques, la condition sociale à certains hommes - père ou mari - plus étroitement qu'aux autres femmes.⁵²

The belief that women are essentially different from men and are unified in this difference was fundamental in the politicization of women's lived experiences, from the most private to the most public. It also spurred the creation of alternatives for women through the establishment of institutions such as women's shelters, bookstores and coffee houses, and

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Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985): 135.

⁵²

Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe I: Les faits et les mythes*, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1949/1976): 19.

the forming of "a women's culture" composed of women produced/women received music, film, art and so on.⁵³

Though the feminist struggle was in many ways furthered by the action of feminists affirming a view of gender as sexual difference, this view has nevertheless significant limitations - limitations which were drawn out by feminists like Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler in the mid-1980s and 1990s. Continuing to pose the question of gender in terms of sexual difference(s) keeps feminist thinking bound to the terms and conceptual frames of Western patriarchy, they argued. It keeps feminists from examining the myriad of ways that patriarchy's binary gender system is inscribed in the political unconscious of dominant cultural discourses and practices, providing its logic for the organization of systematic social inequality.

For Judith Butler, the chief problem resulting from the positioning of "woman" as a unified, exclusive category (and as the subject of feminism) is that it takes up and perpetuates a *metaphysics of substance*, a belief in a prediscursive body that determines, in part, how it is culturally inscribed with meaning.⁵⁴ The "strategic aim" of the regulatory norms that produce our understandings of material bodies as fitting into one of two

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For a discussion of the furtherance of the feminist struggle by feminists affirming gender as sexual difference see: Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 13:3 (Spring 1988); Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, "Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism," *Signs* 19:1 (Autumn 1993); Caroline Ramazanoglu, *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

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Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1990): 18.

discrete, binary categories is concealed, therefore, by the postulation of “sex” as “a cause” of bodily experience, behaviour and desire.⁵⁵ Butler argues, instead, that feminists should now move away from the assumption that the terms “woman” and “women” denote a common identity:

Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, *women*, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety. [...] If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities.⁵⁶

Teresa de Lauretis has similarly argued that a serious limit of “sexual difference(s)” is that it makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the differences *among* women or, perhaps more exactly, the differences *within* women. She maintains that “the radical epistemological potential of feminist thought” lives in its conception of the social subject as “not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted” since she is multiply constituted in gender as well as in the experiencing of race, class, and sexuality.⁵⁷

A central difference within the category “women” obfuscated by theories of gender as sexual difference(s) is variations in sexuality - that is to say, sexual orientations that are

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Ibid., 23.

⁵⁶

Ibid., 3.

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Teresa de Lauretis, “The Technology of Gender,” *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987): 2.

not heterosexual. De Lauretis asserts that “it is not sufficient to remark the now accepted view that gender is a cultural or symbolic construct, and to describe its surface manifestations, without analyzing and deconstructing the deep-structural hierarchy embedded in its foundation in ‘mythic thought.’”⁵⁸ It is central that feminists identify and critique the first principle in this patriarchal mythic thought which holds “that *women* must be *domesticated* - that is to say, tamed, trained to live with and be of use to *men*; trained to be *wo-men*.”⁵⁹ The domestication of women is achieved, albeit tenuously and incompletely, through the mapping of the gender category “woman” onto female subjects; and essential to the gender identity “woman” is the heterosexual contract, the ideological belief that women are the necessary compliment of/for men. “The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire.”⁶⁰ The association of a natural sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural attraction to the opposite sex/gender is a fictive association that is discursively produced, with this

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Teresa de Lauretis, “The female body and heterosexual presumption,” *Semiotica* 67:3/4 (1987): 260.

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Ibid., 261.

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Butler, *Gender Trouble*: 22-23.

founding myth or master narrative, as natural so as to guarantee the production of a patrilineal kinship system.⁶¹ If feminists perpetuate the notion of gender as sexual difference, then, they (perhaps unwittingly) preserve not only a binary restriction on gender identity but an implicitly heterosexual framework for the description of gender and sexuality as well.

De Lauretis also remarks that theories of gender as sexual difference(s) are untenable as they are unable to explore the differences between “women” (as historical subjects) and “Woman” (as [a] representation) - and thus, tend to perpetuate the conflation of women with their image(s). In contrast to the sexual difference(s) theorists, de Lauretis maintains that *gender is (a) representation* that has the ideological function (which defines it) of constituting concrete historical subjects as men and women.⁶² The gender system is a symbolic system or system of meanings that places individuals within a category to which are attached certain values, identities and, importantly, a status or position in the social hierarchy.⁶³ For de Lauretis, as well as for Butler, gender representations never fully capture or inhabit the subject, however. There is a constant slippage between “Woman” as representation and “women” as historical beings.⁶⁴ As a

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Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40:4 (1988): 524.

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de Lauretis, “The Technology of Gender”: 3, 6.

⁶³

Ibid, 5.

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Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of “Sex”*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1993): 67; Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics*.

result, it can be said that “women are both inside and outside gender, at once within and without representation.”⁶⁵

Women are “inside” gender to the extent that their minds and bodies are marked by patriarchal representations of women as Woman, as Mythical Other. Simone de Beauvoir’s cornerstone feminist text *Le deuxième sexe* was pivotal in the elucidation of this gendering of women as Mythical Other. She argues that due to an inability to authentically assume their embodiment and inevitable finitude, men (re)invented themselves as Pure, Transcendent Minds and projected onto women their fears and hatreds of, and desires for, the carnal, the natural, the finite.⁶⁶ They defined humanity as male and defined women as derivative, as vehicles for the self-conceptualizations and activities of men, and not as autonomous, self-identified subjects. Men became “the subject” and women “the other”: “..elle est l’inessentiel en face de l’essentiel. Il est le Sujet, il est l’Absolu: elle est l’Autre.”⁶⁷ As the quintessential, inessential Other, the mythical Woman is an ambiguous, ambivalence figure as she incarnates at the same time all that is defined in the patriarchal imagination as good and bad:

Du bien et du mal elle incarne charnellement toutes les valeurs morales et leur contraire; elle est la substance de l’action et ce qui lui fait obstacle, la prise de l’homme sur le monde et son échec; comme telle, elle est à la source de toute

Cinema, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984): 36.

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de Lauretis, “The Technology of Gender”: 10.

⁶⁶

de Beauvoir, 249.

⁶⁷

Ibid., 15.

réflexion de l'homme sur son existence et de toute expression qu'il en peut donner, cependant, elle s'emploie à le détourner de lui-même, à le faire sombrer dans le silence et dans la mort.⁶⁸

Woman is both Nature negatively defined (chaotic, out of men's control, destructive) and positively defined (passive, nurturing); she is Mother and Whore, Muse and Soul-Sucking Temptress. De Beauvoir suggests that this ambivalence of the figure of Woman is an intrinsic property of the "Eternal Feminine": "La sainte mère a pour corrélatif la marâtre cruelle, l'angélique jeune fille, la vierge perverse: aussi dira-t-on tantôt que Mère égale Vie ou que Mère égale Mort, que toute pucelle est un pur esprit ou une chair vouée au diable."⁶⁹ This desire that women embody all that is good and bad feeds a related myth - that of Woman as Mystery. "Est-elle ange ou démon? L'incertitude en fait un Sphinx."⁷⁰

Provocations and Transgressions: Feminist Strategies for Gender Subversion

Although the construction of women as Woman, as mysterious and contradictory Other, has occurred since antiquity and is very powerful⁷¹, this representation is not wholly determining. It has been able to neither fully capture and mask women nor erase women's

⁶⁸

Ibid., 318.

⁶⁹

Ibid., 397.

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Ibid., 312.

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Simone de Beauvoir explores the history of the representation of women as Woman and the reasons for the longevity of this patriarchal myth in the first volume of *Le deuxième sexe*.

subjectivity. Women are able to move “outside” of gender, outside of their representation as Mysterious, Inessential Other.

For Butler, this incomplete domestication of women is due to the nature of the patriarchal ideological myths themselves. Because these myths do not refer to a “real,” “authentic” condition but rather, are the *effects* of discursive practices, they must be continuously reproduced and reiterated:

If there is something right in Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot be rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification. [...] Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, or a natural sort being.⁷²

Butler locates the possibility of gender subversion in the constitutive failure of the performative: if the reiteration of gender norms constitutes subjects as gendered, the process of repetition also de-constitutes or destabilizes these same norms. The gaps and fissures, “that which escapes or exceeds the norm, [...] that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm” constantly haunt and render incomplete and unstable gender norms.⁷³ By performing these gaps and excesses - that is, by parodically repeating, failing to repeat, or de-forming gender - feminists expose oppositional gender

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Butler, *Gender Trouble*: 33.

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Butler, *Bodies That Matter*: 10, 125.

categories and oppositional heterosexuality as “acts,” as “fundamentally phantasmatic,” as created *effects* rather than natural states.⁷⁴

While Butler usefully articulates how binary gender categories (and the concomitant heterosexual presumption) are naturalized and reified and, in this way, function as an effect of (patriarchal) power, she does not present a satisfying feminist plan of action for the transformation and movement beyond the patriarchal gender/sexuality system. She has difficulty envisioning a *radically different* future after the movement beyond male-defined, male-serving gender: “..there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms [of gender, of sexuality] the intelligibility that they have. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, *to displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself.”⁷⁵ For Butler, a feminist subversion of patriarchal gender norms is “a kind of political contestation that is not a ‘pure’ opposition, a ‘transcendence’ of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure,” since, she argues, feminists cannot maneuver outside dominant discourses.⁷⁶

Concomitant with her view that there exists nothing outside discourse, Butler maintains that the idea of the “inner” (space, core) as distinct and opposed to the “outer” or “outside” should be abandoned. She suggests that the inner/outer distinction should be

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Butler, *Gender Trouble*: 141, 146.

⁷⁵

Ibid., 148.

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Butler, *Bodies That Matter*: 241.

abandoned for two reasons. Firstly, this distinction seeks to internalize gender - that is, it seeks to present gender as emanating from a being's inner core. The result is an obfuscation of the political regulations and disciplinary practices which produce binary gender reifications. "The displacement of a political and discursive origin of gender identity onto a psychological 'core' precludes an analysis of the political constitution of the gendered subject and its fabricated notions about the ineffable interiority of its sex or of its true identity."⁷⁷ Butler argues that the inner/outer distinction should also be discarded because it works strategically for patriarchy in a second, related way: the distinction constitutes who is and who is not a subject by positing the "abject," the "other," as the constitutive outside of *the* subject, man:

The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute the site of dreaded identification against which - and by virtue of which - the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation.⁷⁸

While her point that the inner/outer distinction works strategically within dominant discourses as a way of defining and naturalizing both gender and the (male) subject is well taken, in arguing for a wholesale abandonment of the "internal" (core) and "outer" (space) Butler can neither account for present-day feminist contestation, nor explore possibilities

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Ibid., 136.

⁷⁸

Butler, *Bodies That Matter*: 3.

for a differently engendered subject. In wishing to reject all notions of an internal core and remain fully within the social, the discursive, the “always already there,” her theorizations underestimate the agency of the social subject and her ability to not be captured by, and transcend, social discursive conventions. Butler’s theorizations do not convincingly explain how “abject beings” come to question their representations within dominant discourse and seek to introduce new, contesting self-definitions. While she does ask “how [it is] that those that are abjected come to make their claim through and against the discourses that have sought their repudiation,”⁷⁹ her belief that “there is no ‘I’ who stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will *through* discourse”⁸⁰ makes answering the question quite difficult if not impossible. How can the “abject ‘I’” successfully work against dominant discourses if it cannot occupy a mental space that is , at least in part, *behind, beyond or outside* hitherto established discursive conventions, and if it cannot will itself to imagine, then create the sociomaterial conditions for the development of an “I” that is differently engendered?⁸¹ While I argue for the retention of Butler’s incisive reflections on the

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Butler, *Bodies That Matter*: 224.

80

Ibid., 225.

81

The argument that feminists should approach the notion of a total discursive construction of the subject which erases any room for maneuver or radical change by the subject with some trepidation because it could lead to an ineffective, wholly negative feminism (which deconstructs and disrupts but does not construct anything) is usefully developed in: Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism”; and Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope, “Sexual Identity/Textual Politics: Lesbian [De/Com]positions,” *Sexual Practice, Textual Theory: Lesbian Cultural Criticism*, Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope, ed., (Cambridge MA and Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).

discursive constitution of gender norms through a continuous process of repetition and repudiation and her argument that subversion involves inhabiting the practices of the reiteration of norms, I argue that Butler does not go far enough in her theorizations of subversion because she needlessly curtails the (mental) room for maneuver of the feminist social subject which can take her within (so she can critique and deconstruct) and beyond (so she can work toward the construction of a radically new gender system) hitherto established notions of gender. I will now look to Teresa de Lauretis' provocative work for the conceptualization of the agency of the social subject and the possibility of a feminist overturning of the binary gender system.

De Lauretis suggests that contestation is possible because subjectivity is (symbolically and materially) constructed through a continuous, reciprocally constituting, interaction between a self or subject and the social world - a process of interaction she defines as "*experience*". "Experience" is a continuous process through which "one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective those relations - material, economic, and interpersonal - which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical."⁸² A woman is seen to be produced by the external ideologies of her society (notably the ideology of gender and its representation of women as Woman, as abject Other) that seek to determine and control her material situation and her understanding of her Self. But, de Lauretis continues, subjectivity is *also* a product of an individual's personal engagement with her external circumstances. Experience, the process which

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de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*: 159.

constructs subjectivity, is therefore more accurately defined “as a complex of habits resulting from the semiotic interaction of ‘outer world’ and ‘inner world,’ the continuous engagement of a self or subject in social reality.”⁸³ This approach, then, acknowledges the forces acting upon the individual yet leaves room for human agency, for resistance to these external forces. It is this resistance which can bring about social change.⁸⁴ Importantly, de Lauretis’ approach posits a view of the “inner world” or self of the individual as dynamic and not reflective of an essential core:

For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction - which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one’s personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world.⁸⁵

Unlike Butler who did not conceive of the subject’s “inner core” apart from an essentialist understanding of this core, de Lauretis argues for an understanding of the subject’s inner world as fluid, shifting, unstable and in constant dialogue with societal forces. The societal discourse of gender, while very powerful, does not fully capture the subject - and this is why it can be asserted that women exist both inside and outside gender - they are both marked by and in struggle with the myth of Woman.

83

Ibid., 182.

84

Ibid., 184.

85

Ibid., 159.

The feminist struggle against gender norms entails both articulating a critique of the dominant discourses of gender as well as an “ongoing effort to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narrative, and to define the terms of another perspective - a view from ‘elsewhere.’”⁸⁶ De Lauretis notes that this “*elsewhere*” is not a “mythic distant past” or a “utopian future history” but rather:

..it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourse, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus. And it is there that the terms of a different construction of gender can be posed - terms that do have effect and take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation: in the micropolitical practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments; and in the cultural productions of women, feminists, which inscribe that movement in and out of ideology, that crossing back and forth of the boundaries - and of the limits - of sexual difference(s).⁸⁷

Butler also argues that feminists can accomplish social change by identifying and calling attention to the “gaps,” “fissures,” and “excesses” of hegemonic discourses, but her insistence that there is no “outside” of dominant discourses and her desire that feminists abandon all “language of internalization” leave little room for the exploration and creation of radical new alternatives to patriarchal gender norms. I argue, then, that Butler’s theoretical work on the constitution of gender norms and the inhabiting of practices of the reiteration of these norms (in order to disturb and disrupt) is usefully extended by de Lauretis’ theorizations, particularly her discussion of the subject’s agency and the importance of the

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de Lauretis, “The Technology of Gender”: 25.

⁸⁷

Ibid..

subject's "inner world" in the development of a critical consciousness that seeks to transform the present gender system and create a radical new way of gendered being.

Textual Production and the Promise of Subversion

In her theoretical writings, Teresa de Lauretis calls to our attention the central role played by textual (self)representations in the production (and counter-production) of social subjects and systems. She argues that modes of cultural production (such as literature, cinema, television, and visual art) are at once material apparatuses and signifying practices in which subjects are implicated, constructed, but not exhausted.⁸⁸ Textual representations can be understood as "a kind of mapping of social vision into subjectivity."⁸⁹ Those representations participating in the repetition of gender norms, de Lauretis notes, "[specify] woman in a particular social and natural order, [set] her up in a certain [position] of meaning, [fix] her in a certain identification. Represented as the negative term of sexual differentiation, spectacle-fetish or specular image, in any case ob-scene, woman is constituted as the ground of representation, the looking-glass held up to man."⁹⁰

If cultural representations are sites of the continued subjugation of women in reified gender relations, they are also potential sites of gender contestation and subversion.

88

de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*: 15.

89

Ibid., 8.

90

de Lauretis, "The Technology of Gender": 15. Note: The verb tense has been altered to match the text of thesis.

Strategies of writing *and* of reading [cultural texts] are forms of cultural resistance. Not only can they work to turn dominant discourses inside out (and show that it can be done), to undercut their enunciation and address, to unearth the archeological stratifications on which they are built; but in affirming the historical existence of irreducible contradictions for women in discourse, they also challenge theory in its own terms, the terms of a semiotic space constructed in language, its power based on social validation and well-established modes of enunciation and address.⁹¹

De Lauretis argues that the regulatory gender norms are so well-established and successfully interpellated that the only way to position oneself out of the dominant discourse of gender is “to displace oneself within it - to refuse the question as formulated, or to answer deviously (though in its words), even to quote (but against the grain).”⁹² While de Lauretis, like Butler, argues here that the perverting of gender norms entails using the “words” of these norms, she (de Lauretis) does not argue for a Butlrean “strategic” repetitive performance of gender norms - rather, de Lauretis maintains that the theoretical and artistic texts produced by feminists to contest the dominant significations and practices should reflect the feminist displacement to the space of “elsewhere,” to the margins which are constituted but not fully captured by dominant discourses. More specifically, de Lauretis argues that feminists wishing to re-signify “women” face a dual challenge. The first is to produce (counter) texts that uncover and question the ways in which women have been represented as Woman and the presumptions and implicit category boundaries and hierarchies of value circulating in these dominant gender representations.⁹³ The disruption and destruction of

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de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*: 7.

92

Ibid..

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Ibid., 6.

this oppressive male-centered vision can be accomplished by representing its blind-spots, its gaps, and its repressions of the “object.”⁹⁴ Having “begun an argument,” defined the metaphors and contexts of gender oppression, the second challenge facing feminists is “how to effect another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject.”⁹⁵ This “new social subject,” de Lauretis argues, is the result of feminism: “As a form of political critique or critical politics, and through the specific consciousness that women have developed to analyze the subject’s relation to sociohistorical reality, feminism not only has invented new strategies or created new texts, but, more important, it has conceived a new social subject, women: as speakers, writers, readers, spectators, users, and makers of cultural forms, shapers of cultural processes.”⁹⁶

What remains to be seen/represented, however, is the specifics of this new feminist social subject. What would “she” look like? How would “she” think? act? circulate in the social world? Would “she,” as de Lauretis argues, be constituted in gender though not by sexual difference alone; a subject multiply and contradictorily engendered in the experiencing of race, class and sexual relations?⁹⁷ Or, as Monique Wittig desires, would

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Teresa de Lauretis, “Rethinking Women’s Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory,” *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987): 135.

95

Ibid..

96

Ibid., 134-135.

97

de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*: 2.

“she” not be gendered at all, “women” as a category of thought and language having been disappeared politically and ideologically?⁹⁸ And finally, it remains to be seen if, and in what ways, the figure of the Amazon would be (re)deployed as a conceptual figure in the texts of these new feminist subjects. What would this new Amazon figure look like and how would she circulate in the social world? Would she continue to participate in the discourse of gender?

Discourses of Gender: Sites of Conflict and Struggle over Meaning

A poststructuralist feminist theory of gender, as articulated by theorists like Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler, holds that gender is a (re)presentation whose constant repetition constitutes historical subjects as men and women. Social beliefs about gender, as well as gender identities and relations, are constituted in and through these continuously reiterated representations. The convergence of textual representations addressing gender and the social and discursive practices, the social beliefs and ideologies, and the categories and terms of social knowledge about gender together form a “discourse of gender.” The *dominant* discourse of gender, that is, the discourse that has the power and authority to speak about gender and have its construction of gender legitimized and naturalized, has, for centuries, held that social knowledge about gender is a reflection of a stable, biologically-given difference between women and men. A *counter-discourse* of gender such as that

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Monique Wittig, “One Is Not Born A Woman,” *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1992): 16.

produced by poststructuralist feminists challenges the dominant discourse's self-assigned status of objective knowledge by bringing to light the constructed nature of the dominant discourse, as well as the operations of power working in the (tentative, always imperfect) securing of gender knowledge. The presence of counter-discourses challenging the dominant discourse of gender suggests that the discursive field is characterized by struggle and instability, and points to the possibility of social change.

The next two chapters of the thesis will examine the place of the Amazons in this contested field of gender discourse(s). After briefly looking at the social beliefs and practices concerning men and women in the ancient Greek world, the treatment of the Amazons in various ancient written and visual texts will be explored in Chapter IV. Recalling the framework of analysis detailed in the methodologies section, my examination of the ancient Greek representations of the Amazons will seek to tease out recurrent themes and *topoi*, and explore the significance of the mythic form for the meaning and function of the Amazon myth. The (possible) intertextuality and the coherence or ambiguity of the corpus of ancient texts will be addressed. Finally, given the brief exposition of ancient Greek society, the place of the figurations of the Amazon in the social and ideological fabric of ancient Greece will be explored. Because my central concern is how the figure of the Amazon operates in texts as an object and vehicle of gender construction and/or deconstruction, emphasis will be placed on how the Amazon is used thematically and rhetorically in the reproduction and/or transformation of social and ideological notions of gender.

The same focus and framework of analysis will then be applied to the present-day representations of the Amazons found in the American television program *Xena: Warrior Princess* in Chapter V. The question of intertextuality will be of particular interest here as it will illuminate the ways in which these modern portrayals take up and/or change the ancient imag(in)ings of the Amazons, as well as throw light on whether a feminist counter-image of the Amazons or a feminist poststructuralist counter-discourse of gender such as that produced by Butler and de Lauretis is taken up by the recent portrayals of the Amazons appearing on *Xena: Warrior Princess*.

CHAPTER IV ANALYSIS 1

The Amazons in Ancient Greece: Heroes, Outsiders, Women

What is immediately striking about ancient Greek representations of the Amazons is the popularity and longevity of the figure: the ancient Greeks retold, rewrote, redrew and resculpted tales of Greek male heroes or armies triumphantly defeating the Amazons throughout their history. Strangely, many past studies of the Amazons in Greek literature and art ignored the historicity of the representations of the Amazons. The studies by W.B. Tyrrell and Page du Bois, for example, present convincing interpretations of the later representations of the Amazons produced by the Athenian Greek but then problematically generalize their conclusions, arguing that the meanings and use of the Amazon figure in Classical Athens was constant throughout time and space and thus shared by Greeks living in other parts of Greece before and after the heyday of Athens. In doing so, these scholars impose a framework of interpretations that is ahistorical and does not capture the fluid, changing nature of the ancient Greek figurations of the Amazons. A core meaning or structure cannot be attributed to the Greek portrayals of the Amazons since, as the analysis in this section hopes to show, the figure is not static and constant but rather, is multiply signified and ever-changing. I suggest that those wanting to understand the figure of the Amazon are faced with the challenge of mapping out the various, varying (re)articulations of the figure and examining the productivity of the figure: What does the Amazons *do* that she is repeatedly taken up?

The Amazons in Epic Poetry

The earliest known references to the Amazons appear in the *Iliad*, an epic tale detailing the days in the last year of the ten-year Trojan War. Thought to precede from and be the culmination of oral tales about the war at the fortress city of Troy, the *Iliad*'s composition is attributed to Homer and is usually dated as being created in the eighth century B.C.E.⁹⁹ Homer's epic poetry addressed a broad panhellenic aristocratic audience and the breadth of the audience may have conditioned the degree to which the views presented in the *Iliad* were familiar and acceptable to Greeks in the Archaic period (roughly 800-500 B.C.E.) as a whole.¹⁰⁰ The Homeric inscription of the Amazon can be said to have operated in dialogue with "familiar and acceptable" views about gender.

The reconstruction of the social life of men and women during the Archaic period based on the poems of Homer must be made guardingly, with an attention to its inherent problems - "[f]or example, the Homeric epics may reflect an actual historical context at any time from the tenth to eighth centuries B.C.E., possibly even earlier, or an imaginary social world, a tapestry that includes historical detail from a number of different periods and social

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Mandy Merck, "The City's Achievements: The patriotic Amazonomachy and ancient Athens," *Tearing the Veil: Essays on Femininity*, Susan Lipshitz, ed., (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978):97; Donald J. Sobol, *The Amazons in Greek Mythology*, (South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1972): 93.

¹⁰⁰

Elaine Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World: Image and Text*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 10, 12.

contexts woven together over a period of centuries by an oral poetic tradition.”¹⁰¹ Other evidence, such as the visual art of the period and fragmentary archeological remains, tend to corroborate the social view presented in the Homeric text, however. It is for this reason, then, that the Homeric texts are examined for the insights they provide on the social life of Archaic Greek women and men.

The Homeric texts and the visual and archeological evidence suggest that the role of men and women display a surprising continuity throughout ancient Greece.¹⁰² Sex roles prescribing that men be warriors and women bear children is thought to have been found in most, if not all, Greek locales and historical periods.¹⁰³ Following the growth of the *polis*, or city-state, women were increasingly expected to remain in the house to cook and weave, leaving the complete freedom of the outside world to men.¹⁰⁴ Women were considered the possessions of their male relatives, and the exchange of women in marriage was “an important part of foreign policy among Greek city-states, since it established, along with the

¹⁰¹

Ibid., 11.

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Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1975): 33.

¹⁰³

Ibid..

¹⁰⁴

The social condition of Dorian women living in Sparta and Gortyn (a city in Crete) seems to have been somewhat better than that of the Ionian women living in and around Athens. While the principle duty of Spartan and Gortyn women was also the production of children, they had more legal rights (including the right to possess, control and inherit property). Spartan women, unlike their Athenian counterparts, were well feed and engaged in physical exercise (so they could produce strong children for the state); they also received some education. (See Pomeroy, 33-42.)

exchange of gifts, a panhellenic network of social obligations and a complex group of kin relations.”¹⁰⁵ As city-states developed and the power of the panhellenic network of aristocratic families declined, a shift in the institution of marriage occurred. Instead of husbands offering gifts to the bride’s family at marriage, dowries were often given to the bride. Fathers only kept the daughters he could provide with a dowry, and exposed those he could not, or did not, want to support.¹⁰⁶ Archeological remains in tombs and written works such as Homer’s *Iliad* show the resulting male-female population imbalance: studies of burial plots show almost twice as many burials of males than females; Homer wrote that King Priam had fifty sons but only twelve daughters, and Nausicaa was the only daughter in a family with many sons.¹⁰⁷

While the institution of marriage, and women’s experience of marriage, changed somewhat during this period, the ancient Greek practice of exchanging women through marriage remained central to the preservation of their political, cultural order - an order which provided men with power, control and freedom, and women with disempowerment and servitude: “The purpose of the family, from this political point of view, is to transmit property and social role so that the political order survives the death of the individuals. In terms of nature, the civic role of women was to produce citizens, that is to say, male heirs

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Fantham et al., 11.

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Guiseppe Cambiano, “Becoming an Adult,” *The Greeks*, Jean-Pierre Vernant, ed., (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995): 87.

107

Pomeroy, 46.

to the households that compose the cities; in terms of culture, women functioned as tokens in a transaction between father-in-law and son-in-law.”¹⁰⁸

The *Iliad* makes two passing references to the Amazons: in the first, Priam, the King of Troy, reminisces about his participation in a past battle in which the Amazons were present¹⁰⁹; in the second, the Amazons are named as one of the “monsters” slain by the Greek hero Bellerophon¹¹⁰. In these brief passage, little is said about the Amazons except that they were a group of women warriors and that they were the opponents of Greek heroes and Trojan leaders in the past. While their role in this epic is a minor one, it is nonetheless telling, however. In both passages, Homer calls the Amazons *antianeirai*, an epithet variously translated as the “peers of men”¹¹¹ or the “equivalent to men”¹¹². The spirit of these translations is the same: the Amazons are presented as heroic warriors and worthy

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James Redfield, “Homo Domesticus,” *The Greeks*, Jean-Pierre Vernant, ed., (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995): 156-157. I would add to and thus somewhat amend this quotation by recalling Elizabeth Grosz’s important insight that “nature” or biology is inherently social and has no prior, natural origin outside of culture. (Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994). Redfield’s “terms of nature” are to be understood, then, as *culturally mediated* understandings of biological reproduction, and not as *a priori* “naturally” given.

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Homer, *The Iliad* vol I, with an English translation by A.T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1954): 3.182-190.

110

Ibid., 6.178-190.

111

Merck, 97.

112

Blok, 146.

opponents. The epithet *Antianeirai* operates as a formula which expresses both the *equivalence* of Amazons to men (they equal Greek male heroes in skill, power and honour) and their *difference* (they are of the female sex). While this ambivalent formula is little more than a bare sketch of the Amazon figure, it is significant because it presents an image of these warriors that (tentatively) conforms with the norms of the epic genre and thus “makes speakable” the figure of the Amazon. A fundamental principle of the epic genre is that fighting is central of Greek culture and is a male activity. Greek male warriors achieve glory and honour by following the heroic code of fighting. Of paramount importance is the necessity that warriors and heroes engage in battle with fundamentally equal opponents:

In epic, a man encounters another man as his opponent on the field of battle, and recognizes him as sharing an essentially similar identity; indeed, their renown as heroes is dependent on this similarity. [...] ..the fundamental equality of the opponents is a precondition for all the other variations in epic heroism.¹¹³
The stature of the hero and the measure of his glory grow with the stature of his opponent. The more impressive the opponent, or the number of opponents, the more glory accrues to the hero. [...] Awareness of this makes it necessary to identify the opponent as a worthy antagonist.¹¹⁴

While the epithet *antianeirai* identifies the Amazons as worthy opponents whose defeat will bring *kleos* (glory) to male epic heroes, it also underlines their difference from men due to their being sexed female. The Amazons are thus ambiguous and threatening figures since, in the epic perspective, “fighting a woman is threatening to masculine identity, and thus

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Ibid., 281.

114

Ibid., 255.

culturally abject behaviour. A man should not take up arms against a female opponent because a woman is an unworthy opponent and the killing of a woman is in principle a shameful act.”¹¹⁵ While the *Iliad* does not explore this paradox of the Amazonian fighting woman, another epic poem - Arctinus of Miletus’ *Aithiopsis* (ca. 750 B.C.E.) - presents a portrait of an Amazon figure that is more detailed and elaborates on the ambivalent and paradoxical character of the Amazon.

The *Aithiopsis* is an epic poem that, along with the *Iliad*, is part of the Trojan Cycle.¹¹⁶ Though the poem itself does not survive, we know of it from a summary provided in Proclus’ *Chrestomathia*, a fifth century B.C.E. handbook of classical Greek literature.¹¹⁷

Proclus wrote:

The Amazon Penthesileia, a daughter of Ares, a Thrakian by [genos], comes to the help of the Trojans. Achilles kills her as she is acting like a hero [aristeousan], and the Trojans bury her. And Achilles kills Thersites because he has been abused and mocked by him for his alleged [eroos] for Penthesileia. A dispute arises among the Achaians over the killing of Thersites. After this Achilles sails for Lesbos, and after sacrificing to Apollon, Artemis and Leto he is purified of the killing by Odysseus.¹¹⁸

While the poet of the *Iliad* safely identifies the Amazons as a tribe of warrior women from

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Ibid., 283.

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“The Trojan Cycle was comprised of eight separate heroic poems, which in order of the events they related were the *Cypria*, *Iliad*, *Aithiopsis*, *Little Iliad*, *Sack of Troy*, *Returns*, *Odyssey*, and *Telegony*.” (Sobol, 94.)

117

Proclus’ work is also known to us indirectly - it is quoted in ninth century A.D. Byzantine scholar Photius’ *Bibliotheca*, a collection of abridgements and extracts from hundreds of classical authors. (Ibid.)

118

Proclus’ summary of the *Aithiopsis* which was copied by Photius is here quoted by Blok, 195-196. (!)

the eastern or northeastern Aegean who existed in Greece's heroic past, the poet of the *Aithiopsis* places them in the narrative present, at the battle of Troy. Instead of appearing as a group or community, the Amazons are signified through the depiction of a single figure - their queen, Penthesileia. Is this placing of an Amazon in an individual role a narrative strategy whose goal is to lessen the numbers of the Amazons and their strength as a community in order to obfuscate and thereby defuse the threat of the Amazons as an *alternative all-female community*? Or, as Blok advances¹¹⁹, is Penthesileia presented isolated from her group so that she can be held up as the quintessential Amazon and magnified so as to be able to play a major role in the epic tale, much as Achilles was made representative of the best of Greece?

Like the Amazons appearing in the Homeric text, Penthesileia is ascribed qualities that were constructed as male in ancient Greece. She "acts like a hero" - that is, she succeeds in major trials of strength and kills many Greeks before being herself bested by Achilles. Unlike the Homeric Amazons, however, Penthesileia's "masculinity" is further underlined through her association with Ares and the Thrakians. In describing her as a "daughter of Ares," the Greek god of war, the martial nature of the Amazon is explicitly stressed. Ares inspires the *thumos* of warriors - their lust for, and ability in, battle. *Thumos* is, of course, considered by the ancient Greeks to be an exclusively male characteristic. In case audiences are still not clear about Penthesileia's "masculinity," the poet associates her again with male aggressivity by giving her a Thracian origin. Thrakians were seen as

119

Blok, 210.

barbarians whose mores and behaviours placed them as the polar opposites of the Greeks. These barbarians living to the northeast of Greece were especially known for their excessive behaviour in battle (as well as in sexual matters).¹²⁰

Also stressed in Proclus' summary is Achilles' killing of his fellow Greek warrior Thersites after Thersites insulted his honour by suggesting the Achilles harboured passionate feelings (*eroos*) for the dead Amazon. Thersites' accusation is a grave one. The ancient Greeks believe that at death, the *thumos* leaves the body. Since the masculinity of the Amazon is thought to reside in her *thumos* and is the essential element that makes her equivalent to male warriors and thus, a worthy opponent, the moment of her death is a problematic one for epic warriors. At death, the *thumos*-less Amazon is simply a female corpse. "To fight with an Amazon is an act of heroism, a man-to-'man' combat, but once the Amazon is dead the honour of the victor is called into question, since the opponent is no longer a worthy antagonist but a dead woman. It was therefore necessary to avoid stressing the femininity of the Amazon in order to spare the male hero the risk of dishonour."¹²¹ In mocking Achilles for having felt *eroos* for Penthesileia, then, Thersites charges that Achilles entertained feelings for the Amazon *as a woman*. Thersites' words are abusive and threatening to Achilles' honour: "...the effect of his words has retrospective repercussions for the duel itself, for he insinuates that Achilles has been fighting a woman and has killed a woman all along, and that he knew it all the time. No greater aspersions can be cast on a

¹²⁰

Blok, 268.

¹²¹

Ibid., 283.

hero's behaviour."¹²² Achilles must kill Thersites in order to disavow the ambiguity of the Amazon warrior - her martial behaviour accomplished so well with a female body - during the combat. The conflict between Achilles and Thersites can therefore be thought of as a dramatic staging of the problematic presented by the figure of the Amazon to the Greek social order - the lack of fit between the Amazon and the binary sex roles and identities constructed in and through the epic genre and the larger society of its audience identifies the Amazon as *a figure of excess* who troubles the dominant Greek discourse of sexual difference. While Homer and Arctinus of Miletus attempt to reduce the anxiety surrounding the Amazon's confusion of accepted ideas about women by stressing her "masculine" qualities, Thersites' words illustrate that this narrative strategy does not gain its end. The female-ness of the Amazons haunts these epic poems and the attempt to reduce the Amazon to her masculine attributes are ultimately unsuccessful.

If the Amazons are such problematic, irreducible figures, why did the epic poets continue to represent and develop them? Kleinbaum's argument that "the Amazon is a dream that men created, an image of a superlative female that men constructed to flatter themselves"¹²³ does not satisfyingly account for the epic representations of the Amazon (though it does account for many of the modern (re)imag(in)ings of the Amazon in 1950s pulp novels, 1970s made-for-tv-movies, and so on...). The epic Amazons were figured as masculine and their femininity obfuscated as best as possible. The female-ness of these

122

Ibid., 287.

123

Kleinbaum, 1.

Amazons threatened to bring dishonour and anxiety, rather than flattery, to the man who defeated them in battle.

Tyrrell's belief that the defeat of the Amazons was used to argue the righteousness of the Greek social division of the sexes is also inadequate here. The epic poets did not openly castigate the Amazons for transgressing upon the male identity and role - again, to do so would have stressed the female sex of the Amazons and thus problematized their status as worthy opponents of Greek heroes.

Blok suggests another, and I would argue somewhat more satisfying, reason for the portrayal of Amazons in epic poems. She argues that while the epic representation of the Amazons as an exclusively female people bearing arms radically distanced them from the Greek world of binary sex division, the Amazons could, contradictorily, at the same time, operate as vehicles of escapist fantasy. She explains:

..the Amazons embody an alternative that is not only confusing and menacing, but can also exercise a power of attraction. The potential to escape the burden of the cultural difference between the sexes that is embodied in the Amazons could lend them a utopian aspect. Perhaps this finds expression in the respect for the Amazons as opponents and in the continuity of their presence on the borders of the Greek world.¹²⁴

While this theory of the performativity of the Amazons in epic poetry is more satisfying than the explanations advanced by Kleinbaum and Tyrrell, I would argue that it should be taken a step further. It should be stressed that while these epic representations may have operated as explorations of alternatives to the social division of the sexes, it is not likely that the poets or their (male) audiences wished to approach the "Amazonian lifestyle" as a viable and

124

Blok, 174.

desired alternative to be reconstructed “in the real.” The *Iliad* safely situates the Amazons in the distant past (from which they can titillate without causing too much damage); the *Aithiopsis* situates the Amazons in the present but explicitly explores, through its detailing of the conflict between Achilles and Thersites, the problems elicited by the Amazon and her gendered irreducibility. Additionally, the *Iliad* expresses the importance of the preservation of binary gender roles and identities in other parts of the text - to cite two examples: the Trojan prince Hector tells his wife Andromache to return to her proper place (the home) and her proper activities (weaving) and to leave the war to men¹²⁵; and the mortal male hero Diomedes wounds and chastises Aphrodite, the goddess of love and the embodiment of femininity, who has come to the battle-field (the preserve of men) to protect her son Aineias¹²⁶.

The Homeric description of the figure of the Amazon and its subsequent expansion in the *Aithiopsis* provides the bedrock for later Greek representations of the Amazons by supplying a set of cultural associations for the Amazons that underlined their gender ambiguity and their lack of fit within the patriarchal social structure of the *polis*. Just suggests that “the works of Homer were ‘transformed into a cultural exemplary, psychologically salient object which, once adopted by a society becomes - precisely - a myth.’”¹²⁷ These epic poems were “held as models of literary excellence and, more

125

Homer, 6.490-493.

126

Homer, 5.347-351.

127

Just, 219.

importantly, as repositories of moral wisdom”¹²⁸ and, in this way, acted as “the common treasure-house on which [Greek] culture would draw in order to remain alive and perpetuate itself.”¹²⁹ Not surprisingly, then, the mythic written texts about the Amazons inspired a plethora of visual representations produced from the eighth century B.C.E. onward.¹³⁰

Representations of the Amazons in Vase Painting

The most important extant visual presentations of the Amazons in terms of both quantity and quality is Attic black-figure (and later, red-figure) vase painting. The black-figure style, developed during the seventh century B.C.E., refers to the practice of drawing figures in black outline then filling it in with a black varnish, thus presenting a black silhouette against the natural red background of the clay. Other colours - white, purple, red, brown - might be added, and some lines marked by incision. (Around 530 B.C.E., red-figure vase painting was introduced and became the dominant style used in the fifth century. Here, figures were sketched into the clay and the area surrounding the figures then painted in black varnish. Details (such as muscle definition and clothing) were then added to the red

128

Ibid..

129

Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, (New York: Zone Books, 1990): 220.

130

Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC) I:1, (Zurich and Munchen: Artemis Verlag, 1981): 638.

silhouetted figure.)¹³¹ “How many vases, from the stately amphora to the humble eye-cup, were adorned with Amazonomachies [battle scenes involving Amazons] is impossible to estimate, but after some 2,500 years, more than a thousand examples - dating between 700 and 400 B.C. - survive in private collections and museums around the world. Rare must have been the Greek household that did not boast at least one fictile representation of Heracles laboring for the golden girdle, or the defense of Athens, or Antiope’s abduction.”¹³² While the audience of the epic poems is thought to have been the aristocratic class of Greece, vase paintings adorned the wine and oil vases and the drinking vessels used by “common” people (farmers, merchants, soldiers) as well as aristocrats, in and around Athens and in those places that traded with Athens. The Amazon as artistic *topos* thus became known to all groups of society and became more firmly entrenched in the imagination of the ancient Greeks.

Three general themes in black-figure vase painting can be discerned. The first - the Trojan Amazonomachy - can be considered the standard:

Since the epic tradition was the fixed point of reference for the Amazonomachy, in the absence of inscriptions it would be natural to imagine a Trojan setting rather than one involving Herakles [the second theme]. The inscriptions on the black-figure vases show that there was still a need to identify Herakles clearly, precisely in the Amazonomachy, even when the addition of his attributes made this

131

Charles Alexander Robinson, Jr., *Ancient History: From Prehistoric Times to the Death of Justinian*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959): 168-171.

132

Sobol, 104-105. The themes mentioned will be discussed in detail in the following pages of the thesis.

redundant. The explosive growth of popularity of the Heraklean Amazonomachy towards the middle of the sixth century did little to alter this situation.¹³³

Artists addressing the first theme added new elements to the story of the Trojan battle to freshen or reinvigorate the encounter between Amazons and Greeks. Chariots are added to the battle scene and Amazons appear for the first time on horseback.¹³⁴ (Figure 5) The third theme found on these Attic vases presents Amazons on their own, in scenes that are related to but are not battle scenes. Paintings falling under this group show scenes of the Amazons dressing for battle, returning from the battle with wounded, and sitting on or walking with their horses, for example. (Figure 6)

Figure 7 presents a breakdown of the approximate number of vases falling under the three thematic categories and their approximate dates of creation. It can be seen that while the Trojan Amazonomachy is the standard visual motif, representations of the battle between Herakles and the Amazons are much more numerous in the sixth century B.C.E.. Indeed, Herakles is “a central icon of this period, accounting for some 44 per cent of all mythic representations on Athenian vases.”¹³⁵

In the written mythic texts, we are told that Herakles is the son of Zeus and the mortal Alcmene. He is forced by Zeus’ jealous wife Hera to serve his cousin Eurystheus

133

Blok, 390. (There are two notable exceptions - one of which is the famous vase by Exekias showing the duel between Penthesileia and Achilles, ca. 550-540 B.C.E.. See Figure 4.)

134

Lexicon, 639.

135

Merck, 100.

through a series of heroic deeds known as his Twelve Labours. The Heraklean myth is thought to be an extension of the Homeric epic since this hero is obliged to perform of series of heroic tasks like the *Iliad*'s Bellerophon.¹³⁶

Herakles' Ninth Labour consisted of a voyage to the Amazon capital Themiscryra to secure for Eurytheus' daughter the golden girdle given to the Amazon queen by Ares. The meaning of the queen's girdle is ambiguous - and it follows, then, that the meaning of the hero's capture of the girdle is equally ambiguous. The myth describes the girdle as Ares' token of martial prowess in battle. It also calls to mind a woman's girdle, however. In the euphemistic thinking of the ancient Greeks, the act of a woman loosening her girdle for a man was understood as both a prelude to and a metaphor for her sexual submission. The Amazonian girdle, then, signifies both her "masculine" *thumos* and her "feminine" vulnerability to male sexual aggression. In completing his Ninth Labour, Herakles defeats the Amazon Queen's so-called masculine side in battle and (symbolically) ravishes her feminine side by taking her girdle.¹³⁷ A later, first century B.C.E. account given by Diodorus goes so far as to say that Herakles' actions caused the destruction of the Amazon nation:

Consequently he embarked on this campaign, and coming off victorious in a great battle he not only cut to pieces the army of the Amazons but also, after taking captive Hippolytê [the queen] together with her girdle, completely crushed this nation. Consequently the neighbouring barbarians, despising the weakness of this people and remembering against them their past injuries, waged continuous wars

136

Merck, 99; Blok, 389.

137

Tyrrell, 91, 93.

against the nation to such a degree that they left in existence not even the name of the race of the Amazons.¹³⁸

Was this complete victory over the Amazons due in large part to the fact that Herakles no longer viewed the female sex of the Amazons as a contentious and threatening issue? Did his ability to address and conquer both the socially constructed masculine *and* feminine characteristics attributed to the Amazons contribute to his stature as an iconic hero? Did it also signal the Greek belief that they had successfully defused the threat posed by the Amazonian failure to “correctly” perform their femininity?

While these questions may have been answered with a “yes” in the post-classical period during which Diodorus wrote, it is less clear that the Greeks creating and using the vases and drinking cups adorned with black-figure work in the seventh and sixth centuries would have answered in the same way. The Attic vase painters tend not to depict the symbolic ravishment of the Amazon queen, for instance. Instead, the vases tend to simply show Herakles in a traditional battle scene, defeating one or more Amazons with his sword, lance or club. (Figure 8) While Blok suggests that this reluctance to symbolically conquer the Amazon sexually by taking her girdle was possibly due to the fact that the patron goddess of Athens was Athena and only she was entitled to wear a girdle denoting “masculine” valour¹³⁹, I would suggest that it could also be symptomatic of a continued reluctance to address the implications raised by the Amazons as women not following Greek

138

Diodorus, *Diodorus of Sicily* vol II, with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1961): II.6.3-5.

139

Blok, 439.

social dictates regarding gender role and identity. I argue that a further analysis of the visual representations of the Amazons on Attic vases demonstrates both the Greeks' continuing anxiety about the Amazons and their lack of fit in the dominant gender system, and a developing inclination to further explore the hitherto "taboo" female-ness of the Amazons.

This contradictory attitude toward the Amazons can be seen, for instance, in the scenes (in all three thematic categories) illustrating the wounding and killing of Amazons. There is a marked diminishment of epic anxiety about dead Amazons. An examination of sixth and fifth century paintings illustrating battles between Herakles and the Amazons, for example, shows a significant increase in depictions of fallen Amazons and Amazons carrying their dead sisters off the battlefield. (Figure 9) Though this suggests that the Greeks were somewhat more inclined to explore the female-sexed-ness of the Amazons, their anxiety did not evaporate completely, however. While the Amazons could now be represented dead on the battlefield, they did not appear (in life or death) naked as did male warriors and heroes. The association of (dead) Amazons with signifiers of masculinity - armor, weapons - continued to be necessary. Figure 10, a Heraklean Amazonomachy, shows naked Greek male warrior battling the clothed Amazons. The bottom panel depicts two (naked) fallen Greeks and one (clothed) fallen Amazon.

Interestingly, the clothing and arms donned by the Amazons in black-figure painting are generally those of the Greek *hoplites* - the heavily armed foot soldiers making up the phalanxes of the Greek army. Like the *hoplites*, the Amazons are shown wearing a helmet, a round or violin-shaped shield, a sword and a spear, and occasionally greaves, a breastplate or boots. (Figure 11) The bodily contours of breasts and hips are not shown. Instead, the

physique of the Amazon warrior is remarkably similar to that of the Greek warriors - in some cases, her shoulders are even broader and her biceps more developed than her male opponent! (Figure 12) All that distinguishes the Amazons as *female* warriors is the whiteness of their skin (pale skin being a conventional artistic device for depicting women and distinguishing them from men). Occasionally, slight embellishments to the *hoplite* costume - embroidery, jewelry - also allude to the female sex of the Amazons:

Seule marque de féminité, bien timide, chez certaines de ces A. [Amazones], des broderies embellissent la tunique; bijoux, colliers ou boucles d'oreilles parent les plus coquettes. Et, n'était la blancheur de leurs chairs, on ne les distinguerait pas toujours des hoplites dont elles ont adopté la tenue. Il arrive pourtant que quelque détail, une peau d'animal jetée autour du corps par exemple, vienne rappeler leur origine étrangère.¹⁴⁰

What is striking about these visual representations of the Amazons, then, is their oscillation between allusions to the *sameness* and *difference* of the Amazons through the devices of physical appearance and dress.

While the sexual difference of the Amazons is only tentatively explored in sixth century B.C.E. Attic vase painting through the use of pale skin and the occasional depiction of embroidered clothes and jewelry, explorations of another kind of difference - ethnic difference - becomes an increasingly common feature of the visual representations of the Amazons, beginning in the second half of the sixth century. (Figure 9) The ethnic Otherness of the Amazons, like their sexual Otherness, is expressed through clothing and arms. While the Amazons continue to be dressed as *hoplites*, they are also increasingly shown wearing the costumes and bearing the arms of two northern "barbarian" groups: the Skythians and

140

Lexicon, 637.

the Thracians. Once the Skythian dress of male archers, which consists of long trousers, a jacket, and a tall, pointed cap, appears on black-figure vase work (perhaps because of trade relations or war with this northern group), some Amazons are shown in the same clothes, using the same curved bow. (Figure 13) Decorative items such as earrings and garment borders with sphinxes are also occasionally added. Similarly, once Thracian horsemen begin to appear in Greek art, the Amazons are sometimes depicted with Thracian shields (the crescent moon-shaped *peltae*) and cloaks. (Figure 14) Some Amazons are also shown wearing animal skins - as mentioned earlier, the dressing of Amazons in animals skins alludes to their Thracian origin which, in turn, evokes the Greek association of Thrace with the themes of "wildness" and "excess."

Blok argues that this "barbarization" of the Amazon - that is, this attribution of a "northern," "non-Greek" origin to the Amazons - was prompted by a desire to render more determinate and identifiable the ambiguous and disruptive figure of the Amazon. She suggests that the fixing of the Amazon as an ethnic Other living at a safe distance from the Greek world functioned as an anchor for the exploration of a second, more menacing and problematic, type of difference - sexual difference:

By anchoring the image of the Amazons in the ethnographical concept of the Other, it was now possible to explore the more hidden aspect of the Amazons, their femininity, in more detail. If these assumptions about the function of barbarization are correct, we would expect to find both a portrayal of the Amazons as barbarian Others and a more explicit presentation of their character as women in the course of the sixth century and subsequently. The development of the Amazonology, following the visual representation of the Amazons as a Northern people, is a clear illustration...¹⁴¹

141

Blok, 418-419.

This “Amazonology” refers to the ensemble of prose writings about Amazons that began to emerge at the close of the sixth century B.C.E.:

The rise of prose, in the form of accounts of history, geography and related topics which at first were hardly distinguished, was based on a critical attitude to mythical narrative. Yet by and large, myth was not completely discarded. Rather, prose writers from ca. 500 B.C. onwards tried to make coherent sense of traditional stories, explaining the inexplicable or straightening out the knotted trajectories of myth. The Amazons in particular became an object of exegesis, for few mythical personae combined so many problematic properties. This knowledge about the Amazons expanded to become a veritable Amazonology.¹⁴²

As the following discussion will show, this Amazonology expresses a marked shift of emphasis in the Greek (re)deployment of the figure of the Amazon. The view of the Amazons as heroic, masculine, *antianeirai* opponents of the Greek heroes is displaced by articulations of the Amazons as ethnic and sexual Others - as barbarian women whose patterns of social organization and whose sexual behaviour differs radically from those of the (patriarchal) Greeks.

Seeking to explain why the female Sauromatians, a barbarian tribe bordering the area around the Black Sea beyond Thrake and Skythia (Figure 15), rode horses and hunted and warred with bows alone or alongside Sauromatian males, fifth century B.C.E. Greek historian Herodotus argues that these women are of Amazonian ancestry. Their story begins after the Amazons were defeated by the Greeks on the Thermodon (the location of their capital, Themiscyra), and the Greeks sailed away on three ships carrying the Amazons that had been taken alive. During the voyage, the Amazons killed the Greek crews and, not knowing how to navigate ships, drifted on the sea until they reached the land of the

¹⁴²

Ibid., 440.

Skythians. The Amazons seized the first troop of wild horses they encountered, then raided the Skythians. The Skythians, who “supposed them to be men all of the same age,” met them in battle. Upon examining the bodies of the Amazons that had been killed during the battle, the Skythian men discovered that they had been fighting women. Instead of going after the rest of the Amazons to kill them, they decided instead to attempt to outwit and domesticate the Amazons:

Wherefore taking counsel they resolved by no means to slay them as heretofore, but to send to them their youngest men, of a number answering (as they guessed) to the number of the women. They bade these youths encamp near to the Amazons and to imitate all that they did; if the women pursued them, then not to fight, but to flee; and when the pursuit ceased, to come and encamp near them. This was the plan of the Scythians, for they desired that children should be born of these women. The young men, being sent, did as they were charged.¹⁴³

Eventually, having come to see that the Skythian men were not a threat, the Amazons allowed the two groups to form closer ties:

..and as the women wandered alone, a young man laid hold of one of them, and the woman made no resistance but suffered him to do his will; and since they understood not each other’s speech and she could not speak to him, she signed with the hand that he should come on the next day to the same place bringing another youth with him (showing by signs that there should be two), and she would bring another woman with her. [...] When the rest of the young men learnt of this, they had intercourse with the rest of the Amazons.¹⁴⁴

The Amazons and Skythian men then joined camps and lived together in “man-wife” couples, Herodotus tells us. After some time had elapsed, the men expressed a desire to move back to Skythia with the Amazons as their wives.

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Herodotus, *Herodotus* vol II, with an English translation by A.D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1957.): IV.111.

¹⁴⁴

Ibid., IV.113.

To this the women replied: 'Nay, we could not dwell with your women; for we and they have not the same customs. We shoot with the bow and throw the javelin and ride, but the crafts of women we have never learned; and your women do none of the things whereof we speak, but abide in their waggons [sic] working at women's crafts, and never go abroad a-hunting or for aught else. Nay, if you desire to keep us for wives and to have the name of just men, go to your parents and let them give you the allotted share of their possessions, and after that let us go and dwell by ourselves.' The young men agreed and did this.¹⁴⁵

The Amazons suggested that they move to a new land - again, the Skythian youth consented. And it is in this way, argues Herodotus, that the new Sauromatian tribe was created.

Herodotus' account of the Amazons is very different from past visual and written accounts of these martial women. While he does present the Amazons engaging in battle, his account does not focus on the Amazons' skill in battle and the glory brought upon the male warriors who succeed in defeating them. Instead, he focuses on their lifestyle which drastically inverts the norms of Greek society. The Amazonian difference is underlined in terms of *patterns of social organization and sexual practices*. They live outdoors, raiding and hunting, and refuse to go back to Skythia and live a life "indoors," "working at women's crafts" like the Skythian women. While the Amazons seem willing to have sexual relations with the Skythian men, this does not lead, as the men had hoped, to the domestication of the Amazons. It is the *Amazons* and *their* customs and decisions that dominate and determine the future of the Amazon-Skythian coupling.

Strangely, in his analysis of Herodotus' account, Tyrrell argues that the men succeeded in taming the Amazons simply because they had sex with these women. The

¹⁴⁵

Ibid., IV.114.

Amazon refusal to live a life of subjugation in Skythia is, for Tyrrell, not significant and not suggestive of the autonomy and independence of the Amazons. I would argue that Tyrrell is guilty, here, of erroneously fixating on and overestimating the importance of the sexual relations between the two groups. While Herodotus does present the Amazons as being open to the advances of men and, in this way, perhaps lays the groundwork for later eroticized representations of the Amazons as seductive barbarians whose purpose was to titillate the Greek male audience, he does not suggest that the sexual act lead to the taming of the Amazons. In fact, quite the opposite seems to have occurred - it is the men that are tamed by the Amazons!

Another concern of prose writers centers around the question of the Amazons and reproduction. How does an all-female tribe reproduce itself? The fifth century historian Hellanicus calls the Amazons ““a golden-shielded, silver-axed, female, male loving, male-infant-killing host”” who cauterized their right breasts in order to be more effective on the battlefield.¹⁴⁶ Though this portrait of the Amazons is a mere fragment of a larger, lost text, it is nevertheless telling. The great wealth of the Amazons is alluded to for the first time and, more importantly, three practices which appeared “deviant” by Greek standards are mentioned - namely, the seductive, sexually aggressive nature of the Amazons; their killing of infant boys; and their searing of a breast. The nature of the deviations speak to what the Greeks found problematic about the Amazons - their control of their own bodies and sexualities; their refusal to include men in their community; and their extreme manipulations

¹⁴⁶

Hardwick quoting Hellanicus' *Fragments* 16-17: 161.

of their breasts, symbol *par excellence* of motherly nurturance. The historian Philostatus writes that the Amazons did not nurse their female children at all, preferring instead to feed them horses' milk.¹⁴⁷ The searing of the breast and the decision not to breast-feed points to, and is perhaps symbolic of, the Amazon refusal of the patriarchal Greek belief that the primary social purpose of women was to bear and rear children.

The presentation of the Amazons as ethnic Others whose way of life dramatically differs from that of the Greeks continues to be developed in prose by writers in successive centuries. Indeed, the Greek-Amazon oppositions become more explicit and drawn out as time goes on. Diodorus' first century B.C.E. histories of two tribes of Amazons - the Thermodon and Libyan Amazons - are a good illustration. Diodorus follows tradition by telling of the valour of the Amazons. He describes the Thermodon Amazon queen, for example, as "remarkable for her intelligence and ability as a general" who, "fighting brilliantly in a certain battle...ended her life heroically."¹⁴⁸ His praise is mitigated, however, by his desire to warn his (male) readers of the dangers that can befall men living closely with strong, independent women. His historical account is essentially a chronicling of the fate of the men living with the women who came to be known as the Amazons. These men had been living with the "Amazons" in a matriarchal society ("...the sovereignty was in the hands of a people among whom the women held the supreme power"¹⁴⁹) and in the beginning,

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Philostratus' *Heroikos* 330 is discussed by Fantham et al.: 131.

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Diodorus, II.45.4-5.

¹⁴⁹

Ibid., II.45.1.

fought alongside the women warriors. One of these warrior women, who was of royal blood, “was remarkable for her prowess in war and her bodily strength,”¹⁵⁰ and she gathered together an all-female army. With this army she subdued in war countless neighbouring tribes. “Filled with pride” because of these victories, she then passed laws condemning the men of her group to “slavery” - that is, to the same lot as Greek women:

..and as the tide of her fortune continued favourable, she was so filled with pride that she gave herself the appellation of Daughter of Ares; but to the men she assigned the spinning of wool and such other domestic duties as belong to women. Laws also were established by her, by virtue of which she led forth the women to contests of war, but upon the men she fastened humiliation and slavery. And as for their children, they mutilated both the legs and the arms of the males, incapacitating them in this way for the demands of war, and in the case of the females they seared the right breast that it might not project when their bodies matured and be in the way...¹⁵¹

Unlike the epic poets who sought to explain the martial skill of the Amazons by ascribing to them the epithet “daughters of Ares,” Diodorus writes that the epithet is a prideful boast. He amends the traditional view of the Amazons as “supra-human-women” who are the (literal or figurative) children of a god and instead, underlines their humanity, and thus “takes them down a notch.” Diodorus’ mention of the mutilations of both male and female children is a further condemnation of the Amazons and calls into question the righteousness of the dominance of women in Amazonian society. In detailing these mutilations and setting them up in the narrative as parallel instances of bodily manipulation or transformation, Diodorus not only very explicitly lays out the physical threat posed by the Amazons to infant boys

150

Ibid..

151

Ibid., II.45.2-3.

(and by extension, to men in general); he also introduces a notion of the “natural” body and the dangers inherent in “tampering with the natural.” He insinuates that the Amazons mutilated the arms and legs of infant boys so that “Amazonian men” would not be able to perform their “natural” role of warrior. The dominance of the Amazons is explained by their erasure of “real” men in their society. Similarly, Diodorus cannot accept the existence of strong, warring women unless their bodies are mutilated and rendered “less female.” A fully female body (a body with two breasts) would not engage in battle and in other physical activities; a female body would “get in the way” of such pursuits.

While the Amazons lived with and used their mutilated men for sexual purposes, Diodorus tells his readers that when the Amazons “practiced the arts of war,” they remained virgins. In his account of the Libyan tribe, he writes:

For it was the custom among them that the women should practice the arts of war and be required to serve in the army for a fixed period, during which time they maintained their virginity; then, when the years of their service in the field had expired, they went to the men for the procreation of children, but they kept in their hands the administration of the magistracies and of all affairs of the state. The men, however, like our married women, spent their days about the home, carrying out the orders which were given them by their wives.¹⁵²

While the virginity of the Thermodon Amazons is not explicitly stated, Diodorus alludes to it when he writes that they worshiped both Ares, god of war, and Artemis, virgin goddess of the hunt.¹⁵³ Like the prose writers before him, Diodorus is interested in the sexual practices

152

Diodorus, III.53.1-2.

153

Ibid., II.46.1.

of the Amazons. He adds a new element to their reputation of sexually aggressive females by suggesting that while they fought, they were virgins.

Not surprisingly, Diodorus ends his accounts of the Amazons by detailing their demise. In his history of the Thermodon Amazons, for example, he explains how the valiant efforts of two Greek heroes precipitated the collapse of the Amazon nation. Herakles' part in the subduing of the Amazons is mentioned first - and has already been quoted on page 65. Achilles' defeat of Penthesileia then brings the history of the Amazons to a dramatic close:

Now they say that Penthesileia was the last of the Amazons to win distinction for bravery and that for the future the race diminished more and more and then lost all its strength; consequently in later times, whenever any writers recount their prowess, men consider the ancient stories about the Amazons to be fictitious tales.¹⁵⁴

Diodorus' message is clear. In manipulating their bodies and those of their male companions, the Amazons sought to invert the "natural order" of binary sex roles. While they were successful for a time, their society was destroyed when they fought "real" men, Greek men. In restoring order, Diodorus does not put the Amazons in the "rightful place of women" - the home - but rather, in the "rightful place of the *abject*" - nonexistence. This signals that the Greek belief in the material historical existence of the Amazons has come to an end. The Amazons are now seen as fantastical creatures beyond possibility because of the non-congruence of female bodies and the role of warrior. The first century A.D. Greek geographer Strabo clearly expresses this new Greek disavowal of the Amazons: "For instance, who could believe that an army of women, or a city, or a tribe, could ever be organized without men, and not only be organized, but even make inroads upon the territory

¹⁵⁴

Ibid., II.46.6.

of other people, and not only overpower the peoples near now Ionia, but even send an expedition across the sea as far as Attica? For this is the same as saying that the men of those times were women and that the women were men."¹⁵⁵

The Amazons in Ancient Prose

While the female sex of the Amazons (or better, the lack of congruence between the female sex of the Amazons and the Greek beliefs about proper gender roles) elicited anxiety in the producers and consumers of epic poetry and was tentatively explored alongside the barbarian Otherness of the Amazons in black-figure painting, in the prose writings of the both the archaic and classical periods, it received central attention. Mention of the battle exploits of the Amazons became second in importance to fleshing out the figure of the Amazon by detailing the various ways in which these martial women departed from and even in some accounts, *reversed* the patriarchal ideals regarding gender role and function found in city-states such as Athens.

Qu'il s'agisse des Amazones ou des Lyciens, la cité grecque, club d'hommes, s'est, par la voix de ses historiens et de ses 'ethnographes' posée en s'opposant; Herodote apporte un admirable exemple de cette fonction d'inversion quand il définit les coutumes de l'Egypte comme exactement à l'inverse de celle des Grecs. De même, l'Etat imaginaire des Amazones est l'inverse, un inverse localisé, de la cité grecque.¹⁵⁶

Taken as a whole, these (re)articulations of the figure of the Amazon participate in what

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Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo* vol V, with an English translation by Horace Leonard Jones, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1961): II.5.3.

¹⁵⁶

Pierre Vidal-Naquet quoted in Page du Bois, *Centaur and Amazons: Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1982): 37.

many classicists (du Bois, Tyrell, Vernant, Blok) call the “discourse of the Other”:

This mode of representation entails a description of the other peoples by virtue of their difference from one’s own identity, while the only terms available for the description of their alterity are themselves derived from the same identity. By representing itself by means of its opposite - the Other - self produces its own confirmation. This other is a projection, and need not be an accurate representation of genuine others. This image may incorporate real features of others, but its essential contours are a form of self-representation by negation.¹⁵⁷

The Greek male citizen constituted and attributed value to himself and his institutions by defining borders around himself and his domain and producing a “constituting object outside.”¹⁵⁸ The object outside is performed, here, by the Amazons - a tribe of warrior women living, literally, at the edges of the Greek world and engaging in behaviours which invert the developing Greek ideal.

Interestingly, the presentation of the Amazons as the undesirable polar opposites of the Greeks coincides with the fall of the Peisistratid tyranny and the beginning of Athenian democracy in the fifth century B.C.E.. The large number of images of the Amazons produced in Athens and its surroundings (Attica) on vases and cups, as well as in prose writings, can be seen as part of a general scrutinization of the “proper place” of women (and non-Greeks) in the new democratized city-state and the “proper relation” between the sexes (and between different ethnic groups) under democracy.¹⁵⁹

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Blok, 268.

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We recall, here, the thoughts of Butler, discussed in this thesis on page 39.

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Stewart, 578.

During this time of political and social development in the *polis*, the ancient Greeks speculated about sexual (and ethnic) difference with a polarizing, analogical mode of thinking:

In the fifth century, the earliest formulations about difference establish a series of polarities which are linked by analogy. That is, the definition of the norm, the human subject, proceeds through a catalogue of difference. The human Greek male, the subject of history and of the culture of the *polis*, is defined in relation to a series of creatures defined as different. He is at first simply not-animal, not-barbarian, not-female:

Greek/barbarian
Male/female
Human/animal

The sum of these polarities yields the norm, the Greek male human being, and the others, on the opposite side of the series of polarities, are grouped together by analogy. Barbarian is like female is like animal; these 'different' beings share attributes and function essentially to define the norm through opposition.¹⁶⁰

The Amazons are, on some Attic vase paintings and in prose texts, presented as analogous (that is, in a relationship of similarity that tends to be assimilated to that of complete identification) with all that is uncivilized, chaotic and excessive - barbarians, animals and (other) females not tamed by the civilizing influence of men (such as the wild Dionysus worshiping Maenads). Their ethnic Otherness, or status as barbarians, operates in conjunction with their sexual Otherness, or status as destructive, unsocialized women. Blok's suggestion that the ethnic Otherness of the Amazons was used as a way of approaching and exploring their sexual difference (discussed on page 69) seems correct, then. "The analogy among barbarians, animals, and females brings into particular

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du Bois, 4.

prominence the difference between male and female. Barbarians and animals are clearly 'other'; females are clearly defined as such through analogy with them."¹⁶¹

The Amazon, defined through the barbarian/animal/female analogy, constitutes the Greek/human/male norm by performing as the undesirable polar opposite of the Greek ideal. The figure of the Amazon performs the reversal of the Greeks' desired norms by both *inappropriately "acting like a man"* and *not appropriately "acting like a woman."* She accomplishes the former by reversing the fundamental inside/outside polarity of Athenian patriarchy.¹⁶² The Athenian associated women with the inside, with the home. Laws passed by Solon aiming to strengthen the democracy by reducing the outward manifestations of inequality between men, strengthen the *oikos* and provide men with legitimate heirs, place severe restrictions upon the movement of women. Women living in the *polis* are not allowed to appear outside their homes except for funeral and religious rituals and festivals.¹⁶³ Even within the home, women are kept in seclusion:

Women are repeatedly said to inhabit 'women's quarters' in the most remote and protected part of the house. The wife, other freewomen in the household, and female slaves normally lived and worked in these women's quarters. Plato (*Laws* 781c) captures the nature of these confined spaces when he describes women as a race 'accustomed to a submerged and shadowy existence.' Although these quarters

¹⁶¹

Ibid., 68.

¹⁶²

Tyrrell, 45.

¹⁶³

Fantham et al., 79.

are not always easy to locate in the archeological remains, some traces can be seen in the plan of a house excavated on the north slope of the Areopagus in Athens.¹⁶⁴ (Figure 16)

While women are associated with the “inside,” men are associated with the “outside”: “The outside had a masculine connotation; its attributes - movement, strength, endurance, wisdom, toil, and danger - were the antitheses of the feminine indoors. Men left the dark confines of the house for war, politics, business, and pleasure, activities entered into mostly under the brilliant Mediterranean sky.”¹⁶⁵ The Amazons reverse the Athenian inside/outside polarity by being women whose sphere of action is the outside. They hunt, go to war, all they do is associated with movement and freedom, not seclusion and atrophy. When the Amazons are depicted as living with men, it is the men who are kept indoors.

The Amazons are also the polar opposites of the Greek ideal because they do not act like “proper women.” The Greek ethnographic writings focus particularly on the Amazon failure to make themselves available for exchange by men in marriage. “Control of marriage and reproductivity was a pillar of Athenian patriarchy.”¹⁶⁶ For the Greeks, marriage is a metaphor for culture and a measure of their civility.¹⁶⁷ The barbarous, uncivilized Amazons invert the ideal of the patriarchal marriage both by being sexual outside of marriage and by being “virgins.” The Amazons do not marry - but rather, they enter into “egalitarian”

¹⁶⁴

Ibid., 103.

¹⁶⁵

Tyrrell, 45.

¹⁶⁶

Ibid., 52.

¹⁶⁷

du Bois, 71.

relationships with men (Herodotus); keep a group of enslaved men to serve their domestic and sexual needs (Diodorus); or have anonymous sex with a neighbouring tribe of men for procreative reasons (Strabo¹⁶⁸). Furthermore, the Amazons do not assume the submissive attitude and behaviours of Athenian wives who were, ideally, to aspire to become as innocuous and serving as a piece of furniture.¹⁶⁹ While Athenian sexual relations within marriage take place indoors, in the home of the husband, and are initiated and controlled by the husband, the Amazonian women have sex outdoors, often anonymously, and have power in the sexual relation. The fate of the children born of Amazons is controlled by the Amazons and not the fathers who, as Strabo suggests, have no way of proving their paternity anyway.

The Amazons are also presented as virgin warriors, as *parthenoi* or unwed girls. While the depiction of the Amazons as promiscuous *and* as virgins may seem paradoxical and contradictory, it must be remembered that Greek notions about sexuality are not

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Strabo writes: "The Gargarians also, in accordance with an ancient custom, go up thither to offer sacrifice with the Amazons and also to have intercourse with them for the sake of begetting children, doing this in secrecy and darkness, any Gargarian at random with any Amazon; and after making them pregnant they send them away; and the females that are born are retained by the Amazons themselves, but the males are taken to the Gargarians to be brought up; and each Gargarian to whom a child is brought adopts the child as his own, regarding the child as his son because of his uncertainty." (II.5.1)

¹⁶⁹

Plutarch writes, for example, that the ideal wife should act as follows: The modest wife ought to be most conspicuous in her husband's company and stay in the house and hide when he is away. / Every activity in the house is carried out with modesty by both in agreement but displays the leadership and preferences of the husband. / She ought to speak to her husband or through her husband and not be disgruntled if, like the fluteplayer, she utters sounds through the tongue of another. (Plutarch's *Advice to the Bride and Groom* quoted in Tyrrell, 52-53.)

congruent with our own. The ancient Greeks believe a woman to be a virgin or *partheneai* if she is not married; the question of whether or not she is having, or has had, sex does not enter into the equation:

..parthenoi represent femininity in its unripe, unfinished state. They are adolescents who have not been tamed by marriage and the offspring-producing 'work' of conjugal sex with a husband. [...] So until they marry and lay aside their weapons, Amazons are unruly teenagers: unripe, undeveloped, undomesticated, and unrestrained. Living beyond the confines of polis society, they mate with men at their own convenience and pleasure and maim or kill the male infants born of these promiscuous liaisons. Far from the demure virginity prescribed by law and custom, their sexual life is a continual series of flagrantly public one-night stands. In this way they represent not only the threat that every adolescent girl poses to her father's authority and to the stability of the family, but the lure of forbidden fruit as well.¹⁷⁰

In calling the Amazons "virgins," then, the Greeks were speaking to the wild, untamed nature of the Amazons rather than to their lack of sexual experience; they were making a value judgement about the uncivilized, adolescent nature of the Amazons and their practices rather than speaking to their biological condition.

The representations of the Amazons as both promiscuous/lascivious and "virgins" are not as contradictory as they many have first appeared, then. Both depictions of the Amazons point to their excessive sexuality (a sexuality uncontrolled and untamed by men via the institution of marriage), and situate the Amazons at the two extremes of the Greek ideal of gender relations. (Figure 17)

The Greek focus on the various ways the Amazons fail to correctly perform the patriarchal gender role of "Woman" suggests that the myth of the Amazons may have served as a warning against the dangers of not supporting the sexual dichotomy

170

Stewart, 579-580.

institutionalized in Athenian marriage. "The Amazons represented women as they might well have been, freed from the constraints of male command, the ultimate extension of a view which saw the young virgin as a creature of the wild to be tamed and domesticated by marriage. Girls who were unbroken horses in the commonplace metaphors of Athenian society become in myth, and beyond the bounds of civilization, the wild horse-riding Amazons."¹⁷¹ The female sex, defined as "nature," is seen by the ancient Greeks as the threatening polar opposite of the male, defined as "culture." In order to dissipate the male anxiety over women - those threatening creatures analogous with barbarians and animals that live within their midst and are necessary for the perpetuation of the *oikos* and *polis* - the Athenian Greeks introduce a third category which will mediate between the male/female polarity. This third category is the *feminine*.¹⁷² A woman is "feminized," her threat defused, when she is married off and, to use several Greek expressions, "tamed," "broken," and "plowed." "Unfeminized" women like the Amazons, then, are viewed as serious threats to both individual men and to the patriarchal social system. The stories about the Amazons expressed on vases and in prose reiterates the desirability and necessity of the system of gender dichotomy and the marriage imperative for girls, and warns of the dangers inherent in not socializing women into "Woman", into the tamed "feminine." The defeat of the Amazons - which is the culminating point of these representations - aids in dissipating male

171

Just, 249.

172

Tyrrell, xv.

anxieties by continuously (re)positioning the Greek male and his patriarchal institutions as the dominant, normative center.

(Re)considerations of the Figure in Fourth Century Greece

The importance of the figure of the Amazon in the construction and valuation of the Greek male identity and his patriarchal institutions continues into the fourth century B.C.E.. However, changes in the Greek approach to difference introduced during this time results in another transformation of the image of the Amazon. While the figure of the Amazon warrior is still taken up in the fourth century and is still used to (re)articulate the (patriarchal) belief in the utility and desirability of rigid gender categories, the supplementation of *polar and analogical* speculations about difference with a *hierarchical* approach to difference results in the concomitant ascription of new meanings to the figure of the Amazon.

The fourth century B.C.E. can be seen as a time of political and social crisis for the Greeks. The myth of *isonomia*, of the city as a community bound by sameness is shattered as a result of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.E.), a war fought between Greek city-states (notably, Athens and her allies against Sparta and her allies). The Athenian empire (allegedly built upon the Athenian desire to unify Greece and protect Greece from the invading Persian barbarians) is shattered and the victorious Sparta's inability to bring about a new panhellenic unification invites a series of bloody inter-city revolts and skirmishes during the fourth century.¹⁷³ The identity of the Greek male as warrior and citizen linked in

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Isocrates, "Panegyricus," *Isocrates* vol I, with an English translation by George Norlin, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1966).

sameness and equality with other Greek males, and opposed in difference with barbarian outsiders, is called into question. The threat of danger no longer comes from the "barbarous," different "outside" but rather, comes from the "civilized," similar "inside."¹⁷⁴ The Greek male fear of another threat to himself and his institutions lurking dangerously within his own walls - namely, the fear of women, the sexual Other - is also expressed around this time. Tragedies such as Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Euripides' *Medea*, which show women in rebellion against the patriarchal norms of society, illustrate this unease, for example.¹⁷⁵

Page du Bois argues that the infighting amongst the Greeks and the increasingly tense relations between men and women in the *polis* resulted in a rethinking of relations of difference:

With the eruption of the Peloponnesian War, the impossibility of sustaining a polarizing and analogical view of difference became clear. The vocabulary of difference no longer reflected the logic of reality. Those outside the city were revealed to have broken in - Greek warred with Greek, man with woman. The Greek male human struggled against imaginary barbarism, bestiality, and effeminization. The outside had invaded, and the city was threatened in its very idea of itself. In tragedy and in works of art the categories of differentiation through analogy were exposed as inadequate. The result was a rupture, a new ordering of social relations based not on polarity and analogy but rather on hierarchy - within the individual, within the city, within the cosmos as a whole. It is this reordering, this new logic, which is the project of the philosophers Plato and Aristotle and which established the 'great chain of being,' whose links are forged in relations of superiority and subordination.¹⁷⁶

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du Bois, 131.

¹⁷⁵

Merck, 109; du Bois, 17.

¹⁷⁶

du Bois, 5.

While internal stratification did exist in the classical *polis* of the fifth century in the form of levels of citizenship based on wealth (in descending order - aristocrats, cavalry, wealthy middle class and poor labourers), the idea of hierarchy was not prominent as a subject of discourse.¹⁷⁷ It is not until the fourth century philosopher Plato that the new way of thinking about difference - difference as hierarchical - becomes dominant. Plato's interest in hierarchy and internal differentiation (that is, differences *within* the city) introduces a way of thinking about difference that does not rely on the establishment of physical (home/*agora*) and geographical (city-state/wilderness) boundaries to underline polar oppositions but, instead, defines identities and regulates practices within the *polis* by establishing relations of domination/submission based on (constructed) "natural," immutable qualities.

Du Bois cites the myth of the metal in Plato's *Republic* as a crucial transitional text in the shift from polarized, analogical thought to hierarchized, logical thought about difference. Plato "uses not analogy but a similar procedure, that of extended metaphor, which he calls a myth, to set forth the hierarchization of kinds."¹⁷⁸ He argues that all men are children of a common mother - earth- but that differences between men in the city exist because during generation men are mixed with different metals:

¹⁷⁷

Ibid., 134.

¹⁷⁸

Ibid., 133.

You are, all of you in this community [*polis*], brothers. But when god fashioned you, he added gold in the composition of those of you who are qualified to be Ruler (which is why their prestige is greatest); he put silver in the Auxiliaries, and iron and bronze in the farmers and other workers.¹⁷⁹

Plato reasons that the differences existing within the city are visible, essential and natural, and that the acceptance of a hierarchy of kinds based on a hierarchy of metals would erase the social conflicts plaguing his time.

Later, in the *Timaeus*, Plato elaborates upon this hierarchy of kinds to include women and animals. He presents women as beings less perfect than men and more estranged from the good (the Celestial or Heavenly). Women, he argues, represent a decline and a punishment for cowardice and wickedness:

And he that has lived his appointed time well shall return again to his abode in his native star, and shall gain a life that is blessed and congenial; but whoso has failed therein shall be changed into woman's nature at the second birth; and if in that shape, he still refraineth not from wickedness he shall be changed every time, according to the nature of his wickedness, into some bestial form after the similitude of his own nature...¹⁸⁰

Plato lays out a descending ladder of creation. "Just as in the myth of the metal, difference is defined in terms of relative value, and of progressive estrangement from the good."¹⁸¹

The Greek male citizen is no longer identified as the center surrounded by "outsiders." Instead, as the philosopher and as the man of gold who acts nobly, he stands at the top of the "chain of being," closest to the divine, and rules over all the naturally lesser beings.

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Plato, *The Republic*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1978): III.415a.

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du Bois quoting Plato's *Timaeus* 42bc: 135.

¹⁸¹

Ibid., 136.

The contradictory position of women - as both the objects of exchange necessary for the perpetuation of the city, and bestial, irrational outsiders - and the male need to subjugate women is rationalized in a new way, then. Women are constructed as lesser beings due to their "inferior biological natures." They are associated with all that is not valued: the *body* (which is inferior to the male-associated mind), *nature* (which is inferior to "male" culture), and *chaotic, untamed wilderness* (which is inferior to "male" civilization).

The representations of the Amazons in written and visual texts produced around the fourth century B.C.E. reflect this change in thinking about difference and its concomitant (re)articulations of gender (and ethnic) relations. The traditional anxiety over the ambiguously-gendered Amazon and the accompanying conventional belief in the *antianeirai* status of these warriors becomes slowly displaced by a Greek emphasis on the female sex of the Amazons and their inherent inferiority vis-à-vis Greek male warriors. The figure of the Amazon becomes more eroticized and the theme of Greek sexual dominance over these warriors more pronounced.

The increased, eroticized focus on the femaleness of the Amazons can be seen in the red-figure Attic vase paintings of the late fifth and fourth centuries, for example. Semi-nude Amazons with breasts bared appear for the first time. (Figure 18) Depictions of Amazons on the temple walls such as the temple of Apollo Epikourios at Bassae (Figure 19), and on statues such as the famous shield of Athena Parthenos inside the Parthenon (Figure 20) and as statues (Figure 21), similarly present the Amazons wearing short *chitoniskoi* which reveal their breasts, torso, arms and legs. Stewart suggests that representations such as these "invite the attentions of the 'eye's hand,' positively teasing the male viewer to caress the

Amazons' trim, lithe bodies, to possess them from afar."¹⁸² I would add that because the Amazons are not depicted as actively engaging in battle and presenting the Greek warriors with a challenging fight but rather, are shown wounded, running away or begging for their lives, there is added to this voyeuristic pleasure a strong element of desired sexual domination.

The theme of sexual possession and dominance is further underlined by the subject of many of these paintings and sculptural works: Theseus' abduction and rape of the Amazon queen Antiope.¹⁸³ Theseus is, in the mythic thought of Athens, the heroic founder of Athens and its democratic institutions. He is attributed a series of labours much like those of the panhellenic hero Herakles, including an expedition to the Amazon capital, Themiscyra. In some representations of this expedition, Theseus' abduction of the queen is depicted as quite violent. Figure 22, for example, shows that the abduction occurs during or after a battle between Greeks and Amazons. According to other accounts, Theseus successfully claimed for himself an Amazon by cunningly exploiting a "female" weakness of the Amazons: their inherently promiscuous, lustful natures. In his biography of Theseus, Plutarch writes that "[t]he Amazons...were naturally friendly to men, and did not fly from Theseus when he touched upon their coasts, but actually sent him presents, and he invited

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Stewart, 592.

¹⁸³

Note #1: In some ancient Greek accounts, the abducted queen is called Hippolyte. However, since the majority of the texts I encountered name this queen as "Antiope," that is the name I will use in this thesis.

Note #2: For a discussion of Theseus' long history as a rapist, see Plutarch's *Theseus*, XXIX.1-2. (*Plutarch's Lives* vol 1, with an English translation by Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1959.)

the one who brought them to come on board his ship; she come on board, and he put out to sea.”¹⁸⁴ So successful is Theseus’ mastery of the Amazon queen in this account that when the Amazons invade Athens to get their queen back, the queen fights alongside Theseus and dies helping him defeat the Amazons.¹⁸⁵ Isocrates presents a similar story in his *Panathenaikos*.¹⁸⁶

The invasion of Attica by the Amazons desiring to get their queen back from Theseus and their subsequent defeat on the soil of Athens becomes an integral part of the history of Athens and is used as a rhetorical *topos* in orations praising the glory and superiority of the Athenian Greeks. “Defeating them [the Amazons] in battle and/or abducting their leader begins to be formalized not merely as a sign of the supremacy of the mythic heroes but as a sign of the historical supremacy of the Greeks (and most notably the Athenian) over outsiders.”¹⁸⁷ The threat of the “outside” coming “inside” is somewhat defused by evoking the historical victories of the Athenians over barbarous outsiders. This can be seen, for example, in Lysias’ 392 B.C.E. Funeral Oration II (“Funeral Oration for the Men Who Supported the Corinthians”), which eulogizes the Athenian male citizens fallen during the Corinthian War by speaking of the ancestral valour of the Athenian Greeks as evidenced by their historical defeat of the invading Amazons.

184

Plutarch, XXVI.2.

185

Ibid., XXVII.4.

186

Just, 249.

187

Hardwick, 166.

So now, in the first place, I shall recount the ancient ordeals of our ancestors, drawing remembrance thereof from their renown. [...]

Well, of old there were Amazons, daughters of Ares, dwelling beside the river Thermodon; they alone of the people round about were armed with iron, and they were first of all to mount horses, with which, owing to the inexperience of their foes, they surprised them and either caught those who fled, or outstripped those who pursued. They were accounted as men for their high courage, rather than as women for their sex; so much more did they seem to excel men in their spirit than to be at a disadvantage in their form. Ruling over many nations, they had in fact achieved the enslavement of those around them; yet, hearing by report concerning this our country how great was its renown, they were moved by increase of glory and high ambition to muster the most warlike of nations and march with them against this city. But having met with valiant men they found their spirit was now like to their sex; the repute that they got was the reverse of the former, and by their perils rather than by their bodies they were deemed to be women. They stood alone in failing to learn from their mistakes, so to be better advised in their future actions; they would not return home and report their own misfortune and our ancestors' valour: for they perished on the spot, and were punished for their folly, thus making our city's memory imperishable for its valour; while owing to their disaster in this region they rendered their own country nameless. And so those women, by their unjust greed for others' land, justly lost their own.¹⁸⁸

Lysias suggests that the Amazons were successful in conquering other barbarian tribes because of "the inexperience of their foes." Instead of bringing democracy and civilization to the conquered as the Athenian (arguably) did, the Amazons brought primitivism and "enslavement." The successful campaigns of the Amazons introduced some confusion as to their sex; they had the bodies of women, argues Lysias, but not the demeanor or practices of women. This state of gender role confusion and this propagation of "primitive" ways of life comes to an end when the "greedy" Amazons foolishly invade Athens and meet with "valiant men," not effeminate barbarians. In defeating the Amazons, Lysias suggests, the Athenians brought an end to both the political and sexual menace posed by the Amazons.

188

Lysias, "Funeral Oration II," *Lysias*, with an English translation by W.R.M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1960): II.3-6.

Order is restored and, once again, the Amazons are rendered into namelessness and nonexistence.

Both the stories about Theseus' abduction and rape of the Amazons queen and Theseus' defeat and wholesale destruction of the invading Amazons present the sexual and physical defeat of the Amazons as an inevitability, due to the superiority of Greek males over the female Amazons. The figure of the Amazon who hitherto would not make herself available for marriage is here taken by force and/or trickery. Once Antiope is brought to Athens, she learns the classical virtue of *sophrosyne*, the self-knowledge that leads to measured self-control:

A woman's *sophrosyne* consists in knowing that she must submit herself to male governance. When Antiope fell in love with Theseus and married him, she showed that she had come to recognize this. In the formula of the Greek marriage ceremony, she had left the bad and found something better. Now domesticated within the polis, she had abandoned her wild state of *partheneai*, had learned *sophrosyne*, and had submitted herself to the womanly 'work' of marriage.¹⁸⁹

Whereas the barbarian Skythian men in Herodotus' account were "not man enough" to tame the Amazons, the Athenian Theseus, being a "real man," succeeds in domesticating an Amazon. In accounts after the fourth century, the Greek male and his patriarchal marriage imperative and binary gender roles triumph over the Amazon.

The Amazons are no longer viewed as heroic equals. Instead, they are presented as barbarous outsiders who inappropriately perform the male role and in this way, threaten the Greek male and his institutions by daring to invade Athens, the center of patriarchal "civilization." Lysias presents the Athenians as good and civil people who introduced

189

Stewart, 584-585.

democracy because they “deemed that it was the way of wild beasts to be held subject to one another by force, by the duty of men to delimit justice by law, to convince by reason...”¹⁹⁰ The defeat of the Amazons (as well as other barbarians such as the Persians) is presented as a triumph of “civility” over “barbarity”:

Here, then, in remarkably clear-cut terms, is a confrontation between culture and nature, civilization and barbarity that was simultaneously a confrontation between the social and political achievements of men and the wildness and savagery of women. But Athens won, and in the orator Lysias’ almost smug account the reasons for Athens’ victory are clear. They relate to those innate qualities which, in the end, must entail women’s subordination to society and to men.¹⁹¹

In adopting a view of difference as hierarchical and based on a logic of varying innate qualities, the Greeks succeeded in defusing or rendering less ambiguous the contradictorily gendered Amazon. They “tamed” the Amazon by underlining her female-ness and constructing this female-ness as essentially inferior. The Amazon could now be tamed through marriage; if she continued to resist, she (and her nation) could be erased, her threat to male “civilization” thus eradicated.

But perhaps this victory over the Amazons was not as complete as the ancient Greeks would have liked. After all, the Greeks continued to (re)present the figure of the Amazon, her vanquishment needing to be continuously repeated, time and again. While the introduction of notions of naturalized sexual difference (gender *as* sexual difference) may have eased the anxiety over resisting women to some degree, the anxiety was/is never completely eliminated. As already noted, the symbolic defeat of the Amazons and the

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Lysias, II.19.

¹⁹¹

Just, 250.

(re)articulation of the Amazonian woman's "inherent inferiority" was still being repeated in the first century B.C.E. by writers such as Diodorus, and in the first and second centuries A.D. by men such as Strabo and Plutarch. If, as feminist such as Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler suggest, the dominant discourse of gender must to continuously repeated if it is to maintain its power and position, it is not surprising that the figure of the Amazon - who epitomizes the struggle between gender discourses by menacingly occupying the space "outside" and performing as a warrior woman refusing the dominant patriarchal dichotomized gender identities and roles - would continue to haunt to privileged "inner" space of the (Greek) male and his patriarchal institutions.

In the next chapter, I will examine how the most recent (re)figuration of the Amazon in the television series *Xena: Warrior Princess* operates. Does the Amazon figure continue to act as a site of tension and irreducibility in a dominant discourse of gender *as* sexual difference? Or, performing as she does in a media world confronted by gender issues raised by the women's movement since the 1960s, and in a social world that, while still unfortunately patriarchal, has seen much change since the institutionalization of patriarchal beliefs and practices in ancient Greece, does she more actively speak to a subversion of the dominant, patriarchal view of gender by performing gender in a new way?¹⁹² That is to say,

192

For an exploration of the legacy of second-wave feminism and how it has changed society, as well as a discussion of continuing feminist efforts in the 1990s to combat injustices such as battering and sexual abuse and deal with issues such as AIDS and pornography, see the collection of articles in *"Bad Girls" / "Good Girls": Women, Sex and Power in the Nineties*, Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry, ed., (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996.) Interestingly, several articles in the collection are dedicated to the examination of the role played by the media in the struggle over gender(ed) power and signification.

does the figure illustrate a media engagement with a feminist counter-ideology of gender by (to paraphrase Teresa de Lauretis) rewriting past cultural narratives about women and men such as those introduced by the ancient Greeks, occupying a new space of discourse, and defining the terms of another perspective - a view from "elsewhere"? These questions will be explored in the following pages.

CHAPTER V ANALYSIS 2

The Amazons in *Xena: Warrior Princess*: Subversive Fighting Women / Recuperative Barbies in Leather

Xena: Warrior Princess, which began in September 1995 and is now in its fourth season, is a much-watched¹⁹³, campy, fantasy-action television show which places a woman warrior - Xena, the "Warrior Princess" and "Destroyer of Nations" - at the thematic and visual center of its heroic action narrative.

The character of Xena is first introduced in a three episode arc of its companion series, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*. In the first episode, "The Warrior Princess," Xena (played by Lucy Lawless) appears as a ruthless, power-hungry warlord who wants to "rid the world of the son of Zeus," who is the personification of good and stands against her evil desires for control and mastery over the known world. She seduces Hercules' best friend and sidekick, Iolaus, then tries to manipulate the insecure, love-struck man into killing Hercules. She is unsuccessful as Hercules is able to make Iolaus see that *he* is not the enemy. In the second episode, "The Gauntlet," Xena's army is still wrecking havoc on the countryside. The Warrior Princess encounters problems, however, when she stops her army from killing an infant. She is seen as being "soft" and her second-in-command, Darfus, stirs

193

In its first season, the show became the most-watched prime-time drama in syndication, a group which includes *Hercules*, *Baywatch*, and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, according to ratings published by Nielson Media Research in the United States. (Alex Strachan, "She is Xena, Hear Her Roar as She Evens the Score," *The Vancouver Sun* 12 April 1996: C1.)

the men to mutiny. They force her to step down "the only way a warrior can" - by walking a gauntlet. Stripped of her armour and weapons, she walks between two rows of her former soldiers as they pummel her with clubs and sticks.

Although "no soldier has ever survived the gauntlet," Xena does. Now in exile, she decides to slay Hercules in battle and with this great victory, convince her men to rejoin her. Again, she is unsuccessful - Hercules is able to fend her off...with the help of his cousin. When he puts his sword to her neck, she tells him to "finish it - prove you're the greatest warrior." Instead, Hercules pulls his sword away and chastens her, saying "killing is not the only way to prove you're a warrior. I think you know that." Xena stalks off - but returns to fight alongside Hercules to help stop her former army which is now killing everything in sight. They are "not true warriors" and therefore, explains Xena, they "had to be stopped." In this episode, then, Xena begins her journey from seductive, manipulative, blood-thirsty warlord to honourable hero fighting for the greater good.

In the last episode of this arc, "Unchained Heart," the audience is shown that Xena is sincere in her desire to dedicate her life to fighting for justice and to atoning for her past sins. She begins her journey of redemption by working with Hercules and Iolaus to defeat Darfus once and for all. Xena and Hercules become lovers but by the end of the episode, Xena decides that she must go on alone:

Xena: There's so much in my life I have to make amends for. I've got to get started.

Hercules: I wish you'd let me help.

Xena: You already have. You unchained my heart.

While the male hero shows her the error of her ways and paternalistically wants to continue his role as teacher, Xena rides off alone.

The series *Xena: Warrior Princess* details Xena's atonement and her devotion to a life of doing good after she leaves Hercules. After saving a village from slavers, Xena meets a feisty young girl named Gabrielle who wants to get away from her repressive milieu that wishes her to conform to the role of "Woman" and marry. Gabrielle wants to be a bard and see the world so she follows Xena. Together, they roam the countryside fighting evil warlords and helping the weak and abused. (Figure 23) The episodes of *Xena: Warrior Princess* chronicle their adventures.

The show has been aptly labeled "postmodern"¹⁹⁴ because it, like other postmodern art and media texts, is characterized by *playfulness* and by *indeterminacies* - that is, by "ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, deformation."¹⁹⁵ It also makes extensive use of such "postmodern" techniques as *parody*, *pastiche*, and *fragmentation*.¹⁹⁶ Though the MCA/Universal Xena Web site¹⁹⁷ says that the

¹⁹⁴

Karen Pusateri, "Xena: Warrior Princess: An Analytical Review," *Whoosh!* (on-line journal for IAXS, the "International Association of Xena Studies"), Issue 1 (September 1996).

<http://thirdstory.com/whoosh/>; Rhonda Nelson, "The Female Hero, Duality of Gender and Postmodern Feminism in Xena: Warrior Princess," *Whoosh!* Issue 13 (October 1997).

¹⁹⁵

Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism," *Postmodernism*, Thomas Docherty, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 153.

¹⁹⁶

Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, (Toronto, New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1988): 1; Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,"

show is set “in the Golden Age of myth, long before ancient Greece or Rome, on the distant frontier of known civilization,” it is more accurate to say that the show is not firmly located in a specific time or space. The show’s narratives are comprised of schizophrenic, patchwork mergings of many historical periods, people and events, Greek and Roman mythology, biblical stories and religious/spiritual references, and totally original characters: Xena and Gabrielle travel to Troy to help Helen during the twelfth century B.C.E. Trojan War and to first century B.C.E. Egypt where, with the help of two original characters - Autolycus, the King of Thieves and Joxer, the wanna-be-warrior buffoon - they save Cleopatra from assassination; Xena fights against her hated enemy, the first century B.C.E. Roman Julius Caesar, alongside the first century A.D. Celtic warrior queen Boadicea in Britannia; Xena and Gabrielle encounter centaurs, cyclops, giants, banshees, titans and an assortment of gods and goddesses; they help David defeat Goliath, a biblical event said to have occurred around 1000 B.C.E. - to name but a few examples.

The style of the show is equally heterogenous. The episodes vacillate between the dramatic (dealing with Xena’s dark past - in “The Debt I and II” - or presenting the destructiveness of war - in “A Good Day” - for example) and the comic (presenting the Buster Keaton-like antics of Joxer and infantile jokes about bodily functions in episodes such as “In Sickness and In Hell,” for example). B-movie-like action sequences and lessons about morality are intertwined with the dramatic and comic scenes, giving the show an even

Postmodernism, Thomas Docherty, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 73-74.

197

<http://www.universalstudios.com/tv/xena>

more eclectic feel. The show's visual look and auditory sound can also be described as pluralistic. Regardless of the country Xena and Gabrielle find themselves in and regardless of the type of episode it is, for example, the villages are prehistoric *Flintstones*-like and the villains are post-apocalyptic with their *Blade Runner/Mad Max*-like matted hair and ragged outfits. (Figure 24) The weapons used on the show can be dated from ancient times (swords, bows and arrows, javelins) as well as from later periods (medieval cross-bows, for example). "The dialogue...is delivered with loony relish, a curious mix of hifalutin' mythology ('The gods grew jealous of their great love and condemned them to separate destinies'), weird sentiment ('I'm not leaving you Gabrielle; I never met a girl who knows every line of Sophocles by heart'), and '90s trash-talk ('You love shoving women around so much? Try me.')." ¹⁹⁸ Though the show strives to have its dialogue delivered in modern, Californian English ¹⁹⁹, the actors speak in a vast mélange of accents (Kiwi, Australian, British, New York American, and so on) - thus adding to the show's haphazard, inconsistent, multi-cultural feel.

The look of the show is also marked by its postmodern borrowings from other, past texts and genres - that is, by its use of pastiche. Many of the borrowings from past media texts are quite blatant. Xena's fighting style - rapid kicks and punches, gravity defying jumps and flips - is imitative of Hong Kong martial arts films. In fact, the gauntlet scene in the episode "The Gauntlet" is lifted directly from the classic 1993 Ronnie Yeu Hong Kong

¹⁹⁸

Strachan, C1.

¹⁹⁹

Robert Weisbrot, *Xena: Warrior Princess: The Official Guide to the Xenaverse*, (New York: Doubleday Books, 1998): 225.

film *The Bride with the White Hair*. Monty Python's "man-killing rabbit" sketch is copied in "In Sickness and In Hell." In "Athens City Academy of the Performing Bards," an early episode showing Gabrielle competing in a barding contest against the eighth century B.C.E. epic poet Homer, the fifth century B.C.E. playwright Euripides, and others, Homer's story of Spartacus is shown visually using clips from Stanley Kubrick's 1960 film *Spartacus*. The action-packed stories of the bard Stallonus (a comical send-up of Sylvester Stallone) are brought to life by clips of Pietro Francisci's 1959 film *Hercules*.

While *Xena: Warrior Princess*'s blending of history and myth, past and present, drama and comedy, originality and borrowings from past texts and various genres makes it perhaps one of the first American television programs with a style that can be described as postmodern, its central thematic - a woman action hero and the fight between good and evil - is certainly not new. *Xena*'s representational foremothers include past film and television representations of "Amazonian" women in the genres of action and adventure as well as past figurations of the Amazon. Hong Kong actress Brigitte Lin (Lin Ching Hsia)'s portrayal of the fierce and beautiful woman warrior who gives up her murdering lifestyle in *The Bride With The White Hair* strongly influenced the conception and development of *Xena*'s character and the show in general.²⁰⁰ *Xena: Warrior Princess* draws upon not only the arguably Western fascination with the figure of the Amazon, then; it also references the warrior woman of Eastern/Asian history, literature and myth.²⁰¹

200

Weisbrot, 5-6.

201

For a brief yet intriguing discussion of Asiatic women warriors see Chapter I of Varla Ventura's *Sheroes: Bold, Brash, and Absolutely Unabashed Superwomen*, (Berkeley CA:

Xena's earliest television predecessor was Emma Peel, a talented amateur who solved crimes alongside secret agent John Steed in the stylish cloak-and-dagger British-turned American production of *The Avengers* (1966-1969). Peel's dry wit, calm manner, and elegant dispatch of villains with martial arts kicks and punches set her apart from other female characters on television, particularly the women represented in the "masculine" genre of action and adventure. "What is most important about the various action/adventure genres is that they privilege physical strength, combative-ness, and skill - and therefore maleness. Women exist to be threatened or victimized and then rescued, or to be the hero's reward for his accomplishments."²⁰² When not presented in the roles of victim or prize, women tend to be absent, erased, rendered invisible from this genre. While *The Avengers* manage to get away from the conventional erasure of women in the action genre and the representation of women as weak and in need of protection, it does not abandon "the representation of woman as image (spectacle, object to be looked at, vision of beauty - and the concurrent representation of the female body as the *locus* of sexuality, site of visual pleasure, or lure of the gaze)"²⁰³, however. Peel's character was presented as much for its sex appeal as its independence and capability. In fact, the contract of the actresses playing this character stipulated that they beat up a man at least once in every episode (a subversion of the traditionally "masculine" action genre) *and* that they put on a tight black leather cat suit (a

Conari Press, 1998.)

²⁰²

Philip Green, *Cracks in the Pedestal: Ideology and Gender in Hollywood*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1998): 160.

²⁰³

de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*: 37.

perpetuation of the patriarchal sexual stereotyping of women as object of the male gaze and - arguably - a recuperation of the character's subversive potential).²⁰⁴ Media reviewers have drawn parallels between Emma Peel and Xena because of their shared dual representations as sexily clad women action heroes who beat up men: "Think of her [Xena] as a mythological Emma Peel, but instead of the skin-tight leather jumpsuit the *Avengers* heroine favored, this warrior princess tools around in a low-cut, short-skirted leather ensemble. Instead of a fierce hi-yaaaaa! you'll hear a yell that sounds like a turkey gobble on speed as Xena leaps over tall enemies with a single bound, hits the ground and cleans their clocks."²⁰⁵

Xena's other television female action hero predecessors - Sergeant Pepper Anderson (Angie Dickinson) in *Police Woman* (1974-1978); the various "Angels" in *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981); Jaime Sommers (Lindsay Wagner) in *The Bionic Woman* (1976-1978); and especially the Amazon superhero Diana Prince (Lynda Carter) in *Wonder Woman* (1976-1979) - also combined some measure of skill and intelligence with a lot of sexual spectacle. While viewers do not see the male action hero Superman in the buff as he transforms from simple reporter to superhero, for example, viewers get a quick glimpse of a naked Wonder Woman as she twirls around and her revealing red, white and blue outfit materializes.

Though parallels can be drawn between the equally advertising outfits of Xena, Wonder Woman, Emma Peel and others (Figure 25), the Warrior Princess is generally

204

The details of the acting contract is taken from Green, 169. The argument is mine.

205

Ellis Widner, "Beefcake, Cheesecake on TV's Myth Menu" *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* 17 November 1995: 2W.

deemed as being not simply a carbon-copy of past female action heroes. As one (re)viewer states:

Xena is a sort of Superwoman for the new millennium; she uses her head more often than her brawn; her most reliable allies are other women...²⁰⁶

The post-feminist heroine for the millennium, she's leapt off the comic book pages, where the modern version was conceived as Charles Moulton's Wonder Woman in the 1940s, and on to the...tube...²⁰⁷

The show's star, Lucy Lawless, attributes the program's tremendous success to the fact that society, particularly its female members, are ready for and desirous of a new kind of screen representation of women.²⁰⁸ Indeed, the desire to "take a step forward" in the representation of television female action heroes was, according to Executive Producer Rob Tapert, one of the driving forces behind the creation of the more "progressive" heroine, Xena.²⁰⁹

Reviewers have mixed opinions as to how successful *Xena: Warrior Princess* is in breaking through the historical erasure, objectification and/or gender stereotyping of women in the media. Some have remarked that the depiction of Xena's strength, skill, self-reliance, and independence from men mark a decided improvement in the representations of female

²⁰⁶

Strachan: C1.

²⁰⁷

Antonia Zerbisias, "Action Ma'am: Pop Culture's New Breed of Tough Women are Mean, Muscular and Not Shy about Showing it Off," *The Toronto Star* 28 April 1996: C1.

²⁰⁸

Eileen Glanton, "Five Questions with Lucy Lawless: Xena Warrior and Empowerer," *The Associated Press*, 28 August 1996.

²⁰⁹

Stated in interviews with Tapert in Weisbrot, 19; and in Donna Minkowitz, "Xena: She's Big, Tall, Strong - - and Popular," *Ms. Magazine* 7:1 (July/August 1996): 74.

characters in the fantasy genre and on television in general.²¹⁰ In a seminal article in *Ms. Magazine*, for example, Donna Minkowitz suggests that Xena is “a hero for the feminist ‘90s” because she is strong, courageous, and does not have a Barbie doll body.

Many feminists have been dreaming of mass-culture moments like this since feminism came into being. But we’ve almost never seen these fantasies realized. The Bionic Woman smiled too much. Even Cagney and Lacey worried about looking “over-masculine.” No woman television character has exhibited the confidence and strength of the male heroes of archetype and fantasy - - or if she did, she was a one-episode fluke, and her anomalous presence could reassure viewers that next week all the regular women characters would be back, nervous and self-questioning as ever.

Until now [with the production of *Xena: Warrior Princess*.]²¹¹

Like past depictions of the Amazons as powerful warriors, the portrayal of Xena as an exceptional warrior challenges and deconstructs the patriarchal myth of woman as passive, non-violent, and nurturing.

Others, however, have reacted negatively to the show, calling it “mindless junk”²¹², a “mythological Baywatch” that perpetuates the patriarchal view of women as sex objects for men by presenting for the male gaze images of scantily clad women in brass and leather.²¹³

210

See for example: Minkowitz, “‘Xena’: She’s Big, Tall, Strong - - and Popular,”: 74; Suzanne Sheldon, “Xena: Feminist Icon”, *Whoosh!* Issue 9 (July 1997).

211

Minkowitz, 74.

212

“Of course, there’s also lots of mindless junk - *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Kindred: The Embraced*, *Baywatch Nights*, *Jerry Springer*- but nobody forces you to watch it...” (Ooch!) (Antonia Zerbisias, “TV Doesn’t Abuse People, It’s People Who Abuse TV,” *The Toronto Star* 24 March 1996: D2.)

213

An interesting analysis of the Cleavage-School-of-Critique and the Xena-as-Baywatch School of Thought in media reviews (mainly dominant or mainstream press) of *Xena: Warrior Princess* is given in: Kym Masera Taborn, “The Curse of Baywatch,” *Whoosh!*

And still other reviewers have taken a middle position, noting that while Xena looks like the latest incarnation of the male fantasy of “the warrior chick in the brass bra,” she is nevertheless a “feminist icon” because of her independence and her ability to bash heads.²¹⁴ The question of whether the women characters on *Xena: Warrior Princess* are sexually objectified and whether this takes away from the feminist potential of the show is a much debated one. While the Xena-as-Baywatch school tend to categorically dismiss the show because of the outrageous outfit of the central character, others (lets call them the Xena-as-(Post)-Feminist-Hero-School) are more willing to explore the idea that a character’s sexuality and sexiness can be depicted in a non-exploitable way.²¹⁵ Xena’s “major cult status” in the lesbian community further complicates the simplistic equating of skimpy outfits with the label of “sexploitation TV” as lesbian spectators’ appreciation of Xena’s body is acknowledged and discussed. Heather Findlay, editor of and writer for *Girlfriend* magazine, notes:

Issue 10 (July 1997).

214

Elizabeth Kastor, “Woman of Steel: Television’s Warrior Xena is a Superheroine with Broad Appeal,” *The Washington Post* 21 September 1996: C1; Walt Belcher, “Reformed Villain Cuts Men to Size,” *The Tampa Tribune* 25 May 1996: 1; Stephanie Schorow, “Xena: It’s Those Thighs,” *The Boston Herald* 9 October 1996: 49.

215

See for example: Minkowitz, 74; Stacey D’Erasmus, “Xenophilia,” *The Village Voice* 26 December 1995: 47.

Twenty years ago, lesbians bonded with one another on explicitly political terms. Now, in the '90s, we're in a much better position to say that as lesbians we sexually desire other women. A figure like Xena can come along with great cleavage and beautiful legs and we can enjoy lusting after her on TV.²¹⁶

Xena is, then, an Amazon of the 1990s: "She's the warrior woman, the modern Amazon, the fighting female who won't be tamed, shamed, blamed or beaten." She is "the post feminist heroine for the millennium"²¹⁷ who combines, at time quite uneasily, sexuality and feminist power and independence. (Figure 26)

While much of the literature about *Xena: Warrior Princess* identifies a circulation of ideas about gender within the text of the show, it does not adequately explore the contradictions and ambiguities found within these ideas. In the following pages, I will explore this plethora of often inconsistent meanings, focusing, of course, on how the figure of the Amazon is variously (re)deployed as a vehicle for the (re)inscription of gender meanings. The thought of Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler - elucidated in Chapter III - will be drawn upon in the analysis of the discourse of gender in *Xena: Warrior Princess* that follows, in an effort to: 1) explore how the gender meanings vehicled by the figure of the Amazon differ from and/or resemble those found in the ancient Greek imag(in)ings of the Amazon, and 2) to situate and reflect upon the varying (re)viewer reactions to *Xena: Warrior Princess* and its Amazon characters and determine whether, and in what ways, the show's (re)presentations successfully (re)think gendered identities and relations.

²¹⁶

Findlay quoted in Kastor, "Woman of Steel": C1.

²¹⁷

Zerbisias, "Action Ma'am": C1.

The first question that must be addressed is: Who is an “Amazon” on Xena: Warrior Princess? I would argue that the Amazon is figured in three different ways on the program: She is *explicitly* figured (firstly) through the recurring guest characters who are the members of the Arborean Amazon Nation, and (secondly) through the character of Gabrielle, Xena’s sidekick who becomes an Amazon princess after trying to save the life of an Amazon princess; the Amazon is also *implicitly* figured (thirdly) through the figure of Xena, the Warrior Princess.

A Television Depiction of an Amazon Nation

Members of the Amazon nation are first introduced in the first season episode “Hooves and Harlots.” (Figure 27) Xena and Gabrielle enter into Amazon territory and are greeted by a group of Amazons dropping from the tree tops with ropes and wearing bird masks. (Figure 28) We note that the Amazons are given a new visual look in Xena: Warrior Princess. Whereas the ancient Greeks presented the warrior women as muscular *hoplites* or as lithe barbarians wearing patterned tunics and caps in order to explore both the similarities and differences between Greek males and Amazon women, these television Amazons, who wear form-fitting leather bikini-tops and short skirts and brightly-coloured bird masks made of feathers...and plastic (!), are presented as erotic spectacle.

While the Amazons and the traveling couple are engaged in conversation, arrows shower upon them from an unknown attacker. Though Gabrielle tries to shield the body of a fallen Amazon - the Amazon princess Terreis - the Amazon dies. In her last moments, Terreis gives Gabrielle her “right of caste” - that is, she bestows upon Xena’s companion

her position in the Amazon Nation as well as all her belongings. Gabrielle is now an Amazon princess.

The arrow that kills Terreis is of the kind used by the Centaurs - fantastical creatures who are half-man, half-horse - and the Amazons therefore get ready to declare a retaliatory war on the Centaurs. Though Xena does not appear to like the Centaurs, she is not ready to believe that they are responsible for Terreis's death. After an investigation, Xena discovers that a warlord wanting the lands of both the Amazons and the Centaurs is trying to bring about a war between the two groups in the hopes that they will decimate each other's numbers and make it easy for him to take their lands. In discovering Terreis's true murderer, Xena is able, then, to prevent a needless war between the Centaurs (the "Hooves") and the Amazons (the "Harlots").

While the Amazon nation on *Xena: Warrior Princess* is presented as an all-female society living independently of men whose members are trained in the arts of war, they are not presented, as they often are in ancient Greek representations, as dangerous, diametrically-opposite sexual and racial Others. That the discourse of the Other and the promotion of the notion of gender as sexual difference is much less present in the television show is perhaps not surprising. While the Greeks centrally used their depictions of the Amazons as a way of exploring and propagating a definition of themselves (Greek/Athenian male citizens) and their institutions (*polis, oikos*), and did so by putting forward notions of difference as analogical (Amazon = barbarian, woman = Other) and hierarchical (Amazon = woman = lesser being = Other), the television show, located as it is 2500 years or so after Greek antiquity, illuminates the somewhat more emendatory gender identities, practices, and

ideologies of (post)modern America. The social ground upon which the producers, writers, actors and (re)viewers of Xena: Warrior Princess are operating is different from the social milieu within which the ancient Greeks produced their (re)imaginings of the figure of the Amazon. Notably, the nature of patriarchal beliefs and institutions and women's position within society have undergone some important permutations and transformations since the genesis of patriarchy, and its subjugation of women, in antiquity. Unlike the ancient Greek (re)presentations of the Amazons which were largely produced so as to illuminate the identity, practices and ideologies of the Greek male citizen, the (post)modern American television show, whose narrative focus centers around the female warrior Xena rather than the Greek male warrior/hero, presents itself as *a site of contestation of conventional, patriarchal notions of gender*. As noted earlier, interviews with Lawless and Tapert reveal an intention on their part to produce a show which "breaks new ground" in terms of media gender (re)presentations. As well, (re)viewers in both the mainstream and alternative/lesbian/queer presses have tended to focus their attentions on the promises and limitations of Xena: Warrior Princess as a site of gender norm contestation.

While the depiction of the Amazon nation on Xena: Warrior Princess does not take up the discourse of the Other (as did the ancient Greeks), it does speak about gender in other ways. The constructed relationship between men and women in the patriarchal Greek world and the differences in identities and practices of Greek and Amazon women are explicitly addressed in a conversation between Terreis and Gabrielle shortly before Terreis is felled by an arrow:

Gabrielle: I wanted to read philosophy and learn about history and science...but they didn't consider me a *normal* girl.

Terreis: Philosophy and history are among the first things taught to Amazon children.

Gabrielle: Really?

Terreis: It is a man's world Gabrielle. Not because it should be - but because we let them have it. It's based on a woman's weakness.

Gabrielle: Yeah?

Terreis: The Amazon world is based on truth, on a woman's individual strength.

After pointing out the different lived experiences of Amazon and Greek women, Terreis rejects the notion of natural difference and the inevitability of a patriarchal social system. Unfortunately, she then seems to blame (Greek) women for their oppression under a patriarchal system (“..we let them have it...”). Absent, then, is any awareness of the systematic and institutionalized nature of the patriarchal repression of women and the creation and positioning of the socially constituted female subject (as feminine, as “Woman”) through interpellation. The central and active role played by *men* in the oppression of women is not enunciated.

In case we missed this sentiment the first time, it is again repeated. As two Amazons dress Gabrielle in Terreis' Amazon princess leather outfit, the three discuss Terreis and gender relations:

Gabrielle: What kind of person was she?

Amazon #1: Terreis was an Amazon in the purest sense.

Amazon #2: She would have made a good leader one day.

Amazon #1: And she didn't think all men and Centaurs were evil - just misguided.

Gabrielle: It's a man's world - not because it should be but because we let them have it. Yeah....I guess that's true.

While the ancient Greeks strove to cement a sense of gender difference between men and women (and located the Amazons as a problematic in that solidification of binary gender categories in need of eradication), the television show conversely strives to bridge the gender gap by presenting Terreis as a believer in the need to foster greater understanding and tolerance among the Amazons/women and the Centaurs/men.

This idea of a movement away from a notion of gender as sexual difference toward a *rapprochement* of the sexes (and possibly a respect for difference?) can be seen running through the entire episode and is, I would argue, the moral of the episode. By refusing to fall prey to the conventional antagonism between the sexes and, instead, searching out the true identity of Terreis's murderer, Xena teaches the Amazons, the Centaurs, and the viewers that hasty decisions based on negative gender generalizations will only bring about strife and the destruction of both groups. Peace between the genders is more desirable than war, the episode tells us.

After the Centaurs and Amazons join together and defeat the scheming warlord, their peoples are shown interacting for the first time. A young man speaks as two young Amazons listen. An Amazon child walks hand-in-hand with a Centaur boy, showing him her village. The camera then pans on Xena who is talking with Queen Melosa, the Amazon leader, and Tyldus, the Centaur leader:

Melosa: It's not going to be an easy peace - but it's a good start.

Xena: Making war is simple - making peace is never easy. If it was, everyone would do it.

Tyldus: Old enemies, new friends.

Unlike the ancient Greek tales of the Amazons which necessarily ended in the defeat or destruction of the Amazon Nation, this episode ends with the forging of peace. The Amazons are not presented as a threat in need of analysis and defusion - instead, it is ignorance, lack of tolerance and the resulting aggression between women (symbolized by the all-female Amazon nation) and men (symbolized by the all-male Centaur nation) that needs to be challenged.

The peace forged between the all-male and all-female groups and the breaking down of barriers between the two groups is further symbolized by the marriage of Ephiny (the Amazon who helps Xena investigate Terreis's murder and who becomes a close friend to Xena and Gabrielle) and Phantes (Tyldus's son) and by the subsequent birth of their child, Xenan (in "Is There A Doctor in the House?") How should this marriage be viewed? Is the show taking up the patriarchal institution of marriage with its exchange of women as favoured practice of cementing social and political ties between two groups or tribes - and in this way, perpetuating and celebrating an institution which has throughout history oppressed women? Or should the marriage be viewed as "progressive" because it shows tolerance for interspecies couplings (!) - and thus breaks down social taboos and prejudices against mingling with "other," "lesser" groups? The evaluation of the marriage is made difficult by the fact that the program never shows the married couple - in "Is There a Doctor in the

House?" viewers learn that Ephiny and Phantes had married in the off-screen space of the show and that Phantes had recently been killed protecting the pregnant Ephiny. The marriage is dissolved and made incidental before ever being made real on the screen. The significance of the seemingly haphazard, off-handed treatment of the marriage of an Amazon will be addressed and speculated upon in the concluding remarks of this section of analysis, after a more thorough discussion of the figure of the Amazon on *Xena: Warrior Princess* has been made.

While the show follows ancient Greek mythology in its use of the Amazons and the Centaurs as representations *par excellence* of "woman" and "man," its characterization of these two groups is quite different. "In the myths of the Greeks, the Amazons and the Centaurs were creatures at the boundaries of difference. Speculation about them constitutes part of the Greek's thinking about sexual, cultural, and species boundaries."²¹⁸ As mentioned in section one of this chapter, the Amazons are presented by the Greeks as an exclusively female community characterized by a lack of moderation in war and in sexual practices and by an absence of modesty and self-abnegation typical of the "feminized" or culturally constructed Greek woman. Modern scholars believe that the ancient Greeks drew parallels between the Amazons and the Centaurs (and therefore depicted Amazonomachies and Centauromachies together on vases and on the walls of temples such as the Parthenon) since Centaurs were similarly represented as untamed, wild creatures whose excessive acting out of their sexed-ness positioned them as dangerous inversions of

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Page du Bois, 27.

the Greek ideal of moderation. An exclusively *male* species, the Centaurs were presented as “*hypermasculine*; the violence and sexuality of the horse was super-added to the human virility in their bodies.”²¹⁹ Unlike the “civilized” Greeks who (ideally) drank modestly and adhered to the conventions of marriage and *xenia* (or guest-friendship - the hospitable receiving of guests into one’s home, city or land), the Centaurs were known for their drunkenness, their greed, their abduction and rape of “other men’s women,” and their inability to receive guests in a civilized fashion.²²⁰

In the episode “Hooves and Harlots,” an inversion of the Greek inversion occurs, however. Moderation and nobility in war and in one’s dealings with others is not epitomized by the Greek male citizen - indeed, Greek male citizens are absent from this (and most other) episodes of *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Instead, the Amazons and the Centaurs possess these ideal qualities - both groups are ruled by reason and not fanaticism when dealing with their “enemies” and when deciding whether or not to wage war; both are seen as respecting the relations of *xenia* (and, we will learn in a subsequent episode, the institution of marriage).

In short, then, the figure of the Amazon is (re)drawn in *Xena: Warrior Princess* (as is that of the Centaur). Her characterization as ambiguously gendered female warrior who menaces the Greek male and his system of gender as sexual difference is abandoned and, in

²¹⁹

Ibid., 31.

²²⁰

Ibid., 28-29.

its stead, she is presented as a non-threatening woman capable in war²²¹ but preferring the forging of peaceful relations with men. While the ancient Greeks sought to defuse the threat posed by the Amazons by killing (or, in the case of Theseus and Antiope, by abducting and forcibly domesticating) the Amazons, the television program defuses the oppositional dynamic of the Amazons by suggesting that they are not sites of tension within the patriarchal system of gender. They will make peace with men and even willingly enter into marriage relations.

That the show both challenges and recuperates gender conventions by presenting the Amazons as skilled warriors *and* as potential mates is not surprising given its desire to attract as many viewers, from as many groups, as possible. Producers of the show have repeatedly stated in interviews that they wish their show to appeal to all audiences - feminist and chauvinists; lesbians and straight men; adults and children - and produce their show with a stated desire to provide "a little something for everyone."²²² This desire for wide audience address very often results in the production of texts characterized by middle-of-the-road, ambiguous and/or oscillating ideological messages, as well as by an openness to varying and even contradictory interpretations. This is especially apt to happen in the production/consumption of media texts addressing the volatile, debated issues about gender

221

The skill and capability of the Amazon Queen Melosa is especially underlined. She is shown fighting in three extended fight scenes - an unusual and therefore remarkable number given that she is a guest character.

222

Kastor, C1; Belcher, 1.

identities and relations initiated by the women's movement since the 1960s.²²³ In the episode "Hooves and Harlots," the desire to appeal to a feminist audience (and perhaps to a lesbian audience who holds the Amazons as heroic foremothers of the modern lesbian) is translated into a depiction of the Amazon Nation as strong, noble, and skilled in warfare; the desire to not alienate but rather, appeal to male viewers who are threatened by the feminist challenging of patriarchal practices and institutions and by the conventional representation of the Amazons as symbols of these (feminist) challengings is perhaps instrumental in the erasure of the hitherto association of the Amazons with an antagonism toward men.

In subsequent episodes in which the Amazon Nation appears, the "progressive" aspects of the initial representation of the Amazons (that is, their strength, intelligence, and skill in battle and in their relations with others) is unfortunately deconstructed.²²⁴ Their effectiveness in battle is disappeared when faced with the psychotic renegade Amazon Velasca who (in the off-screen time between the first and second episodes featuring the Arborean Amazon Nation) killed Queen Melosa, her adoptive parent, in a desire to take the throne. (Figure 29) In "The Quest," Gabrielle, the rightful successor to the throne after the death of Melosa, names Ephiny her regent and not Velasca. The once strong and unified Amazon Nation is now divided as the Amazons are asked to take sides behind

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This argument is presented by Karen Hollinger in her book *In the Company of Women: Contemporary Female Friendship Films*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

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The word "deconstruct" is used in this thesis in its traditional sense and refers to a reversal of a building process, a taking apart of something previously constructed. It is not used as followers of Derridean "deconstructionism" use the term.

Gabrielle/Ephiny or Velasca. The members of the Nation are unable to remedy the situation - it is Xena that reestablishes order by hurling Velasca into a fiery pit.

This renewed equilibrium is only fleeting, however. The pit contained ambrosia, the mythological food of the gods that conferred immortality. Velasca eats the ambrosia and returns as an immortal in the next episode, "A Necessary Evil." She vows to kill Gabrielle and Ephiny and begins killing Amazons and destroying the Amazon village with lightning strikes conjured from her fingertips. The Regent Ephiny is woefully ineffective in organizing her "warriors." The Nation must again be saved by Xena - the Warrior Princess takes charge, orders a retreat, then successfully masterminds a plan that results in the eternal entrapment of Velasca in a river of lava. The initial representation of the Amazons as a community of strong, skilled warriors developed in "Hooves and Harlots" is put into question when, in the next two episodes featuring the Amazons they are shown to be ineffective in battle and unable to solve their own internal problems.

The image of the Nation as strong and vibrant is further tarnished when the immortal Velasca challenges Artemis, goddess of the hunt and patroness of the Amazons, in front of one of her temples:

Velasca: Artemis, you fake! Where were you when our nation died? Where were you when the many Amazon tribes were scattered and destroyed? Where were you when the word "Amazon" became a *joke* told by old men in taverns? I was once your subject. Now I'm your equal. And your enemy.
[Velasca then destroys the temple with a few blasts of lightning.]

Again, this portrayal of the Nation as "scattered," "destroyed," and "dead" is a far cry from the image of the strong community lead by Queen Melosa (as well as the majority of the ancient Greek descriptions of this very successful all-female warrior community - we recall

that it was not until later representations that the wholesale destruction of the Amazons was celebrated).

And finally, the deconstruction of the dynamic Amazon Nation is achieved through the increased *fetishization* of the Amazons as objects of sexual speculation. In the words of one disgruntled viewer, “the Amazons seem headed for exile in Barbieville.” She colourfully sums up many of the problems with the show’s portrayal of the Amazon nation:

I’m all for sisterhood, but these chicks have got to have a little more going on than costume parties and clannish rituals. [...]
Let’s hope the scriptwriters quit fueling the Babewatch BC fires with girls who like to dress up and dance. Let’s see something from the Amazons that looks like a community built solid leadership, teamwork, harmonious communal living, and commitment to shared ideals. We certainly don’t need any more enactments of the worst stereotypes associated with women. (Is Velasca the ultimate backbiting b*tch or what?...) ²²⁵
[Figure 30]

While the first episode featuring the Amazon Nation also showed several scenes of Amazons dressed in revealing leather bikinis dancing around a fire (with many close-ups of bare thighs and taut abdomens), their skill as warriors was also highlighted (thus producing oscillating, contradictory ideological gender inscriptions of women). The erasure of this martial skill in subsequent episodes effectively relegated the members of the Amazon Nation to the status of decoration. (Figure 31) Instead of continuing to expand upon or play with the idea of moving away from the notion that men and women are naturally and inevitably different and in a relation of necessary antagonism, the television show falls back on conventional,

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Maria Erb, “Amazons: B*tch*n’ Babes or Barbie Buddies?” *Whoosh!* (on-line journal for IAXS, the “International Association of Xena Studies”), Issue 12 (September 1997).
<http://thirdstory.com/whoosh/>

oppressive stereotypes about women: women as erotic objects of the (male) gaze; women as dangerous, chaotic psychos; women as weak and in need of saving. That these myths about women are somewhat offset by representations of Xena as strong, moderate, and the rescuer of the weak does not erase the problematic stereotypes associated with the Amazons of Arborea; rather, it contributes to the show's outpouring of ambivalent, contradictory messages about women.

Xena as Amazonian Figure

Interestingly, the most Amazonian character in the show - that is, the character most resembling the ancient Greek portrait of the Amazon warrior - is the main character, Xena. An exceptional warrior who knows the Amazon ways (in "Hooves and Harlots" she is shown making the Amazon sign of peace upon running into the Amazons, and using Amazon battle techniques), Xena refuses the label "Amazon" (in "A Necessary Evil" and "Adventures in the Sin Trade"). While she is respectful of the Amazons in the show's narrative present, in her past, Xena killed most of the Amazon leaders in both Greece and the Eastern Steppes ("Adventures in the Sin Trade"). While Xena does not "identify" as an Amazon and in her past, did much to antagonize the Amazons, many have read and labeled her an Amazon both "on" and "off" the show. In "Hooves and Harlots," Queen Melosa tells Xena: "And we've heard of you Xena. To some of us, you're a hero. A true Amazon at the head of the mightiest army the world has known." The deranged Velasca also declares that Xena is an Amazon in the truest sense of the word and that she therefore occupies an important place within the Amazon nation. ("The Quest") Before Xena killed her and the other Amazon leaders of Eastern Steppe tribe, Sian offers Xena a place in their tribe and

tells her that she is “a true Amazon” even if she denies it! Xena’s Thracian origin as well as the wildness and lack of measure that characterized her early warlord days can also be read as an implicit coding of this warrior as an Amazon.

The association of Xena with the Amazons is also found in the news media and the alternative lesbian press. Xena is often called an “Amazon warrior” or described as “Amazonian.” The *New York Daily News* describes Xena as “the leather-clad, sexually ambivalent Amazon swordswoman,”²²⁶ and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* states that she is “six feet of Amazonian bad attitude.”²²⁷ In the lesbian magazine *Curve*, she is called “an Amazon Robin Hood”, and in *Girlfriends*, she is possessively referred to as “our Amazon.”²²⁸ Because of this overwhelming association of Xena with/as an Amazon, I will include Xena in my exploration of the figure of the Amazons in *Xena: Warrior Princess*.

The reading and labeling of Xena as an Amazon occurring both “on” and “off” the screen suggests that the word “Amazon” has been, in (post)modern usage, more loosely applied. “Amazon” does not directly reference the more fully drawn out figure of the Amazon developed by the ancient Greeks after the heyday of epic poetry. Instead, the contemporary (re)deployment of the figure of the Amazon manifested in *Xena: Warrior*

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Brian Kennedy, “Meet Xena, the Web Princess,” *New York Daily News* 4 January 1998).

²²⁷

Jennifer Weiner, “She’s a Kick in More Ways than One: Xena, Warrior Princess is TV’s Toughest Sister. Foes - and Fans - Know She Can’t Be Beat,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 30 January 1996: F01.

²²⁸

Jenni Olson, “Xena: Warrior Princess and Dyke Cult Hero,” *Curve* 6:2 (March 1996): 48; Heather Findlay, “Xenophilia: Why She Slays Us,” *Girlfriends* 5:4 (April 1998): 29.

Princess's characterization of Xena takes up the skeletal image of the Amazon as woman and warrior (an image which, we recall, was introduced in Greek epic poetry and formed the understructure of the Greek figuration of the Amazon). The Amazonian Xena is evidence of a deconstruction or displacement of the figure of the Amazon as imag(in)ed by the ancient Greeks after the seventh century B.C.E.. While Xena shares some of the characteristics of the ancient Greek Amazons, there are some important differences - and she is therefore most usefully approached as a (re)deployment of the Amazon figure that takes up some conventional meanings and uses of the figure, reworks others, and randomly introduces new elements into the fray.²²⁹

Xena, like the ancient Greek Amazons from epic poetry, is *antianeirai* - a worthy opponent of the male warrior. Importantly, however, Xena's opponents are not all males and are not all Greeks as is the case in Greek Amazonomachies. Indeed, her most popular nemesis is, arguably, Callisto, a woman whose family was burned to death by Xena's army and whose anger and hatred toward Xena has warped her into a vengeful, psychotic mass murdering warrior. (Figure 32) Xena also does battle with women such as Alti, a shamaness whose thirst for power resulted in her expulsion from the Eastern Steppe Amazon tribe (in "Sins of the Past" and "Devi"), and Najara, a Joan of Arc look-alike who tries to convert

229

Though the *Xena: Warrior Princess* character of Xena most clearly exemplifies this (post)modern tendency toward the appropriation, deformation and reformation of past figures, the show's portrayal of the Amazon Nation also shows evidence of this tendency. As suggested earlier, the representations of the Nation subsequent to their introduction in "Hooves and Harlots" even deconstruct the understructure of the Amazon figure (Amazon as woman and warrior) by portraying them as inept in battle and fond of dressing up and dancing.

male warriors to her faith and kills the ones who refuse (in "Crusader"). Although Xena does engage in battle with men, these men tend to be evil warlords or errant kings, not "upstanding" Greek male citizens. In the episode "Cradle of Hope," for example, Xena must convince King Gregor that the baby she and Gabrielle found in a basket by the riverbank is not a threat to his throne and must not be killed.²³⁰ Xena's most famous non-Greek male opponent is, of course, Julius Caesar. In "Destiny," Caesar is shown to be the reason Xena turned to evil ten years earlier. Xena, who had taken up the sword defending her village (Amphipolis) against the warlord Cortese, became obsessed with avenging the death of her brother and other fellow villagers and kept chasing Cortese so as to kill him. She met Caesar during this time. While commanding a pirate ship (pirating being a wonderful way of obtaining the monies necessary for keeping up an army), she captures the Roman. He manipulates her, has an affair with her then, after Xena allows him to leave, returns with Roman reinforcements and captures Xena's ship. Her pirate booty is taken and Caesar orders that she be crucified and her legs broken. Xena is saved by the slave girl M'Lila - but when M'Lila is killed by Roman troops while defending Xena, Xena flies into a murderous rage. She kills the troops and angrily declares: "A new Xena is born today with a new purpose in life - - Death!"

Unlike the ancient Greek representation of battles with the Amazons which necessarily culminate in the defeat of the women warriors, Xena's opponents - whether they

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Two biblical stories are reworked in this episode: the story of baby Moses, and the story of Herod's order that all new born males be killed so that Jesus will not threaten his throne.

be male or female, Greek or non-Greek - do not succeed in triumphing over the Amazonian Xena. Even with broken legs she is able to kill the Roman troops sent to kill her and M'Lila! The show inverts the conventional roles played by the Greeks and Amazons in epic myth: the Amazon, as figured by Xena, is no longer the defeated opponent but rather, is the triumphant hero.

The gender meanings circulating in the representation of Xena as an *Amazon* *antianeirai* differ from and have a different *raison d'être* than those circulating around the figure of the Amazon in the epic poetry of the ancient Greeks. Notably, the *tension* arising from the lack of fit between the Greek socially constructed understandings of the (female) body and the socially constructed understandings of the (female) social role that is central in the Greek explorations of the *antianeirai* Amazons is absent in *Xena: Warrior Princess*. While the Amazon (as warrior and woman) was, for the Greeks, a site of potential rupture in the patriarchal construction of binary gender identities that needed to be continuously addressed and the anxiety it produced (tentatively, incompletely) assuaged, the producers of *Xena: Warrior Princess* seem to embrace the ambiguity and multiplicity of the Amazonian Xena. Xena is, like the Amazons in epic poetry, coded as having both "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics. Her title, "Warrior Princess," captures her encapsulation of both genders - warrior (masculine) and princess (feminine). Her appearance (Figure 33) also calls attention to her combination of binary gender characteristics:

Xena's outward appearance - - leather mini skirt and boots, bronze breast plates, bare thighs, long straight dark hair, and piercing blue eyes - - is one part harem girl (feminine) and one part warrior (masculine). Her clothing highlights her femininity while at the same time "shielding" it. Her sword, a masculine image of strength and power which could be seen as a phallic symbol, is worn on her back or her side. Her

chakram, a circular metal disk with a razor sharp edge which can slice through steel as well as flesh when thrown by Xena, is worn on her hip. Its circular shape is symbolic for the female sex and it is her ultimate weapon and source of strength.²³¹

The opening song and credits sequence of the show alternates between images of Xena's "feminine assets" - close-ups of her legs, arms and hands, and chest as she adjusts her armor and scenes of Xena moving provocatively on a bed and seductively toward a male warlord, for example - and images of her conventionally "masculine" strength and abilities in battle. Unlike the representations of the ancient Greeks, however, Xena's multiply-gendered self is not questioned or presented as problematic. No male warriors, warlords, or ruffians are reluctant to fight against Xena because she is a woman.

Furthermore, Xena's ability to embrace or positively assume both her female-sexed-ness and her traditionally "masculine" skills, and her facility with "playing up" the traditional markers of femininity and masculinity, are presented as one of the sources of her control and power. This is shown, for example, in "The Path Not Taken," an episode in which Xena helps a prince by rescuing his fiance (a princess from a neighbouring kingdom) whose kidnaping has been orchestrated by the arms dealer Mezentius (so as to spark a war between the two kingdoms of the engaged couple and thus make a lot of profit selling weapons to both sides). The episode features two strikingly different tavern scenes. In the first, Xena's female-ness is accentuated. When she and Gabrielle walk into a tavern in a small village, the drunken, lecherous male patrons start cat-calling and making suggestive comments and gestures. Xena's expression is steady, unwavering, and knowing. When one unsavoury

231

Pusateri, "An Analytical Review."

character comes behind her and tries to put his arm around her shoulders, she sends him reeling by driving her fist back into his face. She then dispatches another “suitor” with an elbow into his ribs. Enraged by Xena’s action this man pulls out a knife. Xena convinces him to stop pursuing her by casually taking a torch from the wall bracket and, in a gesture farcically imitative of blowing a kiss, blows a mouthful of alcoholic beverage across the flame, thus sending a stream of fire toward his face. The fire blowing is shown in a close-up emphasizing Xena’s classical features and brilliant blue eyes - both her *sexiness* and *deadliness* are thus underlined.

While the ancient Greeks could not envision an Amazon as being strong and powerful unless she was “masculinized” (we can recall, here, Figure 12 - an example of black-figure vase painting depicting the Amazons as having massive shoulders and arms), *Xena: Warrior Princess*’s Xena is strong and powerful *and* has a body whose femininity is accentuated. This challenges conventional constructions of women in several ways. First of all, the purity of patriarchal oppositional gender categories which code aggressivity and violence as male is disturbed by this Amazonian figure who is violent and yet is *not* divested of her femaleness.²³² Second of all, the patriarchal imperative that women live their sexuality and sensuality passively is undermined. The combination of (heroic) woman with power *and* sexiness is a refreshing change from the more conventional, misogynist portrayal of women as passive and weak or, alternatively, as *problematically* powerful and sexy and

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See Lynda Hart’s book *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) for an interesting discussion of how the historical linking of violent, aggressive women with masculinity and sexual deviancy has operated in literary, theatrical, filmic, and performative representations.

hence *necessarily demonically villainous* (as in *Double Indemnity* and other Hollywood *film noirs* of the 1940s and in more recent films such as *Basic Instinct* and *Fatal Attraction*) - and some viewers enjoy the Amazonian Xena for this reason.²³³ “Xena may look as if she sprang full grown from male-fantasy pulp fiction, but the character has become a ‘90s icon of female empowerment.”²³⁴

The second tavern scene takes place in Mezentius’ armed fortress-village. To rescue the princess, Xena infiltrates the village. Upon entering the tavern, she assumes an exaggerated “masculine” demeanor so as to be accepted by the assassins and mercenaries gathered there. When they welcome her as “one of the guys,” viewers are shown that Xena can successfully perform masculinity. That the performance of femininity is also in Xena’s repertoire is convincingly illustrated when, in “Cradle of Hope” and then again in “Royal Couple of Thieves,” Xena masquerades as a harem girl and seductively performs a scarf dance.

These performances of masculinity and femininity and these attempts at resignifying what a female body is capable of suggests that the Amazonian Xena illustrates a notion of *gender as an intentional, performative and necessarily contingent “act.”*²³⁵ While the ancient Greek figure of the Amazon illustrates a tension and potential fissure in the patriarchal construction of *rigid* gender categories, *Xena: Warrior Princess*’s Xena points

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Minkowitz, “Xena”; Kastor, “Woman of Steel.”

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Schorow, p. 49.

²³⁵

Butler, *Gender Trouble*: 139.

to the potential of the figure for the exploration of the inherent *instability, fluidity, and malleability* of gender categories. In showing that the stability and rigidity of gender categories is illusory and ungrounded in a “natural,” “essential” body, the show breaks open and further destabilizes patriarchal binary gender roles and identities.

Besides breaking new ground by moving way from strictly binary notions of gender, the Amazonian Xena also challenges the patriarchal compulsory heterosexuality imperative. Though the producers of the show did not initially intend to connote Xena as being non-heterosexual²³⁶ (indeed, Tapert was told by MCA/Universal to “make sure no one perceived Xena and Gabrielle as lesbians” because advertisers would not like it²³⁷), and though Xena and Gabrielle are never *overtly* sexual with one another (as they are with men), many viewers have read the relationship between the two women as a deeply committed, sexual one. The show’s staff and cast were initially surprised by the lesbian or queer reading of the show, but wasted no time exploiting the angle.²³⁸ Tapert and Lawless have been playfully ambiguous about Xena’s sexual orientation and the nature of her relationship with her sidekick in their interviews with the press, saying such things as “I will neither confirm nor deny” (Lawless) and “All I can say about that is that Gabrielle satisfies her every whim”

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Anne Stockwell, “Flirting with Xena: Producer Liz Friedman hits Hollywood’s Big Time with the series *Xena: Warrior Princess*,” *The Advocate* (20 August 1996): 81.

²³⁷

Minkowitz, 74.

²³⁸

Al Weisel, “The Importance of Being Xena, Warrior Princess,” *US Magazine* Issue 237 (October 1997).

(Tapert).²³⁹ In her *Playboy* interview, Lawless answered that Xena's vacation fantasy would be "a biennial sailing trip to Lesbos!"²⁴⁰ The show tries to "blur the lines" and "push the boundaries a little" (Tapert) by peppering their episodes with lesbian innuendo.

It is evident that the series plays up camp elements to appeal to a queer audience. A famous first-season scene has the camera panning the pair's clothing and gear, strewn across several trees. We hear Gabrielle ask, "How was that?" and in a sultry voice, Xena replies, "Very good. You're getting the hand of it." The camera eventually reveals both women naked in a stream...fishing. ["Altered States"] The same episode later has a drugged Gabrielle falling to the floor in front of Xena and exclaiming rapturously, "You are beautiful!"²⁴¹

Double-entendres such as "Gabrielle, let's get wet!" and "She wants me to fist a fish?" ("Fins, Femmes and Gems"), a lengthy shared hot tub scene ("A Day in the Life"), and numerous declarations of love coyly insinuate that a degree of sexual intimacy exists between the two women without, however, explicitly defining their relationship as lesbian. Because of Xena's wonder bra and breastplate combination and the show's propensity to get Xena and Gabrielle naked and put them together in rivers and bathtubs, *Xena: Warrior Princess* has been labeled "a soft porn 'girl-girl' fantasy" that appeals to both lesbian and straight male audiences.²⁴² (Figures 34 and 35)

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Weiner, F01.

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"20 Questions." *Playboy* 44:5 (May 1997): 148.

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Atara Stein, "*Xena: Warrior Princess*, The Lesbian Gaze, and the Construction of a Feminist Heroine," *Whoosh!* Issue 24 (September 1998).

²⁴²

Findlay, "Xenophilia": 44.

In challenging the dominant notion of gender as sexual difference based on an “essential,” “natural” body through its representations of Xena as an *unproblematically* ambiguously and variably gendered character who exhibits both the constructed “masculine” and “feminine” characteristics and who plays with or plays up gendered conventions so as to gain control or power over people and situations, and in (tentatively) challenging the patriarchal notion of compulsory heterosexuality by packing its episodes with messages which suggest that Xena may be lesbian or bisexual, *Xena: Warrior Princess* offers resistance to two of the founding ideological ideas subtending the patriarchal construction of binary gender categories. The belief that material bodies fit into one of two discrete, binary categories and the concomitant association of a “natural” sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural attraction to the opposite sex/gender is undermined by *Xena: Warrior Princess*’s depiction of the Amazonian Xena.

Can it be stated, then, that the television show *challenges* and *subverts* the dominant gender ideology and that it (re)imagines gendered relations in a new way?

Unfortunately, the answer is “no.” The aforementioned critique of the dominant gender ideology embodied or communicated through the character of Xena appears alongside conservative, recuperative messages about gender that participate in the perpetuation of a notion of gender as sexual difference as well as the conservation of harmful myths about women. These conservative, recuperative messages about gender are vehicled through the Amazonian Xena as well as (and especially) by Xena’s Amazon Queen sidekick, Gabrielle.

The presentation of Xena as a warrior woman untouched by the oppressive patriarchal connotation of women as “Woman,” as sexual Other characterized by inferiority to, dependence on, and sexual objectification by men, is challenged and undermined in the show’s third season. In “The Debt,” for example, audiences are treated to images of Xena being mistreated sexually and told to submit to the will of men. After Xena receives a cryptic message, she heads for Chin (China) to fulfill a promise made to a woman (Lao Ma) from her past. As Xena prepares for the journey, she recounts to Gabrielle her history with Lao Ma. After the death of M’Lila, Xena joined forces with the barbarian warlord Borias, and together they headed for Chin in search of riches. Though Borias claims to love Xena, he throws her from a horse while they are in the middle of having sex and sends her into exile after she spoils his meeting with Lao Ma, the woman secretly ruling one of the kingdoms of Chin in the name of her comatose husband. Viewers are also treated to the visual imagery of Xena, dressed in tattered rags, falling at Lao Ma’s feet after having been chased by hounds for the amusement of a ruler of another of kingdom of Chin. Lao Ma rescues Xena from the hounds and tries to teach her “the Way” of the Taoists. Xena is told that to succeed in life, she must “empty [herself] of desire.” She must strive to conquer herself by refusing to conquer others and by “serving others.” Xena is dressed up like a demure Chinese serving girl and told to serve the man who had her hunted for sport. She is instructed not to retaliate when he calls her “a worthless whore.” “This is the antithesis of the message of empowerment from the previous seasons,” argues one viewer. “When Xena refused to bow to this way of life, she was deemed a failure. We are slapped in the face

with a new message: 'If you can't fit into the traditional woman's role [submissive, serving, devoid of personal interest and desire], *you* are a failure.'"²⁴³

The patriarchal imperative that women be domesticated and positioned in the role of the self-effacing and serving wife is also both challenged and recuperated by the show's depiction of Xena. When Xena wakes to find her camp being overrun by a band of ruffians in "A Day in the Life," she fights off the hoodlums with a frying pan, the signifier *par excellence* of domesticated femininity. "A frying pan in the hand of June Cleaver cements her role as the 'good mother' and places her firmly within the feminine sphere. A frying pan in the hands of Xena is not only deadly, but actually turns this image on its head, supplanting the 'feminine ideal' with the new image of the feminine warrior."²⁴⁴ This humorous attack on conventional gender norms must be viewed alongside the show's numerous laudatory and non-critical portrayals of the patriarchal, nuclear family (see "A Good Day," for example), and its frequent efforts to place Xena in the role of wife and mother, however. Hercules attempts to tame Xena by "unchaining her heart." In what appears to be an appeasement for those studio types who did not believe a show about a woman beating up men could be a success²⁴⁵, the second episode of the series, "Chariots of War," shows Xena rescuing a little boy then willingly playing the part of surrogate wife and mother with the

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Michelle Frazier, "Empowerment and *Xena: Warrior Princess*," *Whoosh!* Issue 24 (September 1998).

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Elisa Deyneka, "*Xena: Warrior Princess* and the Masochistic Ideal," *Whoosh!* Issue 14 (November 1997).

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Weisbrot, 19.

grateful widower and his three young children. In the season two episode “Ulysses,” Xena has an affair with Ulysses and contemplates living with him on Ithaca until they hear that his wife Penelope is, contrary to rumour, not dead. That Xena does not stay with these men and that she refers to Gabrielle as her family (“Athens City Academy of the Performing Bards”) suggests an affirmation of a greater variety of “types” of families. While this affirmation may disturb, it does not disrupt, however, as this affirmation of difference and multiplicity is not accompanied by a critique of the regulatory system of thought and practice that attempts to strangle such “difference.” Again, the show seems to randomly present both conventional and unconventional meanings about gender identity and gender relations; its gender “politics” is its lack of, or multiplicity, of political positions.

Whereas the Amazon figures put forward by the ancient Greeks are firmly located within a discursively performed gender struggle (and indeed, whose *raison d'être* is to elucidate and assuage a fissure or inconsistency in the patriarchal construction of binary gender), the quintessential Amazon in *Xena: Warrior Princess* - Xena - is (impossibly, uncomfortably) located outside that struggle. The producers of the show try to (re)think gender categories and relations by presenting Xena in an “alternative” universe (called the “Xenaverse” in fan jargon) - that is, in a time and space in which the notion of gender as sexual difference does not exist and the greatest warrior in the known world can *unproblematically* be a woman. “[Executive Co-Producer Liz] Friedman cite[s] a rule for the series: ‘Don’t write Xena any differently than if she were a man.’”²⁴⁶ The program is

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Weisbrot, 159-160.

unable to free itself from the dominant system of gender, however, and (inevitably) draws from the bank of symbolic gender meanings. The show's approach to gender as articulated through its characterization of the Amazonian Xena appears rather schizophrenic, then: A neutered Xena is neither ascribed the "limitations of the female sex" (passivity, weakness, intellectual inferiority, and so on) nor faced with such "realities" as sexual violence²⁴⁷ - but she is often imagined as the stereotypical seductress, using her body to manipulate and hold power over others, for example. (Figure 36) The show illustrates very clearly the difficulties inherent in trying to (re)think gender relations and the identity of "woman," and presents viewers with a wonderful illustration of Teresa de Lauretis' and Judith Butler's theoretical assertions that one cannot occupy or represent a truly alternative space - a space "outside" societal gender constructions - because one will inevitably draw upon the storehouse of gender constructions. Attempts to erase gender categories without first deconstructing and critiquing how those categories operate within the dominant symbolic system leave that system unchallenged. In the absence of a counter-ideological politics (an explicit challenging of the dominant notions of gender by articulating its gaps then defining the terms of a different construction of gender from within "the blind spots," the "margins of hegemonic discourse"²⁴⁸), the perpetuation of patriarchal gender myths and stereotypes and the recuperation of potentially subversive impulses (the presentation of Xena as "queer," as ambiguously and multiply sexual, for example) is facilitated.

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D'Erasmus, 47.

²⁴⁸

de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*: 25.

The Amazon figure best exemplifying these tendencies toward the perpetuation of dominant gender notions and the recuperation of potentially radical, oppositional ideas on *Xena: Warrior Princess* is Gabrielle, the Amazon Queen. (Figure 37)

The Representation of Gabrielle, Amazon Queen

Gabrielle is introduced in the first episode (“Sins of the Past”) as a brave young woman willing to sacrifice herself to the slavers attacking her village in order to save her fellow villagers. After the villagers are saved by Xena, Gabrielle leaves home to follow the warrior. She hopes that with Xena, she will be able to fulfill her dreams of traveling and being a bard - dreams that earned her the dubious honour of “not being a normal girl” in her village:

Many viewers of *Xena: Warrior Princess* have celebrated Xena, the consummate woman warrior battling baddies [sic] both historical and mythological, as the character who repaints the male-only portrait of the heroic Greek. Gabrielle, though, as educated poet/philosopher and bard, plays an equally subversive role in this tale. Because she is assigned the secondary function as chronicler of Xena’s exploits, it is easier perhaps to overlook the ways in which the bard usurps a station in Greek society that was, almost without exception, entrusted only to men. Yet, it is the bard of Poteidaia, the feisty young woman who became an intellectual outlaw in defiance of societal expectations, who subtly undermines the Greek view of “the proper order of the world” and, hence, shatters conventions of history and mythology in ways that differ from Xena, but are no less important.²⁴⁹

The character of Gabrielle contests notions of discrete, binary gender categories by explicitly challenging a gender system that would have her ignorant and domesticated. She studies the stars and speculates about the physics of the universe, loves maps, knows every word of Sophocles by heart, speculates on atomic theory, and is familiar with both contemporary

249

Kate Maynard, “A Mind That Matters: Gabrielle As New Myth,” *Whoosh!* Issue 21 (June 1998).

Greek theatre and obscure Greek dialects (“Sins of the Past,” “The Titans,” “Death in Chains,” “Hooves and Harlots,” “One Against An Army,” “Forgiven”).

Though her lack of skill in battle and general naivety in the early episodes results in her having to be rescued time and again by Xena, Gabrielle is occasionally shown using her oratory and rhetorical skills to rescue Xena. In “Sins of the Past,” she talks the villagers of Amphipolis out of stoning Xena. In “The Reckoning,” she has the more daunting task of acting as Xena’s “defence lawyer” when the warrior is falsely accused of murdering a group of men. While Gabrielle is sometimes ascribed the conventional action/adventure role of the “quintessential female”²⁵⁰ to Xena’s “action hero,” she is not locked into this role. Xena and Gabrielle’s exchange of victim/rescuer positions, and the fact that they are both women, destabilizes the traditional ascription of male with heroic rescuer and female with weak, helpless victim.

As with the other Amazon figures on *Xena: Warrior Princess*, however, the aspects of Gabrielle’s character that challenge rigid binary conceptions of gender roles and identities

250

“Quintessential Female We have all seen this individual. Usually she is the girlfriend, ex-girlfriend of the male action hero. Her main reason for existence is to further the drama. Her motivations, when they happen to be presented, tend to be shallow and underdeveloped. She exists to enhance the hero’s motivations. This often takes the form of providing the hero with someone to rescue, someone who hampers his efforts - unintentionally making his job more challenging, or someone wronged whom he can avenge. At best, she may display some viable emotions, even have an adventure or two, particularly if the AH [action hero] is not around, but at her worst, she is a mere plot device.”

Rachel Gordon. “How Subversive is *Xena: Warrior Princess*? A Brief Examination of the Post-Rift Gabrielle,” *Whoosh!* Issue 21 (June 1998): 2.

have been deconstructed and diminished as the seasons have progressed.²⁵¹ Her talents as bard and her desire to right the wrongs of the world are ridiculed in the season three episode “The Quill is Mightier,” for example. The bard who was sufficiently talented to impress the esteemed Bard Gustacius and win herself first place at the Athens City Academy of the Performing Bards (in the episode of the same name), the bard whose story telling touched the heart of General Marmax and convinced him to stop a bloody war (“Is There a Doctor in the House?”), the bard who has spread tales of Xena’s fight for good so successfully among the people of Greece that they, in turn, are celebrating Xena with graffiti like “Xena Rules!”, is in “The Quill” unable to form a coherent sentence. This causes much calamity since Aphrodite, jealous of Xena’s popularity (the result of Gabrielle’s talents as a bard, we are told), has put a curse on Gabrielle’s scrolls making whatever she writes come true.

251

Importantly, it should be noted that these multiple, deconstructive representations of the Amazonian characters on *Xena: Warrior Princess* - notably the representations of the Amazon Nation and Gabrielle - are not due to a change in writers or the introduction of “hack” writers. Members of the permanent *Xena: Warrior Princess* writing staff - which includes head writer R. J. Stewart, and principal writers Steven Sears and Chris Manheim - have been with the show since its beginnings. Though this permanent writing team has not written *all* the episodes (while the first two episodes featuring the Amazon Nation - “Hooves and Harlots” and “The Quest” - were written by Sears, for example, the third episode - “A Necessary Evil” - was written by Paul Robert Coyle), they hold staff meetings to discuss and supervise the development of stories and characters. The permanent writing staff also hold producer positions. The conception and writing of stories, as well as the general development of the show’s plot lines and characters, can therefore be attributed to the vision and labour of this team of writers (and the other producers of the show - Tapert and Friedman - who also attend the writers’ staff meetings). (Weisbrot, 33-39.)

One reviewer has noted that the episodes in which Gabrielle's abilities are diminished and/or ridiculed coincides with the presence of the imbecile warrior-wanna-be Joxer.

(Figure 38) She labels Joxer's affect on Gabrielle "The Joxer Syndrome":

The Joxer Syndrome is a mysterious illness that occurs when a normally capable, three dimensional female character...suddenly and inexplicably suffers a complete loss of the abilities and instincts she's had all her life (or at least from the beginning of the series, if you'd rather) when in the vicinity of another character of dubious skills and questionable intellect, who is the carrier of the dreaded disease. ...it is rapidly escalating in importance as the third season progresses. Think recurring virus, re-activating in Gabrielle's system whenever she's in the vicinity of Joxer. This virus affects both her abilities as bard/breadwinner and her overall IQ (which is substantially higher whenever Joxer is not around), and thus we have The Joxer Syndrome.²⁵²

The Joxer Syndrome has continued into the fourth season. In "The Play's The Thing," with Xena conspicuously absent and Joxer in her midst, Gabrielle is duped into writing and directing a play for an audience of warlords that will kill her because of her play's message of peace. Her writing is deemed to be "pretentious," "heavy-handed," and generally lousy. At the end of the episode, Gabrielle is saved from herself, from the dangers she brought on with her "bad" writing, by the mysteriously reappearing Xena.

While Gabrielle is the primary victim of this virus, the members of the Arborean Amazon Nation are also affected. In "The Bitter Suite," when a crazed Xena comes to the Amazon village looking to kill Gabrielle, the Amazons are uncharacteristically cowardly. Instead of fighting to their deaths protecting their Queen, they jump out of Xena's way and thus allow Xena to kidnap the Queen. Only Joxer engages Xena in battle. He is, of course, not successful - but, unlike the Amazons, he at least *tries* to save Gabrielle. The virus is in

²⁵² Shelley Sullivan, "Gabrielle and The Joxer Syndrome," *Whoosh!* Issue 21 (June 1998).

full effect in the Amazon nation since, as Sullivan convincingly argues, the purpose of this virus is to elevate the nobility and heroism of this male character. Because he is an idiot, the only way to elevate him is to diminish the female characters around him. Whereas in the ancient Greek representations of the Amazons, the *defeat* of the valiant woman warrior in battle functioned as a way of elevating the Greek male citizen and perpetuating his dominant position in Greek society, in this American television program, the male character of Joxer is elevated through the *diminishment* of the Amazons (the Amazon Nation and Queen Gabrielle). The valuation of heroism arising from a combat between inherently *equal* Greek and Amazon *opponents* is not found in *Xena: Warrior Princess*; instead, viewers are presented with the praising of foolish, ineffectual male attempts at heroism and a concomitant deconstruction of previously heroic female characters. Interestingly, only Xena - more Amazonian than the Amazons - is immune to The Joxer Syndrome. (Figure 39)

That Joxer does not attain the status of heroic warrior even after the female characters around him are reduced is suggestive of an ironic poke at the action and epic genres and their prizing of male heroism is possible, though not wholly convincing given the second way in which his character diminishes the Amazon Queen. While Joxer is content to love Gabrielle from afar in season two, his unwanted attentions become increasingly insistent and objectifying in season three. In "The Bitter Suite," Gabrielle arrives in Illusia naked and must wait as Joxer ogles her then clothes her. She has become an object for the male gaze and can do nothing to regain the power necessary to change the situation. In "The Quill is Mightier," Joxer writes a sexual limerick in Gabrielle's enchanted scroll, thus creating "three naked Gabrielles." Again, Gabrielle is uncomfortable with Joxer's

“undressing” of her - yet in her ineptness as a bard (due to The Joxer Syndrome) she does not think to rectify the situation by writing on the scroll: “And the three naked Gabrielles got dressed.” Joxer’s sexual harassment continues full force in the fourth season. In “Forget Me Not,” Gabrielle, who is distraught over the problems in her relationship with Xena and the hardships the two have endured during the past year, goes to the Temple of Mnemosyne to decide whether to face her past or have her memories of the past erased by the Goddess. While her soul leaves her body to make the journey of self-discovery, Joxer disregards her instructions and chosen course of action and endangers her by taking her “soulless” body out to the temple. (She should not be moved and the defense of the “empty” body should not be left up to him.) Joxer then lies to Gabrielle the “empty shell,” telling her that they are lovers. Thankfully, Xena returns and Gabrielle “rejoins” her body before the sexual manipulation progresses any further. In stripping Gabrielle of her power over sexual situations and in presenting Joxer’s disrespect for the Amazon Queen as “harmless, comic fun,” the show maintains the conventional media presentation of women as objects of sexual speculation and (re)deploys the late ancient Greek figuration of the Amazon as eroticized object to be looked at (on temple walls) or taken (as described in the stories about Theseus’s rape of Antiope).

Just as the representation of the Amazon nation and the Amazonian Xena on *Xena: Warrior Princess* takes many liberties with the traditional figuration of the Amazon, the show’s portrayal of Queen Gabrielle also introduces added elements to the figure of the Amazon. The show borrows from an (arguably) more misogynist Greek myth - the myth of the first woman, Pandora - and thus adds a new layer of (patriarchal) gender meanings upon

the figure of the Amazon. The story of Pandora is related by Hesiod in his eighth century B.C.E. poems *Theogony* and *Work and Days*²⁵³: Zeus, having been tricked into selecting the inferior portion of a sacrifice (the bones and not the meat) by the Titan Prometheus, retaliates by having the first woman - Pandora - created and presented to Prometheus's less intelligent brother Epimetheus. Though warned by his brother never to accept a gift from Zeus, Epimetheus nevertheless succumbs to Pandora's beauty and her deceptively charming ways. To satisfy her curiosity (a 'deficit in woman's character,' Hesiod suggests), Pandora one day removes the lid from the box housing all the evils of the world. In letting "evil" escape, Pandora condemns all men and all future generations to wretchedness and misery. Like her successor, Eve, Pandora is a "beautiful evil," a woman whose splendid exterior masks her corrupt interior and brings an end to the Golden Age/Paradise, a glorious time when only men existed and life brought only good things.²⁵⁴

This myth of the seductive and evil woman who brings evil into the world is persistent and continues to be (re)presented in the modern media. Roman Polanski's frightening 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby*, which depicts the devil inseminating a young woman so that she will bring evil into the world, can be seen as a modern (re)working of the

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Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, with an English translation by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1950).

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For a structuralist analysis of this myth as it appears in Hesiod, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The Myth of Prometheus," in his *Myth and Society*. For an analysis of this myth that, unlike Vernant's analysis, looks at the importance of the myth of Pandora in the construction of the "myth of Woman" see Peter Walcot, "Greek Attitudes Towards Women: The Mythological Evidence," *Women in Antiquity*, Ian McAuslan and Peter Walcot, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Pandora myth, for example. Its message - that “behind the most innocent-appearing female countenance lies an unspeakable monster”²⁵⁵ - strikingly echoes that of the Pandora myth.

The modern (re)working of the Pandora myth found in Polanski’s film is taken up in *Xena: Warrior Princess*, I argue, in a third season story arc labeled “the Rift Saga.”²⁵⁶ In “The Deliverer,” Xena and Gabrielle travel to Britannia because Xena wants to help the Celtic warrior queen Boadicea fight Caesar. (Figure 40) While Xena and Boadicea prepare for battle, Gabrielle stays in a temple with its priest Khrafstar. Ever in search of spiritual enlightenment and the celebration of goodness, Gabrielle is intrigued by Khrafstar’s description of his religion celebrating the (supposedly) loving and forgiving “One God.” The priest’s description of his religion is a deception, however, and Gabrielle finds herself in the middle of a demonic ritual involving blood sacrifice. To save the person being sacrificed (Khrafstar) Gabrielle stabs and kills the priestess Meridian. Khrafstar then thanks Gabrielle for having sacrificed her “blood innocence” by killing for the first time. “The One God,”

255

Karlene Faith, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement and Resistance*, (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993): 259.

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“[T]he Rift Saga,’ a series of episodes where Gabrielle and Xena systematically change personalities, betray one another, and break down the trust and devotion that has always bonded them together.” (Nikki Staffort, *Lucy Lawless and Renee O’Connor: Warrior Stars of Xena*, Toronto: ECW Press, 1998: 319.) The “Rift” consists of the episodes “The Deliverer,” “Gabrielle’s Hope,” “The Debt I and II,” “Maternal Instincts,” and “The Bitter Suite.” Gabrielle and Xena, once “best friends” and “family,” are shown deceiving , betraying and being physically abusive toward one another.

Dahak, is revealed as an ultimate evil which needed Gabrielle's goodness and the sacrifice of her blood innocence in order to enter into the world.²⁵⁷ Gabrielle is told by Khrafstar:

Khrafstar: You're going to help bring Dahak into this world. He needed a sacrifice - and not just one of flesh and blood. He wanted your purity...your innocence of evil. And you just gave it to him. This world and all who are in it will be no more - the new kingdom of Dahak will rule - and you, Gabrielle, will bring it to us.

When Xena notices dark storm clouds forming above the temple, she realizes that Gabrielle is in trouble and runs to the temple. As she enters, she sees Gabrielle being dragged by the foot by hell-fire of Dahak. Xena (and viewers) watch helplessly as Gabrielle is lifted into the air, and enveloped, prodded, and molested by Dahak.²⁵⁸ (Figure 41)

The next episode, "Gabrielle's Hope," takes place a day later. Gabrielle and Xena learn that Gabrielle has been impregnated by Dahak. A wedge is driven between the two friends as Gabrielle gives birth to the child of evil and sees Xena as her enemy because Xena believes that the child should be killed. Gabrielle, who does not want "her child" (whom she has named "Hope") killed, escapes with the child. When Xena pursues, Gabrielle sends the baby down the river in a basket and tells Xena that she dropped the baby off a cliff.

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Dahak is, according to Persia's ancient Zoroastrian religion, "the greatest of noxious miscreants" bent on terrorizing the earth. He occupies the same position in Zoroastrian thought as Satan does in Christian thought. (Gary Gerani, "Dahak: Anatomy of an Apocalypse," *Xena: Warrior Princess: The Official Magazine* Issue 4 (n.d.): 9.)

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Though viewers tend to see this scene as a rape scene, Friedman and other members of the production staff fervently deny that the character was raped. (See Frazier, "Empowerment and *Xena: Warrior Princess*," for a discussion of this worrisome phenomenon.) Is this lack of responsibility for its images encouraged by the show's belief that it is creating an "alternative universe"? If so, another reason for the problematization of the argument that one can represent a truly alternative spade "outside" of social constructions has been found.

The repercussions of Gabrielle's not listening to Xena's warnings about the evil child are illustrated in "Maternal Instincts." Hope, now a ten year-old child, joins with Callisto (the psychotic warrior-turned-goddess who hates Xena) and together, they kill Xena's son, Solan. When Xena learns that Gabrielle lied to her about Hope's death and that Hope is responsible for Solan's death, she no longer wants anything to do with her "best friend." A devastated Gabrielle poisons Hope then almost commits suicide. When she cannot/will not kill herself, she goes to the Amazon Nation.

In the next episode, "The Bitter Suite," a grief-stricken Xena comes to the Amazon village. She takes Gabrielle against her will and drags her behind a horse across the countryside. As Xena is about to throw Gabrielle off a cliff (Figure 42), Gabrielle regains consciousness, declares that she hates Xena, then pushes them both off the cliff. Xena's dead son Solan presumably appeals to the Fates on their behalf since instead of dying, the two women are sent to Illusia, a dream-like world created by Solan so that they can resolve their...differences.

Throughout the Rift Saga, Gabrielle, who is a victim of rape and is impregnated against her will, is blamed and held accountable for Hope. The child is repeatedly called "Gabrielle's child," not "the child Dahak forced upon Gabrielle." Gabrielle herself takes full responsibility for the creation of Hope. In "Maternal Instincts," the following conversation takes place between Queen Gabrielle and her Regent Ephiny:

Gabrielle: While we were there [Britannia] I...I got into a very bad situation.

Ephiny: What do you mean? What happened?

Gabrielle: I had a child.

Dahak's responsibility is not mentioned. His responsibility is erased by Xena as well. Before she and Gabrielle part she tearfully and angrily tells Gabrielle: "You lied to me. I trusted you and you lied to me. And now Solan is dead. My son is dead - because of you." The character of Gabrielle is positioned as mythic "Woman" in the Rift Saga, then. She deceives those around her. She "allows" evil to enter into the world - firstly, by taking Meridian's life and thus giving Dahak the sacrifice of purity needed for entry into the world; and secondly, by not killing Hope and thus giving her the opportunity to kill many innocent people, including Xena's son Solan.

That the deceptive, monstrous/demonic mother is an Amazon, and that the chaos caused by "her" offspring puts her at odds with the other characters that are figured as Amazons²⁵⁹ in the series adds a new element to the figuration of the Amazon. Whereas the Amazons are presented as a closely-knit and very loyal group in the representations of the ancient Greeks (as well as in the [re]presentations of lesbian-feminist writers and artists for whom the Amazons are explicitly²⁶⁰ or implicitly²⁶¹ held up as the foremothers of modern "women-identified" lesbian-feminists), the Amazons in *Xena: Warrior Princess* are more often depicted fighting amongst themselves (Velasca vs. the Amazons; Xena vs. Gabrielle;

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The life of Ephiny's centaur son Xenan is also threatened by Hope and Callisto. Xena is able to save all the children (except her own son), however.

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Geneviève Pastre, "Twentieth Century Lesbians: Should We Revive Memory or Break with the Past," *Journal of Homosexuality* 25:1-2 (1993).

²⁶¹

Christine Downing, "Lesbian Mythology," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 20:2 (1994).

Xena v.s the Amazons) than fighting against men. While the necessary antagonism between the sexes in the presentations of the ancient Greeks problematically constructs a notion of the inevitability of conflict between the sexes, the lack of solidarity demonstrated by the Amazons in *Xena: Warrior Princess* is equally troublesome. As Simone de Beauvoir suggests, such infighting between women keeps women from joining together to resist and subvert the constructed, institutionalized notions subtending and (re)constituting patriarchal gender relations.²⁶²

What can be concluded, then, from the myriad of gender significations surrounding the figure of the Amazon in *Xena: Warrior Princess*? First of all, the show importantly breaks with the historicity of the figure. *Unlike the bulk of (re)presentations making up the history of the figure of the Amazon, the Amazonian characters on this television show do not take up and repeat in the same way the two pivotal aspects of the ancient Greek myth: the fascination with and critique of the "untamed," "excessive" female, and the imperative that she be conquered, subdued, and the threat she poses to dominant male identities and institutions defused.* The show breaks with the historicity of the figure in both emendatory and recuperative ways, however. Social and media conventions are challenged by the central character, Xena, who is presented as *unproblematically* "excessive" - that is to say, unlike the ancient Greek Amazons who disturbed the dominant patriarchal ideology and practices because of the perceived lack of fit between their female bodies and their warrior

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Notions such as: women must be tied to and identify with men - father or husband- not to other women; women are inherently inferior as they have personality flaws - they are deceptive, untrustworthy, chaotic, destructive, and so on.

skills, on *Xena: Warrior Princess* it is deemed perfectly acceptable that Xena have a female body and that she engage in martial activities and with her unparalleled skill, be able to best even Ares, the god of war. ("The Furies.") And while the show has played with the idea of the conquering of the Warrior Princess by presenting men such as Hercules trying to "tame" and "domesticate" Xena, and by showing Xena momentarily tempted by the notion of settling down with men like Ulysses, executive producer Tapert insists that Xena will never be conquered and subdued (as was the ancient Greek Amazon queen Antiope): "'That will never happen,' promises Tapert."²⁶³

Strangely, at the same time, the "transgressive" and challenging use of the Amazon figure vehicled by Xena is somewhat recuperated by the show's representation of the Arborean Amazon Nation. While the idea of marrying off Xena is deemed anathema to the spirit of the character, the show's producers have no qualms about presenting the Amazon Nation practicing the exchange of women through marriage in order to forge social and political ties between their tribe and that of the Centaurs. This is a complete reversal of the ancient Greek use of the figure of the Amazon - the ancient Greek Amazons *refused* the patriarchal institution of marriage (we recall Diodorus' account, for example); and this refusal was one of the primary reasons that the Amazons were perceived as a threatening, oppositional force. In making the members of the Amazon Nation amenable to and available for exchange in marriage, the television program defuses the threat historically posed by the Amazons to patriarchy. It also empties the Amazon figure of its oppositional

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Minkowitz, 74.

dynamic, a dynamic which feminists and lesbian-feminists have found attractive and have exploited to further their own (re)deployments of the figure of the Amazon.²⁶⁴

The show also abandons other parts of the Amazon myth that have made it amenable to a feminist (re)appropriation. It does not present the Amazon Nation as a strong, harmonious all-female community (whose collective strength could successfully challenge a patriarchal system of beliefs and practices), for example. Instead, the Nation appears to be in its last stages of existence. It is characterized as a warrior community which rarely fights - it certainly does not fight against men! The majority of fighting that goes on consists of *infighting between Amazons* (Velasca vs. the Amazons; Xena vs. the Amazons). A unified, communal Amazonian society as space for the development and flourishing of a female identity which counters and challenges the patriarchal interpellation of women into "Woman" which is present in both the ancient Greek and the (post)modern feminist accounts of the Amazons (and which is denigrated by the Greeks and celebrated by the feminists) is erased by *Xena: Warrior Princess*'s presentation of the Arborean Amazons as not unified, and not characterized by martial strength and skill. *The radical potential of a community of women warriors is erased instead of explored.* Perhaps it is fear of this radical potential (which has been explored by feminists like Wittig and Allen during the last thirty years) that prompted *Xena: Warrior Princess* to depict Xena as a lone warrior who, although she is the most "Amazonian" of the show's characters, steadfastly refuses to either

264

See, for example, the novels of Monique Wittig - especially *Les Guérillères*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969/1985) - and the academic work of Jeffner Allen - particularly "Poetic Politics, How the Amazons Took the Acropolis," in her book *Simosities. Lesbian Poetic Politics*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996).

identify as “Amazon” or align herself with an all-female Amazon community.

It can be concluded, second of all, that *the television show's gender politics is its lack of, or multiplicity, of gender politics*. Though the producers and star of *Xena: Warrior Princess* have stated that they seek to challenge social and media gender conventions and “break new ground” in the (re)presentation of the female action hero, they have not successfully responded to Teresa de Lauretis’ call for a feminist (re)thinking and (re)writing of a differently engendered female subject/character. The show has taken up a position on the middle-ground and has *oscillated between the presentation of notions that challenge and notions that perpetuate dominant gender conventions*. While the Amazon queen Gabrielle disturbs binary gender categories by being a bard and wanting to travel with Xena rather than marry, and while she disturbs action adventure conventions by being a female sidekick who is capable of playing the role of the “action hero” as well as her traditional role of “quintessential female,” she also recuperates negative stereotypes about women (women as deceptive and the root of evil) that have historically worked to regulate women into the position of “Woman.” Similarly, the character of Xena is also developed along pluralistic, contradictory lines. She challenges conventional notions of gender as sexual difference based on an “essentialist,” “natural” body by being ambiguously and variously gendered, and by playing with gendered conventions (and in this way, underlining the performativity of gender). As well, Xena (tentatively, incompletely) challenges the notion of compulsory heterosexuality, a notion which regulates gender into binary categories. Alongside this exposure of the constructed and oppressive nature of binary gender categories and the ideology of gender as sexual difference, however, appears conservative gender meanings

that participate in the continuation of traditional, patriarchal ideas about women's proper role (in society and in media texts). Xena is presented as a seductress who uses her body to manipulate poor, unsuspecting men, for example.²⁶⁵

Why does Xena: Warrior Princess produce gender meanings that contradict and oscillate between the challenging and the perpetuation of gender and media conventions?

While it is, of course, impossible to provide a definitive answer to this question, I put forward two possible ideas. Firstly, it can be argued that the presentation of Xena: Warrior Princess's varying, contradictory gender meanings reflects and participates in the developing, contemporary social gender situation, a situation which is in flux as a myriad of conventional (patriarchal) and challenging (feminist) meanings about gender identities and relations circulate in contradiction and in struggle. While the feminist efforts to subvert the binary gender system have successfully challenged some of the oppressive patriarchal attitudes and practices and introduced new ideas about how women and men should act, think, and circulate in the social world, past normative ideas about gender continue to circulate. As a result, (re)presentations of women - such as those found in the television program Xena: Warrior Princess - may draw upon a multitude of gender meanings that reflect dramatically different political positions. Secondly, the repetition of gender meanings

265

While Xena's seductiveness is playfully used in episodes such as "Cradle of Hope" and "Royal Couple of Thieves" and points to Xena's ability to "play up" or "play with" conventional markers of femininity, in her first television appearance - in the episode "The Warrior Princess" - Xena appears as cold, calculating and manipulative, a classic (re)iteration of the deceptive and dangerous "dark woman" of *film noir*. Even in its treatment of the stereotype of the seductive women, then, the show is ambivalent or multiply oriented.

reflective of a variety of political positions suits the interests of the show's producers who have stated a desire for wide audience address. In providing (re)viewers with a polysemic television text, producers can attract both feminist and chauvinist, female and male, audiences.

Finally, it can be concluded that as a result of the show's presentation of varying, contradictory gender meanings reflective of differing political positions, *two approaches to or logics of gender are presented: the show's perpetuation of social and media gender conventions maintain the view of gender as sexual difference, while the show's attempt to create an alternate universe - "the Xenaverse" - in which the greatest warrior can unproblematically be a woman, as well as its message of rapprochement between the sexes suggest that notions of sexual difference should be erased.* Unfortunately, neither approach to gender is amenable to a feminist project of emancipation as developed by Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler. The problems inherent in the view of gender as sexual difference has been explored in the first section of Chapter III. The erasure or obfuscation of difference in favour of the positing of a neutral subject position "outside of" sexual/gender specificity - which, as producer Friedman suggests, the show tries to do with its central character, Xena²⁶⁶ - is itself imbued with a problematic sexual politics. There is, first of all, the danger that the neutered, "objective" subject position take men's experiences for human ones and that the experience of being female be thus subsumed under male definition. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, this is what has historically happened in the writing of

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We recall her assertion that show approaches the writing of Xena's character with the belief that she should be thought of as no different from a man. (Weisbrot, 160)

supposedly neutral subject positions.²⁶⁷ Second of all, a movement toward a gender-less state that does not first of all address and challenge the contemporary, dominant view of gender as sexual difference will not disrupt the present system but instead, will develop innocuously alongside the dominant gender system. A depiction of the Amazon figure that attempts to place the figure “outside of” the continuous process of gender negotiation and contestation is thus emptied of much of its signifying power and its potentiality for radical (re)appropriation seriously compromised. If the producers, writers and stars of *Xena: Warrior Princess* were serious about wishing to challenge social and media gender conventions, then, they will find that their transgressions - though laudatory - have been minor and not radical or revolutionary.

A final question needs to be posed: How does the performativity of the Amazon on this television show resemble or differ from the performativity of the Amazon in the visual and written texts of the ancient Greeks? This question will be explored in the following, concluding chapter of the thesis.

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Grosz, 191.

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSIONS

The *wealth* of (re)presentations of the Amazons produced by ancient Greek poets, prose writers and artists and by the producers of the television show *Xena: Warrior Princess* are clear evidence that the figure of the Amazon has captured and retained the imagination of text producers (as well as consumers) throughout history. The ancient and modern (re)presentations explored in this thesis vary greatly in textual *form* (epic myth, ethnographic account, vase painting, temple sculpture, Hong Kong/B-movie action, moralistic American drama, slapstick comedy...) and *thematic content* (Amazons are worthy opponents and the equals of Greek male heroes; Amazons are barbarous outsiders whose customs and practices are diametrically opposite to those of the Greeks; Amazons are untamed *partheneai* in need of sexual and physical subjugation; Amazons are plagued with problems of infighting and struggles for power; Amazons like to dress up and dance; the most successful and skilled Amazon is an Amazon not aligned with a community of warrior women...) These vast differences existing *within* the corpus of ancient Greek (re)presentations and the ensemble of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (re)presentations, as well as the differences existing *between* ancient and modern (re)deployments of the Amazon figure, make systematic interpretation and the drawing of any simple conclusions about the performativity of the figure extremely difficult. A common thread can be seen to run through the myriad of (re)presentations of the Amazon, however. What is always mapped into the figure of the Amazon is an explicit articulation of gender meanings: how should

bodies look and act and what identities should result from this coding of body-subjects²⁶⁸? How should body-subjects circulate in the social world and how should they relate to one another? The Amazon has been (re)defined and (re)employed in varying ways that reflect the producers' sociopolitical beliefs about how women and men should relate and their desires for the future of gender relations and is, therefore, an important, recurring, struggled over site of the textual (re)constitution of gender meanings. The exploration of some of the (re)presentations of the figure of the Amazon in antiquity and in modern times undertaken in this thesis suggests that *written and visual (ancient and mass) media texts are important sites of the construction and the struggle over gender meanings.*

The figure of the Amazon first appeared in the epic poetry texts of the ancient Greeks. There, she was presented as a fascinating, admirable, yet menacing *antianeirai* warrior. Her defeat in battle brought to the Greek hero glory as well as the possibility of dishonour and the calling into question of his identity as a male and as a warrior. The body of the Amazon - its femaleness - was presented as a particular source of tension and anxiety for the Greek male. Though scholars tend to identify the thought of Plato and Aristotle as the origin of the notion of sexual difference based on an understanding of the perceived differences between male and female bodies,²⁶⁹ even in these pre-Aristotelic times, bodies were perceived as being the indicators and the base for sexual differentiation. The vested

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The term *body-subject* is used by existential phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty - it describes the embodied nature of the social subject and expresses the mutually constitution of biological bodies and social subjectivities.

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This idea is discussed in Grosz's *Volatile Bodies*, page 5, and appears throughout du Bois's *Centaur and Amazons*.

interest of the Greek image producers in the perpetuation of a construction of sexual difference based on such an essentialist understanding of discrete, “natural,” biological difference resulted in the presentations of the female-ness of the *antianeirai* Amazon warrior as a point of conflict in epic poetry. The need to present the Amazon as the *equal* of the male hero because of the conventions of the heroic epic conflicted with the need of the developing patriarchal system to present women as *different*, and not *analogous*, to men. While the strategy of obfuscating the sexed difference of the Amazon by covering her up with “male” armor and by not depicting her naked after death served to somewhat reduce the anxiety produced by the Amazon as woman and warrior, the female-ness or better, the irreducibility of the female sex of the Amazons with the Greek beliefs about “proper” binary sex roles and identities, continued to haunt the ancient Greek imagination.

Subsequent (re)presentations of the Amazons sought to flesh out the skeletal image of the Amazon as woman warrior introduced in epic poetry, and explorations of the femaleness of the Amazons became increasingly central in the Greek (re)employment of the figure. In black-figure Attic vase painting, the masculinization of the Amazon through her portrayal in the uniform of the *hoplite* appeared alongside increasingly numerous representations of the feminized “barbarian Amazon,” for instance. This barbarization of the Amazon can be understood as a tentative foray into the exploration of the femaleness of the Amazons as barbarians were conceived by the Greeks as being analogous with women and animals and as being the polar opposite of the Greeks (and their analogous conceptual counterparts - men and humans).

The portrayal of the Amazons as the polar opposites of the Greeks was further developed in the prose writings produced after 500 B.C.E.. The lack of congruence between Amazonian practices (military and sexual) and identity (woman *and* warriors), and the Greek social dictates concerning the “suitable” identity and role for women received central attention in the works of ethnographers, historians, and geographers such as Herodotus, Strabo, and Diodorus. The problematic presented by the Amazons became more clearly established. Rather than being portrayed as being “counter to nature” (as modern gender renegades are often labeled²⁷⁰), the Amazons were presented as *excessively* female. They were chaotic, destructive, *natural* females “untamed” by the *culture* of males. “Unfeminized” women like the Amazons - that is, women not “tamed,” “broken,” and “plowed” by men in and through male culture and its institutions (particularly the institution of marriage) - were viewed as serious threats to both individual men and to the patriarchal social system. The question then became: Can the Amazons be “feminized” or “tamed”? A challenge, of sorts, was launched.

In the later Greek (re)presentations, the physical and, for the first time, sexual defeat or conquering of the Amazons was boastfully presented as an inevitability. Theseus’ abduction and rape of Queen Antiope and the eroticized (re)presentations of the Amazons on temple walls and in vase painting and sculpture are illustrative. If the Amazon refused to be taken and did not submit to the patriarchal role of Woman as wife and mother, she and her nation would, as Lycias’ funeral oration vaunted, be eradicated. The ascription to a new

270

See, for example, Faith’s *Unruly Women*, Hart’s *Fatal Women*, and Butler’s discussion of the “abject” in *Bodies That Matter*.

view of difference as hierarchical and based on a (constructed) logic of varying innate qualities provided the rationale for this new belief in the possibility of “taming” and “erasing” the menacing Amazon.

For the ancient Greeks, then, the figure of the Amazon performed as site of tension and anxiety over the construction of gendered males and females under the burgeoning patriarchal social system. She was presented as a woman who did not behave according to patriarchal gender dictates and therefore, “did not fit” into the patriarchal social system. The Amazon was presented as a problem in need of solving. Her defeat and/or vilification was used as a means of speculating about and developing as normative a *male identity* (variously understood as: heroic warrior, civilized human, superior head of the hierarchical chain of being) and a concomitant, self-serving collection of *patriarchal institutions* (most notably: *polis*, *oikos* and marriage). She was, as other patriarchal imag(in)ings of women have been, “a looking glass held up to man.”²⁷¹ In later representations, she also functioned as a warning of the dangers associated with “excessive,” “untamed” females and as an illustration of the (constructed) necessity of maintaining a patriarchal social system through the continuation of its central institution - marriage- for the preservation of social order.

The Amazon’s unwillingness to be “a proper Woman” also (and probably inadvertently) suggests, however, that other non-normative identities are possible and that there exist an “abject outside” (which is not outside the system but rather is constructed as outside the desired, normative center of the system) in which female body-subjects not

271

de Lauretis, “Technology of Gender”: 15.

captured by patriarchal norms can be seen to circulate. Though ancient Greek (re)presentations try to dissuade women from positioning themselves within this “abject outside” by killing, raping, destroying the Amazons and in this way, trying to suggest the futility or undesirability of taking up an “Amazonian positioning” vis-à-vis the patriarchal norm, the *possibility* of living, acting, be-ing differently (in a counter-ideological way) is nevertheless exemplified in and through the ancient Greek (re)presentations of the Amazons.

The Amazon figure communicates *in excess* of its producers desires, then. While the ancient Greek figurations of the Amazons bear evidence of the patriarchal investment of their male creators, they also implicitly point to the constructed nature of gender and the concurrent ability to *reconstruct* gender. It is perhaps for this reason that the figure of the Amazon captured the (post)modern imaginations of twentieth century feminists and lesbian-feminists. While some of the textual figurations of the Amazons produced by these women engaged with the thematic content of the ancient Greek representations of the warrior women²⁷², most of the modern lesbian and feminist (re)deployments of the figure of the Amazon were emptied of much of their patriarchal historical content. The discourse surrounding the sexual and social Otherness of the Amazons was abandoned, as was the necessary defeat of the Amazons at the narrative end of the ancient Greek (re)presentations, for example. All that was retained was the understructure of the Greek Amazon - her image as woman warrior.

272

Again, the aforementioned texts of Monique Wittig and Jeffner Allen can be looked at, here.

That the American television show *Xena: Warrior Princess* also takes up the skeletal image of the Amazons as woman and warrior is perhaps, then, not very surprising. What is remarkable, however, is the great number of ways the figure of the Amazons has been incorporated into the show. Members of an Amazon nation are recurrent guest characters and the two female leads are explicitly and implicitly coded as Amazons (Gabrielle is an Amazon Princess/Queen; Xena is referred to “on” and “off” screen as an Amazon and possesses Amazonian qualities).

The figure of the Amazon functions on *Xena: Warrior Princess*, as it did in ancient Greek (re)presentations, as “spectacle-fetish.” The Amazon Nation is more often shown dancing around bonfires in skimpy leather bikinis and cavorting in bizarre bird feather head-dresses than engaging in battle. Both Gabrielle and Xena also wear revealing outfits that accentuate and eroticize their female bodies. The show’s propensity to get their Amazon protagonists naked and wet has even prompted its being likened to “soft porn”!

A crucial difference exists between the ancient and modern (re)imagings of the Amazons discussed in this thesis. The implicit suggestion that gender is (unstably, incompletely) constructed and struggled over in and through the figure of the Amazon in ancient media texts becomes explicit in the *Xena: Warrior Princess* presentation of multiply, contradictorily gendered Amazons. And, while the ancient Greek figurations of the warrior women functioned as “a looking glass” for their male creators and their patriarchal investments, the figurations appearing on *Xena: Warrior Princess* show a dual movement, a concurrent challenging and perpetuation of patriarchal binary gender identities and roles. In the early representations of the members of the Arborean Nation and of Queen Gabrielle,

their strength and skill (the Nation) or intelligence and resourcefulness (Gabrielle) in battle is high-lighted - and thus, the myths of Woman as passive, weak, intellectually deficient and in need of male protection are disturbed. Subsequent episodes present a deconstruction of these admirable traits (and the accompanying disruption of binary gender stereotypes), however, and in their stead, oppressive gender stereotypes are (re)articulated. The Amazon Nation is largely emptied of substantial characterization and becomes mere decoration or “eye-candy”; Gabrielle perpetuates the age-old myth of Woman as deceptively innocent creature who brings evil, chaos, and destruction into the world.

The characterization of the show’s central character - the Amazonian Xena - is somewhat more complex and hence, more interesting. While the ancient Greeks approached the Amazon with some fascination and a great deal of anxiety because she is a female figure who defies the prescriptive patriarchal gender identity and role of Woman, Xena’s combination of traditionally feminine and masculine aspects and her ability to “play up” the conventional markers of femininity and masculinity are praised and presented as an important source of her control and power. The popularity of the Amazonian Xena among viewers (as gauged by remarks made in media and Internet reviews and interpretations of the show) is in large part due to the show’s presentation of the Amazon figure as multiply, unstably, and fluidly gendered and an exemplar of the “performativity” of gender. The presentation of the Amazonian Xena as having an ambiguous sexual orientation also disrupts the dominant discourse of binary gender and its attendant compulsory heterosexuality, much to the delight of lesbian, bisexual and queer audiences.

The dominant gender ideology is not subverted and gender relations and identities are not consistently (re)imagined, however. Perhaps because of the producers' wish to appeal to a wide variety of disparate audiences and to neither alienate its feminist nor its misogynist/patriarchal audiences, concurrent with the show's incorporation of the feminist poststructuralist notion of performative, malleable, constructed gender identities and the need to challenge compulsory heterosexuality are conservative, accommodating messages about gender. The character of Xena problematically takes up the image of the seductive and dangerously powerful woman who uses her body to manipulate "poor," "unsuspecting" men, for example.

Interestingly, Xena - arguably the most interesting character and the most Amazonian of Amazon characters depicted on *Xena: Warrior Princess* - "does not identify" as an Amazon. This could be seen as another way in which the show playfully points to the (post)modern challenging and deconstruction of collective identities. While it would be a little far fetched and alarmist to suggest that the producers of *Xena: Warrior Princess* consciously deconstructed a collective Amazon identity so as to challenge the lesbian-feminist (re)appropriation of the image of the Amazon collective in their articulations of a modern (separatist) lesbian-feminist identity, it is quite possible that the show unconsciously presented such a deconstruction of the Amazon/lesbian-feminist collective identity. This would be consistent with its preference for messages about the *rapprochement* rather than the continued antagonism or separation of gendered groups (discussed in the analysis on the episode "Hooves and Harlots") and its allergy to radical political positions on gender (its preference for fence-sitting, for the presentation of ideas advanced by both the dominant and

counter-ideological gender theory groups, was discussed on many occasions in the analysis of the show's (re)presentations of the Amazon in Chapter V.)

I would also argue that the presentation of Xena as “more Amazonian than the Amazons” allows for some provoking reflections on the nature of *polysemous textual figures*. As was seen in the discussion of the ancient Greek (re)presentations of the Amazons, the figure of the Amazon has been used in multiple ways and for a myriad of reasons - it can therefore be characterized as *polysemous*, able to connote multiple meanings according to the sociopolitical needs and desires of its producers (and consumers). In *Xena: Warrior Princess*, the figure of the Amazon is also polysemous - Gabrielle, the Amazons of Arborea, and Xena communicate different gender meanings that vary even in sociopolitical orientation. In arguing that Xena is “more Amazonian than the Amazons,” however, one of the limits of the polysemous figure is alluded to; Xena is more Amazonian than the Amazons because she, unlike the other Amazon characters presented in *Xena: Warrior Princess*, does not abandon the crucial, skeletal understructure of the Amazon - the image of the Amazon as woman and warrior. While the Arborean Amazons fit this image in “Hooves and Harlots,” their appearance in subsequent episodes eroded their status as skilled, successful warriors. Though Gabrielle is an Amazon Queen, she was initially unable to fight with weapons. After becoming competent with a fighting staff in the second and third seasons, this queen of a warrior nation decides in the fourth season (in the episode “The Way”) to follow a path of staunch pacifism and throws her Amazon staff into a river. (Figure 43) While Gabrielle and the Arborean Amazons are women, they are not credible as women

warriors. Xena, on the other hand, is - she can therefore be said to more Amazonian than the Amazons.

While academics have put forward different definitions of “polysemy” - polysemy as a resistive reading practice by a subordinate audience which challenges the meaning of the dominant cultural forces; polysemy as the inclusion of different meanings by the skillful, shrewd producer willing to appeal to multiple, disparate audience, for example - most agree about what falls outside its scope.²⁷³ “Polysemy indicates a bounded multiplicity...in which we acknowledge diverse but finite meanings.”²⁷⁴ I would suggest that the multiplicity of the Amazon figure is bounded by its understructure which is the image of woman warrior. It is this image that makes the figure recognizable as “Amazon.” In ancient Greek (re)presentations of the Amazons, this base or cornerstone image was always retained and various differing notions about gender identities, roles and relations were then layered into this image. While *Xena: Warrior Princess*'s (re)presentations of Queen Gabrielle and the Arborean Amazons do not remain faithful to this understructural image and are unconvincing as Amazons, the show's presentation of the Amazonian Xena does retain this image; and it is for this reason that Xena is labeled and viewed as an Amazon even though she herself rejects the label and is not aligned with an all-female community.

It can be seen, then, that the figure of the Amazon is embedded with a *historicity* - that is, with “what might be understood as the history which has become internal to a name

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Leah Ceccarelli, “Polysemy: Multiple Meanings in Rhetorical Criticism,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84:4 (November 1998): 397.

²⁷⁴

Ibid., 398.

[“Amazon”], has come to constitute the contemporary meaning of a name: the sedimentation of its usages as they have become part of the very name, a sedimentation, a repetition that congeals, that gives the name its force.”²⁷⁵ A (re)presentation of the Amazon “works” - is believable and is a successful vehicle for a producer’s message about gender - if it draws on its sedimented, historical association with the image of the woman warrior.

If the textual figure of the Amazon is polysemic and if this polysemy is bounded by its historicity, its need to cite or (re)iterate its base image of woman warrior, what are the potentialities and limits of this figure for an articulation of a feminist political project of gender subversion and transformation? Does the figure of the Amazon, even in its base form as image of woman warrior, even in its feminist (re)deployments which seek to rewrite the conventional patriarchal defeat, subjugation and/or objectification of the Amazons, carry within it residual traces of its past patriarchal significations? I would suggest that a feminist (re)deployment of the Amazon is somewhat limited by the burden of the historicity of the figure - that is, by its historical use by the ancient Greeks in the development and maintenance of a patriarchal male identity and institutions. Feminists wishing to define the terms of a differently gendered social subject through the figure of the Amazon must address, for instance, the figure’s history in patriarchal representations as an eroticized object, as “spectacle-fetish.” The sexual power of the figure must be reclaimed from the objectifying patriarchal producer/consumer and be made to serve and augment the feminist

275

Butler, *Excitable Speech*: 36.

project of gender subversion for the (re)appropriation of the figure to be successful.²⁷⁶ If the associations of the Amazon as sex object are not changed, these associations will always be available for the co-opting of the feminist (re)imag(in)ings of the Amazon. Since the historicity of the figure can never be completely erased by feminists, the patriarchal gender notions historically associated with the Amazons must be critiqued, delegitimized, then replaced with feminist counter-meanings. In view of these potential limitations or risks involved in a feminist (re)deployment of the figure of the Amazon, it is clear that if feminists are to successfully take the Amazon “out of” its patriarchal history and (re)define her along feminist lines, feminists will need to think strategically and (self)critically about the implications of such a (re)appropriation.

That said, the figure of the Amazon nevertheless remains bountiful, full of potential signifying power, and is therefore quite amenable to a critical, nuanced (re)deployment in a feminist project of gender subversion. The dominant structure of power’s dependence upon the continuous (re)articulation of its logic for its perpetuation, and the fascination and continued use of the figure in the struggle over the signification of gender suggest that the future of the figure is always already partially open. In the continuous process of repetition of gender ideologies and in the (re)iteration of those ideologies through the figure of the

276

This has been clearly illustrated by the television show *Xena: Warrior Princess*. While it has identified itself as a site of contestation of traditional gender norms, its desire to “break new ground” in media (re)presentations of women has been severely undermined. In the absence of a clearly articulated feminist critique of past oppressive (re)presentations of women, and in its desire to appeal to conservative, chauvinistic as well as feminist audiences, it has fallen back upon and repeated the historical association of Amazons as eroticized objects of the (male) gaze. The impact of its gender “transgressions” has, in this way, unfortunately been diminished.

Amazon there exists the potential for: i) the elucidation and highlighting of gaps existing within gender norms and evidenced in the (re)articulated portrayals of the Amazons, and ii) the (re)signification of the figure of the Amazon. Feminists can, for example, draw out the gaps and fissures of the dominant patriarchal gender ideology evinced in the ancient Greek (re)presentations of the Amazons by exploring the ways in which the sexed-body (in both senses of the word: the femaleness and the independent, assertive sexuality of the Amazons) haunted the Greek imag(in)ings of the Amazons and became the *excess* of the figure that could not be (or could only be difficultly) “tamed” or “domesticated.” The television program *Xena: Warrior Princess* exemplifies both the promise and the hazards of attempting to resignify the Amazon figure. The show successfully introduces new aspects to the figure of the Amazon through its presentation of Xena. The most striking of these new aspects - her ambiguous sexual orientation and her playful engagement with gender conventions - suggest a textual engagement with a feminist counter-ideology of gender which contests the heterosexual imperative and challenges conventional notions of stable gender identities. The show’s concurrent accommodation to and perpetuation of the dominant gender ideology through, for instance, its repetition of the “myths of Woman” (the Amazonian Xena as dangerous, seductive murderous whore; Queen Gabrielle as deceptively innocent vessel of evil) recuperate, or at the very least, temper those aspects of the show that present a potential feminist resignification of the figure of the Amazon. Though the show does play with some “progressive,” challenging notions that disturb the textual and social status quo, it ultimately fails to resignify the figure of the Amazon and subvert the oppressive notion of binary gender categories.

While Teresa de Lauretis' call for (re)presentations that define the terms of a different construction of gender, participate in the construction of other objects and subjects of vision, and formulate the conditions of representability of another, differently gendered social subject has not been achieved in the textual (re)presentations of the Amazons explored in this thesis, the *potential* of the figure for (re)appropriation and (re)deployment in counter-ideological discourses of gender can be seen. The "recalling" of the communicative history of the Amazon figure undertaken in this thesis suggests that as long as producers and consumers of written and visual media texts continue to be fascinated with the Amazon, the future of the figure and her participation in discourses of gender remains always already partially open. Perhaps in her next (re)incarnation or (re)employment, the Amazon will speak more actively to a subversion of the dominant, patriarchal view of gender and perform gender in a radical new way.

FIGURE 1



Amazones 201

Battle scene with Amazons adorning a Roman sarcophagus, ca. 220-230 A.D..

Source: *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* LIMC I:1: 600.

FIGURE 2



American Amazon-Cannibals, from Hulsius, *Voyages*, 1st ed. (Courtesy Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

European travelers to North America encounter man-killing “Amazons.”

Source: Kleinbaum, *The War Against the Amazons*.

FIGURE 3



Bo Svenson and Anita Ekberg in the twentieth-century version of the Amazon dream, *Gold of the Amazon Women*. (Courtesy The National Broadcasting Company, Inc.)

Still from the 1979 American made-for-TV-movie *Gold of the Amazon Women*.

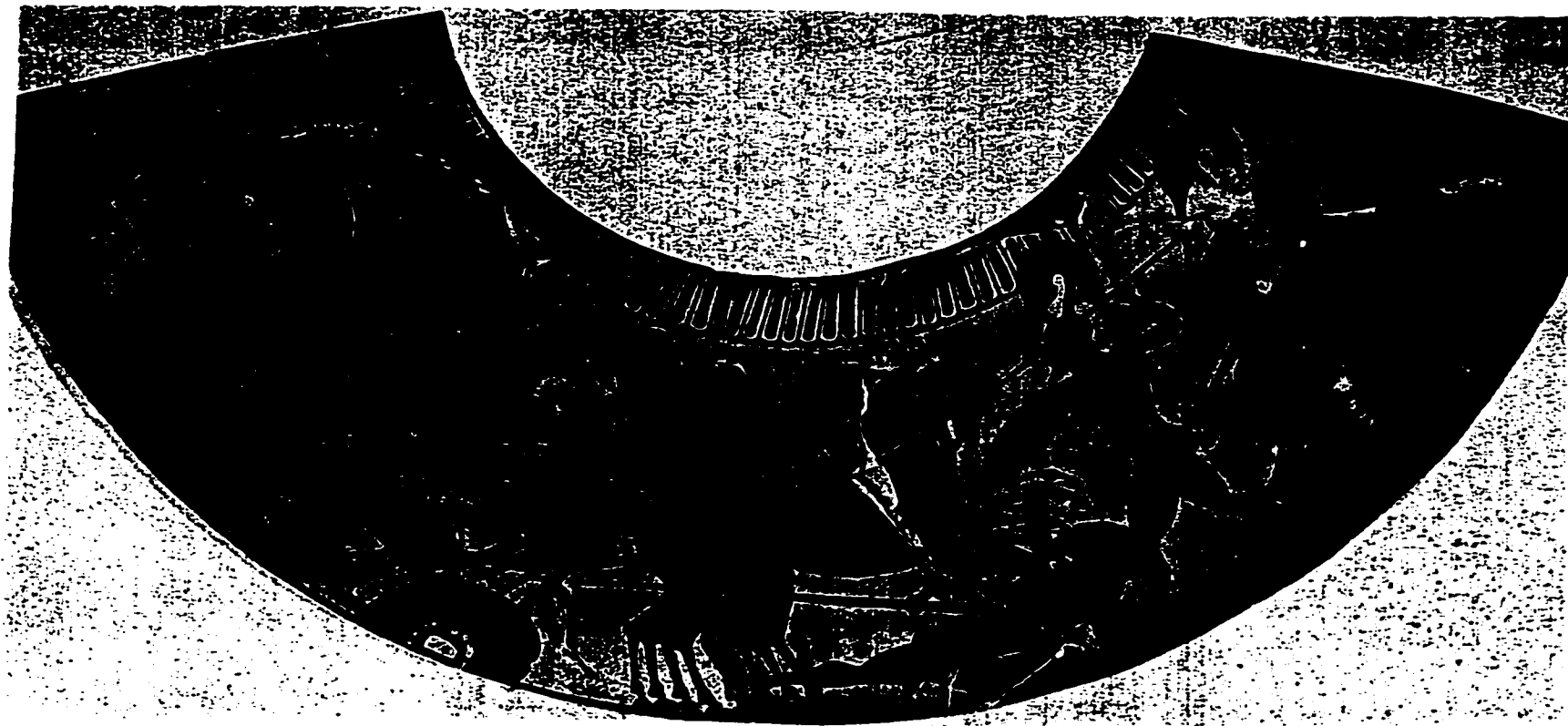
Source: Kleinbaum, *The War Against the Amazons*.

FIGURE 4



Attic black-figure neck amphora depicting a Trojan Amazonomachy - Achilles killing Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons.

Source: Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons: Heroes, Outsider, or Women?"



Top: Amazons on horseback. Source: Bothmer, Plate LV, 2.

Bottom: Amazons on chariots. Source: Bothmer, Plate LVIII, 1.

FIGURE 6



Top: Amazons putting on their armor. Source: Bothmer, Plate LX, 1.

Bottom left: Amazons with their horses. Source: Bothmer, Plate LXIII, 1.

Bottom right: Amazons returning from battle with their wounded.
Source: Bothmer, Plate LXI, 6.)

FIGURE 7

Amazons in Attic Black-Figure Vase Painting: Themes

<i>Date</i>	<i>Herakles</i>	<i>Troy/Other</i>	<i>Amazons on their Own</i>
575-500	42	23	5
550-530	325	230	230
530-460	20	12	53

Source: Blok, *The Early Amazons*: 379.

FIGURE 8



Herakles (with lion skin covering) versus the Amazons. Attic black-figure painting, ca. 520-500 B.C.E..

Source: Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*.

FIGURE 9

Amazons in Attic Black- and Red-Figure Vase Painting: Content

<i>Recurring motifs</i>	<i>Black-Figure</i>		<i>Red-Figure</i>
	<i>599-550</i>	<i>551-500</i>	<i>499-450</i>
Herakles vs. Amazons	95*	94	100
Non-Heraklean Battles with Amazons 5		6	0
Amazon Dress			
* Hoplite	67	78	69
* Barbarian	9	22	8
* Hoplite and Barbarian	7	11	8
* Oriental	2	0	0
Amazons Wearing Animal Skins	4	0	0
Amazons on Horseback	2	0	8
Amazons Running Away	22	28	46
Amazons Running To Help Fellow Amazon(s)	9	28	23
Amazons Running Away and Amazons Running to Help Other Amazons	2	11	15
Greeks Running Away	0	6	0
Amazons Wounded/Fallen	27	56	54
Amazons Carrying Fallen Amazons	5	0	8
Amazons Disarmed by Greek Hero	2	0	0
Greeks Wounded/Fallen	5	6	0
Greeks and Amazons Wounded	4	0	0
Amazon Home Represented	2	0	0
Presence of God/desses	4	11	0
Named Amazons	18	33	15

* All numbers given here are percentages reflecting the frequency of motifs appearing on extant vases catalogued in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (LIMC) I:1.)

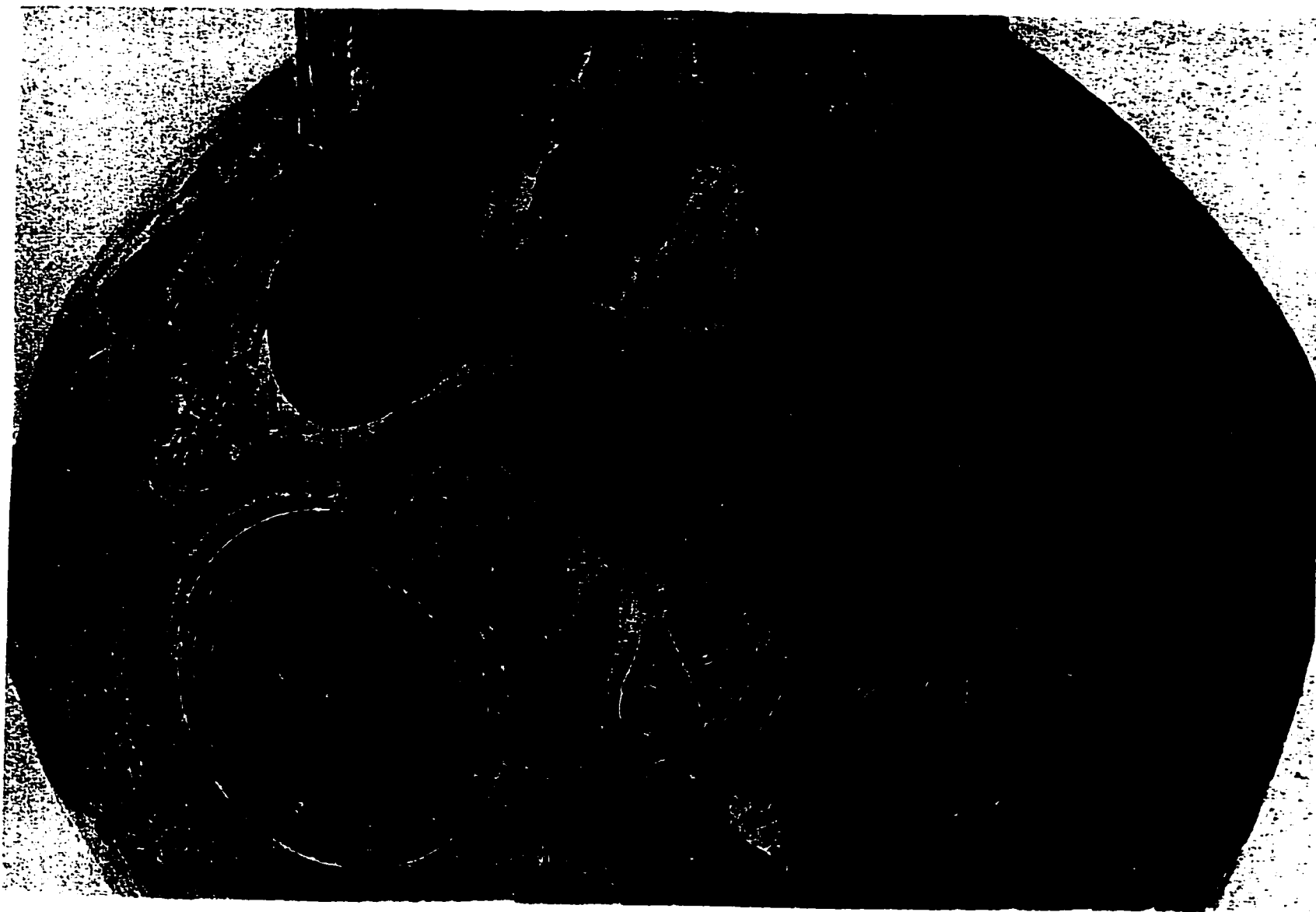
FIGURE 11



Amazons represented in the armor and with the weapons of the Greek foot soldier - the *hoplite*.

Source: Bothmer, Plate LIII, 1.

FIGURE 12



Very "buff" Amazons: the necessity of rendering "more masculine"
the body of the Amazon in Attic vase painting.

Source: Bothmer, Plate XXI, 1a.

FIGURE 13

Amazons dressed in "barbarian costume."

Top: We can note the pointed, phrygian caps, and the Skythian curved bows and axes carried by the two figures.

Source: Bothmer, Plate LX, 6.



Bottom: Here we can note the pointed cap, and decorated tunic and pants of the Amazon on the left; and the hoplite shield, sword, helmet and the Greek tunic of the Amazon located on the right of the "barbarian" Amazon.

Source: Bothmer, Plate LXI, 1.



FIGURE 14

Amazons dressed in "barbarian" costume.

Top: We can note the curved Thracian shield (*peltae*) and Phrygian cap of the Amazon on the right.

Source: Bothmer, Plate XXXVIII, 5.



Bottom: Here we can see the very ornate Thracian cloak donned by the fallen Amazon who is being carried.

Source: Bothmer, Plate LXI, 4.



FIGURE 15

Map of Ancient Greece and Surrounding Areas

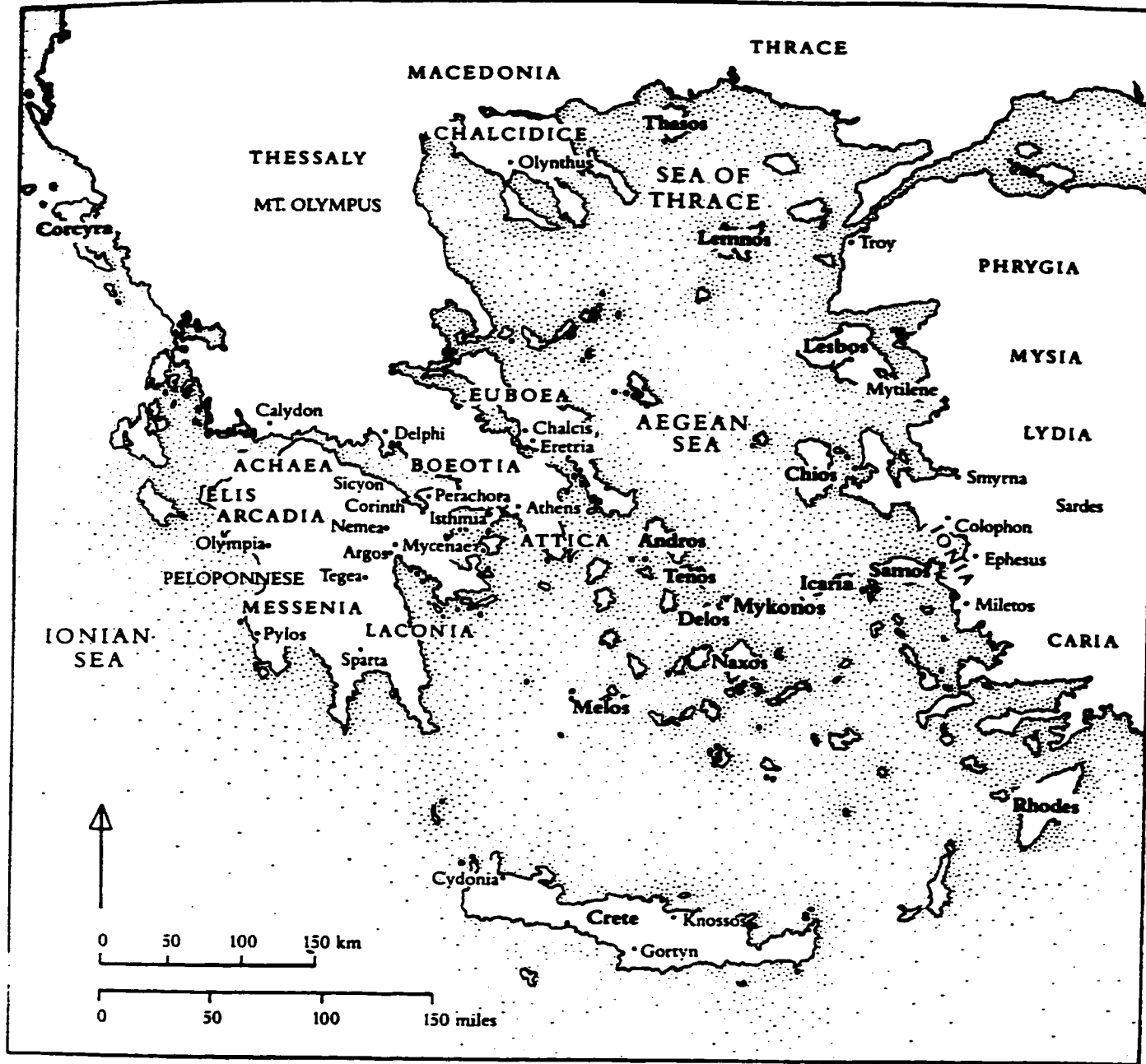


FIGURE 16

Plan of a fifth century B.C.E. house on the north slope of the Arcopagus in Athens, which indicates the separation of men's and women's quarters and the placement of the latter in an area with no direct connection to the *andron*, the room for men's gatherings.

The plan on the left ("A") indicates the purposes or uses of the different rooms; the plan on the right ("B") shows who used the different rooms - the rooms used by women are marked with dots and the ones used by men are shaded.

Source: Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*: 104.

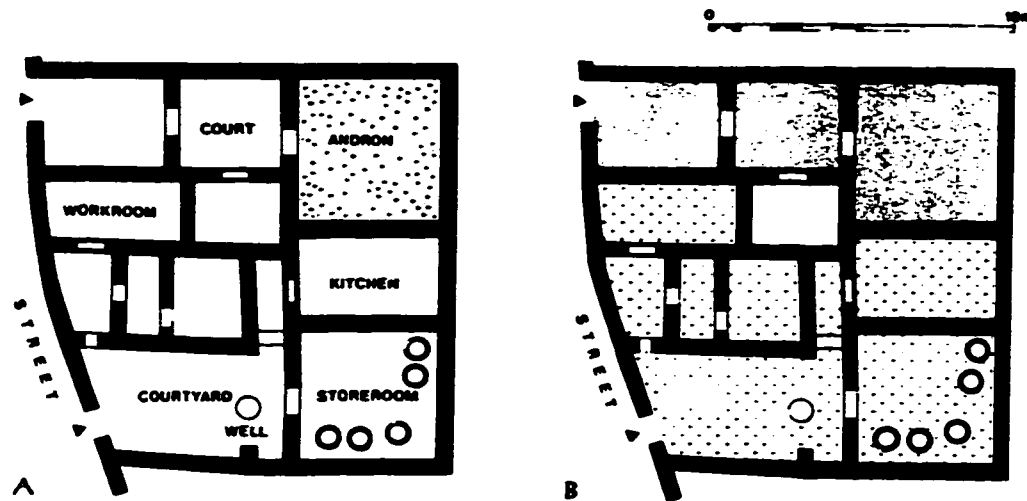
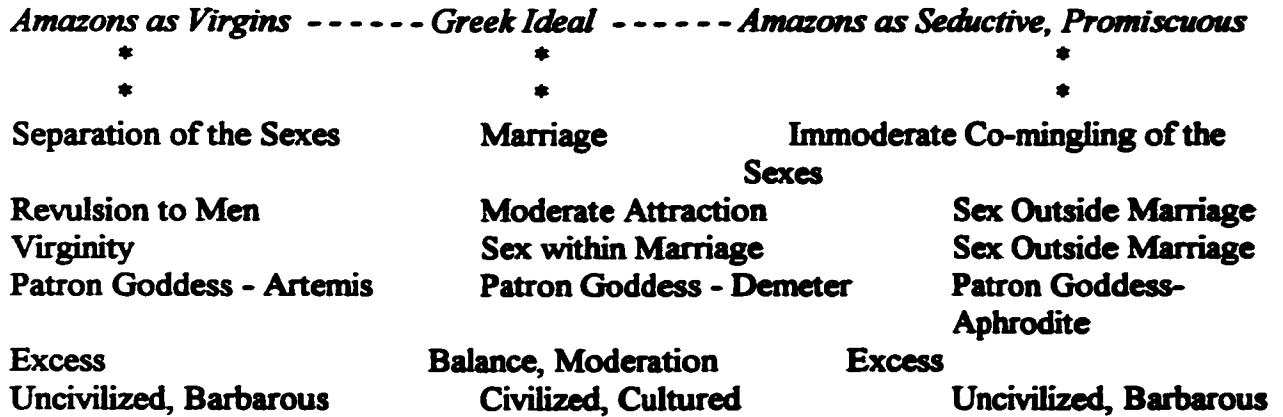


FIGURE 17

Map of Analogy of Sexual Excess in Ancient Greek Thought



This figure illustrates that the Greek ideal is analogous with marriage and is thought to be the desired, moderate middle position between two excessive, undesirable polar extremes figuratively brought to life by the Amazons.

FIGURE 18

**Eroticization of the figure of the Amazon Attic Red-Figure vase painting:
an Amazon's breasts are shown in this Amazonomachy, ca. 460 B.C.E..**

Source: Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other."



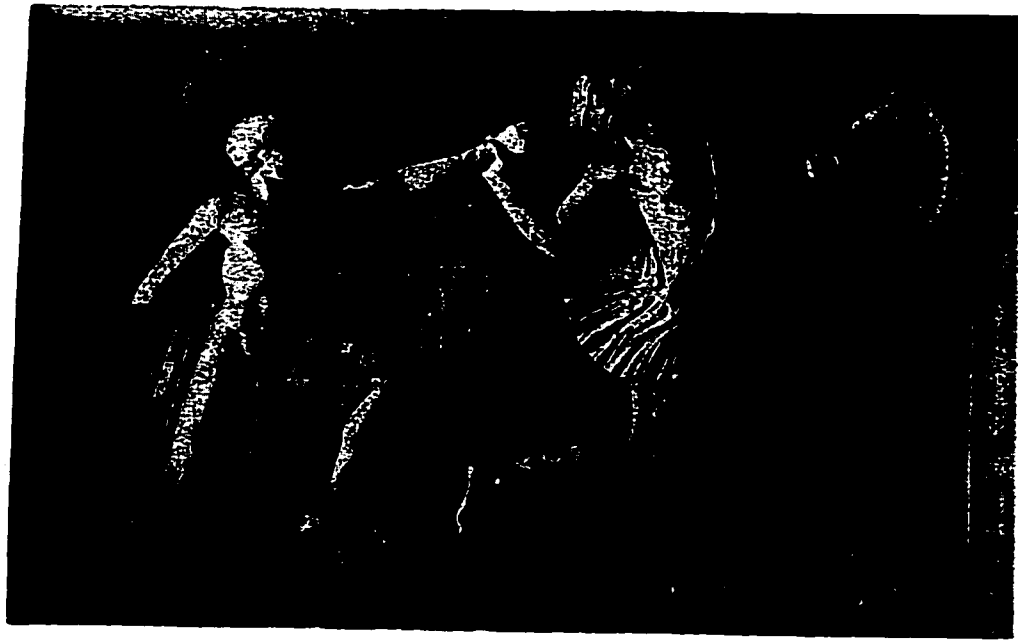
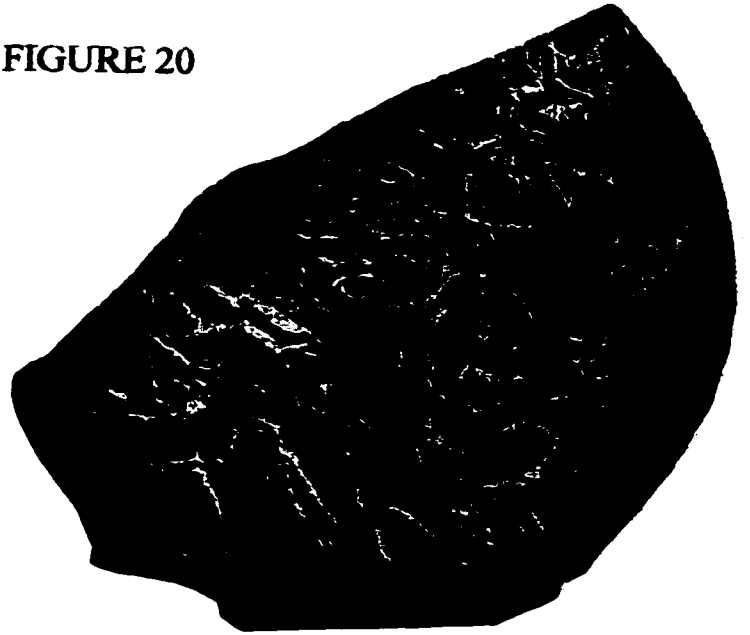
FIGURE 19

Amazonomachy
on the walls of
the temple of
Apollo Epikourios
at Bassae.

Source: Bothmer, Plate
LXXXVIII.



FIGURE 20

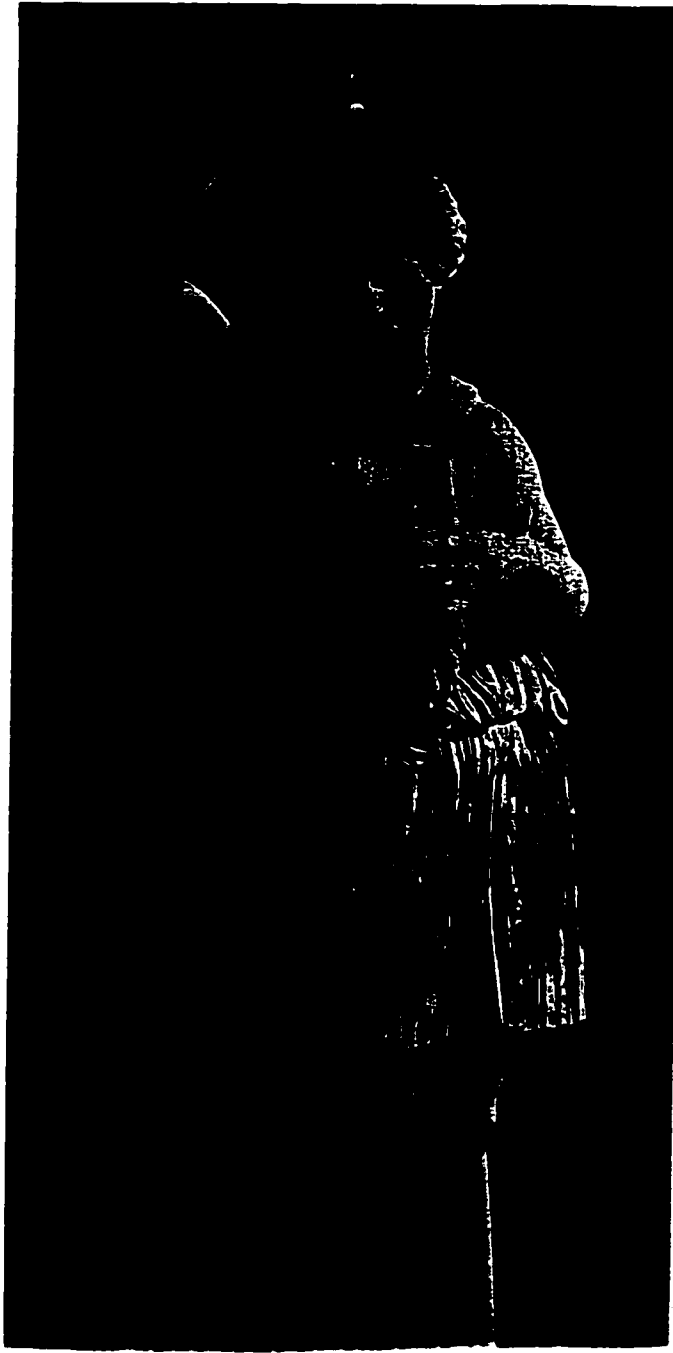


Top: Shield of Athena on statue of Athena Parthenos inside the Parthenon at Athens.
Bottom: Details of the shield.

We can note the enthusiastic slaughter of the Amazons depicted, as well as the increased eroticization of the Amazon (bottom right detail). At the feet of the Amazon who is being pulled back by her hair in the bottom right detail, we can see that her weapon is a double-edged ax, or *labrys*.

Source: Bothmer, Plate LXXVII.

FIGURE 21



Statues of Amazons from the Classical Period.

Source: Bothmer, Plate LXXXIX, 1. & 3.

FIGURE 22



Theseus' abduction of Antiope. Red-figure vase painting ca. 510 B.C.E..

Source: Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons: Heroes, Outsider, or Women?"

FIGURE 23



Gabrielle, Xena, and Xena's horse Argo tra
Source: Stafford, *Lucy Lawless and Renee*

FIGURE 24



The *Flintstones*-like villages made of styro-stone and chunky wooden structures, and post-apocalyptic villains of *Xena: Warrior Princess*.

Source: Weisbrot, *Xena: Warrior Princess: The Official Guide to the Xenaverse*.

FIGURE 25

Comparison of Outfits Donned by Television Women Action Heroes



A: Xena



B: Emma Peel



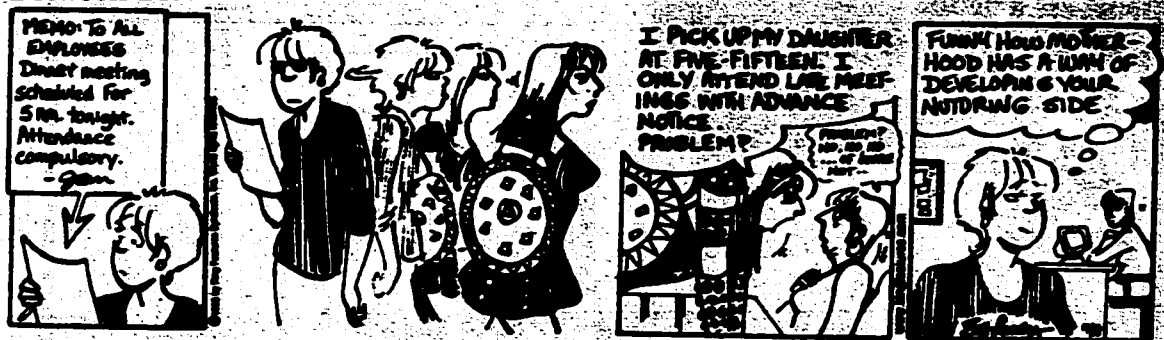
C: Wonder Woman

FIGURE 26

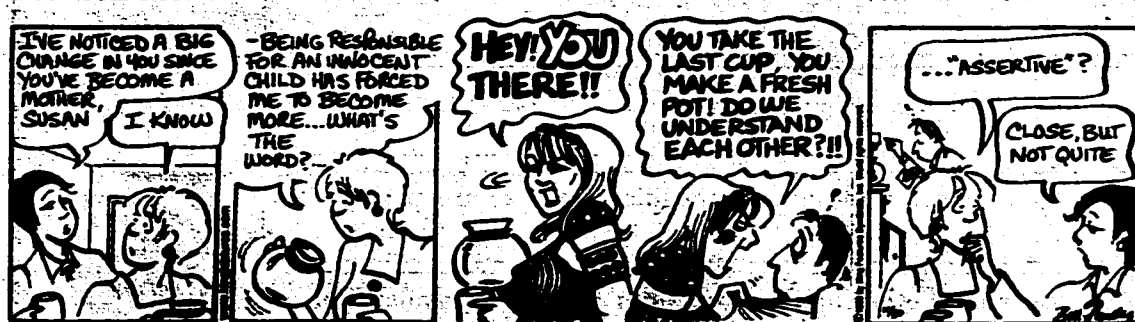
Comic Reactions to *Xena: Warrior Princess*



Between Friends



Between Friends



A: Strips appearing in *The Toronto Star*



B: "Battle On!" Comics by Jeanette Atwood T.G., appearing on *Tom's Xena Page*
(<http://www.xenafan.com>)

FIGURE 27



Amazons of the Arborea Nation: Still from the episode "Hooves and Harlots" showing Ephiny (standing on platform), unnamed Amazon (lower left), Queen Melosa (lower middle), and Eponin (lower right).

FIGURE 28



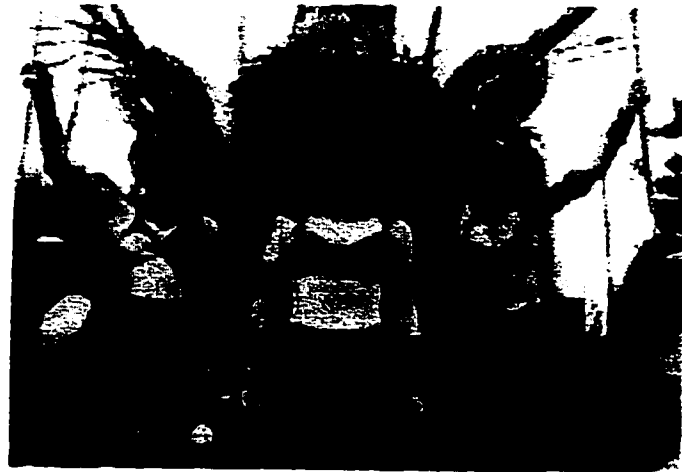
Princess Terreis (left) and Ephiny (right) drop from the trees wearing bird masks and greet Xena and Gabrielle in “Hooves and Harlots.”

FIGURE 29



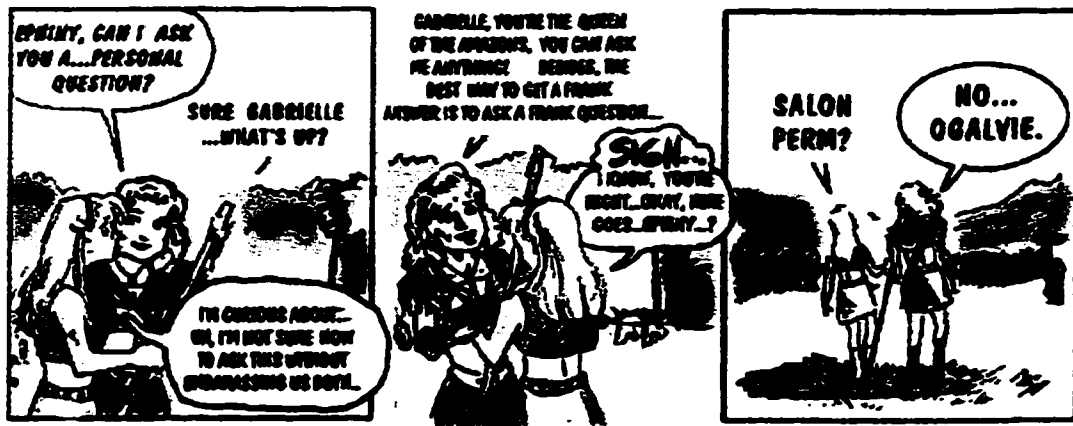
Velasca, the psychotic and power-hungry Amazon, briefly rules the Nation in "The Quest."

FIGURE 30



The Arborea Amazons: Girls who like to dress up and dance. Images from the episode "The Quest."

FIGURE 31



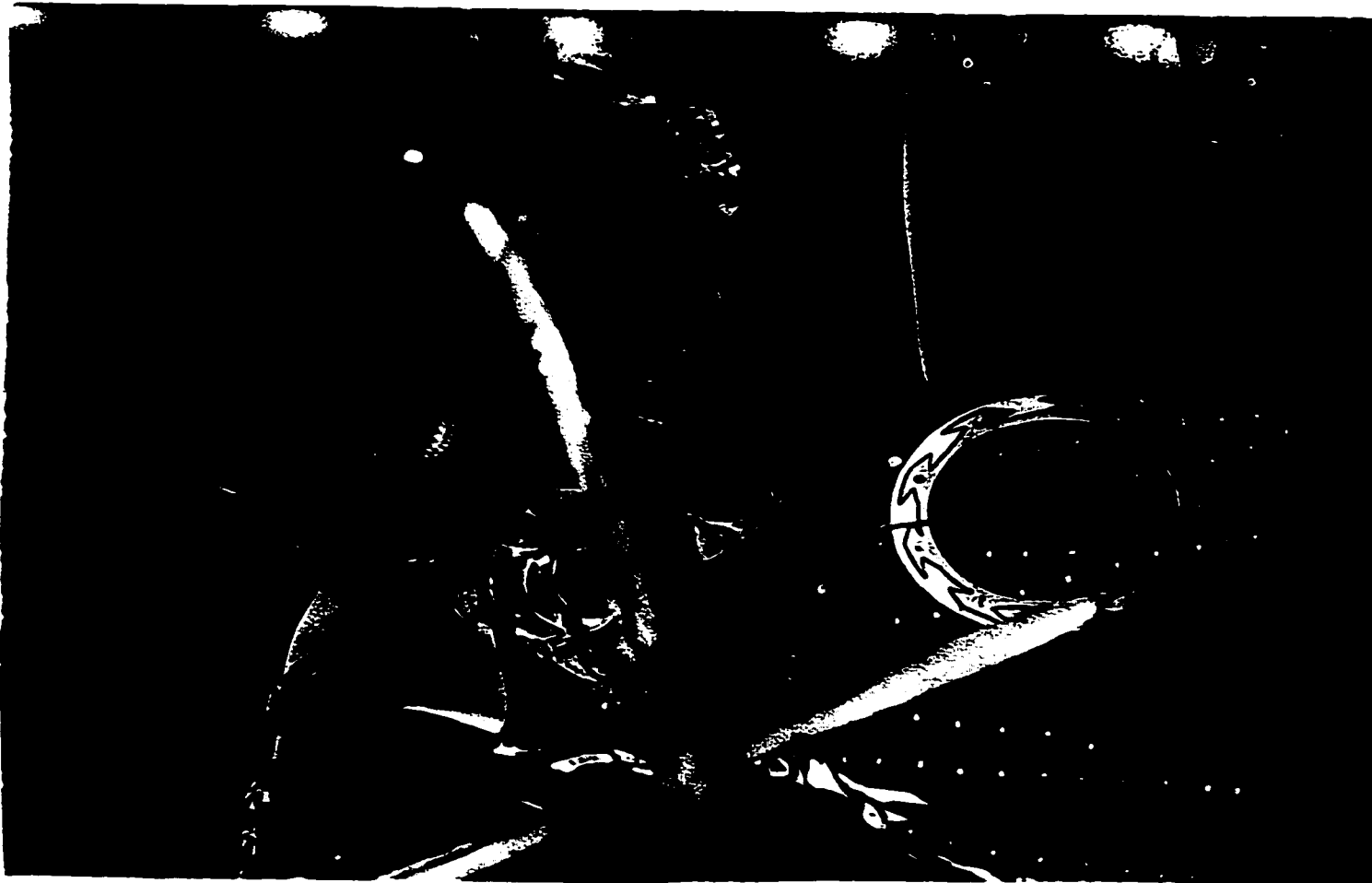
A humorous poke at the fashion- and beauty-conscious Amazons of *Xena: Warrior Princess* in a "Battle On!" comic by Jeanette Atwood T.G..

FIGURE 32

**Callisto, the nemesis of
Xena, in "Callisto" (top)
and "Maternal Instincts"
(bottom).**



FIGURE 33 Xena: the Warrior Princess.





"Let's get wet Gabrielle!": The "soft porn" dimension of *Xena: Warrior Princess* is illustrated by the show's penchant for presenting its protagonists naked and wet.



A humourous commentary on Gabrielle's "Magically Shrinking Bilious Green Sports Bra" is made by Atwood's "Battle On!" comic!

FIGURE 36



Xena is not
impressed by
Draco's belligerence
in "Sins of Past"

A "dressed down" Warrior Princess: Although Xena has a sword pointed toward her throat, the half-dressed male warrior is not a (sexual or physical) threat. His sword proves to be no match for her seductive and charming ways!

FIGURE 37 Gabrielle, the Amazon Queen

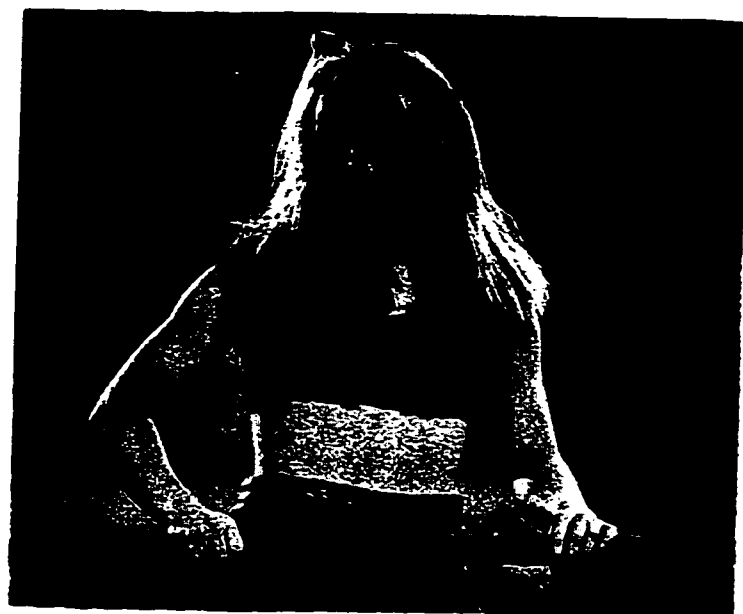


FIGURE 38 Joxer the Mighty...Idiot



FIGURE 39



Atwood's "Battle On!" comic depicts Xena beating up Joxer because he is encroaching on her show....perhaps she should go after the producers/writers of the Joxer character next?!?!

FIGURE 40



Still from "The Deliverer" depicting Xena and Boadicea. Boadicea is the first woman warrior depicted on the show to wear a *functional and protective* breastplate!



**GIANT
CALLISTO
POSTER!**

**PARALLEL
WORLDS!**
Herc/Xena Crossovers

ARES SPEAKS!

**BITTER
SUITE**
*Xena's Musical
Odyssey*



"I hate you!" a bruised-but-unbowed Gabrielle shouts to Xena after the Warrior Princess turns on her sidekick. "The Bitter Suite" pushes the Xena-Gabrielle relationship to the breaking point.

JOXER THE MIGHTY Music // Lyrics and more

FIGURE 43

“What has happened to Gabrielle, Amazon Queen?”: Even Xena is posing the question...in Atwood’s “Battle On!” comic.



**XENA...I FEEL SO AT
PEACE AND ONE WITH
NATURE...IT'S LIKE I
AM THE COSMOS...
I JUST KNOW I'M
GOING TO SAVE THE
WORLD WITH MY SHORT
HAIR, BODY PAINT,
ENORMOUS EGO AND
PACIFIST PSYCHO BABBLE!
BY THE WAY...THERE'S
SOME RUFFIANS AHEAD.
YOU'LL HAVE TO PROTECT
ME SINCE I'M SO PURE &
PEACEFUL AND I JUST FLUNG
MY PRIZED AMAZON
STAFF IN A RIVER!**

UH HUH..

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