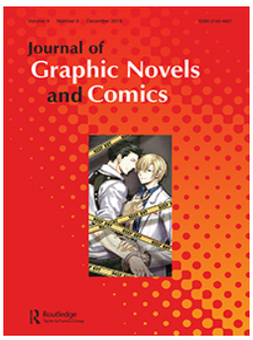

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ARTICLE

Wonder Woman and the public humanities: a reflection on the 2016 Wonder Woman Symposium

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ABSTRACT

In honor of the 75th anniversary of the comic book super heroine Wonder Woman in 2016, Kent State University and Cleveland Public Library partnered to celebrate the intersections of public literacy, comics, and feminism in a jointly sponsored symposium with support from the Ohio Humanities Council. The 2016 Wonder Woman Symposium partnered these powerful public institutions in Northeast Ohio, taking up the historical trends that have changed the world of comics, American popular culture, and feminism. Centering on the figure of Wonder Woman and her heirs, this symposium featured addresses by major creators in the industry and historians of the comics world, and workshops by comics creators on creating graphic narratives and comics. This celebration paid respect to "herstory" while recognizing Wonder Woman's perpetual relevance to our present day, and beyond. This article reflects on the 2016 Wonder Woman Symposium, public humanities and the future of comics.

KEYWORDS

Wonder Woman; Superheroine; Public Humanities; Feminism; Gender

We are honoured to edit this special issue of the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* celebrating Wonder Woman and the female superhero. This, our inaugural issue as American Editors, collects the papers, interviews and roundtable shared at the Wonder Woman Symposium, an event that brought Kent State University and the Cleveland Public Library together in September 2016. In honour of the 75th anniversary of Wonder Woman, Kent State University and the Cleveland Public Library with generous support from the Ohio Humanities Council partnered to celebrate the intersections of public literacy, comics, and feminism in an academic and community symposium. The partnership offered a public space to consider the historical trends that have changed the world of comics, American popular culture, and our shared feminist futures. Centring on the figure of Wonder Woman – and her heirs – our gathering of artists, scholars, and readers featured plenary addresses by major creators in the industry and historians of the comics world, workshops by cartoonists on creating graphic narratives and comics, and even included the 'fanfare' of cosplay and children's craft corners. The forum sought to highlight both regional and national talent. Our celebration of Wonder Woman's anniversary paid respect to 'herstory' while recognizing her perpetual relevance to our present day, and beyond. While this

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symposium was held in 2016, the discussions we had in the library and our focus on female agency, power, and activism are now more relevant than ever before. What follows is part white paper and part critical analysis of the public humanities, comics, and Wonder Woman. Our project had several aims, which we hope to capture in this Introduction.

This project began as a discussion around the power of the comics form, its increasing popularity, its rootedness in the community, and in the history of our own region of Northeast Ohio. As we had conversations about comics both in the classroom and outside of it, we often returned to a similar thought, that while comics has finally entered the academy today, it has long flourished in spaces outside of university classrooms. It took the academy many years to embrace the idea of comics and material culture: as debates over high theory prospered, the reading public was often overlooked, or worse, denigrated. Thus, the comics form reached new audiences through mainstream and underground publications. And for anyone who knows the history of comics, this is a familiar tale: the realms of medicine[1] and high culture[2] have ever disavowed the value of comics, however, they may enrapture popular audiences. Throughout the twentieth-century, new reading publics were forming around the circulation of comics whether on playgrounds and in dime stores,[3] within communities formed and represented in the anthology series such as *Wimmen's Comix*[4] or *Gay Comix*, or within the new groups born in the comic book shops.[5] While we do not have the space to linger over the specifics of the many reading communities that formed, we recognize that the comics now analysed within academic discourse largely flourished outside of the academy. By hosting our event in the gem of The Cleveland Public Library (while supported by Kent State University and the Ohio Humanities Council) we could respect that uniquely popular and public origin of comics. Cleveland is the place where superheroes began (we even have a welcoming statue of Superman at the airport!) and the Cleveland Public Library was regularly visited by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster.[6]

Andrew Carnegie once said, '[t]here is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration' (Carnegie). Wonder Woman is an heir to Carnegie's vision of the public library system as she stresses equality, communality, and an enlightened message of empowerment and agency to girls, and women, while offering a message of civic service and conscience to boys and men. Our celebration of her anniversary offered us all opportunities to work together. We were invested in our local classrooms and communities, celebrating the valuable skills humanistic thought offers while respecting comics' creators, characters and consumers. And it must be said that it is only within a major liberal arts research university that such an innovative project could find support and furthermore find its way into a distinguished scholarly journal such as the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. We thus drew our vision from the academy's interest in literary change and the library's investment in public literacy and the community. Our shared appreciation for these anchors of democracy has never been more profound as we embrace our role now making a distinctively American contribution to this distinguished British journal.

Communing in the Cleveland Public Library

We chose the image of Wonder Woman on the front cover of *Ms.* magazine because it captures the active humanities work we hoped to achieve and continue to support in our work within the academy, with public libraries in Ohio, and in the larger community. And as will be well known to the readers of this journal, it was Gloria Steinem who placed the original 'Golden Age' Wonder Woman on the cover of *Ms.* in 1972. It was she who convinced DC comics to give Wonder Woman her powers back. We are all in her debt for her pioneering work as a female superhero to a generation of feminists. As Wonder Woman boldly strides across the cityscape of that front cover, so we followed into the city library, an establishment of free speech. In *BiblioTech: Why Libraries Matter More than Ever in the Age of Google*, John Palfrey suggests that public libraries 'can offer important alternatives to the services provided by the corporate sector, which will always have incentives to offer biased, limited and costly access to knowledge' (2015, 130). The public library serves as a refuge for ideas and education – a necessity in our age of privatization – one that should be celebrated and preserved by scholars and teachers. David Shumway has argued:

> The humanities must be public so that the public can come to understand them and thus be willing to lend them their support. Public support for the sciences has long been promoted by public relations efforts designed to translate scientific research into discourse suitable for the lay audience. This includes not only efforts tied directly to research budgets of scientists themselves, but also of dedicated media outlets such as *Scientific American* and the *New York Times* science reporters. It is instructive to compare the way science figures in the news media with the way the humanities do (2016, 41).

Kent State University stands at the cutting edge of interdisciplinary work in the integration of the science of the mind and creativity. Our event reflects how this public university – one of the first land-grant colleges in the American Midwest-sustains public discourse and academic learning in spaces that expand the classroom out to everyone. Turning outward into the community, the study of literature is not defined by departmental politics and specialties but rather by engagement. The 'People's University' of the Cleveland Public Library offers free education to the community. Martha Nussbaum considers the role of the humanities in education, and our duty to the public when she writes, 'Aristotle argues that the goal of moral and political philosophy ought to be "not theory but practice." The Hellenistic philosophers who following him strongly concurred, holding that the philosopher or political thinker was like a doctor, who did not fulfil his task if he just talked about the state of the patient and made no recommendations for cure' (1997, 208). Our celebration of the iconic figure of Wonder Woman allowed for sustained thought on a popular subject, aiming to cultivate tenants of humanism, as well as 'searching critical thought, daring imagination, empathetic understanding of human experience of many different kinds and understanding of the complexity of the world we live in' (2010, 7). Nussbaum links humanist scholarship, communication and engagement with global democratic citizenship – a vision represented by the distinctly American figure of Wonder Woman – an ambassador for peace understands the link of love with justice.

Wonder Woman, on her 75th anniversary, represents the power of partnership, public discourse, and enlightened female empowerment. Across popular culture, few figures hold such sway over so many. Diana Prince, Wonder Woman has been world ambassador who

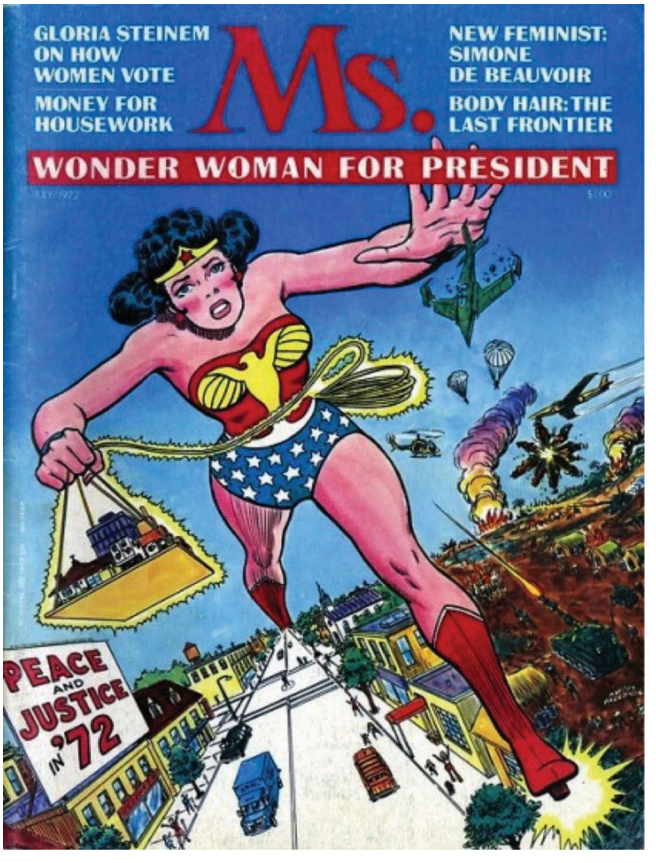

Figure 1. *Ms.* magazine #1 (1972). Permission granted by *Ms.*

like all of us believes we are stronger together. We chose the iconic 1972 cover of *Ms.* magazine with Wonder Woman ending world hunger and war as our promotional image for the event on our flyers and other materials (Figure 1). It was also serendipitous that the cover also proclaimed, 'Wonder Woman for President!' in 2016 as Hillary Clinton, the first female candidate nominated by a major party for President was running for the same position. Throughout our promotion of the Wonder Woman Symposium, we celebrated female power, and the need for systemic change in the world. While our hopes were ultimately dashed, at the time of the symposium we were quite energized at the prospect of the first female president of the United States.

As we promoted our event throughout the region we quickly learned that nearly everyone has their own Wonder Woman story. Wonder Woman *is* Lynda Carter to some (today they claim Gal Gadot) while others got to know Diana from reading comics in the local library systems, or they had personal stories of receiving Wonder Woman socks as a Christmas present. The positive response to Wonder Woman herself allowed us to obtain partnerships with local non-profits and businesses who directly assisted us in our programming. In the end, we partnered with nearly 30 non-profits, businesses, and University departments, high schools, and colleges (Figure 2). As with the partnerships, the presenters' diversity was also integral to our plans.

Figure 2. The Sponsors of the Wonder Woman Symposium.

The line-up

Our participants were major critics and contributors to the world of comics. Included in this list is Peter Coogan, who credits his undergraduate advisor at Kent State University, Vera Camden, one of the editors of this volume with uttering the five most important words in his career: 'why don't you study comics?' (2006, i). This journal's founding editors Joan Ormrod and David Huxley represented equally pioneering work. Research librarian and comics

historian, Carol Tilley gave voice to historical context. Phil Jimenez, Genevieve Valentine, and Cameron Stewart allowed us to hear the voices and images of comics creators. The Underground Comix movement was represented by Trina Robbins, a founder of *Wimmen's Comix* and also an important bridge figure in facilitating the return of Wonder Woman to her former glory as conceived by William Marston (Busiek and Robbins 1986). Apropos that legacy, we heard talks by Christie Marston, the granddaughter of William Moulton Marston and Laura Siegel Larson, the daughter of Jerry Siegel, each of whom brought us insight and inspiration from personal memories (Figure 3). Siegel Larson shared the origins

Figure 3. Presenters of the Wonder Woman Symposium. Art By Christopher Darling.

of Lois Lane and Marston contested the myths about her family. Finally, we were delighted that Greg Rucka who could not attend the symposium was willing to be added to the list of pieces in this collection in an interview about his work on *Wonder Woman*. Each of these figures represented a different aspect of comics even as the hybrid nature of the form fostered our success. As will be clear from the pieces collected in this volume, the voices of each presenter were distinct, and brought a signature interpretation of Wonder Woman, female heroism, and the wonder of comics as a medium.

Enough of celebration: now let's face the dark side of comics

Remarkably, in the year of Wonder Woman's anniversary, DC Comics did very little to celebrate her character. Indeed, DC Comics relaunch of their comics line entitled 'Rebirth' paid little attention to Wonder Woman. With the publication of *DC Universe: Rebirth in* May 2016, Geoff Johns along with a team of artists revamped the DC Universe (Johns et al. 2016). Wonder Woman appears along with other women, but is never given a voice. The issue which focuses on legacy in superhero comics does not celebrate Wonder Woman! While other characters – all male – pass on their mantles to other characters, or bond with their mentees and protégés, the story only reveals that Wonder Woman has a long-lost brother, a story later told by James Robinson. In the second chapter of the comic, entitled 'Legacy,' the reader sees the legacy of characters including The Atom, Green Lantern, Blue Beetle and the Flash continued on in the bodies of new heroes. The new Green Lantern, the only female in this comic to be seen continuing the legacy of another, turns to a man, Hal Jordan, as she becomes a Green Lantern of Earth. While legacy defines the life of the superhero, either in their origin or those they inspire, it seems women do not have legacies in superhero comics. Women may be heirs, but they do not promote history and followings. This is a systemic issue as Jennifer K. Stuller writes, [t]here are few examples of women mentoring superhero women" (2013, 22). Only the men in this comic are given a history, their bodies are archives, with the purpose of inspiring others in the universe and with heirs to continue their identities. For women in superhero comics, *Rebirth* suggests that men hold the power, which women can then borrow or continue. While *Rebirth* is only one comic, it was an editorially mandated story, and for DC Comics, it was the building block on which they would establish the next few years of their storytelling. The *Rebirth* story grants insight into how DC Comics continues to see their female heroes. It is not a pretty picture.

And Wonder Woman would continue to suffer. In the same year of her 75th anniversary outside of comics, after our symposium, Wonder Woman was announced as a U. N. Ambassador (Cavna 2016), but within months her appointment was ended (McCann 2016). The image of Wonder Woman used for her ambassadorship proclaimed: 'Think of all the Wonders We Can Do.' (Figure 4) The idea here was that Wonder Woman might inspire girls, women and all of us to be empowered to make a change. But the protests and the petitions impacted the decision to end Wonder Woman's tenure as an ambassador. It is not surprising that Wonder Woman's position ended far too soon becoming a repository for political snarling. As Michael Cavna (2016) writing for *The Washington Post* stated upon Wonder Woman receiving her U. N. position,

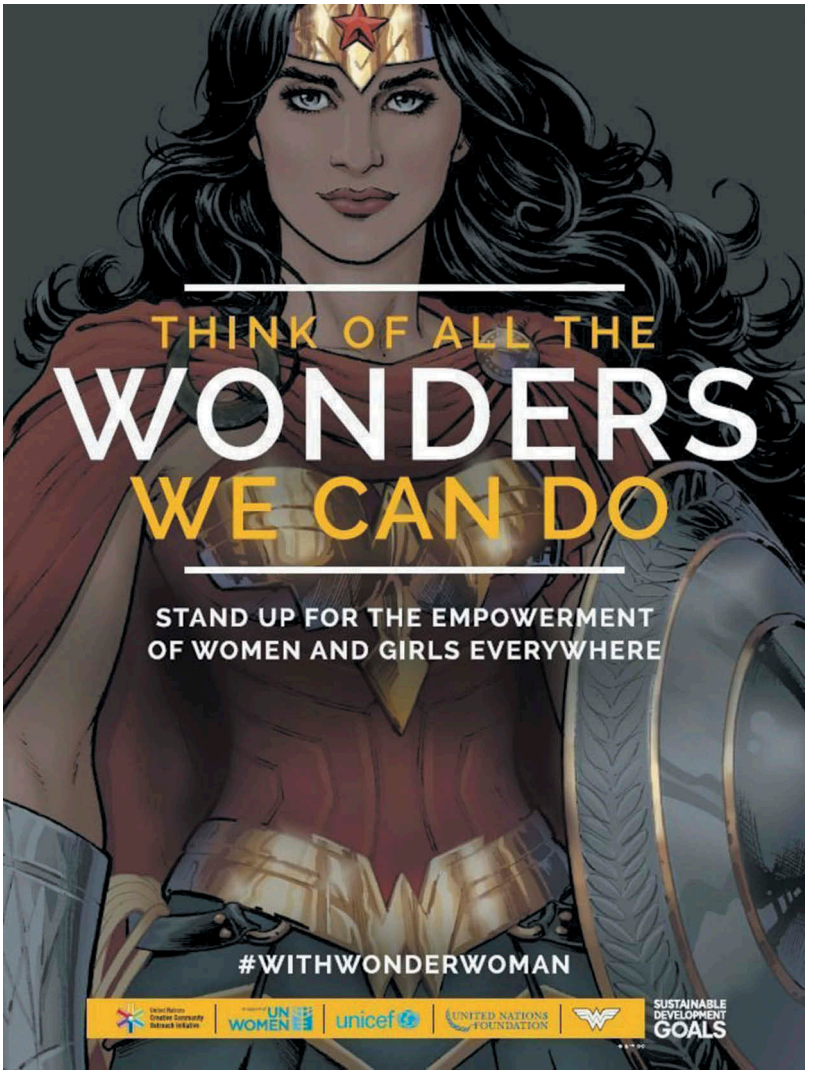

Figure 4. "Think of All the Wonders We Can Do." U.N. Wonder Woman Campaign Advertisement.

> [f]rom her origin to her sexual orientation right down to her latest toned-down outfit, arguably no figure in all of superhero comics is more saddled with political scrutiny great and small than Wonder Woman. She projects strength with compassion; onto her, the world has projected so much else.

Philip Smith in a recent article explores the political nature of Wonder Woman suggesting that the character has been seen as a political leader since Marston's issue of 'Wonder Woman for President.' However, because of that Wonder Woman has been scrutinized as only women in politics have been. Turning to criticism of women including Hillary Clinton, Theresa May, Angela Merkel, and Nicola Sturgeon, he recognizes that women are criticized for taking care of themselves

and imagines if Wonder Woman were not taking care of herself, she would be seen as slovenly. He says this because much of the criticism of Wonder Woman relates to her appearance. Smith writes,

> When the debate concerns her appearance, she has effectively already lost. She exists in a system that holds women to an impossible and self-contradictory standard, where she is read as sexualized and then punished for that reading, and where the only way to be regarded as a legitimate public figure is to reject any signs of femininity. Wonder Woman's removal from political office ended one part of this debate, but did nothing to address the underlying problem (2018, 240).

Smith's remarks echo those of Lynda Carter who in an interview for *The New York Times* stated, 'She's an iconic defender, she's archetypal. It's the ultimate sexist thing to say that's all you can see, when you think about Wonder Woman, all you can think about is a sex object' (Williams 2016). Wonder Woman does not represent all women, but to dismiss the U. N. campaign on the looks of the character is indeed sexist. The impact of the campaign, whether minimal or great could not be imagined. She was denigrated from the beginning.

The lack of female legacy highlighted in *Rebirth* and further disregarded in the attacks on the U. N. campaign has historically been pervasive in the superhero genre. While there is no lack of female superheroes, they have rarely been mothers or mentors as already noted. Women have acted as plot points, supporting characters and girlfriends. When women have continued on the legacy of a predecessor, it often comes from men and they do not pass it on. The history of the superheroine is one of being depowered, punished and forgotten. In 1999 Gail Simone compiled an original list of superheroines whom as she describes, were 'either depowered, raped, or cut up and stuck in the refrigerator' In fact, the statement that women have been cut up and stuck in a refrigerator is not a hyperbole, but rather part of comics history. Green Lantern's girlfriend in *Green Lantern* #54 (1994) was indeed chopped up and put in a refrigerator. As Simone continues, she states, 'Some have been revived, even improved – although the question remains as to why they were thrown in the wood chipper in the first place' (1999). Simone made this statement nearly twenty years ago and while there has been improvement in the portrayal of female characters, many women are still 'thrown in the wood chipper.' Gloria Steinem would save Wonder Woman from a similar fate of being depowered, depressed, and degraded.

As we celebrated the myth of Wonder Woman, one of the efforts of our symposium was to address not only female power, but the legacy of the female hero. That is why we turned to focus on Wonder Woman and her heirs in the broadest sense, because we wanted to consider many different images of women. While Wonder Woman the icon has been a beacon of hope for so many, Diana in the comics has not always been treated with respect, nor have creators allowed her to remain a stalwart image of power, something we hope is changing with the success of the movie and new creators exploring her story including G. Willow Wilson and Kelly Sue DeConnick. While we cannot tell the history of female superheroes or Wonder Woman here,[7] different parts of the character's story and the history of female heroes will be addressed throughout the issue. Both of these topics are too large for a single Introduction, instead, with an

eye toward the future, as was the goal of our symposium, we grounded the history of violence, and look toward women in comics that are creating stories that embrace mother-daughter love and mentorship between women in these next sections.

Wonder Woman: a history and a hope

While Wonder Woman was not the first female superhero, she is certainly the most popular. She has also lasted the test of time as she reaches toward her 80th year. She has never left popular culture, whether we think of the Golden Age Wonder Woman, or Lynda Carter – it seems we all have a Wonder Woman. Because of the sustained presence of the character in popular culture, Wonder Woman represents feminism for many and the archive of *Wonder Woman* comics provides a long history of women's status – for better or worse. For example, the Wonder Woman who emerged during World War II lost her powers and other hallmarks of her identity as she proceeded into the 50s and 60s. In *Wonder Women! The Untold Story of American Superheroines* (2012), Gloria Steinem tells the powerful story of when she was able to persuade DC Comics to give Wonder Woman her powers back after she had lost them under the reigns of Denny O'Neil. When Steinem found out that Wonder Woman 'had fallen on hard times,' she contacted DC Comics, with a wish to have Wonder Woman's super-powers restored. DC Comics was reluctant, as Steinem recalls, but they finally called her up and conceded: '"Okay. She has her magical powers back, her lasso, her bracelets, she has Paradise Island back, and she has a black African Amazon sister named Nubia. Now will you leave me alone!"'[8] The problem here was not just that Wonder Woman was in a white jump suit, had lost her powers, her homeland and everything that symbolized her connection to her mother, but furthermore as Tim Hanley describes this era: 'Diana's solution for any problem was to hit it or blow it up or, more often than not, kill it.' (2014, 179). Diana had been stripped of her history, and in her place was a character very different than the Wonder Woman of Marston's era who saw rehabilitation of villains as integral to ending the violence that formed them and that which they continue to engender. Or even years later the Wonder Woman of Gail Simone who stated: '[w]e have a saying, my people. "Don't kill if you can wound, don't wound if you can pacify, and don't raise your hand at all until you've first extended it."' (Simone and Chang 2008). It was this type of message that inspired Steinem and generation of comics readers and further dignified Wonder Woman as a character all her own in the world of superheroes.

While Wonder Woman has always been a central figure of hope in a genre dominated by narratives of war and violence, she has also been the recipient of that violence. The history of female superheroes, which began in a time of war as a necessary response for justice and inspiration have faced nothing but war and violence since these early years of powerful images of women. In fact, the erasure of women in comics that Simone highlights with her 'Women in Refrigerators' is no more evident than in Steinem's statement in an essay she wrote in a forward to a reprinting of several Wonder Woman stories. She wrote, 'As a little girl, Wonder Woman was the only female superhero, so she was irresistible. She was literally the only game in town, the only hero that made you feel good about yourself' (1972). While Wonder Woman

would be the last action heroine standing, Steinem's statement is a bit overdetermined but also quite revealing. As a child reading comics, Steinem may have witnessed the emergence of the female superheroines such as Miss Fury, The Blonde Phantom, Black Canary, Miss America, Moon Girl along with so many others and she would have also witnessed their erasure. The silencing of women in comics is thus confirmed by Steinem's statement that Wonder Woman was the only game in town because by 1972 when Steinem places Wonder Woman on the cover of *Ms.* there was nobody else present or remembered.[9] Significantly, the fact that Steinem places Wonder Woman in her powered 1940s state further underscores the fact that there was nobody else left. Even Steinem's contemporary Wonder Woman had no powers, so she had to return to a previous time. There was indeed no game in town by 1972. For the history of feminism and the female superhero this was a defining moment, lobbying for images of powerful women. This 'Golden Age' Wonder Woman influenced many. In 1970 Trina Robbins placed Wonder Woman in her golden age costume on the front cover of *It Ain't Me Babe* (Figure 5). We used this image as well to promote the symposium as it

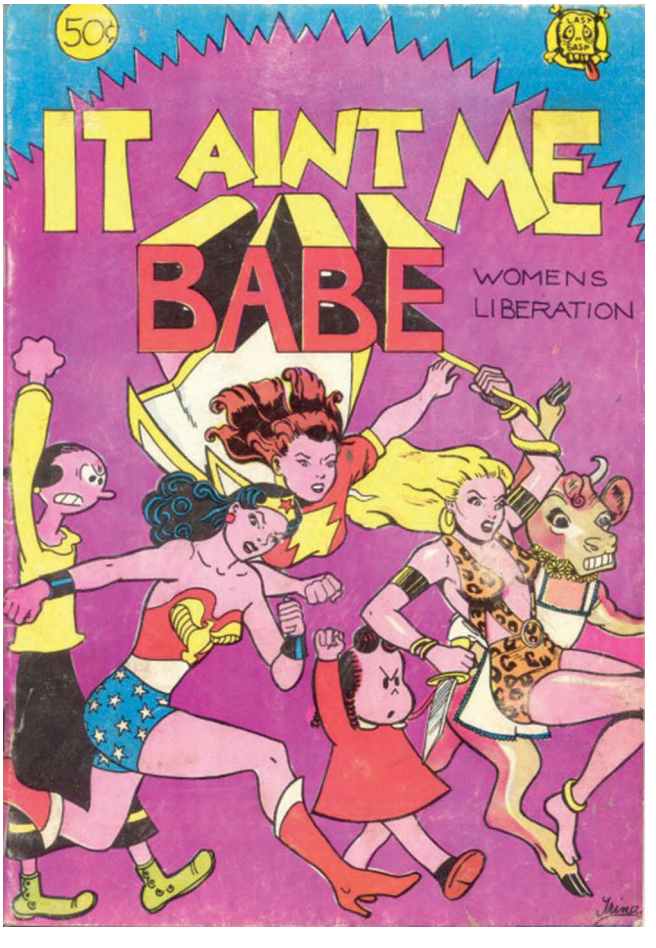

Figure 5. *It Ain't Me Babe* (1972). Cover by Trina Robbins. Reprinted with Permission of the artist.

captured Wonder Woman taking the leading with other female characters demanding change and forming a community.

Today the increased dedication to female characters, creators, and consumers underscore a cultural shift in the comics industry, and one visible in our culture. Despite the forces of patriarchy which continue to have a stranglehold on parts of our world, there is a clear arc of history leaning toward justice for women that we are witnessing. Since the Wonder Woman Symposium, we have seen the emergence of the Women's March, the #metoo movement, a surge in women running for elected office, and what will likely prove to be a major shift in power. And in comics, while it has been a slow process, with many setbacks, the last five years has seen a form once critiqued for its misogyny now in the midst of something of what we hope is a feminist Renaissance. It is not just that Marvel, DC, Image, Dynamite, Boom, Valiant, etc., are invested in the growing population of female readers, but they are offering strong images of women in comics, and many independent comics are emerging globally outside of corporate bastions. Though beyond the purview of this issue, the burgeoning in global comics and graphic narratives of and for girls and women is nothing less than astonishing.[10]

The investment in images of women has a powerful impact on the lives of women and even men. As Jessica Bennett of the *New York Times* writes,

> George Orwell once argued that clichéd language produces clichéd thinking. The same could be said of visual storytelling – which brain researchers will tell you is processed tens of thousands of times faster than the written word. And yet so much of the messaging we receive about *who* can do *what* in the world is subliminal – the absence of what's missing more even than what is there. Sometimes it is the lack of voices, of speaking roles, of perspectives. The invisibility of certain types of characters. It appears in film and advertising and media and music and action films and video games and stock photos. Sometimes, a lot of times, we don't even notice it until it is upended. We've grown accustomed to the largely white, largely male default.
>
> But then suddenly you're a 35-year-old woman sitting in a theater and you see the thing that was missing – the boss, the doctor, the president or the righteous superhero who happens to be a woman – and something clicks. Oh, this is what people mean when they talk about representation. This is why it matters (2017).

Bennett captures the feeling so many shared after seeing the *Wonder Woman* movie. There were reports that women were crying while watching Wonder Woman on film (Woerner 2017) and Patty Jenkins responded enthusiastically on Twitter after learning from a Kindergarten teacher about all the positive changes in girls' lives the *Wonder Woman* movie made (O'Neil 2017) And while Wonder Woman may not represent all women, Bennett's point is still valid regarding clichéd imagery. The same white male hero on screen over and over again will lead to clichéd thinking and simple understanding of power. The *Wonder Woman* (2017) movie envisioned power not only in the hands of a woman, but it was a power that was given to her through love by her mother. And as Wonder Woman ends the battle with Ares, she once again asserts the need to love, that her power comes from her love for the world and what it can return to her. *Black Panther* similarly chips away at this repletion of images of white men in power. It was such a success, offering blackness as powerful, and showing black people saving the world. What Bennet argues for though is something that we have known for so long as fans of Wonder Woman, and something we hoped to capture in our event: the images that we see on a daily basis affect how we understand power. This was our goal in the Wonder Woman Symposium: to celebrate the image of Wonder Woman, active

Figure 6. Wonder Women and Men on the steps of the Cleveland Public Library.

female power, and flood our world with images that we so rarely see (Figure 6). There is much more work to be done.

The mother's love

It is not only the activism of the myth of Wonder Woman that inspired us, though, but also what is perhaps the most powerful piece of her mythology: love between mother and daughter. As Phil Jimenez articulates in his essay 'I have always understood the primary love story in Wonder Woman to be between a mother and daughter.' Greg Rucka echoes this thought referring to Diana and Hippolyta:

> So, each of them are giving a sacrifice. To me, thematically, that is crucial. We always talk about Diana's superpower, and invariably the conversation always comes back to love: her ability to love. Most people tend to get a little cringey at that, but it is an act of love on each of their behalves to allow the other ability to thrive.

The love of the mother is the central love of the story of Wonder Woman, it is a story that needs to be told and one that has significance in the psychic lives of both women and men. Luce Irigaray opines, '[t]o anyone who cares about social justice today, I suggest putting up posters in public places with beautiful pictures representing the mother-daughter couple – the couple that illustrates a very special relationship to nature and culture' (2001 [1993], 380). Irigaray does not mention Wonder Woman, but her story is the perfect example. It is an image that is integral to the importance of female power as Virginia Woolf famously said, '[f[or we think back through our mothers if we are women'(2008 [1929], 57) and an idea captured in the *Wonder Woman* movie as Hippolyta says to Wonder Woman 'you have been my greatest love' (Jenkins, 2017).

In the original story Diana is molded out of clay by her mother Hippolyta – a clay enchanted by Aphrodite herself. However, not all saw Marston's Wonder Woman as empowering, or the love between women as something to celebrate. The favourite villain of the comics world – Fredric Wertham – referred to Wonder Woman in his book *Seduction of the Innocent* as the 'Lesbian counterpart of Batman' (1954, 192). Wertham accuses Wonder Woman of propagating lesbianism and argues that [f]or boys, Wonder Woman, is a frightening image. For girls she is a morbid ideal." (1954, 193). Trina Robbins later tartly observes about such comments: '[w]ell there's hugging, but. . .women *do* hug (2014, 146).' Perhaps Wertham's fears were that when women save one another, they exclude men from conventional heroism.[11] And while there has been much ink spilled to speculate upon the personal perversions of Marston, we need to remember that though Marston may have had H. G. Peter draw Wonder Woman in chains, never once did she stay in those chains. Furthermore, are repeated images of women in chains not to be read metaphorically as accurate representations of their everyday lives? And are Wonder Woman's repeated escapes not as satisfying as any Houdini?

As Trina Robbins, argues, 'for over ten golden years, William Moulton Marston provided a haven for girls in the pages of his comics, away from man's world' (2014, 150). As Robbins also notes, '[g]irls have needed, at least in their fantasy lives, a safe place to be with other girls, where they could express themselves without being threatened by boys' (2014, 149). There is a greater fear of what Wonder Woman may have meant for little girls and boys than what was actually going on in these comics. As Robbins notes, after reviewing a series of misogynistic readings of the character, '[p]erhaps Frederic [sic] Wertham was correct when he wrote, 'For boys, Wonder Woman is a frightening image" (1996, 14).

The love between women and the relationship between mother and daughter from which Wonder Woman derived her strength and her investment has been undermined as an origin myth many times in comics. Most recently in 2011 with the 'New 52' revamp of DC Comics, Brian Azzarello and Cliff Chiang rewrote Wonder Woman's origin story, uncovering a secret past and erasing the history that defined Wonder Woman's story for decades. The revelation is that Wonder Woman's father is Zeus, her mother Hippolyta was impregnated, but told the lie of Diana being born from clay to evade Hera's wrath. Significantly, Noah Berlatsky writes, 'Hipploya's lie was that there could be a female community and a female magic that is not inhabited by, and powered by, men. Wonder Woman's foolishness was in accepting and believing her.' Finally, Berlatsky suggests, the truth of Wonder Woman in this revelation is 'manness' (2015, 191).[12] Azzarello repudiates the mother's power and everything the story stood for: the power of love between women, between a mother and a daughter.[13] The New 52 creators reject Wonder Woman's power as a love leader, her ability to use aggression for public good as she becomes a God of War. She is imagined not to be a loving, powerful force any longer, but a destructive force – war.

Perhaps the new 52 creators felt excluded from Wonder Woman's love. It seems that they could not see the love between women as an important love, a necessary love, one that may be romantic for some women, but was also a sustaining love for Wonder Woman, and ironically foundational to her love for Steve Trevor in subsequent issues. Indeed, the 'adult envy of childhood pleasures makes childhood bliss nearly intolerable

to behold, particularly if the adult has felt excluded from or robbed of such joys' (Camden, 2007, 697). The discussion is too long for this Introduction, but the idea here is important: Wonder Woman certainly has a sexuality, based on a love for the mother that far from being perverse was foundational, as we know from relational psychology of mother/infant attachment, for the entire repertoire of her creativity. Such a progressive relational psychology threatened the heavily classical Freudian schema absorbed by Wertham in his clinical repudiation of the Amazons. And for their part Azzarello and the others who rendered Wonder Woman into one more pornographic fantasy, leading them to implant male fantasies on this female hero..[14]

Wonder Woman of the future

Jill Lepore argues in *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, 'Superman owes a debt to science fiction, Batman to the hard-boiled detective. Wonder Woman's debt is to the fictional feminist utopia and to the struggle of women's rights' (2015, 5). Wonder Woman is thus directly linked to political action and women's lives and she is not linked to fiction in the way that the other two characters are. But that is not to say that their histories are also not in some ways political. For example, Superman was an immigrant and the link to pulp fiction and its role in democratization is extremely important. However, what Lepore suggests is more significant to understanding female superheroes. When gender (race and other identity categories) are introduced into a text they come from the lives of real people and are politically inflected. We can think of the narratives of Miles Morales, Spider-Man, or Kamala Khan, Ms. Marvel. When these two characters were introduced into the Marvel universe because of their racial identity they brought us into new landscapes in the world – places that other superheroes had rarely gone. When gender is introduced it not only provides new landscapes but almost always integrates the political and the social. These racial, gendered – political landscapes – are not the worlds that billionaires such as Tony Stark inhabit. Rather, Kamala Khan takes us to Jersey City and Miles Morales bring us to Brooklyn. The political and the social are directly linked to their bodies. Thus the external world directly influences the embodied status and presentation of the embattled character of Wonder Woman more than her counterparts, the rich, white male superheroes who are portrayed as more stable, simply because they seem unaffected by changes in the world outside of comics. And thus, it is ever important to begin to construct an archive of the female hero now, otherwise we are doomed to lose her once again and announce a so-called revival in another 30 years.

The 2016 Wonder Woman Symposium was filled with optimism as we all believed we were forecasting the ultimate expression of a feminist awakening of a hoped for female president who would hold the highest power in the land and position in the world. Now in 2019, as we see the impact of the anti-feminist administration that in fact prevailed, we turn again to Wonder Woman for help. Never trivial though often trivialized the figure of Wonder Woman helps us understand the significance of female empowerment, development and the power of the image in culture. This is what we learned together at the symposium and in these papers about Wonder Woman and her wide-ranging influence. To return to what feminist icon Gloria Steinem, who was at 82 a co-chair of the Women's March, said of her own girlhood growing up in Toledo,

Ohio: she was rescued from the plight of passivity and victimhood by female action heroine, Wonder Woman. 'I was rescued from this plight at about the age of seven or eight. Rescued (Great Hera!) by a woman' (1972, 2).

Today thousands indeed, hundreds of thousands of women and men have marched all over the word for equality. Are all of the signs and prophesies of a new feminism that we heralded in 2016 still blossoming, still coming to life? We can only hope. And we turn to Wonder Woman because the superhero comic still relies upon morality, and hope for the future. While dystopian narratives such as the *Handmaid's Tale* have their own function in popular culture, it is Wonder Woman who still offers us inspiration because she always prevails. As Percy Shelley promises, 'O, wind, if winter comes, can spring be far behind?' (1820).

Notes

1. Fredric Wertham infamously derided the form of comics in many articles, his testimony at a Senate Subcommittee hearing on juvenile delinquency, and in his book *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954). Today Medicine has begun to embrace the form of comics with the emergence of Graphic Medicine (Czerwiec, et al., 2015).
2. For the ways that high culture has often ignored or denied the form of comics see Bart Beaty, *Comics Versus Art* (2012) and Christopher Pizzino's *Arresting Development* (2016).
3. For the history of comics, see David Hajdu (Hajdu 2008), Jared Gardner (2012), Van Lente and Dunlavey (2017), Hillary Chute (2017).
4. Trina Robbins (2016) details the history of Wimmen's Comix in the Introduction to *The Complete Wimmen's Comix*.
5. See Benjamin Woo (2011) and Dan Gearino (2017).
6. See Brad Ricca (2013) for the History of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's creation of the character of Superman and see Peter Coogan (2006) for the history of the superhero.
7. Wonder Woman's history, origins and the personal life of her creators have been explored by Les Daniels (2004) and Lepore (2015). See also Joseph Darowski's *Ages of Wonder Woman* (Darowski 2013) a collection of essays spanning the history of the character and Travis Langley and Mara Wood's (2017) collection of essay on Wonder Woman and psychology. On the history of female superheroes, see Trina Robbins' *The Great Women Superheroes* (1996) and Carolyn Cocca's *Superwomen* (2016).
8. Nubia continues to be a popular character outside of the comics finding new life on the internet and in fan communities, despite her short-lived time in the comics. See Whaley (2015) and Fawaz and Scott (2018).
9. Trina Robbins notes in *The Great Women Superheroes* that by 1955 all action heroines besides Wonder Woman were gone. It was officially the era of the romantic heroine in comics (1996, 206).
10. As Hillary Chute has said, 'girls are the new superheroes' (2017, 275). See also Camden (2016) on the action heroine in popular culture.
11. Today *Jessica Jones* has been celebrated for this very idea of women saving women, saving themselves (Chhibber 2016).
12. At the end of Azzarello's 35 issue run, too long to discuss here, Wonder Woman becomes the God of War, replacing Ares. The Wonder Woman, placed on the cover of *Ms.* magazine in 1972 is long gone. Wonder Woman no longer ends war, she is the embodiment of war. We will not review all of Azzarello's Wonder Woman as we believe that Berlastky captures it best: the entirety of his 'run' on the series aims to destroy Wonder Woman's history and also uncover that power comes from men.
13. As Neal Curtis argues, there is a 'Unfortunately, there is a tragic inevitability to all this. It seems that women can be portrayed as strong as long as they mimic patriarchal

representations of strength, and more importantly bend their knee to male authority as the normative source' (2016, 308). Sadri () attempts to challenge Berlatsky's reading unsuccessfully.

14. Rucka comments on the queerness of the Amazons. He suggests that some found love with one another and others identified other forms of love (Greg Rucka on Queer Narrative and Wonder Woman 2016).

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