

“Goddesses” Tell their Tales: Reassessing Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve*

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Introduction

The paper is an attempt to represent women as “goddesses” in Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). A postmodernist novel, the genre of which oscillates from science fiction to dystopia and to magical realism, *The Passion of New Eve* documents ambiguous and multivalent female identities. Operating under the broader canopy of “goddesses,” these women reflect varied female spaces that can be described as complex identity metaphors. For the purposes of the discussion, the urban space as underlying operational structure and enhancing the deification of these women will be examined. In suggesting that “goddess” is not exclusively an indication of feminist spirituality, the paper chooses to engage with contemporary frameworks such as the use and meaning of the female body, the performative articulation of female identities, and its relationship to contemporary feminist narrative.

Spanning the urban *milieu* of an apocalyptic and futuristic New York, Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* initially revolves around Evelyn, the male narrator. Evelyn also happens to be a devoted fan of screen legend, Tristessa. Fascinated by the sensual appeal of urban female bodies, Evelyn exploits women sexually and emotionally. In one such pursuit, he gets enamoured of Leilah, a glamorous black New York dancer. The disastrous consequences of this fling—pregnancy, abortion and desertion—lead to Evelyn’s downfall. He tries to escape, but is instead caught by a group of feminists. Mother, the mysterious multi-breasted leader, rapes Evelyn before surgically transforming him into a perfect new woman. Evelyn is then renamed Eve. The now-female protagonist manages to escape from Mother, only to be caught by the chauvinistic Zero. As a woman, Eve is subjected to extreme, violent and humiliating sexual experiences inflicted by Zero. Eventually, Zero discovers and ransacks Tristessa’s secret abode, finds out that this legendary actress is actually a man in disguise and forces him and Eve to have sex in his presence. Tristessa and Eve somehow escape Zero’s clutches, although the former is accidentally shot and dies. Leilah, who manifests as Lilith,

reveals that she is none other than Mother's own daughter. The end of the novel depicts Eve, escaping on a boat and presumably pregnant.

Deifying female identities through Carter's "basic procedure of adding up heterogeneous structural and functional elements without pretending to synthesize them" (Vallorani, 1994: 367), *The Passion of New Eve* successfully produces figurative rituals through which these contemporary "goddesses" manifest themselves. Even though other writings by Carter, such as *Fireworks* (1974), *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991) already translate the bodily and erotic insecurities of female storytellers into a general dilemma of storytelling, the dominant motif of "goddess" sets *The Passion of New Eve* apart. In formulating Carter's female storytellers as "goddesses," this paper argues that "God the father" provides sanction for patriarchal structures and the alienation of women, resulting in a process whereby women internalize their own oppression. The image of the "goddess" is, therefore, not only able to reflect postmodern plurality but also to convey a political commitment to oppose all forms of "kyriarchal" oppression (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992). Female storytellers endowed with "semireligious discourses" (Perez-Gil, 2007: 216), "goddesses" in *The Passion of New Eve* therefore operate as means of contesting existing structures of power.

Stylistically diverse, *The Passion of New Eve* recognizes the multifaceted aspects of "goddesses". For example it echoes Elinor Gadon's (1989) argument that the "goddess" is one of the most powerful transformative metaphors that we can adopt. In other words, Carter's "goddess" is "a metaphor for the earth as a living organism; an archetype for feminine consciousness; a mentor for healers; the emblem of a new political movement; an inspiration for artists; and a model for resacralizing woman's body and the mystery of human sexuality" (Gadon, 1989: xv). Emphasizing the importance of physical journey in achieving feminist spirituality, Klein (2009) discusses the performance of rituals in hidden caves as means to communicate with "goddess" entities. Lebessi (2009), on the other hand, considers the erotic symbolism encapsulated by the iconographic features of Greek goddesses. Similar resonances can be deciphered in *The Passion of New Eve*.

Butler's concept of "gender as performance" through which female roles in Carter's fiction can be interpreted and which received prominent theoretical attention in the 1990's, can also be related to the concept of "goddess". The artificial quality of "goddesses" in the novel challenges interpretations of narrative closure and thematic resolution through gender identity, gender performativity and masquerade. Gargano (2007), who considers theatricality and masquerade in Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, suggests an objective similar to that of Butler. Exploring gender and stereotyping in Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, Perez-Gil (2007) chooses to view the gendered self in psychological terms and explains the associations of gender and stereotyping.

Since various critics agree that gendered space is an inevitable consequence in Carter's novels, this paper proposes female "goddesses" as framework. If female iconographical depictions in the novel extend the range and vividness of the "goddess's" corporeal presence, they also radically undermine all significant

binaries such as mute/vocal, male/female, beautiful/grotesque, sacred/profane so that the identity of these so-called “goddesses” remains problematic. This ambivalence which is so emphatic in Carter’s postmodernist narrative play with authorial voice certainly complements the subversive representation of women. Since Carter’s radical body politics can also include “technologically enhanced human beings” (Pollock, 2000: 35), the contingency and violence that characterize her novels are also integrated in a subversive storytelling process. In fact, Carter’s storytelling universe is full of disturbing, ambivalent stage sets and lacks stability due to corporeal yet goddess-like female representations.

It is therefore implied that if Carter’s narrative rejects indeterminacy, it then runs the risk of disempowering discourses on female sexual identity. After all, the narrative of *The Passion of New Eve* focuses on the unravelling of the female “goddess” through appropriation of narrative format. By choosing to focus on “goddess” figures in *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter subverts Western patriarchal, spiritual and scientific traditions that ordain the domination of women, people of colour and nature, the severance of nature from culture and death from life, the idolization of linear progress and the machine and the denial of the cycles of life. Through her racially diverse “goddess” storytellers, who belong to either breathtakingly beautiful or appallingly ugly categories, Carter revives and invents transformative metaphors for cosmic power and female potency.

Nude “goddesses”

The realm of nudity arguably provides the power source for Carter’s subversive array of goddess-like corporeal figures, whether sexually attractive, perfect icons of beauty or even grotesque. Extensive resonance exists between mythical Greek and Hindu goddesses in the likes of Diana and Kaali and the “myth” unfolding around the youthful black dancer Leilah, the monstrous and highly iconographic Mother, the white femme fatale Eve and the retired cross-dresser/screen-goddess Tristessa. Ancient goddess traditions, like those related to Diana and Kaali, are antecedents of contemporary ideas of the moving, becoming, and sovereign female subject, both human and divine. In particular, Carter’s “goddesses” focus on mythic images of female “divinities,” creating meaning by reaching within their own naked bodies.

In promoting “goddess” avatars through frontal nudity, *The Passion of New Eve* reflects a yearning for a return of female divinity. Clearly motivated by magical realism, the transformation of Carter’s city women into “goddesses” involves ghostly, fleeting yet intensively sexual bodies. Leilah, described as “more than a demented bird than a woman, warbling arias of invocation or demand” (19), “not a flying thing, nor a running thing, nor a creeping thing, nor flesh nor fowl, some in-between thing, hovering high above the ground” (21) possesses a mythical corporeal identity, which seduces Evelyn immediately. This particular “goddess” is immediately present to herself and to the man, as interaction between sense and body. Leilah, the city *flâneuse*, entices the man with her sexual city allure and the

erotic dance of her body. In the city streets, she performs and emblemizes her sexuality as goddess-woman:

Her recklessness, to saunter, singing so, so brilliantly decorated, up and down the desperate streets, appalled and enchanted me; it was infectious, I caught it. Under the dying moon, she lead me on an invisible string through back streets ... her lascivious trotter that sometimes broke into a stumbling dance for a few seconds, the hot, animal perfume she excluded – all these were the palpable manifestations of seduction. (21)

Leilah, who chooses to strip and exhibit her body, engages Evelyn in a seductive dance within New York. Her intimate bonding with the city, which allows her transformation into “the profane essence of the death of cities” (18), enhances her intrinsic truth as subversive “goddess”. Her seductive nudity, indicative of nomadic interaction with urban spaces, also complements her story as a “goddess”. Daughter of the city, Leilah surrenders her body in the name of consumerism and icon-building. By postulating the sensual Leilah as both urban *flâneuse* and sex-goddess, Carter’s postmodern narrative works to celebrate her corporeal presence. In the city, Leilah’s iconographical details are exposed in overt sexual terms such as “black, matte thigh,” (24) “two nipples like neon violets” (22). In this sense, she displays her sexual iconography to the male onlooker, Evelyn, who worships her as he would a goddess. Leilah’s body is a revealing exposition, a collection of parts, rather than a unified woman, an artificial “goddess” of the city.

The novel’s unusual rendering of city women into nude deities clearly emanates from sacred myths, reclaiming the primacy of the “goddess”. Mother, “fully clothed in obscene nakedness” (59) and with the “menacing immobility of a Hindu statue” (58) is an archetypal association with ancient goddesses. Beloved especially by the underprivileged, Mother enacts nudity as an image, a cultural “text” to be read, one whose power is based in infinite background layers of older tales that infuse the surface narrative with memory, colour and metamorphic power. Connected to disadvantaged women like Leilah, Mother also connects strongly with Kaali, the Hindu goddess of destruction and whose name means “black” in Sanskrit. In *The Passion of New Eve*, Mother’s nudity is both powerful and intimidating. Always naked, this “goddess” appears at strategic moments such as nemesis or forgiveness. She eventually morphs into a Medusa-like figure, “an old woman with hair like a nest of petrified snakes” (190) at the end of the novel.

Independent of a male consort, Mother, head of the feminist desert-sanctuary-laboratory of Beulah, therefore takes control of the story. The cult of the goddess, fascination for the goddess and the general control of the body and the narrative by the goddess are motivated by corporeality. Language, in this context, is considered as an ambiguous instrument of fullness and autonomy, or damage and alienation. So, Mother’s imposing nudity, replete with iconographical details “bull-like pillar of her neck,” “false beard of crisp, black curls,” “two tiers of nipples” and “ponderous feet” (59) occupies close bearings with both the divine and the grotesque. Mother, who has “undergone a painful metamorphosis of the entire

body and become the abstraction of a natural principle” (49) also reinstates the notion of gender as performance (Butler, 1990).

Often performed and exhibited as a threat, Mother’s nudity certainly suggests the psychological and political power of an assumed divinity. In this sense, Mother’s usurping of divine authority forces the male narrator to abdicate. Evelyn cannot subsist in a narrative pattern that finds its source in female “goddesses.” The conscious application of Mother’s vindictive actions against males reaffirms female desire and embodiment much more powerfully than even the enticing quality of Leilah, the urban *flâneuse*. As a female alternative to authority and control, Mother indeed suggests the unconscious return to patterns of domination sanctioned by the pervasive power of the patriarchal symbol—God. Her own abuse of power and her appropriation of Beulah as terrestrial alternative to a celestial abode, therefore, generate a renewed interest in the power of female divine symbol:

Beulah is a profane place. It is a crucible. It is the home of the woman who calls herself the Great Parricide, also glories in the title of Grand Emasculator; ecstasy their only anaesthetic, the priests of Cybele sheared off their parts to exalt her, ran bleeding, psalmodising, crazed through the streets. This woman has many names but her daughters call her Mother. Mother has made herself into an incarnated deity. (49)

Through the presentation of this formidable black, naked, multi-breasted “goddess,” female physicality is developed as a new naming of experience and spirituality. The rape of the male narrator, before being erased from narrative control altogether, is highly indicative of the pressures exercised by an alternative system of control, that is, the corporeal, primitive, grotesque Mother-Goddess:

Her Virginia-smoked ham of a fist grasped my shrinking sex; when it went all the way in, Mother howled and so did I. So I was unceremoniously raped; and it was the last time I performed the sexual act as a man, whatever that means, though I took very little pleasure from it. (64-65)

The subversive rapist “goddess” determines the limits of storytelling control and reinstates the value of gender difference within the postmodern narrative. Braidotti, for instance, associates the grotesque with femaleness and identifies the female monstrous with an anomaly, a deviation from the human norm (1994:78). While the place of women as a sign of abnormality and therefore of inferiority has remained a constant in Western scientific discourse and has even produced a literary genre which celebrates a horror of the female body, the subversive icon of Mother-Goddess as “Other” in *The Passion of New Eve* reclaims female sacrality and the re-telling of female stories.

Tristessa, though no more than a man in disguise, successfully achieves cult status in *The Passion of New Eve*. Most significantly, unlike Mother, Tristessa’s “goddess” status is unaided by nudity or surgery. Tristessa’s corporeal identity is one where not even the female symbol of authority, Mother, can exercise control;

so her request for surgical corrective measures is rejected by the main “goddess.” Zero’s attitude towards Tristessa bespeaks not only fascination and repulsion, but also a recognition of the mythical status of “the ambiguous woman who was like nothing so much as her own shadow, worn away to its present state of tangible insubstantiality” (123). Eve is herself nonplussed at the goddess-like complexity encapsulated by Tristessa’s physical presence, where “no connection between her face and any notion of common humanity” (123) can be deciphered.

Tristessa’s disturbing physical parameters, as much as the other “goddesses,” are also governed by carnival logic. Hostile to any finalizing interpretation or unifying metanarrative, Tristessa’s presence implies a refusal to posit a single, unifying interpretive framework in the novel. It is difficult to ascertain whether the transvestite Tristessa is fact or fiction, given that she is most painstakingly fashioned into a cult-status “goddess” in this narrative of desiring female bodies. Deified yet problematic, with “no ontological status, only an iconographical one” (129), Tristessa reinstates an unusual narrative experience in the novel which is clearly connected to extravagant images of the “revisited excesses of her beauty” (8) and the opulent display of her costumes. A clothed rather than nude “goddess,” though materialising largely towards the end of the novel, Tristessa circulates subversive storytelling currents in the text. Multifaceted and symbolically capacious, Tristessa’s participation in the narrative is certainly controversial and prone to debate.

“Goddess” Rituals

Feminist invocation of various ancient goddess traditions is often dismissed as naive, simplistic, static, essentialist. Revealing them as complex and dynamic instead, *The Passion of New Eve* enhances such beliefs through a cosmogynic worldview, that “of an ordered universe arranged in harmony with gynocratic principles” (Allen 1991, xiii-xiv). It implies female divinity as immanent in nature, both wild and human. Expressing this intuition, “goddess” is archetypally envisioned in the “alien cosmogony” and “humid viscera” (52) of Mother’s space. The consistent evocation of feminized rituals evokes the multivalence of Carter’s artificial city “goddesses” at the same time.

It is interesting to note that the fructifying, potent, and autonomous sexuality of Carter’s subversive “goddesses” is at times severed from the compassionate, nurturing powers associated with the goddesses of yore. *The Passion of New Eve*, therefore, focuses on female bodies that self-consciously perform stories of sexual violence. These “goddesses,” who are often attracted to water or alternative forms of fluidity, representing the simultaneity of life and death, danger and redemption, overwhelm conventional realistic notions of the proper boundaries between physical/metaphysical and natural/supernatural. Eve’s final journey relates to the natural discourses of the woman’s body, as she recognizes her identity within the “cave almost filled by water that was now at blood heat” (181). As a departing “goddess,” Eve also responds positively to the “moisture more viscid, more clinging than water” and the “dim, red glow” (184) of the natural elements. Evelyn’s

male genitals are rejected by the female Eve who, in a significant farewell gesture, sends them "skimming over the waves" (187). Thus, *The Passion of New Eve* is filled with sacred "female" fluids – milk, blood, and water – which finally are indistinguishable as they course through Mother, the central "goddess" of the novel.

The beginning of the novel deliberately ritualizes body fluids into "metaphors of subversion" (de Villiers, 2005: 180). Evelyn's "little tribute of spermatozoa" (5) already attests to his sexualized worship of screen icon Tristessa. Zero's superiority complex, enhanced by "the sacred fluid imparted by [his] member" (92), translates into pornographic rituals with his wives. But the oppressiveness of male fluids is quickly replaced by regenerative female ones, announcing a predominant awareness of the dynamism of female divinities and enhancing the autonomy of most of the said "goddesses" in the text. Graphic blood descriptions surrounding Leilah's botched abortion, for example, "massive haemorrhage," "awash with blood" (35) indicate a female principle that has been reviled and rejected but also openly expressed. The emphasis on the "bright, brown blood" (80), as Eve experiences menstruation for the first time, is equally noteworthy. Her attitude mingles wonder and disbelief at this very female "emblem of [her] function" (80). So a new, artificial "goddess" like Eve indicates subversive regenerative processes. Mother, "tender, however condescending" (65), fulfils a universal maternal function by significantly nursing the newly "born" Eve at her breast:

It seemed the breasts I suckled could never be exhausted but would always flow with milk to nourish me and my relation to the zone of mother had not changed. (75)

The entire network of "goddesses" in *The Passion of New Eve* is in fact based upon natural signs, on symbols of creative, fertile femininity.

The actively functioning bodies of Carter's female figures reintegrate a natural correspondence between femaleness and the divine, and concomitantly, the insufficiency of solely masculine and patriarchal signs of the sacred. The ongoing "deification" of these women heralds a return of female sacred powers. Within Elinor Gadon's argument that the world is now in a time of "epochal changes like those at the time of the coming of the Buddha and the birth of Jesus when human realities are being reshaped by a vision of far-reaching consequences" (1989, 376) lies a recognition of universal female Powers. In the novel, for instance, when Mother informs Evelyn, "I can give life, I can accomplish miracles" (63), her sacred powers are understood as goddess-like. Evelyn's transformation into Eve by "the Castatrix of the Phallogentric Universe" (67) retains significance as it includes the dissolution of hierarchical opposition between man and woman.

What is distinctive about Carter's exploration of "goddess" rituals is her connection between divine "control" and a critique of Western rationalism's claims for the unified, separate and self-authenticating self. Mythical stories inform us that true selfhood, which is the prize of all heroic quests, can only be attained by conquering and exterminating the other, thereby denying any sense of plurality. Evelyn's quest is after all sexual as he plunders, destroys female bodies and tries to

annihilate female territory altogether. Under the narrative of this “goddess,” however, Evelyn’s role as conquerer is reversed and his maleness exterminated:

She cut off all my genital appendages with a single blow, caught them in her other hand and tossed them to Sophia, who slipped them into the pocket of her shorts. So she excised everything that I had been and left me, instead, with a wound that would, in future, bleed once a month, at the bidding of the moon. (70-1)

The “goddess’s” manipulation of body and narrative control provides a political figuration that challenges androcentric and kyriarchal assumptions about what is normative and what is not. As inheritors of a history of suppression, marginalization and demonization, the “goddesses” in *The Passion of New Eve* equip the narrative with possibilities for new ways of understanding and responding to difference, while reflecting the spiralling energy of the postmodern narrative as process.

All the female figures find themselves in a world where storytelling is considered as an ambiguous instrument of fullness and autonomy but also damage and alienation. Provoking desire, mystery and worship in different ways, these “goddesses” therefore formulate a narrative “ritual” that creates a framework of meaning to define a new ethos. According to Griffin (1995), this ethos is firmly rooted in the female body. For the “goddesses” in this novel, the body becomes a site of personal vendetta and works to revision power, authority and social relations.

Examining the combined impulses of reading and writing in Angela Carter’s treatment of the Marquis de Sade’s pornographic mythology, Henstra (1999) helps locate Carter’s unusually violent representation of the female self and emphasizes how the story of these “goddesses” is essentially fraught with violence, rape and pornography.

In this sense, Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* identifies with considerable interest in the notion of the goddess-like female, since it is the locus of immediate sexual interaction between man and woman, story and desire. Engaging with a corporeal definition of power which these “goddesses” believe to be free from the dynamics of domination, this type of female power is not about having power over, but rather it is the power to do and the power to be. Since interaction with the other frequently occurs at the level of the body, one might consider the gaze as a subset of this. The considerable degree of sado-masochistic interplay, which characterizes *The Passion of New Eve*, also displays the female body as the site of interaction. Propelled by “savage desire” (24), for example, Evelyn is immediately mesmerized by Leilah’s body and his own rapist instincts are awakened by such an intensive display of female flesh:

I was nothing but cock and I dropped down upon her like, I suppose, a bird of prey... My full-fleshed and voracious beak tore open the poisoned wound of love between her thighs. (92)

Eve’s sexual torture by Zero is recounted in particularly harrowing detail:

He raped me unceremoniously in the sand in front of his ranch-house after he dragged me from the helicopter, while his seven wives stood round in a circle, giggling and applauding. (86)

He entered me like the vandals attacking Rome. (91)

Zero flung me to the floor and took me from the rear, in the anal orifice, with extraordinary brutality, to show me how much he despised me, the pig lover. (138)

Zero’s fear and suspicion of the female body translates into rape and other forms of physical humiliation towards women. Significantly, Zero’s den is located away from the very urban setting which empowers the women in *The Passion of New Eve*. Even the projection of Tristessa, the legendary screen-goddess, as “too much of a woman” (173) works as a final blow to Zero’s excessive machismo. She too is severely mistreated by Zero who strips and beats her and subjects her to perverse sexual acts with Eve.

By sexualizing the goddesses, and implicating them in rituals of pornography and violence, Carter challenges the matrix of traditional notions of deities and transforms them into subversive postmodern ones. The “goddesses” then highlight characteristics of Carter’s own artistic practice, while also operating as postmodern storytellers. Thus, the gendered understanding of power and cultural vision of Carter’s “goddesses” is firmly rooted in the type of female body and experience represented, so that their vendetta over Evelyn presents a serious challenge to patriarchal relations. Corporeality, always leaning towards revulsion and/or desire, is a particularly important component of their storytelling. In this connection, “goddesses” open up a position from which regulatory discourses of gender can be challenged or contested.

“Goddess” and the City

Apocalyptic and futuristic, controlled by a group of feminists known as The Women, urban space in *The Passion of New Eve* is problematized through terms such as “lurid, Gothic darkness” (10), “festering yet familiar” (13). The presence of “goddesses” in this complex space complements woman’s heightened sensitivity to injustice to such an extent that storytelling is transformed into an urban “ritual” as well as a political act. In this science fiction dystopic world nurtured by the urban setting of New York, the physical journey, sexual rituals and vendetta of these “goddesses” are frequently documented. While exploring the possibilities of their stories through urban space, the degree to which desire is predicated upon corporeality is also reflected in the novel. Lust, sex, physical humiliation and bodily glamour are as characteristic of Carter’s world as are the labyrinthine urban spaces with their consumerist protocols.

The urban abode of the “goddesses” in *The Passion of New Eve* imbues itself with female characteristics. Interestingly, Leilah, “the city’s gift” (25), encapsulates a story of fragmentation, desire, violation and abandon in that same urban space. Leilah’s city emerges as an expression of structural equation, in which the socio-historical position of women connected to the urban environment is considered. Through her subversive job as nude model and topless dancer, Leilah guards the individuality she is accorded by her isolated urban existence and resists any hint of classification. Since the feminized cityscape eludes Evelyn all the time, his ultimate decision is to “[abandon] Leilah to the dying city” (37). Carter’s narrative therefore recognizes both the corporeal exhibition that the city can offer as well as the corporeal isolation that it demands. The latter is the basis for the former.

The ultimate abode of the “goddesses,” the city both controls and protects woman. It has the power to reintegrate Leilah while rejecting the misogynistic Evelyn, for example. Evelyn’s comment, “the city had given Leilah to me and then taken her away” (36), is indicative of the city’s subversive function. The consistent return to urban space conveys a readiness to express woman’s experience in her own voice. In *The Passion of New Eve*, urban space is problematized because it is initially mediated by Evelyn, the male figure. However, a surgical solution is provided when the male narrator is now transformed into the physically perfect “New” Eve in the metropolis of “New” York. The image of diversity and the multiple faces of female divinity are, therefore, continuously defined against the urban crowd and widely celebrated.

Governed by carnivalesque logic (Bakhtin, 1968: 4-5), Gothic or festive representations (Mc Guirk, 1999: 473), Carter’s “goddesses” are always on the move or nomadic. Hostile to any finalizing interpretation or unifying metanarrative, the subsistence of these “goddesses” requires the mystery unfolded by urban labyrinthine space. Beulah, Mother’s private abode in the desert, represents the “end of the maze” (49) which connects geographically to Leilah’s metropolis. The final part of the novel, following Tristessa’s death, witnesses Eve’s return to apocalyptic urban spaces and her reconciliation with Leilah, renamed Lilith. The latter informs Eve of a “terrible devastation” and that “the cities of California are burning like the cities of the plain” (176). The relationship between the urban and narrative spaces provokes the emergence of a radical discourse of the female body. Since these “goddesses,” as subject positions, remain mysterious, the narrative is unable to produce a monolithic system of difference which can assign an unchallengeable status of “Other,” “object” or “victim” to them. Thus, the multi-genre narrative of *The Passion of New Eve* self-consciously occupies this indeterminate and chaotic urban space, making it possible for unfettered female storytellers to transform into “goddesses”.

The urban story of these female figures enhances the existence of symbolical abodes within an atmosphere of overall isolation and fragmentation. Clearly, each of these “goddess” examples offers a celebrative vision of power and will, as well as the story behind the bodies and bondings of these women. Rather than presenting role models for women that are defined and limited by their relationship

to divine and secular male authority, each female storyteller seeks to legitimate power and authority from positions on the margins of city life. But instead of being based on dominance and hierarchy, the model of power and authority of these storytelling goddesses is rooted in strength and corporeal self-knowledge. In the apocalyptic city, each “goddess” not only liberates female sexuality, but also celebrates the female erotic. Taken collectively as images which populate Carter’s urban space, these “goddesses” therefore offer subversive storytelling possibilities.

The labyrinthine quality of urban space in *The Passion of New Eve* complements the postmodernist and poststructuralist awareness of the fragmentation and flexibility of female identities. In this vein, the “goddesses” are clearly displayed as sources of ambiguity that provide for alternative discourses of sexuality and narrative practices. Carter’s city represents pleasure and danger, a site of moral conflict; it is fragmented, yet interconnected, monolithic yet heterogeneous. For the constantly morphing or disappearing “goddesses,” the “darkness and confusion [...] of the city” (37), the “dementia which had seized the city” (40) nevertheless become a source of creative appropriation.

The urban “goddesses” in question exemplify, albeit in different registers, the complexity with which postmodernist fiction that deploys such self-reflexive strategies, is able to handle the sexually charged issue of female deification. As characteristic literary aesthetics which govern the narrative of *The Passion of New Eve*, the “goddess” figures undermine the idealization of femininity as inherently benevolent while also challenging the idealization of their own “sacred” selves. In the process, they manoeuvre the text through alternative textual manipulations, the result being their own tales seeping through and completely sidelining Evelyn’s or even Zero’s for that matter.

Conclusion

The Passion of New Eve offers opportunities for integrating the “goddess” ethos into a postmodernist narrative network at the expense of myths of male heroes. It proposes instead a determined disruption of conventional intellectual and religious norms and suggests a reflection on the challenge for women’s literature. In equating these female figures to “goddesses,” and rejecting an essentialist approach to gender in favour of a constructionist one, the notion of the corporeal female in *The Passion of New Eve* problematizes the concept of the supposedly autonomous woman. It also exposes the sexual vulnerability of women. Urban fantasy remains the terrain through which the corporeal female is projected, a recurring model in Carter’s feminist storytelling that motivates the articulation of desire by the woman and the refusal of being trapped as object of masculine desire, as the “Other” of the male gaze.

This analysis of woman as “goddess” helps open up a new space for a feminine subject of storytelling. It provides a framework of meaning for these women who are alienated from patriarchal traditions. In creating mythical images that are rooted in material manifestations such as powerful female bodies, these storytellers seek to shape a new cultural ethos. Presenting their bodies and stories

through an urban network, they attempt to share a worldview that informs this ethos in the belief that, eventually, this will lead to social change. What is clear is that these women have rejected the ethos they believe is present in patriarchy. Through the conscious construction and enactment of “goddesses,” these storytellers seek a new cultural understanding and vision.

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