

# Wonder Woman



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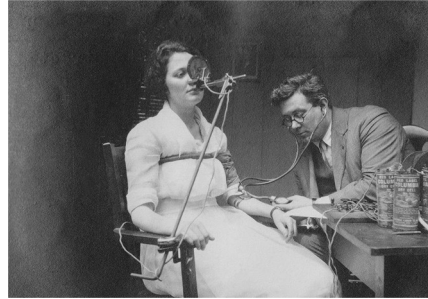
- Women in early Superhero Comics
- generally subordinate roles
  - girlfriends
  - sidekicks
  - secretaries
  - damsel in distress
- early precedent
  - *The Woman in Red* (Peggy Allen)



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## Creation of Wonder Woman

- William Moulton Marston (1893-1947)
  - American psychologist, inventor
    - research polygraph, truth-telling
  - believed in 'female moral superiority'
    - that women more honest than men
- Marston came up with idea for a "female Tarzan"
- evolved into Amazon princess
  - Princess Diana
  - later became "Wonder Woman"
- motivation?
  - read Robbins, p. 55
- debuted in *All Star Comics* # 8 (1941)
- then *Wonder Woman* # 1 (1942)
- became massive hit
  - at peak sold 2.5 million copies/month
- PBS *Superheroes*
  - 41:10 – 44:35



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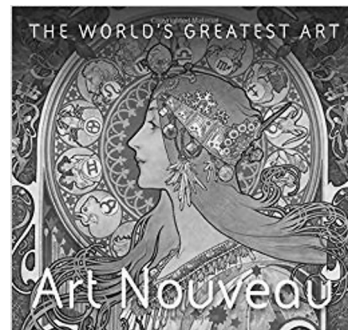
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- rooted in various mythologies
- Greek mythology
  - Amazons = tribe of women warriors
  - life of war
- fairy tales
- Diana emerges from clay
  - two mothers
  - Hippolyta & Aphrodite
- homeland = Paradise Island
- role of Steve Trevor



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- **Co-Authorship**
- Marston (who wrote under pen name: Charles Moulton)
  - wanted to create a superhero who could make people submit to authority
- his wife: Elizabeth Holloway Marston
  - actually came up with idea for a woman superhero
- Marston had a (for that time) unconventional relationship
  - for a long time, they had an 'open' relationship with Olive Byrne who lived with them
  - maybe engaged in 'bondage'
  - Olive Byrne inspired conception of Wonder Woman
- their son: Pete
- artist: Harry G. Peter
  - used art nouveau



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## General Themes

- very few women, heroes and villains
  - Trevor serves as comic foil – a kind of Lois Lane
- technological optimism
  - use of atomic power to save world
- question of superpowers and girls
  - read Robbins, p. 57
- Queer love?
  - what does Robbins say?
    - “Actually, in twenty-five *Wonder Woman*...”
- Bondage?
  - what does Robbins say?
  - but definitely raised some eyebrows in 1940s
  - some people were already complaining
    - Catholic Church in 1942
- writer who took over from Marston was Robert Kanigher, basically a misogynist
  - depicted her very poorly in the 1950s and 1960s
- until 1970s, not taken ‘seriously’ by comic book scholars
- PBS *Superheroes*
  - [44:35 – 45:50](#)



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Gloria Steinem (1934-)

- article by Gloria Steinem
  - second-wave feminist
- “comic books were not respectable, which was a large part of the reason I read them...”
- who did girls have to generally identify with in comic books?
- how did she see Wonder Woman?
  - read p. 205
  - did she agree with Marston?
  - Steinem on her love life?
    - read p. 207
  - other critiques by Steinem
  - what was Steinem’s theory of ‘gynocracy’
- was writing in a particular historical moment of the comic depiction of Wonder Woman
  - in 1968, her powers were taken away
  - Steinem foregrounded Wonder Woman in icon of second-wave feminism
    - *Ms.* Magazine
  - powers returned in 1973



- *Ms.* magazine, issue no. 1
- July 1972

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