**ON THE BRAVERY OF WOMEN:
THE ANCIENT AMAZON AND HER MODERN COUNTERPARTS**

By

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Abstract

In a favourite mythological motif of the Greeks, the Amazons fought many of the most celebrated Greek heroes and lived in independent societies on the fringes of the known world. These warrior women appear throughout Greek literature and art of every kind, defined by characteristics which differentiated them from 'ordinary' women: heroic capability and skills in battle; an unusual lifestyle, marked out by traditions often the very opposite of those of the Greeks, including unique mothering customs; and a significant independence from men, including systems of gynaecocracy or the wholesale exclusion of men from their society. Yet despite their reputations as fierce and talented combatants, the Amazons were constantly bested by their male counterparts and either killed in battle or abducted for marriage. It seems that whenever they fought against the Greeks, they lost.

In an interesting case of the adaptation of myth to the modern world, the archetypal features of the Amazon (as the Greeks imagined her) can also be found in a variety of television and film characters. Through an analysis of both the ancient and 'modern' Amazon, I show how this symbol benefits greatly from the vastly different social context of western society in the twentieth century which enables the Amazon to become an affirmative model of female heroism. The case-study approach adopted here examines instances of the 'modern' Amazon in *Wonder Woman*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Alien/Aliens*, *The Terminator/Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and *Kill Bill Volume 1* and *2* and notes that, while encompassing many of the same traits as their ancient predecessors, these Amazons are no longer constantly on the losing side of the battle. The successes of feminism and the changing expectations which accompany them transform the Amazon from the defeated warrior into the triumphant victor.

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τῇ ἐμῇ μητρὶ καὶ τῷ ἐμῷ πατρί·
καλοὶ καὶ ἀγαθοὶ ἔστε καὶ τῷ κόσμῳ με καθωπλίκατε.

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HGA: Robertson, *A History of Greek Art*

LIMC: various, *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*

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Introduction

Laertes: And I thought this was just a legend, another tale invented by the poets...If I'm dreaming, I hope I never wake up!

Castor: What do you mean? Who are they?

Laertes: They're the Amazons, my friend. This country is inhabited by females – only females.

Hercules (dir. Francisci, 1957)

The Amazon appears in numberless works of Greek art, both literary and visual, extant and lost. The vision of women armed and marching into battle against male opponents appeared to exert an intriguing influence on the culture that conceived such a myth; in turn, the Amazons continued to be popular through Roman times, and in fact throughout the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and into the modern period. In the media of television and film of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, I will argue that several examples of a modern manifestation of the Amazon figure exist, and that through an investigation of how these 'modern Amazons' are both similar to and divergent from their ancient predecessors, an appreciation of how the Amazon can serve as a potential exemplar of heroism may be gained. In turn, this can assist in recognizing the debt which such figures owe to their ancient counterparts.

In showing the striking similarities between the ancient and modern Amazon, this study will attempt to draw together the diverse areas of classical philology and the study of popular culture. The way the Greeks developed and used the myths of the Amazons has been discussed by several scholars: the first major iconographical study, von Bothmer's *Amazons in Greek Art* (1957), though written over fifty years ago, still remains indispensable in terms of scope and breadth of material examined. From the late 1970s onward, philological discussions focused on the Amazons as creatures of difference in relation to the Greeks, with duBois'

Centaur and Amazons (1982), Kleinbaum's *The War Against the Amazons* (1983) and Tyrrell's *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (1984). The growing area of reception studies, and its theories of multiple points of reception (as forwarded by Batstone¹) have also greatly informed this research, particularly because, since the subject is a mythical figure, it can be argued that every manifestation of the Amazon in every text (ancient or modern) is a different point of reception, a different interpretation and application of that figure which has ultimately been received from mythology. The methodology set forth by Stanford in *The Ulysses Theme* (1963), Wyke in *Projecting the Past* (1997) and Hardwick in *Reception Studies* (2003) have assisted me in the way I have attempted to create a 'productive exchange between scholarship on classical culture and cultural theories of the popular'.² In addition, a point Galinsky makes regarding modern reworkings of myth (in his contribution to the Blackwell *Companion to the Classical Tradition*) is beneficial for the present discussion:

Some are inventive (in various ways: take Ray Harryhausen) and some are a silly mess – *just like myths in antiquity*. Like these, however, they continue the tradition of creative vitality, for better or for worse.³

Another theme to keep in mind is the potential for film and television to 'construct and convey new and fascinating readings of...an aspect of ancient culture',⁴ as it is this potential which will make clear the significance of this research: the ability to adapt, mould and transform the Amazon from an outsider and 'alien' figure to an integrated figure of heroism. Although a large portion of 'classics in film' studies focus on films such as *Gladiator*, *Alexander* or *300* – which are more or less straightforward versions of historical events – my research and case studies are more thematically-based, and focused on the archetypal figure of the Amazon. I do not intend to suggest that the television and film producers,

¹ Batstone (2006).

² Wyke (1997) 8.

³ Galinsky (2007) 394; the emphasis is my own.

⁴ Paul (2008) 311.

writers and directors responsible for the case studies in this research have taken the ancient Amazon figure and deliberately attempted to refine and revolutionise her, as may be the case with other mythical characters such as Odysseus. However, Stanford's claim that 'ignorance is often the mother of imagination' can indeed apply to the creators of 'modern Amazons' and the alterations they make.⁵ I intend to observe and analyse the commonalities between the old and new versions of these characters, and thus provide a discussion of the infiltration of the Amazon into popular film and television.

Within the area of media, film and television studies, a number of works have been published in the past twenty years which have examined the increasing visibility of strong female lead characters, and particularly ones who employ violence or display behaviour contrary to that of traditional roles or representations. Both Inness' *Tough Girls* (1999) and Early and Kennedy's *Athena's Daughters* (2003) gather together discussion on several such characters; in addition, Rikke Schubart's *Super Bitches and Action Babes* (2007) takes an approach similar to my own, in identifying several different 'archetypes' into which strong female characters in film and television can be categorised. The present study can perhaps best be described as a continuation of the work of Kristina Passman's 1991 chapter entitled 'The Classical Amazon in Contemporary Cinema', in which several figures from films of the late 1970s and 1980s are identified as particularly 'Amazonian' in their behaviour, abilities, and characterisation. Such studies have often highlighted the ambivalence which accompanies such portrayals of women: while these films have no doubt been enabled by increasing social awareness of issues aroused by second-wave feminism, some scholars argue that these characters' radical potential is stunted by emphasis on traditional markers of femininity or sexual allure. In fact, this existence of aggression or violence within

⁵ Stanford (1963) 4.

a female figure is also just what was so troubling and curious about the original Amazon, and so the correspondence between the ancient and modern exemplars of the warrior woman will become even clearer.

To begin with, an archetype of the ‘modern Amazon’ must be set out, in order to understand the course and structural ideology of the present research. The characteristics that are consistently exhibited in manifestations of the ancient Amazon are their martial abilities on the battlefield; an unusual lifestyle lived in contrast to the ‘normal’ lifestyle experienced by most Greeks; some degree of autonomy from men, either through female-only or gynaecocratic societies; and some unique and curious mothering traditions. To follow such a collection of characteristics as closely as possible, the parameters of the ‘modern Amazon’ have been set much the same: each woman exhibits impressive martial abilities; markers of an unusual lifestyle; significant autonomy from men; and (where applicable) some examples of motherhood under far from usual circumstances.

Part One begins this study with a broad overview of the way the Amazon was viewed, depicted and received in both literature and art, throughout the Greek and Roman worlds. Epic, tragedy and historiography are considered in the literature section (Chapter One), and both vase-painting and sculpture are discussed in the art section (Chapter Two). This overview is divided thematically according to the traits associated with the Amazon as categorised above: on the one hand, the Amazon as warrior; and on the other, the markers of the Amazon’s unusual lifestyle. In addition, the appearances of Amazons in accounts of Alexander the Great’s life, and Amazon-like figures (or *viragines*) in historical events such as the Battle of Salamis and the invasion of Britain by the Roman Empire, are examined in order to fully appreciate the implications of the warrior woman’s persistent appearances in the ancient world.

Part Two moves firstly into the medium of television, in order to discuss *Wonder Woman* and *Xena* (Chapter Three). Case studies into these television series will analyse both consistencies with the ancient concept of the Amazon as well as modifications made to this concept in order to formulate the archetype of the ‘modern Amazon’. Although other series of particular note may be alluded to, these two case studies have been selected deliberately in order to concentrate more closely and provide a more meticulous investigation. In addition, these series provide excellent examples of television Amazons who subscribe to the archetypal traits first set out above.

Part Two’s Chapter Four continues the examination of ‘modern Amazons’, but in the medium of film. It encompasses two minor case studies – *Alien / Aliens* and *Terminator / Terminator 2* – as well as the major case study discussing *Kill Bill Volume 1* and *2*. As with Chapter Two, this discussion will analyse the way in which these cinematic Amazons are depicted and how this compares with the ‘modern’ archetype visible in the television series mentioned in the preceeding chapter. These case studies have been selected as they also represent examples of the kind of ‘modern Amazon’ archetype on which this study focuses. In addition, the diachronic structure of the films’ release dates allows for some insight into the way such characters have been developed over time. In selecting the two *Kill Bill* films (2003 and 2004) as the major case study, I aim to build on Passman’s previous work which examined films up to 1991, and thus incorporate the most recent depictions of such Amazonian figures.

Ultimately I hope to gain insight into how the Amazon, as imagined by the ancient world, can be received in modern film and television in such a way that it challenges the original concept of this figure. In doing so, some small contribution may be made to the growing field broadly classified as ‘classics in

film', and I hope that some new ideas about the adaptability and changeability of ancient myth will be gained. In order to continue to understand not only the ancient world but also receptions of that ancient world, popular culture and its relationship with inherited values, myths and story-patterns of the Greeks and Romans must be considered. The present study aims to take advantage of the large audiences which film and television draw in and show how their popularity (and need to maintain such popularity) can lead to greater dissemination of the classical themes and ideas which they receive and adapt.

Part One

To begin this investigation, we first must address the way in which the Amazon was portrayed in the ancient world. Though the exact origins of the myths surrounding the Amazons are obscure, the prominent presence of these warrior women in *mythopoiesis* marks them out as figures of constant curiosity and fascination for the Greeks and, later, for the Romans. A high level of visibility in both literary and artistic representations demonstrates this fascination. This section will delineate the different ways in which Amazons were depicted by both cultures and the particular characteristics by which they were defined in the public consciousness. This will assist in mapping out the ways in which the Amazon was identified, which in turn will inform the identification of the modern Amazons examined in the subsequent two chapters.

In the ancient world, from the time of Herodotus onward, writers debated the veracity of Amazon legends while also continuing to perpetuate such legends by including stories about them in 'historical' texts. Equally so, in general *mythopoiesis*, writers and artists such as Homer, Euripides and Pheidias include Amazons at various narrative points without discussion of the realistic possibility of Amazon existence. Ultimately, it is not the Amazons' historical authenticity which the present study intends to debate; instead, their recurring appearances shall be taken as the important point of note because the very real forms which these appearances take, in literature and art, tell a vivid story about the ancient world's ongoing fascination with the Amazon. The allure of the Amazon to the ancient Greeks and Romans can be hard to fully elucidate, though several gender-based theories have been advanced which assist in decoding the nuances of the myth.

The aspects of Amazons which serve to differentiate them from ‘ordinary’ women (in particular, Athenian women) can be divided into the broad categories of martial ability, autonomy from men, unusual lifestyle, and unusual approaches to or traditions concerning motherhood. In this way they serve as the very antithesis of the female role defined by Greek society. In such a society men, not women, take part in battle, while women are obliged to depend on men in many areas of life and are expected to lead a life focused quite narrowly on marriage and motherhood. Much valuable research in the area of women of classical Athens has appeared in the past thirty to forty years, in contrast to relatively short shrift the subject had previously been given. As a result, the work of the likes of Sarah Pomeroy, Helene Foley, and Mary Lefkowitz has aided in an appreciation of the relationship between men of Athens and their mothers, wives, daughters and others.¹ The flourishing of the Amazon myth in a society which expected strict behavioural standards from its own females is both interesting and somewhat ironic - though perhaps less so when one considers the implications of the Amazons’ constant defeat at the hands of Greek heroes. Each aspect of Amazonian life listed above appears in the ancient literature and art, though some more frequently than others – in particular, the issue of Amazons’ skills and exploits in warfare receives far greater attention and emphasis. As we shall see, art focuses on this facet of Amazonian life to the exclusion of almost everything else. By contrast, the historians choose to emphasise the more alien lifestyle choices of the Amazons just as much as any tales of martial prowess. Within each category, a chronological order will be maintained in our investigation, thus providing a method of tracing developments while also allowing space to thematic discussion.

¹ Pomeroy (1975) *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*, Foley (ed.) (1981) *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, and Lefkowitz (1986a) *Women in Greek Myth* are these authors’ most famous texts, though they have also contributed numerous articles and chapters elsewhere.

Chapter One: The Ancient Amazons in Literature

The best starting point is the extant literature on the subject, which shows delineation between ‘historic’ and ‘poetic’ styles, as well as varying degrees of skepticism in treating the Amazons. Their extant appearances, however, particularly in classical Greek literature, consist by and large of single-line references (as with the references in *Iliad* 3.189 and 6.186 discussed below) or of tiny vignettes demonstrating a larger theme or past incident. This is partially due, it must be acknowledged, to the fragmentary nature of some ancient authors and the loss of the Epic Cycle’s *Aethiopis*. The tragedians were restrained in their usage of the Amazons, restricting themselves to images of the warrior women as motifs in choral odes or to allusions pertaining to locales such as the Areopagus (as in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* 685-90). The reluctance of Athenian tragedians to cast the highly popular Amazons as central characters in their plays is perhaps primarily due to their status as ‘outsiders’ or ‘other’. Not only are the core stories surrounding the Amazons – namely, battles with Greek heroes – ill-suited to the stage², but their status outside the bounds of normal family units and societal groupings would also make it difficult to depict them as a true part of the dramatic action. In stark contrast, the amount of art (particularly surviving vase painting) which depicts Amazons is vast, and will be dealt with subsequently in this section: some of the curious differences between literary Amazons and artistic Amazons are intriguing and possibly inexplicable. But first, literary treatments will be addressed.

Although the roots of the Amazon myth were already planted and indeed flourishing by the time Homer’s epics were transmuted into written poetry

² Of the extant Athenian tragedies, only two (Sophocles’ *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*) take place during the Trojan War, and even then, during breaks in the fighting: though approaching armies may be reported on by messengers, a military engagement is never portrayed on stage.

(around the seventh century BC), further details of the myths associated with them were included and embellished when later writers, largely in the era of the Roman Empire, included certain episodes in their writings: either as background to the history or geography of places (as in the first-century BC writers Strabo and Diodorus Siculus) or as a conscious effort to retell them as popular entertainment (as in Pseudo-Apollodorus' mythography, or Quintus Smyrnaeus' epic from the third-century AD). In addition, Amazon-like characters, both fictional and historical, materialise throughout time in various forms and various texts: Boudica, the queen of the Iceni tribe who resisted Roman expansion into Britain, is just one example. When the presentation of the Amazons is traced from classical Greek literature to writers of the Roman Imperial period (both Greek and Roman), a pattern of characteristics, distinguishing features, and episodes emerge: a pattern which not only echoes throughout the centuries of the classical world, but into the very world in which we live today.

Amazons as Warriors

From the very first literary mention of the Amazons, they are marked out clearly as fierce fighters, involved in battles with famous heroes. They are entrenched enough in Greek mythology by the time of Homer's *Iliad* to be mentioned in passing without any qualifying or explanatory material: at 3.189 the Ἀμαζόνες ἀντιάνειραι are mentioned as one of the past tribes Priam had encountered when still of a fighting age; and at 6.186 they are numbered among the people fought against (and killed) by Bellerophon. The epithet given with them, ἀντιάνειραι, 'a match for men', stands alone and does not seem to need further expansion. It is as if Homer's audience already knew all about why the Amazons may have been 'a match for men', and why they might have found themselves 'matched against men' in the first place.³ Priam's placement of them, in a battle of his youth and

³ Blok (1995) 155-85 discusses the Homeric formula involving ἀντιάνειραι.

alongside famous Phrygians such as Otreus and Mygdon,⁴ as well as their inclusion in Bellerophon's canon of adventures, indicates the antiquity of their myths, even by the time of Homer. Thus, they are placed at a significant remove chronologically, but their positioning as a foreign race living in lands closer to Troy than to Greece (hence Priam's encounters with them) situates them at a geographic remove as well. As a result they are 'distant' figures in more ways than one. Blok has asserted that, in this way, the 'narrative perspective places them in the past'.⁵ The lost Epic Cycle poem the *Aethiopis* (apparently authored by Arctinos of Miletus) would have placed Amazons even more solidly in this narrative past, as it told the events of the Trojan War after the death of Hector: the arrival of a Thracian Amazon named Penthesileia to fight for the Trojans, and her death at the hands of Achilles, as well as subsequent events surrounding Achilles' murder of Thersites, the death of Memnon, and the death of Achilles himself.

The Penthesileia episode is one of several which place an Amazon in an ultimate battle with a famed Greek hero by whom she is defeated. Many theorists, particularly those interested in issues of gender and sexuality in the ancient world, have observed the constant defeat of Amazons amid the feats of major Greek heroes, including Bellerophon, Heracles, Theseus, and Achilles. All are exceptional heroes in their own place and time within Greek myth and possess their own encounter with an Amazon or Amazons in which they excel and prove themselves to be superior fighters. However, the fact that the women are matched against such legendary warriors in itself proves the esteem in which they are held. Lorna Hardwick succinctly observes the way in which Amazon

⁴ Of these two characters Mygdon is the better-known: his brother Amycus, king of the Bebrycians, is killed by Polydeuces in Apollonius' *Argonautica* 2.97; his son Coroebeus appears in *Aeneid* 2.407; and he gives his name to the Mygdones (or Mygdonians), a Mysian, Thracian or Phrygian tribe. See Tripp (1974) 387 s.v. 'Mygdon'; Hornblower and Spawforth (1996) 1015 s.v. 'Mygdon'.

⁵ Blok (1995) 147.

encounters enable Greek heroes to gain valuable status and *τιμή* and how ‘this is presented as a task or trial for someone aspiring to heroic achievements and victories’.⁶ Bellerophon is perhaps the first to achieve such a heroic victory, when, as mentioned in *Iliad* 6.186ff., he battled the race of Amazons as part of a series of tasks set him by King Iobates of Lycia, which also included slaying the Chimaera (6.179-83) and fighting the Solymoi (6.184-86). His catalogue of accomplishments was also taken up by Pindar in *Olympian* 13, in which the Amazons receive more attention than the Chimaera or the Solymoi, giving some hint of the warrior women’s enduring popularity to come: they receive the explanatory epithet of *γυναικεῖον στρατόν*, while the monster and the Lydian tribe are simply left to share a single line between them (87-90).⁷

Heracles, as his ninth labour, is also charged with a heroic Amazon-themed task: fetching the girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons. Although the nature and vast quantity of artistic representations of this particular episode will be discussed below, the basic outline of the event is usually retold as follows: Heracles, sent on the orders of Eurystheus, takes a group of other Greek warriors with him to the land of the Amazons, where there is a pitched battle over giving up the girdle. Heracles secures the garment through force and returns to Greece with it, leaving behind a decimated Amazon force. One of his companions on this adventure may have been Theseus (according to sources such as Diodorus Siculus [4.16.4]), though in other versions, Theseus is believed to have fought his own separate Amazonomachy by writers such as Plutarch (*Theseus* 26).

The battle to obtain the girdle of the Queen of the Amazons is retold in the first choral ode of Euripides’ *Heracles* which sings of Heracles’ labours (partially as rebuttal to the cynical dismissals of Lycus):

⁶ Hardwick (1990) 16.

⁷ Hardwick (1990) 16.

τὸν ἵππευτάν τ' Ἀμαζό-
 νων στρατὸν Μαιῶτιν ἀμφὶ
 πολυπόταμον ἔβα δι' Ἀ-
 ξεινον οἶδμα λίμνας,
 τίν' οὐκ ἀφ' Ἑλλανίας
 ἄγορον ἀλίσσας φίλων,
 κόρας Ἀρείας †πέπλων
 χρυσεόστολον φάρος,†
 ζωστήρος ὀλεθρίους ἄγρας.
 τὰ κλεινὰ δ' Ἑλλὰς ἔλαβε βαρ-
 βάρου κόρας λάφυρα, καὶ
 σῶζεται Μυκῆναις.

(408-418)

Then he crossed the stormy Euxine
 to meet the horse-riding army of Amazons
 where many rivers flow around Lake Maiotis;
 what allies from Greece did he not gather for the challenge,
 to take †the golden robes† of the daughter of Ares,
 in the deadly pursuit of the girdle?
 Hellas took the illustrious prize from the barbarian maiden
 which now is preserved in Mycenae.⁸

As Bond has observed, this labour, situated as it is in the eastern reaches of the known world, balances out the three immediately previous labours – fetching the apples of the Hesperides, clearing the seas, and holding up the heavens for Atlas – which were situated in the far west.⁹ The placement of the Amazons in a far-off land (complete with an ‘inhospitable’ sea - Ἀξεινον) and described as a ἵππευτάν στρατὸν reinforces their distance from the Greek ideal which Heracles here

⁸ This, and all translations within this work, are my own.

⁹ Bond (1981) 170.

represents. His twelve labours accounted for here largely consist of killing ferocious or troublesome beasts such as the Nemean lion (359-63), the golden hind (375-9) and the Lernean hydra (418-22) and ridding the world of evils, such as Cycnus, a malicious murderer (389-93), Centaurs (364-74) and pirates (400-402).¹⁰ As a benefactor of mankind, as Diodorus Siculus would have us view Heracles (3.55.3), it seems that winning the prize (λάφρρα) of the Amazon's girdle is just as laudable as is his ridding the earth of fearsome predators. Like the other non-combative labour, holding up the heavens for Atlas (403-7),¹¹ the acquisition of the girdle is a deed which brings glory to Heracles and therefore to Greece; the fact that it is preserved at Mycenae (413) underlines the 'Pan-Hellenic' importance of the mission to retrieve it.¹² Euripides' reiteration of one of the key Amazon myths in this play is cast as a deed in which the courage and *τιμή* of Heracles, rather than that of his Amazon opponents, can be encapsulated – which, as seen above, is in itself a crucial feature of the Amazon interactions with Greek heroes.

Apollonius of Rhodes also includes details of the Amazons' mythical encounter with Heracles in the third-century BC *Argonautica* (2.966ff.). The presence of Heracles among the crew of the Argo is literally a weighty one, and his abandonment of the mission to Colchis does nothing to end the psychological grip he retains on the crew; thus the mention of his ninth labour is in keeping with this emphasis.¹³ Apollonius combines precise knowledge of the areas through which the Argonauts sail with one of the famous mythical exploits of Heracles, the

¹⁰ However, Bond (1981) 168 appears to see this more as clearing the seas of monsters, Tritons perhaps. Barlow (1996) 139 explicitly prefers pirates, despite the absence of the actual word in the text.

¹¹ Though he does not kill anyone in order to master the horses of Diomedes, Barlow (1996) 142 notes how the 'gruesome relish with which the mares gulp down gory human flesh at their bloodstained stalls is stressed in the striking choice of language here.' In addition, the seemingly innocuous task of fetching the apples of the Hesperides (394-99) must be achieved through slaughtering the dragon which guards them. Although obtaining the girdle is envisaged as non-combative, the battle that ensues – though possibly unexpected – once again involves bloodshed and violence.

¹² Bond (1981) 170; Barlow (1996) 139.

¹³ Hunter (1993) 26-7 discusses Heracles' role as an 'inimitable exemplar' to the expedition.

‘greatest hero among the Argonauts’.¹⁴ He begins by describing how the hero had ‘ambushed’ (ἐλοχήσατο) Melanippe (who is given the epithet Ἀρητιάδα), and, as a ransom, her sister Hippolyta had gifted to Heracles her highly decorated girdle. After a short digression on the nature of the river Thermodon, Apollonius then returns to the Amazons of Jason’s time, and explains the havoc which would have ensued if the Argonauts had lingered at the Thermodon:

καί νύ κε δηθύνοντες Ἀμαζονίδεσσιν ἔμειξαν
 ὑσμίνην, καὶ δ’ οὐ κεν ἀναιμωτί γ’ ἐρίδηναν -
 οὐ γὰρ Ἀμαζονίδες μάλ’ ἐπητέες οὐδὲ θέμιστας
 τίουσai πεδίων Δοιάντιον ἀμφενέμοντο,
 ἀλλ’ ὕβρις στονόεσσα καὶ Ἄρεος ἔργα μεμήλει·
 (2.985-989)

And tarrying there, they would have engaged in battle with the Amazons,
 and it would not have been a bloodless battle:
 for the Amazons who dwelt on the Doiantian plain
 were not gentle, nor did they honour justice
 but concerned themselves with grief-bringing violence and the works of Ares.¹⁵

The Amazons’ preoccupation with ‘grief-bringing violence’ and ‘the works of Ares’ expressed here by Apollonius underlines their reputation as fierce warriors, portraying them as fixated on war above all else; as will be seen further on in the cases of Penthesileia and Camilla, such a narrow focus on combat, to the exclusion of other more ‘feminine’ pursuits, is often utilised in portrayals of Amazons. It not only serves to illustrate their rejection of the traditional roles

¹⁴ Hunter (1993) 26.

¹⁵ Such a disregard for *thémis* aligns the Amazons with the Cyclopes, another terrifying, aggressive race described as *athemístōn* (Hom. *Od.* 9.106): see Mooney (1912) 207.

associated with women, but also more subtly shows an incapacity for balance and moderation in their zeal for war over any other activity or issue.

The Amazon lifestyle as portrayed by Apollonius seems to be at odds and thoroughly incompatible with any ‘normal’ Greek style of living. Here, a possible explanation for the women’s warrior ways is given: they are the result of a union between Ares and the nymph Harmonia, which resulted in *φιλοπτολέμους κούρας* (2.990-991). Other, more historically-focused writers do not mention this divine ancestry of the Amazons; but this divine facet of the warrior women’s identity was used by poets and orators alike to suit their varying purposes.¹⁶ It can, for the Greeks, serve to explain the extraordinary courage of women in battle when such attributes were wholly unexpected and indeed discouraged in their own women; a warlike temperament seems only natural in the child of the war god, much the way any other half-divine hero such as Achilles or Heracles is naturally expected to achieve great feats. This divine heritage also serves to further recognise the achievements of those who do manage to overcome the Amazons – achievement which, as mentioned above, is cause for great celebration, long-lasting fame and heroic glory.

Theseus’ Amazon encounter follows the same basic outline as Heracles’; in fact it has often been noted that Theseus’ catalogue of heroic adventures are a minor version of Heracles’ labours.¹⁷ Isocrates goes a step further and declares that while Heracles undertook tasks which were *ὀνομαστοτέρους καὶ μείζους*, Theseus’

¹⁶ Euripides (*Heracles* 413), Lysias (*Funeral Oration* 3) and Isocrates (*Panegyricus* 68) name them thus; Diodorus Siculus names Penthesileia as a ‘daughter of Ares’ (2.46), but another, unnamed queen of the Amazons is described merely as giving herself the appellation ‘Daughter of Ares’ (*θυγατέρα μὲν Ἀρεος αὐτὴν προσαγορεύσαι*) due to the pride she felt in her battle prowess (2.45). The late Quintus Smyrnaeus also names Penthesileia as the daughter of Ares, and includes a vignette illustrating the war god’s anger at the death of his daughter in *Posthomerica* 1.675-715.

¹⁷ Merck (1978) 101 describes Theseus as a ‘remarkably synthetic figure, plucked from relative mythic obscurity and fixed up with a retrospective genealogy in the traditional way’ and goes on to link the rise in popularity of Theseus with the rising power of the state of Athens in the fifth century, resulting in ‘a peculiarly Athenian cult’ of Theseus.

labours were more ‘helpful’ and of ‘vital importance’ to the Greeks (*Helen* 24). In the case of Theseus, the focus of his labour is more centrally placed on his acquisition of an Amazon bride (variously named as Antiope or Hippolyta) and the transportation of her back to Athens, rather than the attainment of a treasured prize such as the Amazon’s belt. The most detailed account of Theseus’ foray into Amazon territory and the resulting Amazon invasion of Attica is found in Plutarch’s *Theseus* 26-28, which the writer has shaped from the accounts of various historians no longer extant (such as Hellanicus, Pherecydes, and Cleidemus). Whether the Amazon in question actually assented to this marriage or not is largely ignored by most ancient authors; while the artwork illustrating the scene seems to indicate a measure of unwillingness, the literature is fairly euphemistic.¹⁸ In any case, the Amazons were none too thrilled at the abduction of their queen and invaded Athens in order to retrieve her, leading to a pitched battle between them and Theseus’ forces, with the Athenians eventually triumphant.¹⁹ The importance of this quasi-mythical event to the Athenian polis psyche is not to be underestimated: Lysias and Isocrates both invoked the battle as an example of past martial glory to which modern Athenians could aspire.²⁰ In addition, this battle between Athenians and Amazons helped cast the Athenians as ‘historically significant’ and their previous feats as an ‘everlasting source of civic pride’;²¹ with particular reference to the Persian Wars, the victory showed a prior triumph of civilised *polis* over barbarian invader.²² Isocrates possibly embellishes

¹⁸ Diodorus Siculus’ description of Heracles’ actions is τῶν δ’ αἰχμαλωτίδων Αντιόπην μὲν ἐδωρήσατο Θησεῖ (4.16.4); thus he ‘gifts’ the Amazon (who is part of the war ‘prizes’, τῶν αἰχμαλωτίδων) to his friend with no mention of her opinion of the event. Diodorus later says that the remaining Amazons then pursued revenge against the Athenians because τὸν Θησεῖα καταδεδουλώσθαι τὴν ἡγεμόνα τῶν Ἀμαζόνων Αντιόπην (4.28.1), the ‘enslaving’ verb indicating at least some sense of reluctance on the part of his Amazon ‘wife’, and echoing her role as a war captive mentioned previously. For his part, Plutarch repeats both Philochorus’ claim that the Amazon bride was given by Heracles as γέρας (a ‘prize of valour’) and the version of Pherecydes *et al* that Theseus himself took her αἰχμάλωτον – ‘as a captive’ – which Plutarch regards as ‘more plausible’.

¹⁹ Diodorus Siculus 4.28; Plutarch *Theseus* 27.

²⁰ Lysias *Funeral Oration* 3-6; Isocrates *Panegyricus* 66-70.

²¹ Kleinbaum (1983) 11-12.

²² See Loraux (1986) 56-8 and 67.

the Athenian victors' significance when espousing the belief that 'of all [of the Amazons] who came not one returned again, while those who had remained at home were expelled from power because of the disaster here' (*Pan.* 70). In a less hyperbolic manner, Plutarch describes the invasion of Athens by the Amazons as 'no trivial or womanish affair', and also evokes the long historical shadow cast by the war when he mentions the many graves and monuments apparently set up in memory of the Amazons; of those in Athens in particular he states:

τὸ δὲ ἐν τῇ πόλει σχεδὸν αὐτὰς ἐνστρατοπεδεῦσαι μαρτυρεῖται καὶ τοῖς
ὀνόμασι τῶν τόπων καὶ ταῖς θήκαις τῶν πεσόντων.

(*Theseus* 27.2)

The fact that they encamped near the city is evidenced by both the names of the places there and by the monuments set up to those who fell.²³

Plutarch's account of the end of the battle merely states that, after three months, a treaty of peace was arrived at, brokered by Antiope/Hippolyta; Lysias, however, chooses to explain an Amazonian trail of destruction throughout Attica being finally halted in Athens in another way:

τυχοῦσαι δ' ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν ὁμοίας ἐκτήσαντο τὰς ψυχὰς τῇ φύσει, καὶ
ἐναντίαν τὴν δόξαν τῆς προτέρας λαβοῦσαι μᾶλλον ἐκ τῶν κινδύνων ἢ ἐκ
τῶν σωματῶν ἔδοξαν εἶναι γυναικες.

(*Funeral Oration* 5)

When they met with courageous men their characters were proved to be like their gender, and the reputation they earned was the opposite to

²³ Aeschylus *Eumenides* 685-690 mentions the Amazons encamping and sacrificing to Ares and that 'they named this rock from that day onward 'Ares' Hill' – thus explaining the etymology of the Areopagus. Presumably, some of the other names may have been non-Greek, and the link to the distant Amazons who invaded would then explain such strange names. Pausanias (1.2.1), on the topic of monuments and places and Attica, says that when entering Athens, there is a monument to 'Antiope the Amazon': he then gives three possible explanations (which cover almost the entire gamut of Amazon martial myths) for who this Antiope was – a) an Amazon abducted by Theseus and Perithous, b) an Amazon who surrendered when Heracles and Theseus invaded Themiscyra, and c) an Amazon who died when she and her army invaded Athens. He later (1.41.7) describes the tomb of Hippolyta, but this is a fair distance from Athens, in Megara.

what it had been previously; and it was on account of their perils (rather than their bodies) that they were deemed women.

Up until this point, Lysias supposes, when the Amazons had encountered the ‘many races’ over which they came to rule and ‘enslave’, they had been met with less-than-remarkable foes, and thence had won easy victories.²⁴ To Lysias, a victory would not be so simple over the ‘good men’ of Athens: it was this battle which showed the Amazons up to be mere ‘women’, in the true misogynistic sense of the word – their actions when in danger, rather than their physical makeup, shows them up as inferior to the true men of the Athenian polis.²⁵ Loraux notes that in the victory of the Athenians (‘a club for just men and warriors’) over the Amazons, ‘Dike triumph[s] over Hybris’, and ‘the order of the world is reestablished’.²⁶

In contrast, many of the other Greek authors, including Herodotus and Euripides, refrain from the misogyny on display in Lysias and later works. Curiously, if the myth was formulated by Greeks to encapsulate the inevitable failure of females to live independent of men (let alone battle against them), wholesale denigration of the Amazons is not apparent. What is absolutely key to the legends surrounding battles fought by heroes against Amazons is the very real ability and skill of these women on the battlefield. Fighting against any old easy-beat is nothing to take pride in, glorify in poetry, or cast in marble: but to fight and triumph against a formidable foe is something upon which enduring myths are founded. Somewhat ironically, Lysias’ boast that the Amazons ‘perished on the spot, and were punished for their folly, thus making our city’s memory imperishable (*ἀθάνατον*) for its valour; while owing to their disaster in this region they rendered

²⁴ Hardwick (1990) 20.

²⁵ Kleinbaum (1983) 13.

²⁶ Loraux (1986) 146-8.

their own country nameless (τὴν δὲ ἑαυτῶν πατρίδα...ἀνώνυμον κατέστησαν)’ is mitigated by the very fact that he himself is celebrating this event, and therefore propagating the fame of the Amazons, not rendering them nameless.²⁷ In their very enthusiasm for pointing out the shortcomings of Amazons when faced with Athenian valour on the battlefield, Greek authors and orators such as Lysias and Isocrates can be seen to ultimately generate even further ‘publicity’ for the women, ensuring an undying legacy even through martial failure. Certainly, it is emphasised by authors of the funeral orations that it is Athens, the great civilised *polis*, that is responsible for assisting in the Amazons’ everlasting reputation; this is a hallmark of such funeral orations, in which developing ‘the immortality of civic glory’ is a significant theme.²⁸ Therefore, the wish to glorify the existing *polis*, combined with the inclusion of the Amazons in the roll-call of past martial triumphs, results in a constant invocation of the myth, and this ultimately succeeds in perpetuating the Amazon legends.

The Theseus/Amazons episode (and the ensuing consequences of the marriage) also gained the attention of tragedians, most noticeably Euripides, who attempted at least one other version of the Hippolytus story before producing the prize-winning *Hippolytus* of 429.²⁹ The titular character’s Amazon mother is noticeably absent, and Theseus has ultimately married Phaedra, who helps set off the chain

²⁷ Perhaps Lysias means to indicate that no-one knows where the Amazons have come from, because the name of this place has died with them; but previously, he had specifically stated that they ‘dwelt beside the river Thermodon’ (4), which was a fairly well-known geographical area since Herodotus’ time (when it was within the territory populated by the Sauromatians). In fact, several ancient authors mention particular place names, such as the Thermodon River and a town named Themiscyra, in conjunction with the Amazons: see Dowden (1997) for an excellent survey. In addition, if the Amazons were a true nomadic race, as recent excavators such as Davis-Kimball propose, then defining one’s culture in terms of a city would not have been a priority for the Amazons in the first place. Although the ideological concept of the *polis* symbolised order and civilization to the Athenians (and thus its opposite – nomadism – implied anarchy and barbarism), the numerous associations of the Amazons with Themiscyra seems to indicate that this potentially ‘barbaric’ feature of their culture was not emphasised.

²⁸ Loraux (1986) 37.

²⁹ Euripides’ previous play focusing on this subject, *Hippolytus Veiled* (which only survives in fragment form) was apparently far less popular than the play that is extant today. See Roisman (1999) for discussion on the (eternally troublesome) issues surrounding the possible content of the first *Hippolytus* play.

of events which lead to Hippolytus' grisly end. Though she is invoked a handful of times, the Amazon (she is never named) is often entwined with Hippolytus and his status as an illegitimate child, underscoring her union with Theseus as one outside the bounds of purely Athenian marriage – that is, one in which both parties are Athenian citizens.³⁰ Instead of being the wife who tends the home and with whom Theseus engenders legitimate children, Hippolytus' mother is out of the picture, perhaps dead, and ultimately negligible; she is not part, and *cannot* be a part, of the crucial *oikos* upon which Athenian society is based. In addition to this, the Amazons' non-Greek status also hinders their chances of inclusion elsewhere within the realm of tragedy. Although occasional non-Greeks such as Medea (marries a Greek) and Hecuba (life destroyed by Greeks) appear, sometimes as major characters, it is by and large the ancient families of renowned Greeks – Agamemnon, Heracles, Menelaus, Cadmus, Oedipus – upon which tragedians choose to focus the action.

The Trojan War incident once found in the lost epic *Aethiopis* and involving a one-on-one battle between the Amazon queen Penthesileia and the Greek hero Achilles is extant in excerpts from Diodorus Siculus' *Library* and the *Posthomerica* of Quintus Smyrnaeus.³¹ The only surviving evidence of the *Aethiopis* comes from the fifth century AD summary (titled the *Chrestomathia*) by Proclus.³² The portion which relates to Penthesileia reads as follows:

...Ἀμαζὼν Πενθεσίλεια παραγίνεται Τρωσὶ συμμαχήσουσα, Ἄρεως μὲν
θυγάτηρ, Θρᾷσσα δὲ τὸ γένος, καὶ κτείνει αὐτὴν ἀριστεύουσαν Ἀχιλλεύς, οἱ
δὲ Τρῶες αὐτὴν θάπτουσι. καὶ Ἀχιλλεύς Θερσίτην ἀναιρεῖ, λοιδορηθεὶς
πρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ὀνειδισθεὶς τὸν ἐπὶ τῇ Πενθεσιλείᾳ λεγόμενον ἔρωτα·

³⁰ In this way, this pairing is similar to that of Medea and Jason, particularly in the apparent discardable nature of the non-Greek wife in favour of a royal Greek princess such as Glauce or Phaedra. On Hippolytus' illegitimacy, as well as the Amazon's lack of proper name, see Halleran (1991) 117 especially n. 46.

³¹ This myth's popularity in fifth-century vase-painting will be discussed later in this chapter.

³² This is published in Bernabé (1996) 67-8.

(*Chrest.* 4-8)

...the Amazon Penthesileia came to fight as an ally of the Trojans – the daughter of Ares, and Thracian by race – and Achilles killed her when she was in full flight, and the Trojans buried her. Achilles killed Thersites – he had been reproached and reviled by him for his reputed love for Penthesileia.

Diodorus' concise summary outlines how Penthesileia, fighting alongside the Trojans as an ally after the death of Hector, slaughtered many Greeks and ἀριστεύσασαν δ' αὐτὴν ἐν τῇ παρατάξει καταστρέψαι τὸν βίον ἥρωικῶς at the hands of Achilles (2.46.5). As the sole female warrior to be granted such an *aristeia* during the Trojan War, Penthesileia seems undoubtedly to be an anomaly of womanhood, and just like the previous Amazons who encountered Greek heroes in battle, she too is defeated. Quintus paints a broader picture of the events largely due to the epic medium's suitability in illustrating fierce battle scenes and heroic deaths. Alan James has observed that Quintus 'exhibits a strong tendency to idealize' his characters,³³ and Penthesileia is certainly nothing short of a Homeric-style hero(ine). He bestows upon her a variety of heroic qualities and motifs: a twofold motive for joining the war (she thirsts for battle, but also must cleanse herself of the accidental murder of her sister); the divine patrimony of Ares; an army of twelve Amazons to follow behind her; similes likening her to goddesses and animals; a highly Homeric arming scene; an almost twenty-line *aristeia* featuring a catalogue of slain enemies; and finally, a hero's death on the battlefield. The key variation comes in this last section, when Achilles has boasted over Penthesileia's dying body before finally removing her helmet:

τῆς δὲ καὶ ἐν κονίῃσι καὶ αἵματι πεπτηνύίης
ἐξεφάνη ἐρατῆσιν ὑπ' ὀφρύσι καλὰ πρόσωπα
καίπερ ἀποκταμένης. οἱ δ', ὥς ἴδον, ἀμφιέποντες

³³ James (2004) xxvi.

Ἀργεῖοι θάμβησαν, ἐπεὶ μακάρεσσιν ἐώκει

....

καὶ δ' Ἀχιλεὺς ἀλῖαστον ἐὼ ἐνετείρετο θυμῷ,
οὐνεκά μιν κατέπεφνε καὶ οὐκ ἄγε δῖαν ἄκοιτιν
Φθίην εἰς εὐπωλον, ἐπεὶ μέγεθός τε καὶ εἶδος
ἔπλετ' ἀμώμητός τε καὶ ἀθανάτησιν ὁμοίῃ.

(1.659-62 and 671-674)

And even as she lay in the blood and dust
a beautiful face beneath lovely brows was revealed
even in death; and the Argives crowded around,
and when they saw her, they marveled at how she seemed just like the
immortal goddesses

....

and even Achilles was struck unremittingly in his heart,
because he had killed her, and not taken her as his wife
back to Phthia, famed for horses; for she was in stature and beauty
flawless, just like the immortals.

No male hero would cause such a swoon in the heart of the enemy who has just slain him; perhaps one of the crucial points to this episode is that Penthesileia, when fully armed and rampaging over the battlefield, does not arouse such feelings in her enemies either. It is only once she is dying on the ground, weakened, that the Argives crowd around and admire her feminine beauty. Their admiration is phrased in terms of conventional marriage: they wish for their *wives* to look as she does once they finally arrive home, and Achilles wishes he could have taken her back to Phthia as his wife, instead of killing her on the battlefield as an enemy.³⁴ Disarmed and no longer able to pose any kind of martial threat,

³⁴ This option, though, is a slight red herring, since Achilles' decision to forgo a long life in Phthia in favour of a short glorious life has already been made (*Il.* 9.410-416), and such a short glorious life could hardly include marrying a lovely Amazon and living happily ever after with her.

Penthesileia can become a (conventional) object of desire. Her Amazon way of life sets her apart from the ‘normal’ roles expected of women, and once that life has been ended, she can be considered as a potential bride or love-object. Schmiel notes that

For a time Penthesileia seemed about to embody the possibility of mediation between the sexes, seemed about to become a role model for liberated women. But...by her reversion to sex object (or suitable mate), Penthesileia shows that mediation is not possible.³⁵

Standing in opposition to Penthesileia and her atypical lifestyle in the *Posthomerica* are the Trojan women who, earlier, are tempted to join the Amazons in battle (1.403-476). These women fulfil those roles proscribed as ‘suitable’: mothers and wives, staying behind the walls of Troy, watching the war from a distance. However, one of them, Hippodameia,³⁶ displays a remarkable view of gender equality in her enthusiasm to join in the battle:

οὐ γὰρ ἀπόπροθεν εἶμεν ἔυσθενέων αἰζηῶν,
ἀλλ’ οἶον κείνοισι πέλει μένος ἔστι καὶ ἡμῖν·
ἴσοι δ’ ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ γούνατα, πάντα δ’ ὁμοῖα,
ξυνὸν δ’ αὖ πάντεσσι φάος καὶ νήχυτος ἀήρ,
φορβὴ δ’ οὐχ ἑτέρη· τί δ’ ἐπ’ ἀνδράσι λώιον ἄλλο
θῆκε θεός; τῶ μὴ τι φεβώμεθα δηιοτῆτα.

(1.414-419)

We are not far removed from the strength of men.

That vigour that is in them is also in us.

Eyes, and knees – everything is alike.

³⁵ Schmiel (1986) 193.

³⁶ The significance of this name is surely a learned nod by Quintus to the tradition of horse-related Amazon names, such as Hippolyta and Hippodameia (‘horse-tamer’) which in turn evokes their *ἵππευτάν στρατὸν* (mentioned in Euripides’ *Heracles* 408). Therefore, it seems only fitting that this character admires and wishes to emulate the Amazons. However, on the uncertainty of this Trojan woman’s name, see Schmiel (1986) 191 n. 8.

The light and liquid air are common to everyone,
and our food is no different. So what advantage is given to men
by the god? Let us not flee from the battle.

This statement normalises the Amazons' actions: why *shouldn't* they be fighting, if they have all the same vigour, desire and equipment for battle? Hippodameia's subsequent justification – that the Trojan women have parents, children and husbands to fight for, while Penthesileia simply fights 'on behalf of a foreign king' (1.422) – also serves to mark out the Penthesileia story from the other Amazon myths discussed above. While the others involved Amazon communities being attacked by Greeks and needing to defend themselves, or attacking Greeks in retaliation, this myth casts the Amazon, Penthesileia, as a mainly mercenary warrior, not fighting on behalf of any personal outrage but simply due to her 'will to destroy' (1.424). In addition, the past transgression involving her sister, of which she wishes to purify herself in battle, is also a somewhat self-interested mark of difference to the other Amazon myths.³⁷ In contrast, the Trojan women have everything to fight for, and also have the added horror of impending slavery if the city should fall (1.430-435). However, although Hippodameia's words inspire the women to ἀπόπροθι δ' εἴρια θέντο / καὶ ταλάρους, ἀλεγεινὰ δ' ἐπ' ἔντεα χεῖρας ἱαλλον (445-446), such words are tempered by those of Theano, who points out some significant differences between their way of life and that of the Amazons:

αὐτὰρ Ἀμαζόσι δῆρις ἀμείλιχος ἵππασίαι τε
εὐαδον ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ ὅσ' ἀνέρες ἔργα μέλονται·
τοῦνεκ' ἄρα σφίσι θυμὸς ἀρήμιος αἰὲν ὄρωρεν...
(1.456-458)

But the Amazons have delighted in relentless battle on horseback
from the very beginning, and concern themselves with the works of men;

³⁷ This detail assists in linking her with other famous (male) figures who have been required to seek expiation for the murder of a sibling, usually a brother: see, for instance, Adrastus (Hdt 1.35ff). Diodorus (2.46.5) also mentions this detail.

therefore always they have a warlike spirit...

In contrast, the Trojan women have never ‘worked in a battle before’ (1.452) and therefore are unaccustomed to the demands of war which the Amazons know so well. Schmiel has observed that while Hippodameia emphasises similarities and equality between genders, Theano underlines their ‘differences based on (lack of) knowledge and personal preferences’; therefore their debate becomes one between *phusis* (bodily similarities between men and women) and *nomos* (learned training and knowledge which differentiates men and women).³⁸ Theano’s gentle suggestions to the women that they ‘stay away from the noisy battle and busy [them]selves with the looms inside’ echoes Hector and Andromache’s famous exchange in Book 6 of the *Iliad*, particularly Hector’s advice to Andromache that *πόλεμος δ’ ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει πᾶσιν* (6.492-493); Theano’s words are *ἀνδράσι δ’ ἡμετέροισι περὶ πτολέμοιο μελήσει* (1.469). This halts the would-be Amazons of Troy from joining the fray and they indeed return inside to their weaving, their ‘normal’ female roles, and ‘watch[ing] the fighting from afar’, while Penthesileia continues on her path of destruction through the Achaean forces.

As mentioned above, the myth of Penthesileia also effectively ends with her death on the battlefield, just as the interactions between Bellerophon, Heracles and Theseus and various Amazons ended with the warrior women being killed, or in Theseus’ case, married off to the conqueror. The theory that Amazons existed solely for the purpose of giving Greek heroes an opponent over whom they can enjoy a glorious victory was first fully examined by Abby Wettan Kleinbaum in 1983.³⁹ This idea gained momentum and is now certainly one of the mainstream theories concerning the Amazons, though it does have its detractors, among them Mary Lefkowitz and Lorna Hardwick, with the latter arguing for a less gender-

³⁸ Schmiel (1986) 191.

³⁹ See Kleinbaum (1983) *passim* but especially 1-11; additional authors favouring this theory include Tyrell (1984), Keuls (1985), Stewart (1995a) and Veness (2002).

centric conception of the Amazon myth as a whole.⁴⁰ Those who favour Kleinbaum's theory see in the constant defeat of Amazons a way for Greek myth to subtly underline the futility of women attempting to confront or challenge men, in battle or in any other way. This then enables myth, as stories passed down through the centuries, to perpetuate the idea of women's inevitable defeat when attempting to match themselves against men in that very masculine sphere of war – and thus reinforcing the notion that war is a man's concern, and the concerns of women should be the home, the family, the *oikos*.⁴¹

While the Romans did not share the Greek mythological tradition of having fought (and triumphed over) Amazons, the Amazon figure (even if not explicitly named so) remained a popular type in various works of literature of the Roman imperial period. As if an implicit acknowledgement of the doubtful existence of Amazons after so many years, Amazon-like figures – women warriors, likened to Amazons – both imaginary and historical are more common than those actual Amazons (such as Hippolyta and Penthesileia) famous from Greek literature and art. Two examples from epic survive and serve as the most fleshed-out examples of the Amazon of the Roman imagination: Camilla, leader of the Volscian forces in Vergil's *Aeneid*, and Asbyrte, a Marmarican princess in Silius Italicus' *Punica*. In addition, Vergil also mentions the Amazon leader Penthesileia in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, though this is only as part of a larger description of the Sack of Troy as depicted on the Temple of Juno at Carthage.

Perhaps it is best to start with the most lengthy (and also well-known) of these episodes in Latin literature, which appears in Book 11 of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Vergil's description of the childhood of Camilla (11.532-596) and her appearance in

⁴⁰ Hardwick (1990); Lefkowitz (1986).

⁴¹ Blundell (1995) 61, for instance, asserts that 'we can be sure that [the Amazon story] had nothing to do with heartwarming messages about the empowerment of women'.

support of Turnus' troops (involving an impressive *aristeia*), and ultimately her heroic death on the battlefield (11.648-867) has been labeled one of Vergil's 'most brilliant achievements'.⁴² She initially appears briefly at the end of Book 7 as the last in a catalogue of Turnus' Italian allies (641-817), an appearance which, though the last in an extensive list, makes a lasting impression. She is the only one of the allies who is accorded the following crowd of admirers:

*illam omnis tectis agrisque effusa iuventus
turbaque miratur matrum et prospectat euntem,
attonitis inhians animis ut regius ostro
velet honos levis umeros...*

(7.812-815)

And the youth all rushed in from the houses and the fields
and the crowd of mothers marvelled at her, following her with their eyes,
mouths agape and minds astonished at the royal purple splendour
which hung from her smooth shoulders...

Though various other heroes in the catalogue of allies have divine paternity to boast of (Aventinus, Caeculus, and Messapus), and other troops wear startlingly strange weapons and outfits (the Sarrastians' bark headgear; Aventinus' lionskin cloak; Caeculus' forces who wear only one boot⁴³), it is Camilla who wins *attonitis inhians animis*; only Camilla can provoke this flood of staring onlookers. Although her parentage (to be elaborated on in Book 11) is not divine, there is

⁴² Gransden (1991) 20.

⁴³ Each of these features, of course, doing much to establish the native Italian forces as somewhat savage and 'barbarian' in terms of their strangeness to the Trojans. That these 'barbarians' are not foreign, but the exact opposite – the indigenous tribes of Italy – is just one ironic twist of several in this epic. They would perhaps also remind Vergil's Roman audience of the strange outfits worn by the tribes populating provinces such as Germania, Gaul, and Britain. Like the Amazons of Homer, Turnus' allies are situated in the remote past (the time of Aeneas' invasion of Italy), thus marking them out as 'distant' figures, in temporal terms – much as other races could be marked out as 'distant' figures in geographical terms, as the Amazons were in the time of Herodotus onward.

still an element of the supernatural about her, illustrated in her imagined fleetness of foot:

*illa vel intactae segetis per summa volaret
gramina nec teneras cursu laeisset aristas,
vel mare per medium fluctu suspensa tument
ferret iter celeris nec tingeret aequore plantas.*

(7.808-811)

She could have flown over the tops of untouched sheafs
and not harmed the tender ears of corn in her course,
or she could have made her way quickly across the sea,
poised over the churning waves
and not touched the water with the sole of her foot.

Such fleetness of foot brings to mind, naturally, the swiftest of the gods: in his commentary of the *Aeneid*, Servius claims that in the poetry of Callimachus, Camillus was the Tuscan name for Mercury.⁴⁴ This divinely-themed reference surely recalls to mind the possible divine parentage of the Amazons the Greeks wrote of: the daughters of Ares. Other theories have also been advanced for the naming of the *Aeneid*'s warrior girl; particularly popular is the association with the term *camillus*, meaning a religious devotee.⁴⁵ In addition, the association with M. Furius Camillus, famed Roman general and 'saviour of the city' after the Gallic invasions of 387-386 BC has also been noted by scholars:⁴⁶ Camillus himself had appeared in Book 6 among the Roman heroes of the past, distinguished by his possession of 'the standards he recovered' (6.825).⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Servius on *Aeneid* 11.543; see also Boyd (1992) 230; Gransden (1984) 189.

⁴⁵ Fratantuono (2007) 274; Gransden (1991) 24 and Trundle (2003) 171. This seems all the more compelling given the divine 'prologue' to Camilla's reappearance in Book 11, delivered by Diana, which is discussed below.

⁴⁶ Gransden (1991) 24-5; Trundle (2003) 171-2. Camillus is thought to have kept this cognomen because of his way of life: he was, according to Livy, a *diligentissimus religionum cultor* (5.50.1). See Gransden (1991) 25 n. 68.

⁴⁷ Servius gives the story of Camillus' return from exile and triumph over the Gauls on the note to *Aeneid* 6.825.

Vergil itemises three things in particular which elicit the stares from onlookers: her clothing, which is regal purple (*regius ostro honos*); the golden brooch in her hair; and her weaponry, including a Lycian quiver (*Lyciam pharetram*) and an intriguing shepherd's staff with a steel point (*pastoralem praefixa cuspidē myrtum*). One thing only briefly mentioned by Vergil (805) but another possible talking point among her admirers is Camilla's gender: she is a *bellatrix*, a warrior-woman. Like Herodotus' Amazons, she knows nothing of 'women's work' – her hands are not accustomed to *colo calathisve Minervae*, as is the case with other women, but as is revealed further in Book 11, her upbringing has much to do with this attitude. Servius, in his commentary, observes cogently that Minerva is not only a goddess of war, but also of wool-working, and that, fatefully, *Camilla animum ad arma sola contulit*.⁴⁸ Servius' observation of Minerva's role in war then calls to mind the semi-divinity of Greek-imagined Amazons mentioned above. While Penthesileia may be able to claim divine patrimony from the war-god Ares, Camilla is fatally ignoring Minerva's domestic sphere of influence which would be more appropriate to her gender (in the eyes of Vergil's Roman audience, at any rate) – that is, wool-working and weaving.⁴⁹ Each Amazon feels the call of battle, despite 'civilised' society's views of how inappropriate or unacceptable such behaviour may be considered to be in a woman.

After such a memorable entrance in Book 7, Camilla does not appear again until the penultimate Book of the *Aeneid*. Several scholars have noted the division of the book into a triad, consisting of the funeral of the recently-perished Pallas, the council of war, and the renewal of battle; and all agree

⁴⁸ Servius on *Aeneid* 7.805.

⁴⁹ Boyd (1992) 216; for an example of the wife who passes the litmus test of womanly virtue, see the story of Lucretia, Livy 1.57.9-10. Of course, the combination of Lucretia's beauty and chastity is what then inspires in Sextus Tarquinius the horrific idea to rape her; this in turn leads to Lucretia's own suicide due to her belief that, though violated against her will, she has *amissa pudicitia* (1.58.7). Lucretia's virtue and utmost concern in preserving it sets the bar almost impossibly high for 'normal' women.

Camilla is the undoubted focus of the last third.⁵⁰ After the breakup of the war council, Turnus is met by Camilla and her Volscian squadrons, and she declares her martial intentions to ‘risk the combat at close quarters’ while Turnus guards the city (11.505-6). In reply, Turnus’ admiration is clear:

*o decus Italiae virgo, quas dicere grates
quasve referre parem? Sed nunc, est omnia quando
iste animus supra, mecum partire laborem.*

(11.508-510)

Oh maiden, glory of Italy, what thanks could I prepare to say,
or show in action? But now, since your spirit is all-surpassing,
share in the toil with me.

Turnus’ use of the noun *decus* (‘glory’) illustrates his high opinion of Camilla, and it is not mere physicality that seems to have impressed him as goes on to entrust her as a ‘co-commander’ (the noun used is *ducis*).⁵¹ No other commander (such as Messapus or Tibertus) is accorded the special speech and lavish praise given to Camilla; Vergil merely notes that *sic ait, et paribus Messapum in proelia dictis / hortatur* (11.520-521).

Once the forces have been dispatched, the scene shifts to the divine realm, where Diana speaks to her companion Opis, telling the evocative story of Camilla’s childhood and adolescence and prophesying her death on the battlefield. Camilla’s father, Metabus, had been exiled from the town of Privernum, and he takes his infant child with him on his wanderings through mountainous territory. Camilla’s bond with Diana is in fact forged through the actions of her father: with enemies in pursuit, and needing to cross a dangerous river, Metabus attaches her

⁵⁰ Quinn (1968) 233-4; Gransden (1984) 155; Trundle (2003) 169.

⁵¹ ‘Co-commander’ is Fitzgerald’s (1996) translation. Fratantuono (2007) 274 n.6 advances, in Turnus’ assignation of Messapus and others as Camilla’s fellow commanders on the battlefield, the possibility of ‘Turnus’ (or Virgil’s?) discomfort with having a woman in charge of the military operation’, which I find unconvincing.

in a bundle to a spear and throws it across to the other side – but not without having first prayed to Diana, pledging Camilla to be the goddess’ servant if she will safeguard the infant. Camilla and Metabus make their escape, and thereafter the father equips his tiny daughter with all the trappings of a mini-Diana: he arms her with a javelin and bow and quiver to hunt with (574-5) and clothes her in a tiger skin cloak (576-7), and she grows to be a young woman who *sola contenta Diana / aeternum telorum et virginitatis amorem / intemerata colit* (582-4). Diana, regretful of Camilla’s abandonment of her huntress existence in favour of that of the warrior, commands Opis to kill whoever should kill Camilla. Such divine concern recalls the theory posited above – that is, the relationship between Camilla’s name and the term *camillus* (a devotee or attendant to a priest). Diana describes Camilla as *cara mihi ante alias* (537), promising to preserve her body after death for burial in Privernum; in return, Camilla’s preservation of her own virginity and adherence (up to this point) to a nymph-like existence hunting and living in sylvan surroundings has endeared her to Diana.⁵² However, as scholars have pointed out, Camilla is now leaving such surrounds for the bloody delights of war, and her arrows once used for the hunt will now hunt down fellow human beings.⁵³ I see here a much closer link with Amazons of the Greek imagination than has thus far been acknowledged.⁵⁴ Strabo’s description of Amazons includes the point that *τὰς δ’ ἀλκιμωτάτας ἐφ’ ἵππων κυνηγεσίαις πλεονάζειν* (11.5.1), as well as engaging in war. In addition, Amazons have been associated with Artemis (the Greek equivalent of Diana) by several authors, most notably Callimachus in his *Hymn to*

⁵² Fratantuono (2007) 277 suspects the former to be the main reason for Diana’s favour: ‘she retains Diana’s affection and patronage, probably because she remains a virgin – always the litmus test for Diana’s favouritism’.

⁵³ Fratantuono (2007) 276-7; Bishop (1988) 237-8.

⁵⁴ In particular, Carney’s (1988) 438 view of Camilla as Amazon suffers from some misconceptions of the varied customs described by several ancient authors: she applies blanket assumptions to the Amazons such as widespread sexual aggressiveness, conscious rejection of femininity, and ‘rejection of the male world.’ Carney also believes the breast-removal legend which several ancient authors (including Herodotus) do not mention and which, as will be shown below, is never portrayed in any ancient artwork.

Artemis (237-247).⁵⁵ There are also the explicit references in Vergil's similes to Amazons (discussed below), which further reinforce the point. Whether Camilla is 'not so much an Amazon as she is someone who imitates one', as Carney believes,⁵⁶ is beside the point: Vergil's imagery and associations serve to show parallels and analogies with Amazons, and do not need to unambiguously prove Camilla's total authenticity as one.

Camilla's entry into the fray is a marvelous one, calculated by Vergil to make the Amazon connection even clearer.

*At medias inter caedes exultat Amazon
unum exserta latus pugnae, pharetrata Camilla,
et nunc lenta manu spargens hastilia denset,
nunc validam dextra rapit indefessa bipennem;
aureus ex umero sonat arcus et arma Dianae.*

(11.648-652)

Into the midst of the fray came the Amazon, exulting,
one side bared for the battle – quiver-bearing Camilla,
here showering supple javelins thick from her hand,
there seizing the strong double-axe in her tireless right hand;
the golden bow and arms of Diana rang out on her shoulder.

Camilla carries into battle two weapons instantly identifiable with Amazons: the double axe (*bipennem*) and the bow (*arcus*). In addition, she has 'one side bared for the fight' (*unum exserta latus pugnae*) just as Amazons were depicted by many sculptors as battling with one breast bared. Indeed, this last detail (and much of Camilla's Amazon-like identity) serves to connect her to the one 'genuine' Amazon previously mentioned in the *Aeneid*: Penthesileia, who appeared in the

⁵⁵ The *Hymn* has the Amazons dedicating an altar to Artemis in Ephesus, around which 'was raised a shrine of broad foundations' (248-9), presumably referring to the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, one of the Seven Wonders of the World in the ancient tradition.

⁵⁶ Carney (1988) 438.

panels on Dido's temple to Juno in Book 1. The small vignette describing Penthesileia fighting at Troy introduces several identifying features which Vergil later attributes to Camilla.

ducit Amazonidum lunatis agmina peltis
Penthesilea furens mediisque in militibus ardet,
aurea subnectens exsertae cingula mammae
bellatrix, audetque viris concurrere virgo.

(1.490-493)

Leading the crescent-shielded army of Amazons,
 he saw Penthesileia, furious, blazing in the midst of the soldiers,
 fastening a gold girdle beneath an exposed breast,
 a warrior woman, a maiden who dared to fight men.

There are numerous similarities between this and the descriptions of Camilla in both Book 7 and Book 11. Camilla's appearance at the end of the catalogue of allies (7.803-817) is paralleled with that of Penthesileia at the end of the *visual* catalogue of Trojan war heroes;⁵⁷ the word *Amazon* or its cognate is included in the first line (*Amazonidum*; *Amazon*); and the exposed (*exserta/exsertae*) breast is common to both women. In addition, an explicit simile linking Camilla with Penthesileia is invoked, likening the Volscian leader and her female troops to the Thracian Amazons:

quales Threiciae cum flumina Thermodontis
pulsant et pictis bellantur Amazones armis,
seu circum Hippolyten seu cum se Martia curru
Penthesilea refert, magnoque ululante tumultu
feminea exsultant lunatis agmina peltis.

⁵⁷ Boyd (1992) 225-6 notes that the epic cycle tradition (known to us through Proclus' summaries) had Penthesileia dying *before* Memnon, while Vergil chooses to place Penthesileia *after* Memnon on the temple frieze, and therefore 'in the most prominent final position'. Boyd associates this deliberate placement with the introduction of Dido a mere three lines later, as well as the later appearance (and ultimate defeat) of Camilla. Lyne (1987) 136 also sees, in such proximity, a suggestion by Vergil of 'some sort of affinity between the Carthaginian queen and the Amazon'.

(11.659-663)

Just so do the Thracian Amazons' hoofbeats echo by the river
Thermodon when their army battles in their ornate gear;
gathering around Hippolyta or around Mars' daughter,
Penthesileia, riding back in her chariot, with a great clamorous war-cry
the army of women exults, carrying their crescent-shields.⁵⁸

The verb *exsultant* also links the fervour of Amazons in battle with that exhibited by Camilla in Book 11 (11.648). Vergil's use of the term *furens* ('raging') in reference to her behaviour (11.702, 762) further evokes the vision of the fierce warrior: she is not just a *virgo*, but an *aspera virgo* ('harsh maiden', 664).

Camilla's *aristeia* is brief but certainly leaves an impression: she dispatches twelve men in fifty-two lines. She exhibits many of the traits of any Homeric hero: vaunting over dying opponents (11.686-689); supernatural speed in overtaking enemies (11.718-719); and above all, the ability to kill vast numbers in a short space of time. One death in particular, that of Orsilochus, is particularly gruesome:

*tum validam perque arma viro perque ossa securim
altior exsurgens oranti et multa precanti
congeminat; vulnus calido rigat ora cerebro.*

(11.696-698)

⁵⁸ The verb *ululante* featured at 11.662 has connections to particularly female, animal, and barbarian uses: elsewhere in Vergil, the word appears at 4.168 (nymphs crying out the wedding song), 4.609 (the [female] cries addressed to Hecate), and 2.488 (the sound of women's wailing), as well as at 6.257 (dogs howling) and 7.18 (wolves howling). Other authors to use it include Livy at 43.10.5 (the cries of the women of the Illyrian town of Uscana), Ovid *Her.* 2.117 (the wedding song being sung by Tisiphone), and Silius 3.346 (Gallicians singing noisy native songs). The interplay between women, animals and barbarians is no coincidence here. Women are seen in traditional roles in each example: singing the primal wedding-song, calling out to goddesses concerned primarily with women's affairs (Hecate), and lamenting, but there are also the binary oppositions of man/woman:human/animal:civilised/barbarian which link the cries of animals, such as dogs and wolves, and barbarians, such as Gallicians or Illyrians, with the laments and shrieks of women. The familiar anecdote, attributed to either Thales or Socrates (Diog. Laert. 1.33) or Plato (Plut. *Mor.* 46), of giving thanks to the gods for having been born human (not animal), male (not female), and Greek (not barbarian) illustrates the currency of these concepts in ancient times. DuBois (1984) 4-7 gives a particularly concise explanation of such 'formulations of difference'.

And rising up she plunged her strong axe through both armour and bones,
again and again, though the man often begged and supplicated;
and warm brains flowed from the wound down his face.⁵⁹

Horsfall rightly observes that, with the use of *perque arma...perque ossa* ‘the anatomical horror is also increased, as it is drawn out into our gaze.’⁶⁰ The unusual juxtaposition of woman and war is not wholly lost on Camilla, but she turns it to her advantage, and in fact makes a point of it, taunting Ornytus as he lies dying:

*‘advenit qui vestra dies muliebribus armis
verba redargueret. nomen tamen haud leve patrum
manibus hoc referes, telo cecidisse Camillae.’*

(11.687-9)

‘The day has come for your words to be refuted by the arms of a woman.
However, this is no trivial glory that you will take to the spirits of your
forefathers:
to have been killed by the weapon of Camilla.’

After this first flurry of slaughter, the scene shifts away from Camilla briefly; however, it returns at line 759 with a focus this time on her killer, Arruns. He tracks her with guile and stealth, *tacitus vestigia lustrat*, the indication being that, had he met Camilla face to face, he would stand no chance. His reasons for killing Camilla seem to be rooted in a gender-based objection to her participation in the battle (*aboleri dedecus*, 789), and he hunts her down as she is recklessly pursuing

⁵⁹ There is, of course, the possibility that the *ora* of line 698 may in fact be *Camilla's*: if Orsilocho's brains splatter up onto and all over Camilla's face, the scene is even more repugnant than first realised. However, personally I think the likelihood is that they are pouring down over Orsilocho's own face. The three translations I have consulted (Fitzgerald [1996], Mandelbaum [1971] and Fairclough [2000]) each interpret the *ora* as belonging to Orsilocho.

⁶⁰ Horsfall (2003) 384.

Chloreus, a Cybelean priest bedecked in gold.⁶¹ The fateful distraction of Camilla in her quest for Chloreus' arms has been widely discussed, particularly Vergil's use of the phrase *femineo praedae et spoliolum...amore* (11.782).⁶² There is no doubt that Chloreus' arms are gloriously outlandish, and certainly a worthy trophy – and not just to a female warrior. However, it is this detail which is to lead directly to Camilla's downfall – perhaps, in Aristotle's terms, her *hamartia* is some innate female nature which leads all women to covet shiny things, as magpies do? Whether or not Vergil's depiction of Camilla's *femineo amore* ultimately reflects badly on Camilla does not, in the end, detract from her grandly heroic status: though her pursuit of Chloreus may have been foolhardy, her exploits on the battlefield still remain those of a true Homeric-style hero.

With his prey thus distracted, Arruns is able to take his shot at Camilla. His spear hits her in the naked breast (803-4) and immediately, he flees the scene, with a Vergilian comment which validates the earlier suspicion of Arruns' faith in his own battle prowess: *nec iam amplius hastae / credere nec telis occurrere virginis audet* (11.807-8). His cowardly exit, like a wolf escaping with its tail between its legs (812-813), emphasises the dishonourable nature of the attack by stealth;⁶³ his death, by Opis' arrows, similarly demonstrates what Horsfall terms a 'powerful element in Diana's vengeance' – he is left dying in the dust by his comrades,

⁶¹ Horsfall (2003) 423: 'Defeat, and at the hands of a woman, [is] viewed as an offence against decorum, an *αἰσχος* to be wiped out without delay.' This should be explained as indicative of the narrow-mindedness of Arruns, rather than the Italian and Trojan forces in general: contrast the view of Apollo in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, who, when speaking of the shameful death Agamemnon suffered, laments that he did not die *θουρίοις / τόξοις ἐκηβόλοισιν ὥστ' Ἀμαζόνος* (627-8) – evidently, the (only?) acceptable way to die at the hands of a woman.

⁶² See Fratantuono (2007) 280-1 and esp. n. 26 for the view that this interest of Camilla's in Chloreus' garb as booty shows 'new facets of her personality'; he proposes as a point of differentiation the character Euryalus who appears in Book 9, and who exhibits a similar lust for spoils, though taken from corpses, and in a nocturnal raid. Trundle (2003) 183 compares Camilla to the historical figures of Crassus and Antony who were also 'lured too far away from friends by dreams of eastern luxury.'

⁶³ Fratantuono (2007) 282 esp. n.32: although I disagree with the point 'Arruns will earn no glory because he is killing a woman' (since there seems to be no precedent for shame over killing an Amazon elsewhere, and Camilla *is* an Amazon for the purposes of the *Aeneid*), I agree that killing her *ex insidiis* accrues less honour.

unnoticed (*obliti*).⁶⁴ Camilla, on the other hand, is surrounded by her *comites* who support her as she slides from her mount (11.805-6) – underlining the contrasting non-heroic/heroic death scenes of the two adversaries. Her dying words are brief and concise: she asks Acca to bid Turnus to return to the battle, and then, ‘*vale*’ (11.823-7).⁶⁵ Several scholars have noted that the description of her moment of death – *vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras* – is identical to the final lines of the *Aeneid*, describing Turnus’ death.⁶⁶ It is clear that Camilla’s portrayal is not that of any ordinary woman foolishly hoping to compete with men in the world of warfare; rather, she is a hero and warrior, and her death will have grave consequences for Turnus and the other allied forces. Her death is *saevissimus nuntius* to Turnus (11.896-7) – he had, after all, put much faith in her as *decus Italiae virgo* (11.508). Her death, though, in terms of the conventions of Amazon mythology, is inevitable: as we have seen with the Greek Amazonomachies involving Heracles, Theseus, and Achilles, the warrior woman is always either abducted for marriage, or killed. Since marriage is out of the question for a devoted and virginal follower of Diana, Camilla’s entry into battle against men seals her fate, and she is yet another Amazon killed on the battlefield.

And yet Camilla symbolises something more than a woman intruding on the masculine arena of warfare; in the context of the *Aeneid*, she and the other native Italian tribes faced against Aeneas must be sacrificed, in a symbolic loss of primal Italian values, in order for the onward march of fate to progress as it should. Jenkyns has observed that Vergil’s awareness of imperfection in both Trojans and Italians, and his perception of a ‘golden age lost’ assists in giving the epic a sense of future momentum: a process of development must be undertaken, a ‘blending of Trojan and Italian virtues’ and ‘purging out of the Trojan and Italian faults’, to

⁶⁴ Horsfall (2003) 449.

⁶⁵ Gransden (1991) 138, contrasting Turnus’ lengthy final speech, expresses admiration for Camilla’s selflessness here: ‘[she] thinks only of the cause for which she has fought’. Similarly, Carney (1988) 438.

⁶⁶ Gransden (1991) 10; Fratantuono (2007) 285.

ensure the prosperity and peace of the Augustan age.⁶⁷ Vergil's elegiac treatment of such characters and their courage on the battlefield reflects some historical regret at such a loss, but this is ultimately tempered with acknowledgement of the 'greater good' and the benefit of progress.

Vergil's *Aeneid* proved a mighty influence on Roman epic poets. In particular, Silius Italicus, a great admirer of Vergil, was to absorb many elements of the *Aeneid* and adapt them for his own epic, the *Punica*. The character of Asbytte, who appears all too briefly in Book 2 of the *Punica*, is clearly modeled on Vergil's Camilla, though she is not accorded the grand entrance the Volscian is in Book 7 of the *Aeneid*. Asbytte appears only in one episode of the epic (2.56-205), and yet the appearance is a bold, memorable one, involving a grand *aristeia* and a terribly gruesome death (and post-mortem mutilation). Silius' reputation as a *doctus poeta* has made clear to readers of his work the debt he owes (and certainly the intentional homage) to Vergil and, particularly in the case of the Asbytte episode, the character of Camilla.⁶⁸ The echoes of the Volscian heroine in Asbytte, queen of the Marmaricans are clear; but the latter's appearance in the *Punica* is comparatively brief and not as 'glittering' as Rosenmeyer suggests Camilla's appearance to be.⁶⁹ However, Asbytte is still undoubtedly one of the few Amazon figures imagined and granted a substantial literary portrait by a Roman writer, and therefore a discussion is warranted.

Asbytte arrives at the battle of Saguntum, where Hannibal and his allies are besieging the town, which is in turn backed by the Roman forces. She is introduced among the Libyans as 'bold for battle' (*audax in bella*), and has a divine genealogy to boast of: not only is her father, Hiarbas, the son of Ammon, but her

⁶⁷ Jenkyns (1985) 68.

⁶⁸ For a collection of references evidencing Silius' status as *doctus poeta*, see Pomeroy (1989).

⁶⁹ Rosenmeyer (1960) 159.

mother is the nymph Tritonis (2.56-67). Additionally, this genealogy is also fully African, marking her as distinct from Romans and their allies: Ammon is the African equivalent of Zeus/Jupiter, and the African lake Tritonis is mentioned in several texts as being in Northern Africa (though specific locations vary greatly).⁷⁰ Just like Camilla, Asbyte turns aside from the usual womanly pursuits in favour of the hunt:

*venatu et silvis primos dependerat annos;
non calathis mollita manus operatave fuso,
Dictynnam et saltus et anhelum impellere planta
cornipedem ac stravisse feras immitis amabat...*

(2.69-72)

She had spent her early years in the hunt and the forests;
neither the wool-basket nor the spindle occupied and softened her hand,
but she loved Dictynna and the woodlands, and to urge on her panting
horse with her foot,
and to lay low the wild animals without remorse.

And like Camilla, an explicit connection is made between Asbyte and the mythical Thracian Amazons (2.73-76). Asbyte rides into battle on a chariot, not on horseback as did Camilla and most of the Amazons in Greek art (though Vergil does mention Penthesileia in a chariot at 1.661). However, her garb and the way she wears it again echoes the Volscian queen:

*Ergo habitu insignis patrio, religata fluentem
Hesperidum crinem dono dextrumque feroci*

⁷⁰ Spaltenstein (1986) 111 remarks that there were two lakes in North Africa with the same name – one in the south of Tunisia, the other near Cyrene – ‘mais les anciens les confondaient’; he asserts that Silius is referring to the Tunisian Tritonis here. In addition, he remarks, the tradition of young girls participating in war-games to celebrate Athene’s birthday in this same area may have influenced Silius’ warlike characterization of Asbyte. Apollonius Rhodius (4.1391) and Strabo (17.3.20) place this lake in eastern Libya, while Herodotus (4.178-187) sites it further west, at a place thought to correspond with Djerba, near Tunisia, and Diodorus (3.53.4) places it (and in fact all of Libya) even further west, near the mythical Oceanus ‘which surrounds the earth’. See Ambühl and Huß (2010) ‘Triton’.

nuda latus Marti ac fulgentem tegmine laevam

Thermodontiaca munita in proelia pelta...

(2.77-80)

And therefore, distinctive in her native dress, her flowing hair
tied back by a gift of the Hesperides and her right side bared for fierce
war,
and with her left side sparkling with an animal skin, protected for battle
by an Amazon shield...

Not only is Asbyte 'distinctive' in her native clothing, she wears a golden gift from the Hesperides in her hair (78) as did Camilla (7.815-816) and also has her right side 'bared for war' (compare Camilla's *unum exserta latus pugnae*). Like her literary predecessor, she is surrounded by a largely virginal force of women (*virgine densior ala est*, 84 – Camilla has a catalogue of *circum lectae comites*, 11.655⁷¹). To be sure, Silius is not slavish in his imitation of Vergil's Camilla: he adds his own touches to Asbyte's *aristeia*, including the self-sacrificing death of her comrade Harpe, which results in sorrow, and also bloody vengeance, from Asbyte (2.116-124). Asbyte's fatal opponent is named Theron, and, significantly for Amazon mythology, he is a priest of Hercules (*Alcidae templi custos araeque sacerdos*); dressed in shaggy lion skin with the head and jaws for a hood, bearing a club as weaponry, and holding a shield which bears the device of the Hydra, he is the very vision of the Greek hero.⁷² Given the rich mythological tradition linking Hercules/Heracles to the subjugation of Amazon communities, the appearance of such a figure is surely

⁷¹ Although, see Keith (2000) 28 for the problems reconciling such remarks with 'earlier references to her presumably male Volscian troops'.

⁷² In addition, the location of the battle, Saguntum, is closely linked to Heracles: Spaltenstein (1986) 48 notes that, while not explicitly naming him as a founder, at 1.273-295 Silius 'le cite ensuite par une simplification naturelle, comme le fondateur de Sagonte', using the hero's name as a kind of short-hand in the phrase *Herculei...muri*. The name of the place itself is thought to be a reference to both Hercules' companion Zacynthos (who died at the location and is buried there) as well as later colonists of the area, who originally hailed from the island of Zacynthos off the west coast of the Peloponnese. Asso (2010) 181 views Silius' linking of Saguntum with Hercules as 'cast[ing] Hannibal's aggression as an impious act of offense to the deity himself'.

significant in indicating Silius' knowledge of such traditions, as well as ominously signaling the impending death of the Amazon figure Asbyte.⁷³

Her death comes about in a straightforward battlefield encounter: not for her is there any chance of being distracted by an enemy's glittering trophy armour as with Camilla and Chloreus. She faces Theron and (like Camilla) desires his armour as a prize for her patron goddess – *spolium inde superbum / Herculeasque tibi exuvias, Dictynna, vovebat* (2.190-191). When her chariot is upset, she flees but is struck down by Theron, in what is certainly one of the most brutal and bloodthirsty deaths of any Amazon in literature (or art, for that matter):

...*incussa gemina inter tempora clava,
ferventesque rotas turbataque frena pavore
disiecto spargit collisa per ossa cerebro;
ac rapta properans caedem ostentare bipenni,
amputat e curru revolutae virginis ora.*

(2.198-202)

...he smote her between the temples with his club
and over the burning wheels and the reins thrown into confusion by
panic
he split open the brains and spattered them through the crushed bones;
then he seized her double-axe, hastening to show his slaughter,
and cut off the maiden's head as she tumbled from her chariot.

However, the horror does not end there; Theron affixes her head to a spear 'for all to see' (*spectandum*) – and particularly *ante agmina Poenum*, which he senses will

⁷³ Keith (2010) 368-9 asserts that the alignment of Asbyte with the Amazons 'marks out Asbyte (and Hannibal) as, ultimately, the loser(s) in this contest' and finds in the contest a display of 'the hierarchy of gender and westward impetus of *translatio imperii* [which] work together to naturalize as inevitable Asbyte's brutal death'.

enrage the opposition.⁷⁴ He is only too correct in this assumption, for Hannibal, echoing Turnus' anger in *Aeneid* 11.896-900, is infuriated at not only the death of his comrade but *fixique tropaeum / infandum capitis* (2.209-210). Asbyte's killer, also, just like Arruns, will not escape unharmed; he is reduced to running, unarmed, away from the enemy when he throws his club in vain at Hannibal (2.244-255) and is overcome by the Punic leader, who stabs him in the *iugulum* (259). And just as Arruns lies forgotten by his comrades, so Theron also suffers indignity in death; while Asbyte is given *munus tumuli*, Theron's body is dragged around her ashes, his weapons are cast into the pyre, and the final humiliation is expressed thus:

*ambustoque ore genisque
deforme alitibus liquere cadaver Hiberis.*

(2.268-269)

When the face and beard were all burned,
They left the defaced corpse to the Spanish birds.⁷⁵

The intriguing detail of the Amazon-killer, once venerated as a hero (as was the case with Heracles, Bellerophon or Theseus) but who now suffers a horrid death in direct consequence of his actions, is a Roman innovation. The most likely rationale for such an adjustment perhaps lies with Vergil's decision to cast Camilla as a favourite of Diana, and thus give the goddess some vested interest in the punishment of her companion's killer. Naturally, following in the footsteps of Vergil, Silius also has his Amazonomachist eradicated shortly afterward, though there is no protective goddess to command such vengeance – it is his antagonist,

⁷⁴ Spaltenstein (1986) 127 describes the fatal wound as 'affreuse et brutale', but notes that it is quite in keeping with the current vogue; his observation of the commonality with Hercules' description in Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus* ('utinam liceret stipite ingesto impiam effringere animam quale Amazonium malum circa nivalis Caucasi domui latus', 1449-1451) adds further possible proof of Silius' attempts to link in Hercules and his slaughter of the Amazons.

⁷⁵ A distinctly Homeric concept (though one which survived for centuries after), having one's corpse left out to be devoured by dogs and birds, marked the nadir of post-mortem mutilation: Achilles boasts to the dying Hector that this punishment is what he will suffer (*Il.* 22.354). Some accounts report that a similar fate was suffered by Nicias and Demosthenes after their capture during ill-fated Sicilian Expedition of 412 BC: see Plut. *Nicias* 28.4.

Hannibal, who fulfils this role of ‘divine avenger’. Though Asbyrte is not accorded the same level of goddess-favourite camaraderie (there is no divine ‘prologue’ as there was in *Aeneid* 11.532-594), her veneration of Dictynna is still mentioned (2.71; 191), which perhaps allows her the role of a protected mortal, and thus requires her killer to be fatally punished. Though each Amazon figure is fighting on the ‘wrong’ side in the eyes of the Roman (Camilla against Aeneas’ forces; Asbyrte against the Saguntines, Rome’s allies), they are still accorded great honour in death, and their killers are left to die unburied, or denigrated postmortem. In neither epic does a divinity intervene in order to save their favourite, as happens for instance, with Juturna and Turnus (*Aen.* 12.468ff); this adds to the sense of realistic battle heroics, and a significantly heightened awareness of imminent death. Despite the similarities, though, the tone of the epics overall differs significantly, and Vergil’s elegiac tone contrasts markedly to the harsh violence of Silius. This can be attributed to each epic’s subject matter and the historical distance of that matter: Vergil can indulge more poetic reminiscence, due to the largely mythical milieu of the *Aeneid*, while Silius’ subject matter, and its status as relatively recent history, demands (like Lucan’s *Pharsalia*) an air of grim realism and immediacy.⁷⁶ These Roman depictions of the Amazon are the first fully-realised literary portraits of such women, since nothing comparable survives from the Greek epic or tragic literature. In both cultures, the Amazon is represented as an admirable warrior figure, albeit one who inevitably suffers at the hands of a superior, male opponent. Clearly the martial abilities of these women are what mostly readily identifies them, and this is visible right from the time of Homer, when *antianeirai* is the sole epithet used to define them. However, other characteristics came to distinguish the Amazon from other women; these were discussed and embellished by writers of historical or ethnographic texts, which we

⁷⁶ Braund (1992) 1.

shall turn to now in an effort to more fully consider the ancient concept of the warrior woman.

Unusual Lifestyle, Autonomy From Men and Unique Mothering Traditions

Thus far, the main emphasis has been on the prolific fighting skills of Amazons, especially in particular mythical battles with Greek heroes; it appears to be the most easily identifiable characteristic of the Amazons as well as the favoured theme in ‘fiction’ writers such as tragedians and epic or lyric poets. However, more pragmatic and analytic accounts of Amazons and their lifestyles also exist in various ‘non-fiction’ writers (such as historians and geographers) and contain supplementary information which further builds up the picture of Amazons of the ancient world. One of the earliest and most lengthy of these accounts comes in the fifth-century BC historian Herodotus’ discussion of the ancestry of the Sauromatae (*Σαυρομάται*) in Book Four of his *Histories* (4.110-117). It comes at the end of a sizeable digression (4.103-109) on the many tribes which neighboured Scythia in Herodotus’ time, each tribe being singled out for one strange custom or another: the Androphagai are cannibals; the Agathyrsi share their womenfolk in common; the Budini eat lice. The Sauromatae, however, are identified by their ancestral relationship to the mythical Amazons (and the resulting unique traditions of their women), and this forms the entirety of Herodotus’ discussion of them. Beginning with *λέγεται* (as is often the case with the many stories Herodotus has gathered from non-Greek locales⁷⁷), he relates how the Amazons came to be in Scythian territory. While a Greek naval force was transporting Amazon prisoners of war away from the site of a battle at the

⁷⁷ For his part, this is central to the formulation of Herodotus’ ‘enquiry’: at 4.195 he remarks candidly *ταῦτα εἰ μὲν ἔστι ἀληθές, οὐκ οἶδα, τὰ δὲ λέγεται γράφω*. See Asheri, ‘General Introduction’ in Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella (eds.) (2007) 20-21: ‘[Herodotus] is inspired by a profound respect for what is known, said, or remembered, that is, for the sources, though he often voluntarily leaves the task of evaluating and judging to the reader, or to posterity.’

river Thermodon, the women overcame and murdered their captors, but were unable to sail the ships, and subsequently made landfall at Lake Maeotis. Having seized some horses, they began skirmishing with the Scythians who owned the horses, and who were entirely unaware of who the interlopers were – let alone their gender. Upon discovering the Amazons were women, the Scythians changed their tactics, sending a group of their youngest men to follow the Amazons and not attempt to attack them, as their motive now is explained succinctly by Herodotus: οἱ Σκύθαι βουλόμενοι ἐξ αὐτέων παῖδας ἐκγενήσεσθαι ('the Scythians wished to have children by them', 4.111). One sexual encounter between a Scythian and an Amazon seems to start the ball rolling; thereafter the two races match up and begin to live as married couples.⁷⁸ However, the Scythians' proposals to return to live in their homeland are met with firm resistance from the Amazons; in fact, the following reply to this request seems to encapsulate the idea of the Amazon for many historical (and poetic) writers of Greece and Rome.

Ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἂν δυναίμεθα οἰκέειν μετὰ τῶν ὑμετέρων γυναικῶν· οὐ γὰρ τὰ αὐτὰ νόμια ἡμῖν τε καὶ ἐκείνησί ἐστι. ἡμεῖς μὲν τοξεύομεν τε καὶ ἀκοντίζομεν καὶ ἵππαζόμεθα, ἔργα δὲ γυναικῆα οὐκ ἐμάθομεν.

(4.114)

We would not be able to live alongside your women, for our ways are not as theirs are. Our business is the bow and the spear and the horse; we know nothing of women's work.

Due to their concerns about not mixing well with Scythian women, the Amazons suggest moving to a separate locale with the Scythian men's possessions and settling there. Herodotus relates two persuasive speeches attributed to the

⁷⁸ As Tyrell and Brown (1985) *passim* have noted, although the verb used for the sexual intercourse between the Amazons and Scythians is ἐκτιλώσαντο – normally translated as 'tamed' in the sense of wild animals and the like – the marriage that the races embark on is far from the usual (Greek) model of marriage with a submissive, 'tamed' wife and dominant husband. Corcella in Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella (eds.) (2007) 659, however, thinks it is merely 'an ironic stroke'.

Amazons (the first, partially quoted above, in which they ask if they might live separately from Scythian society; and the second, in which they suggest moving across country to forge a new community), to which the only rejoinder is *ἐπείθοντο καὶ ταῦτα οἱ νεηνίσκοι* ('the young men were persuaded'). The resulting trek, three days east of the river Tanais and three days north of Lake Maeotis, brings them to the place *ἐν τῷ νῦν κατοίκηνται*, and Herodotus naturally reports that the present-day Sauromatian women keep to some very Amazon-like traditions: they are free to go hunting by themselves or with their husbands, and they join in on the battlefield (*ἐς πόλεμον φοιτῶσαι*) as well.⁷⁹ Additionally, they are also mentioned as wearing the same clothing as the men (4.116.2) and not being allowed to marry before they have killed an enemy in battle – with the result that some of them, unable to accomplish this condition, die as spinsters (4.117.1). A similar account of Sauromatian women's customs is reported by Hippocrates in *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, including the same details of riding horses, throwing javelins, and taking part in battle which Herodotus mentions; in addition, a variant on the stipulation of having to kill an enemy before marrying is described - *οὐκ ἀποπαρθενεύονται δέ, μέχρι ἂν τῶν πολεμίων τρεῖς ἀποκτείνωσι* (*Airs* 17.7-9). Hippocrates also mentions the breast-burning tradition, which is discussed further below in connection with the occurrence of it in Diodorus and Strabo..

Herodotus' treatment of the Amazons and their ancestral connection to the Sauromatians is very much an ethnographic portrait: situated as it is within a catalogue of tribes dwelling around the Scythians, it is a reasoned and explanatory account of customs that, while alien to his mainland Greek (and especially Athenian) audience, appear to have a logical basis stemming from a unique

⁷⁹ Tyrell and Brown (1985) 300, however, seem to believe that the above phrase should be understood with a supplementary *χωρὶς τῶν ἀνδρῶν*, and that only the women fought, while the men stayed at home. However, most other scholars including Flory (1987) prefer to read the passage as referring to Amazons fighting *alongside* men.

ancestry. Unlike later writers such as Diodorus Siculus and Strabo, who meld the mythological status and associated legends of the Amazons with historical and geographical fact, Herodotus focuses on the Amazons in terms of their historical role as ancestors to the Sauromatians.⁸⁰ It can additionally be viewed as symptomatic of his general depiction of women and what Dewald has termed ‘the social reciprocity...that exists in the *Histories* between men and women.’⁸¹ In refusing to write women out of his *Histories* – indeed, choosing to include sections on not only the Amazons but on the famous queen, Tomyris of the Massagetae (1.205-14) and relating several particularly interesting episodes concerning Artemisia of Halicarnassus (7.99; 8.68-9; 8.87-9; 8.93; and 8.101-7) among others, Herodotus provides a more inclusive model of history, in contrast to many other Greek orators or historians.⁸²

Many other authors were not so inclusive, nor forgiving of the Amazon societies and their transgressive ways of life. Greek, and particularly Athenian, society of the Classical age did not accord women active participation in spheres of politics or law, and relegated women mainly to the household roles of wife and mother to legitimate children; the Amazon, however, represented an inversion of all these norms, and this perception remained throughout the centuries. This becomes clear when reading the portions regarding Amazons in the works of the late-Republic Diodorus Siculus and Augustan-era Strabo. In showing Amazons and their ‘alternative’ lifestyle as ultimately defeated each time in battle by superior Greek heroes, many Amazon myths attempt to instead promote women’s natural

⁸⁰ Hazewindus (2004) 211. See also Munson (2001) 125-6: ‘Herodotus ...portrays the Amazons as a people who possessed certain peculiarities but otherwise were not all that alien from other *ethnea* or abnormal with respect to the moral sense of the rest of humankind, Greeks included.’

⁸¹ Dewald (1981) 100-101. Green (2008) has also pointed out Herodotus’ inclusion of women throughout his narrative especially in contrast to Thucydides’ ‘severe limiting of what he deemed permissible as elements of historiography....Out went personal anecdotes, most foreign ethnography, and domestic or private motivation: out, above all, went anything to do with women.’

⁸² Munson (2001) 132 notes Herodotus’ refusal to restrict himself to the usual binaries of Greek/barbarian and male/female in his ‘pursuit of the similar within his representation of difference’ which ‘confounds mythical constructs of alterity’.

roles as wives and mothers, which enforce the ‘proper order of patriarchal civilization’.⁸³ The historical writers purporting to describe the Amazons also assist in this, by emphasizing their very abnormality and unnatural lifestyles, often paired with the mythological tales of military defeat.

The Amazon societies detailed by historians either lived in wholesale inversion, with gender roles and expectations completely reversed, or else organised themselves independent of men entirely. Both options present the Amazons as possessing an extraordinary amount of independence and autonomy from men. According to Diodorus Siculus, the Amazons on the river Thermodon elevated women to a superior societal position, enslaving the menfolk or forcing them to perform female tasks:

...τοῖς δ' ἀνδράσι προσνεῖμαι τὰς ταλασιουργίας καὶ τὰς τῶν γυναικῶν κατ' οἴκους ἐργασίας. νόμους τε καταδείξαι, δι' ὧν τὰς μὲν γυναῖκας ἐπὶ τοὺς πολεμικοὺς ἀγῶνας προάγειν, τοῖς δ' ἀνδράσι ταπείνωσιν καὶ δουλείαν περιάπτειν.

(2.45.2)

And to the men [the Amazon queen] assigned the task of spinning wool and other things that were the jobs of women in the home. She also set down laws which decreed that women would go out and do battle at wartime, and the men were humbled and the yoke of slavery was fastened upon them.

Other writers, such as Strabo, described the Amazons as having eradicated men from their society altogether, instead preferring to randomly couple with neighbouring tribes in order to continue their race:

δύο δὲ μῆνας ἐξαιρέτους ἔχειν τοῦ ἔαρος, καθ' οὓς ἀναβαίνουσιν εἰς τὸ πλησίον ὄρος τὸ διόριζον αὐτάς τε καὶ τοὺς Γαργαρέας. ἀναβαίνουσι δὲ

⁸³ Shapiro, Pomeroy and Foley (1994) 131-132.

καὶ κεῖνοι κατὰ ἔθος τι παλαιόν, συνθύσοντές τε καὶ συνεσόμενοι ταῖς
γυναιξὶ τεκνοποιίας χάριν, ἀφανῶς τε καὶ ἐν σκότει, ὁ τυχὼν τῇ τυχούσῃ,
ἐγκύμονας δὲ ποιήσαντες ἀποπέμπουσιν.

(11.5.1)

For two special months in the spring, they would go up into the nearby mountains which formed the border between them and the Gargarians. They go up there in accordance with an ancient custom: they sacrifice together and have intercourse in order to beget children – secretly and in the dark, any man with any woman – and having made them pregnant, they send them away.

Strabo himself maintains a heavy level of skepticism towards the claims of a man-free community such as that of the Amazons: he finds it difficult to believe that a *γυναικῶν στρατὸς ἢ πόλις ἢ ἔθνος* could be organised without men, and even more unbelievable that these women apparently waged, and won, wars against other tribes (11.5.3). Diodorus seems in agreement, seeing in the tales detailing the Amazons' strength and deeds 'an incredible pre-eminence' of *ἀνδρεία* when compared with that of the women of his own day (3.52.4). This goes some way in supporting claims that the concept of Amazon society was a full-scale inversion of 'normal' society: Strabo expands on the point above (about women organizing their own community) by complaining that such a suggestion 'is the same as saying that the men of those times were women, and the women were men' (11.5.3). Not that such inverted societies were entirely unheard of (or unimaginable) to Greeks – it was famously said by Herodotus of such relatively near neighbours as the Egyptians that *τὰ πολλὰ πάντα ἔμπαλιν τοῖσι ἄλλοισι ἀνθρώποισι ἐστήσαντο ἥθεά τε καὶ νόμους* (2.35: 'for the most part they have set up all their customs and laws opposite to those of the rest of mankind'). However, within the formulation of the Amazons as an inverted society, there is not only their identity as foreigners to differentiate them from Greeks – there is also their gender, and their behaviour and customs succeed in inverting the gender norms

upon which Athenian society relied for stability. For Herodotus it is largely the non-Greek element which figures in his description of them – as can be seen in his non-judgmental stance on the fact that women play vastly different roles in Sauromatian society compared to their Athenian counterparts. And even within this context, Herodotus never discusses in his *Histories* customs ‘that are simply bizarre’: rather, as Dewald has cogently observed, he ‘attempts to report habits that seem odd to Greek eyes in a large cultural context that makes sense of them.’⁸⁴ The Sauromatians live a relatively ordinary lifestyle when compared to ethnicities such as the Argippaei, the Budini or the Androphagai. Other writers, however, such as the aforementioned Diodorus, fixate rather on the gender of the Amazons and what would seem (to a Greek reader) to be radical departures from the expected roles of women. The Amazon approaches to sexuality (as told by male Greek authors) are certainly poles apart from the expected sexual behaviour of Greek women: the stories of yearly random couplings between Amazons and Gargarians (Strabo 11.5.1) or even the less scandalous-seeming casual sex between Amazons and Scythians (Hdt. 4.113) both provide an inversion of the Greek expectations of wives to be chaste and sexually modest.⁸⁵

The essential differentiation between male and female spheres and the ways in which anthropologists have sought to understand such a definition among many diverse ethnic groups is well dealt with by Rosaldo.⁸⁶ Rosaldo demonstrates the varied ways in which ‘cultural expressions of sexual asymmetry’ manifest themselves, largely in women being restricted to roles in the domestic sphere, and therefore being limited in terms of wielding authority in a community.⁸⁷ Athenian society practised the same kind of sexual asymmetry, choosing to allow only the

⁸⁴ Dewald (1981) 101.

⁸⁵ The role of Cecrops, autochthonous founder of Athens and ‘culture-hero’ for his role in inventing marriage (as the Athenians knew it), is discussed by Vidal-Naquet (1981) 198-199; see also Castriota (1992) 146.

⁸⁶ Rosaldo (1974).

⁸⁷ Rosaldo (1974) 19.

male members of society access to education, a political life and legal freedom, and restricting females to providing their husbands with legitimate children and supervising the *oikos*.⁸⁸ Pericles' famous exhortation to his Athenian audience in 430 BC that 'the greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men' (2.45.2) may be a purely Thucydidean invention,⁸⁹ but the sentiment is voiced nonetheless, and seems not wholly out of place with other Athenian writers' opinions.⁹⁰ In a society placing such strictures upon its women, both morally and legally, the Amazon seems to embody every notion of what women ought *not* to do. Casting aside for a moment their identity as foreigners, there are other elements demarcating them as 'other'. They fight in wars, with or without men: although some extreme examples of women contributing to war efforts in other ways can be found in Thucydides and other authors,⁹¹ these women never plan out invasions, arm themselves and actually ride into battle on horseback, as the Amazons do.

In addition to the gender role-reversals present in Amazon society, there is a striking rumour about the Amazons which is repeated so often throughout antiquity and beyond that people still believe it to this day (that is, if they believe Amazons to have been a historical force in the first place): that the Amazons had one breast seared off in infancy. Strabo phrases it thus:

⁸⁸ See Tyrrell (1984) 44-45.

⁸⁹ Rusten (1990) 176: 'That Thucydides himself might agree is suggested by the absence of women elsewhere in his history; whether the husband of Aspasia thought so is another matter entirely.' Plutarch, in *Moralia* 242E, attributes the opinion to Thucydides while declaring his own dislike for it; see also Wiedemann (1983) 163. Richter (1971) 3, also noting the scarcity of women's appearances throughout Thucydides' work, asserts that 'the curtness of the remark seems to reflect a Thucydidean prejudice' and, in contrast, 'Pericles was clearly no woman-hater'; however, Richter's views on the women of Athens are far from approving, and in fact he is questionably selective in his choice and interpretation of evidence. In contrast, Tyrrell and Bennett (1999) seem to attribute the speech and sentiments wholesale to Pericles.

⁹⁰ One particular writer who could fit this mould is Xenophon, who, in the *Oeconomicus*, exhorts men to teach their wives well lest their households be ruined by them – assuming that, if left to their own devices, women would more likely be incompetent in these matters than not (*Oec.* 10-16).

⁹¹ The women of Plataea (Thuc. 2.4.2); the women on the democratic side in the Corcyrean civil war (Thuc. 3.74.1). See Schaps (1982) 195-6 for further examples which appear in Greek literature ranging from Diodorus Siculus to Plutarch.

ἀπάσας δ' ἐπικεκαῦσθαι τὸν δεξιὸν μαστὸν ἐκ νηπίων, ὥστε εὐπετῶς
χρησθαι τῷ βραχίονι πρὸς ἐκάστην χρεῖαν, ἐν δὲ τοῖς πρώτοις πρὸς
ἀκοντισμόν·

(11.5.1)

They all have the right breast seared off from infancy, so that they may use that arm more easily in each task, in particular the hurling of the javelin.

Diodorus' description is very similar:

τῶν δὲ γεννωμένων...τῶν δὲ θηλυτερῶν τὸν δεξιὸν μαστὸν ἐπέκαον, ἵνα μὴ
κατὰ τὰς ἀκμὰς τῶν σωμάτων ἐπαιρόμενος ἐνοχλῇ·

(2.45.3)

And they sear off the right breast of the female children, so that it won't protrude at maturity and get in the way.

Hippocrates, in *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, also includes a passage discussing this tradition, though it is described in relation to the Sauromatae, and the 'Amazons' are never mentioned; rather, as seen above, he takes the lead from Herodotus, who first associated the Sauromatae with Amazons.⁹² Additional etymological 'proof' of such a custom is taken from the formation of the word 'Amazon': Blok has examined both the traditions of the alpha-privative + *mazos* (*madzos*) or *mastos* ('breast') = 'breastless', as well as more unusual formations such as alpha-privative + *maza* (barley or gruel) = 'not eating bread'.⁹³ Overall, however, Blok has pointed out what is most significant about such etymologies:

It should be noted that these representations of the Amazons, for example as women lacking one or both breasts or with an unusual diet,

⁹² Although, according to Littré (1961) 67, a scholiast's annotation here has linked the Sauromatian women and Amazons, naturally enough.

⁹³ Blok (1995) 22-25. Stewart (1995) 579 advances the theory that perhaps the 'breastless' term refers to 'sexual unripeness' of the Amazons, due to their age: many are described as *parthenoi*, and were perhaps adolescents.

are the result of the etymology, not vice versa....the etymology illustrates how language was used to fill in the picture of the Amazons.⁹⁴

The verb used by all three authors to describe the action of ‘searing off’ is *ἐπικαίω*, a term which describes a burning or scorching, and in this case, a cauterizing of the right breast. Such a word brings to mind a painful and brutal image, especially if these are tiny children that are being thus mutilated, which the texts indicate (*ἐκ νηπίων, γεννωμένων*). However, this rumour of Amazon social practices does not only serve to display their outlandish barbarian behaviour, encapsulated in cruel treatment of mere children; at least one scholar has viewed it as a symbol of a repudiation of the breast-feeding role of women.⁹⁵ In choosing to favour warfare, horse-riding, and generally living independent from men over any life of traditional domesticity, the searing-off of one breast for the purposes of combat can confirm such priorities in physical terms. One should view this as rejecting not necessarily a maternal symbol but, more simply, a female symbol. The repudiation of what physically differentiates women from men then releases the Amazon from traditional roles and expectations of her gender, and (apparently, according to ancient authors’ questionable claims about physiology) enables her to further perform in that sphere which men had previously solely dominated – war. The ancient authors detailing such practices perhaps envisaged Amazons as attempting to physically assimilate themselves with men, in order to compete with them in battle; behaving in such a way, so far from any usual concept of ‘femininity’, thus probably made such rumours of seared-off breasts all the more believable to them.

⁹⁴ Blok (1995) 24. She also notes (25) the interesting paradox that while Greek writers never suggest that the word *Amazon* might not be Greek at all, Amazons were constantly regarded as a non-Greek people.

⁹⁵ According to, for instance, Tyrrell (1984) 49; however, given that the women would still have their remaining breast from which to nurture their infants, the argument is not altogether convincing.

What is most intriguing about this aspect of the Amazon myth is that the ‘monomastism’ apparently practiced by these women is never evidenced in Greek or Roman art. This may go some way in proving this to be merely one of the more outlandish claims about Amazons, and an invention which I suspect assists in underlining their unnatural behaviour and savage customs. In fact, it should be interpreted with a view to the tradition of several literary Amazons who rode into battle with *one breast bared* (Penthesileia, Camilla, Asbyrte): such customs could have become confused over time, or exaggerated and embellished to suit the current genre in which the writer was operating – which in the cases of Strabo and Diodorus, were ‘realistic’ historical-ethnographic accounts. Bringing into account the positioning of the Amazon as the ‘opposite’ of all that was deemed ideal and appropriate in a woman, such outlandish tales of self-mutilation certainly contribute to the overall picture of strangeness and abnormality; the historical reality of such practices, then, need not be viewed in earnest, as many over the centuries have done. One should consider the overall picture of the Amazons’ inverted society as an amalgam of features which troubled Greek society. Not only do these women fight in wars, but they also get rid of their male children, and reduce the menfolk to slavery. In seeking an explanation for the mythical women warriors, more information and explanation was required – and duly supplied by those willing to rationally understand the existence of such people; thus the picture of Amazons as truly ‘other’ in every possible way was perpetuated throughout time.

Between Myth and History: Alexander and the Amazon Queen

In one particularly famous case, the myth of the Amazons’ interactions with Greek heroes conflates with the historical ‘reality’ of the Amazon race, and that is in the case of Alexander the Great, and his rumoured dalliance with Thalestris, queen of the Amazons. Here is the best place to position the Alexander/Amazons tale, as it indicates the kind of *mythopoiesis* typified in the

instances concerning Heracles, Theseus and Achilles discussed above, and yet also forms a link to the very real personage of Alexander (rather than a long-ago mythical hero), bringing the tale into the realm of those ‘historical Amazons’ which will be discussed below.⁹⁶

The tradition of Alexander’s own Amazon encounter relates how the Macedonian leader was visited by an Amazon queen, usually named Thalestris, who wished to have a child with him. The implication is that the genes of the most powerful man in the world, combined with those of the most courageous woman in the world, should result in a human being *ὑπερέξειν ἀρετῇ τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων* (Diod. 17.77.3).⁹⁷ Having consorted with Alexander for thirteen days (according to the sources who are particular about this point), Thalestris then apparently went back to her homeland. Since nothing more is heard of this apparent union, it is to be assumed that the exercise, so to speak, was fruitless. Historians who relate the incident treat it with varying degrees of belief.⁹⁸ Curtius and Diodorus relate the encounter in some detail, with no trace of skepticism shown, while Strabo vehemently discounts the tale as *ἀναποδείκτως καὶ ἀπίστως*. Somewhere in the middle, Plutarch – listing each writer for and against the story – finds the story probably a fiction, yet points out what is most important about this fantastical meeting:

⁹⁶ The *Alexander Romance* also mentions Amazons in relation to Alexander (3.25-6), but they are configured as simply one of the tribes in Northern Africa from whom Alexander exacts tribute in his relentless conquest of the known world: the ethnographic description of them owes much to Herodotus, and once they have been threatened into submission, nothing more is heard of them.

⁹⁷ Exactly where the meeting took place is some matter for debate: while Hamilton (1999) 123 asserts that it took place near the River Orexartes (also known as the Tanais – familiar from Herodotus 4.116), others, such as Curtius, explicitly state that the Amazons lived near the border of Hyrcania (6.5.24), while Diodorus (17.77) and Strabo (11.5.4) locate the meeting in Hyrcania. The *Alexander Romance* (3.25-6), meanwhile, locates the Amazons in North Africa, where Diodorus also places the ‘Libyan Amazons’ (3.53.4).

⁹⁸ The incident is discussed in Diodorus Siculus, 17.77; Strabo 11.5.4; Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander* 6.5.24-32; Justin, *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus* 12.3.7-14; and Plutarch, *Alexander* 46. Arrian (7.13) discusses Amazons only in relation to the satrap Atropates dressing up female warriors as Amazons and presenting them to Alexander, but he does not discuss the Thalestris episode: see Bosworth (1988) 65-7.

ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἂν τις οὔτε ἀπιστῶν ᾗττον οὔτε πιστεύων μᾶλλον
Ἀλέξανδρον θαυμάσειε.

(*Alex.* 46.5)

Whether one were to disbelieve or believe this story, it would not diminish or increase admiration for Alexander.

This is indicative of Plutarch's method and aims: as he states himself at the beginning of the *Alexander*, he is not overly concerned with the entirety of events and 'famous actions', but rather signs of the character of the man (*Alex.* 1). But though Plutarch may rightly claim to be writing 'not Histories, but Lives', the other writers mentioned above do not subscribe to such a distinction: they are historians first and foremost.

The reasons for the inclusion of the Amazon tryst can be attributed largely to the mythmaking surrounding Alexander even in his own lifetime. His wish to emulate his heroic ancestors Achilles and Heracles through his travels and conquests, then, would naturally include *something* associated with Amazons, given his predecessors' battlefield encounters with them.⁹⁹ In fact, in situating Alexander's encounter as one of mutual benefit and in the realm of reproduction, rather than on the stage of war, there is a movement beyond mere martial vanquishing of the Amazon. Instead, the Amazon can be co-opted as bedmate (as Theseus had done, though he was unable to keep his Amazon there) and as partner in the creation of offspring which would certainly surpass all others both in pedigree and in natural excellence. And yet, despite such a modification, Thalestris still conforms very much to the model of Amazon dress most vivid from Vergil:

⁹⁹ As Baynham (2001) 122 has phrased it, 'Both Heracles and Achilles had had encounters with Amazons; therefore Alexander must have one. Indeed, we would be more surprised if the traditions had said Alexander never even saw an Amazon, let alone made love to one.'

Vestis non tota Amazonum corpori obducitur; nam laeva pars ad pectus est nuda, cetera deinde velantur.

(Curt. 6.27)

The Amazon's clothing does not cover their whole body; the left side is bare to the breast, while the other side is covered.

In addition, Curtius provides knowledge of the habits of only rearing female children and breast-searing attributed to the Amazons by Strabo and Diodorus (6.28). Such a learned portrait then blends myth with ethnography and history in this account, perhaps motivated by a desire to lend credence to Alexander's meeting with an Amazon.

The authors do not elaborate on whether Thalestris' Amazons live according to the kind of annual mating agreement seen in Strabo (11.5.1); in the absence of such further information, Alexander is virtually presented as the only man worthy of the Amazon's affections. An intriguing detail included by Curtius seems to cast a less-than-flattering light on Alexander at first:

Interrito vultu regem Thalestris intuebatur, habitum eius haudquaquam rerum famae parem oculis perlustrans; quippe omnibus barbaris in corporum maiestate veneratio est, magnorumque operum non alios capaces putant, quam quos eximia specie donare natura dignata est.

(Curt. 65.29)

With a fearless expression, Thalestris contemplated the king, surveying his bearing which was not at all equal to the fame of his exploits; for indeed, greatness of form is venerated by all the barbarians, and they consider no others to be capable of great deeds except for those to whom nature has given exceptional beauty.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ See Baynham (2001) 117 and especially n. 15 on this detail referring perhaps to Alexander's height, and the issues of perspective associated with such conventions: she notes by way of comparison the hostile British traditions which describe Napoleon Bonaparte as a short man, when in fact he was around five foot six – an average height, even today.

However, Alexander evidently proves himself impressive enough to Thalestris – whatever the first impression – as Curtius goes on to report her thirteen-day sojourn with the Macedonian king. Can this success in winning over a barbarian – those people who apparently value good looks over any past proof of valour – be attributed to Alexander’s immense charisma? Not only is it a barbarian queen being won over, but an *Amazon*, whom mythical heroes had to face in battle before any romantic concessions could have been made. If Theseus was cast as ‘so magnetic he can even attract an Amazon’ in the midst of an Amazonomachy with Heracles,¹⁰¹ then Alexander is here envisaged as so magnetic he can even attract an Amazon who has never met him and who initially views him as fairly mediocre.

There are many who dismiss the entire episode as fantasy, of course: Arrian’s complete silence on the issue, and Strabo’s scathing dismissal are two instances of this. Plutarch’s doubt about its veracity is bolstered by an anecdote he supplies regarding Alexander’s contemporary historian Onesicritus:

λέγεται δὲ πολλοῖς χρόνοις Ὀνησίκριτος ὕστερον ἤδη βασιλεύοντι
Λυσιμάχῳ τῶν βιβλίων τὸ τέταρτον ἀναγινώσκειν ἐν ᾧ γέγραπται περὶ
τῆς Ἀμαζόνος· τὸν οὖν Λυσίμαχον ἀτρέμα μειδιάσαντα ‘Καὶ πον,’ φάναι,
‘τότε ἤμην ἐγώ;’

(*Alex.* 46.4-5)

It is said that much later, when Lysimachus had become king, Onesicritus was reading aloud to him the fourth book of his history, in which he had written about the Amazon; and Lysimachus smiled gently and said ‘And where was I at the time?’¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ The irresistible phrasing is Dowden’s (1997) 102.

¹⁰² Pelling (2002) 176 asserts that Plutarch is ‘sceptical, even if he does not exclude the possibility of Amazons completely’.

However, ultimately the veracity of the story is negligible for the purposes of the present research. The real point of interest is that the Amazons were co-opted into the Alexander canon of adventures by several authors because of the potency of the Amazon as a symbol to the Greek audience. The modifications made to the encounter – the opposing Greek hero is no longer purely a martial opponent or forceful abductor, but a potential mate and father of strong, courageous children – also reflect the shifting concerns of the authors to replace forceful conquest with a gentler form of mutual agreement. The legacy of this mythical encounter can even be traced to the modern age: filmmaker Oliver Stone apparently had Alexander’s Amazon lover in mind when formulating the character of Roxane in his 2004 *Alexander*, revealing that he envisaged the love scene between Alexander and Roxane as symbolizing the way in which ‘Alexander consummates the dream of conquering the Amazon’.¹⁰³

Historical Amazons: Herodotus’ Artemisia and Tacitus’ and Dio’s Boudica

Throughout Greek and Roman literature, several historical figures appear who can be classed as Amazon-like in their abilities to lead armies and regal power. The term *virago* may be most appropriate to use here for such women. Artemisia and Tomyris in Asia Minor and Persia, Queens Cartimandua and Boudica¹⁰⁴ in Britain, and Zenobia of Palmyra are all such figures; in the historical characterisation of such women as ‘Amazons’, the preservation and perpetuation of the Amazon figure through the centuries is made possible. Such figures in Greek literature largely symbolise the alien customs of the Persian Empire and its allies; in the Roman literature, they likewise feature in the expansion of the Roman Empire as symbols of the most recent foreign area conquered, and as

¹⁰³ On the director’s commentary to *Alexander: The Director’s Cut* DVD. See also Carney (2010) 155.

¹⁰⁴ For the spelling of the name as Boudica (not Boudicca or Boadicea), see Jackson (1979).

symbols of barbarian lands and non-compliant client rulers. Artemisia is ultimately on the losing side of the Persian war against Greece (though she herself is part-Cretan, and from Halicarnassos), while Boudica and Zenobia are held up as examples of Roman opponents eventually destroyed or otherwise subdued. Other women viewed as particularly powerful within their respective societies, such as Thusnelda (wife of German hero Arminius), are paraded as prized war-prisoners in Roman triumphs.¹⁰⁵ Not once does a historical Amazon-like woman appear on the side of the dominant, or victorious culture – that is, the Greeks or Romans.¹⁰⁶ Just as the mythical Amazons were faced off against pre-eminent heroes, only to be defeated, the historical record shows such *viragines* are also ultimately unsuccessful in their battles against men. This is mainly due to the resistance of Greeks or Romans to include females within their military forces; the only *viragines* encountered are those of the opposing, often strange and barbaric, armies. Two case studies of such historical *viragines* will show how the Greek and Roman treatment of such figures can be seen to follow a similar pattern to the treatment of mythical Amazons.

Herodotus has already been seen to give far greater space to female characters within his *Histories*; examining one particular example of this will give some further idea of how the historical Amazon or *virago* figure can be portrayed in such non-fiction works. Artemisia is a figure who looms large in Herodotus' account of the Persian naval invasion, particularly due, apparently, to Xerxes' reliance on her advice as *γνώμας ἀρίστας* of all his allies, though some have attributed Artemisia's prominence in Herodotus' account to her Halicarnassian heritage,

¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Aurelian paraded ten women, who had been found fighting with the now-defeated Goths, with a placard asserting that they were 'the race of Amazons' (SHA *Aurelian* 34.1).

¹⁰⁶ It should be noted here that Nero, when attempting to suppress an uprising in Gaul, prepared to take a group of his concubines with him, cutting their hair and furnishing them with 'Amazonian axes and shields' (*Nero* 44.1). As some way of explanation for such an action, Kleinbaum (1984) 32 notes that Nero was 'touched perhaps by madness and certainly by a vivid poetic imagination'. The Emperor Commodus also exhibited a predilection for Amazons, dressing his concubine as one and wishing himself to enter the Roman arena as an Amazon (SHA *Comm.* 10.9).

which the writer shared.¹⁰⁷ Artemisia is singled out in several places for both her naval tactics and her exemplary wisdom. Although Herodotus considers her decision to join in the war against Greece a *μάλιστα θῶμα* (7.99), he does not adjudge this to be a shameful or terrible thing, as the Athenians are later said to view it (8.88).¹⁰⁸ Artemisia's seafaring skill is illustrated at 8.87-9, where, finding herself trapped between ally ships and enemy ships, she rams the friendly Calyndian ship, achieving a *δίπλα ἀγαθὰ* (8.87): firstly, the Athenians see this and assume she is one of their own, so leave off pursuing her; and secondly, Xerxes sees this and assumes she has rammed an Athenian ship, so her reputation is increased in his opinion. Such tactical seafaring, if admittedly treacherous and somewhat unheroic, is impressive enough to warrant Herodotus' attention and it remains the only detailed vignette of the whole sea-battle.¹⁰⁹ Crucially, for the purposes of this section, Xerxes makes a telling comment on seeing Artemisia's apparent success: 'My men have become women, and my women men!' In the context of the Amazons – *antianeirai* who are a match for men in battle – such a proclamation of Artemisia's abilities fits her neatly into an Amazon mould. In addition, Artemisia's Carian lineage, as well as her alliance with the Persian Xerxes, also denotes her as inherently non-Greek – which, as has been seen, is a defining feature of Amazons in this period.

In addition, Artemisia fulfils the role of the 'wise advisor', giving advice to Xerxes which is first ignored, and then followed.¹¹⁰ In her first piece of advice to Xerxes, Artemisia is the only one who dares to speak out against the proposed plan to

¹⁰⁷ The excerpts concerning Artemisia in the *Histories* are found at 7.99; 8.68-9; 8.87-9; 8.93; and 8.101-7.

¹⁰⁸ According to de Selincourt's translation, this is due to the fact that she has a 'grown' son who would be capable of commanding the Halicarnassian ships in her stead and that therefore *οὐδεμιῆς ἐούσης ἀναγκαίης* for Artemisia herself to enter the fray; others, including Thompson, read the Greek as meaning 'a young son' and therefore see the stress on Artemisia's *λήματός τε καὶ ἀνδρηίης* which compels her to fight in the sea battle.

¹⁰⁹ Munson (1988) *passim* compares Artemisia's treachery to that of the Athenian hero Themistocles, both representing a self-preservation ethic above all else.

¹¹⁰ Lattimore (1939) 34.

engage the Greek fleet at Salamis; although Xerxes does not follow her advice, he esteems her ‘more than ever’, and is highly pleased with her answers. This, then, leads to his private consultation of Artemisia after the engagement at Salamis – on account of the fact that *πρότερον ἐφαίνετο μούνη νοέουσα τὰ ποιητέα ἦν* (8.101) – and this time, he follows her advice, as it appears Artemisia and Xerxes are like-minded on what should be done (8.103).

Ultimately, Artemisia exhibits not only military skill but also an ability to diplomatically negotiate with Xerxes, which the Persian king views as pre-eminent wisdom and insight. It is only the Athenians who are mentioned as finding the very idea of this female naval commander a *δεινόν*. Neither Xerxes nor the other Persian generals question her role,¹¹¹ and neither indeed does Herodotus, who limits himself to marveling at her as a *θῶμα*, and certainly (given the amount of time he dedicates to relating her exploits) must have some measure of admiration and perhaps even ‘a special fondness’ for her.¹¹² Artemisia’s position of exceptionality – the only female general on either the Greek or Persian side – further cements her Amazon or *virago* identity. Herodotus’ account points out Artemisia as an anomaly, but also as a highly skilled military tactician – just as mythical Amazons challenged the ‘norm’ and yet proved to be impressive on the battlefield.

The most famed heroine of Britain during the Roman period was Boudica, queen of the Iceni tribe of eastern England. Though her appearances in Tacitus’ *Annals* (14.31-37) and Cassius Dio’s *Roman History* (62.1-12) – involving a short background, pre-battle speech to her troops, and ultimate defeat – are fairly brief,

¹¹¹ Although the generals do seem jealous of her special position of honour with Xerxes: at 8.69 they are described as *φθονέοντες*.

¹¹² Thompson (1999) 59, who argues that in fact the portrayal of Artemisia goes beyond the pattern of the ‘wise advisor’ mentioned above at n. 109.

they are striking.¹¹³ Diverse accounts are given as the catalyst for the Icenian uprising. Dio claims the recalling of huge loans to the Britons led to resentment, while Tacitus includes an altogether more personal motive: after the death of Boudica's husband Prasutagus, Boudica was whipped and her two daughters raped by Roman troops, and other prominent Iceni were deprived of their estates, wherein mass outrage erupted and the tribe *rapiunt arma*. Dio's account builds on that of Tacitus in that he includes physical details about Boudica, attributes to her a lengthier speech, and also includes further details about the Icenian troops' slaughter and desecration of Roman settlers. The physical description of Boudica found in Dio begins as follows:

ἦν δὲ καὶ τὸ σῶμα μεγίστη καὶ τὸ εἶδος βλοσυρωτάτη τό τε βλέμμα
δριμυτάτη καὶ τὸ φθέγμα τραχὺ εἶχε...

(62.3-4)

She was of very tall stature and most terrifying in countenance, and the look in her eye was very fierce and her voice was harsh...¹¹⁴

Dio also generously accords to Boudica 'more wisdom than women normally have' (62.3). Certainly, the presentation of Boudica (and her Iceni) in Dio relies heavily on standard descriptions of 'barbarian' peoples: not only is her colourful jewellery and clothing commented on, but in addition, the Iceni's habits of using 'extra-military display as opposed to strategic calculation'¹¹⁵ (war-songs, Druids gesturing wildly) and animal portents interpreted as signs from non-Roman gods (Andraste in particular) also add to the picture of a culture alien to the Roman norm. The actual speeches attributed to Boudica, however, contain elements which certainly are not alien to a Roman audience: the concern with *libertas* in the

¹¹³ Dio's account only survives as an epitome written by one Xiphilinus in the eleventh century AD; some scholars, such as Bulst (1961) 508 blame what they perceive to be Dio's 'lack of clarity' on Xiphilinus' epitomizing abilities. Overbeck (1969) 129-30 is even more vehement in his distaste for Dio's account, which he describes as 'so full of words yet so empty of information'.

¹¹⁴ Fraser (1988) 59-60 discusses the recurring theme, over the centuries, of attributing to warrior women and queens a harsh or strident voice, and almost universal male disapproval for such a trait; in contrast, she notes, queens with 'dulcet tones' are spoken of approvingly.

¹¹⁵ Roberts (1988) 126.

face of imminent slavery in Tacitus' account is a point which Roberts has argued would make the Icenian rebellion 'seem a more noble undertaking' to a Roman audience.¹¹⁶ While there are certain stock elements to the presentation, it is not an altogether unsympathetic portrait.

Firstly, let us turn to Tacitus' speech, the shorter and more concise by far of the two. Boudica appeals to the Icenii as a 'woman of the people' whose body has been lashed and her daughters' honour 'tarnished';¹¹⁷ this she blames on Roman 'avarice' (*cupidines*). But she claims that the *dei* are on the Icenian side, and the Romans will not be able to face the huge and clamorous army of Britons. The speech ends with Boudica proclaiming 'such is the settled purpose of a woman – as for the men, they may live on and be slaves!' The alliterative *viverent viri et servirent* underscores both Boudica's gender, as well as the concern with freedom from the yoke of Roman slavery.¹¹⁸ Dio's speech, however, has a different emphasis. Boudica's own torture and the rape of her daughters are not mentioned; it is partially a tirade against Roman oppression of the residents of Britain (through taxation and colonization), partially a celebration of British customs over those of the Romans (especially concerning war), and it ends with a long rebuke of Nero (including slights against his lyre-playing and dubious masculinity).¹¹⁹ The release of a hare from the folds of her dress 'as a kind of divination' marks out Boudica as a devotee of unknown religious customs, which therefore aids in a depiction of an alien, barbarian queen; such religion is juxtaposed immediately afterward with the *δεινοτάτον καὶ θηριωδέστατον*

¹¹⁶ Roberts (1988) 127.

¹¹⁷ Adler (2008) observes rape as 'an event that validates an uprising', comparing the rape of Lucretia which leads to the demise of monarchy and rise of the Republic.

¹¹⁸ Santoro L'Hoir (1994) *passim* but particularly 10-11 reads the entire passage about Boudica as a condemnation of the *dux femina* by Tacitus, and this point of the speech as an implicit criticism of the Icenii's actual servitude, which is that they are men being led by a woman.

¹¹⁹ Adler (2008) 193 views the tirade against Nero as indicative of 'Dio's overall impression of him', and also as implicitly condemning the Roman people who would 'allow such a weak, 'feminine' emperor to rule over [them]'.

atrocities perpetrated upon the people of two unnamed Roman towns, where apparently the slaughter and torture was accompanied by sacrifices and banquets ‘particularly in the grove of Andate’.¹²⁰ The depiction of Boudica in Dio is altogether more ‘Amazonian’ than Tacitus’ portrait, in terms of her military potential (her Iceni destroy two towns, though they are ultimately defeated in a pitched battle at 62.12), strange customs, and seemingly ferocious actions. In addition, the depiction of Boudica’s pre-Roman Britain as ‘a Valhalla free from taxation’ and ‘an idyllic golden age’ assists in positioning the Icenian queen alongside other Amazon figures such as Camilla and Penthesileia, whose lifestyles likewise eschew modernity and materialism, focusing on a virginal life among the woodlands, and with little concern for Roman or Greek mores.

Antonia Fraser has discussed the intriguing popularity of Boudica throughout Britain’s history (particularly since the rebirth of enthusiasm for Tacitus’ work in the Renaissance), and various configurations of this fascination are apparent. Fraser notes the statue of Boudica near the Houses of Parliament in London, sculpted by Thomas Thornycroft and eventually erected in 1902, the year following the death of Britain’s longest-serving monarch (male or female), Queen Victoria.¹²¹ The enduring popularity of a woman perceived as a kind of ‘national hero’ such as Boudica can be linked (through Boudica’s identity as a *virago* and ‘warrior queen’) to the enduring popularity of the Amazon; while not any *Greek’s* idea of a national hero, the Amazon remains a popular touchstone throughout all the genres of literature discussed here. In art, too, as we shall see now, this mythical warrior woman was able to exert a powerful influence over vase-painters and sculptors of public buildings alike, which resulted in a visual record of the ancient obsession with the Amazon.

¹²⁰ Andate (62.7) and Andraste (62.6) are largely thought to be one and the same: see Adler (2008) 190 and especially n. 44.

¹²¹ Fraser (1988) 297-8.

Chapter Two: The Ancient Amazons in Art

It is now necessary to depart from the varied Greek and Roman literary discussions of Amazons, in order to turn to the depictions of them in ancient art. This will allow for an appreciation of the way in which the Amazon has maintained a grip on the different modes of representation. A thematic and diachronic assessment of how the Amazon is presented in both sculpture and vase-painting, using some particularly prominent and useful examples, will add to this chapter's overall evaluation of the woman warrior in the ancient imagination, and the characteristics by which she is identified.

Amazons were an exceptionally popular motif in Greek art, both in architectural and freestanding sculpture, and in vase-painting. The depictions can be roughly divided into two central themes: Amazonomachies, which are the battles between Amazons and heroes, such as Heracles, Theseus, and Achilles (along with their amassed forces); and Amazons arming and preparing for battle. By far the most popular are the Amazonomachies, which were featured in the sculpture of prominent public buildings such as the Athenian Treasury at Delphi and the Parthenon, as well as appearing on the shield of Athena Parthenos inside the temple. Such scenes were also popular in vase-painting. Heracles' initial prominence in the Amazonomachies gives way over time to that of Theseus, his younger and (to an Athenian audience) more civilised comrade. Given the equally intense fascination for Trojan war scenes, episodes featuring the encounter between Penthesileia and Achilles were also common. Any analysis of the Amazon in Greek vase-painting and sculpture is naturally hindered by the fact that much original material is now lost to us. Some notable examples of such 'lost' works are the Athenian Theseion and Stoa Poikile, and Pheidias' cult statue of Zeus at Olympia. However, a discussion of certain works which *are* extant can

give an insight into how the Amazon was presented in these genres of art, and in this area the works of Von Bothmer (1957) and Devambez (1981) are essential. The Amazon is more popular in Greek art than later, Roman art, for various reasons. The lack of direct Roman interaction with Amazons remains a central problem, though it did not entirely stifle the interest in Amazons as artistic subjects. Therefore, although more room will be devoted to the sculpture and vase-painting of Athenian and other Greek city-states, a short discussion on Roman sarcophagi featuring (in particular) the Achilles/Penthesileia battle will be included.

Vase-painting: Amazons as Warriors

The first Amazons appear in art on a fragmentary votive shield found in Tiryns (fig. 1). Its date is uncertain, but it is generally thought to be from around the early seventh century BC.¹²² The shield shows a sword-brandishing male figure, wearing a short tunic and crested helmet, clutching a spear-wielding Amazon (who wears a long decorated skirt) by her helmet crest. Though the two main figures take up the majority of the shield, there are other, smaller figures (one male, one female) on either side. It is with the second quarter of the sixth century, in Attic black-figure vase painting, that Amazons abruptly proliferate, arriving (as von Bothmer states) ‘suddenly, and in force, without any apparent antecedents.’¹²³

¹²² Von Bothmer (1957) cites Cook’s (1934-5) 207 postulation of such a date, which Cook had based on ‘affinities both to fibulae of Hampe’s two earlier classes (eighth-early seventh centuries) and to Attic vases of the early ‘Black and White’ style’ (what he terms ‘Middle Protoattic’ and which displayed ‘developed Orientalizing style and no longer Geometric form’, and is prominent for its use of black varnish and white paint).

¹²³ Von Bothmer (1957) 6.

Fig. 1: Greek vs. Amazon: votive shield, Nauplia 4509 from Tiryns (AG4 I.1a).

The overwhelming trend throughout this black-figure period (approximately 575-530 BC) is for scenes of Amazonomachies featuring Heracles as the attacking hero, distinguished by his common identifying elements of lionskin cloak and club – though his weapons are by no means limited to the club, for he also carries his bow and arrow, and brandishes swords, as is the case on the Timiades Painter's neck amphora (fig. 2). In terms of the Amazons' placement on these vases and their sartorial characterization, they are inevitably placed on the right-hand, or 'losing' side of a panel; Heracles is often reaching out with one hand to grasp the closest Amazon's helmet crest (as with the Tiryns shield) and raising his weapon of choice with the other (fig. 3). Amazons from this black-figure period are largely garbed like Greek hoplites, in short chitons (sometimes with patterned borders), with greaves, breastplates and helmets, while their male opponents are shown naked (though occasionally wearing a *himation* or animal skin cloak).¹²⁴ However, from around 550 onward (and increasingly toward the end of the sixth century), elements of Thracian and Scythian iconography appear in the dress and weapons

¹²⁴ Shapiro (1983) 106.

of the Amazons. Such features include the *pelta* (crescent-shaped shield), animal skins (such as leopards), pointed Scythian caps, patterned trousers, and bows and arrows (predominantly used by Scythians elsewhere). Such an influx can be attributed to a growing familiarity with the clothing of inhabitants of such areas, or (if not first-hand familiarity) at least *reports* by travelers of such strange and alien outfits – particularly given the proximity of the Ionian Greeks to Scythian territories.¹²⁵

The growing numbers of foreign-dressed Amazons after 480 BC – the date of the final defeat of the Persians by Athenian-led forces at Salamis – has been observed by many scholars and is most often attributed to an Athenian desire to relive their victory through depiction of other past triumphs over foreign races, effectively casting the Amazons as ‘stand-ins’ for the Persians.¹²⁶ However, with the advent of the red-figure technique in around 530-520 BC, vase painters were suddenly afforded far greater opportunities in terms of showing detail, pattern, and drapery with ease, and thus it seems only natural that Amazon costumes should, over the course of the fifth century, become more lavishly decorative and outlandish until reaching the point illustrated by the Suessula Painter’s neck amphora (fig. 4).¹²⁷ But although these features gain in popularity and soon seem the vogue for Amazon fashion, Amazons dressed in the same manner as Greek (clothed) warriors still continue to be depicted, often alongside their more garishly garbed comrades. Veness has used the Penthesileia Painter’s name vase to illustrate this

¹²⁵ Bähler (2005) 116.

¹²⁶ For proponents of this theory, see, for instance, Boardman (1982) 5, Tyrrell (1984) 5, Shapiro (1983) 106 esp. n. 9, Hall (1989) 68-9, and Schwab (2005) 182 (in reference to the Parthenon west metopes); contrast Veness (2002).

¹²⁷ The movement toward detailed costuming did not happen immediately: see, for instance, Douris’ kantharos, Brussels A718 (*AGA LXX.4*; *LIMC* ‘Amazones’ 83) and the Berlin Painter’s hydria, New York Met. 10.210.19 (*AGA LXXI.1*; *LIMC* ‘Achilleus’ 734), both of which date from 490 yet retain simple, Greek-style chitons for the Amazons.

Fig. 2: Heracles vs. Amazons: Timiades Painter's 'Tyrrenian' neck amphora, Boston 98.916 from Vulci (AGA V, *LMC* 'Amazones' 9).

Fig. 3: Heracles vs. Amazons: Painter of Berlin 1686's amphora, Bologna PU 192 from Vulci (AGA XXVIII).

juxtaposition and from such evidence postulates that the depiction of Amazons had ‘much wider appeal...than to symbolise a past victory over the Persians.’¹²⁸ It is probable that Penthesileia’s depiction on this vase has been configured with a more pressing issue in mind: namely, the romantic connection between her and Achilles, who is in the process of delivering the fatal wound, a point which is discussed further below.

Fig. 4: Amazons vs. Greeks: Suessula Painter’s neck amphora, New York 44.11.12 from Suessula (AGI LXXXI.3).

Though historical context certainly has its place in interpretation of ancient art, particularly in the absence of contemporary scholarly discussion of said art, to reduce the Amazon figure to a mere Persian proxy is to neglect other ideological facets of the woman warrior. As Stewart and Veness (among others) have elucidated, the issue of gender – Amazons as women, not just foreigners – also figures prominently in depicting the Amazon as a danger to the *polis* and *oikos*; unmarried, untamed, she represents ‘the threat that every adolescent girl poses to her father’s authority’ inherent in her liminality and potential to control her own

¹²⁸ Veness (2002) 95.

sexual destiny.¹²⁹ Of the female characters depicted in vase-painting, Amazons hold a unique position: though goddesses such as Athene or Artemis were depicted supporting favourite warriors or overseeing the punishment of transgressors, and courtesans and flute-girls were shown in symposium scenes, Amazons were the only mortal women ever depicted participating in battle scenes.

In addition to the new variations in Amazon clothing, the progress made in red-figure vases also results in far fewer Heracleian Amazonomachies – in fact, no Attic vases are found depicting such scenes after the mid-fifth century.¹³⁰ At this very same time the first certain identification of Theseus in an Amazonomachy scene can be made, a shift in focus possibly inspired by two buildings which no longer exist – the Stoa Poikile and the Theseion.¹³¹ These two monumental structures (described in the travelogues of Pausanias, 1.15.2 and 1.17.2), together with the Athenian Treasury at Delphi, undoubtedly assisted in pushing Theseus to the fore as Athens' civic hero of choice.¹³² Scholars assert that the Treasury metopes illustrate Heracles' and Theseus' 'joint expedition to Themiscyra', if such an expedition took place.¹³³ Theseus' association with a hero of Heracles' stature certainly does him no harm: such a connection, alongside his own identity as Athenian royalty (as the son of Aegeus) and own set of 'labours' (slaying the Minotaur, defeating the outlaws Periphetes and Sinis, battling the savage Centaurs, uniting the Attic demes) contribute to a solid heroic background which

¹²⁹ Stewart (1995a) 580.

¹³⁰ Von Bothmer (1957) 133.

¹³¹ Stewart (1995) 577; Boardman (1982) 11-12. For more on the Stoa Poikile and the Theseion, see Boardman (1982) 16-18. Some have attributed the new emphasis on Theseus to the influence of an (now lost) epic *Theseid*, but Walker (1995) 38-9 thoroughly refutes past suggestions surrounding such an epic poem, and ends his discussion by saying 'whether we turn to Greek writers and scholiasts or to Greek artists, there is no evidence for this hypothetical poem'.

¹³² Additionally important was the recovery of Theseus' supposed bones from the island of Scyros in 470 by the general Cimon: see Plutarch *Theseus* 36.

¹³³ Merck (1978) 102; von Bothmer (1957) 118. This building's sculptural programme is discussed further below.

included several ‘civilising’ motifs differentiating him from Heracles.¹³⁴ In terms of vase-painting, Theseus’ Amazonomachy in which he gained possession of Antiope/Hippolyta as well as the retaliatory Amazon invasion of Athens are both thought to be represented in extant vase-painting. The successful Athenian repulse of the Amazons from the city provided not only the chance for Athenian self-aggrandizing public oratory, but also celebration through art. Ultimately, and perhaps curiously ironically, although Theseus replaces Heracles in artistic popularity (particularly with regard to vase-painting), it is the Amazons themselves who remain constant artistic favourites, no matter which hero they are matched against. And though he may take the place of Heracles in popularity, there still only exist around twenty-one vases depicting Theseus, which is a far cry from the over two hundred in which Heracles is identified; even fewer vases depict Achilles and Penthesileia (ten), as we shall see.¹³⁵ One possible reason for Theseus’ comparative scarcity is that, as Neils has suggested, ‘it is not always possible to distinguish Theseus from the other Greek warriors...when his name is not inscribed’; thus, many Greek/Amazon battles are merely classified as ‘generic’ due to the unknown identities of the participants.¹³⁶ One good example in which Theseus’ name *is* inscribed, however, is on the squat lekythos at Boston (fig. 5). As was the case with Heracles, many of the representations affirmed as Theseus follow a certain pattern, as on this vase: a central warrior is flanked by comrades, and each Greek is paired with an Amazon opponent.

¹³⁴ Isocrates’ phrasing (*Helen* 24), discussed previously at page 20, is that Theseus’ deeds were more ‘helpful’ and of ‘vital importance’ to the Greeks than those of Heracles.

¹³⁵ These figures come from Stewart (1995) 594.

¹³⁶ Neils (1994) 943; the number of ‘Generic Battles’ according to Stewart (1995) 594 far outweighs the number of ‘Theseus Battles’.

Fig 5: Theseus vs. Hippolyta: Squat lekythos, Boston 95.48 from Athens (AGA LXXVII.6, *LMC* 'Amazones' 240).

The third hero popularly associated with Amazons is Achilles. However, despite the popularity of Trojan War scenes in vase-painting, episodes that can be easily identified as Achilles and an Amazon (usually Penthesileia, due to her famous single combat with Achilles in the lost *Aethiopis*) are few.¹³⁷ One of the most famous of this type contains a valuable identifying inscription labeling the Greek warrior *AXIAIEYΣ* and the Amazon *ΠΕΝΘΕΣΙΑΕΑ* – this is the black-figure neck amphora by Exekias (fig. 6). Dating to around 540-530 BC, the scene is memorable and yet simple: the two warriors face each other, with Achilles at the very moment of plunging his spear into Penthesileia's throat. Von Bothmer notes the way in which the 'blood gushes forth', in comparison with the relatively bloodless Heracleian Amazonomachies.¹³⁸ The vase's scene brings to mind not only the moment of Achilles' fatal blow, as had been depicted in the *Aethiopis* and

¹³⁷ This could be due to the Amazons' relatively late showing at the Trojan War. In the Epic cycle tradition, they arrive after the death of Hector when the battle is in its tenth and final year, and only appear in the *Aethiopis*, ruling out any possibility of extra-martial depictions; alternatively, the popularity of scenes showing the Sack of Troy (by which time all Penthesileia's Amazons had been killed) over Amazon scenes may be a root cause.

¹³⁸ Von Bothmer (1957) 72.

was later to be depicted in the *Posthomerica*, but also the idea of Achilles' admiration (or love?) for the dying Amazon leader.

Fig. 6: Achilles vs. Penthesileia: Exekias' neck amphora, London B 210 from Vulci (*AGA* LI.1, *LMC* 'Achilleus' 723).

Their eyes meet in a way described by various scholars as 'poignant' and 'striking', and the exchange of glances is cited as proof that Achilles 'seems to have fallen in love with her at this moment'.¹³⁹ However, the *Posthomerica* itself contains no such loaded looks or sudden surges of love as the fateful spear is plunged in; it is after he has already stabbed her twice on the battlefield and she is utterly helpless that her helmet is removed, and her beauty bedazzles onlookers.¹⁴⁰ In addition, there is no mention, in either the summary of the *Aethiopis* or in the *Posthomerica*, that Penthesileia reciprocated Achilles' supposed love – though, of course, given the later tradition of Theseus' forced abduction of and 'marriage' to an Amazon queen, perhaps the question of an Amazon's feelings are quite irrelevant. Details of this ilk prove the inconsistencies and disparities in myth over

¹³⁹ Stevenson (1999) 146; Woodford (1993) 89.

¹⁴⁰ For that matter, in Quintus' work Penthesileia is mounted and speared through into her horse by Achilles, and then falls to the ground; no horse is present in Exekias' work.

centuries and the danger of relying on a late source such as Quintus for supporting evidence to contextualise artworks from the 6th century BC (such as Exekias' work here). Artists are not necessarily working from a particular literary text when depicting such myth, and in fact it can be fairly fruitless to try to assume such connections; rather, the 'moment' that Exekias or the Penthesileia Painter chooses to depict should be assessed on its own merits rather than used as 'proof' of one literary tradition or another.¹⁴¹

Another vase, traditionally (but by no means unanimously) thought to depict Achilles and Penthesileia at the Trojan War, is the Penthesileia Painter's name vase, held in Munich (fig. 7). Two central figures fill the most part of the tondo, the Greek naked but for a cloak, helmet and greaves, and the Amazon dressed in a Greek-style chiton and no armour whatsoever. Two comrade figures fill the remaining space at either side: a clothed and armed Greek, and a prone Amazon clad in patterned trousers and jacket with a chiton over the top.¹⁴² The absence of labeling inscriptions (in contrast to Exekias' vase discussed above) prevent any solid claim to be made for definite identification of the two central figures.¹⁴³ However, general scholastic agreement now attests that this depicts either an Achilles/Penthesileia battle at Troy, or an Amazon/Greek battle at Athens. Von Bothmer himself leans toward the latter proposition, despite the heavy tendency in modern scholarship to easily label it as the former. The exchange of looks is again present between the opponents here, which contributes to the Achilles/Penthesileia proposition. However, the reaching up to the Greek's chin

¹⁴¹ Hardwick (1990) 23-8 elucidates this problem well: 'when we look at sixth-century and fifth-century vases we have to contend with the fact that the association made by the Hippocratic authors and in the fourth century by Isocrates (for example) are part of *our* cultural experience, but not necessarily that of archaic and early classical painters.'

¹⁴² See Veness (2002) 101 for a discussion of the juxtaposition of Greek- and foreign-dressed Amazons in relation to this vase.

¹⁴³ Von Bothmer (1957) 147 notes that past viewings of the vase have led scholars to claim the scene represented Semiramis being killed by her son, or Dolon being killed by Odysseus and Diomedes, before the identification of Amazons was made by Panofka in 1847.

is a gesture of supplication and the look of the Amazon is appropriate to such a plea for mercy, rather than a sure sign of a 'love connection'.¹⁴⁴ Von Bothmer's assertion of this much-discussed element of these vases seems most sensible to me:

[the Penthesileia Painter] has put much intensity into the faces, but who is to say whether the expressions reflect love or hate, remorse or reproach, or other emotions?¹⁴⁵

Fig. 7: Greek and Amazon: Penthesileia Painter's cup, Munich 2688 from Vulci (*AGA LXXI.4*, *LMC* 'Achilleus' 724).

¹⁴⁴ Von Bothmer (1957) 143-8 places the Penthesileia Painter's name vase (Munich 2688) in a group with three other similar duel-style Amazonomachies, and of two of these he notes the gesture of mercy (*LXXI.1* and *LXXI.2*; of *LXXI.3* he notes the upturned palm but does not suggest a plea for mercy); of Munich 2688 he states 'I am inclined to see less sentiment in the gesture of her arms than is commonly assumed; with her right hand she braces herself against the chest of the Greek while with her left she attempts to ward off or block the fatal thrust of the sword.'

¹⁴⁵ Von Bothmer (1957) 148.

Pollitt also provides a useful amalgam of the two possibilities:

[Achilles'] thrusting arm seems to freeze as anger, duty and pride begin to conflict with love and regret. Penthesileia grasps him feebly, partly imploring, partly resisting. In her case fear and pride, and perhaps also love, mix.¹⁴⁶

Reeder has argued for the importance of the 'fusion of eroticism and aggression' in the scenes of heroes in combat with Amazons, and this seems particularly applicable to the Penthesileia Painter's vase.¹⁴⁷ Thus, while this Amazon must be defeated, she is also undeniably feminine and attractive to the attacking Greek warrior, and such a depiction in turn inspires conflicting emotions.

In addition, a unique and early example survives of Achilles actually carrying Penthesileia's body from the battlefield, a motif that was to become popular in the mid-fourth century; the stance of the figures is similar to that of similar scenes in which an Amazon carries off a dead comrade.¹⁴⁸ Though the vase is not inscribed, von Bothmer's identification of Achilles and Penthesileia is to be preferred over the suggestion of Theseus and Antiope.¹⁴⁹ At least two South Italian vases from around 360 show Achilles with a facial expression not particularly victorious or pleased, attempting to drag a limp Penthesileia from the battlefield, while the battle goes on unabated around them.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, this aspect of the story may have been one that grew increasingly appealing throughout the centuries, leading finally to the version espoused by Quintus. Some proof of this may be found in the second- and third-century Roman sarcophagi which feature Achilles holding a limp and dying Penthesileia: this will be addressed further below, in the section on sculpture.

¹⁴⁶ Pollitt (1972) 22.

¹⁴⁷ Reeder (1995b) 374.

¹⁴⁸ Achilles carrying Penthesileia: *AGI* LVIII.4; Amazon carrying comrade: *AGI* LXI.3, 4, 5 and 6.

¹⁴⁹ Von Bothmer (1957) 89.

¹⁵⁰ Volute krater, Schloss Fasanerie 178, from Apulia (*LIMC* 'Achilleus' 740); and the volute krater, Basel Antiksmuseum, from Apulia (*LIMC* 'Achilleus' 741).

Vase-Painting: Arming and Preparing Amazons

We have seen that the popularity of Amazonomachies remained constant, whichever Greek hero happened to be leading the charge. However, Amazon scenes without any attacking Greeks also survive and the breadth (or lack thereof) of variation in them is intriguing. The vases largely show Amazons riding horses in groups (perhaps in the process of riding off to the next battle as, more often than not, they are armed), near horses with weapons, or arming.¹⁵¹ A small number do not show horses, but instead what could be termed ‘Amazons at rest’. However, they never can be mistaken for normal Greek women at rest, as even when relaxing the Amazons hold spears and shields, and are notable for their elaborately patterned foreign dress involving trousers and jackets (particularly with the advent of red-figure; fig. 8). Other than these scenes, very little exists depicting Amazons carrying out any other activities as was the case with Greek women (for instance, washing clothing, offering sacrifices and preparing for festivals, in wedding and funeral scenes, caring for children). This is certainly indicative of the concept of Amazons in the Athenian and larger Greek mind: their lack of ‘normal’ lives – and in fact, according to later writers, frankly *abnormal* customs – created a notable absence of Amazons depicted doing normal things. On the other hand, the most abnormal customs so dwelt on by Strabo and Diodorus are never depicted in art either, so the artistic Amazon is left to live out a highly one-dimensional life.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ See the section in *LMC* ‘Amazones’ at 709-774.

¹⁵² Although, of course, Diodorus and Strabo are both writing centuries after the Greek vase-painters, it is possible that such stories about Amazon customs existed in the 6th and 5th centuries. However, the lack of depictions of them should most probably be attributed to the vast popularity of battle scenes over any other Amazonian activity.

Fig. 8: Amazons: Eretria Painter's cup, Naples 2613 from Nola (AGI LXXXV).

Artists, then, can emphasise (and suppress) wholly different aspects of Amazon mythology than the elements authors choose to focus on; one particular illustration of this is the lack of artistic evidence for the breast-searing myth popular in literature from *Airs, Waters, Places* onward. Not a single (extant) artistic representation exists in which an Amazon has one breast seared off in the tradition which Diodorus and Strabo maintained was commonplace. Certainly, one breast can be exposed in battle scenes (more often in sculpture than in vase-painting), which in turn Vergil and Silius Italicus depicted in their literary portraits. Cohen has cogently argued that the exposed breast of an Amazon in art stands as an 'intentional symbol of violent defeat', and given that the martial exploits of the Amazons were continuously met with defeat, this seems a convenient visual cue to indicate imminent conquest.¹⁵³ Indeed, the exposure of one breast is probably more prominent in sculpture than in vase-painting due to the fondness of painters to invent ever more varied costumes for their Amazon

¹⁵³ Cohen (1997) 74.

subjects, which run the gamut from hoplite-style breastplates and chitons to full-length bodysuits with vertical stripes and animal skin cloaks. The flowing chitons preferred by sculptors afford more opportunity for casual (or obvious) breast exposure, as well as providing the artist with a garment which could reveal their gifts for anatomical depiction. Here seems a fitting place to turn to these sculptors and their work.

Sculpture: Amazons as Warriors

Although there originally existed more examples of sculptural Amazonomachies, the number of those extant is limited. The best instances of those that survive – and on which the present research focuses – are from the Athenian Treasury at Delphi, from the west metopes from the Parthenon, from (copies of) the shield of Athena Parthenos at the same temple, from the temple of Apollo at Bassae, and (copies of) the ‘Ephesian Amazons’.¹⁵⁴ In addition, the Mausoleum at Halicarnassos featured a frieze depicting an Amazonomachy and several Roman funerary sarcophagi depicted the Amazonomachy at Troy, which will be discussed subsequently in order to illustrate the pervading influence of the Greek concept upon Caria (the Mausoleum) and the Roman Empire (the sarcophagi). The Ephesian Amazons are the only sculpture of this group not to depict an Amazonomachy, as they are stand-alone statues which, according to Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* 34.53), were the fruits of a contest to furnish the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus with an Amazon sculpture. Nothing of the original statues survives; however, the Roman copies (and copies of those copies) are spread throughout several museum collections. The immense popularity of Amazons in battle (over any other type of depiction) provides for a distinction between the sculpture and

¹⁵⁴ One example of sculptural Amazons which is no longer extant is the depiction of them on part of Pheidias’ cult statue of Zeus at Olympia (Pausanias 5.11.4). I will not be discussing instances of single Amazons within a more expansive theme, such as the labours of Heracles: suffice to say that this theme was certainly popular in Greek sculpture and one example of it is on the metopes of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia.

vase-painting; while we saw that there is a fair number of vases showing Amazons merely *preparing for* (rather than waging) battle, the same cannot be said for sculpture, in which Amazonomachies take precedence. Since a chronological discussion seems best, the oldest of these sculptural Amazons – the archaic-style metopes from the Athenian Treasury at Delphi – shall be discussed first.

The Athenian Treasury, thought to date to around 490 BC, was a small, but prominently positioned building on the Sacred Way, leading to the Temple of Apollo.¹⁵⁵ It featured the women warriors battling Heracles and Theseus on the metopes, and also, surprisingly, as acroteria, dismounting from horses.¹⁵⁶ Theseus is here co-opted into the heroic cannon through association with Heracles. Given that the building was apparently built as a thanks-offering after the victory at the battle of Marathon¹⁵⁷ and the association of both heroes with this battle (the Athenians encamped in a Heracleian shrine the night before the battle;¹⁵⁸ a ghostly apparition of Theseus appeared alongside the Athenians in the midst of the battle¹⁵⁹), the link seems rational enough. The issue of Theseus' rising importance as a 'new hero for a new constitution', combined with the political significance of the entwining of Heracles and Theseus (for which Neer argues), is particularly helpful for an understanding of the wider implications of the building.¹⁶⁰ In terms of the function of the Amazon figures in these sculpted metopes, they have largely been viewed as Persians-by-proxy: yet another example of Amazons standing in

¹⁵⁵ Ridgway (1977) 236 is among those who posit an earlier date for the Treasury. However, the controversy that once raged over the dating of the Treasury now seems all but resolved: see Neer (2004) 67 especially n. 12. The difficulty ultimately lay in reconciling Pausanias' given date of 490 BC with the distinctly archaic style of the sculpture (which could suggest an earlier date), and doubt over the relation of the base to treasury. However, recent French excavations have proved the two structures to be integral and therefore both to date from after 490 BC.

¹⁵⁶ Von Bothmer (1957) 119; Ridgway (1977) 236-8 especially n. 22.

¹⁵⁷ The limestone base reads *ΑΘΕΝΑΙΟΙ Τ[Ο]Ι ΑΠΟΛΛΟΝ[Ι ΑΠΟ ΜΕΔ]ΟΝ ΑΚΡΟΘΙΝΙΑ ΤΕΣ ΜΑΡΑΘ[Ο]ΝΙ Μ[ΑΧΕ]Σ*: 'The Athenians to Apollo as offerings from the Battle of Marathon, taken from the Medes.' See Neer (2004) 66.

¹⁵⁸ Hdt. 6.108.

¹⁵⁹ Plut. *Theseus* 35.5.

¹⁶⁰ See Neer (2004) 75-77. See also Ridgway (1977) 236.

for the recently defeated barbarians.¹⁶¹ Which Amazonomachy in particular is depicted here is also cause for debate: since both heroes encountered the warrior women, it could either be the Heracleian or Heracleian/Thesean expedition to Themiscyra, or it could be the Thesean repulse of the Amazons from Athens, the latter of which would reinforce the Amazons-as-Persians theory.¹⁶² In either case, the metopes themselves are unable to settle the case, and we must focus on the central fact that an Amazonomachy (wherever it may be set) is being depicted.

Significantly later than the Athenian Treasury, the next sculptural Amazons we shall turn to are the west metopes of the Parthenon in Athens (447-440 BC), though their identification as such has come into question. The central problem surrounding these sculptures is the degree of damage which they have suffered. This damage may be at the root of a few scholars' refusal to interpret the sculptures as an Amazonomachy but, by and large, they are generally acknowledged as such.¹⁶³ Schwab asserts it to be 'most likely the Attic version of the Amazonomachy', which would be most appropriate on a temple in Athens, home of Theseus, celebrating Greek and divine victories over unruly or uncivilised foes.¹⁶⁴ Castriota takes the connection even further and ascertains a link between the Amazonomachy on the west metopes and the contest between Athene and Poseidon on the west pedimental sculpture, positing that the common element of Amazons battling Athenians (the only autochthonous race in Greece) and Athene flanked by Cecrops (the autochthonous king of Athens) is the message

¹⁶¹ However, Ridgway (1977) 236-8 and n. 22, arguing for an earlier date, maintains therefore that the Amazonomachy cannot be read as an allusion to victory over the Persians, and in particular cites the Amazon acroteria as implying 'no concept of defeat, but rather one of supernatural power.'

¹⁶² Von Bothmer (1957) 118 prefers the Heracleian expedition to Themiscyra, citing similarities between these metopes and red-figure vase paintings showing Heracleian Amazonomachies.

¹⁶³ Wesenberg (1983) 203-8 refutes all the previous doubters' arguments fairly convincingly.

¹⁶⁴ Schwab (2005) 178. Most scholars agree with this viewpoint: see, for instance, Castriota (1992) 143; Boardman (1982) 27.

of ultimate ‘repression or containment of women by autochthonous males’.¹⁶⁵ Though the metopes suffer from serious erosion, it is possible to make out mounted Amazons facing Greeks on foot, which seem to alternate with metopes showing both fighters on foot. Even though the metopes are damaged, however, the fact still remains that the Amazons were employed as subject matter for the most important temple in the Athenian *polis*: prominent placement indeed for an apparent ‘enemy of the state’ – but highly logical once the importance of the past Athenian triumph in fending off an Amazon invasion is recognised and taken into consideration.

Much better preserved than the metopes – albeit through vase painting imitations and Roman copies – are depictions of the Amazonomachy which originally graced the shield of the cult statue of Athene inside the Parthenon. The round shield of Athene, at the centre of which was placed a Gorgon’s head, featured small groups of duels between Greeks and Amazons. It was in this scene that Pheidias was alleged to have placed his own likeness, and that of his friend Pericles, among the other Greek fighters (Plutarch *Pericles* 31), though this story’s veracity is impossible to confirm.¹⁶⁶ The placement of the warriors is a response to the spatial demands of the shield, and it appears that several different layers of grounding were depicted (fig. 9). Images familiar from vase painting, such as grasping of an Amazon by the hair, are evident in the copies of the shield (such as the relief in the Piraeus Museum, fig. 10) and the Amazons often expose their right breast.¹⁶⁷ Not every copy of the shield as a whole contains the same figures, or the same arrangement of figures, however. The bald man lifting a stone, for

¹⁶⁵ Castriota (1992) 146 notes that Cecrops’ establishment of monogamy and marriage laws concerning patriliney is particularly noteworthy for repressing women – who might otherwise run the risk of becoming Amazon-like in their control over their own sexual and social destinies. Whether visitors to the Parthenon in the fifth century and beyond would observe and ponder such a particular connection between the Cecrops pediment and the Amazon metopes, however, seems a little doubtful.

¹⁶⁶ Harrison (1966) 107–113 thoroughly and meticulously examines the ancient sources for such a tradition, and ultimately labels it ‘incongruous’ (132).

¹⁶⁷ Stewart (1995a) 585.

instance (sometimes thought to represent Pheidias), is positioned at the top of the Lenormant shield, but at the bottom of the Strangford shield (and is holding an axe, not a stone). The generally accepted view is that the shield depicts the Amazon assault on Athens, with the varying levels representing the rocky slopes of the acropolis and Areopagus. Harrison has argued, furthermore, for an interpretation of the shield based on the assumption that several figures involved in the Amazonomachy are the autochthonous kings Cecrops, Erechtheus and Pandion, and thus the shield is ‘fully in accord with the west pediment in its emphasis on the autochthony of the Athenians.’¹⁶⁸ Athens’ use of Amazon iconography – to artistically reassert its importance as defenders against barbarian invaders – is shown to be highly prioritised when considering the cumulative effect of the combination of the prominent metopes along with Athene’s shield. And yet the use of these favoured sculptural subjects does not limit itself to Athens or solely Athenian buildings: the Temple of Apollo at Bassae also includes some magnificent examples of sculpted Amazons, as do some good examples of Roman funerary sarcophagi.

¹⁶⁸ Harrison (1966) 129-132.

Fig. 9: Recreation of Shield of Athene, from Evelyn B. Harrison (1966) 'The Composition of the Amazonomachy on the Shield of Athena Parthenos', *Hesperia* 35.2, 107-133 (plate 38).

Fig. 10: Athenian and Amazon, Roman marble relief, copy of a group from the Athene Parthenos cult statue – Piraeus Museum (*AGI* LXXXVII.4, *LMC* 'Amazones' 246 d [b]).

The Amazonomachy of the Temple of Apollo at Bassae, which dates to around 420-400 BC, was contained in an interior frieze. The exact original arrangement of the frieze blocks is unknown and their present arrangement in the British Museum is contentious.¹⁶⁹ Madigan's reconstruction differs from that of Corbett (who supervised the present British Museum arrangement) and thus the conclusions he draws from the placement must be considered with this in mind.¹⁷⁰ In his construction, the frieze blocks featuring Amazons comprise not one but two Amazonomachies, one a Heracleian Amazonomachy, and one an Amazonomachy at Troy. With this sculpture, there remains no doubt as to whether Amazons or Persians are being depicted: the sculpture is well-preserved and the Amazons are identifiable by their drapery, breasts, and hair. In terms of individual figures, some identifications are more tenuous than others. Heracles has a prominent lionskin and appears to wield a knotted club on slab BM 541;¹⁷¹ the figures on BM 537 named Achilles and Penthesileia by Madigan are so identified by Penthesileia's now-lost crown, Achilles' hair, and their pose, familiar from vase-painting.¹⁷² However, the identification of Telamon and Peleus (in the Heracleian Amazonomachy) and Ajax (in the Trojan)¹⁷³ must remain more conjectural. The style of the action in the high-relief frieze is vibrant and movement is communicated through the swirling draperies which surround the figures – echoing and also in turn influencing the style of South Italian red-figure pottery popular from this time (fig. 11).¹⁷⁴ Thought to have been the work of three

¹⁶⁹ Jenkins (2006) 134.

¹⁷⁰ Madigan (1992) 70-78; Jenkins (2006) 253 n. 68 has noted that an attempt to construct the frieze according to Cooper and Madigan's proposed order in 1991 resulted in an arrangement that did not fit properly. Thus, the Corbett order was reinstated. Madigan (1992) 63-4 acknowledges the Museum's objections to his arrangement, but nonetheless provides his proposed order to 'encourage future experimentation'. Von Bothmer, meanwhile, maintains the British Museum arrangement.

¹⁷¹ This, however, has not prevented scholars in the past from identifying the figure as Theseus: see von Bothmer (1957) 215. References to the frieze slabs' catalogue numbers follow those of Madigan (1992).

¹⁷² Madigan (1992) 71-2.

¹⁷³ Madigan (1992) 70-76.

¹⁷⁴ Von Bothmer (1957) 216.

or more different sculptors,¹⁷⁵ each with their own style and preferences, the frieze is nonetheless united by the sense of tumult in battle, with bodies moving in every direction and many inventive positions portrayed. It is intriguing to consider the implications of such a depiction of an Amazonomachy outside of Athens, where (for instance) the invading army of women's defeat by Theseus was a source of civic pride and celebration. The temple's site in the mountainous Arcadian countryside, and the dedication of the temple to Apollo (who does not seem to have any connection with Amazons) cause one to ponder the reason behind the Amazons' appearance. Perhaps, given the large segment of the frieze which features Apollo with his twin sister Artemis in a chariot, the frieze intends to evoke the connection between Artemis and the Amazons.¹⁷⁶ Another possibility is that both the Amazonomachy and the Centauromachy emphasise the victory of Greek civilization over forces of barbarism and savagery, and thus Apollo – who served a crucial role within the Greek system of religion – is cast here as a kind of Olympian overseer of such a victory.

Fig. 11: Amazonomachy: Marble frieze from Temple of Apollo at Bassae, BM 537 (*AGA LXXXVIII*).

¹⁷⁵ Madigan (1992) 91-98; Jenkins (2006) 145.

¹⁷⁶ This explanation fits with Madigan's (1992) 77-8 reasoning, and links the Amazonomachy frieze with the Centauromachy (in which Apollo and Artemis intervene on slab BM 523).

Sculpture: Arming and Preparing Amazons

As mentioned above, the Amazonomachy was the preferred sculptural subject when depicting the warrior women; however, an exception to this is seen in the group known collectively as the ‘Ephesian Amazons’. They comprise several full-size Roman copies of singular Amazon statues, in various states of repair and restoration, along with assorted heads, headless bodies, and torsos.¹⁷⁷ Nothing remains of the original bronze statues, which were, according to Pliny the Elder, the outcome of a contest to furnish the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus.¹⁷⁸ Each Amazon is wounded, standing with the right arm reaching up, and wearing a very Greek chiton, not the highly patterned garments or animal skins popular with later vase painters. In 1974, Ridgway set out the now-generally accepted ‘types’ each Amazon belongs to – the Lansdowne, Capitoline, Mattei, and Villa Doria Pamphili.¹⁷⁹ The latter is the only one which has both breasts covered; the other three types all expose one, although they vary the side that is uncovered. Each has no surviving hoplite armour in the way of greaves, breastplate, corselet or spear,¹⁸⁰ like the Amazon from the Penthesileia Painter’s cup. However, the movement of the raised arm (particularly with the Capitoline and Mattei Amazons) is generally understood to indicate the leaning on a stationary spear.¹⁸¹ Though the original statues would have been bronze, the surviving copies are all marble. The clear wounds to the Lansdowne Amazon (by the exposed left

¹⁷⁷ For a more complete listing, see Ridgway (1974) 4 n. 18; also von Bothmer 216-222.

¹⁷⁸ *Nat. Hist.* 34.53; Ridgway (1974), however, makes a thorough and convincing case for discounting such a contest ever having taken place, the comparative (and incompatible) dates in which the sculptors are known to have lived being a major point of her argument.

¹⁷⁹ Ridgway (1974) 2. However, she notes the contentious issue of whether the Villa Doria Pamphili actually constitutes a ‘type’, given the absence of copies of this type. Von Bothmer (1957) 216, for instance, discounts the possibility of it being an Amazon at all, as does Sestieri (1951) 16, who interprets the statue as an Artemis/Diana figure.

¹⁸⁰ However, in Carol W. Carpenter’s reconstruction drawings accompanying Ridgway’s article, three of the Amazons’ raised hands are imagined to have held spears.

¹⁸¹ Ridgway (1974) 4 reads the raised arm of the Doria Pamphili and Lansdowne Amazons as a gesture of resting the hand over the head; though it is difficult to secure published pictures of the rear view of the Doria Pamphili Amazon, Ridgway asserts that the head ‘shows traces of the attachment for the fingers’ and thus should be understood as a resting gesture.

breast), the Capitoline Amazon (in the same place as the Lansdowne) and the Mattei (in the thigh) prove beyond doubt that, though not part of a sculpture group depicting an Amazonomachy, these Amazons have recently been involved in combat, and have been injured by their opponents. So, although such commemorative statues (placed at the temple of a goddess often associated with these women warriors, most famously in Callimachus' *Hymn to Artemis*¹⁸²) might seem at first glance to merely evoke such a divine association, there still remains the undercurrent that Amazons need to be defeated and will be defeated.¹⁸³

The popularity of the Amazons, particularly in sculpture, continued into the Hellenistic age, during which the tomb of Mausolus, or 'Mausoleum', at Halicarnassos was built. In around the 350s BC, the widow of former Carian satrap Mausolus (named, like another previous ruler of Halicarnassos, Artemisia) commissioned several architects and sculptors to construct a tomb, which would become known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.¹⁸⁴ The reasons for choosing an Amazonomachy for one of the lengthy friezes can only be guessed: at the most pragmatic end of the scale, Hornblower asserts that continuous battle scenes with many participants are well-suited to the long blocks of marble decoration; more tenuously, the identification of the previous Halicarnassian Artemisia as an Amazon may form a link between subject matter and location.¹⁸⁵ At the very least, the depiction of Greek heroes, and their triumphs over opponents such as Centaurs and Amazons, is curious given that the tomb is not for a Greek at all, but a Carian satrap. The sculpture is similar in parts to that of the Temple of Apollo at Bassae, though not as well preserved: the drapery swirls

¹⁸² *Hymn to Artemis* 237-247. Diodorus also states that an unnamed Amazon queen, many generations before Heracles' arrival in the Black Sea area, had established a magnificent festival for Artemis Tauropolos (2.46.1-2).

¹⁸³ Cohen (1997) 77 asserts that these statues are essentially 'violently defeated enemies of the Greeks represented immediately after battle.'

¹⁸⁴ On the date, see Hornblower (1982) 244.

¹⁸⁵ Hornblower (1982) 267-8. He goes on to say, however, that 'this should serve as a warning not to press historical and mythical parallels on the friezework, with its very conventional themes' (268).

and drapes dramatically, and the sets of warriors are configured in similar groups of two and three. The Amazons, however, are wearing chitons which bare significantly more flesh than the Bassae relief; in one instance almost the whole body (though it is viewed from behind) is revealed through the movement of the garment (fig. 12), which is a state of exposure not seen in Greek depictions.

Fig. 12: Amazonomachy: Marble frieze from the Mausoleum at Halicarnassos, BM 1014 (*HGA* 142a).

Following on from their popularity through the Classical and Hellenistic eras, the Amazons also proceeded to exert some influence over the Romans, as we have seen in the literature discussion above. In addition, the warrior women were also featured on several funeral sarcophagi from the second- and third-centuries AD. In particular, the theme of the battle between Achilles and Penthesileia received quite lavish attention, and the survival of numerous sarcophagi depicting this scene gives an interesting insight into the Roman concept of the battle. Featuring large numbers of combatants, the sarcophagi place the figures of Achilles and Penthesileia at the centre, with the Greek hero holding a slumping Penthesileia: the Roman sarcophagus from the Vatican (fig. 13) is a good example. Though other formations (with Achilles straightforwardly attacking his opponent, rather

than dragging her away) certainly exist,¹⁸⁶ the configuration of the Vatican sarcophagus appears to have been more popular and this could be traced back to the Achilles-Penthesileia statue group no longer extant (from the later second century BC), but available in several copies in numerous museums (fig. 14). The number of copies of this group points to the popularity of such a moment as captured by artists, which naturally can then be transposed to varying media, including sarcophagi. Such a depiction, showing the tragic moment of death where ‘zu spät erkannte der Pelide seine Liebe zu der Amazone’¹⁸⁷ no doubt carried some weight when placed upon funerary monuments such as these. Other popular themes included the self-sacrificing death of Alcestis and the heroic death of Adonis, enabling mythological tales to thus be linked through analogy to the deceased.¹⁸⁸

Fig. 13: Achilles and Penthesileia: Roman Sarcophagus, Vatican 933 (*LIMC* ‘Achilleus’ 767).

¹⁸⁶ For instance, the scene depicted on the Attic sarcophagus from Salonica (Louvre 2119), on which Achilles seizes the horse-riding Amazon by the hair. The identification of the battle of Troy is confirmed by the presence of Odysseus behind Achilles: see Kossatz-Deissmann (1981) 167.

¹⁸⁷ Kossatz-Deissmann (1981) 165-6.

¹⁸⁸ Koortbojian (1995) 19-22.

Fig. 14: Achilles and Penthesileia Statue Group: Reconstruction, Malibu/Basel (*LMC* ‘Achilleus’ 746).

Throughout Greek art, the Amazons are never wholly glorified or depicted as triumphant victors; while an Amazonomachy may include Greeks being wounded and killed (though not in the earliest depictions), there are always just as many wounded, dying or dead Amazons to maintain the balance.¹⁸⁹ And throughout the artistic depictions of the Amazon-related escapades of Heracles, Theseus, and Achilles – of which Greek audiences already knew the outcome – the warrior women naturally follow the mythical accounts and remain the constant losers in such struggles. Overall, the popularity of the Amazonomachy can be followed

¹⁸⁹ An interesting exception to this rule is the Etruscan Amazon Sarcophagus held at the Museo Archeologico in Firenze (*LMC* ‘Amazones Etruscae’ 29), which provides the only instance of Amazons outnumbering and gaining the ‘upper hand’ against their opponents.

through almost eight hundred years of Greek and Roman art and despite the fact that other, more tranquil scenes do exist, it is apparent that (as with literary depictions of Amazons) it is the battle scenes which enthrall artists: the clash of sword and shield, vain pleas for mercy, flesh pierced by steel, death and triumph. The employment of such battle scenes as allegory for a city-state's own past victories over the barbarian host is most prevalent in Athens, where the Parthenon, Theseion, Stoa Poikile, and grave markers (as well the city-state's Treasury at Delphi) all feature this symbolism carved into marble. However, Athens was not alone in utilizing such scenes in public sculpture works, as the Temple of Apollo at Bassae and the Temple of Zeus at Olympia prove. In addition, the sheer amount of vase-painting depicting Amazons falling time and again under the sword of a conquering Heracles or Achilles reinforces the pre-eminence of the Greek heroes.

When this artistic predilection is considered alongside the rhetoric and mythmaking of writers of every stripe (tragedians, comedians, epic writers and others), the impression seems that the Amazon figure is never very far from any form of Athenian art. The Hellenistic and Roman worlds' use of the Amazon attests to artists' continuing fascination with this figure and a desire to include such warrior women in art even long after any apparently 'historical' association with them could be suggested. The novelty of seeing women battling men seems not to have worn off throughout these centuries. As we have seen, certain features of these women warriors are continuously stressed and remain significant throughout time and genre: they are warriors first and foremost, and their gender makes that warrior identity a matter for both wonder and curiosity. Such curiosity provokes not only poets and artists, but ethnographic and historic writers, who – through their evocations of this mythical race – help circulate and disseminate both mythical exploits and tales of alien customs and traditions. It is little wonder, then, that these figures of mythology have exercised such power

over the Western imagination, even into the twenty-first century. It is from here that the present research will turn to the era of television and film to investigate the lasting impact of the warrior woman: the modifications and adaptations made to the collection of central attributes which define her and the ultimate significance of such an archetypal character's survival.

Part Two

Having assessed the impact of the Amazon upon the art and literature of the ancient world, we now turn to the first section of this research which deals with the contemporary world, and examine and how the medium of television has appropriated the figure of the Amazon. Two case studies – *Wonder Woman* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* – will be utilised in order to closely assess how the characteristics of the Amazon have been used, adapted and altered in response to the social constraints and context of each television programme. This, in turn, will show how the Amazon remains a figure of fascination for the modern world, and how changes made to the defining features of Wonder Woman and Xena reflect changing social mores and tastes while also retaining a surprising amount of common ground with their ancient predecessors.

Chapter Three: The Amazon On the Small Screen

The road to creating a television Amazon has been paved with many other heroines and independent female characters along the way – each of whom assisted in changing the way women had been traditionally depicted for decades previously. Though this section focuses on two central case studies – *Wonder Woman* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* – other relevant characters from television series will be drawn on in order to more clearly trace the diachronic development of a modern television Amazon figure, as well as situate the case studies in relation to the context which gives rise to such figures. The advantage of using the medium of television and its associated characters when examining the impact of the ‘modern Amazon’ is that audience interpretation and reaction to shows can extend far beyond any sole original ‘meaning’ that may have been intended by television producers and directors. The relevance of such audience response (and scholarly acknowledgement of same) has manifested itself in the increasing interest in Spectator Theory and the work pioneered by John Fiske.

Fiske has noted the polysemy of television texts and the way in which varied readings make television shows popular with diverse sections of their audiences. Perhaps the point made by Fiske which is most valuable in the present study of these television shows is the following:

However hard it may try, the text can never finally control the meanings that may be generated when the discourse of patriarchal control collides with that of feminine liberation.¹

The presentation of liberated, strong, and independent female characters within certain television texts can both conform to patriarchal norms and expectations of women (particularly, standards of physical attractiveness) as well as exhibit a

¹ Fiske (1989) 87.

message of feminism appropriate to the post-1960s social context of *Wonder Woman* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Such a ‘collision’, as Fiske would describe it, can produce apparent contradictions within the text, and yet such contradictions can result in a broader audience (and hence, popularity) for the show in question. A broad audience and increasing popularity naturally leads to the show wielding an increased influence over a larger proportion of viewers, and central characters becoming ‘household names’. My selection of *Wonder Woman* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* stems not only from the lead characters’ Amazon attributes but also this crucial component of familiarity to a large amount of people; an ease of recognition absent in other, less popular shows.

Possibly the earliest proto-Amazonian television characters were those of the English series *The Avengers* (1961-9). The show’s prominent placement of female spies Dr Catherine Gale (played by Honor Blackman, 1962-4) and Emma Peel (played by Diana Rigg, 1965-8) alongside their male colleague John Steed (Patrick Macnee) was a large factor in the show’s immense popularity. Both Gale and Peel possessed brains and beauty, exhibiting martial arts expertise and self-determinism while still appearing feminine and sexy – an apparently non-negotiable element in the world of television.² However, the show’s use of such heroic female characters was seen to be curbed when Diana Rigg left the series in 1968, and was replaced by a character named Tara King (played by Linda Thorson), described by critics as ‘an altogether more girlish character’³ and ‘only slightly more threatening than the Avon lady’.⁴ In addition, Inness in particular notes the way the character Emma Peel was written out, casting her departure

² Wright (2006) has collected a variety of female viewers’ observations of the effects that the Catherine Gale character had on their own lives in the 1960s; most saw her as a role-model, and a character who assisted them in rejecting traditional female gender roles or stereotypes, and in fact encouraged them to pursue hitherto unimaginably ambitious career and personal goals.

³ O’Day (2001) 223.

⁴ Inness (1999) 34. Interestingly, Blackman and Rigg both went on to play love interests in James Bond films (*Goldfinger* and *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* respectively) and maintained steady careers in television, film and stage, while Thorson’s career was far less prominent.

from ‘avenging’ as a return to hearth, home and husband;⁵ she is also consistently addressed as ‘Mrs. Peel’, thereby reinforcing her role as wife, even if her husband is presumed to have perished. After the cancellation of *The Avengers* in 1969, the ensuing decade of the 1970s ushered in a broader range of roles for women than had been afforded previously, and the stereotypically ‘traditional’ roles of mothers, wives, nurses and secretaries were challenged by a new wave of single, independent, working women. In this contextual setting, Bonnie J. Dow has viewed the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-77) as the starting point for such innovation in television programming.⁶ Following on from that show were several others (including *Rhoda* and *One Day At A Time*) also featuring what Dow terms television’s ‘lifestyle feminism’: that is, the changes brought about by the women’s liberation movement are illustrated in various elements of the central character’s lifestyle, rather than how she thinks, or any ‘explicit feminist content’ in the storylines.⁷ Despite their apparent independent lives, though, characters such as Mary Richards (from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*) were still portrayed in fairly conventional ways:

...*Mary Tyler Moore* took its central character out of a traditional family setting only to recreate a conventional family dynamic in the workplace, altering a female character’s circumstances to fit changing times while retaining the traditional functions of women familiar from previous domestic sitcoms.⁸

Dow has particularly singled out the title character’s relationship with her father-figure boss, Lou Grant (always addressed by Mary as ‘Mr Grant), as a marker of the show’s reliance on traditional binaries, such as the father-daughter dynamic;

⁵ Inness (1999) 34 describes the framing of Emma Peel’s departure as ‘reverting to a more acceptable role as wife....this conclusion to Mrs. Peel’s career suggests that being a secret agent (or other adventurer) might be tolerated for a single woman but not for a married one’.

⁶ Dow (2005).

⁷ Dow (2005) 380.

⁸ Dow (2005) 381.

thus despite the focus on a central female character, there was still apparently a need for a male character ‘supporting’ her.⁹

However, later on in the 1970s, several dramatic (as opposed to sitcom) shows emerged which placed women in traditionally male occupations (particularly those related to crime-fighting) and focused on them as lead characters. *Charlie’s Angels* (1976-81), *Police Woman* (1974-8), *The Bionic Woman* (1976-8) and *Wonder Woman* (1975-9) all fall into this category, and all enjoyed some measure of success. Much scholarly discussion of this age of television often centres on *Charlie’s Angels*, due to its immense popularity with both males and females of diverse ages, as well as its problematic contradictions of scantily-clad heroines who appeared to champion the type of self-determinism urged by the feminist movement. Gough-Yates describes this contradiction in terms of ‘notions of women’s ‘independence’ being recuperated through the sexual objectification of ‘liberated’ heroines’.¹⁰ The show itself gave rise to the term ‘jiggle television’ due to the repeated use of the Angels’ bodies as a titillating spectacle, unashamedly objectifying the central female characters through leering camera shots and exploitatively clinging or brief clothing. Certainly, *Wonder Woman* is often cited as just as jigglesome as *Charlie’s Angels* due to the central character’s brief and cleavage-enhancing costume. However, the costuming component of the show will be addressed in due course of this chapter. In general, *Charlie’s Angels* (arriving on screens at around the same time as *Wonder Woman*), depicted women working in roles previously guarded as male bastions and refused to focus on romance, marriage, or childbearing as the essential elements of womanhood, as previous shows may have chosen to. This in

⁹ Such constant reliance on a male figure of support, particularly as it relates to historians’ discussions and explanations of famously powerful women, is elucidated in Antonia Fraser’s ‘Appendage Syndrome’, discussed further below in this chapter, n. 106.

¹⁰ Gough-Yates (2001) 83. However, in this article Gough-Yates argues for a generally less critical reading of *Charlie’s Angels*, positing that the show offers ‘pleasurable glimpses of female solidarity and strength for women audiences’ (100) in spite of the constant ‘sexual spectacle’ that was the Angels (89). See also Dow (2005) 383.

itself went some way in continuing the reinvention of female characters which was beginning to gather momentum.

While *Charlie's Angels* featured ambitious, single women characters able to perform a 'man's' job – therefore fitting the show neatly alongside others of this period such as *Wonder Woman* and *The Bionic Woman* – it is *Wonder Woman* that I wish to focus on as the first case study of this chapter. The feminism extolled within the series, coupled with the features of the 'modern Amazon' which appear in the person of Wonder Woman, have been underestimated – in fact, belittled – in past analyses of the series. Though previous scholars have derided many aspects of *Wonder Woman*, ranging from her outfit to her friendship with Steve Trevor, the series' contribution to the idea of the modern television Amazon – which was later to significantly influence the creators of *Xena: Warrior Princess* – is too important to neglect, and therefore deserves a more thorough examination herein.

Case Study: *Wonder Woman* (1975-79)

Now the world is ready for you

And the wonders you can do

Make a hawk a dove

Stop a war with love

Make a liar tell the truth

Wonder Woman! Wonder Woman!

Get us out from under, Wonder Woman!

- Theme song from *Wonder Woman*

The Amazon background of Wonder Woman is an essential part of her identity: she is not only a 'modern Amazon' in the very theoretical sense; her character actually *is* an Amazon. The figure of Wonder Woman originally began life as a

comic-book hero in 1941 and her creator, psychologist William Moulton Marston (1893-1947), was intrigued by ancient Greek mythology, moulding his comic creation around this rich foundation.¹¹ Marston specifically rejected what he perceived as ‘bloodcurdling masculinity’ prevalent in other comics of the time, in order to present his readers with a new kind of female role-model: ‘a feminine character with all the strength of a Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman.’¹² In fact, his characterisation of Wonder Woman managed to rewrite the constantly defeated ancient Amazon: time after time, the comic story would include the tagline ‘lovely as Aphrodite, wise as Athena, *stronger than Hercules*, swifter than Mercury’ (my emphasis) – thus positioning her as in fact superior to her old foe Heracles. Marston was immensely successful with his creation of this figure: the *Wonder Woman* comic (produced by one of the giants of the comic world, DC Comics) has been published constantly for almost seventy years, and in turn the successful television show (1975-9) kept the character of Wonder Woman firmly in the public consciousness; in fact, it introduced her to an entirely new generation of fans who may never have read a comic book – thus increasing Wonder Woman’s popularity exponentially.

The philosophy behind Marston’s ‘Amazing Amazon’ is intriguing, and yet not wholly surprising, in view of what Wonder Woman and other modern Amazons come to stand for in a century which saw such developments in women’s liberation. In an interview with him published in *Family Circle* in August 1942, many of Marston’s ideas on gender equality and psychology were on full display: he voiced the opinion that, by the end of the war, ‘that traditional description ‘the weaker sex’ will be a joke – it will cease to have any meaning’ and that women

¹¹ Daniels (2000)18-22.

¹² Marston (1943-4) 42-3. His psychology background no doubt also contributed to his view that comics which inspired in children the wish to be super-strong or to overcome obstacles gave such children a ‘better chance...for self-advancement in the world’.

would one day ‘begin to control things in a serious way!’¹³ Marston was a psychologist by profession, and had first been brought into the comics industry by publishers in order to observe shortcomings and recommend improvements to current comics of the day.¹⁴ Soon afterward (in the December 1941 edition of *All Star Comics*, and under the name Charles Moulton) he brought Wonder Woman to life on the page, as his very own example of the powerful, strong, yet beautiful (super)woman he thought current comics lacked. Some of Marston’s psychological theories were less well-received than others: his opinions about bondage and captivity, and how such a state had the potential to be enjoyable, manifested themselves within the *Wonder Woman* comics in the form of the heroine (or other women) being bound with her own lasso before performing a miraculous escape, provoking disapproval from (among others) Josette Frank of the Child Study Association of America.¹⁵ For his part, Marston had real belief that the bondage experienced in almost every episode was beneficial. In a letter to the publisher of *Wonder Woman*, he insisted the following:

...confinement to Wonder Woman and the Amazons is just a sporting game, an actual enjoyment of being subdued. This, my dear friend, is the one truly great contribution of my Wonder Woman strip to moral education of the young. The only hope for peace is to teach people who are full of pep and unbound force to *enjoy* being bound.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the comic went from strength to strength during the 1940s, boosted by Wonder Woman’s commitment to the American cause in various World War II-themed issues. Despite Marston’s death in 1947, *Wonder Woman* carried on, with a succession of writers and artists contributing over the ensuing decades. It should be noted that although Marston wrote the story and dialogue of each

¹³ Marston, quoted in Richard (1942).

¹⁴ Marston (1943-4) 41.

¹⁵ Joining Frank in voicing disapproval at *Wonder Woman*’s level of chaining and bondage scenes was W. W. D. Sones, a professor of education at the University of Pittsburgh, who complained in a letter to M. C. Gaines, publisher of the comic. For discussion of the ‘bondage’ controversy, see Daniels (2000) 59-72.

¹⁶ Quoted in Daniels (2000) 63.

comic (until his death in 1947), the actual comic itself was drawn by Harry Peter until 1958, when he was replaced by two younger artists, Ross Andru and Mike Esposito. Thus Peter was largely responsible for establishing the ‘look’ of Wonder Woman – compete with star-patterned hotpants, gold tiara and long dark locks – which has never been successfully replaced in the comic’s seventy-year history. The writing duties between 1947 and 1958 were fulfilled by Bob Kanigher, creator of ‘some of the wildest concepts in the history of comics’, and after his departure many more writers and editors followed.¹⁷

In the mid-1970s, it was realised that the power of television, coupled with the allure of ‘a real live flesh-and-blood woman’, would enable this Amazon to reach a much larger audience than ever before. The decision to forge ahead with a *Wonder Woman* television series, after several ill-received false starts, indicates the esteem in which this superheroine and her stories were held.¹⁸ In addition, the attractive actress playing the part of Wonder Woman/Diana Prince, Lynda Carter (a former Miss World USA), won the hearts of audiences and to this day is remembered by many viewers first and foremost as Wonder Woman. The first season of *Wonder Woman* was set during World War II (thus evoking the origins of the character in her comic-book incarnation), while the second and third seasons updated the show to the contemporary 1970s, allowing for a wider scope of issues, enemies, and plotlines to be dealt with.¹⁹ The syndication of the show after it had been cancelled in 1979, and the subsequent DVD release of all three seasons in

¹⁷ See Daniels (2000) *passim*.

¹⁸ Daniels (2000) 136. The television series *Batman* had been highly successful in 1966-8, and had also helped place its superhero in a more prominent position in popular culture, doubling the sales figures of the comic, and featuring many famous Hollywood stars in guest roles. In addition, the series’ undeniably camp aesthetic (described as ‘the idea that something could be amusing because it was corny or ridiculous’) surely influenced the creators of *Wonder Woman*. See Daniels (1999) 102-115. Earlier, a television series titled *The Adventures of Superman* (1952-8) had also had success with bringing a comic-book hero to the small screen.

¹⁹ One website has archly commented on the issues dealt with in the second and third seasons thus: ‘Diana was able to take on relevant things in the late 1970s, like mimes, disco, and psychics.’ See <http://www.wonderwoman-online.com/tvshow.html>, accessed 27/02/2008.

2003 ensured that, like other cult television series, *Wonder Woman* remained in the public memory and could continue to be viewed and enjoyed even after the series finished its run. Contextually, *Wonder Woman* was being produced, shot and broadcast in the wake of great advancements and social activism in the area of women's rights; and, understandably, the writers of the show seemed eager to mould Wonder Woman into a role model of female independence and self-determinism. Not every critic views the *Wonder Woman* series this way, however, and many complaints have been directed at Wonder Woman's inclusion of a male figure of authority (Steve Trevor), exploitatively brief costume, and element of the magical in Wonder Woman's superheroic abilities.²⁰ However, the following appraisal of *Wonder Woman*, including the show's use of what Dow terms 'explicit feminist rhetoric', aims to bring to light the importance it had both within its own context and also in paving the way for future modern Amazons such as Xena in the 1990s and beyond.

Wonder Woman's position as a 'modern Amazon' is cemented by her adherence to the central characteristics asserted in this study to be essential for such a figure. There is an element of 'otherness' to her identity as both a foreigner, and as an Amazon; she exhibits admirable fighting skills (even and although she is resolutely anti-violence); she has no male figure in her life controlling her or on whom she relies for validation; and she lives an unconventional lifestyle outside the realms of usual expectations, which (in her case) includes the common superhero motif of a dual identity. Each of these characteristics can be equally applicable to the

²⁰ See, for instance, Douglas (1994) 212-218. Douglas, however, despite often being quoted by subsequent writers on the subject, displays several inaccuracies when discussing the *Wonder Woman* show: she asserts that Wonder Woman 'wasn't supposed to like or need men, but then she met one and kinda lost her resolve', when in fact such proscriptive behaviours are never declared on Paradise Island; that she would 'zap bad guys with her bracelets' when the bracelets were merely used to deflect bullets shot at her; and that Diana Prince 'worked as a secretary in low-cut dresses', when in fact she was clad in a buttoned-to-the-neck military uniform for the whole first season – and in the second and third seasons was not a secretary at all but a secret government agent! Small matters perhaps, but such subtleties are what Douglas' arguments against *Wonder Woman* rest on, and her inaccuracies do an injustice to the series as a whole. For other critics of *Wonder Woman*, see also Inness (1999) 47; Dow (2005) 383.

Amazons of the ancient Greek imagination, and thus an examination of these traits can assist in making such connections clear and formulating the larger picture of the ‘modern Amazon’.

To begin with, it is necessary to look to Wonder Woman before she adopts her identity of ‘Wonder Woman’ – when she is simply Diana, a princess living peacefully on her native Paradise Island with her fellow Amazons. This background and ‘homeland’ both situate Diana outside of ‘normal’ (in this case, American) society and serve as signifiers of her ‘otherness’. The pilot episodes of both the first and second seasons of the show feature substantial footage set on Paradise Island, although once Diana leaves to assist the American government, the island is shown only occasionally. The first glimpse of the island is shown in the Season One *Pilot*, when Steve Trevor, an American sent on a dangerous mission over the Bermuda Triangle, ejects from his plane after a dogfight with a German pilot. Washed up on the shore and near death, he is brought in for care and rehabilitation by women of the island. Paradise Island is depicted as a quasi-utopia, with women in flowing pastel gowns running through sunny fields, practising archery, and playing the harp; Diana’s mother, Queen Hippolyta, explains the very nature of the island’s name thus:

I named this island Paradise for an excellent reason: there are no men on it. Thus, it is free of their wars, their greed, their hostilities, their barbaric masculine behaviour.

Pilot (season 1)

War is labelled as a patriarchal preoccupation, and something that the Amazons have evolved beyond; here on their own little microcosmos, they can enjoy a unique freedom and, apparently, immortality. Hippolyta, expressing worry at the thought of Diana leaving Paradise Island, reminds her that this immortality will only last while she is on the island and leaving would risk her being turned ‘into a

human being'.²¹ Such a link to divinity calls to mind the Amazon epithet some ancient authors favoured: 'daughter of Ares', the chosen appellation of Quintus Smyrnaeus' Penthesileia, among others.²² An intriguing parallel is apparent: the ancient Amazon may be semi-divine, but is mortal; on the contrary, this modern Amazon is merely a princess, yet she somehow possesses immortality.²³

The geographical location of Paradise Island is described as being in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle - thus explaining the Amazons' success in remaining an untouched matriarchy amid a world of patriarchy. Steve Trevor's first encounter with Diana/Wonder Woman comes about only because he ejects from his aeroplane into this mysterious region, and is washed ashore on the Amazons' island. Additionally, the island's inaccessibility (it is apparently not on any map, probably due to the area's enigmatic reputation) sets it just beyond the bounds of usual human travel, just as the ancient Amazons had been placed beyond the borders of 'civilised' Greek territories, frequently in areas surrounding the Black Sea. The mystery surrounding the Bermuda Triangle and the numerous aircraft and seacraft disappearances associated with it thus provide Paradise Island with a convenient explanation for the continuation of their untainted, matriarchal world, as well as supplying an element of mystery to the whole concept.²⁴

²¹ A connection here between Wonder Woman and the fairytale character of Hans Christian Anderson's Little Mermaid can also be made: the surrender of immortality for love (in the Mermaid's case) or for assisting mankind (in Wonder Woman's case) casts both characters as unselfish and willing to sacrifice their own godlike characteristics.

²² *Posthomerica* 1.55. See also Euripides *Heracles* 413; Lysias *Funeral Oration* 3; and Isocrates *Panegyricus* 68.

²³ This motif had been similarly illuminated in Pietro Francisci's *Hercules* (1957), a film which in fact shares several resonances and details with the *Wonder Woman* series. In that film, Hercules gives up his immortality in order to experience love and family, yet still manages to exhibit amazing levels of strength (such as the final scene in which, Samson-like, he brings down the pillars of the royal palace of Iolkos).

²⁴ The entire issue of the Bermuda Triangle and its supposed supernatural reputation gained real traction in the 1950s, when stories of the disappearance of the United States Navy Flight 19 in 1945 began to circulate, along with theories explaining such an event; undoubtedly both the paranoia of the decade combined with increased interest in UFOs and supernatural phenomena assisted in creating an environment in which bizarre theories were advanced. The overwhelming majority of opinion now is that weather patterns and natural rates of attrition in seafaring are to blame rather than any giant squid attack or extra-terrestrial invasion. See Mayell (2003).

With emphasis placed on physical fitness and higher education, Paradise Island combines the mythical traditions of ancient Amazons with the egalitarian ideals pushed for in the Second Wave of feminism. Here, women are not simply child-carers and housewives to breadwinner husbands; they reach their full potential because, as Wonder Woman tells a particularly sexist Nazi in *Fausta: the Nazi Wonder Woman*, ‘we are able to develop our minds and our physical skills unhampered by masculine destructiveness’. The absence of men means women take part in every facet of society, and fill all-important posts – doctors, queens, educators. This aforementioned Nazi commander, Kesselmann, had earlier sneered at the prospect of Paradise Island, declaring ‘An island of women? Such a place would not last a week!’, echoing the exact thought found in Strabo about the existence of a female-only community of Amazons.²⁵ But the dramatic irony of Kesselmann’s remark means such sentiments are a cause for laughter, not agreement. The audience’s knowledge of the Paradise Island community and how it appears to have functioned quite successfully over many centuries leads to acceptance of this idea, and rejection of Kesselmann’s misogynistic logic. As happens in many other instances in the show, when such sentiments are expressed, Wonder Woman’s reactions to them serve to throw into high relief the absurdity of sexism and gender discrimination; as a result, in a period when such issues were now becoming widely discussed and debated, *Wonder Woman* was able to extol feminist ideas without seeming overtly earnest.²⁶

In addition to this immortality, the Amazons of Paradise Island possess a physical prowess which evokes that of the ancient Amazons, particularly in the scenes in which the women compete in an Olympics-like competition to determine who

²⁵ Strabo (11.5.3) expresses strong reservations about the female society’s ability to survive: *τίς γὰρ ἂν πιστεύσειεν ὡς γυναικῶν στρατὸς ἢ πόλις ἢ ἔθνος συσταίη ἂν ποτε χωρὶς ἀνδρῶν*; (‘for who would ever believe that an army, or city, or race of women could survive without men?’).

²⁶ The feminism of the *Wonder Woman* series is discussed by Lynda Carter and several scholars on the featurette *Wonder Woman: The Ultimate Feminist Icon* on the *Wonder Woman: Season Three* DVD.

will transport the recovered Steve Trevor back to America. Amazons are shown leaping over high-jump bars with miraculously high bounds, and they all seem equally accomplished in activities ranging from weightlifting, to arm-wrestling, to sprinting (fig. 15).²⁷ When only two contestants are left, the ‘Bullets and Bracelets’ event is begun, whereby one Amazon shoots at the other, who in turn must avoid the bullets by deflecting them (with incredible swiftness) using her bracelets.²⁸ Diana is the victorious Amazon; she wins the right to the ‘Wonder Woman’ outfit (and identity) created by her mother and the accoutrements that go along with it: the golden lasso, which compels people to tell the truth, and the golden belt, which allows the Amazon to retain her ‘cunning and strength’ away from Paradise Island. Dressed in the outfit for the first time, Diana has a last conversation with her mother and once again the island’s ‘otherness’ is to the fore. However, this time it comes in an unexpected way. Hippolyta warns Diana that there are many things she does not know about the ‘world of men’: ‘there are even some women there who are...less than our Amazonian ideal’. Here, a neat reversal of the ancient Greek view of foreigners is exploited; while a Greek would have thought themselves the civilised ones, and foreigners (mythical Amazons included) as those with more undesirable mores, the *Wonder Woman* Amazons are all too aware that the ‘civilised’ world which Diana is about to enter may contain elements unable to measure up to their own exacting standards.

²⁷ This seems another evocation of the 1957 *Hercules* film, in which the youths of Iolkos are shown throwing spears, hurdling, and performing the high-jump under the watchful instruction of Hercules. And in a moment of which the Paradise Island Amazons (who develop both their minds *and* their physical skills) would surely approve, Hercules has a telling exchange with a young competitor named Ulysses, who says ‘my father says you’re only a man of strength, but I know that you place your strength at the service of intelligence’, to which Hercules replies ‘And so I do. All right – if you stay with me, I’ll teach you how to fight; but not only with your arms. And one day friends and enemies will know you as ‘the wise one’’. Hercules here has been re-imagined: no longer simply a brawny demi-god, he is now also a man who values intelligence and wisdom.

²⁸ Though it seems a highly violent contest for such peace-loving Amazons, this is mitigated by the fact that the losing Amazon only receives a small wound to her arm, and the aforementioned fact that the Amazons are immortal means this wound is in no way life-threatening.

Fig. 15: The contest to decide who will be Wonder Woman.

Wonder Woman's idealism, ultimately rooted in her egalitarian upbringing, constantly comes up against belittlement and dismissal in America, where gender equality was slowly developing but a much more pressing issue in the first season was the war they were fighting. As Gloria Steinem has observed, although Wonder Woman was amazed at the simplistic gender division which existed in America, 'she never had much opportunity to follow up on it; a nation mobilised for war is not a nation prepared to accept criticism'.²⁹ Her innocent questions, particularly when she first arrives in America, serve a double purpose: not only do they signal her 'other' status, as someone from a different world, but they also expose complex double standards and socially accepted sexism as plainly nonsensical and pointless. The situations in which Wonder Woman finds herself at a loss can occasionally be humorous, as seen in several scenes in the season one pilot: in one of these Wonder Woman wanders into a clothing store, is recommended a dress by the sales-lady, but when asked to pay for her dress, replies 'I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about' (Paradise Island apparently remains the last capitalism-free bastion of the world). In addition, she

²⁹ Steinem (1972, republished 1982) 118-9.

refers to a telephone as ‘this instrument’; and when confronted by bank robbers shooting guns in the street, indignantly tells them ‘Excuse me, but that’s very rude...it’s also very dangerous!’ Such touches add to the overall ‘fish-out-of-water’ scenario which the show exploits in order to juxtapose Wonder Woman and her Paradise Island ideals with the harsh realities of wartime America – a juxtaposition which in turn parallels the binary opposition of Greek/barbarian or ‘other’. Though Season One, set in 1942, is particularly laden with sexist sentiments, and the irony ensuing from Wonder Woman’s inevitable triumphs, in Seasons Two and Three (set in the late 1970s) the misogyny decreases, though Diana Prince faces quite a barrage of leering and even some sexual harassment instead. The increase in attention from male admirers is perhaps due to what was felt to be appropriate in the 1970s as opposed to the 1940s. Sexual harassment became in the 1970s a focus point for many feminist activists and thinkers, who campaigned for the issue to be recognised and its perpetration to be rectified in law. The harassment that Diana Prince/Wonder Woman faces is relatively mild (with the exception of what she suffers at the hands of the phony Steve Trevor in the Season Two *Pilot*³⁰), but its inclusion in Seasons Two and Three can lend further weight to the concept that the series has strong feminist leanings. The key to unpacking the existence of this harassment is that it is only ever Diana Prince who is subject to it, not Wonder Woman. The apparently weaker, normal, un-superpowered Diana is targeted rather than the seemingly invincible Amazon.

Having been raised in such a female-positive environment, uncorrupted by misogynistic preconceptions, Wonder Woman genuinely does not understand the judgement and discrimination based on gender which she encounters.³¹ Her

³⁰ A villain has had cosmetic surgery to look identical to Steve and, taking advantage of Diana’s friendship with him, talks his way into her apartment before leaning in for a passionate kiss, which is repelled by Diana – despite his forceful insistence that ‘it’s been a long successful evening...it’s not over yet!’

³¹ It should be noted that such discrimination is mainly restricted to the first season, set in 1942; the second and third seasons’ 1970s setting located Wonder Woman in a more ‘enlightened’ decade (perhaps in a self-congratulatory vein, rather than a real attempt at self-criticism of former mistakes), and the show became

ability to overcome villains, male or not, seems to prove her point – she is apparently ‘just’ a woman, yet countless times she rescues an imprisoned, bound or wounded Steve Trevor from harm’s way, reversing the usual ‘damsel-in-distress’ paradigm. From the very beginning, in the pilot episode of Season One, Diana/Wonder Woman is shown running along the beach carrying the unconscious Steve Trevor with marvellous ease, his limp body a clear contrast to her strength and fitness. This time it is a revered war hero, an all-American military man, who is the one in need of saving, and by a woman, no less. Such subtleties seem to be overlooked by modern scholars who have included the show in their research. Several prefer to point out that *Wonder Woman*’s superheroic context means that it could never be mistaken for reality, and that in hiding her powers while in the person of her alter ego Diana Prince, *Wonder Woman* actually worked within a ‘media compromise with feminism’, in restricting power to the superheroine and denying it to the normal woman.³² The present discussion, however, is aimed at rectifying such impressions of the show and pointing out the more positive aspects of Wonder Woman and her Amazon abilities.³³

One of the most obvious connections between the ancient Amazon and her modern counterpart Wonder Woman is the abilities both possess in terms of physical skill in combat: the very quality of the Amazons which, as seen in the previous chapter, was the most often depicted and celebrated by ancient writers and artists. Although, as mentioned above, Wonder Woman comes from a peace-loving community where war is but a very distant memory (and something perpetrated by men), once she arrives in wartime America she often find herself in

more like other conventional female crime-fighting dramas of the time such as *Charlie’s Angels* and *The Bionic Woman*. See Levine (2007) 139.

³² Douglas (1994) 217-8.

³³ The many negative scholarly views of *Wonder Woman* are, however, somewhat mitigated by Elana Levine’s appraisal of the show in her 2007 book *Wallowing in Sex*, which notes the feminist rhetoric employed particularly in the first season and refuses to dismiss the show as one about a ‘bionic bimbo’ as others such as Douglas have.

violent situations involving Nazi spies, turncoat Americans, and a myriad of other villains. In a key alteration, while ancient Amazons were labelled ‘daughters of Ares’, at least partially to explain away these women’s inexplicable martial exploits, Wonder Woman is resolutely anti-violence – a point repeatedly stressed throughout the series – and her moves are largely restricted to martial arts-type throws as opposed to actual punches and attacks.³⁴ However, this seems not to affect Wonder Woman’s abilities in defending herself or others, or her speed and adaptability when attacked. In addition to wearing the golden belt (making her super-powerful when away from Paradise Island), Wonder Woman also wears two bracelets made of an indestructible material found only on Paradise Island named ‘Feminum’, with which she is able to deflect any number of bullets.³⁵ She also carries a golden lasso, which forces anyone bound by it to tell nothing but the truth. If a gun should come into her possession, Wonder Woman’s strength enables her to bend it in half to render the weapon useless – as well as render her opponent speechless and significantly more reluctant to fight with her. Such reactions (forcing the truth from an enemy, ruining weapons) point out the essential power of Wonder Woman: her physical strength, bracelets and lasso disarm enemies, and render their weapons useless, much as an ancient Amazon’s bow and arrow could wound from a distance, leaving that enemy’s sword (only good for close-up combat) useless (fig. 16).³⁶ Therefore, although there are differences, similarities remain as well. In addition, Wonder Woman’s strength

³⁴ Wonder Woman’s obvious antecedents in this aspect are Catherine Gale and Emma Peel of *The Avengers*, but additionally, the show *Kung Fu* (1972-5) also increased the profile of martial arts in America.

³⁵ Miraculously, the bracelets (combined, of course, with Wonder Woman’s incredible reflexes) can even deflect a machine gun’s fire, as seen in the Season One *Pilot*.

³⁶ The bow and arrow, naturally, was regarded with no small amount of suspicion by the largely hoplite and cavalry armies of the ancient Greeks; often derided as a ‘coward’s weapon’, (Heracles’ use of the bow and arrow is derided by Lycus in Euripides’ *Heracles* as *κάκιστον ὄπλον* [161]) it nevertheless could be highly effective. Compare the famous anecdote from the night before the battle of Thermopylae (Hdt. 7.226) where the Spartan Dieneces, in response to the comment that the Persians had so many arrows that they would block out the sun, laughed that then ‘we shall have our battle in the shade!’ which demonstrates the potential value of vast numbers of archers. It remained a weapon used in the main by Persians, Scythians, and Parthians (leading to the commonly used ‘Parthian shot’). On the ambiguity of the archer, see Trundle (2010).

and her lasso emphasise her fundamental opposition to violence; discovering secret plans and plots through disarmament and (forced) honesty is preferable to torture or injury. Wonder Woman's original creator, William Moulton Marston, asserted in his 1942 *Family Circle* interview that 'her magic lasso is merely a symbol of feminine charm, allure...' which can then be used to 'influence or control' the bound victim.³⁷ While perhaps this could be seen as merely more evidence for Marston's fascination with bondage, in the television series the lasso allowed for the pacifist Wonder Woman to gather evidence and clues without just using brute aggression.

³⁷ Quoted in Richard (1942).

Fig. 16: Wonder Woman utilising her bullet-deflecting bracelets, golden lasso, and super-strength.

The Amazon stands virtually alone in Greek *mythopoiesis* as the woman who dares to fight in war against men, her gender being the main cause for such singularity. Her divine parentage by Ares is even utilised to attempt to explain such ‘unwomanly’ abilities in war. Likewise, Wonder Woman’s gender is often mistakenly thought to mitigate the threat she poses to opponents. Time after time, villains attempt to shoot at the heroine, only to have the bullets swiftly deflected; time after time do they attempt to tackle or otherwise beat up Wonder Woman, only to be bested and thrown to the ground. In the two-part episode *The Feminine Mystique*, a small Nazi force invades Paradise Island, intending to mine the indestructible Feminine for their own needs.³⁸ However, when faced with the Amazons’ superstrength, the Nazis are tossed aside (literally) all too easily – thrown into lakes by giggling Amazons, who are baffled by their futile attempts to manhandle them – and the only way they gain the upper hand is to use tear gas on the women. Captain Radl, in charge of the Nazi deployment, had rejoiced in a manner worthy of Heracles when he first glimpsed Paradise Island and its inhabitants: ‘Wait until I contact Berlin and tell them I’ve conquered a whole *island* of Wonder Women!’ But his expectations are foiled by the strength of the women and, ultimately, their ability to out-think their opponents, as they regain control, and retain their autonomy, their island, and the island’s anonymity (fig. 17).³⁹

³⁸ A knowing reference to Betty Friedan’s seminal feminist tract *The Feminine Mystique*, the episode was written by Barbara Avedon and Barbara Corday, who were later to create *Cagney & Lacey* (1982-88), a television series noted for its advances in representing strong, independent women and issues commonly faced but rarely depicted in mainstream television: see Faludi (1992) 184-7; D’Acci (1994) *passim*; Dow (2005) 385-6.

³⁹ Once they are resoundingly defeated by the Amazons, the Nazis are given a drug ‘from the Hybirnian tree’, which will erase their memories – including any knowledge of the location of Paradise Island.

Fig. 17: Amazons of Paradise Island easily manhandle the invading Nazis.

Wonder Woman, however, is not the only woman to exhibit the ability and willingness to fight in this television show. Female villains, including women sympathetic to the Nazi cause, appear several times, and tend to provoke expressions of disappointment from Wonder Woman, as if she expected women to be above such scheming and deception. In the pilot and first two episodes of *Wonder Woman's* first season, three women feature who are Nazi members or sympathisers and who come up against Wonder Woman physically. This provides a contrast to the usual man vs. woman dynamic of the traditional depictions of Amazons in Greek art. In fact, in the *Wonder Woman* comic, there was an array of female villains (The Cheetah, Giganta, Eviless), some of whom dressed as men to disguise themselves (such as Dr Poison).⁴⁰ In terms of the television *Wonder Woman*, villainous females included Nazi agents/spies Baroness von Gunther, Marcia, Erica Belgard, and (later reformed) Fausta, terrorist Gloria, and insect sympathiser Formicida. While Wonder Woman would often implore these women to change their ways, or to give themselves up, a physical fight would often ensue: one such exchange is particularly telling within the context of Wonder Woman's ideals versus the realities of life in America:

⁴⁰ See Beatty (2003) 112-3.

Diana: You're a woman! We shouldn't be enemies.

Gloria: I don't know where your head is at, baby, but women are naturally enemies!⁴¹

The Return of Wonder Woman (season 2)

While Gloria was unable to see the point of Diana's reasoning, others were able to be convinced: Season One's Fausta, disgusted at the sexism displayed by her Nazi cohorts and inspired by Wonder Woman's abilities and humanity, decides to help the Resistance instead, crediting Wonder Woman for such a transformation.⁴²

Wonder Woman: Thank you. You're an inspiration to women all over the world who want to be free.

Fausta: And you showed me the way. And now, I must show others.

Fausta: The Nazi Wonder Woman (season 1)

Levine has noted the way in which the sexual difference of such female villains is emphasised, particularly in the case of Fausta. Wonder Woman speaks of Fausta's 'womanhood' in an attempt to appeal to her 'essential femaleness', which will in turn help her to recognise the sexism and tyranny of the Nazis she works with.⁴³ In giving female figures the chance to be not only the superhero but also the supervillain, the comic's writers opened more avenues to women characters, who in other comics may have been relegated to secondary 'girlfriend' or 'mother' roles; and the television incarnation of Wonder Woman followed in these footsteps, providing actresses with villainous roles in which they could flex dramatic muscle. It also neatly reverses the original Amazons' roles as the ultimately defeated enemy of the triumphant Greek heroes: now the

⁴¹ Gloria's hostility toward Diana is apparent from the very beginning of the episode, and she virtually embodies the stereotypical cat-fighting female unfortunately common in popular media. However, positioning her as a villain in this particular episode assists in casting Diana's viewpoint (that women should find commonalities and treasure alliances with each other) as the loftier ideal, and Gloria's as an antagonistic, dishonourable code by which to live.

⁴² In the comic *Wonder Woman*, such female villains ended up on 'Transformation Island', where they could be reformed: see Daniels (2000) 36.

⁴³ Levine (2007) 140-141.

Amazon, Wonder Woman, is the triumphant hero(ine) over defeated villainesses – as well as villains.

Of course, Wonder Woman does not merely possess all the same characteristics of an ancient Amazon; as was seen with her non-violent stance, adjustments are made to the ancient model when necessary. In particular, the kind of villains Wonder Woman encounters over three seasons provide evidence of another modification made in order to make the modern Amazon more palatable to her audience. In addition to the numberless Nazis represented in Season One, many of the Season Two and Three criminals are megalomaniacs or misanthropists, bent on either destroying the world, or taking over the world, either for their own benefit or because of some deep hatred or grudge. Villains who fall into this category include Dr Solano (Season One *Pilot*), Ishida (*The Man Who Could Move the World*), Professor Chapman (*The Man Who Made Volcanoes*), and Mariposa (*Screaming Javelin*). Inevitably, Diana Prince discovers the villain's plans and transforms into Wonder Woman in order to stop said plans and save the world (quite literally, in some cases). This altruistic, philanthropic motivation is something absent from the depictions of ancient Amazons, perhaps due to several reasons. Firstly, there was no real concept of 'the world' as a united entity in itself.⁴⁴ In addition, as was observed in Part One, there was a marked predilection for showing Amazons on the battlefield, as opposed to helping out others in times of need.⁴⁵ The very concept of the figure who can help those in need was very much restricted to those famed Greek *male* heroes whose catalogues of deeds were so often celebrated in epic and song.

⁴⁴ Nor was there much of an idea of 'Greece' as an identity either: although the 'Achaeans' as a combined force battle the city of Troy and its allies in the Trojan War, there is no sense that all the city-states of this area identify with each other in the modern nationalistic sense.

⁴⁵ The exception is the Amazons assisting the Trojans in the war against the Greeks – though more is inevitably made of Penthesileia's antics on the battlefield than her status as an ally of Priam in the *Posthomerica* of Quintus Smyrnaeus.

Wonder Woman, however, is a champion of all. Her arrival in America in 1942 and actions during that time are spoken of as celebrated history, mentioned by Steve Trevor Junior in the Season Two *Pilot*:

When I was a kid, my father raised me on stories about Wonder Woman.

How they worked together, all the adventures they had...

In addition to the numerous villains she defeats in order to save the world, Wonder Woman also serves as a representative of Earth to alien civilisations, illustrated in the Season One episodes *Judgement from Outer Space 1* and *2*, and a defender of Earth in Season Two's *Mind Stealers From Outer Space 1* and *2* and Season Three's *The Boy Who Knew Her Secret 1* and *2*. Not only does Wonder Woman become a defender of America through her service during World War 2 in Season One,⁴⁶ but she also becomes the person best able to communicate with alien lifeforms or thwart their attempts to destroy Earth (fig. 18). This assists in representing Wonder Woman as a hero for everyone, not just the American people who might benefit most from her time in their country; in this way, her diplomacy and impartiality make her a universal hero.⁴⁷ Schubart has identified this shift in the presentation of the modern Amazon as part of the re-interpretation and re-contextualisation of the ancient Amazon; the 'helpful' Amazon is made 'less intimidating' to the audience through her dedication to ideals involving justice and democracy.⁴⁸ However, *Judgement from Outer Space 1* and *2* expose some cracks in this apparent universality: though Wonder Woman's rapport and empathy with the alien Andros proves that she is able to reason with and co-operate with alien lifeforms rather than fearing or dreading them, her

⁴⁶ This service is even extended to taking to the actual battle lines (though this is shown only once), as is seen in the episode *The Man Who Could Move the World* (season 2), which focuses on a Japanese man who blames Wonder Woman for the wartime sufferings of his family due to her role on the opposing American side.

⁴⁷ This largely stems from her origins as a comic-book superhero: as Layman (2005) 195-199 has remarked, superheroes perform their duty and uses their super-powers for good 'because it is right', and because 'with great power comes great responsibility', as Peter Parker's Uncle Ben tells him. For more on the 'duty' of the superhero, see also Robichaud (2005).

⁴⁸ Schubart (2007) 231-4.

hatred of the Nazis is contrasted with Andros' willingness to communicate with *all* humans, not just those among whom Wonder Woman lives. Her attempts to argue with him about which wartime measures are justified are countered at every turn, Andros insisting 'I'm not interested in national squabbles; I'm here to study humanity.'⁴⁹ When attempting to rescue him from the grip of the Germans, Wonder Woman's cry of 'But they're *Nazis!*' is countered by Andros' reply:

Yes, they are Nazis. Your friends are Republicans and Democrats. The Russians are Communists. All different. All human.

Eventually Andros does recognise the evil motives of the Nazis, but the episode is an intriguing lesson in judgement and what Andros terms 'distinctions...not differences.'

Fig. 18: Wonder Woman acting as mediator between aliens and humans.

Further parallels between ancient Amazons and Wonder Woman (and evidence of Wonder Woman's modern Amazon status) can be seen when one looks closely at Wonder Woman's - and Diana Prince's - romantic relationships with men:

⁴⁹ Wonder Woman's argument that the United States has never 'made arbitrary arrests or...used concentration camps' is countered by Andros' reply that 'I think you'd better explain that to the Americans of Japanese descent'; this provides a rare self-criticism of American wartime methods, which is all the more intriguing given the plotline discussed above at n. 46.

namely, that there are none. Although what brings the Amazon princess to America in the first place appears to be a deep feeling for Steve Trevor – perhaps even love – *as well* as a desire to assist the Americans in World War Two, no relationship ever ensues between the two characters. This is one point on which the television series diverges from the comic markedly. In the DC comic of Wonder Woman, Steve Trevor figures again and again as a love interest and Wonder Woman even marries him (*Wonder Woman* #329) on the eve of the ‘Crisis on Infinite Earths’ special issue of 1986.⁵⁰ However, the television series refuses to marry its Amazon off to the eligible bachelor and instead seems content to show the mutual admiration and friendship shared between the two. There are multiple episodes in which either character expresses their affection for the other with the words ‘(S)he’s wonderful!’, supposedly a clever pun on the series title. But no physical relationship is ever shown. It seems that the adventures and responsibilities that come with the identity of Wonder Woman leave no room for much of a private life. Perhaps this is a suggestion that a career girl cannot also enjoy a fulfilling family life; she must choose one or the other, and cannot ‘have it all’, which later backlash campaigns of the 1980s would portray as an impossible, unattainable dream.⁵¹ Alternately, this can be a more positive indicator of societal change: instead of forcing a super-powered heroine into the box of conventional marriage and children, Wonder Woman’s life remains independent and free of such constraints. This in turn also reaffirms her as a true Amazon who does not need a man to ‘look after’ her: just as the ancient Amazons had lived their own lives away from male domination, Wonder Woman is more than capable of getting herself out of any difficult situation and in fact is constantly the one

⁵⁰ See Daniels (2000) 155.

⁵¹ See Faludi (1993) 55-61 who details the work of several researchers who insisted that there was a link between mental illness and careerism in women (with many suffering ‘burn-out’) and contrasts other research which actually proved a link between improved mental wellbeing and employment in women. Faludi also cites with disapproval a self-help book of the 1980s, *Smart Women/Foolish Choices* which blamed women’s distress on feminism, because ‘it created a myth among women that the apex of self-realisation could be achieved only through autonomy, independence and career’ (4).

extricating Steve Trevor from danger. Instead of being the ‘damsel in distress’ so vivid from popular television and film, Wonder Woman plays the part of the dashing rescuer, often shown carrying injured men from scenes of disaster (the Season One *Pilot*, *Wonder Woman Meets Baroness von Gunther*: fig. 19). Perhaps, the male ego being frail as it is, no man would ever be able to maintain a relationship with the super-powered Wonder Woman, mindful of the fact that he could never ‘rescue’ or protect her – since she needs no such thing. Other superheroes also have trouble forming lifelong relationships – Batman and Superman, for instance, both remained bachelors despite having occasional love interests, reciprocated or otherwise. This is in part because of the difficulties in maintaining a dual identity and a wish to protect loved ones from danger due to their knowledge of the superhero portion of this dual identity. Wonder Woman’s dual identity, explored more fully further on in this chapter, plays an intriguing role in the absence of romantic interests in the show.

Fig. 19: Rescuing men in distress is no problem for Wonder Woman.

Though it is Diana/Wonder Woman who may harbour feelings for Steve Trevor, he is only interested in Wonder Woman and his interactions with his secretary (in Season One), Diana Prince, are completely platonic. In fact, several comments

made in Season One (combined with his baffling inability to recognise Diana and Wonder Woman as the same person) seem to indicate that Steve barely views Diana as a woman at all, let alone one with the potential to be as physically attractive as Wonder Woman. The episode *Beauty on Parade* plays on this theme with great effect: suspecting a beauty pageant was somehow associated with the sabotage of radar equipment, Diana goes undercover as an entrant. The following patronising exchange takes place:

Diana: Perhaps if we could get one of our own agents into that beauty contest...

Steve: It might flush him out! It'd take a really beautiful girl, though – someone with all the right qualifications (smirks).

Diana: Well, I'd be willing to try...

Steve: Thanks Diana - I know you'd do a wonderful job. But I'm afraid this calls for a really *gorgeous* girl, someone who looks great in a bathing suit.

The crestfallen look on Diana's face in response to this remark gives some indication of how the viewer is supposed to react to Steve and his blinkered opinions; but she is vindicated (somewhat) when she dresses up for the contest in a low-cut, clinging dress and high heels, causing Steve to remark 'Diana?...is that really you? The transformation's incredible!' Notably, Diana's large black-framed glasses remain on her face (she had removed them earlier when entering the pageant), serving as an ever-present 'screen' to conceal her resemblance to Wonder Woman (fig. 20).⁵²

In addition, the glasses help Diana conform to the stereotypes of attractive/non-attractive; the old adage 'men don't make passes at women wearing glasses' seems

⁵² Almost identically, Clark Kent wears glasses to disguise his identity as Superman; it is perhaps similarities such as this that have led some scholars to decry Wonder Woman as simply a female version of a male superhero prototype, 'changing the sex of the hero without more substantive adjustment to the character or her mythology': see Lotz (2006) 69.

to ring true even in Season One of *Wonder Woman*, with its consistent deference to feminist ideology. The glasses appear less and less frequently in Season Three of the show and, additionally, Diana is shown with her hair loose more often (previously it was tied up under her military cap in Season One, and in a ponytail or bun in Season Two). This can be linked to the noticeably shrinking role of Steve Trevor and the shift in the focus of the show to not just Wonder Woman but also Diana as a crime-fighting woman of her own merit.⁵³ If Steve still appeared in every other scene, the need to retain the disguise would remain; now that the show chooses to emphasise Diana (*as* Diana) and her interactions with various criminals and other characters, there is less need to do so.

Fig. 20: Diana goes undercover as a beauty pageant entrant, but keeps the glasses on in Steve Trevor's presence.

Although several other male characters throughout the three seasons of *Wonder Woman* express a romantic interest in the superheroine, she in turn displays little interest in them. This again shows the connection to her Amazon roots, as they also, according to several sources, maintained autonomy from men and refused to subscribe to the convention of married life which was the 'norm' in Athenian law

⁵³ Martinez & Martinez, 'The Spotlight Is Not Willing To Be Shared' *TV Guide* January 20-26, 1979.

and life.⁵⁴ Though they may have required the services of neighbouring men in order to reproduce their line, sources such as Strabo (11.5.1) assert that no regular cohabitation or marriage arrangements were established. Diodorus (2.45) places the Amazons in a superior societal position and (in a nightmare scenario) even has them enslaving and enfeebling their menfolk through force in order to maintain the upper hand. Luckily for Steve Trevor and the rest of his gender, Wonder Woman is a benevolent, peace-loving Amazon who does not intend to enslave anyone – though she does not seem intent on marrying anyone, either. In addition, her age – she is situated somewhere beyond her teenaged younger sister’s years, but is not yet married – locates her in a liminal position, similar to that which Tyrrell attributes to the ancient Amazon.⁵⁵ Wonder Woman’s admirers never leave much of a romantic impression on her, though often it does not help matters when they attempt dire pick-up lines. One particularly excruciating exchange came in *The Queen and the Thief*:

Count Diaz: Is there a name to go with such a pretty face?

Diana: Yes, sir. Diana.

Count Diaz: Ah, Diana – the goddess of the hunt. Are you a huntress like your namesake? Because if you are, I’m your willing prey...

Diana: (embarrassed) I really must return to my duties...

In addition, such attempts at wooing the superheroine (featuring cheesy opening lines such as the one above) are made based on her looks alone. In keeping with feminist ideology, this blatant judgement based on physical beauty is treated with contempt by Wonder Woman – though she is diplomatic enough to merely laugh

⁵⁴ Although Herodotus has the Amazons agreeing to marry their Scythian neighbours, they refuse to live the same lives as ordinary Scythian women (because *ἔργα δὲ γυναικῆα οὐκ ἐμάθομεν* [4.114]), and insist on continuing to live in the same nomadic, warrior tradition (the *δαίτη παλαιῇ* of 4.117).

⁵⁵ See Tyrrell (1984) especially 64-73 for further discussion on the Amazon as a liminal figure, which Tyrrell compares to the ephebe of Athenian culture: between childhood and true manhood, the ephebes, at eighteen years old, spent a year training and carrying out guard duties on the fringes of the city-state, before being fully integrated into the polis on their return.

it off.⁵⁶ Given the businesslike glasses which she hides behind when in character as Diana Prince, it is all too clear to her (and the audience) that appearances can be highly deceiving – especially if we are to believe that Steve Trevor has been unable to recognise her as Wonder Woman for all this time. The same ideology works also for Superman when he is disguised as Clark Kent – no-one ever suspects that the ‘mild-mannered’ reporter with horn-rimmed spectacles actually possesses x-ray vision, super strength, and the ability to fly. As Danny Fingeroth has observed, the idea of the ‘dual identity’ serves to assimilate the superhero into his/her environs (when dressed as, say, Diana Prince, or Clark Kent), while also enabling the hero to have a ‘super’ identity which makes him/her stand out from the rest, and therefore be a role-model, crime-fighter, and leader.⁵⁷

One final aspect of Wonder Woman which can classify her as a ‘modern Amazon’ – and thus assist us in evaluating how the Amazon figure has adapted in modern television – is her unconventional lifestyle. Her independence, single status, and, crucially, her secret identity as the crime-fighting Wonder Woman mark her out as extraordinary, different, and exceptional. Though, as mentioned previously, the television show *Wonder Woman* was part of a whole decade-long genre shift towards featuring strong, independent women lead characters, its importance as part of such a group must be acknowledged. However, the key difference which separates Wonder Woman from other female heroines working in traditionally male occupations (and thus subverting past gender expectations) is her identity as a superhero. Superheroes have been observed to be wish-fulfilment figures to their fans (and in the television age, viewers)⁵⁸ and here arises an interesting

⁵⁶ Similarly, Helford (2002) 23-24 has discussed how Buffy in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* utilises humour to offset an ‘inappropriate display of anger’, for instance when she experiences despair over the importance of her role as a slayer and how it impinges on her own desires and hopes for her life.

⁵⁷ Fingeroth (2004) 56.

⁵⁸ Often the creators of *Superman*, Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, are cited as initiating this kind of projection of hoped-for characteristics onto their creations: ‘[Siegel] began to daydream about ways to gets girls’ attention. “What if I had something special going for me, like jumping over buildings or throwing

connection between the ancient and modern Amazon figures. While Wonder Woman may fulfil the fantasies of female viewers to be powerful, independent and near-invincible, the original concept of the Amazon was a figure characterised as a ‘universal male nightmare’: a woman who had not fulfilled any fantasy, but, contrarily, embodied all those dark, threatening and overwhelmingly powerful characteristics which men feared their women may possess. Therefore Wonder Woman’s combination of intimidating powers with a gentle and helpful disposition and distinctly non-threatening alter-ego modify the idea of the Amazon into something more palatable to the masses.

One particular advantage of the Diana Prince alter-ego is that it enables her to keep up the ‘subordinate’ act while being capable of performing all kinds of admirable exploits. This works especially in conjunction with judgements based on gender made by various characters in Season One. In this way the fallibilities of those apparently in command (Steve Trevor, General Blankenship, various Nazi commanders) can be seen more clearly since they are often outwitted or whisked away from danger by a woman – and one who (secretly) works beneath them at that. Such framing of the possible inadequacies of males who are ostensibly ‘in charge’ can also be seen as further evidence of *Wonder Woman*’s feminist ideology. Those who, in the past, were naturally thought to be leaders and role-models can be ineffectual and those who have patiently toiled in the background, receiving little credit, can turn out to be the costumed crusaders who save the day. A close-up of the smiling, knowing face of Diana Prince ends every episode of all three seasons of *Wonder Woman*, often after some highly ironic comment regarding Wonder Woman’s identity has been uttered – which once again reminds viewers that Diana has fooled them all, again. Ultimately, it is not

cars around...? Then maybe [girls] would notice me.” Instead he began to write about guys who had something special going for them.’ Jones (2004) 65.

only her dual identity, but also her ability to conceal her superhero persona so successfully which illustrates Diana/Wonder Woman's talents.

There is, however, a less positive way to view Diana's secret identity as Wonder Woman: that is, the crucial aspect of keeping this identity secret, and hidden, and preventing anyone from discovering who really is behind this superheroine. The fact that it is when she is dressed as Wonder Woman that she possesses the belt which supplies her powers when away from Paradise Island, and that it is with this identity that she performs her most amazing and powerful feats, may lead one to question the necessity of hiding these powers. May this be some indication, some warning to women to keep their powers concealed in order to still be able to conform to ideals of demure, modest femininity? On the contrary; the fact that Wonder Woman appears when criminals and villains are endangering others or the world, and clad in a highly conspicuous outfit, and is unafraid of stopping such villains using any and all of her powers, seems to mitigate the fact that she cannot live her life simply as Wonder Woman. In addition, her life as Diana Prince allows her access to the most top-secret missions, projects, and intelligence of the War Department (Season One) and the Inter-Agency Defence Command (Seasons Two and Three) – giving her a certain amount of insider knowledge that can then allow her to take action as Wonder Woman. Thus, the dual identity functions on a practical level rather than anything more sinister. In fact, some comparison can be made to models of 'subversive cunning', such as the popular early 1990s television series *Jeeves and Wooster*, in which the oblivious Bertie Wooster finds himself invariably outwitted and out-thought by his unassuming butler, Jeeves.⁵⁹ This entire idea itself stems from the concept of the *servus callidus*

⁵⁹ The British series *Jeeves and Wooster* (1990-1993) starred Hugh Laurie as Bertie Wooster and Stephen Fry as Jeeves, and was based on the novels and short stories by P.G. Wodehouse.

of Roman comedy, whose machinations ultimately result in a happy ending for all.⁶⁰

One of the most visible symbols of Wonder Woman's superhero identity is her costume. In addition, discussion about Wonder Woman's stars-and-stripes costume can also yield conclusions regarding her cultural assimilation, as Smith has recently discussed.⁶¹ He contrasts Wonder Woman to her fellow superhero Superman (who actually grew up in America, despite being born on Krypton) by remarking that she 'represents the variety of ready-made patriots America has come to expect from its immigrants'.⁶² Wonder Woman may be an immigrant from Paradise Island, but she wears an outfit which mimics the iconography of America with a red, white and blue colour scheme and golden eagle emblazoned across the bustline. About the costume's design, her mother Hippolyta reveals the following to Diana:

Hippolyta: The colours were chosen to show your allegiance to freedom and democracy...the material is indestructible.

Diana: It's beautiful, Mother!

Hippolyta: I designed it myself...never knowing that it would be worn by my own daughter.

Though broadly described as colours of 'freedom and democracy', the white stars on the blue shorts and skirt leave little doubt in the viewer's mind that America is the undisputed paradigm of such 'freedom and democracy' (fig. 21).

⁶⁰ See Parker (1989) especially 241; and also Segal (1968), particularly Chapter 4.

⁶¹ Smith (2001).

⁶² Smith (2001) 133-4. Superman, although he also wears a red and blue outfit, is seen as more Americanised than Wonder Woman because 'he is reared from infancy onward as one of us' and thus his 'identification with truth, justice, and the American way is a product of years of association with normative patriotic values.'

Fig. 21: Wonder Woman's costume, including Season Two's adapted version at right.

Wonder Woman got accustomed to it just as we assume the Metropolis residents got accustomed to Superman's S-emblazoned leotard. The outfit itself can easily be dismissed as exploitative in terms of its scanty nature and brazen display of Lynda Carter's curves, and this has led television scholars to compare the show with others which dressed their female stars in revealing or titillating outfits – *Charlie's Angels* being a favourite. And yet Daniels has asserted that the effect of the outfit may have been mitigated by the following fact:

...the ability to appear relaxed, confident, and natural while dressed in an outrageous outfit is something that not even the most acclaimed actors can easily achieve, but Carter had the poise and imagination to pull it off.⁶³

The undeniable titillation value attributed to the Wonder Woman costume gives cause for some discussion here regarding female costuming conventions of 1970s television. The low-cut bustier puts Wonder Woman's chest on fairly obvious display, and the small shorts became more high-cut for Seasons Two and

⁶³ Daniels (2000) 141. In the second and third seasons two variations to the patriotic-looking costume were added: a motorcycle-riding outfit complete with matching helmet, and the 'wonder wetsuit', a full-body diving costume with hood. Though possibly less exploitative because they were comprised of full-body catsuit/wetsuit, they were still very figure-conscious and clinging.

Three.⁶⁴ In addition, the outfit is paired with long, high-heeled, red and white boots, which several critics have derided for the unrealistic expectations of Wonder Woman constantly running in such footwear.⁶⁵ Undoubtedly, the ‘Woman’ portion of the superheroine’s moniker is deliberately accentuated through her costuming. Several scholars have associated the costume’s brevity (in contrast to her male counterparts, Superman and Batman, who seem to wear twice as many layers as Wonder Woman ever does) with television networks’ desire to cater to a male audience by providing a ‘hyperfeminized’ character, whose great skills and abilities are balanced out by her physically attractive appearance.⁶⁶ In this way *Wonder Woman* was making no real deviation from predecessor *The Avengers*, which likewise clothed Cathy Gale and Emma Peel in a series of tight, dominatrix-inspired leather catsuits and mini skirts;⁶⁷ or from the frequent undercover ‘costuming’ of the lead women in contemporary show *Charlie’s Angels*.⁶⁸ Sherrie Inness has observed how a particular episode of *Charlie’s Angels* (‘Angels in Chains’) reveals the way that television producers temper strength and independence with sex appeal:

[‘Angels in Chains’] shows how the media make women, like the Angels or Mrs Peel, sexually alluring to men by weakening their toughness,

⁶⁴ Douglas (1994) 217 remarks that ‘Wonder Woman’s breasts seemed constantly poised to burst forth from their Playboy bunny-type container’.

⁶⁵ In fact, when observing the show closely, it becomes apparent that Lynda Carter wears a lower-heeled style of boot when running, which are then substituted for the high-heeled style in shots of Wonder Woman standing still; such editing disparities are cited as ‘continuity errors’ on the show’s webpages at sites such as www.IMDb.com.

⁶⁶ For instance, Douglas (1994).

⁶⁷ O’Day (2001) 224-5 details *The Avengers*’ essential emphasis on portraying the both Steed and his female partners as ‘highly desirable paradigms of fashion’; he contends that Cathy’s look, as the ‘fetishistically charged heroine’, was one of the main reasons for the show’s cult following, while Emma’s status as a ‘monumental camp fashion icon’ was developed using fashion-forward items not yet available to the buying public, such as the mini skirt. Honor Blackman, the actress who portrayed Cathy Gale, was garbed in leather trousers and jacket because her fighting scenes were incompatible with the skirts she had been wearing, and Emma Peel’s leather catsuits followed on from this theme which had proved so popular. Patrick Macnee retells the story of the invention of Cathy Gale’s outfit in his autobiography, *Blind In One Ear* (1989) 225-6.

⁶⁸ Douglas (1994) 215 notes that ‘the endless bikinis, décolletage, and wet t-shirts, which prompted libidinous comments from the appreciative male characters, re-emphasised to women viewers the importance of looking like a *Playboy* centrefold if you’re really going to get what you want.’

emphasising their sexuality, and transforming them into sex objects for the male gaze.⁶⁹

The same charge, of course, can be made against the makers of *Wonder Woman*. Her small, brightly coloured, figure-hugging outfit balances out any potential audience discomfort with the concept of a female superhero who possesses incredible strength and speed. Comics writer Alex Ross has made the following telling point about the costume:

Here's this woman, a very gorgeous woman, running around half-naked essentially, wearing pretty much a swimming outfit. And somehow she comes across as not being ultra-sexual...and in fact, she is this symbol to young women, or women of any age, [who is] not being *defiled* by that exposure...[she is] an object of energy and motion, not of corrupted sexuality, or something that is just 'for the boys'.⁷⁰

Of course, the outfit cannot be blamed solely on television producers, and this is where *Wonder Woman* differs from *The Avengers* or *Charlie's Angels*: *Wonder Woman* had been a comic book fixture for over thirty years before the ABC network created the show, and the *Wonder Woman* illustrated on those pages had been clothed in the same bustier and hotpants since 1941. To tamper with such a well-established costuming tradition would have been tantamount to comic-book sacrilege; therefore, it seems inevitable that the 1970s incarnation of the Amazon princess would be clothed accordingly.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Inness (1999) 40.

⁷⁰ This quote comes from Ross' discussion on the featurette *Beauty, Brawn and Bulletproof Bracelets: A Wonder Woman Retrospective* on the *Wonder Woman: Season One* DVD.

⁷¹ However, DC Comics recently unveiled designs for an all-new *Wonder Woman* costume to coincide with the comic's 500th episode. The new outfit consists of full-length black leggings, cropped blue jacket, as well as a modified version of the red and gold bustier. *The Guardian's* Peter Bradshaw noted that these alterations have the effect of 'reducing the flesh on display by about 70%'.

The aspect of the Wonder Woman costume that is most valuable in the context of the present discussion is the immediacy of identification through it: the distinctive outfit easily marks out this woman as nobody else *but* Wonder Woman. Ancient Amazons as portrayed in Greek vase-painting of the 6th-5th centuries BC were likewise immediately identifiable – particularly so when the style of depicting them in highly detailed leggings and animal skins became popular. Their distinctive clothing and weapons, paired with their presence in battle scenes, helped to provide instant viewer recognition. However, a crucial difference here is that the Amazons, as they are increasingly depicted in Persian-style leggings and animal skins, are wholly differentiated from their opponents, the Greek heroes: such extravagant outfits mark them out as different and alien. Wonder Woman, however, dresses in a costume that instead assimilates her with her new homeland, as was discussed above: wrapping herself in the American flag illustrates her willingness to adapt and integrate herself with an adopted environment. At the same time, such an attention-grabbing outfit means recognition is instantaneous – particularly in the second and third seasons, when stories of the wartime Wonder Woman’s exploits have proliferated among the American public, and thus her appearance in dire circumstances becomes more expected than hoped-for.

Getting into this star-spangled outfit was a challenge in itself and Diana would sneak off to a secluded corner, spin in a circle, and (with apparent mind-power, accompanied by a bright visual flash) change into the Wonder Woman garb.⁷² In comparison, Superman seems to wear his costume under his Clark Kent clothing, and Batman somehow changes into costume by the time he reaches the bottom of the Bat-pole; but Wonder Woman seems to magically summon up her outfit mentally. An essential part of the costume – the golden belt – actually serves a

⁷² She is shown, in a flashback, as practising this change in front of an approving Queen Hippolyta and Drusilla in *The Feminine Mystique*.

crucial purpose: without it, Wonder Woman no longer has her superhuman strength when absent from Paradise Island. Surprisingly, only once or twice throughout three seasons of *Wonder Woman* is the belt taken away from her by a villain. The ancient implications of an Amazon's belt or girdle (often named as a ζωστήρ, as in Diodorus Siculus 2.46.4 and 4.16.4) were that it symbolised her virginity or sexuality – thus was Heracles' forcible seizure of Hippolyta's belt equated with his sexual possession of her (whether by rape or consensual sex). Wonder Woman's ability to (more or less) constantly retain possession of her own belt in the television series can stand for her sexual independence, autonomy and individuality. Wonder Woman's sexuality is not to be manhandled or abused by any man – it is her own, remains in her possession, and is not yielded. In this instance, the myth of the Amazon who is sexually used and abused at the hands of men can evolve and be rectified by adaptations made to the modern Amazon, Wonder Woman. The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s played no small part in the social revolution which pushed for recognition of women's rights over their sexual destinies, and the television *Wonder Woman*, situated in the midst of such social upheaval, meant the modern Amazon benefited as well.

There are several episodes in which a villain attempts to 'use' Wonder Woman or her likeness to aid their schemes. The sculptor in *The Fine Art of Crime*, for example, unveils a stunning likeness of Wonder Woman at an exhibition (which is actually the real thing, like his other 'sculptural' creations) but his plan to put Wonder Woman in suspended animation beforehand (like the others) is foiled because of Wonder Woman's quick thinking and sleight of hand. The toymaker in *The Deadly Toys* makes a likeness of Wonder Woman which he then orders to destroy the real heroine, but due to the confusion in the scuffle between the two Wonder Women, he is duped into thinking his creation is triumphant – when it is actually the true Wonder Woman, playing along with the plan until she can secure his imprisonment. In *Screaming Javelin*, the megalomaniac Mariposa

‘recruits’ Wonder Woman for his mighty Olympic team made up of numerous (kidnapped) athletes from around the country, only to be foiled by the heroine. And in *Fausta, the Nazi Wonder Woman*, Fausta dresses as Wonder Woman at a bond rally, knowing this appearance would bait the real superheroine into appearing and asserting her identity, thus falling into Fausta’s trap.⁷³ Needless to say, they are all foiled, for two reasons. Firstly, the presence of two Wonder Women often results in confusion which can ruin villains’ plans, and secondly, any attempt to ‘contain’ Wonder Woman is shown to be futile because of her strength and cunning. These various attempts to ‘use’ Wonder Woman often spring from a combination of underestimating her strength (usually because of her gender) and a wish to control this power, but ultimately, no-one is able to ‘use’ Wonder Woman in the way they had wished. Women were viewed in the ancient Athenian world largely as objects and possessions of either fathers or husbands.⁷⁴ In most mythological tales, those Amazons not killed in battle were either made wives or raped (such as the Amazon ‘wife’ of Theseus), though there is some overlapping of these two areas. They are ‘used’ in the way that women have been traditionally used in many societies: for sex and for marriage (and therefore, for propagation of the *oikos* – though their fundamental status as outsiders seems to doom such a union, as ultimately happened with Theseus). In addition, the punishment of inflicting upon an unwilling Amazon the traditional roles of wife and mother seems designed to restore them to a ‘normal’, default female position, which they had rejected while leading their unconventional lives elsewhere.⁷⁵ The

⁷³ Such doubling motifs, common in many mythologies, were also put to excellent use by the makers of the Wonder Woman comic, particularly when Andru and Esposito were in charge: see Daniels (2000) 105.

⁷⁴ I resist using the term ‘ancient Greek world’ because of the clear differences between, in particular, Athenian and Spartan women: women in Sparta (at least, aristocratic women, as opposed to the large population of helots) seem to have been accorded a greater level of freedom than Athenian women, and could own and manage property and may have also enjoyed some measure of sexual freedom: see Cartledge (2002) 156-162.

⁷⁵ DuBois (1982) 40, speaking of marriage as a system of exchange which is explicitly rejected by the Amazons, asserts that the ‘abduction of the Amazon queen represented a rectification of their attitude towards exchange’. See also Reeder (1995) 374 on the ‘fusion of eroticism and aggression familiar in pursuit scenes’ featuring Amazons.

symbol of the Amazon stood for many things in ancient art and literature – and, as seen in Part One, was frequently ‘used’ in these capacities to stand for foreignness, strangeness, barbarity – and when shown defeated in battle, this symbol could warn against female rebellion and self-determination. With Wonder Woman, the world is given a new Amazon symbol – who stands for female independence, strength, and self-reliance. This Amazon cannot be ‘used’ in defeat, as she cannot be defeated.

Wonder Woman’s constant ability to defeat her opponents (mad inventors and master criminals, both male and female) turns on its head the ancient idea that Amazons are never victors, and that they must be vanquished in order to maintain the status quo and reinforce patriarchal norms. Marston’s desire to make Wonder Woman a triumphant female enables this character to evolve and adapt the myth and transform this modern Amazon into the winner instead of the loser. Hence, societal changes are able to influence the reworking of a myth, once its central premise (that is, womanly inferiority) has become an outdated idea. The changing place of women and how they are viewed within society by the 1970s brings about a particularly positive re-interpretation of this myth; in turn, the mythical figure becomes more affirmative, and more inspirational than before. Yet many of the characteristics of the ancient Amazon are retained even into the twentieth century: Wonder Woman fights with astounding skill, maintains an unusual lifestyle, and any reliance on men (romantic or otherwise) is noticeably absent – just as was the case with so many of the Amazons described by ancient authors. Alterations and modifications may be made – such as Wonder Woman’s opposition to violence, and her role as a ‘universal’ hero – but many of the archetypal traits remain wholly intact, demonstrating the resonance and enduring fascination with the figure of the Amazon and its facility for adaptation in the modern medium of television.

After *Wonder Woman*'s cancellation in 1979, syndication both in the United States and elsewhere in the world, along with the widespread sale of DVDs of each season, kept this particular modern Amazon in the public memory. In the 1980s, several more television series focusing on women were produced, of which *Cagney & Lacey* (1982-8) was one of the more long-running and successful; however, by and large, action-oriented shows celebrating independent women were few and far between. As Susan Faludi has pointed out, this decade ushered in a succession of bloody, male-oriented action films focusing on events such as the Vietnam War and featuring exploding cars and damsels in distress. Those television shows which did include women among their lead characters, such as *thirtysomething* (1987-91) exhibited a tendency to emphasise traditionally 'feminine' elements and portray independent or feminist characters as highly unsympathetic or shrewish.⁷⁶ Family-centred shows such as *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992), *Family Ties* (1982-9) and *Growing Pains* (1985-92), while acknowledging women's increasing visibility in professional careers, still persisted in situating the vast majority of their action within the confines of the family home.⁷⁷ It was not until 1996, when *Xena: Warrior Princess* (hereafter *Xena*) became a success that once again, the spirit of the Wonder Woman series was reborn. Indeed, Rob Tapert, creator of the *Xena* series, has specified that he had Wonder Woman in mind when he first became interested in producing a television series focused on a female hero.⁷⁸ A discussion of this show and its relationship to both *Wonder Woman* and the ancient Amazon archetype will assist in rounding out this discussion of Amazons on television.

⁷⁶ Faludi (1992) 184-7 and 194-202 particularly contrasts the potentially positive role models of *Cagney & Lacey* (whose female creators faced an uphill battle to feature hot-topic issues such as unplanned pregnancy, abortion and sexual freedom) with the emphasis placed on motherhood and housewifery in *thirtysomething*.

⁷⁷ Clare Huxtable of *The Cosby Show* was a lawyer, Elyse Keaton of *Family Ties* an architect, and Maggie Seaver of *Growing Pains* a journalist; however, these women's workplaces and colleagues were virtually never shown, vastly reducing their impact and giving the distinct impression that such 'careers' were mere tokenism. On this point, Faludi (1992) 188 notes that '[t]hese women are the same old TV housewives with their housecoats doffed, their 'careers' a hollow nod to the profound changes in women's lives.' See also Dow (2005) 384-5, and Early and Kennedy (2003) 5.

⁷⁸ *Xena's Hong Kong Origins* featurette on the *Xena: Warrior Princess 10th Anniversary Collection* DVD.

Case Study: *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001)

In a time of ancient gods, warlords, and kings, a land in turmoil cried out for a hero. She was Xena: a mighty princess forged in the heat of battle. The power. The passion. The danger. Her courage will change the world.

- Opening credits of *Xena: Warrior Princess*

Xena, like *Wonder Woman*, has also become a true cult classic, spawning multiple fan websites, star appearances at conventions, and serious scholarly discussion on the significance of this newest female icon of the small screen.⁷⁹ The fact that such fan-bases and discussion carried on beyond the series' cancellation in 2001, when it was then put into syndication, is testament to the vast popularity and richness of content of the show. Such popularity can be useful in gauging just how influential a modern Amazon such as *Xena* can be, in terms of creating a variation on the mythological framework and observing how that variation can, as *Wonder Woman* did, reflect changing social mores and expectations. In addition, the varied interpretations of the series give rise to several strands of co-existing 'meaning' and analysis, which in itself can provide evidence of changing social constructions of just what is expected of a modern female television heroine. Ultimately, teaming an analysis of *Xena: Warrior Princess* with the preceding

⁷⁹ Some helpful guidance regarding a definition of 'cult' television can be found in Gwenllian-Jones and Pearson's 'Introduction' to their *Cult Television* (2004): '[Cult] programs formulate complex internal logistics, combine realistic and archetypal characters, and construct fantastical worlds where philosophical and ethical issues can be explored and grand gestures enacted free from the obscuring trivia and mundane concerns of everyday reality' (xvi). Additionally, the crucial aspect of cult television shows' avid fans, and the communities and discussion initiated by such fans, is also noted by most scholars of this topic, including Gwenllian-Jones and Pearson. Certainly, the 'fantastical worlds' aspect remains true even for cult programs of the present day; further to this I would add that even when situated in a relatively 'ordinary' world, elements of the quirky, supernatural or nostalgic will go some way in lending 'cult' credibility to such shows. Recent and/or current shows I would classify as 'cult' (and the elements which define them as such) include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2004, featuring vampires and vampire-slayers [supernatural]); *Mad Men* (2007- , set in the early 1960s world of advertising [nostalgic]); *Deadwood* (2005-8, set in gold-rush era frontier America [nostalgic] and also featuring dialogue written in iambic pentameter [quirky]); and *True Blood* (2008- , featuring vampire characters [supernatural]).

discussion of *Wonder Woman* will provide a wider investigation of television's Amazon figures and how they have evolved or adapted to suit social context.

Played by New Zealand actress Lucy Lawless, the character of Xena herself is and was pivotal to the popularity of the show, much as Lynda Carter truly embodied the character of Wonder Woman to many viewers who were fans of the television show. Like Carter, Lawless was a tall, blue-eyed brunette; like Carter, she wore a comparatively scanty outfit with confidence; and like Carter, she became almost synonymous with the character she played on screen.⁸⁰ Xena fulfils the criteria for a 'modern Amazon figure' on many levels, much as Wonder Woman did in the 1970s. She has an impressive stock of fighting skills, gathered from numerous sources; she rejects reliance on any domineering male love-interest or husband; she lives an unconventional, nomadic lifestyle; and she has a relationship with her children which is somewhat unusual. In addition to these criteria, the show often celebrates aspects of her femaleness such as pregnancy and motherhood, and also her close relationship with Gabrielle (played by Renee O'Connor) – which is only possible due to advancements made through second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. These last aspects are ones which *Wonder Woman* was not able to explore because of the eponymous heroine's lack of children and single status; thus *Xena* is able to significantly augment the range of experiences open to its lead character. Throughout the series' six-season run, these aspects of Xena's identity

⁸⁰ Carter's interchangeability with her Wonder Woman character was played for comic value in the film *Sky High* (2005) where she played the principal of a school for superhero children (and spoke the ironic line 'I'm not Wonder Woman, you know!' near the end of the film). Carter has remarked that 'I don't know that I will ever play a character that has as great an impact as Wonder Woman did' (Daniels [2000] 148). The New Zealand comedy series *Bro'Town* used Lawless' Xena identity for the episode *Touched By A Teacher* (2005) in which Lucy rescues a schoolteacher from a lynch-mob with her famous Xena battle cry; additionally, in the episode *So You Think You Can Dance Near The Stars* (2009), Lucy features as a dance contest judge, and enters with the Xena battle cry and is addressed as 'Madame Warrior Princess' by the character Agnes. The American series *The Simpsons*, in the episode *Treehouse of Horror X* (1999), emphasised over-zealous viewers' identification of Lawless with Xena by showing a mad 'Collector' who insists on keeping his favourite television stars (whom he values purely because of the much-loved characters they play) shrink-wrapped in his basement. Rescuing Bart and Lisa Simpson from the crazed Collector's trap, 'Xena' then flies off through the air clutching the children; when Lisa protests 'Hey, wait a minute – Xena can't fly!' the reply that is given is 'I told you, I'm not Xena, Lisa! I'm Lucy Lawless!'

motivate plotlines and assist in character development, but can also raise interesting questions about the expectations of a modern female action hero. Xena's pregnancy and motherhood, in particular (as shown in the episodes *God Fearing Child*, *Eternal Bonds* and *Kindred Spirits*), illustrate a more nurturing side of Xena while still allowing her to continue her unconventional life; her relationship with Gabrielle – which trumps all others in the course of the series – assists in questioning the necessity of the heteronormative model into which female television characters are so often forced. To begin with, an investigation into Xena's 'Amazon' characteristics can assist in seeing the pattern of behaviours emphasised by the creators of the 'modern Amazon', which in turn are embraced by the audience.

Weapons used by Xena throughout the series include a trusty sword, a 'chakram' (a circular boomerang-like object with sharp edges) and other objects used less frequently but no less adeptly (a bow and arrow in *When Fates Collide*, a staff in *The Bitter Suite*). But Xena's true weapon is her skill and intuition when confronted with an enemy. Several episodes deal with Xena facing numerous foes at once and dispatching them one by one with punches, kicks, sword thrusts and elbows to the face. The episode *One Against An Army* involved Xena preparing to fight off a large contingent of Persians from a barn while also tending to a poisoned and slowly dying Gabrielle. Once she has successfully seen off their attempted attack, she snarls 'go home – there are thousands more like me!' (fig. 22). Dutifully, the Persians depart. Yet despite Xena's intimidating battlefield prowess, the episode also shows her more caring, compassionate side: tending to the ailing Gabrielle, she fetches her animal-skin blankets and reassures her that 'even in death, Gabrielle, I'll never leave you.' This all fits in with one of the overarching premises of the series, which is that Xena's combat expertise can be balanced out with her gentler characteristics, which are enhanced and encouraged through her friendship with Gabrielle.

Fig. 22: Xena takes on an entire contingent of the Persian army.

In addition to those weapons mentioned above, Xena possesses (like Wonder Woman) a tool which is often used to extract the truth from an opponent. While Wonder Woman has the magic lasso, Xena has ‘the pinch’: a deft blow to the neck which cuts off the flow of blood to the brain, killing within thirty seconds. This gives the victim just enough time to reveal whatever information Xena needs and can be ‘released’ by an equally swift motion. Like the lasso, it can disable Xena’s foe as well as elicit the truth; unlike the lasso, there is an element of violence and even torture in ‘the pinch’ which Wonder Woman would surely shy away from. Xena’s knowledge of ‘the pinch’ is revealed in the episode *Destiny* to have been imparted to her by a slave girl named M’Lila, encountered when Xena was a marauding pirate and who ultimately saved Xena from crucifixion by Caesar’s troops. A foreign woman who has been dispossessed, therefore – the lowliest of the low in the Greco-Roman hybrid world of *Xena* – is the ultimate source of one of Xena’s greatest weapons. Another two episodes explore the

implications and responsibilities associated with the manoeuvre, the series finales *A Friend In Need I* and *II*. Not only do the episodes show Gabrielle begging Xena to teach her ‘the pinch’, they also reveal that Xena had taught the move to a Japanese woman, Akemi, years ago – only for Akemi to immediately use it on her murderous father. The pinch is obviously lethal in the right (or wrong) hands, particularly to someone who is unwilling to ‘release’ it. It also provides a close link between Xena and The Bride of the *Kill Bill* films (to be discussed in the next chapter): both characters possess a treasured technique which ultimately proves their mastery of martial arts and with which they can place themselves in a superior position over opponents.

It becomes apparent from the very outset that Xena is able to overcome cumbrously-armed Roman troops and Olympic gods alike with an array of martial arts-style kicks, throws and feints. In addition to her expert use of such fighting methods, Xena travels to China and Japan and interacts with both cultures – for better or worse. While some scholars have criticised *Xena*’s depiction of these nations as ‘Orientalising’, Xena’s personal reaction and relation to them is far from that of the colonial Westerner determined to assert her superiority.⁸¹ The ability of Xena to form close relationships with people from these areas (for instance, Lao Ma in China and Akemi in Japan), and indeed, her final decision to die to atone for the crimes she had perpetrated in China, seems to mitigate such accusations of cultural imperialism. Indeed, one might argue, particularly in view of the refusal by *Xena*’s creators to adhere to any firm historical or mythical tradition (or even any firm timeframe), that geography and chronology are irrelevant to the tale they wish to tell.

⁸¹ Kennedy (2003) especially 48-9 argues that *Xena* contains many of the hallmarks of Orientalist texts in portraying the East as ‘soft, fragrant, mysterious, seductive, and essentially female’ and also in ultimately privileging the Western hero (Xena) through the Chinese characters’ reliance on her. However, she notes the exception to this rule: the show notably ascribes significant agency to Eastern women, portraying Lao Ma with wisdom, power, and (crucially for this show) invincibility against Xena.

Xena's involvement with M'Lila, Akemi, Lao Ma, and the various Amazon tribes who occasionally appear, demonstrates what Kathleen Kennedy has described as the 'multicultural tradition of warrior women' in which Xena is positioned.⁸² A significant element of this multiculturalism is Xena's fighting style, which borrows heavily from martial arts such as kung fu. Rob Tapert and Liz Friedman, producers of *Xena*, have openly acknowledged their debt to Hong Kong and Chinese cinema classics such as *Chinese Ghost Story* and *The Bride with White Hair*. In addition to centering the series around what they term a "take no prisoners' kind of character", several particular fight scenes take their cue from similar scenes in these films. Scenes involving Xena breathing fire (inspired by *Drunken Master II*), fighting on ladders (*Once Upon a Time in China*) and battling enemies while balanced upon people's heads and shoulders (*Fong Sai Yuk*) all show the immense diversity of Xena's fighting methods while also paying homage to female heroes from non-Western film.⁸³ Such use of non-Western traits and skills by a Western figure thus undermines the previous privileging of Western methods – a natural result of the globalisation of popular culture, in which there occurs what Butt and Wohlmut term a 'demystification of alien cultures'.⁸⁴ The blending of martial arts with sword skills and deadly accuracy with her chakram results in a Xena who, if not invincible, is well-endowed with exceptional combative abilities enabling her to overcome Romans, Persians, or any other enemy. The martial arts have now become merely another string to the modern Amazon's bow. The immense popularity of Chinese-American film star Bruce Lee in the early 1970s, which continued well after his death in 1973, helped bring martial arts (particularly his unique brand, named Jeet Kune Do – 'the way of the intercepting fist') to the

⁸² Kennedy (2003) 41.

⁸³ These inspirations and elements are discussed in an interview with Rob Tapert, Liz Friedman, David Pollison and Doug Lefler on the *Xena's Hong Kong Origins* featurette, from the *Xena: Warrior Princess 10th Anniversary Collection* DVD.

⁸⁴ Butt and Wohlmut (2006) 92.

attention of Western audiences.⁸⁵ Other martial arts such as karate and wing chun were also appropriated as crucial elements of the television or film hero's arsenal, with which they could fight opponents in an impressive and stylised way. Prior to *Xena*, the characters of Catherine Gale and Emma Peel in *The Avengers* had exhibited admirable abilities in judo and karate,⁸⁶ but it was the influx of increasingly popular martial-arts films of the 1970s which brought such fighting styles into the (Western) mainstream.⁸⁷ In addition, martial arts also conquered the small screen with the ABC television series *Kung Fu* (1972-5), which cast American actor David Carradine in the lead role of Kwai Chang Caine, a part-Chinese Shaolin priest travelling through the American Old West of the 1870s.⁸⁸ In terms of how this relates to Xena's identity as a modern Amazon, I see some interesting parallels with the way in which Amazons, in the classical Greek world, were viewed very much as 'foreigners', constantly positioned at the farthest (frequently Eastern) fringes of the known Greek world; in turn, Xena's employment of what may still be regarded by the Western world as 'foreign' methods of fighting (because of their Eastern origins) serve to further associate her with the ancient Amazon.

Another aspect of Kennedy's phrase regarding the 'multicultural tradition of warrior women' that must be addressed is the number of female adversaries faced by Xena. In a significant departure from the opponents faced by the ancient Amazons, she must fight off female as well as male opponents, though Xena's

⁸⁵ The influence of Bruce Lee will be examined further in Chapter Four of this work.

⁸⁶ Inness (1999) 33-5; Wright (2006) 471.

⁸⁷ Indeed, the creators of *Xena* have openly acknowledged their debt to Asian cinema: this is discussed further on in this chapter.

⁸⁸ In the matter of casting the main character, Tasker (2001) 124 quotes the show's producer Harvey Frand: 'In my eyes and in the eyes of [fellow producer] Jerry Throe, David Carradine was always our first choice to play Caine. But there was some disagreement because the network was interested in a more muscular actor, and the studio was interested in getting Bruce Lee.' Tasker herself admits (116) that 'neither [the show's] liberalism nor its undoubted innovation extended to the casting of an Asian actor in the central role'. Rumours still remain that Bruce Lee was denied the lead role because it was thought that American audiences would not warm to an Asian main character.

more cynical outlook negates any potential disappointment (such as that shown by Wonder Woman) when faced with such women. One particular recurring character matched against Xena is Callisto, who as a young girl sees the ‘bad’ warlord Xena destroy her village, and thus grows up wishing to exact vengeance. She first appears in the Season One episode *Callisto*, making an immediate visual impression with an outfit very similar to Xena’s (leather bustier, short skirt, bare arms) which is teamed with an appearance very much the opposite of Xena’s – long blonde hair, brown eyes, and a thinner physique – which then allows for a light/dark contrast between the two (fig. 23).⁸⁹

Fig. 23: Xena’s nemesis, Callisto.

While modelling herself on Xena (having learnt everything about her methods and habits), Callisto also seeks to surpass her. When the captured Joxer addresses her as ‘Warrior Queen’, Callisto muses ‘Warrior Queen...I like that’ and Joxer posits ‘It’s much better than ‘Warrior *Princess*!’ This character revisits Xena several times throughout the series’ six seasons, often with malicious intent: she kills Gabrielle’s old boyfriend Perdiccas (*Return of Callisto*), causes the death of

⁸⁹ Inness (1999) 171-173 notes that ‘in many ways, she is the mirror image of Xena’ and ‘the show reveals that each of them has an identity that is closely bound up with the identity of the other’. Such a doubling of hero/opponent in which one appears as the inverse of the other can be traced back to Shakespeare’s *Othello* (in which the white villain Iago balances the black tragic hero Othello), and also features in the antagonism between darkly-suited Batman and his nemesis, the colourfully-garbed Joker.

Xena's son Solan (*Maternal Instincts*), and impregnates Xena so that she may be reincarnated (*Fallen Angel*). Other female opponents of Xena include an evil Amazon, named Velasca (*A Necessary Evil*), a sorceress, Alti (*Adventures in the Sin Trade II*, *Between the Lines*, *Them Bones*, *Them Bones*, *When Fates Collide*), and Gabrielle's daughter, Hope (*The Sacrifice I and II*, *A Family Affair*). As was the case with *Wonder Woman*, the allocation of villainous roles to women provides the series with a broader range of female characters, but in addition it provides a key divergence from the ancient concept of the Amazon. While the modern Amazon must face other women who may match her in physical abilities and determination, this was an impossibility for the ancient Amazon, who by very virtue of her identity was the only kind of woman who dared act in such a way.

Actual Amazon communities are also depicted in *Xena* and have proved popular with the show's fanbase: although they are not always opponents of Xena, their appearance assists in adding to the broad scope of physically capable and independent women on display in the series. The inclusion of Gabrielle within one such community, when a dying Amazon princess bestows her own 'Amazon right of caste' upon her in *Hooves and Harlots*, allows for the show's first close look at the group; she eventually becomes Queen of these Amazons in the fourth season episode *Endgame*. This episode also explicitly links Xena to Amazons – and the Amazon archetype – when their queen, Melosa, tells Xena that 'to some of us, you're a hero, a true Amazon'. She is again identified as an Amazon in the episodes *Adventures in the Sin Trade Part 2*, when Cyane says the following to Xena:

You know you have the potential to be the greatest of women warriors. At heart you're an Amazon, whether you believe it or not.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Futoran (2003). Just as the comic Wonder Woman was referred to as 'stronger than Hercules', *Xena's* creators also position Xena as superior to an ancient foe: In the episode *To Helicon and Back*, Bellerophon – who in past mythological tales (*Iliad* 6.186) had defeated the Amazons – is eventually killed by Xena, in retaliation for attempting to destroy Gabrielle's tribe of Amazons.

As was the case at least by the time of Diodorus, the diverse Amazon tribes of *Xena* are shown to inhabit more than one territorial area. While the Amazons of *Hooves and Harlots* seemed to live in Greece, those featured in *Adventures in the Sin Trade Part 1* and *2* live in Siberia, and those of *Them Bones, Them Bones* are referred to as ‘Northern Amazons’. Unlike Wonder Woman’s Amazon community, which was portrayed as benevolent and peaceful, there can be dissent and violence among the Amazons in *Xena*. In particular, Velasca (*The Quest; A Necessary Evil*) kills the current queen and attempts to usurp the Amazon throne for herself; and Alti, a megalomaniac shaman of the Siberian Amazons, reappears in numerous episodes in order to challenge, torment and battle Xena and Gabrielle (*Adventures in the Sin Trade; Between the Lines; Them Bones, Them Bones; Send in the Clones; and When Fates Collide*). Such female foes can, as mentioned above in relation to *Wonder Woman*, assist in depicting women in a broader range of roles, even if those roles may be criminal or dangerous.

Although Mary Magoulick has argued that *Xena* situates its heroine as the ‘creation’ of Hercules (namely in *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, the show from which the *Xena* series grew)⁹¹, Xena is in fact reliant on no man, whether father, brother, husband or lover. The *Hercules* series itself was, at the time, simply the latest point in a decades-long Western fascination with the hero which had assisted in the production of myriad films at its zenith in the 1960s (some mentioning Hercules by name, others featuring a thinly veiled version of the strongman).⁹² In contrast, *Xena* stands as a rejection of the rigid gender lines along which such strongman films had been divided; indeed, the show seems to gleefully reverse such sexual stereotypes throughout its six seasons. A blundering, frequently cowardly male character, Joxer, and the Olympian god of war, Ares,

⁹¹ Magoulick, 735.

⁹² See Pomeroy (2008), particularly 49-59, for discussion on the Hercules figure in so-called *peplum* films made in Italy in the 1960s; see also Nisbet (2006) 50-52.

who seems hopelessly and helplessly in love with Xena, are juxtaposed with the courageous warriors Xena and Gabrielle – not to mention several tribes of warlike Amazons (comprised, naturally, entirely of women). Kathleen Kennedy has also illuminated the ways in which *Xena* offers ‘a sustained critique of the male warrior story – in particular its embedded misogyny and its emphasis on the violent conquest of others.’⁹³ Gender role-reversal and the absence of any controlling male characters combine to give Xena more autonomy than any female lead character since *Wonder Woman*. An examination of the relationships which do exist between Xena and members of the opposite sex can reveal an interesting set of issues invoked by the creators and writers of the series.

The bulk of *Xena*’s episodes focus on the heroine in her ‘good’ days – after she has forsaken her former life as a violent warlord and has decided to begin a new life, using her skills to benefit others and atoning for past transgressions.⁹⁴ However, several flashbacks are provided throughout the series which show glimpses of Xena’s old lifestyle. One of the striking differences between Xena’s old life and new seem to be her interactions with men – in particular, romantic relationships with them. Three male figures stand out throughout the six seasons of *Xena*: Borias, Julius Caesar, and Ares. All once had or continue to have some semblance of romantic chemistry with the heroine, and examining her response and reaction to each of them can in turn explain her single status and non-reliance on men. Firstly, this case study will address the man occupying the most distant position in Xena’s history and who is shown solely in flashback scenes of Xena’s warlord days: Borias.

⁹³ Kennedy (2003) 41.

⁹⁴ Xena forsakes the ‘old’ life after a memorable encounter with Hercules in an episode of the aforementioned *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* series (and hence Magoulick’s standpoint on Hercules ‘creating’ Xena).

Borias (played by Martin Csokas) was a fellow warlord, and the audience also learns he is the father of Xena's son Solan.⁹⁵ Flashbacks of the relationship show it to have been one between equals, but not overly sentimental – in *Adventures in the Sin Trade I*, Xena asserts (in reply to Borias' expressions of affection) 'people like you and me don't "fall in love"!'. It is also in concert with Borias that Xena plots to infiltrate and defeat a tribe of Amazons in this same episode, which shows her 'old' life – that of warlord, that of lover of Borias – to be particularly anti-woman. It is when she frees herself from the expectations of heterosexuality (which will be examined later in this chapter) *as well* as from the former life of crime and plunder that she can once again be an ally and champion of the Amazon communities, as seen in episodes such as *Hooves and Harlots*, *A Necessary Evil* and *Adventures in the Sin Trade I* and *II* (in which she eventually helps those very Amazons she sought to destroy years earlier). When he has become the father of Xena's child Solan, Borias begins to show a more merciful side in the episode *Past Imperfect*. He refuses to make war on a nearby tribe of centaurs despite the megalomaniac Xena's wishes and ultimately pays the price: two of Xena's allies end up killing him. Though Xena is distraught at the death of Borias, ultimately she chooses the life of a warlord over a potentially peaceful retirement at home with children; Futrell points out that this tension in Xena's life results in a portrayal of Xena as 'an antimother'.⁹⁶

Another male lover who appears in the series (both in flashback and in 'present time') is Julius Caesar. A flashback in *Destiny* first introduces him when Xena's band of pirates capture him, intending to ransom him back to Rome – echoing

⁹⁵ Solan only appears in four episodes, *Past Imperfect*, *Orphan of War*, *Maternal Instincts* and *God Fearing Child*, and will be discussed further on in this chapter.

⁹⁶ Futrell (2003) 16. Xena's decision evokes memories of the 'heroic choice' made by mythical figures such as Achilles, who chose a short but glorious life over a long and uneventful one (Hom. *Il.* 9.410-16).

the legend familiar from Plutarch's *Caesar*.⁹⁷ The handsome young man is then sexually seduced by Xena, who brazenly approaches him in a skimpy outfit and urges him to join forces with her in conquering the world with the words 'we'd make an unstoppable team!'⁹⁸ However, Caesar soon reveals a duplicitous streak, having Xena seized and crucified on a beach, after announcing to her that 'you'll have a special place of honour – among my conquered'.⁹⁹ Here it would seem that it is intolerable to Caesar that he himself may have been (sexually) conquered, so in return he uses words to assuage his masculinity and assure himself that it is he who is conquering Xena, not vice versa. Ultimately, though, even crucifixion by Caesar's soldiers fails to 'conquer' Xena, as she is saved and resuscitated with the help of a slave girl named M'Lila. When Caesar's troops track down Xena's would-be saviour, M'Lila saves Xena once again by placing herself in the path of a deadly weapon. Stricken by her new friend's death, Xena demolishes Caesar's men and thus starts down her destructive path of violence, and thus it is from this incident that Xena's 'old' life as a violent warlord is shown to have stemmed.

⁹⁷ This was just one of many instances in which the writers of the show 'inserted' Xena into actual historical events or invented events in the lives of historical figures – such as the battle against Boudica in Britain (*The Deliverer*), an attempted assassination, and successful assassination, of Cleopatra (*The King of Assassins* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, respectively), the Persian invasion of Greece (*One Against An Army*), an attempt by Caesar and Pompey to conquer Greece (*A Good Day*), the Trojan War (*Beware Greeks Bearing Gifts*) and a power-hungry rampage by Caligula (*The God You Know*).

⁹⁸ This particular scene casts Xena almost as a sexual predator, or at least as a woman in charge of and aggressively pursuing her own sexual destiny: a link can be made here back to the 1957 *Hercules* film, in which the Argonauts happen upon a community of Amazons, whose unhappy past experiences with men visiting their territory have led to a violent solution:

Queen Anthea: From that day on, whenever men landed here, we made sure that they wouldn't harm us...

Jason: By loving them and then killing them!

Queen Anthea: It gave us a feeling of...superiority.

Shades of Strabo's tales of random couplings with neighbouring Gargarians (11.5.1) are apparent here. The women take what they need to assuage the 'loneliness' spoken of by Anthea, but in this film, they must kill the men when they are satiated, which the Argonauts only just manage to escape through the wiliness of Ulysses.

⁹⁹ This follows the historical tradition retold by Plutarch, in which Caesar takes revenge on the pirates who originally captured him by hunting down and executing them: see Plutarch *Caesar* 2. Several details, such as Caesar insisting he is worth a larger ransom than the pirates' original demand and the eventual crucifixion of the pirates at Caesar's behest are transferred to the tale in the *Xena* episode.

Caesar reappears again in several other episodes¹⁰⁰ but it is on *The Ides of March* and *When Fates Collide* that I wish to focus particularly. The former episode has the (present-day) Xena setting out to destroy Caesar because of his increasingly megalomaniacal tendencies, being foiled only by the vast amount of Caesar's personal guards. When Xena enters his room, Caesar himself merely stands by motionless as she dispatches the guards one by one. Caesar's eventual destruction comes about in the manner all Roman history students are accustomed to: stabbed in the Curia by 'a ring of drawn daggers' (Suet. *Caes.* 82). The interesting addition made by the *Xena* writers is that it is Xena who persuades Brutus that Caesar nurtures power-hungry aspirations to imperial office, thus spurring him to preventative action (fig. 24). The juxtaposition of scenes of Caesar being stabbed with scenes of Xena and Gabrielle being crucified in Northern Italy (once again, on Caesar's orders) allows for an elegant parallel in which the cause of each other's suffering is also, at that moment, enduring their own suffering. It also once again positions Caesar as a key nemesis for Xena, a situation which the episode *When Fates Collide* seeks to rework.

¹⁰⁰ In all, they number five: *Destiny*, *The Deliverer*, *When In Rome*, *A Good Day*, *The Ides of March*, and *When Fates Collide*.

Fig. 24: Xena reveals Caesar's imperial ambitions to Brutus.

When Fates Collide is essentially an intriguing ‘what if...?’ episode, in which Caesar and Xena are Emperor and Empress of Rome, and Gabrielle is a visiting bard from Athens. Seeking to rewrite the past after his death (shown in previous episode *The Ides of March*), Caesar is shown cutting a particular strand of his fate (on a large structure in the Underworld symbolising the Fates’ loom), plunging all *Xena*’s characters into a kind of alternate universe.¹⁰¹ The team of Xena and Caesar seems to work well enough, with Xena shown leading forces on horseback and arrayed majestically in Empress-appropriate clothing, but the arrival of Gabrielle awakens feelings in Xena which seem unfulfilled by her husband – who is meanwhile having an affair with Alti, a scheming priestess. Xena brushes off the attentions of Caesar in the bedroom:

¹⁰¹ Such alterations made to ‘historical’ events, or depictions of non-historical, fantastical events should not necessarily detract from the fact that this is still a reception of the ancient world; indeed, the re-writing of such events or characters is a mainstay of *Xena*’s approach, which can be best classed as a ‘postmodern mythopoetic text’ (Gwenllian-Jones’ [2000] 414). Gwenllian-Jones describes the way the show ‘continually constructs shrewd, playful parahistories that interrogate and critique the cultural texts that they irreverently invoke, ‘misuse’, and transform’ (405). Certainly such a postmodern ‘collage’ of history – impossible in any straightforward analysis of the ancient world – should be regarded as having certain advantages in a reception-based approach to *mythopoiesis*.

Caesar: (strokes Xena's neck) It's been a long time...

Xena: (shrugs his hand away) It's been a long *day*.

This dynamic, particularly when contrasted with the immediate connection made between Empress and Gabrielle (the scene in which they first meet shows them engaged in a deep conversation, neither willing to end it), ultimately shows Caesar to be an ill-suited partner and Gabrielle to be the true soulmate and preferred companion. This has additional consequences for how the audience reads the relationship between Xena and Gabrielle, which is inextricably linked back to Xena's relationships (or lack thereof) with men. Xena asks Gabrielle whether she truly believes (as the play she had presented proclaimed) that there is such a thing as 'a love worth dying for'. Near the end of the episode Xena is (once again) crucified by Caesar for freeing Gabrielle from prison, and thus it is *Gabrielle's* love that is revealed to be the kind of love 'worth dying for', not Caesar's. In fact, in a telling parallel to the end of *The Ides of March*, scenes of Xena's crucifixion in *When Fates Collide* are juxtaposed with scenes of Caesar being stabbed – this time, by his power-hungry mistress Alti, while he is stripped and most vulnerable, in the bedroom.¹⁰² Ultimately, Caesar's plan of changing destiny is foiled when the freed Gabrielle then burns down the loom of fate, plunging the characters back to their previous lives. The final scene shows Xena and Gabrielle once again walking through the usual forest scenery, talking and joking just as they had been at the beginning of the episode, reassuring viewers that all is once again as it should be.

The third and most highly visible male with whom Xena shares a special chemistry is Ares, the Olympian god of war. Their relationship is ambiguous and uncertain, veering between contempt and lust, and at one point (in the episode

¹⁰² Kennedy (2007) 324 remarks that Alti 'is able to kill Caesar in part because he allows her to be on top during their sexual encounter. This positioning gives Alti the freedom of movement necessary to penetrate him while preventing him from escaping her grasp. Had Caesar preserved appropriate gender roles, he could have thwarted Alti and at least saved his own life, if not Rome itself.'

The Furies) Xena suspects Ares may even be her father. Despite this, Ares seems genuinely unable to leave the Warrior Princess alone. The physical possibilities of the relationship are particularly hinted at or played out in two episodes in particular – *Eternal Bonds* and *Amphipolis Under Siege* – which are, conveniently, sequential episodes. In the former episode, Ares appears to Xena while she and her infant daughter Eve are attempting to evade the Olympian gods. Ares assures her he will protect her if only she will succumb to his charms and bear him a child – displaying a curious and inexplicable desire for a living legacy, considering his own immortality. Xena appears physically attracted to Ares and tempted by his offer, but stands firm in refusing it. Ares’ offer essentially reduces Xena to nothing more than a vessel for his child, and in view of the character development displayed throughout the show and the adamantly independent nature of the show’s heroine, Xena agreeing to this plan would be both unlikely and unacceptable. The constant harping of Ares to ‘just give me a child!’ comes while Xena is still nursing a baby she had given birth to in only the previous episode, making this offer seem all the more outlandish and selfish on Ares’ part. Xena’s refusal is a clear signal of her intentions to never be reduced to a mere object in such a way, despite the strength of her attraction to Ares.¹⁰³ She has flashbacks during the episode of a passionate kiss between them, and they seem to be erotically intense, as she finds herself stumbling over words and shaking her head to dislodge the flashbacks. Although Xena’s self-control in resisting Ares and his plan assist in reassuring viewers of the heroine’s core independence and autonomy, the subsequent episode once again brings Xena and Ares together and further explores the chemistry between them.

¹⁰³ Ares’ request is again made in the Season 5 episode *Eve*, but this time in an altogether more threatening manner, with Ares demanding Xena bear him a child in exchange for him stopping the murderous rampage of her grown daughter, Eve.

In *Amphipolis Under Siege*, Xena is faced with the unwelcome possibility of having to offer herself to Ares in return for assistance in battle. Ares' sister, the goddess Athena, is laying siege to Xena's hometown of Amphipolis, and the heroine and Gabrielle are determined to defend both themselves and the town. For most of the episode Xena is successful in warding off both Ares' advances and Athena's forces, but eventually she seems to resign herself to the trade-off and, clothed only in a voluminous bearskin, meets Ares in a dimly lit room, asking 'can I trust you to keep your end of the bargain?' (fig. 25). The convenient interruption of their tryst by an explosion and Xena's own mother (who looks both surprised at and disapproving of the couple's compromising position) prevents Xena from uniting sexually with Ares. By extension, it also stops her from embarking on an alliance which Gabrielle acknowledges will be destructive and harmful when she later confronts Ares: 'You will destroy Xena. You will turn her into exactly what she used to be – a vicious killer.' Ares' response is apathetic: 'I kind of liked that Xena.' The end of the episode shows Xena ultimately outwitting Ares, and Athena's forces retreat before the city is breached. Ares' anger is palpable and he questions Xena:

Ares: Back there in the temple - can you tell me you didn't feel anything?

Xena: I felt nothing.

Amid Ares' warnings that she will need his help in the future, Xena walks back to the city with Gabrielle, having once again successfully rebuffed a male's attentions – albeit through complex machinations in this episode.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Xena creator Rob Tapert rationalised Xena's actions in the episode thus: '...in that episode [sex] was the only weapon left to her. The siege mentality was the justification for her going to Ares and spinning her web that way'. Cited on the www.whoosh.org episode guide for *Amphipolis Under Siege*, accessed 20/11/2009.

Fig. 25: Xena seduces Ares in order to save the city of Amphipolis.

One can conclude, then, that Xena's assorted sexual liaisons with men have never had a strong and lasting effect on her.¹⁰⁵ Given the analysis put forward by Antonia Fraser concerning the historical tradition of casting powerful women largely as 'appendages' to men, it is surprising and welcome to find that – like Wonder Woman – not only does Xena have no long-term male romantic companion, she also has no father or older brother to take on the *kyrios* role familiar from the norms of Greek society.¹⁰⁶ Although Xena's mother makes several appearances in the series (in the pilot *Sins of the Past*, *The Furies*, *Amphipolis Under Siege* and *The Haunting of Amphipolis*), her father does not. His death is explained in *The Furies*: when Xena was small, he was ordered by Ares to sacrifice his daughter, but Xena's mother intervened and killed her husband. This

¹⁰⁵ Additionally it is clear that Caesar's treacherous treatment of her shown in *Destiny* had a firmly *negative* effect on her, as was discussed on page 138.

¹⁰⁶ Fraser (1989) 11-12 and *passim*, stresses five thematic 'syndromes' which crop up time and again in the historical and biographical accounts of 'Warrior Queens': the Appendage Syndrome (the 'stressed connection of so many Warrior Queens to the nearest strong masculine figure'), the Voracity Syndrome (presenting the female in question as 'preternaturally lustful'), the Chaste Syndrome (presenting her as strictly adhering to chastity), the Shame Syndrome (in which all the surrounding males fail in courage in comparison with the woman being discussed), and the 'Only-a-Weak-Woman' Syndrome (in which the 'normally robust' female leader indulges in 'sudden diplomatic outbreak of modesty, pleading the notorious weakness of her sex').

particular episode makes an obvious parallel between Xena and Orestes, in that both are charged with avenging their fathers' murderers, who are their respective mothers. Key adjustments have been made in this twentieth-century version of the myth, however. Xena has not grown up with a strong paternal presence, as her father died when she was small; she has a close relationship with her mother; and the true story behind the murder (told by Xena's mother) is couched in the terms of a battered wife's self-defence.¹⁰⁷ She explains that 'he was drunk...and angry. He told me Xena had to die. He was very confused, Xena...I told him I wouldn't let him do that. He said he'd kill me too, then.' Alison Futrell has observed here that '[c]ulpability in this scenario is thus fixed on the abusive father' and therefore, the murder is one of pure maternal instinct to protect her child from danger.¹⁰⁸

The possibility is then floated in this episode that in fact Ares may be Xena's real father – adding what one author has termed 'a *frisson* of incest' to the series in light of Ares' role as a potential (if unsuccessful) suitor to Xena.¹⁰⁹ This possible paternity (which is never confirmed by Ares), though disturbing in view of his romantic pursuit of Xena throughout the series, is highly interesting in terms of viewing Xena as a modern Amazon. As mentioned in Chapter One, several ancient authors including Euripides and Lysias labelled the Amazons 'daughters of Ares'; and thus the innate martial abilities of both the Amazons and Xena can

¹⁰⁷ In contrast, Orestes exhibits a stronger sense of loyalty to his father that possibly stems from a closer relationship with him (as well as a strong misogynistic streak, which is ultimately borne out by Athena's verdict in *Eumenides*). His relationship with Clytemnestra seems distant, seen in such comments as '[she] discarded me to misery' (*Choe.* 913) and 'with such a woman may I never share my home' (*Choe.* 1005-6); and (particularly in Aeschylus' retellings) the murder of Agamemnon is seen as a power-play by the usurpers Clytemnestra and Aegisthus *as well as* revenge for Iphigenia's sacrifice – not self-defence against a dangerous drunk.

¹⁰⁸ Futrell (2003) 20-21.

¹⁰⁹ Tigges (2007) 8. He also notes Xena's potential 'dual fatherhood' is 'one of the hallmarks of the archetypal hero'. Such dual fatherhood is a feature of myths involving Heracles, Oedipus, and the Dioscuri.

be explained through divine parentage.¹¹⁰ This could be one way of explaining away the battle skills of a group of women, who by virtue of gender should not be warlike – it can all be explained as the work of a god. However, Ares’ refusal to confirm paternity of Xena, coupled with his relationship-inappropriate overtures to her, leaves the subject open to interpretation. Thus, the audience can attribute Xena’s abilities to her own training and determination, instead of an incredibly lucky gene combination. In this aspect, Xena is identical to Wonder Woman: without the ‘super-powers’ that male heroes such as Superman and Captain America possess, these female heroes must rely on their own physical skills and intelligence to outwit their foes.

Xena’s dalliances with Ares are the most recurrent and also problematic of the series. The love-hate relationship between them is exacerbated by their past alliance (Ares had shown favour to the formerly ‘bad’ Xena) and the threat to the Olympian gods which the birth of Xena’s daughter Eve brings in Season Five.¹¹¹ The physical attraction seems fairly strong, but one which Xena is able to overcome with self-control. Two other characters, Borias and Julius Caesar, had been physically involved with Xena in the days of her violent past, and once she has changed her life direction, she seems unwilling or unable to revisit such past liaisons. Ares, on the other hand, remains in Xena’s sphere even now she is ‘good’, leaving room for some sexual tension which also serves to maintain a veneer of heterosexuality even in the face of an increasingly noticeable lesbian

¹¹⁰ Futrell (2003) 21.

¹¹¹ It had been foreseen that the birth of Xena’s daughter would bring about the destruction of the Olympian gods – yet another appropriation of a Greek mythical *τόπος*, in which, with the birth of a child, catastrophic events are foretold upon the child’s advance into adulthood: examples from Greek myth include Achilles being the son who would ‘grow to be greater than his father’, in which case sea nymph Thetis was deliberately married off to the lowlier (and mortal) Peleus – no god wishing to risk spawning a son who would overshadow him (Aesch. *Pr. Des.* 778); Perseus as the child who was doomed to kill his own grandfather, leading to Acrisios setting Danae and infant Perseus adrift in a sealed chest (Apollodorus 2.34); there is also a trace of the Oedipus tale here, namely the prophecy that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother, which his parents sought to avoid by exposing the infant on a hillside (first mentioned in Hom. *Od.* 271-80). In every case, fate ultimately trumps any attempt to circumvent it.

subtext. Several television critics have observed the insistent ‘pairing up’ of single female lead characters with male romantic interests, beginning with *The Avengers* in the 1960s. If not expressing a particular romantic chemistry between those leads, an emphasis on the female character’s heterosexuality through dates with other men, feminine clothing, and makeup is palpable. This can largely be attributed to a combination of factors. Foremost, a discernible aura of homophobia was still existent well into the 1970s, which thus scuttled the possibility of any (out or closeted) homosexual lead characters. Additionally, television executives (often mainly male) claimed audiences ‘preferred’ their female characters to conform to certain physical expectations, which ruled out anything deemed too ‘unfeminine’. The creators of *Cagney & Lacey*, Barbara Avedon and Barbara Corday, were constantly beset by requests by network executives to make their characters ‘more feminine’, with an episode which focused on the women’s rights movement being cancelled altogether because of executives’ perverse concerns it might ‘offend’ female viewers.¹¹²

Xena’s lesbian subtext is important because it defies the heteronormative model into which female lead characters on television are regularly shoehorned. The longer *Xena* ran, the further her relationship with Gabrielle developed into something far beyond a usual hero-sidekick dynamic. Critics such as Elyce Rae Helford and Mary Magoulick have examined this particular reading of *Xena* and it can be an instructive one, given television’s polysemic nature.¹¹³ Although lesbianism is never particularly mentioned by any ancient author as an aspect of Amazon life, such an interpretation of *Xena* places the heroine outside the reaches of heterosexual society, adding to the sense of freedom from male desires and dominance which the ancient concept of Amazons suggested. The lesbian aspects of both *Xena* and the title character help formulate a heroic ideal which combine

¹¹² See particularly Faludi (1992) 184-6 for a discussion on such demands made by executives.

¹¹³ Helford (2000), 135-62; Magoulick (2006) 731.

the warrior skills of Herodotus' Sauromatian women with the close female relationships exemplified in Sappho's poetry. Therefore the lesbian subtext and the reaction of audiences to such a subtext can offer up some further possibilities within Xena's formulation as a 'modern Amazon'.

The homoerotic 'subtext' of *Xena* is notorious, especially among fans of the show. Certain segments of the show's fans are resiliently able to find instances of subtext in many episodes and have even set up websites devoted to discussion of such readings, occasionally to the chagrin of other fans equally determined to view Xena and Gabrielle as heterosexual.¹¹⁴ The main point of discussion here is not whether Xena and Gabrielle are actually lovers: instead, what should be contemplated is (as Kathleen Bennett describes it) the 'interpretive landscape where gender roles are uprooted and hetero-, homo- and bisexuality coexist in the space of possibility'.¹¹⁵ In particular, a queer-sympathetic viewing of *Xena* can result in a far greater scope of interpretation of the series, and thus can enable a more broad appreciation. The prospect of Xena's homo- or bisexuality further assists us in placing her in the context of the 'modern Amazon' framework. As mentioned above, it places her in opposition to the 'norm' of heterosexuality and the societal context of the late 1990s and 2000s has given more freedom to such portrayals on television.¹¹⁶ The priority given to Xena's relationship with Gabrielle is unusual in itself, as Helford has highlighted:

¹¹⁴ See in particular the upset fan who complained that '...I have never seen anything that would give the impression of them being lesbians. In my opinion this whole idea is just wishful thinking on your part. I find it to be an extreme insult that you would try and degrade their close, FRIENDLY relationship by thinking of them as gay'. Quoted in Helford (2000) 143. 'Subtext' websites include Xena: Warrior Lesbian and Xenite.org's 'Subtext FAQ' page.

¹¹⁵ Bennett, quoted in Stein (1998).

¹¹⁶ Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) characters are by and large still in the minority. However, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) states that as of 2010, many networks have improved from previous years in the amount of characters from the LGBT community that are included in their shows – with MTV in particular including them in 42% of their broadcasting hours. See www.glaad.org/2010/nri for the Network Responsibility Index, a full report on the percentage of LGBT characters shown by each network. The popularity of shows such as *Brothers and Sisters* (2006-),

Certainly, one could argue that nonsexual friendships between women are too rarely seen on television. Most often, the representations center on temporary school roommate relationships...or dating men plays a major role and men are seen on every episode at the center of women's lives.¹¹⁷

Xena's placement of the (lesbian or otherwise) bond between Xena and Gabrielle as the absolute core of the series significantly reduces the need for such male romantic figures such as Ares and Julius Caesar. As we have seen, the Xena-Gabrielle axis seems to transcend even the megalomaniac parallel world which Caesar creates, as they are nevertheless irresistibly drawn to one another. It is this portrayal of the bond – as one which 'transcend[s] all space and time' – that Tigges has cited as particularly compelling for a queer viewing.¹¹⁸

Though one scholar has pointed out Xena and Gabrielle 'show a comfortable, loving relationship between two women that doesn't have to be justified, questioned, or explained', there certainly are several open declarations of affection between the two.¹¹⁹ One of the most talked-about scenes (in fan circles particularly) which showed this affection came in *The Quest*, an episode in which Gabrielle endeavoured to revive Xena while she was trapped in the body of their friend Autolycus. While in this guise, Xena and Gabrielle share a kiss – which then reverts back to a heterosexual context when Gabrielle opens her eyes and discovers she is kissing Autolycus. However, the image of the couple's kiss remained a particularly favourite moment for subtext-partial fans.¹²⁰ Another fan-favourite episode, *A Day In The Life*, portrayed the two women as akin to a

Modern Family (2009-) *Glee* (2009-) and *The L Word* (2004-) illustrates an improved, higher profile for LGBT characters and shows.

¹¹⁷ Helford (2000) 143.

¹¹⁸ Tigges (2007) 82.

¹¹⁹ Meister, quoted in Helford (2000) 140.

¹²⁰ For instance, the subtext website 'Xena: Warrior Lesbian' has an image of it prominently displayed on their homepage.

bickering married couple (arguing over trifles such as a ruined frying pan), and also featured a much-discussed and possibly suggestive scene in which Xena and Gabrielle take a bath together (fig. 26).¹²¹ Further proof of the strength of their relationship continued to be explored after this episode. In the musical episode *The Bitter Suite*, Xena and Gabrielle have become estranged over the death of Xena's son Solan, but after singing to each other in a semi-fantastical world, they become reconciled and sing the following verse:

We'll overcome our damaged past!
And we'll grow stronger side by side!
To stand together through the storms!
We're safe 'cause love will be our guide!¹²²

In a more somber vein, when faced with death and doom, the expressions of devotion come thick and fast. *The Ides of March*'s crucifixion scene ends with Xena declaring 'Gabrielle – you were the best thing in my life' and Gabrielle responding with 'I love you, Xena'. Two episodes later, when Xena discovers Gabrielle's soul is trapped in Hell in *Fallen Angel*, she is determined to save her, saying:

Gabrielle and I have already been through hell together. I didn't come all this way to lose her now....Michael, Gabrielle's soul and mine were destined to be together. I can't let her walk through hell alone.

¹²¹ Helford (2000) 144-5 calls this episode 'the most famous – or infamous – episode for initiating new fans into queer readings of [*Xena*]' and says 'many subtext fans read [it] as absolute proof of a lesbian relationship between Xena and Gabrielle'.

¹²² Some see in these lyrics more evidence of the highly camp nature of *Xena*: the gloss of camp as 'the idea that something could be amusing because it was corny or ridiculous' (Daniels [1999] 111) – utilised previously in association with *Wonder Woman* – can equally be applied to the ridiculous situation of a land where one can only be understood when singing (as is the case in this episode) as well as the cheesy lyrics and overwrought music. For further discussion on the camp aspects of *Xena*, including the tapestry of cultural and mythological periods, 'hyperbolic sound effects and visual techniques', incredible displays of physical ability, and undermining of traditional gender boundaries, see Morreale's (1998) reading of *Xena* as 'feminist camp'.

Fig. 26: The infamous bath scene.

Another crucifixion scene, in *When Fates Collide*, has the same effect. While awaiting punishment in a prison cell, Xena and Gabrielle have a touching exchange:

Gabrielle: I can't let you die.

Xena: Some things are worth dying for. Isn't that what your play was about? Being prepared to sacrifice all for love?

On Gabrielle's departure, Xena tells her 'I'll love you forever' and once fastened to her cross, she cries out 'I love you, Gabrielle.'

Putting aside the question of Xena's sexuality, perhaps the best explanation for the Xena-Gabrielle relationship is given in the very last episode of the series, *A Friend in Need II*. The now-dead Xena (in spirit form) brings Gabrielle to a place where other spirits, including Xena's friend Akemi, remain. Xena introduces Gabrielle to Akemi as 'my soulmate'. This subtle expression sums up neatly the bond which Xena and Gabrielle do not themselves spend time examining and

defining. It is also ambiguous enough to fit Xena into the ‘modern Amazon’ framework, in that she evades any simple categorisation – particularly categorisation that restricts a woman to heterosexuality. The relationship also differentiates Xena from her predecessor Wonder Woman in that it allows Xena to express far more emotion and complexity of character than Wonder Woman could. Danny Fingeroth has suggested that ‘one could even say that Xena was an updated or revisited Wonder Woman, this time allowed to give free reign to the power and anger that the original never could.’¹²³ The relationship with Gabrielle, whether interpreted as lesbian or not, endows the *Xena* writers with far more scope for their characterisation of Xena – and more freedom than many previous television writers or producers have enjoyed with other female lead characters.

Ancient Amazons were considered the very epitome of ‘unconventional’ women, and likewise, no-one could accuse Wonder Woman of being conventional, particularly considering her swimsuit-like outfit, absolute ignorance of the modern commerce system, and her all-female upbringing in the apparent feminist utopia of Paradise Island. Xena is also an unconventional woman, but less emphasis is placed on this eccentricity, possibly because of the vague quasi-fantastical and decidedly non-linear timespace in which the series is set, where heroes (Hercules, Beowulf, Paris, Julius Caesar), gods (Ares, Aphrodite, Athena, Hades) as well as tribes of Amazons, Philistines, and Valkyries all co-exist. However, Xena’s life is still firmly an exceptional one. Part of Xena’s Amazonian identity, which she shares with both Wonder Woman and the ancient Amazons, is her geographical origin. Her home village, shown in the very first episode, *Sins of the Past* (as well as several subsequent episodes), is Amphipolis – an actual town founded in 437 BC by Athenians and the site of a crucial battle of the Peloponnesian War in 422.

¹²³ Fingeroth (2004) 88.

What is most interesting for the purposes of the present research is Amphipolis' position on the border of Thrace. Given the occasional naming of Amazons as Thracian by authors such as Proclus and Vergil, Xena can thus be further aligned with the ancient Amazons through her birthplace.

More evidence of Xena's exceptional lifestyle comes in the form of her rejection of domesticity. In the episode *A Day in the Life* a love-struck everyman named Hower meets Xena and, soon after, asks Gabrielle hopefully, 'does Xena ever think about settling down and getting married?' When Gabrielle answers in the negative, he replies optimistically 'maybe she just hasn't met the right guy...' What is made clear throughout the series is that even meeting 'the right guy' may not be able to dissuade Xena from the lifestyle to which she is accustomed. The issue of 'settling down' is again raised in *Kindred Spirits* when both Gabrielle and Xena have returned to a tribe of Amazons, of whom Gabrielle has been proclaimed Queen. The peaceful lifestyle there inspires Gabrielle to ask Xena if she ever thinks of 'settling down'. Xena seems puzzled and asks 'What, you mean when I'm too old to do kicks and stuff?' Despite the recent birth of baby daughter Eve, Xena has not slowed down – in fact, she hasn't been able to, having been occupied with curing her poisoned friend Joxer while fighting armies of priests (*Eternal Bonds*), defending her hometown of Amphipolis against Athena (*Amphipolis Under Siege*), and stopping Amazons from waging potentially devastating war on their neighbours (*Lifeblood*).

The fact that Xena's motherhood has done nothing to profoundly change her way of life will be discussed further later on; for now it is suffice to say that putting down roots does not seem to be foremost in her plans for her and Eve. She mulls over the positive aspects of the village:

Xena (to baby Eve): Here you're safe from the Greek gods, Gabrielle's happy...the place is loaded with baby-sitters. Could work.

But ultimately, Xena is bored rigid in the Amazon town: she tries whittling a stick into a figurine, goes hunting, anything to keep herself busy. In terms of parallels with ancient Amazons, this reminds one of the Herodotean Amazons who refuse to live in domestic bliss with their new Scythian husbands, claiming:

We are riders; our business is with the bow and the spear, and we know nothing of women's work; but in your country no woman has anything to do with such things – your women stay at home in their wagons occupied with feminine tasks, and never go out to hunt or for any other purpose.¹²⁴

Although the Amazon community could provide Xena and her child with much beneficial assistance, the compromise required is too much. For Xena, her business is with the chakram and the sword, and she declares 'All this togetherness is making me sick! I can hardly breathe'.

This leads naturally to a discussion about Xena's pregnancy, motherhood, and relationship with her children. The ancient authors were fond of recalling Amazons' traditions of abandoning or even maiming male children and rearing only female children¹²⁵ and Xena's relationships with her offspring turn out to be only slightly less fraught. She has one son, Solan (fathered by Borias and to whom she gave birth back in her 'bad' days), who appears in four episodes: *Past Imperfect*, *Orphan of War*, *Maternal Instincts* and *God Fearing Child*. *Past Imperfect* shows the birth of Solan and the pivotal decision Xena makes regarding his upbringing: she hands him over to Kaleipus, a centaur, saying 'if he stays with me, he'll become a target for all those who hate me....He'll become like me.'¹²⁶ Even in her 'bad' days, it seems Xena could discern what was most beneficial for a child. This awareness of the inadvisability of combining her current lifestyle with

¹²⁴ Hdt. 4.114.

¹²⁵ Abandoning: Strabo 11.5.1; maiming: Diodorus 2.45.

¹²⁶ Kaleipus' education and rearing of Solan seems a direct parallel with Cheiron the centaur's education of Greek heroes such as Jason, Asclepius, Actaeon and Achilles: see Apoll. 1.2.4, 2.5.4, 3.4.4, 3.13.3-5; Tripp, s.v. 'Cheiron'.

motherhood in turn shows she certainly has potential to be a ‘good’ mother in deciding what is ultimately best for her child.¹²⁷ Although this is not strictly an ‘abandonment’ of Solan, she has divested herself of the responsibility of raising him, which allows her to continue living an unconventional, nomadic existence. Xena is reunited (albeit briefly) with Solan in *Orphan of War*, *Maternal Instincts* and in the Underworld in *God Fearing Child*. In the first two instances, she cannot quite bring herself to reveal her true identity as Solan’s mother to him. Nevertheless, the connection between them is sufficiently strong for Solan to ask to travel with Xena after the death of his primary carer, Kaleipus: although enjoying a friendly, mentor-like relationship with the boy, Xena is unwilling to jeopardise this in the name of brutal honesty. Ultimately a closer relationship never eventuates, due to the murder of Solan at the hands of Gabrielle’s evil daughter Hope in the episode *Maternal Instincts*. Xena’s grief at his death is palpable, at least in part because she was never able to assert her identity of ‘mother’ and forge any kind of true parental relationship with Solan. His death goes on to have grave implications for Xena’s relationship with Gabrielle, which (through the ensuing few episodes) undergoes what is labelled among fans of the series as ‘The Rift’. Solan’s final appearance in *Xena* comes in the episode *God Fearing Child*, when a heavily pregnant Xena finds him in the Underworld and rescues him from a tormented afterlife in which he relives his memories over and over. Now that he has discovered (in the Underworld) that Xena is his mother, the dynamic between them has changed, and Xena is able to gladly identify herself as such. She persuades Solan to go to the Elysian Fields instead of remaining with his memories (where he had preferred to stay, since there he could relive his treasured recollections of Xena) and reassures him that the imminent birth of a half-sister does not diminish her need and desire to remember him. Xena’s formerly hands-off, unconventional relationship with

¹²⁷ Futrell (2003) 16 labels this ‘an acknowledgement of the ‘wrongness’ of her lifestyle, which involved knowledge and experiences a child should not have.’

Solan is, in this episode, transformed into a warm and more ‘normal’ maternal bond. However, Xena’s relationship with her daughter Eve will also challenge the bounds of ‘acceptable’ parental behaviour, as we will see now.

The storyline surrounding Xena’s pregnancy and the birth of Eve are helpful in challenging the heroic stereotype which television audiences are accustomed to, as well as stereotypes of pregnant women and new mothers. This in turn can encourage the re-imagining of the Amazon figure as a celebration of female independence and autonomy. In addition, the intriguing plot device leading to Xena’s actual pregnancy provides yet another parallel to the lack of father-figures present in the ancient Amazon societies mentioned by Diodorus and Strabo. Xena is not impregnated by any man, but rather by her (female) former arch-enemy Callisto, whom Xena had encountered in the afterlife in *Fallen Angel*. Callisto is shown touching Xena’s stomach and, three episodes later, it is revealed that Xena is pregnant, the phenomenon explained in terms of a ‘reincarnation’ of Callisto (illustrating the diverse spiritual patchwork which *Xena*’s creators and writers have stitched together). Thus, Xena carries her child and gives birth without male input even of the most basic physiological kind, in turn echoing (while also impossibly exceeding) those tribes of Amazons who were said to merely mate at random with neighbouring men in order to procreate (Strabo 11.5.1). In fact, *Xena*’s eradication of any male contributor to the pregnancy effects a neat reversal of those past misogynistic male wishes to eliminate women from the childbearing process: Euripides’ characters Hippolytus and Jason both memorably longed for such a method of having children without mothers.¹²⁸ Despite the far-fetched nature of the scenario, Xena’s ability to have a child

¹²⁸ Hippolytus bewails women’s role in childbearing and suggests a preferable arrangement: ἀλλ’ ἀντιθέντας σοῖσιν ἐν ναοῖς βροτοῦς / ἢ χρυσὸν ἢ σίδηρον ἢ χαλκοῦ βάρος / παίδων πρίασθαι σπέρμα, τοῦ τιμήματος τῆς ἀξίας ἕκαστον (*Hipp.* 620-23). Jason, somewhat less hysterically (but no less unpleasantly) wishfully muses about how χρήν γάρ ἄλλοθεν ποθεν βροτοῦς / παῖδας τεκνοῦσθαι, θῆλυ δ’ οὐκ εἶναι γένος· χοῦτως ἂν οὐκ ἦν οὐδὲν ἀνθρώποις κακόν (*Med.* 573-75).

independent of any man assists in a feminist reading of *Xena*, as she thus achieves something single women wishing to adopt children – even in the twenty-first century – still struggle to do.

Eve's birth in the episode *God Fearing Child* takes place while Hercules fights off the god Zeus, who is attempting to kill Xena because of a prophecy about her child. The beginning of the episode spells out the very familiar-sounding prediction, in a scene where Zeus speaks to the three Fates:

Clotho (to Zeus): ...you will continue to rule supreme among supreme...

Lachesis: ...until such time, as a child not begotten by man is born...

Atropos: ...a time that is fast approaching.¹²⁹

Because Eve is the reincarnation of Xena's reformed former enemy, Callisto, she is, strictly speaking, 'not begotten by man'. This particular point serves to emphasise the role of the mother even more than would be usual, as Xena is the sole parent on which the series can focus on. Taken alongside the privileging of the mother-daughter bond exemplified in *The Furies*, Alison Futrell has pointed out that such an emphasis serves to reduce and even discount the paternal role, and 'the House of Xena is thus built on female authority; there is no father.'¹³⁰

The first few episodes after Eve's birth are both touching and admirable in terms of Xena's budding relationship with her new infant. On one hand, Xena seems a very natural, nurturing mother, singing to the baby and breast-feeding in the woods (*Eternal Bonds*), and carrying her everywhere in a sling. On the other hand, it seems very clear that, despite the very recent birth of Eve, Xena is determined to remain at her karate-kicking best. The episodes *Seeds of Faith*, *Lyre Lyre Hearts on*

¹²⁹ See above, n. 111 for other ancient foretellings which this prophecy evokes; but perhaps most obvious of all is the Shakespearean witches' announcement that 'none of woman born / shall harm Macbeth' (*Macbeth* Act 4 Scene 1). The symbolic parallel between Xena's three Fates and Shakespeare's three witches makes the connection even clearer.

¹³⁰ Futrell (2003) 15-6.

Fire, Punch Line and *God Fearing Child* showcase a heavily pregnant Xena still able to fight off enemies with ease; once the infant arrives, we see her fight off enemies with baby in one arm, and even utilising weapons such as a dirty nappy against them (*Eternal Bonds*).¹³¹ An exchange with Ares in *God Fearing Child* illustrates perfectly that Xena has remained at her indomitable best throughout pregnancy and childbirth:

Ares: I thought in your present condition, you might be a little more gullible.

Xena: I'm pregnant, not *brain-damaged*!

What is most interesting about the writers of *Xena* maintaining her identity as a strong, skilled warrior while she also experiences pregnancy and motherhood is that it is this very aspect of womanhood that is often used to 'soften' independent female characters. Sherrie Inness has argued that the character of Ripley in the *Alien* films is a victim of such 'softening', with her maternal side emphasised (particularly in *Aliens*) in order to make her tough, strong persona more palatable to the audience.¹³² But Xena's motherhood does not do this; if anything, it steels her resolve even further to improve and defend herself, now that she has a child who will depend on and be influenced by her actions. Butt and Wohlmut describe the inclusion of pregnancy in *Xena*'s storylines assists in 'bringing this eminently natural but awkward state into the realm of the heroic'.¹³³ However, any grand plans for having a healthy, 'normal' relationship with her new child are dashed when, in *Looking Death in the Eye*, Xena and Gabrielle are frozen in an

¹³¹ The image of Xena fending off opponents while toting a baby in a sling owes a huge debt to the *Lone Wolf and Cub* series of films, which featured a ronin (a former samurai, now masterless) named Ogami Itto who attempts to make his way in the world as an assassin for hire, all the while caring for his infant son Daigoro. Ogami Itto transports Daigoro in a booby-trapped pram (which the boy soon learns to operate from a precocious age) and early on fights duels with the baby strapped to his back; there, as in *Xena*, such scenes serve to lighten an atmosphere which, in the *Lone Wolf and Cub* films at least, is largely one of grim desperation and horror.

¹³² Inness (1999) 109-112. See, in a more positive vein, Schubart (2007) 169-94, where the 'mother archetype' (just one of several 'archetypes' Schubart categorises, to which each of the various female heroes in her study belong) is traced back ultimately to Ripley. The *Alien* films are discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

¹³³ Butt and Wohlmut (2006) 89.

icy cave for twenty-five years, while the infant Eve is kidnapped and raised by the Roman Emperor, Augustus.¹³⁴ Unlike the case with Solan, this is not a true ‘abandonment’, but nevertheless Xena’s responsibility as a parent is still removed, and once again her child is reared by others. She voices her disappointment at this in the subsequent episode *Livia*, explaining to Gabrielle ‘I gave away one child once. And this time, I wanted to do right by Eve. But I woke up and my child had been ripped from my arms.’ And the result of Eve *not* being raised by Xena is truly dire: she becomes ‘Livia’, a ‘warrior of Rome’, killing innocent villagers just as Xena had been shown to do in her ‘bad’ days. Only after several violent encounters between mother and daughter is Livia/Eve eventually ‘shown the light’ (quite literally) and able to halt her murderous behaviour, embracing Xena’s motherly love.¹³⁵ After such a rocky start to re-establishing a relationship with her daughter, Xena is able to enjoy a more ‘normal’ bond with Eve and takes her on several adventures to Amphipolis, Africa and Rome (*The Haunting of Amphipolis*, *Who’s Gurkhan?*, *The God You Know*). Eventually, Eve departs to spread the word of Eli, a prophet-like figure, and once again Xena is without her daughter by her side. However, this time it is entirely reasonable, with her daughter now a grown woman and able to make her own decisions.

The relationship between Xena and Eve is given far more scope than that between Xena and Solan: episodes involving Solan are limited to four, while those involving Xena’s pregnancy and labour and the subsequent life of Eve number upwards of twenty.¹³⁶ As a result, this relationship is able to speak

¹³⁴ Xena and Gabrielle, attempting to fake their own deaths, find their scheme interrupted by a meddling Ares, who moves their (still alive) bodies to the icy cave in a primitive attempt at cryogenics.

¹³⁵ Livia/Eve is on the cusp of killing Xena when a ray of light shines through the temple ceiling, and she seems to be shown scenes from previous episodes of Xena caring for the infant Eve, which in turn make her realise the error of her ways.

¹³⁶ This may be due to the creators of *Xena* wishing to continue to emphasise the mother-daughter bond as they had in, for instance, *The Furies*. However, this does not seem to deliberately replace or surpass the

volumes more about the issues of motherhood faced by Xena, and is also able to illuminate some of the more intriguing aspects of her approach to pregnancy and parenting. By following the heroine through (a highly active) pregnancy, labour, and early days of motherhood, the makers of *Xena* are able to challenge traditional notions and expectations about pregnancy and motherhood.¹³⁷ Although showing Xena as a mother could potentially be seen as an attempt to ‘soften’ her independence and strength, the way in which she is shown to retain her formidable personality and skills mitigates any fears of such ‘softening’. Xena’s attitude toward her impending motherhood and the birth of her child is refreshing and candid: when forced to remain in an Amazon village doing nothing but looking after baby Eve, she openly admits her boredom (*Kindred Spirits*). This demonstrates that the creators of the show are determined to refrain from portraying an instantly ultra-nurturing, ‘nesting’ Xena, which would jar with the kind of character they have constructed over the previous five seasons.

A final point that ought to be addressed here is Xena’s costume. Like Wonder Woman before her, Xena is clad in a comparatively skimpy outfit (a leather bustier with metal detailing, teamed with a short skirt in the style of a Roman centurion) which is paired (again like Wonder Woman) with knee-high boots (fig. 27).¹³⁸ Such an outfit has been cited by scholars such as Inness as indicative of how *Xena*’s creators have bowed to the pressures of television studios to show all

mother-son bond; rather, Solan is no longer living, therefore – practically speaking – Xena has more interaction with Eve.

¹³⁷ Faludi (1992) 187-90 examines the trend of late 1980s television series showing ‘nesting’ – women increasingly choosing to leave jobs and stay at home with their children instead – in the context of that decade’s backlash against feminist gains made throughout the 1970s. Such shows illustrating ‘nesting’ women brought back ‘regressive fantasies about motherhood and marriage’ while implicitly (or explicitly, in some cases) condemning women who chose to work after having children, often using housewife characters to ‘serve[s] as mouthpiece for the programmes’ periodic anti-career-woman tirades’. She cites television series such as *thirtysomething*, *LA Law*, and *Family Man* as illustrating this.

¹³⁸ In fact, the physical similarities were noted by Stewart: ‘With her blue eyes, dark hair, alabaster skin, and impressive array of breast-plates, series star Lucy Lawless hails from the same gene pool that spawned Wonder Woman Lynda Carter’ (quoted in Inness [1999] 161). One might also go even further and note the leather and metal decorative forearm protectors which Xena wears evoke, to a certain degree, Wonder Woman’s indestructible Feminum bracelets.

lead women characters as conventionally beautiful, dressing them in such a way as to emphasise their femininity; however, there appear to be mitigating factors involved as well. Inness herself, while admitting that Xena's 'indestructible beauty suggests not only that a heroic woman should be stunning but also that her appearance must be maintained despite the perils she confronts', also notes that having a beautiful face and figure do not compromise Xena's 'tough' character and independence.¹³⁹

Fig. 27: Xena in the leather outfit, with sword at her back and chakram at her hip.

¹³⁹ Inness (1999) 174.

The outfit she wears in no way impinges on Xena's ability to fight, defend, or generally survive. Magoulick, however, has also observed the emphasis placed on Xena's sexual attractiveness, seeing in her sexy costume, flowing hair, and moniker 'warrior *princess*' various ways of making the character more appealing to male audience members in particular.¹⁴⁰ The point must be acknowledged that Xena's costume is undeniably outrageous, combining fetishistic leather with metal components in the breastplate and thigh-high boots, and accompanied by the added accoutrement of an occasionally-used whip. Schubart has observed echoes of what she terms the 'dominatrix' archetype within Xena's outfit:

[It] signals an aggressive and angry eroticism....it is designed to evoke the man's world of war and fighting, yet at the same time tailored to reveal the female hero's 'natural' feminine physique. Long legs, cleavage, loose hair. As in all femme fatale cinema, there is never any mistaking the female hero for a man.¹⁴¹

The show itself made a self-referential nod to the outfit and its popularity in the episode *A Day in the Life*, in which Xena expresses exasperation at attracting unwanted male attention:

Xena: Why does this always happen?

Gabrielle: It's the blue eyes, the leather...some guys just love leather.

Xena: I think a wardrobe change is in order.

Gabrielle: You could wear chain mail.

Xena: Yeah, but I think that would just attract a kinkier group.

Though the outfit may be fetishised through its predominance of leather and metal and the brevity of its size, the popularity of the show with lesbian audiences

¹⁴⁰ Magoulick (2006) 743-4. She notes, with regard to the use of 'princess' rather than 'queen', that 'Princess is a diminutive, less powerful, less threatening, and very feminine kind of female leader as opposed to 'queen', the title one might expect for someone of Xena's stature, accomplishments, and position in her world....there is little reason for Xena to be named 'princess', except to appeal to male fantasies as more demurely maiden-like, less threatening, or less powerful (and thus more sexually available).' See also Morreale (1998) 80. The title is critiqued by Callisto in the first episode in which she appears: see above, page 134.

¹⁴¹ Schubart (2007) 229.

can mean both female and male viewers can ‘appreciate’ and enjoy the aesthetic of Xena.¹⁴² Michael Ventura, discussing the show’s popularity, has labelled Xena ‘a scantily-clad butch who’s still femme enough to please the boys’.¹⁴³ Such butch/femme binaries are often cited when comparing Xena’s dominatrix-like outfit with Gabrielle’s far more feminine, flowing skirts and paler clothing and hair-colour.¹⁴⁴ Ultimately, as Helford points out, because of the polysemy of television in general (and a show like *Xena* in particular), both ‘the nonfeminist viewer’ who may simply wish to see a sexy woman on screen *and* the ‘feminist viewer invested in seeing a strong and independent woman’ can be satisfied with a show like *Xena*.¹⁴⁵

In conclusion, then, *Xena* both carries on the Amazon tradition in television which started with *Wonder Woman*, and also advances it. Some of Wonder Woman’s Amazon attributes – such as impressive physical skills (including martial arts) and the ability to retain her autonomy from men – are paired with elements consistent with the concept of the Amazon as existing outside the ‘norms’ of society: that is, she refuses to be limited to a strictly heterosexual framework, she remains a ferocious fighter even while heavily pregnant, and she has rather extraordinary relationships with her children. The enormous popularity of *Xena* is further proof of the shift in the way the Amazon is interpreted in the modern age. She is now embraced by hetero-, homo- and bisexual fans as a positive exemplar of the independent, strong woman warrior. *Xena*, however, succeeds in transcending her predecessor, *Wonder Woman*. Her personality is developed further than the latter heroine’s, allowing the creators of

¹⁴² Heather Findlay, editor of lesbian-focused magazine *Girlfriend*, has remarked ‘A figure like Xena can come along with great cleavage and beautiful legs and we can enjoy lusting after her.’ Quoted in Helford (2000) 139.

¹⁴³ Ventura (1998) 3.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Schubart (2007) 238; Helford (2000) 149. In addition, Xena’s outfit serves to *differentiate* her from Gabrielle and, by extension, other ‘everyday’ women seen in the show.

¹⁴⁵ Helford (2000) 138-9.

the show to make Xena multi-faceted and thus more pertinent to her audience. This, in turn, further develops the Amazon from a mysterious figure defined solely in terms of ancient male writers and their own preconceptions, to a plausible, admirable female character who lives the life of a warrior. It remains now for the present investigation to turn to the cinema and the manifestations of the Amazon figure therein, in order to balance the television representations discussed in this chapter and provide a wider analysis of the Amazon in modern media.

Chapter Four: The Amazon on the Silver Screen

It is clear the medium of television yielded several new ideas in terms of heroic female characters that we can classify as ‘modern Amazons’. However, it seems appropriate to also consider the medium of film alongside television, given the close relationship and common ground shared between them. Let us now consider, then, the manifestations of such Amazonian characters in film, and how they too have adhered to and adapted the characteristics which identify them as such. This will entail two minor case studies consisting of *Alien* and *Aliens*, and *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, and one major case study of *Kill Bill Volume 1* and *2*. Through a comparative analysis of the female characters in these films and their varying degrees of conformity to the Amazon archetype, we may further build on the discussion of the previous chapter, and create a better understanding of the significance of the modern Amazon.

The roles offered to women throughout the years of cinematic history, while varied, certainly do not show much predisposition toward the warrior or action-hero mould. Indeed, until the 1970s, such roles were the sole domain of men, and were a staple feature in many Westerns, the James Bond series of films, and war- and Bible-themed films. However, female characters configured as independently capable started to become more commonplace from the 1940s, with Katherine Hepburn portraying several in such films as *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *Woman of the Year* (1941), and *Adam’s Rib* (1949) – echoing a sense of increasing autonomy and self-determinism which women had attained particularly during the war years.¹ However, with the 1950s came a renewed emphasis for women to retreat to the home and yield their new-found careers to returning soldiers: as Rosen has observed, never had women been ‘so pressured out of the employment market

¹ See Rosen (1973) 196-7.

and into conjugal bliss'.² With such emphasis now placed on domesticity and marriage, the 1940s' independent and witty heroines all but disappeared. From this period until the 1970s, women appeared in active or semi-heroic roles only sporadically – and some, such as those offered in the James Bond films *Goldfinger* and *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, were either limited to tiny auxiliary roles or were inevitably linked sexually with central hero Bond. The 1970s, however, brought the advent of the 'blaxploitation' genre, and here certain women emerged as a serious fighting force to be reckoned with – albeit in an idiosyncratic and relatively short-lived genre. In particular, Pam Grier's leading roles in *Coffy* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974), and Tamara Dobson's in the *Cleopatra Jones* films (1973 and 1975) established a new type of screen heroine, who was able to maintain her independence *and* fight back physically.³ And while mainstream Hollywood film may not have favoured violent female characters at this time, Asian cinema differed in its approach, and the Japanese *Female Prisoner Scorpion* trilogy (1972-3) and the two *Lady Snowblood* films (1973-4) featured vengeful, violent, and skilled women (all played by Meiko Kaji) at their core.⁴ Mainstream Hollywood did, however, enjoy what Faludi describes as 'a brief infatuation with the feminist cause' in the 1970s, whereby film studios 'finally woke up to the profit potential in the struggle for women's independence'.⁵ Specifically, several films showcased women expressing humanitarian or political concerns and taking action to further such issues, including *Julia* (1977), *The China Syndrome* (1979) and *9 to 5* (1980); however, these female characters did not showcase the ability to 'fight back' in quite the way that the blaxploitation genre had done.

² Rosen (1973) 245-6.

³ Pam Grier found it difficult to secure work after the era of blaxploitation ended, however; her vocal criticisms of AIP (the studio responsible for her films) and the dearth of film roles available for African-American actresses both contributed to Grier struggling to find work until Quentin Tarantino provided a career-resuscitating lead role for her in *Jackie Brown* (1997). See Sims (2006) 90-91.

⁴ The influence of these less mainstream films on Tarantino's *Kill Bill* films will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁵ Faludi (1992) 152-3.

With the 1980s came yet another backlash against gains made in the area of women's liberation – this time in reaction to advances for equal rights made in the late 1960s and 1970s. As had happened on television, cinematic women were largely limited to roles in family dramas or comedies, and were often polarised between playing either idealised wives and mothers, or unbalanced, single career women. One of the decade's most successful films, *Fatal Attraction* (1987), perfectly encapsulated this polarity, contrasting the loving homemaker wife, Beth, with a psychotic, obsessed single woman, Alex. Highly symbolically, Alex is eventually killed by Beth in defence of her husband, hearth and home. Anti-feminist statements voiced later by the film's director, Adrian Lyne, further illustrate his palpable sense of resentment against strong females both on film and in real life.⁶ Concurrently, films featuring male protagonists in uncompromising, action-oriented and 'tough' roles began to proliferate and, in fact, go on to replicate themselves in various sequels during the decade: the *Rambo* (three films, 1982-8), *Lethal Weapon* (three films, 1987-92), *Die Hard* (three films, 1988-95), and *Indiana Jones* (three films, 1981-9)⁷ series began to set a template for the modern cinematic 'hero'. Yet despite the decade's vehement reaction against feminism, the rise of the action film in the 1980s also eventually resulted in the formulation of an action heroine, that came to fruition most visibly and popularly in the characters of Ellen Ripley (in 1979's *Alien* and 1986's *Aliens*) and Sarah Connor (in 1984's *The Terminator* and 1991's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*). These characters, perhaps aided by their cinematic contexts of science-fiction and time-travel, were presented as participating in the action sequences that in the 1980s (with its growing obsession

⁶ In an interview, Lyne complained that hearing feminists talk was 'kind of unattractive, however liberated and emancipated it is. It kind of fights the whole wife role, the whole childbearing role. Sure you got your career and your success, but you are not fulfilled as a woman.' See Faludi (1992) 146-152 for detail on the production of and reaction to *Fatal Attraction*.

⁷ It should be noted that each of these film series extended beyond three films (though I mention above only those that follow within a relatively reasonable timespan: the fourth of each of these franchises come much later than expected, with between six and twenty years passing between the third and fourth installments): *Lethal Weapon 4* arrived in 1998; *Die Hard 4.0* in 2007; and 2008 brought both *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* and the fourth *Rambo* film, titled simply *Rambo*.

with aggression, violence, and weapons) became key set-pieces for blockbuster films. And in the twenty-first century, *Kill Bill Volume 1* and *2* took the model of female heroism found not only in the aforementioned films but also from more non-mainstream films from Japan, Hong Kong and China to create the newest female warrior of this canon. A survey of these particular films and their female characters will here serve to situate Ripley, Sarah, and The Bride within the present archetypal framework of the ‘modern Amazon’ and trace the diachronic development of such an archetype in cinema.

Minor Case Study: *Alien* and *Aliens*

Ripley: I can handle myself.

Hicks: Yeah, I noticed.

The character of Ellen Ripley (played by Sigourney Weaver), who first appears in Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979) and then James Cameron’s *Aliens* (1986), is one of the first female action heroes to appear in modern cinema, and many elements of her character are similar to those exhibited by the previously discussed ‘modern Amazons’ of *Wonder Woman* and *Xena*.⁸ *Alien* begins with Ripley as simply part of a group of colleagues aboard a spacecraft named the *Nostromo*, who receive instructions to land on a nearby planet from which a mysterious signal is being transmitted. When three crew members mount an exploration of the planet, one of them is attacked by an alien life-form, but Ripley tries to prevent this crew member (Kane) from returning to the spacecraft, fearing that he may endanger the rest of the crew. When Ripley’s decision is overruled, the alien arrives and proceeds to gestate in Kane’s body, then emerge through his chest cavity and escape, eventually metamorphosing into a fully mature and extremely deadly

⁸ Ripley also appears in *Alien³* (1992) and *Alien: Resurrection* (1997); however, for the purposes of this research, only the first two films in the franchise will be discussed.

alien, tracking down and killing the crew one by one. The sole survivor of the crew is Ripley, who destroys the alien by ejecting it out of the shuttle's airlock. Only Ripley and the ship's cat, Jones, survive to the end of the film, with the final scene showing both of them in hyper-sleep awaiting their return to their own planet.

The centrality of Ripley's role in *Alien*, which involves a large amount of action-oriented scenes showcasing her courage and steely determination to survive the alien's onslaught, was certainly novel to film of the time.⁹ *Alien's* writers have stated that the role of Ripley was originally conceived to be a male character (although, relaxing this stance, they later stated in the script that 'the crew is unisex and all parts are interchangeable for men or women'), until producer David Giler suggested that, to assist in creating a more original storyline, the role be played by a woman.¹⁰ This telling detail is perhaps what has provoked at least one critic to suspect that Ripley is effectively 'a man in a woman's body';¹¹ however, when viewed in a more positive light, this can illustrate Ripley as truly *antianeira* in the sense that she is 'equal to men'.¹² Though some critics have bemoaned Ripley's 'feminine' traits as indications of weakness, an identity

⁹ Original writer and executive producer Ronald Shusett recalls thinking (when the idea of Ripley being a woman was posited [see n. 10 below]) that 'it seems kind of funny – they've never done that, a woman in a space/horror movie as the leading character...' See 'Pre-Production: Casting' Featurette on the *Alien: Definitive Edition* DVD (2007) Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment.

¹⁰ Giler admits on the 'Pre-Production: Casting' Featurette that he was in part motivated by cynicism on this issue: 'Walter (Hill, another writer/producer on the film) and I thought, 'there's this one character [who is] not too interesting; and, you know, this studio (Twentieth Century Fox, the studio in charge of production of *Alien*) is making *Julia* and *Turning Point*, and they really believe in the return of the woman's movie... So I bet we'll get a lot of points if we turn this character into a woman. And it'll just make the character more interesting'. In turn, Twentieth Century Fox's then-Director, Alan Ladd, suggested this idea to the writers, saying 'I have a feeling that's going to make it unique'. Both *Julia* and *Turning Point* (both 1977) explored women's friendships and featured female characters at their core.

¹¹ Inness (1999) 107.

¹² For ancient Amazons being described as *antianeirai*, and the implications of this word, see Chapter One, page 15. Although most television shows and films set aboard spacecraft have mixed-sex crews, the 'heroic' roles in such media had, until *Alien*, been restricted to the male members of the crew: see, for instance, *Lost In Space* (1965-8), *Planet of the Vampires* (1964), and the *Star Trek* series and films.

encompassing such qualities need not be viewed negatively.¹³ At the time of release, Ripley and her centrality to *Alien* were observed by many critics to present a refreshingly new depiction of women in (action) cinema: her survival and combat abilities, independence, and autonomy from men all certainly assist in aligning her with the ‘modern Amazons’ that have previously been discussed. In some ways, however, she does not conform to this stereotype. Her lifestyle is not unconventional, when considering that the film is set in the distant future (in which a life as an officer on board a spacecraft may not be so unusual), and her fighting skills are thrust upon her by necessity, rather than being born from a desire to have learnt or mastered such abilities. Ripley was, in fact, championed by some as a new figure of feminism, proof that women in dangerous situations did not necessitate rescuing by men, and could surpass and outlive their male comrades when confronted with a deadly force such as the aliens.¹⁴ Not all critics, however, were as convinced that *Alien* reflected unequivocal feminism, and pointed particularly to a sequence late in the film in which Ripley, clad only in brief underwear, prepares for ‘hypersleep’ before being once again confronted with the stowaway alien.¹⁵

To begin our assessment of Ripley’s Amazonian characteristics in *Alien*, it is important to note that it is initially Ripley’s instincts and awareness of the common good which motivate her refusal to admit Kane back on board the *Nostromo* after the ‘facehugger’ has latched onto him:

Ripley: Wait a minute – if we let it in, the ship could be infected. You know the quarantine procedures: twenty-four hours for decontamination.

¹³ Inness (1999), for instance, equates almost every ‘feminine’ trait (motherhood, visibly showing emotion) with ‘weakness’ and thus assumes that such traits must make the character less ‘tough’ than a male character who would have none of these qualities. The problem with such a simple binary model is that it denies any ‘strength’ to feminine traits by virtue of their being feminine, which I find uninformative. See Hills (1999) for an excellent discussion on the futility of these binary-logic theories.

¹⁴ Newton asserts that *Alien* offers ‘on one level...a utopian fantasy of women’s liberation’, though she qualifies this in her article (see n. 24 below).

¹⁵ This scene is discussed in further detail below.

Dallas: He could be dead in twenty-four hours! Now open the hatch!

Ripley: Listen to me, if we break quarantine we could *all* die.

Lambert: Look, would you open the god-damn hatch! We've got to get him inside!

Ripley: No. I can't do that. And if you were in my position, you'd do the same.¹⁶

Overriding her authority, Ash admits the other crew members, which may initially situate him as more benevolent and compassionate than Ripley (in wishing to potentially save Kane's life) – until two points are revealed: firstly, it is discovered that Ash is acting after an order from the crew's employer ('the Company') to bring back the alien in order to study and use the life-form for their own gains; and secondly, Ash is later exposed as a robot, which explains his unswerving loyalty to company orders (and his po-faced endangering of the crew in the pursuit of said orders). The Company's order, initially disclosed only to Ash, also explicitly categorises the crew of the *Nostromo* as 'expendable' in this alien-gathering mission and this proves terribly prescient as the alien roams throughout the spacecraft and slaughters the crew one by one.¹⁷ Ripley's instincts (and Lambert's) are proved to be the correct ones, which could have theoretically saved most of them from the ordeal that ensues. Since this is not the case,

¹⁶ Though many critics contrast Lambert – the only other female on board the *Nostromo* – and her propensity for hysterics (citing this scene in particular, but also her panic-induced inability to move when eventually confronted with the alien, leading to her death) with Ripley's level-headedness and refusal to panic, it certainly should be acknowledged that Lambert's instincts on approaching the edifice in which the alien is first encountered are solid. Twice she urges her colleagues 'Let's get the hell out of here', but to no avail; on her first exhortation to leave, Kane replies 'We've got this far, we must go on. We *have to* go on!' – and horribly ironically, it is Kane who is the first to be killed by the alien. Perhaps this is a subtle nod to 'feminine intuition' by the director? For Lambert as the polar opposite of Ripley, see Jeffords (1987) 77, who labels Lambert 'weak, fearful, confused, and indecisive'; Tasker (1993) 148 calls her 'weak and hysterical'; Newton (1990) 86 describes her as 'passive and easily given to hysterics', who 'functions for the most part to define what Ripley is not – emotional, feminine, unheroic'.

¹⁷ Many critics have seized upon the dictatorial and sinister figure of the 'Company' and suggested it symbolises the evils of capitalism, particularly in view of the way the crew is easily sacrificed in the name of collecting the aliens which are to be used in the 'weapons division': see in particular Byers (1990) and Newton (1990).

however, Ripley's combat and survival skills must be employed, which in turn serve to cement her role as an action heroine and 'modern Amazon'.

Several key scenes illustrate Ripley's strategic abilities when faced with the marauding alien(s), and each film features a 'final showdown' between Ripley and a single alien which can be seen, in a classical sense, to be Ripley's final moment of *aristeia* in which the alien is (in both films) at last ejected into space. Ripley is never specified or coded as a military figure. She is the Warrant Officer on board a commercial towing vessel, in which crew members openly gripe about their pay and conditions. However, circumstances force her into a combat role, involving handling weapons and tactical planning – to which, tellingly, Ripley seems well capable of adapting. Elizabeth Hills has stated that the 'reflexivity [Ripley] employs in relation to her surroundings is not only creatively important but also necessary for her survival', and has demonstrated successfully that an appreciation of Ripley's 'transformation' can assist in viewing her as a positive feminist icon.¹⁸

In *Alien*, Ripley's main 'combat' scene is the final encounter with the alien in the shuttle. Prior to this, the film seems to emphasise her luck in evading the alien, rather than any strength in battle against it. It is not until the captain of the *Nostromo*, Dallas, is killed in the air shafts that Ripley can truly take control – and her first step is to seek advice as to how to destroy the alien from 'Mother', the ship's computer. When Mother reveals that the top priority is retrieval of the alien specimen, and that the crew is categorised 'expendable', a violent altercation between Ash and Ripley takes place. A strange simulated 'rape' takes place in which Ash tries to force a rolled-up pornographic magazine down Ripley's

¹⁸ Hills (1999) 47-49.

throat,¹⁹ but this action becomes somewhat comprehensible when Ash is decapitated and revealed to be, as Parker shouts, ‘a god-damn robot!’²⁰

With the demise of Ash, only Ripley, Lambert and Parker remain.²¹ Ripley is now completely in control and dispatches orders to Lambert and Parker so that they might escape the *Nostromo*, which they intend to blow up.²² However, while Ripley is searching for the crew’s cat, Jones, the alien attacks and kills Parker and Lambert; narrowly escaping the lurking alien in a corridor of the ship, Ripley finally reaches the shuttle and leaves the *Nostromo* behind to explode. A few moments of calm ensue, in which Ripley watches the dying flames of the *Nostromo* wreckage, and then puts the rescued Jones into a hyper-sleep chamber.²³ But, as most followers of the horror film genre know, there exists a convention in which a final moment of unexpected terror is inflicted – and here *Alien* follows convention, with the alien revealed to be lurking on board the shuttle just as Ripley has

¹⁹ Both Kavanagh (1990) and Newton (1990) describe this as a ‘rape’, Kavanagh in particular seeing it as ‘a forceful image relating pornography to violence against women’ (78). Director Ridley Scott, on the audio commentary of the *Alien: Definitive Edition* DVD, states that ‘I figured that robots had to have...if they were really sophisticated, had to occasionally have ‘the urge’...so I said, rather than just beating her up, it’s more interesting that he actually has always wanted to...and here’s his opportunity – but he doesn’t have ‘that’ part.’ For the purposes of the present research, this rape attempt can be compared to the ancient tales of Amazons forced into ‘marriage’ with heroes such as Theseus, and Heracles’ suggestive seizure of Hippolyta’s girdle or belt, which was discussed in Chapter One.

²⁰ Though many read this scene as a simulated rape, it could possibly also be read as Ash’s attempt to ‘silence’ Ripley and stop her from telling the others about the Order prioritising retrieval of the alien over the crew’s safety, which previously only Ash had known about.

²¹ Several scholars have commented on the fact that the three crew members to survive the longest are two women and a member of a minority (Parker is African-American) – Byers (1990) 42 views this as ‘a dig at the predominantly white male power structure’. Additionally, it is perhaps a nice inversion of the ‘black character always dies first’ convention mentioned by reviewer A. O. Scott (see n. 79 below). However, the central characters in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) are both black, and both survive to the very end.

²² Intriguingly, this was Lambert’s idea prior to the incident between Ash and Ripley, but Ripley had replied ‘the shuttle won’t take four’. Now, however, with Ash destroyed, the shuttle is now a viable escape option.

²³ Newton’s (1990) 86 contention that ‘Ripley [being] shown tucking her cat into bed’ affirms her femininity and her identity as a ‘Company woman’ robs this scene of some of its key pathos: the cat goes to sleep in a chamber from which each of the crew members was shown emerging at the beginning of the film; now, with no crew members left whatsoever, Jones is the only person Ripley *can* put into bed.

undressed for hyper-sleep.²⁴ When a scaly arm snaps out at Ripley, she flees to the far side of the shuttle, where she inches her way into a protective spacesuit, only flickering lighting illuminating the leering alien. Director Ridley Scott and actor Sigourney Weaver (on the audio commentary of the 2003 DVD release of the film) have stated that they wished this scene to be portrayed as a voyeuristic episode, in which the loitering alien fixates on the ‘soft pinkness’ of his human prey in a quasi-sexual manner.²⁵ Despite this, Ripley’s dress code – often decried as exploitative – should be recognised as wholly within context: when emerging from hypersleep at the beginning of the film, all crew members were similarly dressed, and the underwear is not overtly scanty or inappropriate. In addition, this scene takes up a mere two minutes within a two-hour film, a film which has for its entirety positioned Ripley as an uncompromisingly determined, capable character. Her destruction of the alien at the end of the scene, then (when she gasses it and expels it through the airlock), could be read as a rejection and punishment of such an objectifying gaze. Such punishment then serves as a reversal of Achilles’ admiring gaze at his vanquished opponent, the dead Amazon Penthesileia; this time it is the alien, and his voyeuristic gaze, which is vanquished and ejected by a triumphant Amazon from the spacecraft, into the deadly vacuum of space (fig. 28).

²⁴ Newton (1990) 87 states that in this scene ultimately ‘Ripley, though in many ways a fine and thrilling hero, is robbed of radical thrust...Impulsive, nurturing, and sexually desirable, she is not so threatening to men after all’. Greenberg (1988) 97 remarks that in the scene, Ripley ‘becomes intensely desirable and achingly vulnerable. The sight of her nearly nude body is highly arousing, in the context of the film’s previous sexual neutrality...’ Inness (1999) 107, however, in my opinion goes too far in asserting that ‘The message here is that it is fine for a woman to act tough and take control in outer space, but she had better be a lady when she returns to society’.

²⁵ Audio commentary, *Alien: Definitive Edition* (2007) Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment.

Fig. 28: Ripley expels the Alien from the shuttle.

Ripley's adherence to the archetype of the 'modern Amazon' is further emphasised through the absence of any romantic attachments to men and considerable level of autonomy from them on board the *Nostromo*. In fact, the absence of sexual entanglements on the ship has been noted by several critics, one of whom has described the atmosphere thus:

Although not unattractive, both sexes evince little if any sexual interest...the crew's interactions are impersonal, tense, and slightly abrasive.²⁶

Such a situation of 'sexual neutrality' then, lessens the need to 'match up' the central female character of Ripley with one of the male characters (or the other female character, for that matter). In addition, although Ripley has two male superior officers (Kane and Dallas) at the beginning of the film, their relatively early deaths result in her assuming authority over the remaining crew. Placing her in such a position of power, no longer subject to male superiors, elevates her above her former station – and thus the attempted 'rape' scene with Ash can serve as a symbolic reaction against such female authority.

²⁶ Greenberg (1986) 101-2.

A sequel to the highly successful *Alien* arrived seven years later, and chronologically this film continued from where the previous film had ended, though it differed in style significantly. In James Cameron's *Aliens* (1986), Ripley is discovered in the shuttle fifty-seven years after she had commenced her hyper-sleep – far longer than she had expected or intended. On her return to Earth, she is grilled over the destruction of the *Nostromo* and her warnings about the aliens are greeted with skepticism. Eventually she is persuaded to return to the planet (now named, with wonderfully 'classical' prescience, 'Acheron') on which her crew had discovered the alien, in order to assist a group of Marines in the rescue of a human colony established on said planet. Ripley retains the role of central heroic figure, despite the fact that, much like the beginning of *Alien*, she is initially situated as merely a 'consultant' to the rescue mission. A group of the Marines are sent forth as an advance party to investigate the colony and soon encounter the aliens. However, when the Marines' commanding officer, Gorman, panics and is unable to take action, Ripley takes charge and from this point on it is she that the others rely on and obey. A small girl named Newt is the sole survivor at the colony: she is rescued, but only Ripley takes the time to help Newt to recover and evade the aliens until their final escape from Acheron.

Aliens, in keeping with its chosen genre – Cameron wished it to be a 'combat movie', distinct from the 'gothic horror' of *Alien* – contains more action scenes than its predecessor, particularly for the central character of Ripley.²⁷ In addition to the previously outlined 'modern Amazon' traits of fighting skills and autonomy from men which Ripley displays in *Alien*, another characteristic is included: motherhood, and specifically, motherhood outside of its customary, 'ordinary'

²⁷ See 'Pre-Production: 57 Years Later – Continuing the Story' Featurette on the *Aliens: Definitive Edition* DVD (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2007). Greenberg (1988) 166-7 has lamented such a change in genre from *Alien*, asserting that 'Cameron projects the typical strategies of the war genre...into space, converting Scott's richly symbolic, muteable horror into an insectoid Terminator'. He also contrasts the taglines used for promotion of the films: while for *Alien* it was 'In Space, No-one Can Hear You Scream', *Aliens* uses the 'hawkish' tagline 'This Time, It's War'.

depictions within a safe, domestic sphere. This is a feature that Ripley shares with Xena, The Bride of the *Kill Bill* films and Sarah Connor of the *Terminator* films (see below). Although Ripley is again not configured as a military figure – when taken back to Acheron as an elite ‘consultant’, she is seated at a separate dining table from the Marines and emphatically tells Burke, the Company representative, ‘I’m *not* a soldier!’ – she rises to the combat challenge at hand. And despite Ripley not leading an outwardly unusual lifestyle (as Xena and Wonder Woman did), each of the other traits demonstrate her conformity to the Amazonian archetype in this film.

In *Aliens*, Ripley displays a significant increase in her ability to confront and challenge authority (which was not necessarily seen to the same degree in the preceding film), particularly when confronting the Board who question both the necessity to destroy the *Nostromo* and the veracity of Ripley’s version of events:

Ripley: Look, I can see where this is going...but I’m telling you, that those things exist.

Board Chair: Thank you, Officer Ripley; that will be all.

Ripley: Please, you’re not listening to me. Kane, the crew member...Kane, who went into that ship, said that he saw thousands of eggs there – thousands.

Board Chair: (emphatically) Thank you; that will be all.

Ripley: God damn it, that’s not all! Because if one of those things gets down here, then that *will* be all. Then all *this* bullsh*t that you think is so important (hurls papers down on table) – you can just kiss all that goodbye.

This outburst, symptomatic of her post-traumatic stress (along with recurrent nightmares involving an alien gestating inside her, as Kane had experienced), leads to her departure from the meeting, determined to have nothing to do with future missions to Acheron. However, the Company’s representative, Burke,

manages to convince her to take part in the journey to Acheron. At first, she is segregated from the Marines (labeled ‘grunts’), eating at a separate table with Lieutenant Gorman and Burke and prompting some quiet ridicule from the Marines:

Vasquez: Who’s Snow White?

Dietrich: She’s supposed to be some kind of consultant. Apparently, she saw an alien once...

Hudson: Well, whoopee-f**king-do!

Ripley is redeemed somewhat, however, when – at a loose end while everyone else is preparing weapons – she commandeers a huge power loader, which looks akin to a mechanical ‘suit’, with legs for movement and arms that operate as a kind of forklift mechanism.²⁸ Despite having proved proficient at such a task, she continues to be configured as somewhat less of a ‘hero’ than the blustering Marines, and the swaggering Hudson reassures her while they are travelling to Acheron ‘Hey Ripley – don’t worry! Me and my squad of ultimate bad-asses will protect you!’ before boastfully listing the many weapons and equipment they possess to deal with potential alien encounters. When they arrive at Acheron’s (empty) colony, Ripley is noticeably nervous, jumping at every rattle and sharp sound, but when the group encounters Newt, it is Ripley who plunges into the airshaft and retrieves the girl – an act that finally seems to hint at Ripley’s potential for heroism and rekindles the determination she had shown in *Alien*.²⁹

With Newt rescued, the Marines re-enter the colony headquarters, only to stumble upon the alien’s lair, where they find bodies of human victims in cocoon-like encasings. Provoking the attention of the aliens that have slowly begun to encircle them, several of the Marines are attacked and killed. Gorman, the

²⁸ Tasker (1993) 151. This scene serves as a visual foreshadowing of the final ‘showdown’ with the alien.

²⁹ When they first spot her and Newt flees, Ripley yells ‘Don’t let her go!’, which is exactly what she says in *Alien* when she, Parker, and Brett are trying to find Jones, and he flees from them. Ripley’s relationship with Newt is discussed further below.

lieutenant in charge who is back on the transport vehicle with Ripley, becomes particularly panic-stricken when ultra-tough Sergeant Apone is killed, and is unable to take decisive action, at which point Ripley forcefully takes charge. She runs to the front of the vehicle, and drives it toward the Marines to evacuate them. In saving several Marine lives she is, crucially, positioned as the ‘hero’, as the one whose name is called out by the Marines for help – instead of Gorman.³⁰ Further, Ripley’s uncompromising suggestion that they ‘take off and nuke the entire site from orbit’ is echoed by the private in charge. Even when she still has military superiors, the weight of Ripley’s authority is clear – which her rescue of both Newt and of the Marines has helped her to earn.

This ability to take charge in a fraught situation is certainly a military advantage, particularly when crew members are being slowly picked off by marauding aliens, and some – most noticeably Hudson – become completely terror-stricken. When the transport aircraft crashes and it seems there may no longer be any means of leaving Acheron, Hudson (moaning ‘dear lord Jesus, this ain’t happenin’ man, this can’t be happenin’ man, this ain’t happenin’!’) is calmed by Ripley, who issues orders for barricading the remaining survivors inside.³¹ However, the aliens still penetrate the barricade, leading to an attempt to escape the planet using a spare aircraft. Hicks, meanwhile, is injured by the aliens’ acid blood, burning an arm and being blinded in one eye, and his injuries render him virtually useless. Thus, much as the final act of *Alien* featured Ripley in a final desperate struggle for survival, *Aliens* follows suit, though in this film the desperate struggle is not only to save herself but also Newt who must be extracted from the mother alien’s lair. Ripley is shown loading up the huge M-41 pulse rifle, adding grenades to it, and strapping the gun harness to her sweat-soaked torso in preparation for

³⁰ Inness (1999) 109.

³¹ As Jeffords (1987) 77 notes, Hudson fulfils a role similar to Lambert’s in *Alien* – becoming hysterical and repeatedly saying ‘let’s get out of here!’ And like Lambert, Hudson is assuaged by Ripley and her calm efficiency. See also Inness (1999) 109.

seeking out the little girl, whom she eventually finds half-cocooned. Soon after, they stumble upon the alien's breeding ground – a room filled with the numberless eggs (mentioned by Ripley to the incredulous Board members at the beginning of the film) and a huge 'mother' alien, with two lurking bodyguard aliens placed on either side. Noted film reviewer Pauline Kael called this encounter 'The Battle of the Big Mamas'³², and facing the mother alien and her minions against Ripley, who balances a clinging Newt on her hip, also makes such an appellation arresting visually (fig. 29).

Fig. 29: Ripley faces the 'mother' Alien with Newt.

Ripley turns her flame-thrower on the eggs, and then begins to fire the machine gun at them, with a look of hatred and vengeance on her face. Given that the whole building has already been rigged to blow up, one should read this

³² Kael (1989) 194.

somewhat pointless moment of destruction as Ripley's attempt to exorcise the 'internal demon' of her encounter with the alien fifty-seven years ago.³³

Ripley and Newt are then picked up by the crew android, Bishop, in the spare aircraft and for a short few minutes it appears that all is well again. However, as with *Alien*, there is an unexpected 'final showdown' with the stowaway alien who has clung to the underside of the aircraft. Again displaying her inventiveness, Ripley resorts to using the power loader which, significantly, she had wielded near the beginning of the film. Backlit with a bright blue-white light, she advances toward the alien and uses the massive pincer-like 'hands' of the loader to batter the alien (fig. 30).³⁴ The alien, however, has a whip-like tail and also a long tongue (in the form of a miniature head with teeth) which snaps at Ripley's head through the bars of the loader. But Ripley's knowledge of the spacecraft ultimately assists her in dispatching the alien: she opens the nearby outer door (which, like the airlock in *Alien*, leads out to the vacuum of space), forcing the alien to be sucked out of the spacecraft. She also operates the controls to shut this door - thereby avoiding herself and Newt being dragged outside. Finally, Ripley and Newt are rid of the alien, due in large part to Ripley's ability to fight off and destroy the beast.

Newt is pivotal for what many critics have asserted to be a central theme of the film: Ripley's role as a surrogate mother, and her resulting battle against the female alien (who, likewise, is guarding her own cache of eggs) to protect herself

³³ James Cameron has said in the audio commentary of the *Aliens: Definitive Edition* DVD that this was what he envisaged the 'heart and soul' of the character and Ripley's motivation to be: that the film would play more or less as a 'straightforward revenge story'. This, in turn, dovetails well with the central revenge motif of *Kill Bill 1* and *2*, which is discussed further below.

³⁴ Hills (1999) 48, using a Deleuzian theory of 'assemblage of diverse elements and forces' resulting in transformation, concludes that Ripley 'increases her capacity to survive by forming unanticipated linkages with other machines'. Although in this situation Hills is discussing *Alien*, it could equally be applied to *Aliens*, in particular the use of the power loader.

Fig. 30: Ripley in the powerloader.

and Newt.³⁵ In turn, Inness has critiqued the film's placement of Ripley in a maternal role as 'ton[ing] down her tough demeanor by emphasizing a role traditionally considered feminine and, therefore, not tough'.³⁶ However, this assumes an 'either-or' binary logic which then betrays the author's preconceived and proscriptive notions of gendered behaviour and what can be considered 'weak' and 'tough'.³⁷ What is key to casting Ripley as surrogate mother to Newt in *Aliens* is that it does not reduce any of her potential as an action heroine: though she may be shown carrying Newt, putting her to bed, and cleaning her

³⁵ Holmlund (1994) 144 criticises the fact that half of the twenty reviews of *Aliens* she had read focused on female sexuality and motherhood 'to the exclusion of all else'. Although motherhood is by no means the be-all and end-all of Ripley's existence, it is still a strong motivator and deserves examination here.

³⁶ Inness (1999) 111. Inness also cites the 'great range of emotion' shown on Ripley's face when searching for Newt as 'affirming her femininity' – in contrast to 'the expressionless, immobile quality that characterises Rambo, the Terminator, and many other tough guys'. A central problem with her comparisons here is that the Terminator isn't even human, but a futuristic cyborg, so he can hardly be expected to show human emotion in the first place. See further below, n. 59.

³⁷ Similarly, other critics have voiced dismay at Ripley's role as mother to Newt, for various reasons: Penley (1990) 125 seems to object to the sexual 'difference' which this motherhood symbolises, and that the film does not configure the mother-daughter relationship in any new radical way, stating that 'what we finally get is a conservative moral lesson about maternity, futuristic or otherwise: mothers will be mothers, and they will always be women'. Faludi (1992) 145 lists Ripley as an anomaly among the decade's female roles, but within her discussion of the overemphasis on maternity, she notes that even Ripley's 'willfulness...is maternal'.

dirty face (all parental actions), she still remains able to wield a flame-thrower, operate a giant power-loader, and ultimately defeat the aliens. Passman's seminal chapter 'The Classical Amazon in Contemporary Cinema' provides an interpretation which is most suitable, I think, to understanding Ripley's (as well as Sarah Connor's, and The Bride's) status as a mother:

The characteristics of the Amazon have remained constant since they were established in antiquity, but with the modern addition of motherhood. Many women are raising their children alone today and face great economic and social challenges as they do so. Amazon films which emphasise motherhood and the future of the human race subliminally respond to this situation, in a sense valuing the heroic effort involved in motherhood under such circumstances.³⁸

The inclusion of motherhood in Ripley's characteristic make-up should be seen as assisting in presenting a multi-faceted and plausible female action hero – an approach later used to good advantage by *Xena*'s creators. In addition, since the status and habits of ancient Amazons as mothers was mentioned several times either explicitly or implicitly by the ancient writers, being both a warrior *and* a mother should not be mutually exclusive for the modern Amazon. Such a protective instinct, as displayed by Ripley toward Newt, in fact strengthens her motivation, thereby inspiring her to greater feats of endurance – so in fact, the surrogate motherhood theme can be seen to *add* to her configuration as an Amazon.

An intriguing scene, cut from the theatrical version of the film, but restored in editions of the DVD released from 2000 onward, involved Ripley asking Burke, early on in the film, about her daughter. Shown a picture of an elderly woman, she is told that her daughter has died, at the age of sixty-six (two years before

³⁸ Passman (1991) 101. My research here is effectively an attempt to build on the excellent work begun by Passman.

Ripley was rescued). Her shock is palpable: she lovingly traces the lines of the face in the photo and quietly says ‘I promised her that I’d be home for her birthday’, then sobs while clutching the photo to her chest. Director James Cameron has remarked that Sigourney Weaver had based her character’s central motivation and mindset on the facts of this scene, and had therefore been upset when it was subsequently cut from the cinematic version of the film.³⁹ Some critics may argue that, without this edited scene (it was only released in 2000), Ripley’s maternal protectiveness with regard to Newt is an ‘improbable’ development.⁴⁰ However, Ripley’s concern for Newt need not be construed as improbable or as simply an attempt to ‘soften’ her heroic persona by presenting her with a surrogate daughter. The same instinct to defend one who is in need of protection is seen in *Alien* when Ripley searches for and rescues the *Nostromo*’s cat, Jones.

As mentioned above, it is Ripley who pursues Newt when she first scurries away from the searching Marines. All the Marines, with the exception of Hicks, are fairly oblivious to Newt, preferring to focus on their weapons and their mission; Hicks, however, who has been described as the ‘least masculinist’ of them,⁴¹ does display some concern and care for Newt, warning her not to touch grenades, for instance. It is Ripley, though, who manages to finally elicit words from the petrified girl, when Gorman’s frustrated interrogations have yielded nothing. It is Ripley who puts Newt to bed, reassuring her that she will be nearby, watching her through the room’s closed-circuit television camera; and it is Ripley who returns to search for Newt after the alien has taken her, despite the colony being about to blow up. And the relationship is one of mutual affection and support: Newt calls

³⁹ Audio commentary of the *Aliens: Definitive Edition* DVD.

⁴⁰ As does Penley (1990) 125. Kael (1989) 193 also labels Newt as ‘the kind of child you meet only in movies, where they’re used to give plots some sentimental propulsion....Newt is out there in space to arouse Ripley’s maternal instinct’.

⁴¹ Jeffords (1987) 74.

out for Ripley more often than anyone else when in danger and it is she who directs Ripley through the tunnels of the colony in order to escape. When Newt is taken by the alien, it is her scream that leads Ripley to find her cocooned in the alien lair. As one scholar has described it, this seems like ‘the direct cry of child to mother’.⁴²

At the beginning of *Aliens*, a glimpse into Ripley’s private life is given through two scenes set in her tiny apartment. The cat from *Alien*, Jones, lives with her, but there appears to be no husband or boyfriend – certainly no-one significant enough to be shown on film. When Ripley asks Burke whether he has any information about her daughter, there is no accompanying inquiry about a husband, boyfriend, or the daughter’s father, which connects her to those ancient Amazons who supposedly raised children without the presence of a father (Strabo 11.5.1). Ripley is configured as a solitary figure, living in an austere, sterile-seeming environment. As with *Alien*, Ripley is initially part of a group – the Marines, Gorman the lieutenant, Burke as the Company’s representative – when the mission to Acheron begins and though earmarked as a ‘consultant’, she seems more or less under the command of Gorman. However, when (paralysed by panic) he is unable to act and is soon after knocked unconscious, Ripley begins to take charge. And even though she asserts that Hicks is next in the chain of command, Hicks in fact immediately agrees to her proposed plan to ‘take off and nuke the entire site from orbit’. Indeed, Hicks is the closest thing to a friend that Ripley makes during the film, yet any possible romantic involvement is deftly avoided: when Hicks gives Ripley a locator wristband, he jokes ‘Hey, it’s not like we’re engaged or anything’ – effectively sidestepping any potential lingering

⁴² Jeffords (1987) 74 views this as a feminist statement: ‘By abandoning the technology [the locator, the rifle Hicks gives her] provided her by men, Ripley seems again to be staging feminist territory, making clear the distinctions between her means of survival – personal contact, nurturing, unmediated communication – and their destruction – mediated interaction, technology, insensitivity.’

sentimentality.⁴³ Hicks' injury and partial blinding render him ineffectual for the final section of the film, leaving the final defence and rescue of Newt the responsibility of Ripley alone. It is with Newt that Ripley has the strongest bond, rather than with any male romantic interest; and thus her reliance on men either as protectors or partners is minimised.

One final point of note with regard to *Aliens* is the presence of another potential Amazonian figure: the character of Vasquez (Jenette Goldstein), a tough female Marine who also voyages to Acheron. In the first scene featuring Vasquez, she is shown doing chin-ups, a sleeveless vest putting her muscular body on display. The Marine 'grunts' are largely characterised through their bravado, scatological speak and aggression, and Vasquez is no exception to this: when teasingly asked by Hudson whether she has 'ever been mistaken for a man', she replies 'No. Have you?' Interestingly, given the fact that the writers of *Alien* had originally conceived of Ripley as being a male character, Jeanette Goldstein (the actress who plays Vasquez) has said the following:

I was very much drawn to the role of Vasquez, just because I thought she was so interesting...and Jim [Cameron] said that he normally would have written her as a man, but he thought it would be interesting to make [Vasquez] into a woman...⁴⁴

Certainly, Vasquez is represented as equal to her male comrades in skill, courage and strength throughout the film. With particular regard to the latter, she is one of only two Marines given the task of carrying an enormous 'smart gun' which requires both arms to balance it (fig. 31). Some scholars prefer to read Vasquez's role strictly as balancing out that of Ripley: Vasquez is physically muscular, while Ripley is not; Vasquez joins in the Marines' vulgar

⁴³ On the issue of Hicks teaching Ripley how to use the M-14 rifle and taking pride in her immediate facility with it, Kael (1989) 193 remarks that 'this is the closest that the movie comes to romance'.

⁴⁴ From interview with Jeanette Goldstein on the 'Pre-Production: Casting and Character' Featurette on the *Aliens: Definitive Edition* DVD (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2007).

banter, while Ripley is disturbed and alienated by it; Vasquez never interacts with Newt, while Ripley cares for her in a maternal manner.⁴⁵ However, despite the numerous differences between Ripley and Vasquez, they are both depicted as strong and resilient even while the mission deteriorates into chaos – neither descends to the level of Hudson’s hysterical panic, for instance – and Vasquez seems easily able to fit the modern Amazon mould. Ultimately, however, Vasquez is killed by the aliens (like Lambert, she is one of the last to die), but even her death has a ring of the heroic about it. Escaping through a tunnel and pursued by numerous aliens, she chooses to kill herself and Gorman with a grenade (and blow up the advancing aliens at the same time) rather than be captured and suffer the gruesome ‘cocooning’ process. Therefore, although Ripley is the main focus of the present research, Vasquez must be taken into account as a further example of a similarly Amazonian individual, albeit one who is an auxiliary figure and thus is less fully developed in terms of character.

Fig. 31: Vasquez with the ‘smart gun’.

⁴⁵ See Jeffords (1987) 79-80 for the contrast between Ripley and Vasquez; see also Inness (1999) 108-109 for a discussion of the two women as reflecting different kinds of toughness. Inness’ analysis suffers, however, from an overly generalizing view of Vasquez: she is described as ‘an impetuous, hot-blooded Latina’ (when in fact she seems one of the most capable and calm Marines) and as a ‘prototypical butch lesbian’ (despite the fact that no mention of her sexuality is ever made – which Inness herself admits).

Minor Case Study: *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*

‘Oh, come on. Do I look like the mother of the future? I mean, am I tough, organised? I can’t even balance my cheque-book!’

Like Ripley, Sarah Connor (played by Linda Hamilton) of *The Terminator* (1984) and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) is forced by circumstances to develop into a heroic figure. Sarah, however, faces the threat of anthropomorphic cyborgs, rather than aliens. In addition, as was the case with Ripley, Sarah becomes far more of an ‘action hero’ in the second film of the two, displaying more assertion, more courage, and more aggression. The plot of *The Terminator* follows a cyborg, the T-101 ‘Terminator’ (Arnold Schwarzenegger), and a man, Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn), who have both traveled back through time – the Terminator to destroy Sarah, mother-to-be of future warrior John Connor, and Kyle to protect her. In the future, Kyle tells Sarah, a nuclear war will result in machines and super-computers taking over the world, leaving only human resistance forces to attempt to fight back, of whom John Connor will be a crucial leader. Though Sarah is initially incredulous of Kyle’s predictions of the future and his claims that he is a time-traveller, she eventually believes him and together they attempt to outrun the Terminator, who is virtually impervious to bullets and other weapons. In the midst of this desperate struggle for survival, Sarah and Kyle become lovers. By the end of the film Sarah has undergone a noticeable change and is ultimately able to defeat the Terminator by herself, while Kyle lies mortally wounded.

Sarah’s configuration as a ‘modern Amazon’ is not as evident in the first film as it is in the second, but this is due to the film’s characterization of her. Like Ripley, she is forced by circumstances to become an action hero. In *The Terminator*, Sarah is initially portrayed as an ordinary ‘girl-next-door’, with a mundane, thankless job as a waitress and a roommate with whom she shares an apartment and details

of romantic escapades. However, after meeting Kyle and being told of her pivotal role in the future survival of mankind, there are suddenly greater issues at hand, and Sarah must find an inner (and outer) strength in order to keep herself alive. Although not displaying great fighting skills, she is still able to destroy the Terminator by the end of the film. Though her lifestyle is not particularly unusual, her future as mother to John Connor places her in a unique position, and will inspire her to contemplate a life that is far from commonplace. Sarah's relationships with men can perhaps be seen to disqualify her from the archetype, however – it is Kyle who gives her direction, support, protection and training that enables her to survive the Terminator's attacks. When the two become lovers, the romantic connection between them becomes a key motivator to Sarah's actions, and this differentiates her from both Ripley and The Bride. Some discussion, then, of how each of Sarah's Amazonian traits is manifested in the *Terminator* films will assist in placing her among other crucial cinematic Amazons.

In keeping with her representation as a 'girl next door who could ultimately become the mother who saves humanity',⁴⁶ Sarah initially shows absolutely no expertise in any kind of combat. In contrast, aspects of her femininity are stressed: she rides a small scooter to work (instead of, for instance, a more powerful car); she works as a waitress (a traditionally feminine occupation) wearing a typical smock-dress uniform and being pestered by irritable customers and misbehaving children;⁴⁷ and she is shown at home applying makeup and blow-drying her hair. However, when both T-101 and Kyle begin following her one night (one to kill, one to protect), she is soon forced out of this unremarkable life and on to a path requiring more strength and aggression. Kyle whisks her out of T-101's path just in time to avoid his gunfire, shouting 'Come with me if you

⁴⁶ This is the term used by director James Cameron to describe Sarah in the 'Other Voices: Cast and Crew Recollections' Featurette on *The Terminator: Definitive Edition* DVD.

⁴⁷ Several critics claim that Sarah's outfit makes her 'childlike': see Goscilo (1987) 39 and Telotte (1992) 29.

want to live!'. It is partially because of Sarah's (understandable) ignorance of future events, of which Kyle is aware, that she is confused, unable to act, and forced to follow Kyle's directions for the first portion of the film. When told about the Terminator's pursuit of her, she asks Kyle 'Can you stop it?' – tellingly, not 'Can we/I stop it?' However, once she has recognised the significance of the attacking Terminator and her own forthcoming role as a mother, Sarah begins to take on a more decisive role. While she once responded to Kyle's predictions about the future with 'Do I *look* like the mother of the future? I mean, am I tough, organised? I can't even balance my cheque-book!', she later assists Kyle in manufacturing home-made bombs with which they plan to destroy T-101. And in a final dramatic encounter, in which the cyborg pursues Sarah and Kyle into a steelworks factory, Kyle is mortally wounded when he attempts to blow up T-101. But Sarah transcends her fear, using the language of a drill sergeant to exhort Kyle to get up: as Tasker has pointed out, a staple from old Hollywood war movies, yet with the added twist that such films would never have placed a female character in such a role.⁴⁸ When Kyle collapses, it falls to Sarah to finally destroy the Terminator, which she does by crushing the cyborg in a mechanical press, with the exhausted yet triumphant remark 'You're terminated, f**ker!' (fig. 32).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Tasker (1993) 138. Perhaps the closest thing to such a character could, interestingly, be the figure of Vasquez from *Aliens*, who is both female and a hardened Marine: see the discussion above, p. 178-9.

⁴⁹ Holland (1995) 167 has argued that, rather than viewing Sarah's destruction of the T-101 as a feminist statement, it should be noted that Kyle had already blown up part of the cyborg, and thus left only its mechanical skeleton functioning. Quoting Margaret Goscilo, she posits that Sarah does not destroy the T-101's 'recognizably male persona' but rather a neuter machine. However, this seems to reduce Sarah's feminist potential to *only* killing males or masculine identities.

Fig. 32: Sarah Connor ‘terminates’ the futuristic cyborg.

As mentioned above, Sarah’s impending motherhood acts as a spur that forces her to fight tooth and claw against the Terminator’s onslaught. Kyle reveals that, in the future, there is ‘one man who taught us to fight....he brought us back from the brink. His name was Connor. John Connor. Your son, Sarah. Your unborn son.’ The very future of mankind, therefore, rests upon Sarah’s ability to ‘keep herself alive so that she can have her son and then ensure that he survives’.⁵⁰ Several scholars have noted the Biblical resonance of the *Terminator* films’ narrative pattern: an ordinary woman is visited by a ‘messianic’ figure and becomes pregnant, giving birth to a man (possessing the initials J.C.) who will grow to be a kind of ‘saviour’ to mankind.⁵¹ Such a reading of the films recognises the centrality of Sarah’s motherhood, while also reflecting the manner in which this role is thrust upon her, without much allowance of her own opinion or feeling on the matter. A kind of ‘maternal imperative’ seems to exist, which Sarah questions (if only once), complaining to Kyle ‘I didn’t ask for this honour, and I

⁵⁰ Holland (1995) 168.

⁵¹ For instance, Passman (1991) 96; Sardar (1992) 493; also Ruppertsberg (1990) *passim*.

don't want it, okay?' However, such protests are briskly brushed aside, with Kyle employing the emotive device of a message from the future (relayed verbatim) that John had sent back with him to tell Sarah: 'You must be stronger than you thought you could be. You must survive, or I will never exist'.⁵² The final scene of *The Terminator* shows a visibly pregnant Sarah driving through a desert, a revolver sitting on the passenger seat, and pulling up to a service station where Spanish is being spoken – perhaps Mexico or Central America.⁵³ The future machines' quest to prevent the conception of John Connor is clearly shown to have failed, and Sarah Connor's role as the 'mother of the future' is soon to be fulfilled.

Sarah is not the autonomous female free of romantic entanglements that Ripley was shown to be in *Alien* and *Aliens*. She relies a great deal on Kyle for the most part of *The Terminator*: he reveals details of his mission to save her, fends off the T-101 with guns, instructs her in how to make bombs, and impresses upon her the 'maternal imperative'. In addition, her romantic and sexual involvement with Kyle results in the conception of John while the T-101 is trying to prevent this very thing from happening.⁵⁴ It can also be suggested that her imminent relationship with her as-yet unborn son influences and affects her actions to the extent that she is not truly autonomous or independent at all, but more of a vessel in which mankind's only hope is to be carried. This is key in differentiating her from the previously discussed figure of Ripley. However, as will be noted below, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* alters the character of Sarah markedly, particularly in her presentation as independent of and distrustful of men. The Sarah whom the

⁵² Goscilo (1987) 45-6 rightly points out the way this 'dual male exhortation to do her maternal, humanitarian duty' (among other things) lays bare the film's 'sexual conservatism' and 'extreme bias toward patriarchal values'.

⁵³ The significance of this is more fully explained in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*: see further below.

⁵⁴ Penley (1990) emphasises the way the 'primal scene' is manipulated by John (by sending Kyle back, to impregnate Sarah and thereby choose his own father). There exist many Freudian discussions regarding the psychoanalytical importance of primal scenes; however, the space to discuss such a vast issue is not permitted in this research.

audience encounters in *Terminator 2* conforms more completely to the Amazon archetype. Her physical and fighting skills are shown to be impressive, both with weapons and her bare hands; her lifestyle (in the intervening years) has been highly atypical, and during the film is relatively unusual; her maternal relationship with son John is also unusual, due to the surrounding circumstances; and (in contrast to the first film) she retains relative autonomy and independence from men, despite her inextricable link to John.

When *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* begins, it is a decade from the end of the previous film; John Connor is a rebellious ten-year-old boy, and Sarah is a patient in a mental institution, where her accounts of time-travellers, cyborgs and an impending nuclear apocalypse have, Cassandra-like, condemned her to life in a white cell where doctors dismiss her as delusional. This time, not one but two cyborgs have been sent back in time: one, T-1000 (Robert Patrick) has been sent by the machines of the future to kill John; the other is the re-programmed T-101 (Arnold Schwarzenegger) who has been sent by the human resistance fighters of the future to protect John. T-1000, a more advanced model than T-101, is made of a molten mercury-like material and thus is more adaptable and even more invincible than the Terminator of the first film. Together John and T-101 help Sarah escape the mental institution (and T-1000) and travel south, where Sarah has a cache of impressive weapons. She eventually decides to take drastic action and confront the inventor (Dyson) whose creations will one day lead to the murderous machines of the future. Dyson helps to destroy his designs, which leads to an impressive scene of action and explosions, but T-1000's relentless pursuit of John and Sarah leads to a final confrontation in a steelworks, where both cyborgs are ultimately destroyed.

The first shot of Sarah in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* exhibits her new, muscular physique to great effect: she is doing a series of chin-ups in a small cell,

underlining her upper-body strength.⁵⁵ She is spoken to (through the locked door) by the resident psychiatrist, Dr Silberman, the very same doctor who had dismissed Kyle as ‘delusionary’ in *The Terminator*. At their very next meeting, when Silberman refuses to transfer her to a lower-security wing, Sarah lunges across the table at him, and must be restrained by four orderlies. Both the doctor’s fear of her unreserved anger and Sarah’s intention to seriously harm the equivocating Silberman are made clear. Though she is restrained and taken back to her cell, Sarah’s strength and skill is soon on show once more, as she unpicks both her wrist shackles and the lock of her cell, then knocks out several guards before taking Dr Silberman hostage, holding a syringe filled with poison to his neck.⁵⁶ It is during this scene of attempted escape that Sarah encounters her son John (Edward Furlong) and T-101, who have come to the institution hoping to reach her before T-1000. However, T-1000 has already infiltrated the institution and comes face to face with his targets at this very moment. With both Sarah and T-101 firing guns at T-1000, the three manage to escape, though Sarah is wounded by one of T-1000’s blade-shaped arms. Driving south, they eventually encounter an old friend of Sarah’s and a cache of weapons she has hidden underground.

While they are compiling weapons, however, Sarah suddenly sets off in the car without John or T-101; John deduces from a carved message on the table that she

⁵⁵ This is the very same action that Private Vasquez, of *Aliens*, is shown performing in the audience’s first real glimpse of her; since both films have the same director (James Cameron), it could be posited that he has chosen this exercise to deliberately symbolise the muscular strength of both women. Telotte’s (1992) phrasing (31), that Sarah is making herself into ‘a smaller version of the Terminator’ by ‘shap[ing] herself into the best *human* cyborg possible’ is quite apt, especially in view (whether Telotte intended this or not) of the fact that Sarah’s height and build is actually quite similar to that of the ‘bad’ Terminator, the T-1000; so while she may be ‘smaller’ than the Schwarzenegger T-101, her body type is more like the newer model T-1000.

⁵⁶ One of the guards, Dougie, is the victim of a fairly brutal stealth attack, but Sarah’s violence has a strong element of vengeance about it. He had earlier been shown maliciously striking her with a baton, before forcefully sedating her and later creepily licking her face while she appeared catatonic. Such a revenge attack on a sinister attendant is later extrapolated by Tarantino in *Kill Bill 1*, in which The Bride murders the orderly Buck, who had been hiring out her comatose body for sex.

intends to kill Miles Dyson, the scientist responsible for developing the technology which leads to the future nuclear holocaust.⁵⁷ Sarah is shown stalking the outside of Dyson's house, loading several weapons, and aiming a gun with a laser-pointer at Dyson's head, before she fires numerous shots into the house (though she misses Dyson only by chance). She then strides across the lawn and into Dyson's house with a revolver in her hand, and walks calmly after him, shooting steadily and systematically in the way the T-101 and T-1000 do. She is, as Telotte says, 'acting like the Terminator' (fig. 33).⁵⁸ However, crucially, while Sarah is standing over a wounded Dyson, she is ultimately unable to be a true Terminator and kill him. This is not because, as some have suggested, she is a woman,⁵⁹ but because she is *human*. She sees the man quaking with fear and pain before her, his small son having valiantly tried to protect him and his wife trembling, and she is unable to simply 'exterminate' him as the Terminators are able to. Such a scene succeeds in humanizing Sarah, who up to this point has been distracted by thoughts of the future, John's role in it, and how the world's destruction might be avoided. However, the encounter with Dyson does not force her to change tack entirely; rather, Dyson is convinced by T-101's account of the future to destroy his creations himself, which leads to a dramatic scene at Cyerdyne, his workplace.

⁵⁷ While Ripley suffers recurrent nightmares about her past (inspired by encounters with the aliens), Sarah suffers recurrent nightmares about the future – particularly, the moment of the nuclear holocaust which destroys much of mankind and leads to the rise of the cyborg machines.

⁵⁸ Telotte (1992) 31; Jeffords (1993) 249 also notes this point, adding that she is doing 'what it no longer can do – kill human beings' (because John had forbidden the T-101 from killing people, it was restricted to merely incapacitating victims: near the end of the film, a read-out of the T-101's CPU reads 'Human Casualties: 0.0')

⁵⁹ For instance, Inness (1999) 128 reads Sarah's failure to kill Dyson as a sign that 'Sarah has returned to her role as a mother and woman....she still possesses the emotion that sets her apart from male action heroes (Schwarzenegger does not break into tears).' The reference here to Schwarzenegger is entirely irrelevant in the context of this film, as T-101 is a cyborg – defined as a 'metal endoskeleton covered with living tissue' – and not human at all. As a 'learning' cyborg, the Terminator has the ability to absorb information passed on to him, but he will never feel emotions as humans do, or truly empathise with them. T-101 asks John 'What's wrong with your eyes?' when the boy is crying, and at the end of the film, tells John 'I know now why you cry – but it is something I can never do'. Elsewhere, John tells the cyborg 'Look, maybe you don't care if you live or die, but everybody's not like that. *We* have feelings. *We* hurt. *We're* afraid. You've got to learn this stuff, I'm not kidding – it's important.'

At Cyberdyne, T-101, Sarah, John and Dyson attempt to destroy Dyson's inventions, but police SWAT teams arrive, resulting in Sarah taking cover while armed police swarm in and deftly avoiding machine-gun bullets. When she, T-101 and John escape in a police van, it is Sarah who maintains a courageous barrage of shots from the back of the van at the pursuing T-1000, who has commandeered a police helicopter. In the final 'showdown' of this film, at a steelworks, the T-101 is horribly maimed by the T-1000 and Sarah is left to valiantly shoot at the T-1000 (despite being shot in the leg and stabbed in the shoulder), propelling him toward a huge molten pit; however, her gun runs out at the crucial moment, and he must be 'finished off' by the T-101. But it falls to Sarah to 'terminate' even the T-101, as no cyborg must be left that might help people in the future construct these kinds of machines again. Despite John's distress, she lowers T-101 into the molten pit, and, in her own words, she and John can now 'face the unknown future...with a new hope'.

Fig. 33: Sarah becomes a Terminator while stalking Dyson.

Closely linked to Sarah's battle prowess is her unusual lifestyle, as it has assisted in shaping her into a person with such skills. Evidence of a past existence that was out of the ordinary comes largely from John, who tells a friend about how, prior to her confinement, they 'spent a lot of time in Nicaragua and places like that' and that Sarah would 'shack up with anybody she could learn from, so she could teach me how to be this 'great military leader'.' He later mentions more about this unusual lifestyle:

See, I grew up on places like this, so I just thought that's how people lived. Riding around in helicopters, learning how to blow sh*t up...

However, John goes on to say a little later, Sarah would 'always screw things up' with any men she was involved with by 'mentioning Judgment Day' and John's

future role as saviour of mankind – clearly, the burden of knowing the future and everything it holds for one’s own child would be more than enough to strain some relationships. In addition to Sarah’s past attempts to educate and train John using the best guerilla forces she has access to, and perhaps *because* of these attempts, Sarah has been placed in a mental institution for the ‘criminally insane’ and this present life is perhaps just as unusual as the one involving ex-Green Berets and gun-running. There have been several escape attempts, Dr Silberman tells his colleagues, and she uses her bed to do chin-ups in order to prepare her body for the coming battle. She must suffer the fate of a modern-day Cassandra, being dismissed as delusional and psychotic, her final hope resting with a cyborg from the future assisting her and her son in destroying Dyson’s inventions.

As happened with Ripley in *Aliens*, Sarah’s status as a mother receives much emphasis. Much of the scholarly writing is critical of Sarah as a mother, decrying her lack of physical affection, her ‘masculinisation’, and her prioritisation of weapons assessment over ‘properly’ bonding with John.⁶⁰ Certainly, as it was in *The Terminator*, Sarah’s maternal status is still central to this film. Her outburst when she is refused the shift to a lower-security ward stems from the fact that, in that ward, she would have been permitted visitors – namely, her son. Her desperation becomes clear when Silberman refuses the transfer: ‘You have to let me see my son. He’s naked without me’. Such concern, however, appears to have been repressed in the next scenes with Sarah: told that John is missing and shown photographs of T-101 with John, no emotion or reaction whatsoever is elicited from a trancelike Sarah. But this is clearly an act, as she is shown secretly purloining a paperclip from the desk, which she later uses to break out of her restraints and her cell – showing her real reaction to such news is, in fact, to escape as soon as possible in order to protect John from the menacing

⁶⁰ Among those who take such a position are Jeffords (1993), Byers (1995), Holland (1995) and Inness (1999).

Terminator(s). Through necessity, Sarah's maternal instincts have an extremely strong element of protection and defence about them, perhaps more so than any 'ordinary' mother's; this goes some way in explaining her prioritisation of John's safety over giving him a hug, for instance. It explains the way she berates John for trying to break her out of the institution: 'You can't risk yourself, even for me! You're too important...' (fig. 34). Such sentiments are occasionally mocked by John in a sarcastic tone, showing his exasperation at the constant emphasis on his future role. But the importance of John's survival has influenced Sarah's entire parental experience, leading to what may be construed as an overly earnest approach to motherhood – which naturally may seem unreasonable to a ten-year-old boy.

Fig. 34: Sarah berates John for risking himself to save her.

A key moment comes when, having retrieved the arsenal of weapons, Sarah is watching John teach T-101 how to give a 'high five', and she muses to herself:

Watching John with a machine, it was suddenly so clear. The Terminator would never stop. It would never hurt him....It would die to

protect him. Of all the would-be fathers who came and went over the years, this machine, this thing, was the only one who measured up. Several have seen this is a crucial moment in illustrating T-101 as taking over the role of ‘properly’ parenting John, while Sarah is too busy assembling weapons and worrying about the future.⁶¹ John does clearly bond with the T-101 from an early stage: refusing to let Sarah destroy his micro-chip (defending T-101 as ‘my friend’), teaching him how to speak in common parlance instead of his own robotic fashion, talking about his unusual upbringing, and weeping when the T-101 is destroyed in the final scene. Interestingly, in terms of the Connors’ parent-child relationship, on two occasions John ‘overrides’ Sarah, and she buckles to his will: the first comes when she wishes to destroy T-101’s microchip, and John pleads ‘maybe you should start listening to *my* leadership ideas once in a while!’⁶² The second comes when the future is being explained to Dyson: Sarah’s outburst (‘F**king men like you built the hydrogen bomb. F**king men like you thought it up. You think you’re so creative. But you don’t know what it’s like to really *create* something, to feel a life growing inside you...’) forces John to interrupt with ‘Mom! I think we need to be a little more *constructive* here, okay?’ and Sarah quietly retreats into the background again. It is clear that the circumstances of their lives have created bitterness and suspicion within Sarah which John is young enough not to have absorbed yet – therefore allowing his relative naiveté to balance out her constant preparations for battle. In some ways, Sarah is the closest to the ancient Amazons in her mothering style (if Diodorus is truly to be believed): she instills in John combat skills, weapons training, and a sense of duty, perhaps at the expense of a so-called ‘normal’ childhood.⁶³ The mother-son dynamic, if unconventional, is still strong, however, with a courageous John

⁶¹ Holland (1995) 168; Jeffords (1995) 250-51; Inness (1999) 128-9.

⁶² Though this scene was not in the theatrical release, it appears in the director’s cut which first appeared on DVD in 2000.

⁶³ In this way she can be considered as similar to *The Bride* (and *Bill*, to an extent), who also allows her daughter to watch extremely violent samurai films: see below, pp. 219-20.

helping a limping Sarah out of a serious vehicle crash and through the steelworks to escape T-1000. Ultimately, T-101 must be ‘terminated’ as well and only mother and son will be left to embrace and face the ‘unwritten’ future together.

Sarah is now no longer under the guidance and protection of Kyle (as she was in the first film) and this assists in portraying her as more autonomous and independent of men. In addition, her very solitary positioning as the lone person who knows what the future holds decisively separates her from the rest of society. However, the relationship John forms with T-101 does result in some subordination of Sarah to his (and John’s) instructions: oftentimes T-101’s ability to drive cars and trucks, to distract T-1000 and authority figures, and his brute strength and near-invincibility provide invaluable assistance to Sarah and John. Sarah would clearly have chosen to escape the mental institution independently, so aghast was she by the sudden appearance of the T-101, looking identical to the cyborg who relentlessly menaced her in *The Terminator*.⁶⁴ However, John’s reassurances, and T-101’s assertion that she ‘come with me if you want to live’ (Kyle’s exact words from the first film) convince her that alliance is an absolute necessity, and thus remaining completely independent is an impossibility.

What is an essential element to this issue, of course, is Sarah’s relationship with John. In giving birth to him, she has provided mankind with its future saviour. It seems somewhat troubling that Sarah exists in order to carry out her ‘maternal destiny’ and that all of her status is tied up in who her son will become – and, therefore, she is constantly inseparable from him.⁶⁵ Is Sarah, as Goscilo has proposed, ‘a mere conduit of male power and supremacy between her son and

⁶⁴ A certain similarity with Ripley’s post-traumatic stress disorder is clear here: when Sarah first sees the T-101 striding out of the elevator, she falls to her knees, crying ‘No. No! No!’ and staring up at him with a look of pure terror. Like Ripley, she must conquer her mistrust and horror of these creatures in order to survive once again.

⁶⁵ The phrase is Goscilo’s (1987) 45.

her lover, assigned her role by their male discourse’?⁶⁶ Perhaps this can be said to be true of the first film, but by the time of the second (though it is not shown on film), Sarah has already accomplished much in an independent manner, seeking out guerillas to assist in training John, impressing on him the importance of his survival and future role, and taking action that has landed her in the mental institution (trying to blow up a computer company).⁶⁷ Overall, however, the interlocking of Sarah’s life with John’s reduces her standing as a truly autonomous woman. Although theoretically her motherhood should not disqualify her from such a label, in the case of the *Terminator* films this is just the case.

In these two case studies, it is clear that both Ripley and Sarah, in the second films of their respective series, exhibit far more traits associated with the ‘modern Amazon’ than in the first films. That both *Aliens* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* were directed by the same man - James Cameron – is probably not a coincidence, as he has spoken of his interest in strong female characters in the past. Both characters demonstrate an increased facility with weapons and in combat, relative autonomy and independence in relation to men, fairly unusual lifestyles, and some intriguing elements of motherhood not common in traditional depictions from mainstream film. However, these films also have their critics, in particular those reading them through the lens of feminist film theory: they protest that the emphasis on motherhood stereotypes the women; that various psychoanalytical readings show an alarming predisposition for phallic weapons and penetration; that the women are deliberately shown as more ‘emotional’ than their male counterparts in action cinema would be.⁶⁸ Despite such criticisms, more

⁶⁶ Goscilo (1987) 46.

⁶⁷ Pace Jeffords (1993) 249, who criticises the fact that John learns about weapons ‘from mercenaries his mother took him to meet, not directly from her’ and sees this as locking Sarah out of ‘any real role in the future’.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, Greenberg (1987); Newton (1990); Jeffords (1993); Holland (1995); Inness (1999). In contrast, however, the characters played by Meiko Kaji in both the *Lady Snowblood* and *Female Prisoner Scorpion* films are very deliberately unemotional, which shows some interesting differences in what might be

productive ways to analyse figures such as Ripley and Sarah exist, such as those advanced by Elizabeth Hills. In her reading, disengaging the binary logic present in traditional feminist film theory in order to read symbols such as Ripley as a 'transformative' heroine can assist in seeing her in a more positive light. Hills believes that 'Ripley's female body challenges and disrupts the tradition of heroes as necessarily male, and undermines any certainty about what she can or will do'.⁶⁹ Certainly, this can be applied to the cinematic 'modern Amazon' in general, and can assist in an analysis which need not rely on rigid definitions of 'heroism' or 'femininity'. The ways in which *The Bride of the Kill Bill* films builds on the prototypes of Ripley and Sarah (among others) will now be discussed, to further gain some insight into these archetypal Amazons and how they relate to their ancient predecessors.

Major Case Study: *Kill Bill Volume 1 and 2*

'I roared. And I rampaged. And I got bloody satisfaction.'

The character of The Bride is undoubtedly a kind of composite character, who emulates many of the cinematic females admired by director Quentin Tarantino, but she is also particularly consistent with the Amazon archetype. She is the most uncompromisingly Amazonian of all women in film, and, for the purposes of this research, she symbolises the very zenith of the modern Amazon in terms of strength, ability, independence and fantasticality.

deemed 'legitimate' emotional responses by female characters in films from Hollywood and those from Asia.

⁶⁹ Hills (1999) 48.

Kill Bill: Volume 1 was released, after much media hype and expectation, in October 2003. It marked the return of Tarantino after an absence of six years; prior to this hiatus, he had spent a much-heralded and prominent few years writing *True Romance* (1993) and *Natural Born Killers* (1994) and, perhaps more famously, directing *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Jackie Brown* (1997) – some of the most original and notable films of the 1990s. In addition to box-office success, there was award success, with *Pulp Fiction* winning both the Palm d’Or at Cannes and an Academy Award for Original Screenplay. Tarantino has made his admiration of non-mainstream and almost-forgotten film genres clear in various interviews. His years as a video store clerk (before becoming a director) provided him with a vast and eclectic knowledge and appreciation of film. Such appreciation arguably found its apex in the *Kill Bill* films, which have been described disparagingly as a ‘Frankenstein’s monster’ due to the numerous inspirations to which they pay homage – from classic Japanese samurai films to Bruce Lee’s kung fu films to Sergio Leone’s spaghetti westerns.

The *Kill Bill* films were originally conceived as a single feature film, but once filming was completed it was decided to split the vast amount of material into two ‘volumes’. Though the films can be said to have some fundamental differences in tone and styling, when viewed together they form one complete story arc and each film balances out the other in different areas. Essentially the films narrate a ‘revenge’ tale, highly influenced by spaghetti westerns and Asian and blaxploitation cinema in which such storylines are common (*Lady Snowblood* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974), for example). The central character is The Bride (played by Uma Thurman), a former assassin who attempts to track down and claim her vengeance on five former colleagues (all also assassins and collectively named the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad [DiVAS]) who had tried to kill her several years before. The members of the DiVAS on whom The Bride seeks revenge are

Vernita Green, O-Ren Ishii, Budd, Elle Driver, and Bill.⁷⁰ Several of Tarantino's cinematic trademarks are present in the *Kill Bill* films: a non-linear narrative; scenes featuring outrageous violence; careful attention to detail and intertextuality in the soundtrack music; and references, explicit or not, to particular films which he himself admires or wishes to evoke. Upon release (*Kill Bill 1* was released in October 2003; the second volume was released six months later in April 2004), the project as a whole received mainly positive critical praise, and both 'volumes' were popular at the box office.⁷¹ However, having a female play the role of an assassin bent on bloody revenge for the wrongs done to her is something quite novel for audiences of Hollywood films, and such uniqueness forms part of the 'modern Amazon' character of The Bride, which will now be fully detailed.

Perhaps the best starting point is a discussion of the extraordinary background and motivating incident which, when combined, have made The Bride into the 'modern Amazon' she is throughout both films. In this way, just as Ripley and Sarah were both forced by circumstances into 'become' Amazons, The Bride is also shaped by circumstances into the character we see in the two films. Her mission in *Kill Bill Volume 1* and *Volume 2* (hereafter *Kill Bill 1* and *Kill Bill 2*), and therefore the impetus behind most of the plot of both films, is to exact revenge on the five former colleagues who attempted to murder her when The Bride left the group, having discovered that she was pregnant. The background profession of The Bride, therefore, is that of a trained assassin, not an ordinary occupation by any stretch of the imagination. Flashbacks in *Kill Bill 2* illustrate elements of this lifestyle: one episode shows The Bride's arrival in China to train with a kung fu grandmaster named Pai Mei, presumably in order to increase her professional

⁷⁰ The hierarchy of the DiVAS is seen in the code names of the group: while the others each take on names of poisonous snakes (The Bride is 'Black Mamba', for instance), Bill is simply 'The Snake Charmer'. His code name implies not only his leadership, but also (given Bill's prior relationships with both The Bride and Elle) his ability to 'charm the ladies'.

⁷¹ The two films took a combined total of 332 million dollars worldwide; given that their budgets (combined) were 85 million dollars, Tarantino managed to almost quadruple the studio's investments.

expertise in overcoming her assigned victims; another shows her en route to an assignment, at which point she discovers her pregnancy. In addition to this, both films emphasise to the viewer her immense skill as an assassin by focusing on The Bride's abilities in both martial arts and in general planning of ambush tactics.⁷² This unusual background and remarkable level of proficiency in an area probably not expected from a white Western female (namely, martial arts) mark her out as 'different' in just the same way ancient Amazons were marked out for their odd social customs (whether true or not) and battle prowess.

When Bill discovers The Bride (and the new life she is attempting to make for herself after leaving the DiVAS) in El Paso, he expresses surprise that she could choose working in a used-record store instead of working as a trained assassin, which he describes in the appealing terms of 'jetting around the world, killing human beings, and being paid vast sums of money'. Once the audience knows The Bride's past assassin lifestyle, hearing her describe the record store job to Bill as 'really cool' seems anomalous, disingenuous even. However, what is learnt only fully near the end of *Kill Bill 2* is the enormous effect which the unexpected pregnancy had on The Bride's view of her lifestyle and its impact on others. Her defensive comment to Bill at their meeting in El Paso, that the record store would be 'a great environment for my little girl to grow up in', gives some idea of the change of attitude which has taken place within her and forced her to flee the assassin lifestyle. Bill remains convinced right to the very end that The Bride is naturally programmed to be an assassin above and beyond any other profession, regardless of any attempts at a 'normal' lifestyle; and when he stresses to her that

⁷² The figure of the female assassin dates back to Irma Vep of the French film *Les Vampires* (1915) and was taken up by several James Bond films (spy Amassova in *The Spy Who Loved Me* [1977] and May Day in *A View To A Kill* [1985]), as well as Ralph Thomas' *Deadlier Than The Male* (1967), Luc Besson's *La Femme Nikita* (1990) and Doug Liman's *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (2005). The *Terminator* franchise even joined in, with Jonathan Mostow's *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003) featuring a female Terminator.

‘you’re not a worker bee. You’re a renegade killer bee’, The Bride herself reluctantly agrees with this claim.⁷³

In addition to her unusual past occupation as an assassin, the motivating incident that has propelled The Bride on her current quest for vengeance is the above-mentioned attempted murder of her by the DiVAS members and the accompanying (assumed) murder of her unborn child as a consequence. The opening scene of both *Kill Bill 1* and *Kill Bill 2* is the same: a close up of The Bride’s bruised and bloody face, in black and white, panting and gasping with fear as the unseen Bill stands over her, then delivers the last, near-fatal, shot to her head. It is this scene which strikes one as evocative of the lines from Quintus Smyrnaeus’ *Posthomerica*, where the dying Penthesileia is gazed upon by Achilles and the other Argives:

...Peleus’ son was greatly grieved
seeing the maiden’s strength and loveliness in the dust;
And distressing pangs devoured his heart
just as when previously his friend Patroclus had been killed.

Posthomerica (1.718-21)

Bill’s words to The Bride reveal that he, like Achilles, feels some regret in his violent actions toward the object of his desire:

Bill: (speaking over the bloodied and bruised Bride) Do you find me sadistic? No, Kiddo, I’d like to believe that you’re aware enough, even now, to know that there’s nothing sadistic in my actions. Well, maybe towards those other...jokers. But not you. No, Kiddo, this moment – this is me at my most masochistic.

The Bride: Bill, it’s your baby...(silenced by shot to her head)

⁷³ This is further examined in the sections dealing with The Bride and Bill’s final meeting at the end of *Kill Bill 2*.

The crucial difference here is, as with all modern Amazons, The Bride will survive the attack and go on to seek her ‘bloody satisfaction’. Defeat is no longer inevitable. Unbeknownst to Bill and the other assassins, The Bride, still alive, is brought to a hospital. She wakes from her coma four years later and, upon realisation that she is no longer pregnant, sets out on her path of vengeance – as much motivated by the wrong done to herself as that done to her unborn child. Through Tarantino’s use of a non-linear narrative style, both past and present events in the Bride’s life show her as the Amazon which she has become, and encapsulate the core elements of the ‘modern Amazon’ which have been shown in the previous chapter to be essential to the characters of both Wonder Woman and Xena. Thus, these events assist in illustrating her impressive fighting skills, her unwillingness to rely on men for validation or identity, her relationship with her daughter (which, like the relationship between Xena and her daughter Eve, is far from commonplace), and lastly her unconventional lifestyle, including her location in a space outside of usual Western (film) geography.

The second ‘chapter’ of *Kill Bill 1* illustrates Tarantino’s trademark refusal to adhere to usual linear narrative (both films are divided into ‘chapters’, each with a specific title, and the chapters do not follow a chronological order).⁷⁴ Having just seen the distressing image of The Bride and the final shot to her head, the audience next sees a shadowy black-and-white close-up image of The Bride’s profile, lying on a bed, while the opening credits play to the melancholy tune of Nancy Sinatra’s ‘Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down)’.⁷⁵ Such an image in the hospital bed gives an early indication that The Bride has somehow survived the murder scene, and following these credits, the audience next sees The Bride

⁷⁴ Tarantino’s previous films *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994) both tell their stories with out-of-sequence scenes.

⁷⁵ The placement of this song in this context led *View London* reviewer Matthew Turner to ask Tarantino ‘Clearly it was your intention when we hear the voice of Nancy Sinatra singing *Bang Bang My Baby Shot Me Down*, to let the audience know really early that this was a very black comedy?’ which the director answers in the affirmative.

driving to a cheerful suburban house (a caption locates it in *The city of Pasadena, California*), apparently unwounded. Walking to the door past assorted children's toys on the front lawn, she is eventually met by Vernita Green (living under the name Jeannie Bell), a former member of the DiVAS and therefore one of the people who is on The Bride's 'Death List'. Music here is used with highly effective and amusing results, with a merry ice-cream truck jingle playing softly as The Bride pulls up to the house.⁷⁶ However, an abrupt change comes when Vernita opens the door: an alarm-like siren sound (from Quincy Jones' 'Ironside' theme tune) is accompanied by the camera zooming in on The Bride's face, filmed through an equally dramatic yellow-orange filter.⁷⁷ The 'Ironside' tune, used here and elsewhere, comes to symbolise The Bride confronting her target and switching to 'killer' mode. Here an echo of Homeric scenes immediately preceding a hero's *aristeia* can be sensed, as Tarantino's selection of a certain musical motif signals what in Homeric epic only words are able to do. In particular, the *aristeia* of Diomedes in *Iliad* Book 5 is especially pertinent:

δαίε οἱ ἐκ κόρυθος τε καὶ ἀσπίδος ἀκάματον πῦρ,
 ἀστέρ' ὀπωρινῷ ἐναλίγκιον ὅς τε μάλιστα
 λαμπρὸν παμφαίνησι λελουμένος Ὠκεανοῖο·
 τοῖόν οἱ πῦρ δαίεν ἀπὸ κρατός τε καὶ ὤμων,
 ὦρσε δέ μιν κατὰ μέσσον ὅθι πλείστοι κλονέοντο.

(*Iliad* 5.4-8)

She made weariless fire radiate from his helmet and shield
 just as that late-summer star which gleams
 with great brilliance, bathed in the Ocean.

⁷⁶ The ice-cream truck tune adds to the general sense of suburban normality which is here dramatically juxtaposed with a scene of great violence: see Madsen (2005) 171-2 for discussion on the 'hyperreality' of this suburban setting.

⁷⁷ Zabriskie (2004). This same musical and/or visual motif is also used when The Bride sees Sophie Fatale and O-Ren Ishii in *Kill Bill 1* and in *Kill Bill 2* when she watches Elle Driver and Budd from afar. Bellantoni (2005) 42 asserts that yellow is the 'cautionary colour', is 'visually aggressive' and is also 'a perfect signal for obsession'. All of these descriptions seem well-matched to The Bride's state of mind.

Just so was the fire she made blaze from his head and shoulders
and she urged him into the middle where the greatest numbers were
engaged in the confusion of battle.

Blazing fire issuing from Diomedes' head, and a yellow-orange glow surrounding a close-up of an Amazon's vengeful countenance are seen to be two different ways of illustrating essentially the same idea: a prelude to slaughter.

Throughout both *Kill Bill* films, The Bride is granted a total of five encounters which should be classified as *aristeiai*, as well as an additional two episodes which further prove her remarkable skills and strength of determination.⁷⁸ Taken together, these episodes all help demonstrate her extraordinary fighting abilities and the array of skills which she possesses – talents which Wonder Woman and Xena are also shown to have, and which associate all of these modern women with the ancient Amazons. The Bride's first *aristeia* is an encounter with the above-mentioned Vernita Green. On entering Vernita's house, The Bride's first fight (of many) begins: it is a knock-down, drag-out battle within a confined and very domestic space, with both women being thrown against items of furniture and walls, and any available weapon, ranging from shelving to saucepans, being utilised.⁷⁹ An inconvenient interruption in the form of Vernita's young daughter, Nikki, arriving home from school brings a superficially civilised break in the hostilities, and it seems for a moment that both women revert to 'normal' female roles. After Vernita has sent her daughter upstairs, the two women go to the kitchen where Vernita prepares cereal for Nikki. However, any illusion that The Bride may renege on her vow of vengeance because Vernita is a mother is vanquished by their dialogue, particularly the following exchange:

⁷⁸ My definition of *aristeia* here is taken from the LSJ (1968) s.v. *ἀριστεία*: 'excellence, prowess'.

⁷⁹ Here Tarantino is taking advantage of two firmly established traditions of cinema: firstly, the practice of staging an action sequence very early on, seen in Hong Kong *wuxia* cinema (Teo [2005] 202); secondly, the less admirable paradigm of 'the black character dies first', to which reviewer A. O. Scott has suggested Tarantino may be making a 'tongue-in-cheek nod' (see Scott [2003]).

Vernita: I know I don't deserve your mercy or your forgiveness; however, I beseech you for both on behalf of my daughter (shoves photograph of daughter in front of Bride's face).

The Bride: Bitch! You can stop right there. Just because I have no wish to murder you before the eyes of your daughter, does not mean that parading her around in front of me is going to inspire sympathy... You and I have unfinished business.⁸⁰

Much like her Herodotean Amazon counterparts, The Bride is unable to sway far from her intended purpose. When Vernita unexpectedly attempts to shoot her with a gun concealed in the cereal box, The Bride's sharp reflexes allow her to dodge the bullet and throw a dagger at her enemy, which strikes her straight in the heart. As the triumphant victor of this battle, she has established her superiority in combat, but her empathy for Vernita's daughter, who the camera reveals to have been witness to her mother's murder, lends a touch of humanity to the façade of the vengeance-seeking warrior woman. She understands the cycle of vengeance, hence her words to Nikki:

It was not my intention to do this in front of you. For that, I'm sorry. But you can take my word for it...your mother had it coming. When you grow up, if you still feel raw about it...I'll be waiting.⁸¹

Each *aristeia* emphasises The Bride's remarkable fighting skills, and each takes place in a distinct location, which in turn can help characterise both the enemy she is fighting, as well as her own adaptability in facing each new showdown. While the initial fight with Vernita may have simply shown The Bride as a

⁸⁰ A favourite tagline of The Bride's, this line is also spoken to O-Ren Ishii (in *Kill Bill 1*) and to Bill (in *Kill Bill 2*).

⁸¹ The addition of another figure (Nikki) who may one day seek revenge against The Bride further aligns *Kill Bill* with *Lady Snowblood*, in which the titular character is attacked in the final scenes by the daughter of a man she has killed. Tarantino has spoken of the possibilities of another film, which would follow Nikki's own quest for vengeance: see the IMDb 'Personal Quotes' webpage for Quentin Tarantino, at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000233/bio>. Accessed 27/11/2009.

woman who can capably throw an enemy around her own living room, as well as being very quick on the draw, the elaborate chapter near the end of *Kill Bill 1*, captioned *Showdown at the House of Blue Leaves*, shows a very different side to The Bride's fighting capabilities. Immediately prior to this sequence she had travelled to Okinawa in order to personally request a samurai sword (or katana) from Hattori Hanzo, a revered swordsmith, who has also taught her how to use it proficiently.⁸² The *Showdown* chapter proves beyond a doubt that she has learned these lessons well. The Bride arrives at the House of Blue Leaves, where O-Ren Ishii, another of the DiVAS, is convening with several of her entourage. Again, the 'Ironsides' theme is used, when The Bride first sees Sophie Fatale, O-Ren Ishii's close friend (who was also present at The Bride's attempted murder), in the bathrooms of the House of Blue Leaves. This is one of several visual and aural cues to the audience that a melee is imminent: others are The Bride's yellow-and-black tracksuit, a visual homage to the clothing worn by the legendary Bruce Lee's character in *Game of Death* (1978); the dramatic song 'Battles Without Honour or Humanity' which accompanies O-Ren Ishii and her small band of close bodyguards as they walk through the House of Blue Leaves;⁸³ and The Bride's dramatic fighting words (in Japanese), shouted up to O-Ren Ishii from the ground floor, subtitled as 'You and I have unfinished business!'⁸⁴ Lastly, the 'Ironsides' tune coupled with the orange filter effect is again used when O-Ren Ishii comes out to face The Bride, with the siren-sound 'alerting' the audience to the imminent violence.

⁸² The *Showdown at the House of Blue Leaves* actually takes place chronologically *before* the battle with Vernita Green, but (perhaps because of the epic sweep of such a climactic fight) takes place in the film after it. An unnamed writer for website *Kung Fu Cult Cinema* offers the point that 'the order with which The Bride takes down the members of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad on her 'Death List' is mixed up in the film, but this is more for effect than anything. For instance, were [The Bride] and [Vernita's] showdown the climax of Volume One, the impact of the cliffhanger would have been softened a great deal'. Hattori Hanzo will be dealt with later in this chapter.

⁸³ This was the theme tune for the same-named series of five films about the yakuza, directed by Kinji Fukasaku; one of the stars of Fukasaku's film *Battle Royale* (2000) is Chiaki Kuriyama, who features in *Kill Bill 1* as O-Ren Ishii's bodyguard GoGo Yubari – one of many actors well-known in Asian cinema and used in the *Kill Bill* films by Tarantino because of their celebrity.

⁸⁴ See above, n. 80.

The *Showdown* section takes part in two halves. In the first, The Bride dispatches O-Ren Ishii's entire small personal bodyguard force, made up of six Crazy 88 members and GoGo Yubari. The first six killings are relatively straightforward and carried out with the aid of The Bride's peerless Hattori Hanzo sword; the battle with GoGo is more difficult and is marked by GoGo's possession of a special weapon – a spiked ball with extendable blades on a length of chain – which hits The Bride in the chest twice. However, The Bride's agility and adaptability (she uses GoGo's own weapon against her) lead to her victory in the end. A brief exchange between The Bride and O-Ren Ishii then takes place, leading in to the second half of the *Showdown*. On hearing the sound of motorcycles pulling up outside, The Bride sighs resignedly and O-Ren smiles:

O-Ren Ishii: You didn't think it was going to be that easy, did you?

The Bride: You know, for a second there...yeah, I kinda did.

A myriad of Crazy 88 members flood the House of Blue Leaves, and The Bride is surrounded by yet more adversaries. This scene owes much to similar sequences from samurai films of the 1970s, as Tarantino himself has acknowledged. Just as in the *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Lady Snowblood* films, limbs are severed and gushing streams of blood flow from the amputation spot, accompanied with extravagant sound effects. One by one, each Yakuza is sliced, diced, stabbed, hacked or decapitated: one writer has described it as 'a tour de force of choreographed film action'.⁸⁵ This is a true *aristeia* which closely corresponds to those of the heroes prominent in the Homer's *Iliad* – Diomedes (5.133ff), Patroclus (1.399ff), Achilles (21 *passim*) – where they dispose of each new foe one by one, using whatever weapon comes to hand. A certain suspension of disbelief is required to avoid thinking of the *Showdown* scenes in strictly realistic terms: why does each Yakuza patiently await their turn to fight The Bride? Why does no-one sneak up from

⁸⁵ Anderson (2004).

behind? However, exactly the same rule applies to ancient epic scenes of wartime carnage.⁸⁶ The Bride ultimately leaves an impressive, seething mass of corpses and amputees on the glass floor of the House of Blue Leaves, with the sound of multiple wailing victims filling the scene aurally (fig. 35).

The Bride's ability to take on so many attackers concurrently proves her sword-fighting abilities beyond doubt. In addition, one brief vignette also displays her capacity for mercy (selective though it may be), a trait often lacking in epic *aristeiai*. One of the last yakuza left to battle The Bride is a baby-faced young man, whose sword shakes in his hands; The Bride slowly whittles down the blade by degrees until he drops it and yields, hands in the air. Instead of dispatching him, The Bride pulls him in by the shirt collar and spansks him over her knee with her sword, yelling 'this is what you get for f**king around with yakuza! Now go home to your mother!' Escaping, he runs down the stairs and is the only member of the Crazy 88 to be seen actually leaving the House of Blue Leaves unharmed. This intriguing incident displays one of The Bride's key traits which humanise her and keep her from being merely a revenge-seeking killing machine. She clearly has a certain amount of mercy, compassion, and love, and although they are seen more in the second film than the first, they prevent The Bride from being a wholly unbelievable character.⁸⁷ One could propose that The Bride only shows such mercy because she is female, and hence mercy is an emotion which would biologically figure into any female killer's personality. I prefer to read this scene as a tiny moment of humour within a barrage of terrifying violence, which is a

⁸⁶ One key ancient exception to the rule is, coincidentally (or not), the death of Camilla in *Aeneid* Book 11: Camilla is caught off guard by an enemy, Arruns, who *tacitus vestigia lustrat* (11.763) and kills her by stealth. However, Arruns' dishonourable cunning is emphasised by Vergil: for further discussion, see Chapter One, pages 37-9. Camilla's failure to notice Arruns could perhaps find a better cinematic parallel in the (often female) victims in 'slasher' horror films, who don't notice the lurking killer approaching them.

⁸⁷ This also serves to differentiate her from ancient heroes such as Achilles and even Aeneas, who will still kill those begging for mercy.

Fig. 35: Showdown at the House of Blue Leaves, including bloody aftermath.

Tarantino trademark.⁸⁸ Additionally, having a lead character who is more than a simple ‘killing machine’ makes both films far more compelling for the viewer.⁸⁹

With the *Showdown* over, the final one-on-one battle with O-Ren Ishii still lies ahead, as the latter had withdrawn from proceedings while The Bride ploughed her way through the Crazy 88. Finally The Bride opens a door which leads to a snow-covered garden, a clear visual homage to the final scene of *Lady Snowblood*, one of the films which most clearly influenced Tarantino’s vision for the *Kill Bill* films. O-Ren removes her traditional Japanese sandals slowly and deliberately before advancing and soon the two women are face to face in single combat. After slashing The Bride in the back with her katana, O-Ren remarks disparagingly ‘Silly Caucasian girl likes to play with samurai swords’. In the context of Tierney’s line of argument, which asserts (with some reproach) that this film shows ‘that Whites can perform an Asian skill better than Asians can perform it themselves’⁹⁰, these words can be seen as O-Ren’s warning to those non-Asians who attempt to infiltrate and appropriate Asian methods of combat. However, given the final outcome of this incident, they merely reinforce The Bride’s successful adaptability to different modes of battle.⁹¹ Recovering from her wound, she stands again and this time wounds O-Ren in the leg, which prompts the latter to remark in Japanese, ‘For ridiculing you earlier...I apologise’ and The Bride to reply, with tears welling, ‘Accepted’. In the final sparring that follows, The Bride is victorious and scalps O-Ren: the top of her head flies through the air to land

⁸⁸ This is also seen in the one-on-one combat with O-Ren Ishii: see below, n. 92.

⁸⁹ Likewise, earlier in this chapter the attempts of Sarah Connor to make herself into ‘a smaller version of the Terminator’ were discussed; in this context, Sarah’s inability to ultimately kill Miles Dyson because of her very *human* (as opposed to cyborg) nature can be compared to The Bride’s mercy for the young yakuza in showing how neither woman is a mere machine, murdering without thought.

⁹⁰ Tierney (2006) 619.

⁹¹ Tierney, however, would prefer to read the final victory of The Bride as a kind of ‘moral lesson’ taught to the Asian character who ‘call[s] into question or reject[s] a White person’s superiority or status’ (617) and thus ‘propagates the theme of a ubiquitous, even inevitable White supremacy of global proportions’ (614). But The Bride is victorious not just over Asian combatants but white ones as well, which I think goes some way to mitigate this argument.

dramatically on the snow, her dying words ‘That really was a Hattori Hanzo sword.’⁹² Tellingly, The Bride feels the sword hit O-Ren but is not facing her directly, and she is unable to look upon her victim immediately. Instead, she walks a few metres and rests, taking in her handiwork from a distance, but panting with exhaustion and with no small amount of despair on her face. Again, The Bride is humanised here and given extra dimensions perhaps not afforded to the Homeric hero. Her tears before accepting O-Ren’s apology and clear sadness at eventually having to kill her show that, behind her unswerving dedication to her plan of vengeance, there beats the heart of a human being – and a human being that once treasured those in her ‘Death List’ as real *philoí*.⁹³

While *Kill Bill 1* ends soon after the death of O-Ren Ishii, The Bride still has two more *aristeiai* ahead of her, and three more names to cross off her ‘Death List’. These battles, along with two other interlocked episodes which further prove The Bride’s incredible skill and determination, take place in *Kill Bill 2*. The second film of the pair does much to explain character and motivation, which was largely left unexplored in the first film. An increased amount of dialogue further aids the audience in understanding not only the character of The Bride but also that of the man who made the executive decision to kill her, Bill.⁹⁴ Crucially, the second film starts at exactly the same point as the first film: the panting and terrified Bride bloody and bruised on the floor, a calm Bill talking out of frame, then delivering a

⁹² Tarantino, commenting on how the audience is meant to view the violence in the *Kill Bill* films, and particularly this scene, has remarked: ‘It’s supposed to be kind of amusing and poetic at the same time. And also just a teeny-tiny bit solemn. When you see her head, it’s funny. And then her line, ‘that really was a Hattori Hanzo sword,’ that’s funny. But then, the next shot is not funny, when she tips over and Meiko Kaji is singing about revenge on the soundtrack. So, it’s all together. Funny. Solemn. Beautiful. Gross. All at the same time.’ From the IMDb ‘Personal quotes’ webpage for Quentin Tarantino, at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000233/bio>. Accessed 27/11/2009.

⁹³ In contrast, the main character in *Lady Snowblood* has been labeled by one *Kung Fu Cult Cinema* reviewer as ‘an emotionless killing machine, the likes of which would rival even the most determined of Terminators’. However, many films in Asian cinema, such as *Yojimbo* (1961) and *Sanjuro* (1962), emphasise a respectful attitude toward their final opponent. Another point of intertextuality here is that the tune which plays as O-Ren dies is the theme song from *Lady Snowblood*, ‘Shura No Hama (The Flower of Carnage)’, sung by the actress who portrayed Lady Snowblood, Meiko Kaji.

⁹⁴ Smith (2005) 239.

final gunshot to her head. Though nothing in *Kill Bill 2* quite compares to the *Showdown at the House of Blue Leaves*, what fighting there is nevertheless assists in constructing The Bride's image as a powerful and ultimately superior warrior.

In keeping with *Kill Bill 2*'s reputation as the more 'slow, talky, contemplative film' of the two discussed in this chapter, the first real scuffle The Bride engages in comes in the penultimate chapter of the film (titled *Elle and I*).⁹⁵ She has come to the trailer of DiVAS member Budd in order to confront him, but instead finds Elle Driver, who has just poisoned Budd herself by unleashing a deadly Black Mamba snake on him unexpectedly. Unaware that The Bride is still alive (as Budd had told Elle he had killed her⁹⁶), Elle is taken by surprise when she enters the trailer with a flying kick. Immediately the clash begins, with a large amount of kung fu kicks and punches being used alongside many other, dirtier methods. The Bride throws Budd's chewing tobacco in Elle's face (Elle wipes her face, muttering witheringly '*Gross*'); she holds Elle's head in the toilet, only to be foiled by Elle pulling the flush and gasping for air; there are foot-stomps, groin kicks, and all manner of items from Budd's trailer (including lamps and a television aerial) are used as weapons.⁹⁷ Eventually The Bride seizes Budd's own Hanzo sword from his bag of golf clubs,⁹⁸ and faces off in the corridor of the trailer against Elle, who holds The Bride's Hanzo sword (which Budd had previously confiscated). It looks at this point as though there will be a katana battle similar to the one in which O-Ren Ishii had met her end. However, a crucial exchange

⁹⁵ Smith (2005) 243.

⁹⁶ And so he believed himself; Budd's method and the outcome are further explained later in this section.

⁹⁷ It has to be contemplated whether this is supposed to portray the stereotypical 'catty' fight between women: though the statement would be easy to make, and such scenes are seen frequently throughout television and film (including the previously discussed television series *Wonder Woman* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*), the preceding struggles between The Bride and other women (Vernita and O-Ren) alleviate such thoughts. The dirty tactics employed perhaps illustrate better The Bride's adaptability, the restricted confines of the trailer, and Elle's malevolent nature (which is illustrated in the Pai Mei exchange soon after).

⁹⁸ Yet another sign of how far Budd has deteriorated, in addition to his drinking habits, decrepit abode, and lame job: he fails even to show the proper respect to his priceless Hanzo sword.

between the two women changes the outcome significantly. Responding to The Bride's question of what had provoked Pai Mei (who trained both women) to snatch out Elle's eye, the following dialogue takes place:

Elle: I called him a miserable old fool.

The Bride: Ooh. Bad idea.

Elle: Know what I did? I killed that miserable old fool.

(camera zooms in on The Bride's shocked face)

Elle: I poisoned his fish heads. And I told him, 'to me, the word of an old fool like you is worth less than nothing'. (laughs) That's right. I killed your master. And now I'm going to kill you too. With your own sword, no less. Which in the very immediate future, will become *my* sword.

The Bride: Bitch! You don't have a future.⁹⁹

When the two cross swords, The Bride suddenly snatches out Elle's other eye, leaving her screaming and writhing on the floor. Such a punishment works as a gesture of vengeance on behalf of The Bride's treasured mentor, Pai Mei, as well as vengeance for Elle's role in The Bride's own attempted murder four years earlier. With The Bride functioning as Pai Mei's avenger, she is also able to uphold the kind of respect-based system of combat which Elle had subverted in ridiculing and then killing the old master.¹⁰⁰ It is unclear whether Elle dies in the trailer or eventually escapes: the Black Mamba snake which poisoned Budd is still there, and tellingly it hisses at but does not attack The Bride when she leaves. Once again victorious over a difficult foe, The Bride limps out into the desert, the

⁹⁹ Elle's eye patch had gone unexplained until this point, but served to both give her a sinister air and also (in yet another moment of intertextuality) to visually link her to the Swedish rape-revenge film *Thriller: En Gym Film* (1974).

¹⁰⁰ Here I think is one of the key mitigating factors which stand in opposition to Tierney's argument: although, as he rightly points out, Elle (a white woman) kills Pai Mei, The Bride (also a white woman) avenges Pai Mei after clearly being disgusted and shocked at what Elle has done. This should be viewed as an attempt to 'right' one white person's denigration of Eastern traditions or values.

audience aware that there is just one more person left on the list who is not dead: Bill.

The final showdown with Bill is preceded by scenes encompassing a rollercoaster of emotions for The Bride. Arriving at his house in Mexico, she is unexpectedly met with not only Bill, but her four year old daughter BB, who it seems did not die in the carnage at El Paso (as The Bride had believed) but somehow survived.¹⁰¹ The sight of her daughter, the death of whom had at least partially motivated this lengthy revenge saga, clearly strikes The Bride to the heart, and the tears well in her eyes. In addition to the sudden and shocking re-introduction to her child, The Bride is later shot by Bill with a tranquiliser dart containing what he describes as a ‘truth serum’ and Bill interrogates The Bride with regard to a few ‘unanswered questions’ he has. In detailing her reasons for fleeing Bill and her life as an assassin on the discovery of her pregnancy, memories (shown in flashbacks) come flooding back to her. The relaxed setting and the easy conversation between The Bride and Bill is then suddenly interrupted by The Bride’s words of warning: ‘You and I have unfinished business’. Still seated, they engage in a short sword duel, in which Bill succeeds in disarming The Bride, but she deflects his sword with her own sword’s sheath and then performs her fatal manoeuvre – the famed five point palm exploding heart technique (fig. 36). Bill’s shock at this is clear:

Bill: Pai Mei taught you the five point palm exploding heart technique?!

The Bride: Of course he did.

Bill: Why didn’t you tell me?

¹⁰¹ The reasoning behind this is not elaborated on by Tarantino: the best guess is probably that, following The Bride’s transportation to hospital, the baby was born (perhaps by Caesarian – this could explain The Bride’s lack of memories of giving birth) and Bill took her away, and The Bride lapsed into her four-year coma. The Bride’s stark horror when she wakes from the coma and discovers she is no longer pregnant supports this theory. Of course, the audience has been aware since the final scene of *Kill Bill 1* that The Bride’s daughter is still alive, because the very last words of that film were Bill himself asking Sophie ‘Is she aware that her daughter is still alive?’; this adds an amount of dramatic irony to the second film.

The Bride: I don't know! Because I'm... a bad person.

The Bride's knowledge of this technique – which Bill had told her about before her training with Pai Mei, but was not privy to himself – highlights her as irrevocably the superior fighter of both films.¹⁰² Not only has she successfully fought her way through throngs of people to attain her 'bloody satisfaction', she is in possession of what Tierney terms the 'secret technique' and 'hoarded knowledge' which others covet but only she possesses.¹⁰³ Having been dealt the lethal blow and knowing death is imminent, Bill asks The Bride 'How do I look?' and she replies 'You look ready'. Bill knows – as he had explained years earlier to The Bride – that once the five point palm exploding heart technique is delivered, the victim can take only five steps away before their heart explodes inside their body and they will die. Yet he does not seem bitter at the fate dealt to him and he gamely adjusts his jacket, wipes blood from his face, and walks into his garden. When he gently and silently falls to the ground, the camera cuts back to The Bride's face, who has tears in her eyes, yet a look of steely determination as well.

Again The Bride's humanity is shown to lie beneath all that martial arts knowledge and vengeful tenacity. She certainly does not kill Bill without feeling strong emotion at doing so and her tears tell the audience that it is no straightforward task for her. Yet, at the same time, the lengthy discussion with Bill that precludes his demise shows up The Bride as the more rational and

¹⁰² Anderson (2004) asserts that her knowledge 'works as a shorthand way of demonstrating that [The Bride] has become among 'the deadliest' people in the world'.

¹⁰³ Tierney (2006) 617. While Tierney is right in labelling Pai Mei (and Hattori Hanzo) as the typical kind of 'helpful Asian' character common in films where white characters learn martial arts skills, I differ with his assertion that 'the audience is likely not surprised when they find out that the White protagonist has learned the secret' (618). The use of the technique, because it comes so late in the film, *and* because The Bride had entered Bill's house brandishing a revolver, is so unexpected that what could have been deemed an 'anticlimactic' ending (in comparison to, say, the bloodbath at the House of Blue Leaves) is in fact the most fitting finale. The satisfaction of seeing The Bride defeat Bill, the final and most crucial name on her list, through her ultimately superior knowledge of a secret skill, is not to be underestimated.

believable character of the two. Bill is almost unbelievably verbose:¹⁰⁴ his philosophy surrounding the death of BB's goldfish; his self-indulgent diatribe on Superman; his (unintentionally?) ironic exclamation that 'letting somebody think

Fig. 36: The Bride performs the five-point palm exploding heart technique on Bill.

somebody they love is dead when they're not is quite cruel'. In all, the enigma that is Bill – so carefully cultivated in the first film, to the point that his face is never even shown – is revealed to be merely someone who 'overreacted' when his girlfriend ran off. Although the truth serum may force The Bride to burst forth answers with a candour and emotion largely unseen until this point, she remains the calm centre of proceedings, the architect of the showdown and finally, the conflicted victor.

These five battles which I have defined as The Bride's *aristeiai* are further reinforced by two interdependent sequences which also illustrate her determination, despite the absence of a single human foe. They are not hand-to-

¹⁰⁴ This, of course, is a hallmark of Tarantino's films: many critics acclaim his witty dialogue and tangential monologues.

hand fights, but they assist in conveying the sense that The Bride is an invincible warrior, who is able to achieve great feats and master many skills. The sequences begin when The Bride tracks down Budd to his desert trailer and is unexpectedly shot by him with rock salt and then tranquilised.¹⁰⁵ She wakes, limbs tied, to find Budd and a friend digging a grave; they then nail her inside a coffin with a flashlight and throw her into the grave. When the scene goes black for a full minute with only the sounds of earth being shoveled over the coffin and The Bride's panicked, hysterical breathing, a sense of incredible claustrophobia permeates the scene, and unites the audience with The Bride in her terror and panic. As she slowly calms herself down, there is a sudden flashback chapter, captioned *The Cruel Tutelage of Pai Mei*. It shows Bill driving The Bride (one assumes several years ago) to a famed kung fu master named Pai Mei, who will take on The Bride as his student. Bill warns The Bride that it may take some time for the two to bond: Pai Mei 'hates Caucasians, despises Americans, and has nothing but contempt for women'. And indeed, on The Bride's first meeting with the master (or 'sifu'), he is extraordinarily rude to her, complaining (in subtitled Mandarin) 'Your Mandarin is lousy. It causes my ears discomfort. You bray like an ass!' Pai Mei is similarly dismissive of The Bride's capabilities in martial arts, observing 'Your swordsmanship is amateur at best. Your so-called kung fu is really quite pathetic'. The following day brings The Bride's first training session with the master, where he sets out the philosophy and technique behind his three-inch punch.¹⁰⁶ This sets the scene for a montage of images showing The Bride perfecting the three-inch punch, carrying water buckets up steep stairs, and

¹⁰⁵ Budd's 'ambush' of The Bride in this way, and hence evasion of any one-on-one combat with her, is discussed below, page 229.

¹⁰⁶ This technique seems derived from Bruce Lee's famous 'one-inch punch' system, whereby all force was concentrated in the body and released in unison, resulting in a punch which (even if a fight was at very close quarters) could still deliver enough force to knock the opponent back. This homage to Bruce Lee is one of several which occur throughout the *Kill Bill* films, the most obvious being The Bride's yellow and black tracksuit worn at the House of Blue Leaves.

performing the animal forms of kung fu with speed and agility.¹⁰⁷ The film then flashes back to The Bride, still trapped inside the coffin, but now with a sense of calm resolve about her, and she manages to get her hands and feet out of the bonds. With a whisper of ‘okay, Pai Mei: here I come’, she begins applying the three-inch punch technique to the lid of the coffin. As had been shown in the flashback, this technique inevitably caused a certain amount of bloodshed to unconditioned knuckles: now in the coffin, blood from The Bride appears on the lid of the coffin, but it seems to have no effect on her. Her frown of concentration turns to delight as dirt starts seeping through the cracked lid, and soon she is scrabbling up through six feet of earth to reach above ground, gasping desperately for air.¹⁰⁸

The *Cruel Tutelage* and coffin-escape episodes, which showcase The Bride’s utter determination and ultimate triumph, ought to be regarded alongside the five fighting encounters discussed above. They add a significant amount of characterisation to The Bride, which the fight scenes may disregard in favour of action, and this in turn complements the overall picture of The Bride’s disposition. In addition, such a multi-dimensional portrayal assists in creating a believable and sympathetic character for audiences, which in turn can popularise a film. Had The Bride’s ability (or motive, for that matter) to punch and claw her way out of being buried alive been left unexplained, it would have been difficult

¹⁰⁷ Such scenes of a kung fu disciple (with a tough taskmaster) performing tasks of endurance and gradually attaining great skill and ability, are stock sequences from martial arts films. In particular, *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978) (also starring the actor who plays Pai Mei, Gordon Liu, as the kung fu student) is a favourite with kung fu film aficionados and contains similar scenes of strength. Additionally, *Lady Snowblood*, though the fighting style is not kung fu, also contains several scenes showing Yuki, the central female character, being trained in such skills from a very young age by the priest Dokai.

¹⁰⁸ The Bride’s escape from the coffin is set to Ennio Morricone’s incredibly stirring ‘L’Arena’, from Sergio Corbucci’s *Il Mercenario* (1968). Tarantino has openly acknowledged the debt *Kill Bill 2* owes to spaghetti westerns, and this is often communicated through the use of Morricone’s music, including that from *Navajo Joe* (1966) and from *Il Buono, Il Brutto e Il Cattivo* (1966). The scene immediately following shows a dusty, dirt-caked Bride striding across a street and into a diner, where she calmly seats herself and asks ‘May I have a glass of water, please?’, providing another point for Tarantino to alleviate the horror of the previous scene with dry humour.

for the audience to believe, understand or care about her eventual success. However, the flashbacks of her rigorous training, coupled with the rousing music score and knowledge of The Bride's reasons behind her final objective, combine to make the audience relieved and even joyful at her escape. What also must be noted about The Bride's *aristeiai* is that they are accomplished, for the most part, without any reliance on male assistance or leadership. The killing of each person who has wronged her is carried out by The Bride alone. Although the *Cruel Tutelage of Pai Mei* is, indeed, supervised by Pai Mei, this is the only point at which a man is shown in this way, and as will be further expounded below, this is a crucial component of The Bride's 'modern Amazon' character.

In addition to her fighting abilities, The Bride, like Ripley and Sarah Connor before her, also possesses characteristics consistent with those of an ancient Amazon: namely, independence from men, extraordinary experience of motherhood, and an unconventional lifestyle. The first of these to be discussed will be the level of autonomy The Bride enjoys in relation to male characters. The most tangible evidence for The Bride's independence from men is the fact that the scenes with Bill, her former lover, come only at the very end of the second film. For the most part of two films, The Bride goes about her business alone, without needing a man to be by her side or rely on through every step of her plan of vengeance. There are two male characters though, who, by the end of *Kill Bill 2*, the audience would think of as crucial to the furthering of The Bride's plans. The first is Hattori Hanzo, who (on The Bride's request) crafts a katana for her, and instructs her in its usage. His small role in *Kill Bill 1* is played by Sonny Chiba, a Japanese actor most well known from television and film roles of the 1970s.¹⁰⁹ Arriving in Okinawa, The Bride's first stop after

¹⁰⁹ Sonny Chiba playing a character named Hattori Hanzo is yet another moment of intertextuality from Tarantino. In the late 1970s, Chiba appeared in a Japanese television series called *Kage No Gundan* (*Shadow Warriors*) playing several incarnations of a character called Hattori Hanzo. Tarantino speaks of this series

escaping the hospital, she finds the former swordmaker working at a small, desolate sushi store. Playing the part of a naïve tourist with little command of Japanese to start with, The Bride begins with friendly conversation to break the ice, then stuns Hanzo when she mentions his own name:

(Hanzo drops dish, looks stunned; sound of glass shattering)

Hanzo (in subtitled Japanese) What do you want with Hattori Hanzo?

The Bride: (in subtitled Japanese) I need Japanese steel.

Hanzo: (in subtitled Japanese) Why do you need Japanese steel?

The Bride: (in subtitled Japanese) I have vermin to kill.

Although Hanzo declares he ‘no longer make[s] instruments of death’, once The Bride names Bill as her targeted ‘vermin’, he reconsiders, and agrees to make The Bride a sword. The weapon, Hanzo proclaims, is his ‘finest sword...if on your journey, you should encounter God, God will be cut’.¹¹⁰ It is a platonic relationship, but one which contains mutual respect, as is shown in the solemn ceremony at which Hanzo presents The Bride with the sword, and he calls her ‘yellow-haired warrior’. Without this respect, The Bride would not have received the valuable weapon with which she dispatches the entire Crazy 88 gang and O-Ren Ishii, and defends herself against Elle and Bill. In this way, she does rely on a man for something – though it should be pointed out that it is her use of, and superior skill with, the Hanzo katana which ultimately proves her power, not simply her possession of the sword itself.¹¹¹

as one he treasured watching while growing up in the featurette *The Making of Kill Bill Volume 1*, from the *Kill Bill Volume 1* DVD (2003). For Tarantino’s connoisseurship in casting, see Anderson (2004).

¹¹⁰ Scott (2003) dismisses the entire Hanzo scene by backhandedly describing it as ‘mystical Shaolin mumbo jumbo’ – never mind the fact that Shaolin temples (and the monks associated with them) are located on mainland China, *not* in Okinawa, which I think goes some way to discount his criticisms.

¹¹¹ This seemed to be O-Ren’s suspicion when she encounters The Bride. Although impressed that The Bride has such a weapon, her remarks of ‘you want to fight like a samurai? Then you can die like a samurai’ and the aforementioned ‘silly Caucasian girl...’ belie her doubts that The Bride’s abilities can match her own.

The other man to figure fairly prominently in The Bride's background is Pai Mei, the kung fu grandmaster who features in the chapter *The Cruel Tutelage of Pai Mei*, discussed above. His training of The Bride endows her with formidable martial arts skills which not only assist her in clashes with various foes, but also assists her in escaping from Budd's attempt to bury her alive. Though it is never a relationship of equals, we do learn (in The Bride's final scenes with Bill) that Pai Mei has taught The Bride the five point palm exploding heart technique – putting paid to Bill's dismissive assertion that 'he teaches no-one' this skill.¹¹² He may never have taught it to Bill, or Elle, but he does impart this invaluable piece of wisdom to The Bride, indicating the esteem in which he held her. The *Cruel Tutelage* sequence displays both Pai Mei's remarkable skill and agility (at one stage he pounces, and balances, on the edge of The Bride's sword [fig. 37]) but also The Bride's ever-increasing aptitude as she practises the animal forms of kung fu perfectly in time with Pai Mei. Again, The Bride's use of the skills she has learnt from Pai Mei are the crucial point for this discussion; when combined with her proficiency with the Hanzo blade and her general adaptability in fighting situations, they make her into a truly formidable warrior.

When it comes to The Bride's relationship with Bill, however, there is a significant distinction between their interactions shown in flashback and those after. In other words, those events *before* he attempts to murder her and those after. The Bride's true autonomy and independence from men comes about after she awakes from her four-year coma. In contrast, the *Cruel Tutelage* chapter begins by showing The Bride and Bill in happier times, with Bill telling incredible stories about Pai Mei's formidable nature and The Bride listening adoringly, smiling. Warning The Bride of Pai Mei's strict teaching style, Bill advises her:

¹¹² Tierney (2006) 617 notes the way that Asian characters will confer on the White person learning their craft 'a secret technique' or 'hoarded knowledge'. While certainly this may be slightly stereotypical, Tarantino's motivation for including this in the film is the spirit of homage in which the film has been crafted, much like the inclusion of the 'tough mentor' character of Pai Mei and the training montage.

Fig. 37: The Bride's kung fu sifu, Pai Mei.

Whatever – whatever! – Pai Mei says, obey. If you flash him, even for an instant, a defiant eye, he'll pluck it out. And if you throw any American sass his way, he'll snap your back and your neck like they were twigs. And that will be the story of you.

The Bride's wide-eyed surprise at the fearsome reputation of the strict taskmaster and Bill's almost paternal instruction in how best to deal with Pai Mei set the tone of a relationship in which Bill is the more learned, wise, and experienced and The Bride is the student, eager to be trained and taught. In addition, the age difference between the two characters is exploited and almost lampooned in the other flashback of the films – the wedding chapel scene, in which The Bride introduces an uninvited Bill to Tommy, her groom-to-be, as her 'father'.¹¹³ This particular episode, shown early in *Kill Bill 2*, also gives some insight into the dynamic between The Bride and Bill. Having fled her assassin past to start anew

¹¹³ The actor playing Bill (David Carradine) was 66 at the time of filming, while Uma Thurman, as The Bride, was 32.

with Tommy and the baby she is carrying, she discovers Bill waiting outside the chapel where the wedding rehearsal is taking place. Bill's verbal sparring, though playful, still has the undertones of a protective father-figure. He asserts proprietarily that 'I happen[s] to be more or less particular [about] whom my girl marries'; when asked by Tommy if he would like to 'give away' The Bride, he curtly declines, saying 'that's asking a lot';¹¹⁴ and when a dinner is proposed for the wedding party, he agrees to attend 'but only on the condition that I pay for everything', evoking the tradition of fathers-of-the-bride paying for weddings.

These flashback scenes, in showing a distinct difference in age and experience between The Bride and Bill, contrast greatly with the last few scenes of *Kill Bill 2*, in which these characters are finally brought together again. The Bride has spent the most part of two films without Bill. She has killed nearly a hundred people to get to this point – to the final name on her 'Death List Five'. Bill's secret weapon, of course, is BB, The Bride's daughter who somehow survived the massacre at the El Paso wedding chapel and has been brought up by Bill for the four years The Bride was comatose.¹¹⁵ On seeing the daughter she had assumed to be dead, The Bride is clearly overwhelmed; however, the emotion at a reunion with her daughter seems to further strengthen her resolve to kill Bill. Despite all the charming vignettes he regales The Bride with about BB, Bill is at heart still a man bitter that his girlfriend left him and even more bitter that he found her, three months later, about to marry another man. This becomes clear throughout Bill's diatribe on Superman, which he fashions into an analogy of people's innate natures – and in which he declares that The Bride would always be a 'natural born killer'. His snide comments about how she imagined her life *sans* assassin identity would be – 'going to the movies with Tommy, clipping coupons' – give

¹¹⁴ The double entendre of 'giving away' the bride is particularly sinister here in light of subsequent events. Bill's refusal, then, seems to stem from the viewpoint that if *he* can't have The Bride, *nobody* can.

¹¹⁵ See n. 101 above for a possible explanation of BB's survival.

an early indication of the baser motives behind his actions. He abhors the thought of The Bride forging a life without him, discarding the knowledge and teaching he has imparted to her, and feels that her rejection of her former lifestyle is a denial of her true nature and of the path she *should* take. ‘Trying to disguise yourself as a worker bee – that’s you trying to blend in with the hive. But you’re not a worker bee’, he tells her. ‘You’re a renegade killer bee.’ Though The Bride admits that she didn’t think her new life in El Paso would work out, it is hardly reasonable to expect that life to be instantaneously wiped out because Bill thinks it unworthy of her. In fact, his true feelings are soon exposed along with The Bride’s motives for running away, which in turn explains much about the altered dynamic between the two.

In reply to Bill’s question about why she ran away, The Bride flashes back to when she discovered she was pregnant, and then explains that, while ‘Before that strip turned blue, I was a woman – I was your woman’. But The Bride’s pregnancy makes her realise the true implications of her profession for her unborn child. She claims that running away was ‘the right decision, and I made it for my daughter’; that ‘with you, she would’ve been born into a world she shouldn’t have.’ Her concerns for her daughter far outweigh any concerns for Bill’s reaction to her abandonment. Although her role as mother will be discussed in the next part of this chapter, it has implications for the current discussion, as The Bride chooses her child over Bill and her former life with him. Unable to fully accept this, Bill is still, four years later, fairly unevolved in his reaction to this revelation: he defensively explains his rationale:

...so I find you. And what do I find? Not only are you not dead – you’re getting married. To some f**king jerk. And you’re *pregnant!*
I...overreacted.

The Bride (double-take) You *over-reacted?* That’s your explanation?

This exchange perhaps illustrates best why The Bride would have felt the need to escape the assassin life in the first place. Bill explains that ‘I’m a murdering bastard – you know that; and there are consequences to breaking the heart of a murdering bastard’. Away from such dire prospects, she and her daughter may well have been able to lead normal lives. Once the break has been made, however – that is, once she has awoken from the coma Bill’s shot puts her into, and believes her child to be dead – there is no possibility of reconciliation between Bill and The Bride. The look in The Bride’s face when she first arrives at the house, and first holds her daughter in her arms, looking over her shoulder to Bill, says it all: despite all of Bill’s sanctimonious talk in the background, BB is what matters to The Bride now, and nothing must come between them (fig. 38).

Closely linked to the nature of The Bride and Bill’s relationship, and The Bride’s attempt to end it upon discovering her pregnancy, is her role as mother and attitude to motherhood. An assessment of this role and The Bride’s attitude and approach to it will give the present discussion some insight into the way in which the Amazon archetype is adapted with regard to the facet of motherhood. The Bride’s outlook is best described in the following explanation she gives to Bill:

Before that strip turned blue, I was a woman – I was your woman. I was a killer who killed for you. Before that strip turned blue I would have jumped a motorcycle onto a speeding train. For you. But once that strip turned blue, I could no longer do any of those things. Not anymore. Because I was going to be a mother. Can you understand that?

Fig. 38: The Bride reunited with long-lost daughter, BB.

Her concept of herself changes when she becomes pregnant. In her mind, a free agent – a non-parent – can do all kinds of things, but a mother must have a different set of boundaries because now, a child is involved. In the flashback showing her discovery of the pregnancy, she is confronted by a woman sent to kill her and, in the midst of their stand-off, The Bride warns her ‘I’m the deadliest woman in the world. And right now...I’m just scared sh*tless for my baby’. And this prioritisation of her role as mother is arguably what results in her almost being killed. Bill’s ‘overreaction’ to discovering her alive, getting married, and pregnant leads to almost the entire wedding party being massacred.¹¹⁶ Upon waking from her four-year coma, one of The Bride’s first reactions is to put her hands to her stomach – which is no longer the pregnant belly she last remembers – and the realisation that the baby is no longer there (and thus probably died)

¹¹⁶ It is assumed that Bill thinks the unborn child is Tommy’s, not his. Bill’s remark to The Bride when speaking about her obvious pregnancy (‘that young man of yours sure doesn’t believe in wasting time, does he?’) seems to confirm this, along with the fact that The Bride feels the need to blurt out ‘Bill, it’s your baby’ immediately before being shot by Bill. However, it seems obvious that The Bride is more than three months along at the wedding chapel (which is how long it has taken Bill to track her down), confirming Bill as the father.

makes her scream and weep agonisingly. It becomes part and parcel of her mission not only to avenge her own attempted murder and that of her groom-to-be and her friends, but the assumed death of her own child as well. She spells this out to Vernita Green in the scene in her kitchen:

Vernita: You have every right to want to get even.

The Bride: No, no, no. To get even – even steven? I would have to kill you, go up to Nikki's room, kill her, then wait for your husband, the good Dr Bell, to come home, and kill him. *That* would be even, Vernita. That'd be about square.

The idea that The Bride's child is still alive is only brought up in the final moments of *Kill Bill 1*, when Bill is shown asking the now one-armed Sophie Fatale (a casualty of the Crazy 88 massacre) 'is she aware her daughter is still alive?' This final scene leaves the first film on a stunning cliffhanger, which, from both narrative and economic points of view, translates into more audience members being interested in seeing the issues of the first film resolved in the second. Learning that The Bride's daughter still exists can also serve to make the audience anticipate the final showdown with Bill far more keenly, a kind of dramatic irony which is as old as the first dramatic productions of the Athenian stage. When the reunion finally takes place, The Bride's reaction is a combination of complete joy at finally seeing her child thought to be lost and also a steeling of her determination to kill Bill. This is explained when The Bride clarifies her reasons for absconding:

She deserved to be born with a clean slate. But with you, she would've been born into a world she shouldn't have. I had to choose. I chose her.

Discovering BB is alive gives The Bride further cause for getting rid of Bill: without him, she will be able to raise BB with the 'clean slate' she had desired from the beginning. Though Bill may come across as a perfectly caring, affectionate and proper father, he is still, as he freely admits to The Bride, a

‘murdering bastard’. And though *The Bride* is arguably just as murderous (and indeed, ends up killing BB’s father), somehow her cause rings truer. In comparison, the decision by Bill to murder a visibly pregnant woman, along with her friends and groom-to-be, is surely one of the more inexcusable acts in either of these films.¹¹⁷

The scene between *The Bride* and BB in the little girl’s bedroom is one of the most tender parts of either film. Curling up together on the bed, BB asks whether it hurt when Bill shot her (he had just explained the past events, with ultimate candour, to the child) and *The Bride* replies ‘no, sweetie...it doesn’t hurt anymore’ – which could well be interpreted as a reference to the pain *The Bride* had felt at losing her child. While *The Bride*’s approval of *Shogun Assassin* may be a ‘dubious choice for bedtime viewing’ for a four-year-old,¹¹⁸ the theme of the film – a tough former Shogun decapitator roams the countryside with his small child, seeking vengeance and killing with great skill – resonates markedly with that of the *Kill Bill* films.¹¹⁹ In addition, here is another echo of the highly unconventional Amazon style of motherhood. If one is to believe Diodorus’ account of the Black Sea Amazons, the right breasts of small girls were seared off in order that ‘it might not protrude when their bodies matured and be in the way’ [ie, for archery purposes] (2.45). Could *The Bride*’s assent to allowing her small daughter to watch violent samurai films be her way of equipping the child for the dangers of the world, in the same way Amazon girls were taught warlike pursuits

¹¹⁷ Smith (2005) 241 calls it a ‘vile, disproportionate reaction’ and attributes it to Bill having the same sense of morals as the ‘wilful, cackling and cruel Pai Mei’.

¹¹⁸ Kehr (2004). In defence of *The Bride*, it was BB’s first choice when asked what she wanted to watch – so clearly Bill has shown it to her already anyway.

¹¹⁹ Kehr (2004) has also noted the parallels between *Kill Bill* and the *Lone Wolf and Cub* films (of which *Shogun Assassin* is a dubbed amalgam of the first two films in the series of six), including the theme of ‘innocent children bound to violent adults’ and the more general style of violence depicted in the House of Blue Leaves sequences (hacked off limbs, hose-like spraying of blood with fizzing sounds).

from a young age?¹²⁰ As Kehr has pointed out, the theme of innocent children bound to violent adults features in both the *Lone Wolf and Cub* films (from which *Shogun Assassin* is adapted) as well as *Kill Bill*, but additionally, Tarantino's acknowledged inspiration *Lady Snowblood* must also be considered, in which a child is raised to be her mother's avenger throughout her whole life and is taught crucial fighting skills in order to do so.¹²¹

When BB has fallen asleep, The Bride gently tucks her under a blanket, kisses her, and after a last look at her sleeping child she sets off down a corridor to the last name on her list: Bill. And once Bill has finally been dispatched, The Bride is shown leaving his house with a sleepy BB in her arms, and getting into her car. The next scene begins captioned *Next Morning*, and shows BB happily watching cartoons, while in the bathroom The Bride weeps with relief and laughs with joy at finally accomplishing her arduous undertaking. Her whispers of 'thank you' explain her behaviour further: although at the moment of Bill's death The Bride had mixed feelings at killing someone she had once cared for deeply, she can now allow herself a moment of emotional release and the final understanding that her plans have come to fruition. The final 'happy ending' of this film is centered on the fact that The Bride is reunited with the child she had never thought she would meet with again, and after the screen goes black a caption reads *The lioness has*

¹²⁰ The only other mother shown in either film is Vernita Green, and her exchanges with her daughter when she comes home from school are so ordinary and banal, given the context (The Bride and Vernita were poised knife-to-knife when Nikki's bus pulled up outside), that it becomes dark comedy: Vernita says that the 'old friend of Mommy's' and her have 'grown-up stuff to talk about'. See Madsen (2005) 172. In contrast, The Bride treats Nikki more like an adult: she explains that 'you can take my word for it: your mother had it coming. When you grow up, if you still feel raw about it...I'll be waiting.'

¹²¹ Kehr (2004).

¹²¹ In particular, it is reminiscent of the scene in *Lone Wolf and Cub: Baby Cart to Hades* in which Ogami Itto makes his small, barely-crawling son choose between a sword and a brightly-coloured ball: when the child chooses the sword, Ogami Itto sighs with resignation 'It would have been better if you had chosen to join your mother in her world...' However, a major consideration in both *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Lady Snowblood* is the expectation that the children involved will grow up using their knowledge of violence to their own advantage, whereas in *Kill Bill*, The Bride's wish to leave behind the life of an assassin indicates her wish for there to be *less* violence in her daughter's life, which is illustrated when The Bride explains to Bill her reasons for leaving when discovering her pregnancy.

rejoined her cub / and all is right in the jungle. The Bride's motherhood, and her belief that she had been robbed of it, continuously motivates her throughout the most part of both films, and it is not until her arrival at Bill's house that she discovers her child is still alive. However, her ignorance of the situation as it truly stands does not negate the importance of the theme of motherhood; rather, her desire to avenge the death of her child serves as a catalyst to her deadly rampage. As Schubart has phrased it, 'her vengeance is not a maternal issue, but a personal affair'.¹²² Far from dismissing The Bride as the 'overused feminine archetype' of 'fierce mama', as Jervis would prefer to do,¹²³ she can be recognised to be a multi-dimensional heroine, to whom motherhood is just one motivational force among many. Further, it should be noted that the issue of her maternity does nothing to 'soften' her, as some argued had happened to Ripley in *Aliens*.

In accord with The Bride's arguably unconventional style of motherhood, much of what the audience sees of her life in general is also fairly out of the ordinary. Modern Amazons are frequently assigned such lives – Wonder Woman and Xena, as has been discussed, share this aspect, with the former living a life of a superhero, complete with double-identity, and the latter living the life of a former warlord who is now a vigilante, protector and avenger. In addition, both Ripley and Sarah Connor also live unconventional lives, situated in the extraordinary environs of deep space and time-travel respectively. Not only is The Bride's life before the El Paso wedding chapel incident unusual, but one could argue that her determination to kill everyone on her 'Death List Five', her success in doing so, and the way she goes about it are also all extraordinary. The Bride's life as an assassin was far from ordinary; Tarantino's concept of the film as 'not taking place on planet Earth'¹²⁴ additionally allows him to show a highly unusual life in a

¹²² Schubart (2007) 312.

¹²³ Jervis (2004).

¹²⁴ Quoted in Smith (2005) 220.

highly unusual world (where, for instance, everyone at the Tokyo airport carries their katana with them openly).¹²⁵ There are, in particular, two factors which mark out The Bride as having an unusual lifestyle – her constant and lone globetrotting in search of those on her ‘Death List’, and her situation in a place outside of usual (Western) film geography both deserve further discussion here. In addition, these two factors also link The Bride back to the ancient Amazons origins, who also led unconventional lives within nomadic societies and were situated outside of ‘normal’ Western geographical bounds.

The Bride’s first act on escaping from the hospital (though the non-linear narrative does not show it until halfway through the film) shows her at the airport ticket counter, requesting a flight to ‘Okinawa. One-way’. A stylised map then shows a plane traveling from Texas to Okinawa with a dotted line: The Bride’s first step on her journey. Her arrival at Hattori Hanzo’s tiny sushi shop, clad in tourist outfit, conceals the real reason behind her visit, but Hanzo only too readily believes her guise as naïve American tourist who speaks Japanese badly. His surprise at The Bride’s knowledge of his past identity as a master swordsmith can be blamed on the success of her own masquerade and his assumption that a tall, blonde American woman may be the last person one would expect to appear asking for a samurai sword. Conventionally speaking, this would not be what anyone would expect in other films; but with such an Amazon as the protagonist (and an Amazon in a Quentin Tarantino film at that), the unusual is certainly to be expected.

Upon receipt of the sword from Hanzo, The Bride is next shown back at the airport ticket counter, this time requesting ‘one ticket to Tokyo, please’. Again

¹²⁵ Scott (2003) has criticised this ‘highly artificial world’; likewise, but less disapprovingly, Tierney (2006) 619 accepts that ‘the audience is expected to suspend disbelief in *Kill Bill*, which features numerous scenes and events far beyond believability.’

the motif of the stylised map and aeroplane shows her journey from Okinawa to Tokyo. This time, however, she is shown on board the plane, with her katana by her side, gazing out at the bright lights of Tokyo as they come into view.¹²⁶ The film also ends with a scene of The Bride on board a plane once more, writing the 'Death List Five' from which she intends to cross off each name she kills. In each of these in-flight scenes, The Bride is obviously alone except for her Hanzo sword beside her, and with no-one to converse with, she stares ahead or out of the window silently. Such traveling scenes, as well as emphasizing The Bride's vast mission and her dedication to it, also call to mind the ancient Amazons' role as originators of the nomadic Sauromatae of the Eurasian steppes.¹²⁷

In the second film, scenes on planes are replaced with scenes in cars, as the action shifts to America. The first scene, in fact (after the reprised first scene of the first film), shows The Bride, in black and white, styled much like the hero of a film noir and driving in a convertible with an obviously phony backdrop. Speaking directly to the audience, she explains the events which have transpired:

Looked dead, didn't I? Well, I wasn't. But it wasn't for lack of trying, I can tell you that. Actually Bill's last bullet put me in a coma; a coma I was to lie in for four years. When I woke up I went on what the movie advertisements refer to as a 'roaring rampage of revenge'. I roared. And I rampaged. And I got bloody satisfaction. I've killed a hell of a lot of people to get to this point. But I have only one more. The last one. The

¹²⁶ Allowing the passengers' swords on board with them is just another of Tarantino's (sometimes exceedingly subtle) ways of reminding us of his 'alternate universe' (Tierney, 2006): the aforementioned scene with people at the Tokyo airport carrying katana is another, and almost unnoticeable unless one looks for the detail.

¹²⁷ See Chapter One, pages 44-7 for Herodotus' belief of the Sauromatae's Amazonian ancestors. Jeannine Davis-Kimball is perhaps the most noteworthy of modern scholars who believe the Amazons actually existed as part of a nomadic society based around the Eurasian steppes. Her research first appeared in a 1997 *Archaeology* article and developed into the 2003 book *Warrior Women: An Archaeologist's Search for History's Hidden Heroines*.

one I'm driving to right now. The only one left. And when I arrive at my destination, I am gonna *kill* Bill.

The next time The Bride is seen traveling, in the chapter titled *Elle and I*, is on foot – walking across a scorching hot desert, having just escaped being buried alive by Budd. Clothing and face still caked in dirt, she appears on the fuzzy horizon in closer and closer shots;¹²⁸ a shot from higher up then tracks her through the hills of the same desert, until she comes to a vantage point from which she has a view of Budd's trailer. Such travel (on foot, no less) is no mean feat given that this woman has just narrowly escaped death by suffocation in a nailed coffin, and yet the look of steely determination still lingers in her eye, and the audience sees that this setback will not sway her. When she leaves the blinded Elle writhing in Budd's trailer, she limps out the door and off into the desert yet again – to travel to her last target, Bill.

The final chapter, captioned *Face to Face*, shows a far more refreshed-looking Bride driving in a sky-blue convertible along a palm-lined dirt road.¹²⁹ Stopping in at the abode of Esteban Vihaio in Acuna, Mexico, she is given directions to Bill's house 'on the road to Salina' which is on the opposite coast of Mexico to Acuna – meaning The Bride has one lengthy drive ahead of her. Yet it seems only fitting that this nomadic avenger will drive for hours to reach her final target and, unbeknownst to her, her daughter. Her Hanzo sword is shown sitting in the passenger seat beside her as she drives through into the evening – her only companion, just as it had been in the scenes on aeroplanes transporting her

¹²⁸ Smith (2005) 246 likens this to a similar scene featuring Henry Fonda arriving at preparations for a wedding in *Once Upon a Time In The West* (1968). Such scenic similarities, along with the use of Ennio Morricone's music from other spaghetti westerns such as *Navajo Joe* and *Il Mercenario*, emphasise the point which Tarantino has made himself, that while *Kill Bill 1* was 'more from the East', the second film is 'more from the West' – meaning the spaghetti western tradition. The fact that the action of *Kill Bill 2* takes place in America (while *Kill Bill 1* had action taking place in Japan and Okinawa) also reinforces and explains this idea.

¹²⁹ This scene is the same one from which The Bride delivered her monologue at the beginning of the film, referring to the 'roaring rampage', only this time, it is shown in colour.

through Okinawa and Japan. The final credits of *Kill Bill 2*, however, make one crucial change to this motif. After all other characters and the actors playing them have been named, BB is shown, smiling, in the passenger seat of The Bride's convertible, with The Bride next to her, also smiling. It would seem that The Bride's lonely journey of vengeance is over, and she now has a child to accompany her on whatever travels she has left, rather than just her Hanzo sword. In this way, she can be compared to the other modern Amazons examined up to this point. Both Ripley and Sarah Connor are shown together with their respective children at the end of *Aliens* and *Terminator 2*, and Xena, though not shown with Solan or Eve in the final scene of the last season, is accompanied by Gabrielle throughout the six seasons of *Xena*, including the final scenes of all. The exception, however, is Wonder Woman, whose lack of children and close companions has been remarked on.¹³⁰

Tarantino's two *Kill Bill* films, and particularly the first installment, have been especially noted for their extensive 'borrowing' from Asian martial arts films. Scholars have been varied in their reactions to such liberal use of motifs, themes and characters;¹³¹ however, Tarantino himself seems to view his use of martial arts themes and characters as homage to the genre in general. His casting of Sonny Chiba (Hattori Hanzo), Gordon Liu (Johnny Mo in *Kill Bill 1* and Pai Mei in *Kill Bill 2*) and David Carradine (Bill) was heavily dependent on those actors' work in previous martial arts-themed works which Tarantino had grown up with. Integrating such familiar faces from well-known martial arts media is not the only

¹³⁰ Though the sequel to *Aliens*, *Alien³*, is not discussed in this chapter, the plot involves Newt being promptly killed off, leaving Ripley childless once more.

¹³¹ Anderson (2004), for instance, sees Tarantino as using cinematic iconography as 'shorthand' in order to link the *Kill Bill* characters with others from martial arts films and therefore provide a frame of reference for audiences familiar with those films being 'borrowed' from. At the other end of the spectrum, Scott (2003) criticises Tarantino's 'looking-glass universe that reflects nothing beyond his own cinematic obsessions' and contends that 'being so relentlessly exposed to a filmmaker's idiosyncratic turn-ons can be tedious and off-putting'. However, he also admits that Tarantino's 'undeniable passion that drives *Kill Bill* is fascinating, even, strange to say it, endearing'.

way in which Tarantino locates *Kill Bill* in the cinematic East, though. Motifs are littered through the film to pay tribute to genres such as the yakuza films from Japan (O-Ren Ishii's position as queen of the Tokyo underworld), samurai films (the central role accorded the manufacture and use of The Bride's Hanzo sword) and kung fu films of mainland China and Hong Kong (the training montage with Pai Mei, the stock 'hard taskmaster' character). In particular, the 1973 film *Lady Snowblood* has been cited by many, including Tarantino himself, as a particular influence on the *Kill Bill* films. The use of anime imitates *Lady Snowblood's* use of still images from a manga comic;¹³² exact dialogue is adapted when O-Ren speaks to her family's murderer, Matsumoto;¹³³ and the memorable visual image of the four killers standing triumphantly over their dying victim (shown from the victims' perspective) is imitated at the El Paso wedding chapel, where the DiVAS stand over the bruised and battered (and soon-to-be-shot) Bride.

In addition to all of this, The Bride herself, in true Amazon style, is firmly located within these cinematic locales – which are most certainly not the usual location for a Western (or particularly, American) film. In choosing to so densely reference Asian cinematic genres – which are traditionally 'cult' genres, adored by fans but ignored by the American mainstream – Tarantino locates his film, and in particular The Bride, outside of the usual bounds of 'American' cinema.¹³⁴ The Bride is outside the realms of 'ordinary' film, and this parallels the location of the ancient Amazon outside of 'normal' society (through both behaviour and geography). Perpetually the Amazons are situated in an area of wild, untamed

¹³² Some believe this assisted *Lady Snowblood's* director in telling sections of the film which might have been cost-prohibitive; likewise, others, such as Scott (2003) have suggested Tarantino's use of anime allowed him to show far more graphic violence than live-action would allow.

¹³³ She says 'Look at my eyes. Look at my mouth. Do I look familiar? Do I look like somebody...you murdered?!' as she twists the fatal sword. In *Lady Snowblood*, the lines Yuki says immediately before dispatching Banzo are, 'Do I look like someone you know? Do I look like someone you have raped?' which alludes to Banzo's role in the torture and rape of Yuki's mother.

¹³⁴ In addition, in his casting of David Carradine as Bill, Tarantino also acknowledges previous attempts, such as Carradine's television show *Kung Fu* (1972-5), to adapt Eastern film motifs to Western television conventions. For more on *Kung Fu*, see Chapter Two, pages 132-3.

terrain beyond the reaches of Greek city-states, where their society's traditions and behaviour are completely alien to the Greeks. However, the positioning of *The Bride* within such a context serves to showcase her abilities, adaptability and heroism, rather than simply provide some kind of simple binary opposite to the 'norm', and this is seen in her integration within this context of Asian film.

The Bride's easy assimilation with the world of Asian cinematic conventions is illustrated in several ways. Her ability to converse in Japanese with Hattori Hanzo, after he had mistaken her for a simple American tourist, is the first hint at such a capacity. Hanzo's words, when he hands over the sword in a solemn ceremony, allude to his approval of The Bride's use of such a weapon: 'I have done this because, philosophically, I am sympathetic to your aim.' Previously he had had his doubts, saying to The Bride, 'Ha ha. You like samurai swords? I like baseball!' and unexpectedly throwing a baseball at The Bride – who promptly slices the airborne ball in half instead of replying. Hanzo's stunned look of admiration signals an important breakthrough and he agrees to make a sword for her. After receiving her sword, The Bride flies to Tokyo to face O-Ren Ishii, boss of the Tokyo yakuza, and more Asian cinematic motifs and themes creep in. The Bride's yellow and black tracksuit has already been mentioned as an homage to Bruce Lee's similar outfit in *Game of Death*, while the battle with the Crazy 88 is the kind of one-versus-many staple scene familiar from samurai films such as the *Lone Wolf and Cub* series and *Lady Snowblood*.¹³⁵ It is The Bride's utter superiority illustrated in this battle which places her so firmly in the genre. Unlike many action heroes in contemporary American films who may use a kung fu kick here or there to complement their arsenal of guns and other weapons, The Bride seems to be in her element here, demanding (in Japanese) that O-Ren come out to face

¹³⁵ Anderson (2004) notes the Crazy 88 sequence is structured as a 'quintessential grind house fight' which 'begins with the killing of superfluous subordinates, then moves on to a feature fight against an intermediate adversary...then progresses to a larger battle against multiple opponents, and only then moves on to the final duel between equally matched opponents.'

her, hacking off limbs and heads with aplomb (to the sound of gushing blood familiar from samurai films), and displaying a fluidity and adaptability of style that Bruce Lee himself would surely have admired.¹³⁶

The Bride's final fight with O-Ren is visually a clear homage to *Lady Snowblood* and further illustrates The Bride's facility with her weapon. O-Ren, like Hattori Hanzo before her, initially sees The Bride's use of the katana as inappropriate, and taunts The Bride with the words, 'silly Caucasian girl likes to play with samurai swords'. However, O-Ren retracts these words after being wounded herself, apologises for 'ridiculing you earlier' and The Bride is ultimately the victor in this battle. Some scholars, such as Tierney, would view this success of a white protagonist over Asian foes at their 'own game' (ie swordfighting) as further propagating the idea of white 'ethnic superiority'.¹³⁷ However, The Bride's vengeance extends far beyond only Asian foes, as has been discussed above. Her mission is not solely to appropriate an Asian skill (kung fu, or samurai swordfighting) so she can then exhibit her power over lesser, enfeebled Asians. Rather, her skills illustrate a part of her character which links her to similar figures from other martial arts films. Her reverence for the Hanzo sword is effectively demonstrated when she first sees Hanzo's cache of weapons, and she walks slowly toward them in a trancelike manner, while eerie, ethereal music plays in the background. She dares not pick up any of the swords until she has asked Hanzo 'May I...?' In his solemn ceremony presenting the katana to her, Hanzo addresses The Bride as 'yellow-haired warrior', bestowing upon her a kind of special nomenclature within the samurai world, distinguishing her Western looks while according her the respect due any samurai (fig. 39). Similarly, her

¹³⁶ Lee advocated expanding one's repertoire of fighting manoeuvres beyond the limits of any one martial arts style (such as wing chun or karate), and wrote books on the subject. In particular, his encouragement to students that 'if nothing within you stays rigid, outward things will disclose themselves' can be applied here in terms of staying flexible and adaptable in one's fighting style. See Lee (1975) 7.

¹³⁷ Tierney (2006) *passim*.

training with Pai Mei shown in flashback in *Kill Bill 2* does not exist to show her triumph over the seemingly invincible master, but serves in the capacity of what Anderson calls ‘the economy of connoisseurship’, in that it provides an iconographical ‘shortcut’ to link similar stories together.¹³⁸ Fans of (in particular) Shaw Brothers kung fu films would appreciate the use of both the stock Pai Mei character as well as Gordon Liu, because of his famous role in *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin*.¹³⁹ Having earned the master’s grudging respect, The Bride is then taught (though the audience is not shown this) the five point palm exploding heart technique – something Bill had previously labeled as something that ‘he teaches no-one.’ In gaining such knowledge, The Bride is linked with other characters from Asian film who reach the pinnacle of their respective disciplines, gaining what Tierney labels the ‘hoarded knowledge’, and is effectively shown as someone who is ‘worthy’ of such knowledge.¹⁴⁰

Fig. 39: The ‘yellow-haired warrior’ receives her katana made by Hattori Hanzo.

¹³⁸ Anderson (2003).

¹³⁹ The Pai Mei character appeared in five films between 1976 and 1984, including, most famously, *The Clan of the White Lotus* (1980). Characters very similar to Pai Mei, often with the ‘hard taskmaster’ personality and who force their student to undergo a harsh training regime include the Shaolin monks in *36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978), So Chan/So Hat Yee in *Drunken Master* (1978) and Tanaka in *Bloodsport* (1988).

¹⁴⁰ Tierney (2006) 617.

In addition to her location outside of traditional Western film geography, *The Bride* is also located in the ‘alternate universe’ of Tarantino’s own creation. This is a world where things do not always play out in a realistic manner, and where the unexpected can seem entirely mundane. Examples of this world – in which all characters of the film reside, not just *The Bride* – include ‘broad stretches in credibility’ such as people carrying samurai swords around with them, and on aeroplanes, as if for daily use;¹⁴¹ the ability of one person to fight off a vast number of attackers (such as the Crazy 88) without being suddenly ambushed by any of them; and even the ability of a woman to survive the kind of brutal assault to which *The Bride* was subjected in *El Paso*. Located in such a world, one could argue that *The Bride* is afforded far more opportunities and freedoms than the average female role in a ‘normal’ Hollywood film could offer. When the world of Asian cinema, which has long cast females as action stars,¹⁴² is combined with a director determined to create a female-centered revenge drama, it appears to provide the ideal environment in which the modern Amazon may thrive.

A key point illuminated particularly by *The Bride*’s battles with Vernita Green, O-Ren Ishii (along with her bodyguard GoGo Yubari) and Elle Driver is the modern Amazon’s pairing with another female foe. Whereas the ancient Amazon was so singular because there simply were no other women warriors for them to fight, the modern Amazon both in television and on film is frequently paired with an enemy of the same sex. As *Wonder Woman* met up with female villains such

¹⁴¹ See Smith (2005) 220 for further discussion of Tarantino’s self-described ‘Fantasy Land’. Some scenes (such as the coffin escape) are inspirational and yet highly unlikely, and are a large part of the plotline, while other details are almost unnoticeable. And what kind of a mother, except for Vernita Green, would keep a gun concealed in a cereal box? Other details seem to make more sense the more one immerses oneself in Tarantino’s world: although the Crazy 88s carry their katana on the back of their motorcycles, which is slightly unrealistic, the fact that they are lackeys to the queen of the Tokyo yakuza makes it more believable. The fact that there is a *queen* of the Tokyo Yakuza (normally a male-dominated world), and that she is part Chinese at that, is in itself unlikely in any world other than Tarantino’s.

¹⁴² Particularly well-known female stars of Asian cinema include Pei-Pei Cheng, Maggie Cheung, and Michelle Yeoh.

as Formicida and Baroness von Gunther, and Xena faced off against rogue Amazons and arch-nemesis Callisto, the *Kill Bill* films take this point even further by casting four female members of the DiVAS (The Bride, O-Ren Ishii, Vernita Green, and Elle Driver) to only one male member (Bill's brother Budd). This then requires The Bride to battle more women in prolonged, one-on-one fights than men.¹⁴³ All of these women could be labeled as Amazons due to their fighting skills and abilities, yet it is only The Bride's mission of vengeance which remains the core of both films (fig. 40).¹⁴⁴ O-Ren's back-story is perhaps the most prominent in either film aside from The Bride's, and her own tale of vengeance is retold in anime form in the middle of *Kill Bill I*. After her parents are slaughtered in front of her by a Japanese yakuza named Boss Matsumoto, O-Ren sets out to get revenge, and is successful, at the tender age of only eleven. Elle Driver's history features a traumatic encounter with Pai Mei, in which he snatched out her eye for displaying insolence – and which she repaid by killing him. Vernita Green's history remains enigmatic, though her impassioned defence of her child, seen where she begs The Bride to show 'mercy or...forgiveness...on behalf of my daughter' gives some insight into her determination to protect her home and family. In contrast, Budd, the one male member of the DiVAS, has grown overweight and become a heavy drinker since the El Paso incident, and there seems no doubt that if matched in a straightforward clash with The Bride he would come off worse. Therefore, his tactic is to unexpectedly shoot The Bride in

¹⁴³ The Crazy 88, though mainly men, are of course at the beck and call of a woman, O-Ren Ishii, and each is dispatched quickly by The Bride.

¹⁴⁴ Passman (1991) 90 distinguishes between the 'good' and 'bad' Amazons 'ultimately derived from Greek culture...[and] the less rigid Romano-Celtic tradition'. Although Elle Driver is a noticeable exception to Passman's blonde = good Amazon equation, it is still interesting to note O-Ren Ishii's and Vernita Green's dark hair ('bad' Amazons), and The Bride's blonde hair (the 'good' Amazon).

Fig. 40: The other Amazons of *Kill Bill*: O-Ren, Elle, Vernita, and GoGo.

the chest with rock salt when she attempts to charge into his trailer, then tranquilise her, before burying her alive – a scheme which The Bride triumphantly overcomes. Budd is himself eventually dispatched by Elle, who unleashes a deadly snake on him, and he dies a writhing, poisonous death on the floor of his own trailer. Elle herself expresses regret to Budd at the death she believes The Bride has suffered:

Right at this moment, the biggest ‘R’ I feel is regret. Regret that maybe the greatest warrior I have ever met, met her end at the hands of a bushwhacking, scrub alkie piece of sh*t like you. That woman deserved better.

It seems not coincidental that every man who dies in the *Kill Bill* films dies at the hands of a woman. Though at least one critic has described *Kill Bill 2* as ‘not a film engineered to secure or inspire female viewers’,¹⁴⁵ the director and, indeed, his lead actress, have cited the film as an ‘intensely empowered-female movie’.¹⁴⁶

The changes made to the modern Amazon over the years have largely reflected the changing mores in television and film trends. Tarantino’s films in particular are often discussed with reference to what is viewed by some as their gratuitous violence, and the *Kill Bill* films are no exception to this rule, having been described as containing ‘relentless bloodshed’ and ‘sequences that cross the line between jolting and sickening’.¹⁴⁷ However, part of the point of Tarantino’s violence in these films is the undeniable influence of kung fu, samurai, and western films, which included their own fair share of violence and blood-letting.¹⁴⁸ In addition, the central theme of revenge leads to an expected level of violence in repayment for what The Bride has suffered (which was very violent

¹⁴⁵ Christopher (2004).

¹⁴⁶ *The Making of Kill Bill: Volume 2* featurette.

¹⁴⁷ Scott (2003).

¹⁴⁸ The *Lone Wolf and Cub Collection* trumpets the series as ‘the most brutal, bloody and brilliant samurai series ever filmed...’!

to start with), and the fantastical world of Tarantino's films can allow for things initially thought impossible coming to fruition – including one woman dispatching eighty-eight yakuza single-handedly. In terms of contemporary film, violence has become part and parcel of action (and non-action) cinema, and this has happened at the same time as an increase in numbers of female lead characters, leading to the possibility of a character like *The Bride*.

The Bride fits into the mould of the modern Amazon very comfortably; not only is she a warrior woman, capable and trained in various martial arts, but she also displays the other characteristics which television producers and filmmakers have chosen to focus on as distinctive to such women – lack of husband, boyfriend, or powerful father figure, a lifestyle outside of the norm, an atypical relationship with her child. Though there are certainly other film Amazons who have come before her and paved the way, *The Bride* represents the pinnacle of the development of Amazon figures in the twenty-first century.

Conclusions

The problem is, when you're creating myth, everyone has their own vision of that myth.

Douglas Cramer, producer of *Wonder Woman*

The ancient Amazon, having been regarded in the past as an outsider, an alien figure who lives outside the boundaries of normal civilisation and is constantly defeated by Greek heroes, undergoes a transformation in the modern era of television and film. Particularly, due to the effect of second-wave feminism on such media, figures akin to the ancient Amazon appear in programs and in films and show that women can also be capable, skilled, and violent – attributes which may have previously been labeled ‘masculine’. These ‘modern Amazon’ figures share many traits with the ancient Amazons, many more in fact than I expected to discover when my present research was begun. One of the most interesting points to note about the interplay between ancient and modern is how the ‘outsider’ figure of the Amazon is integrated within television and film as a heroine for modern times. She may be a superhero saving the world (Wonder Woman), a warrior princess fighting marauding villains to protect others (Xena), a lone woman fighting off deadly aliens or cyborgs (Ripley/Sarah Connor), or a former assassin on a crusade to avenge those who wronged her terribly (The Bride). In each case, she is presented as the hero of the piece, not the villainess; she is the one who is presented to the audience as the champion, the character to cheer for and sympathise with, and who ultimately triumphs over the forces stacked against her. Such a sea-change from the ancient presentation of the Amazon – which was as an impressive fighter, but one who would inevitably be bested by a renowned Greek hero – can be partially attributed to feminism, and the increasing numbers of heroic women featured in media after the 1970s. It can

also be seen as a rewriting of ancient myth to fit the times in which the media is being created, an example of reception as informed by social context and mores.

In reception studies, a central focus is the analysis of how themes and characters of the ancient world can be retained, emphasised, or changed, according to the receiver's contexts and tastes. Mieke Bal has discussed the borrowing of signs and the ways in which they might be transformed in their reception:

The concept of intertextuality as deployed more recently implies precisely that: the sign borrowed, because it is a sign, inevitably comes with a meaning. Not that the later artist necessarily endorses that meaning, but he or she will have to deal with it: to reject or reverse it, ironize it, or simply, often unawares, insert it into the new text.¹

In addition, Stanford also suggested the potential fruits of reception in 1964:

If Dante had known the *Odyssey* he might not have conceived his epoch-making portrait of Ulysses in the *Inferno*. If James Joyce had not first met Ulysses in Charles Lamb's *Adventures of Ulysses* he might never have become aware of modern symbolisms in Ulysses. One cannot equate any particular author's knowledge of a myth with the total bulk of information available, and one cannot assume that an author's method of gathering and arranging his material is the same as a scholar's. Accident, ignorance, misunderstanding, or carelessness – fatal faults in a work of scholarship – may lead a creative author to valid new conceptions of the traditional myths.²

Such concepts have greatly informed the present study, and have assisted in formulating an assessment of the 'modern Amazons' from television and film which attempts to understand the adaptations made to the ancient archetype and what they might mean in each situation. Changes have been made to the

¹ Bal (1999) 9.

² Stanford (1964) 3.

Amazon in order to create a kind of ideal female heroine for modern times, and the fact that the archetype of the Amazon can be seen in these modern incarnations proves the inescapability of the ancient world, the universal curiosity with women warriors, and a newer appreciation for women's capabilities.

All Amazons, ancient and modern, are singled out as different from 'normal' women because of a certain incident in their past, or a particular kind of background or upbringing – or both, as the case may be. This incident or background has moulded them into the kind of woman who can take on villains or other opponents willingly and ferociously. This is in marked contrast to ancient heroes, such as Achilles, Jason, or Theseus: these men, though sometimes touched by tragic circumstances or forced to embark on epic journeys, are seldom *made* warriors by such events. They take place after they have become warriors, which is a *natural course of life* for them. Women of the ancient world, however – accorded roles restricted to the confines of the *oikos* and suspected when daring to venture outside them – are never expected to achieve such feats. Many of them have a male figure (father, brother, or husband) who protects or controls them, and therefore they need not and *can not* become 'Amazonian'. Even the 'fictional' women of tragedy and myth subscribe to this paradigm, as does Electra, for instance. Some outside force or extraordinary lifestyle must be held to account for those women – Amazons – who behave 'like men' in war. Their intrusion into the masculine sphere of warfare must be somehow accounted for, and thus the stories of the Amazons' divine heritage, and strange lives and customs begin to proliferate, leading to ever more extravagant inventions.

The first chapter of this study revealed that the overwhelming majority of literary and artistic works focused on the abilities of the Amazons as warriors first and foremost and that this aspect of their lives was very much a defining feature of these figures. The tales of Amazons battling against heroes such as Heracles,

Theseus, Achilles and Bellerophon became part of the canon of Greek mythology, to be constantly evoked by successive poets and artists. The battles against the famed Greek heroes found literal expression in the works of Euripides, Apollodorus, Plutarch and Quintus Smyrnaeus, as well as many more, some of which are no longer extant – the epic cycle’s *Aethiopis* being just one of such lost pieces. In addition, Amazon-like figures, *viragines*, feature in Herodotus, Vergil, Silius Italicus, and Tacitus, and these women embody many of the same characteristics ascribed to the mythical Amazons. All of these women – Hippolyta, Penthesilea, Artemisia, Camilla, Asbyte, Boudica, to name the most memorable who appear in detailed poetic and historical vignettes – display courage and ability in battle, destroying enemies with great skill; and they are almost universally virginal or widows, so are without husband or other controlling man in their lives. Historic or ethnographic writers were also fond of recounting the odd lives led by communities of Amazons when not at war, including traditions that would seem highly unusual to the writers’ audiences and readers: not only are they the offspring of the god of war, Ares, but they live in single-sex societies which operate in complete reversal of what Greeks thought of as normal, mutilating their male babies and searing off one breast. The overall impression of the Amazons is one of a strange culture at the fringes of the Greek world, a military force to be reckoned with but which ultimately could be defeated when faced with a hero or army that possessed the required *andreia*.

The art of the ancient world was necessarily limited in how much it could reflect of the Amazons’ lives. As a result, a large proportion of such works dealt solely with Amazons in battle, either against Heracles, Theseus, Achilles or nameless Greeks. Such art often found its most impressive manifestations in monumental sculpture of sacred buildings such as the Parthenon or the Temple of Apollo at Bassae, where lengthy friezes could illustrate multiple figures battling concurrently. Many vase-painters also chose to show many participants mid-

battle, with a duel placed centrally: still, in some of the most memorable battle-scenes, vase-painters chose to focus on a single woman in battle against her Greek adversary with minimal companions, as seen on the vases by Exekias and the Penthesileia Painter. The historical immediacy of the Persian Wars, combined with increasing contact with Scythians and Thracians, also may have caused the proliferation of exotically-dressed Amazons, particularly in Athenian art. Whatever each artist's exact motivation may have been, the vast quantity and prominence of Amazon representations is testament to the ancient fascination for the warrior woman. It is just this fascination, I believe, that led to such a figure becoming popular in the modern media of television and film, as Part Two discussed.

Following on from the investigation of how the ancient world responded to and used the myths associated with the Amazon, Chapter Three turned to television. In particular, it investigated how two particular case studies used and adapted Amazonian characters, and how changing social mores affected these characters and the representational possibilities available to them. In the first case study, *Wonder Woman* (1975-9), the central character was shown to share many attributes with the ancient Amazon, though some were modified. The most dramatic alteration was Wonder Woman's stance as a pacifist: she fights only out of necessity and in defence, and her weapons – including super-strength, a magic lasso and bullet-deflecting bracelets – reinforce this, with the lasso in particular emphasising her preference for persuasion over force. However, when Wonder Woman is placed in violent situations, the abilities and skills she displays are impressive. Further aligning her with the ancient Amazons are her unusual lifestyle, which revolves around a dual identity (as with most superheroes) of Diana Prince/Wonder Woman; her status as an 'outsider' (as a former resident of Amazon utopia, Paradise Island, and 'immigrant' to America); and her significant independence from any controlling men in her life. Other adaptations were

made to the ancient model, however, and assisted in fitting Wonder Woman more comfortably into the social context of the 1970s: the inclusion of female opponents and villains, and the positioning of Wonder Woman as a victorious, ‘universal’ hero both marked a departure from the ancient concept of the Amazon. Amazons of the Greek imagination were solely faced with *male* opponents (since, by very definition, they are the only women who dare to fight men), and were always the enemy in Greek myth, never the victorious hero. But when women became able to be cast as both villain *and* hero, and when a woman could be the hero for not only America but sometimes the entire world, it is clear that shifting social attitudes have enabled this re-imagining of the Amazon. In keeping with the comic-book ethos of Wonder Woman’s original incarnation, such features adapted the Amazon to both her superhero milieu as well as to the 1970s in which second-wave feminism was making such advances for recognition of gender equality. Overall, Wonder Woman’s identity as a ‘modern Amazon’ is affirmed quite clearly through the traits adopted and adapted by the creators of the show. Though not every characteristic of the ancient Amazon remains untouched within Wonder Woman’s personage, this is the key to my position on reception studies within the present investigation: recognising the importance of changes made to ancient ideas and accepting new interpretations as valid – indeed, as equally revealing as any verbatim retelling of such ideas.

Xena: Warrior Princess (1995-2001) was selected as the second case-study for this research, and while the central character Xena shares much in common with Wonder Woman, additional features also assist in presenting her as even closer to the ancient Amazon archetype. Xena possesses a broad range of combat skills and abilities, which she is shown to put to both nefarious (in the past) and virtuous (in the present) uses, and these skills have been garnered from exotic and distant parts of the known world, particularly the East. She is also shown to lead an unusual, nomadic and decidedly non-domestic lifestyle (which extends to her

approach to motherhood), and her lack of reliance on any men is taken to the extreme since her only (and closest) companion is another woman, Gabrielle. It is this relationship with Gabrielle that we might take as a starting point to discuss the divergences Xena makes from the ancient Amazon archetype. Many fans read the relationship as a lesbian one, and writers of the show managed to maintain this so-called ‘subtext’ while also ostensibly representing Xena as heterosexual through her occasional dalliances with other men. To me, the varying interpretations of Xena’s sexuality afford yet another way of illuminating her lifestyle as unusual (in relation to the apparent societal norms of Xena’s world), as well as aligning her with the Amazons’ women-only societies which were free of the desires or domination of men.

Like Wonder Woman, Xena also faces several female opponents (including tribes of actual ‘Amazons’), which provides another departure from the tradition of Amazons battling only males. As was seen in the discussion of Wonder Woman above, such roles for women enable a greater range of representation and can challenge stereotypes of women. The ability to even hint at a lead character’s lesbian relationship, however, is something which would have been impossible in the 1970s. However, by the late 1990s, the increasing visibility and broader social acceptance of gay and lesbian lifestyles enabled Xena’s creators just such an opportunity. The social context and milieu in which a character such as the modern Amazon can be created and become popular is exceedingly important. Without changes in attitudes toward gender equality, it is possible that the modern Amazon may never have seen the light of day. Thus it is clear that both *Wonder Woman* and *Xena* benefited greatly from transformations in social attitudes, which in turn had a subsequent effect on various aspects of their central characters’ lives.

My research turned from television to film in Chapter Four, and three case studies were utilised in order to establish the development of the cinematic Amazon. The first two minor case studies examined *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986), and *The Terminator* (1984) and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), and singled out for discussion the lead female characters in these films: Ripley and Sarah Connor. These figures both showed some of the characteristics established in the Introduction to be essential to the archetype of the Amazon, but Sarah was shown to be less convincing (particularly in *The Terminator*) as an Amazon, due to her heavy reliance on Kyle Reese in the beginning of the film. However, some promising features did manifest themselves, which we shall now review.

For both Ripley and Sarah, their potential as Amazon figures is fully realised in the second film of each franchise, as their characters become more clearly established. Ripley's ability to evade the marauding aliens is largely dependent on luck in *Alien*, though she does also display significant independence, as well as ingenuity in finally disposing of the alien in the ultimate scenes. In *The Terminator* Sarah is shown to be a reluctant participant in the events which unfold, and is coached through them by a man, Kyle Reese, on whom she relies several times to rescue her – though by the final scenes she too has adapted to the situation and proves her mettle when faced with the Terminator. However, *Aliens* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* cast Ripley and Sarah in a far more warrior-like mould, with both showing more combat skill and using numerous weapons against opponents, and also displaying more independence from men, including rejecting any notion of romantic liaisons. Sarah is also placed in a context which singles her out as unusual: though Ripley's lifestyle is not necessarily out of the ordinary, Sarah's knowledge of future events has led to not only incarceration in a mental asylum but a heavy burden being placed upon her conscience, which in turn has influenced her entire perception of motherhood due to the importance of John's

survival. This unusual experience of motherhood, as we have seen, is another trait which helps define Sarah as a modern Amazon, and in fact this applies to Ripley as well: her interaction and bond with Newt, the orphaned girl found on Acheron, is far from normal, overshadowed as it is by the battle against the aliens and for survival. These two case studies, situated within their own context of cinema of the late 1970s to early 1990s, can be seen as influenced by movements in social attitudes as was the case with the television case studies discussed above. Ripley and Sarah mark a decisive move to include women as actual stars in the genre of action cinema, which was certainly influenced by advances toward gender equality and recognition of the capacity for women to fulfil such roles. Though Faludi, for example, has argued for an overall negative response to feminism in popular film during the 1980s, demonstrated through the rise of action films in which mainly men handled multiple weapons and dispatched the enemy, it is important to note that this very genre also gave rise to these first cinematic Amazons. And though they may have been discounted by some feminist film theorists as merely ‘men in women’s bodies’, a closer inspection of their conformity to the Amazon archetype reveals that they are very much *female warriors*, and displaying markers of this femaleness (such as being mothers or showing compassion) need not discount their identities as such.

Having begun Chapter Four with the case studies of *Alien* and *Aliens* and *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2*, the discussion then moved on the central case study of *Kill Bill Volume 1* (2003) and *Volume 2* (2004). The character of The Bride from these two films proved to be something of a culmination of all previously-discussed modern Amazons, as she embodied each of the characteristics set forth in the Introduction. The Bride is shown to have mastered many different fighting styles, including kung fu and samurai swordplay, and even possesses a key skill – the five point palm exploding heart technique – with which she can triumph over her final enemy, Bill. Key encounters in each film help illustrate The Bride’s skills

against her opponents, as well as how she has obtained such skills: I classify these episodes as *aristeiai* as they serve much the same purpose as the *aristeia* of an epic hero, in which the warrior is glorified through a scene illustrating the destruction of opponents. In addition to The Bride's fighting abilities, she also displays remarkable independence from men. The only male love interests for The Bride are couched within the context of flashbacks: the man she would have married in El Paso, Tommy, who was killed by her former DiVAS colleagues; and Bill, whom she left after discovering her pregnancy. No love scenes are ever shown in either film, underlining the fact that these relationships remain closed books, firmly in the past. The very nature of her revenge entails a great degree of independence and self-sufficiency, and so this also highlights the degree of autonomy from any controlling male figures which The Bride enjoys.

The Bride has led an unconventional life both in the past and the present, and this also includes an experience of motherhood differentiated from what would be considered 'normal'. Her former identity as an assassin and her new path of vengeance that is traced in the films are far from the standard motifs or plotlines of Hollywood cinema. The Bride's relationship with her daughter BB has been fractured and altered because of Bill's actions; and in addition, her approach to motherhood is shown to be unconventional in a fascinating scene in which she and four-year-old BB watch a violent samurai film together. A further aspect of The Bride's Amazonian identity is her position as an 'outsider' – in particular, the way she has been positioned outside of the norms of western film geography, through her easy familiarity with Eastern cultures and methods of fighting. Although the use of Eastern techniques such as kung fu have gained popularity in Western cinema particularly over the last thirty years, a *woman* wielding such techniques – and a blonde, American woman at that – is something quite new and instructive in terms of this research. This serves to differentiate her when she is faced with a myriad of Japanese yakuza, for instance in the House of Blue

Leaves sequence; it is also turned to her own advantage in her interaction with Hattori Hanzo, which progresses from his dismissal of her as a simple American tourist to acceptance of her status as a ‘yellow-haired warrior’.

A final point of note which serves to separate The Bride from the ancient archetype and yet align her with modern incarnations of the same figure (such as Wonder Woman and Xena) is the motif of female opponents. The significance of such other women has been seen in the previous discussions to indicate the representational possibilities available to women in the current social climate, in contrast to the ancient world’s concept of Amazons as the *only* women who were *antianeirai*. The same forces are at work here, with The Bride facing off against Vernita Green, O-Ren Ishii and her bodyguard GoGo Yubari, and Elle Driver, as well as a female assassin and several female yakuza. Yet again, the combat capabilities of women are showcased, illustrating their increasing visibility in Hollywood action cinema.

Variations of the Amazon archetype are apparent in both television and film, and an assessment of their key characteristics in this investigation’s case studies has shown a remarkable number of similarities between the ancient Amazon and her modern incarnations. Combat abilities are a significant part of the character of all Amazons: they must be able to physically match their enemy, whether that is through utilizing weapons, technology, or martial arts. They also generally rely little (if at all) on men for either romantic or physical support, leading to a great degree of independence from them. Additionally, their lives are all located, significantly, outside the ‘norm’: they have unusual lifestyles, communities, careers, or identities, marking them out as unconventional. A key consideration, however, is the vastly different social context of the television series and films of this research, as this is the central motivation for modifications made to the

Amazon archetype. Within the milieu of ancient Greece, Amazons were a troubling spectre, being women *and* warriors, as well as barbarian outsiders; therefore their defeat by male Greek heroes was something to be celebrated in poetry and history as ‘the order of the world [being] reestablished’.³ Within the milieu of the late twentieth-century, however, during which second-wave feminism spearheaded advances toward gender equality and demanded women’s rights over their own destinies, the Amazon is able to become a positive symbol, one which can signify the growing acceptance that women can take on the role of ‘action hero’ as capably as any man. Such a social context allows the female warrior – particularly when she is cast as the ‘hero’ of a show such as *Wonder Woman* or films like *Kill Bill 1* and *2* – to be triumphant over her enemies; and thus the adaptations made, in these modern receptions of the Amazon, can help rectify her constant defeat which was present in Greek *mythopoiesis*. Wonder Woman, Xena, Ripley, Sarah Connor, and The Bride are all triumphant victors over villains, warlords, aliens, cyborgs, and assassins, and their efforts in vanquishing such foes form the plots of these television shows and films – much as Greek heroes’ exploits against the Amazons once served as material for orators, epic poets, and historians. Now the tide has turned, and the modern world has enabled these Amazons to be the celebrated heroes.

³ Loraux (1986) 146.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>AW</i>	<i>Ancient World</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>
<i>CP</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CW</i>	<i>Classical World</i>
<i>EJCS</i>	<i>European Journal of Cultural Studies</i>
<i>FMS</i>	<i>Feminist Media Studies</i>
<i>FQ</i>	<i>Film Quarterly</i>
<i>G&R</i>	<i>Greece & Rome</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>IJCS</i>	<i>International Journal of Cultural Studies</i>
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>JAC</i>	<i>Journal of American Culture</i>
<i>JFV</i>	<i>Journal of Film and Video</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JIES</i>	<i>Journal of Indo-European Studies</i>
<i>JPC</i>	<i>Journal of Popular Culture</i>
<i>JPF&T</i>	<i>Journal of Popular Film & Television</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>RhM</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie</i>
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>

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