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Aliens, Nazis, and Dudes in Distress: Depictions of Femininity, Nationalism, and Otherness in “Nelvana of the Northern Lights” and “Wonder Woman”

Dozens of superheroes emerged in comic books around the time of World War II to defend the United States and Canada from the evil machinations of super-villains, Hitler, and other Axis enemies. Nelvana of the Northern Lights and Wonder Woman, characters that first appeared in 1941, reflect the context political, social, and cultural influence of World War II in North American popular culture. As female superheroes, Nelvana and Wonder Woman subvert and reify the dominant social discourses from which they arise. Nelvana allegorically represents the Canadian state and collectivist mindset, while Wonder Woman embodies the immigrant work ethic and individualism that are prized attitudes of the United States. A close, critical reading of their adventures through a cultural studies lens demonstrates how Nelvana embodies the Canadian political precepts of peace, order, and good government, while Wonder Woman upholds the American principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.