

**Ruby BLONDELL**  
**How to kill an Amazon**

In Greek mythology Hercules is the most bestial of male heroes, and the Amazons female separatists who have exempted themselves from the "civilized" patriarchal order. Male heroes, including Hercules, typically deal with the threat of the Amazons by unapologetic slaughter. The TV movie *Hercules and the Amazon Women* (a precursor to the phenomenally successful TV show *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*) reinvents both Hercules and the Amazons in the service of a bourgeois, pseudo-enlightened model of the household characteristic of late-twentieth-century television.

The hero of *Hercules and the Amazon Women* is a family man, utterly devoted to his wife and children. The Amazons he encounters have seceded from an ordinary village because they were mistreated by their husbands. Rather than killing them, Hercules becomes a sensitivity counselor for the village men, whose changed behavior ignites the Amazons' secret yearning for normative domesticity and (hetero)sexuality. The Amazons are domesticated not only by their embrace of a normative model of proper femininity, but by the admission that this is what they have been seeking all along. (Even their rejection of domesticity was fueled by desire for a *better* domesticity.)

The Greek Amazons are thus deprived of both their exceptional power and the threat it poses to men. The power they exercise in the TV movie is the passive mode of female power exemplified in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (the withholding of domestic labor and marital sex), which is itself dependent on the institution of the family, from which such power derives. It is very different from the actively transgressive power of the Greek Amazons (raw physical violence grounding, and grounded in, a lack of interest in, or need for, men) whose strength lies in its repudiation of the *oikos* altogether.

Classical Greek gender ideology so dreads female power that it has no compunction in portraying heroic men brutally killing women who threaten the patriarchal order. Modern American popular culture, by contrast, purports to respect the powerful female. Accordingly, the show offers us a taming of the Amazons that is more insidious than the unapologetic Greek representations of slaughter. For female power is shown to serve, in the end, only the interests of bourgeois domesticity with which female interests are held to be identical. It is for this reason that it is unnecessary for the TV Hercules to actually kill any Amazons. As far as this show is concerned, the Greek Amazons are already dead.