

Qu(e)rying Comic Book Culture and Representations of Sexuality in Wonder Woman

Brian Mitchell Peters  
*Champlain College*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>

 Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

### Recommended Citation

Peters, Brian Mitchell. "Qu(e)rying Comic Book Culture and Representations of Sexuality in Wonder Woman." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 5.3 (2003): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1195>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1195)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 5 Issue 3 (September 2003) Article 6****Brian Mitchell Peters,****"Qu(e)rying Comic Book Culture and Representations of Sexuality in *Wonder Woman*"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol5/iss3/6>>

---

**Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 5.3 (2003)****Thematic Issue *Comparative Cultural Studies and Popular Culture*****Edited by Benton Jay Komin**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol5/iss3>>

---

**Abstract:** In his paper, "Qu(e)rying Comic Book Culture and Representations of Sexuality in *Wonder Woman*," Brian Mitchell Peters proposes that youth culture is responsible for an arbitrary yet highly structured appropriation of what we can call high-contemporary culture. Hence, notions of pop-culture take from the past and use the present to create a highly fluid now, capable of transcending its present moment in a stereotypical fifteen minutes of fame. Part of twentieth-century pop-culture phenomena is the evolution of the comic book. The comic, in its habitual split of binaries, creates a space where young people have tapped consistently into queer themes. Queer is defined as a category that houses an option to traditional heteronormative representations for young people. An analysis of the history of *Wonder Woman* comics that traces her creation, her transition in the late-1960s, and a revolutionary series of comics in the mid-1990s reveals a consistent duo of queer subtexts. In his paper, Peters examines the subtextual and textual representations of gay masquerade (or drag) and lesbian *jouissance* in comics. The theoretical background of the paper is semiotics, queer, and psychoanalytic criticism to explore these three stages in *Wonder Woman* comics to present an argument that reveals the identification of queer themes by the comic's reading public as well as the cultural homophobia that creates a standard storyline and that, in turn, extinguishes habitually the detectable areas of queer text over and over again.

**Brian Mitchell Peters**

### **Qu(e)rying Comic Book Culture and Representations of Sexuality in *Wonder Woman***

It is the young people of our world that decide what works and what does not in terms of popular culture, from music to television, sports and fashion. Comic books mark a pertinent role in the formation of ideology and the young: not only does a comic represent its era and often youth culture, but its crystallization of ideas, both in surface and subtext, caters to the formation of pop-culture trends in its pubescent, and later adult, audience. Comic books have always revealed themes that can be identified as queer, as the majority of superheroes always had to live two lives, one as hero and one as civilian. Many young people who will later identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or queer, zone in on comics because these magazines articulate a space of queer play. One can think of the recent releases of *Queer as Folk*, where Vincent (U.K.) and Michael (U.S.) are obsessed with their favorite comic heroes because of the detectable queer themes that they have always been able to locate in their comic books. Comics are popular culture: they speak for an instant, are constantly changing, and attract an audience that sees something deeper, often comforting, in the printed pages. In the early years of comics, primarily between the Depression and World War II, the split between hero and civilian marked a tangible queer theme present in the majority of superhero comic books. This does not entail that each comic book character with an alter ego could be interpreted as a closeted homosexual; rather, particular aspects of certain comic books reflect a queer consciousness, felt and interpreted by queer readers.

*Wonder Woman* encompasses the very pinnacle of queer themes, and since her inception into the world of DC comics she has exhibited varying degrees of both gay-drag and lesbian subtexts. The result has been a readership, a cult following if you will, that has followed this character through her various incarnations throughout the twentieth century. Her comic can be read as an item of popular culture that has served as a safe haven, a source of inspiration and a pre-liberation voice for many readers. The result is open to ideological critique, for how would such a positive voice, however veiled it may be, serve a yet to be born and often clandestine percentage of individuals? Moreover, how do these topoi affect the belief system of young queers? How do comic book representations of questionable queerness contribute to the way young people consider their own sexualities? The response and its realities lie in a comic series which exemplifies the crystallization of queer themes in *Wonder Woman*. In 1995, *The Challenge of Artemis* depicts a series of comics which create an evolution in the split between heterosexual/homosexual, marked through shifting texts of two heroes. In this series there are two Wonder Women: Princess Diana, the original Wonder Woman, reinvents herself, and this reinvention marks a highly visible gay text of masquerade/drag and a particular lesbian continuum; Artemis, as the impulsive hunter turned Wonder Woman, illustrates a far more visible lesbian text. The result of this arguably "out" queer text creates an ideological reality of pride and survival: although brief in its run, *The Challenge of Artemis* speaks to queer readers as it emphasizes the queer subtexts that have been visible in *Wonder Woman* since the 1940s.

To deconstruct *Wonder Woman* to expose the lesbian and gay (sub)texts which flourish throughout her comic book run, one must embrace some kind of approach that can acknowledge the signs in a given image as well as the subtextual underpinnings that can shift from reader to reader. Comics are notorious for this reality of text/subtext, for they create meaning through image, hidden meanings, the continuity of the story in question, and dialogue. Moreover, the reality of the comic book human form is a highly eroticized physical presence, from hulking men, such as Superman, to masked crusaders like Green Lantern and Green Arrow, to pubescent youths with highly developed bodies like Robin, to the focus of combined physical prowess and beauty seen throughout *Wonder Woman*'s career. Harold Beaver argues that one can conduct a semiotic demystification of unveiling queer texts in popular culture. Beaver makes direct reference to Roland Barthes, as he attests that one can analyze how the homosexual text is "a prodigious consumer of signs of hidden meanings, hidden

systems, hidden potentiality" (105). "A homosexual schema," as Beaver calls it, "can never be proved" (103); instead, a queer theoretical reading often unmasks the mysterious "avenger," something that is often in part "invisible" (103). Throughout the decades, Wonder Woman reveals aspects of both gay drag and masked meanings, along with lesbian continuity and further subtextual underpinnings; these conclusions can be drawn from a detailed exploration of her history, her costume, her mysterious powers, and her transformations. As comics shift for attempted sales, my argument will rely on Wonder Woman's original creation as a foundation, integral changes in the late '60s as an evolution in queer/camp aesthetics, and a study of a series of issues published in 1995. A liaison will be established to emphasize a voice of liberation to readers through the recurring motifs of masquerade and same-sex alliance.

### **The History of *Wonder Woman***

The original inception of *Wonder Woman* illustrates the habitual super hero/secret identity binary. Princess Diana of Paradise Island originally comes to man's world to save the fate of the planet from the Nazis: in the comic book world she wins the war with the U.S. As she fights with America, she also has to have access to the necessary war files, and works in Washington D.C. as Yeoman Diana Prince. The Plain Jane/Mad Molly split is accentuated as one understands it as a kind of closet for Diana Prince: her identity was secret and private, and as she passed as someone conventional in everyday life, she would disappear and reappear in disguise to fight crime. The sexuality of *Wonder Woman* and the subtextual jouissance, an interpretive and suggestive play, has been the product of William Moulton Marston, the creator of *Wonder Woman*. His own life, his status of Doctor of Psychology, and his fascination with desire (as revealed in his curiously avant-garde romantic life, see Daniels Chapter 1), is evident throughout Diana's early comic run. In fact, the lesbianism that was detectable through the all-woman haven of Paradise Island, the lesbian continuum between Wonder Woman and her foes, and the recurring bondage motif, did receive significant attention. In 1954, which coincides directly with a cultural fear of homosexuality and communism initiated by the McCarthy administration, Dr Fredric Wertham launched a "surprising successful campaign to persuade Americans that comic books were corrupting the nation's youth" (Daniels 103). Wertham accused *Wonder Woman* of containing "Lesbian overtones," as he described Diana's then cohorts, the Holliday Girls [*sic*], as "gay party girls" (Daniels 103). However, despite these accusations, it appears that even during more conservative times, comics encompassed images of eroticism or subtextual sexuality that was tolerated. Marston laughed this off; he "loved his little jokes" (Daniels 102), and as a response he created a frequent saying for his Amazon: "Suffering Sappho." In *Wonder Woman* 63 (January 1954), Diana finds herself displaced from her home (after the war moved from Washington D.C. to New York City). As she realizes she is far from New York, she exclaims, "Suffering Sappho! I'm not in New York! I'm in San Francisco!" (Daniels 103). And thus Marston emphasizes and liberates the queer theme which is inherent to *Wonder Woman* by having Diana mark her own ancient lesbian roots through reference to Sappho and the humor of having her wind up, however temporarily, in San Francisco.

On a less abstract level, her habitual iconography, which is even more detectable than her semiotics, is like Wilde's *Salome*. The history of *Wonder Woman* reveals a consistent dragging of the text: as Elaine Showalter argues that the gay male author often hid his own experiences and desires behind his female characters, a readership certainly exists where the female super-hero embodies a double identity that attracts a gay cult following (as a side remark, the gay cult of Wonder Woman was intensified, if not actually confirmed, through the popularity of the 1970s camp television program, and further demonstrated through the many, many diverse websites devoted to *Wonder Woman*). Throughout her analyses on Wilde and *Salome*, Showalter asks, "is the woman behind Salome's veil the innermost being of the male artist?" (151). She goes on to explain how and why the queer male artist of the fin-de- siècle has used the textual space of woman as a boy in drag. While Wonder Woman cannot stand for Marston in drag, her characterization does habitually reveal a motif of masquerade, from her costumes as both hero and civilian, to the varying make-overs she has received

throughout the twentieth century. Thus, her gayness is part of her feyness, and linked directly to the camp that her character initiates throughout the years. Perhaps *Wonder Woman* does portray a space for the queer reader in a type of transferred, imaginary sequence of drag.

In a similar manner, *Wonder Woman's* questionable powers surpass the often limiting boundaries of traditionally feminine stereotypes. As masquerade creates a subtextual gay text, the movement away from gender stereotypes and conventional ideas of woman illustrate her lesbian subtexts. For Diana, unlike the stereotyped good girl of the 1940s, has special powers: these include superhuman strength and speed, granted by the male gods Hercules and Mercury, as well as a paradoxical costume. She is habitually dressed in star-covered briefs, a *bustier* with the patriotic eagle, stiletto boots, and even magic jewelry. She is most definitely burlesque, like Salome, and she has an almost stripper-like quality to her costume. Nonetheless, she is the most successful female crime fighter in comic book history: her tiara is a boomerang, her bracelets deflect bullets, and her trademark is the lasso of truth. The lariat, spun from Queen Hippolyte's girdle of strength, is unbreakable and telepathically controlled, and once bound within its coils even Superman has to submit to its hypnotic powers (note the foundations for the "bound" motif). In short, Diana's powers encompass iconography and abilities that envelop both ideas of femininity and masculinity. Accordingly, Beaver theorizes that homosexuality "is not a name for a pre-existent thing" but part of a network of developing language, on the model of "male/female" (103). *Wonder Woman's* queerness, then, stems from her inherent combination of traditionally male and female stereotypes, grouped together to form an ideal woman-hero. For *Wonder Woman* is ideal because she speaks to and empowers at least three cultural minority groups: women, lesbians, and gay men.

### **The Late 1960s**

*Wonder Woman's* all-women birthplace provides a haven from patriarchy, as well as a response to it. For Themyscira, the more contemporary name for Paradise Island, is governed by women for women, and no man can set foot on the sacred soil. Despite the constant Sapphic undercurrents that have accompanied this island throughout the decades, it did leave the strip for close to five years starting in 1968. The repeated themes of *Wonder Woman* grew tiresome, and in the midst of desperately trying to save her comic-book paramour from a prison sentence or worse, Diana is summoned by her mother to return home at once. Diana is given a choice: she could stay on and leave with the Amazons to another dimension where they went to have their exhausted powers restored (via a desired rest period) and remain the strongest of the Amazons, or return to the outside world, powerless. Diana undergoes the most dramatic rite of Amazonian passage in her history, and before an altar she relinquishes her powers to embark upon "the travails of mortals," as she begs the gods to have mercy on her (*Wonder Woman* 179, 9). She returns to man's world as *Diana Prince: Wonder Woman*, a type of lone adventurer. Flustered yet relieved, Diana has a complete make over that only the late '60s could provide. Her transformation reflects an era, as her new look and mortal-training mirrors *The Avengers*, although the creator of the New *Wonder Woman*, Mike Sekowsky, attests that he knew nothing about Diana Rigg's role in *The Avengers* (Daniels 102). With her new look, she begins her James Bond-esque secret training with a martial arts expert named I-Ching. Diana Prince gets a new do, new clothes and a new car, and becomes a kind of private investigator.

The Sapphism of the immortal Amazons is replaced with a mortal camp: one queer text is replaced by another, as the comic reflects the changing popular culture of the campy late 1960s. Because of the excess of popular cultural changes that occurred throughout the turbulent and often radical 1960s, this decade of artifice and of aesthetic masquerade really does stand for the decade of camp aesthetics and related cultural manifestations. With a modernization of camp which moved away from the theatrical burlesque to the urban jungle, camp and queer culture intersect rather profoundly in the 1960s: not that they did not prior, but the 1960s marked a heightened and thus queerly modernized version of camp. Therefore, camp as a popular genre of the 1960s and of comic book history becomes even more evident. The theme of masquerade receives a camp and fey representation, as Diana

emerges from the beauty parlor with her new do, ready to find the information she had to seek out at the psychedelic hippie club (*Wonder Woman* 178, 10-11). Her character becomes obsessed with secret training, adventure, clothes, and travel, and speaks an even more concrete gay code attracting an even larger readership of men. Furthermore, with Steve Trevor's death, the boyfriend is out of the picture. Diana meets a series of dashing men with whom she fights crime on a very temporary basis. The strip thus receives a far more detectable promiscuity, and Diana appears like a female James Bond. But the lesbian theme is not forgotten, for Diana opens her own carhop clothing boutique with her friend Cathy. While Cathy has a very minor place in the strip, she does get a lot of attention in the last *New Wonder Woman*: Diana moves in with Cathy, Cathy is kidnapped, and Diana and a circle of empowered female characters save her in this special "Women's Lib Issue" (*Wonder Woman* 203, 20-24). Diana becomes smashingly mod, the it-girl around town, and her unexpected popularity as a female adventurer leaves her as such until an interference from *Ms. Magazine* in 1973.

### **The 1990s and "Bad Girl" Art**

Before I begin looking at *The Challenge of Artemis*, it is important to introduce the *oeuvre* in question: the series that will be examined comes from a number of *Wonder Woman* issues orchestrated by writer William Messner-Loebs. During the mid-1990s, there is a concrete development in the representation of comic book women. The muscles that began in the 1980s were continued, but the weight-induced builds that arguably reflected the popularization of weight training during the 1980s, is coupled with a highly eroticized, yet unreal, human form. "Bad Girl" art refers to a counter movement posited against the traditional "Good Girl" representation of women in comic books in the 1950s. Within the guise of the bad girl image, a clear echo of the bad boy image of sex-god and rebel, the comic book woman encompasses a duly ironic yet appealing aesthetic. Les Daniels explains the turning point in *Wonder Woman's* recent history: the first artist to enunciate her bad girl image was Mike Deodato, who created "the most overly eroticized version of Wonder Woman to see print: a long-legged, full bosomed, sloe-eyed beauty who may have been an impossible caricature of a woman" (186). She is sexy yet physically powerful; her motives often reflect the same dichotomy as her composition. She gains an independence yet a sexual prowess that both liberates and hinders her, as *The Challenge of Artemis* exhibits this paradigm for both Diana and Artemis. The bad girl representation has woman placed on a pedestal, but she receives too much attention and must suffer the consequences of her heightened admiration. Moreover, part of "Bad Girl" art is the theme of mysterious doubles and related conflicts, very often exceedingly physical, as the *Wonder Woman-Artemis* series exemplifies. The motif of the double is repeated throughout *The Challenge of Artemis*: Diana has a heroic double in Artemis, a career double in Juliana Sazia, and a series of foe doubles in Cheshire, Cheetah, and especially Poison Ivy. Through these double-relations, Diana reveals the transformations and developments in queer paradigms in *Wonder Woman*, for each double marks yet another woman-woman entanglement for Diana.

At this point, some form of synopsis is required: Queen Hippolyte, Wonder Woman's mother, dreams that her daughter Diana will die in man's world. She holds a "tournament," and Diana and Artemis battle for the title of Wonder Woman. Hippolyte casts a magical spell that transfers Diana's powers to her sister Artemis: Artemis wins the title and with her own special talent, the bow and arrow of her classical namesake, she leaves as the new ambassador of Themyscira to the outside world. Diana realizes she must follow; she cannot give up her life in Boston. She opens a help agency for women, with her mortal friends, and redesigns herself: she chops off her hair and presents herself in a new outfit, titled the *I'm not Wonder Woman anymore* costume. In a much tougher, fetish-like "uniform," she ends up working parallel to Artemis, and in Boston she encounters a group of Batman's foes, primarily women. The combined forces of the new Wonder Woman and the re-vamped Diana post-modernize the two principal queer subtexts in Wonder Woman comics that have existed since Wonder Woman's creation: Diana represents the modernization of the gay man masked in drag, as Artemis represents a lesbian heroine.



### **1995, Lesbian Themes, and Artemis**

In 1995 Diana has another make-over, slightly more drastic than the one she had had close to 20 years earlier. Her new look removes tiara and mane, giving her a severe dominatrix-like appearance; she ports a bolero with sleeves rolled up, her magic bracelets, with leather gloves, a leather brazier fastened with a metal ring, spandex shorts with leather clasps, and leather booties. The comic receives a dark, gothic feel, almost glam-rock in its representation, revealing an oozing sexuality and related queerness as Diana becomes an on-the-edge version of herself. The stories are fully equipped with magical villains, a cliché full moon, and dangers which Diana has never before encountered. An integral component to the gay male subtext of *Wonder Woman* lies in the notion of masquerade. To solidify this theory, the intersection of gothic themes and the double life emphasize this paradigm in *Wonder Woman* stories of 1995: in a manner reminiscent to the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde split, this comic book hero exhibits a similar motif. Diana and Artemis depict how one side of the self is governed by self-control, while the other remains impulsive, volatile, and self-destructive.

Aside from the said Diana Prince/Wonder Woman dichotomy, the new Diana reveals a curious instance of dragging the text. Her masquerade has a certain quality that can be explained through Richard Dellamora's response to Leonardo da Vinci's famous Renaissance paintings. To move back is important, as this will not only solidify Showalter's position on the *fin-de siècle*, but also highlight how masquerade is often linked to veiled homosexual yearnings. Dellamora explains that Walter Pater examines Leonardo's "erotic attractiveness to other males with the inclusion in his paintings of images of doppelgangers" (133). Pater explains: "Leonardo's love for other men affects the meaning of his work, beginning with the Medusa ... then continues with perverse interpretations of ... St. John the Baptist and The Last Supper ... and concludes ... by reading the Mona Lisa as a transvestite self-portrait" (136). The arguments that stem from such a reading of da Vinci, allow the reading audience to open the space of interpretation to house repressed or covert desires in other works, similar to the way Showalter argues her *fin-de- siècle* theories.

The female subject then, on cue from Medusa and solidified through Wilde's Salome, can encompass masked homosexual sentiment if not a masked homosexual. As Medusa is associated with homosexuality, Freud has the discussed this figure with specific attention to same-sex desire: "Since the Greeks were in the main strongly homosexual, it was inevitable that we should find among them a representation of woman as a being who frightens and repels because she is castrated" (136). Medusa's punishment is the loss of her beauty, which psychoanalytically can be argued as a signifier for lost power; thus, her phallic snake-hair, the tragic consequence of her stare and even her questionable insanity reveal homosexual underpinnings. Therefore, the woman who is represented with overtly masculine character traits, too much presence, or caught within a rage of altered power, can, according to Freud's psychoanalysis, reveal a distinctly masked homosexual meaning. By the end of the twentieth century, this type of masquerading female figure could illustrate a gay-drag subtext. By the 1960s, there exists a paradigm similar in comic books; these motifs can be decoded as explicit examples of queer or gay popular culture. Princess Diana, especially in her 1995 form, reveals these topoi with the clarity of comic book magic. Diana's colorful U.S. patriotic costume is given to Artemis, as her day-time life comes to a halt. In her new black and blue costume daylight fades and she finds herself in a comic book gothic, very close to the hands of death.

When Diana returns to Patriarch's world and before Diana can get her women's help center under way, a plan is in full form to capture her. Mob ringleader Juliana Sazia has hired the psychotic karate expert hit-woman Cheshire, Poison Ivy, and Wonder Woman's all-time foe since the forties, Cheetah. Diana is ambushed and poisoned with a combination of Ivy venom and Cheetah's claws, and awakes with her bracelets bound. In the old days, this meant no power. This is also the bondage motif that caused some controversy during the early years of the comic (see Daniels 61-72). However, the bound-motif, which has permeated *Wonder Woman* comics since her birth in the 1940s, creates a stronger sexual overtone throughout the comic's history. Most of Diana's original foes were women, or

women disguised as men. The idea of capture and an often erotic taming of power through bondage is the foundation on which the Cheshire/Ivy/Cheetah/Diana ménage builds itself. Four decades later, Diana finds herself bound, once again, but the text that precedes her escape and the dialogue that follows moves from subtextual theory into textual reality.

As Diana lays unconscious, the villains eat pizza and drink soda, revealing a central metaphor that embodies the connotation of consumption: for eating, as seen in Herman Melville's *Typee* or Tennessee Williams's *Suddenly Last Summer*, has strong homosexual undercurrents. The captors gaze at Diana's eroticized form; her bolero has been removed and she is bound, bandaged, and disheveled. The villains debate what they should do as they wait for Juliana to show up. "I think we should prune her," suggests Ivy in *The Challenge of Artemis*. "You mean cut off her arms and [legs]?" asks Cheetah (27). The aim, as the dotted lines on Diana's limbs reveal, illustrates dismemberment, and Ivy's strong desire to dismember and make contact with the bound hero. Dismemberment has two primary interpretations when linked to a theory of subtextual desire: primarily, the signification should be traced back to the ancient world, with attention to Dionysus. This situation reminds of Dionysian frenzy and chaos where dismemberment, as seen with a series of deities and their respective myths, represents an intense desire. Coupled with the food that the villains consume prior to her escape, the threat of dismemberment complements the implied consumption, as both gesture towards a subliminal sexual interaction. Moreover, from a psychoanalytic standpoint, dismemberment can be linked with castration anxiety, fear of a loss of power. Ivy's desire to dismember Diana reflects her own fear of loss of power, along with a desire unspoken within the text. However, Juliana appears before anything really gothic happens. "What are these marks on her?" she asks (29). Ivy tries to brush it off, but Juliana reprimands her. Ivy makes her promise, "we won't touch her dewy blossoms. Pinky swear!" (29). And the sexualized language of Ivy's remark presents the first of her attractions for the Amazon; through Ivy, the 1995 text reveals one of its primary lesbian themes. The desire to capture, bind, dismember and/or consume reveals a subliminal sexuality that has existed throughout *Wonder Woman's* history.

As Diana comes to, Cheetah finds the chained bracelets and their supposed loss of Amazonian power "charmingly medieval!" (38). Despite Cheetah's enjoyment of the image of the hero in chains, Diana moves quickly, belts away Cheshire, and before she is re-ambushed she snaps her chains, as she informs her captors: "don't believe everything you read" (39). Ivy's undertones are further illustrated as she attempts to recapture the Amazon: "Just let me touch you, sweetheart. Ordinarily, I'd do this with a kiss, but we don't want to get emotionally involved" (40). Diana gives her a kick, and crashes through the window to take to the sky. To couple the queer innuendoes, another motif of desire is relayed through the environment and its violence. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has articulated that within the trajectory of English literature, and especially in the nineteenth-century novel, the all-male environments of friendship, bonding, rivalry, and mentorship are not exempt from erotic undertones (1-15). In a similar fashion, this comic book continuum of female alliance and competition reveals a similar pattern. The precise environment of Diana's capture mimics the homosocial spectrum that Sedgwick claims nineteenth-century English fiction presents. Thus, Ivy's suggestive remarks are not that out of place, and to queer theory, accordingly expected. Moreover, the violence serves as a metaphor, as graphic sequences of wrestling and boxing, from moderns such as D.H. Lawrence and Tennessee Williams, reflect repressed same-sex desires. The punch or kick, like the motif of dismemberment, is an intensified touch, reflecting the power of both repression and desire. Ivy flees, as she thinks to herself: "So I ask myself, self, do I stay here and bravely try to fulfill my contract while ... Wonder-Babe hunts me down like a mad dog ... or do I take my advance and run like hell? Well, duh!" (47). The language not only emphasizes the psychological state of the typical comic book villain, but words like "babe" and "hunt" further imply a subtextual nuance of same-sex yearnings, and emphasize a strong subtext that is directly associated with this series, Diana's capture, and the Ivy/Diana liaison.



### **Artemis: The Silencing of the Lesbian**

Artemis is Diana's heroic double. Diana believes in love and condemns violence, even though she is a trained warrior, and attempts to respond to villains and the troubles of man's world through thinking and kindness. However, she must habitually use her strength and powers to overcome the obstacles she encounters. Artemis, on the other hand, responds immediately with impulse and a self-destructive nature. Diana functions with love and wisdom, as Artemis is molded from her namesake, and with the help of her magic bow and arrows, she reacts impulsively through instinct. Artemis thus envelops the traditionally masculine attributes associated with the hunter; her downfall in Patriarch's world is her maleness. Artemis reacts instantly with physical force, and like Oedipus who flees the oracle in denial, she will not listen to Diana's reason when Diana provides her with the truth. The consequence is the symbolic blinding -- her loss of power at the hands of the white magician -- and her death. Lacan's contribution to Freudian orthodoxy, argues Jane Gallop in *The Daughter's Seduction*, is the shifting in signification from Freudian penis to Lacanian phallus: symbolic, phallic power deals with cultural behavior and psychoanalytic consequences, rather than exclusively male genitals (95-96). Hence, Lacan centers "the castration complex around the phallus, which is symbolic, the maternal phallus, to be understood by reference to Freud's phallic phase ... the ultimate Lacanian goal is for the subject to assume his/her castration" (96). Artemis's primary resistance to man's world is her particular iconography: her bow and arrow are the extensions of the Lacanian phallus, and her ability to NOT react without direct interaction with her weapon reveals her hesitation towards completing her phallic development. It is curious that the same arrow with which she attacks her assailant will bring her to her own gruesome death. Therefore, Artemis's inception into the comic reflects yet another intersection between psychoanalysis and queer theory that not only outs her through her psychoanalytic arrangements, but kills her as well. In comic book land, it appears that while gay subtext is acceptable and almost habitual, texts that oscillate between subtext and surface text with too much detection are regularly altered, and subsequently discontinued.

Artemis's arrival in Patriarch's world is marked through deception: as the new Wonder Woman lacks Diana's association with Athena, Artemis is deceived. A series of men attempt to publicize her, to make her think she is freeing the world of patriarchal danger, as a stronger force secretly lurks in the shadows. When Diana tries to explain this to Artemis, Artemis is already in a rage. In an attempt to claim the city, to expand her territory, Artemis attacks Diana, and Diana must fight before she can explain. Diana attempts to withhold her strength, but Artemis will not stand still and listen to Diana. Finally, to support her insights, Diana supplies her sister with the files that explain her knowledge, and Artemis can believe the facts on her own time.

As she suspects the truth about the contest between herself and Artemis, Diana returns to Themyscira to confront her mother. In the outside world, the fictional mob ringleaders have become much stronger, principally through their chief villain, The White Magician. He has transformed himself into a giant beast-like devil, living in a gothic and violent Hades. In Diana's absence, Artemis seeks him out, and she instantly draws her ammunition. Diana does appear, to save the day as one expects, yet it is too late for Artemis. Artemis has used no thought, as she is fixated on her phallic power. As the combined forces of feminism and psychoanalysis argue, the symbolic movement from Freudian penis to Lacanian phallus does not liberate woman: her phallic power is merely a more threatening symbol to patriarchal power (Gallop 99-100). As she dies by her own arrow, Artemis's strength, her phallic fixations and related angst prove to be her deadliest enemies.

Artemis's end marks an end to the inception of a very erotic and graphic lesbian subtext into the comic book world of Wonder Woman. Artemis, if she is *lesbian*, is too *out*: her gender insubordination is arguably too detectable, and she is removed from the comic, which eliminates the power of the lesbian-type super-heroine. Diana and her women colleagues could not pose such a threat to the patriarchal realities evident in both our world and the many parallel worlds in comic books. Her costume is restored, her contribution to the outside world of men is globalized, and, following the

footsteps of Artemis's death, Diana's own queerness is muted once again. Like the original texts and the late 1960s campy texts, the 1995 story line reveals a very important reality for comic book readers: Wonder Woman allows for a lesbian jouissance, in Lacanian terms, where the interplay of identity, desire, and freedom are not exempt from Freudian and related sexual undertones. Henceforth, in her stories from the mid-nineties Diana illustrates a kind of queer alter ego, breathing a voice of freedom, space, and interactive queer play. The paradoxical reality is that popular culture provides a space for queer representation and related patterns that influence the formation of varying ideological patterns in its reading audience, for the comic book queer can only exist for a brief time, every now and again, until he or she becomes detectable. Part of the ideology that comics create for queer kids becomes curiously homophobic, whether intentionally or not: if the comic book queer meets a habitual end (or reconstruction) time and time again, the message of closeting versus out becomes far too clear as it mimics the outside world's often far too hesitant response towards queer identification and queer life.

### Works Cited

- Beaver, Harold. "Homosexual Signs (In Memory of Roland Barthes)." *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 99-119.
- Daniels, Les. *Wonder Woman: The Complete History*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000.
- Dellamora, Richard. *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1990.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth P, 1953-74. Vol. 7, 135-231.
- Gallop, Jane. *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Œcrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W.W Norton & Co., 1977.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-Siecle*. London: Bloomsbury, 1991.
- Wonder Woman 178 & 179*. Ed. Jack Miller. Illinois: National Periodical Publications, Inc., 1968.
- Wonder Woman*. Ed. Denis O'Neil. Vol. 31, No. 203. New York: National Periodical Publications Inc., 1972.
- Wonder Woman: The Challenge of Artemis*. Ed. William Messner-Loebs. New York: DC Comics, 1995.
- Wonder Woman: The Challenge of Artemis*. Ed. Jennette Kahn. New York: DC Comics, 1996.

Author's Profile: Brian Mitchell Peters teaches in the Department of English at Champlain College, St-Lambert, Quebec. His interests include E.M. Forster, gothic fiction, cultural studies, communication studies, visual literacy, and American writers of the post-war decades. Peters's publications include "Camping the Gothic: Queer Sexualities in Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*," in *The Journal of Homosexuality* (2000), "Gothic Qu(e)ries and Postmodern Homosexualities: The Vampire and Triangular Desire in *Dracula* and *Interview with the Vampire*," in *The Transylvanian Journal* (1998), and "Beyond Psycho(Analytic) Signs: Erratic Homosexualities in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*" in *Canadian Landscapes* (1996). E-mail: <[bryestar@hotmail.com](mailto:bryestar@hotmail.com)>.