



**Manchester  
Metropolitan  
University**

---

Ormrod, J (2018) Wonder Woman 1987–1990: the Goddess, the Iron Maiden and the sacralisation of consumerism. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. ISSN 2150-4857

---

**Downloaded from:** <http://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/621994/>

**Version:** Accepted Version

**Publisher:** Taylor & Francis

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2018.1540135>

Please cite the published version

<https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk>

## **The Goddess, The Iron Maiden and The Sacrilization of Consumerism**

The Previous chapter examined how consumerism constructed a new, less powerful Wonder Woman with no secret identity, no Steve Trevor, just plain Diana Prince, a revision feminists despised. In 1987 Wonder Woman was revised by George Perez as part of an overhaul of the DC Universe, in the Crisis on Infinite Earths story arc. All the major DC characters were revised and some characters such as Supergirl and The Flash disappeared. Perez wrote sixty-one issues of *Wonder Woman* (Feb 1987-December 1991) and his revision affected her representation up to her reinvention in the New 52 in November 2011 (Vol. 4). In his revision of Wonder Woman, Perez also discarded her Diana Prince secret identity and Steve Trevor as love interest. However, influenced by spiritual and feminist discourses of the mid seventies onwards, he made her into a Goddess-like fantasy figure split into two identities. She is Diana, Princess of Themyscira a private, spiritual neo liberal, but she is branded in consumer culture as Wonder Woman, goddess. The discourses constructing Wonder Woman as goddess, however, clashed with other discourses circulating in popular culture and politics that aimed at disempowering female autonomy and highlighted paradoxes in Wonder Woman as female icon.

Perez began by placing Wonder Woman in a universe ruled by the Greek Pantheon where the Amazons communed with Greek gods and goddesses. The origin of the Amazons was revised and the narrative constructed to mirror a biblical structure in which the birth of the Amazons is connected with the Old Testament and that of Diana with the New Testament. The Amazons were the souls of women murdered by men that were stored in the womb of Gaea, the earth mother and rebirthed by the Greek Goddesses led by Artemis (fig 1). They are granted blessings by Athena, Artemis and Demeter so that they are wise, skilled huntresses and their crops abundant. The Amazons are so successful that the Kings of Greece send their champion Herakles to defeat them. Herakles tricks Hyppolyte into giving him the source of her power, Gaea's Girdle and enslaves the Amazons. The Amazons are saved by Athena who leads them to Paradise Island, a space in a different dimension where they are granted immortality and build a great city, Themyscira. However, Themyscira is built over Doom's Door, a portal to Hades in which the evils of the world are held captive. The Amazons are cursed to guard Doom's Door for eternity. Diana's birth mirrors that of her sisters. Hippolyte yearns for a child and she is informed that when she was murdered she was pregnant - it is her unborn child calling to her. Under the direction of Artemis Hippolyte forms a clay image which is then transformed into a child. The Gods then bestow their blessings on the child. In these creation myths Perez articulates the Mediaeval theory of typology in which the Old Testament acts as a prophecy for events in the New Testament. In the birth of the Amazons and Diana, Diana becomes the chosen one, a messianic figure that can redeem the Amazon race and mortals.

Diana becomes the chosen of the Amazon race and the Gods when she competes and wins the contest to travel to man's world bearing Amazon values of love and peace. In man's world Diana lives in Boston with archaeologist, Professor Julia Kapatelis and her daughter, Vanessa. Diana is promoted as Wonder Woman by Myndi Mayer who runs a PR company. Gradually the Amazons, detached from man's world for 4000 years reinstate links with man's world, inviting delegates from the UN and Diana's friends to visit and experience the Amazon way of life. Diana is the only person who can travel freely between Themyscira and man's world, thanks to a gift by Hermes of flying sandals. As she is a creature of fantasy with great powers in man's world, she is regarded by some as a goddess, and this image is promoted by Myndi Mayer's promotions company.

Perez's reinvention of Wonder Woman is the first instance in any story arc up to 1987 when she is represented as sacred. This reflects a similar sacrilization of Superman, also an earthbound god, in this era. Superman's sacrilization arose partly from the influence of the *Superman* film in 1978 which emphasised the messianic qualities of the narrative connecting it explicitly with the American frontier myth and the story of Moses (Campbell, Reynolds, Slotkin, Andrae). John Byrne used the film's evocation of the American small town hero in the big city and turned Clark Kent into the focus of the myth. Where previously Clark Kent was Superman's alter ego, Superman became Clark Kent's fantasy other and the focus was on the mortal rather than the god as hero. Perez did something similar with *Wonder Woman*, there is an emphasis on her upbringing as the only child on Paradise Island. Unlike Superman she comes to earth as a fully grown adult. So whereas Superman 'goes native' becoming an American icon, Wonder Woman spends much of her time in trying to understand and negotiate the complexities of patriarchy. Perez's *Wonder Woman* however, is transformed by consumerism. As Wonder Woman she is a brand, a fantasy figure, something she acknowledges, "To many I am a myth. A mythological daughter of a mythical queen from a mythical land. Yet I am real." (Creatures of the Dark #18, p.5). Other characters regard her as sacred but also a fantasy figure. For instance, Eddie Indelicato, a police officer, describes her as, "...a goddess, or what a goddess ought to look like. Firm, round curves packed into a tiny, tight, armor-plated American flag. Her hair was a cascade of lustrous black curls...gentle sultry voice, flavored with an accent both exotic and musical. It was like hearing my name for the first time. "Eddie," I thought, "You are definitely having the best dream of your life."" ("Who Killed Myndi Mayer?" #20 p.14) As Diana, the Princess of Themyscira, she is an innocent abroad who is spiritual and private but no less sacred than her Wonder Woman brand. In both identities she is perfection in body and mind and there is a conflation of the natural and socialised body in both Wonder Woman and Diana. Like her goddess-like sisters she revels in the health and power of her body claiming, '...there is no greater exhilaration than the sheer joy of flying...the incomparable sensation of pure unbridled freedom!' (Blood of the Cheetah #9 p.3)

In this chapter, Perez's revision of Wonder Woman as sacred object is examined through the cultural lens of feminism, neo paganism and consumerism. Perez critiqued consumerism and popular culture which used beauty and sexuality as weapons to turn woman against woman and destroy those who attempted to become successful career woman. However, he also

trapped Wonder Woman in a profile that was to shape her representation over the next twenty-three years and is, arguably, a figure that other women find an impossible ideal.

### **Capitalism, feminism and the Politics of Health**

The 1980s was a time of extremes: stock market boom and bust, the growth of lucrative health and beauty industries and the emergence of viruses resistant to antibiotics. There was a perception that too many compromises had been conceded to second wave feminism and a feminist backlash began to challenge issues such as abortion and employment rights. These factors played a part in the rise of third wave feminism which developed from the mid 1980s. Third wave feminism also criticised second wave feminism which, it claimed, concentrated upon the rights of affluent white women to the detriment of women of color and the poor.

Third wave feminism was spear-headed by two influential books: Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* and Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. These books attacked patriarchal control of women's cultural disempowerment that grew more oppressive during Reagan's Right wing political administration (1980-1989). Both writers claimed that the feminist backlash aimed to reinstate patriarchal power against what was perceived as the shrinking differences between male and female political, economic and cultural power. However, the backlash was not a coordinated or even conscious attack on women's autonomy, rather it consisted of a number of disparate cultural and political strategies that together increasingly disempowered women. These strategies developed from the late 1970s and became steadily more oppressive during Ronald Reagan's right wing administration.

The media and political spin proposed a cultural difference between the macho Reagan, and 1970s presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter. Nixon and Carter, it was inferred, damaged America's global standing through corruption and a perceived feminization of American politics. 1970s Presidents were presumed to characterise America's reduced status in the world. Symbolically American politics and world standing was characterized by soft, lazy, diseased, or addicted racialized or feminized bodies. Jeffords suggests that Reagan's alignment with Hollywood "links one image popular and national narratives, making them somehow the same story". (Jeffords 6) Reagan's right wing, hard body was the symbol of the new macho political machine: white, courageous and hard working that encouraged family values whilst ordering more single parents back into work and limiting abortion rights (Jeffords 24). In short, Reagan's aim was, through a reassertion of American masculinity, to restore America's place as the Global power.

Domestically, the New Right wing attacked the advances and battles won by second wave feminism. There was a change in attitudes towards feminists in the political administration. Women were edged out of their roles, they were not appointed to daily staff meetings, statistics on women in government were not collected or funding was cut for women's groups. Some posts were allocated to women who were of the New Right but these were ineffective roles. Feminists were purged, those who criticised the political system were deemed subversive and the administration became a 'sea of white male faces'. (Faludi 290-

313) A woman's place as the wife and mother was regarded as crucial to family stability. New Right wing women proposed anti feminist stances claiming second wave feminism's claims that a career fulfilled a woman were unfounded. Beverley LaHaye, for instance, led the attack on feminism from a Christian point of view. She wrote books such as *The Spirit Controlled Woman* and set up groups that supported marriage such as Concerned Women for America supporting women's right to domesticity. The Reagan administration also challenged abortion rights. Benefits were cut to encourage the poor and, paradoxically given the administrative support of female domesticity, single parents to work but this was usually low paid or menial work.

Differences between media representations of women also changed in line with cultural attitudes to women in the workplace. 1970s and early 1980s Hollywood films depicted women challenging inequalities and injustices in the system in films such as *Silkwood* (1983) (nuclear power), *9 to 5* (1980) (workplace equality), *Julia* (1977) (political activism). Or else women were shown as empowered as in *Private Benjamin* (1980). Alternatively, marriage and women's domesticity were critiqued in *The Stepford Wives* (1972), and *The Turning Point* (1977). As the 1980s progressed, representations of women evolved from seventies images of strong women emerging from the domestic setting into the workplace to the depiction of the single professional woman of the 1980s as either mad or bad. An early example of this sea-change mood swing is *Kramer vs Kramer* (1979) in which Joanna Kramer abandons her workaholic husband, Ted and their seven year old son, Billy in order to 'find herself'. During the fifteen months he cares for Billy, Ted loses his career but comes to value his role as a nurturer. However, when Joanna returns over a year later she and her husband go to court to win custody of Billy. Custody is awarded to the mother but she decides she must leave Billy with his father as this is his true home. The film critiques Joanna's selfishness by maintaining that Ted's 15 month parental stint is worth more than her previous seven years of nurturing. It also does not attack the legal system for forcing a child to choose between two parents, or corporate America for its refusal to provide its employees with reasonable working practices to respond to parental obligations.

As the 1980s progressed, however, Hollywood increasingly depicted single and career women as either unfulfilled and unhappy, unfeminine or obsessive and violent marriage wreckers. The latter were the dark women and they were juxtaposed with light women (invariably domesticated, wives or hyperfeminine bimbos). Faludi illustrates how the film that set the trend, *Fatal Attraction* (1987), was adapted from a novel, *9 1/2 weeks*, that depicted a woman, Alex Forrest, destroyed by an illicit relationship with a married man, Dan Gallagher. The film turned Alex into a violent, potentially murderous home wrecker who at the end is killed by Dan's wife, Beth. Family stability and patriarchy is once more restored. The film inspired, usually male audiences, to exhort Beth to 'kill the bitch'. However, these audiences did not question Dan's dubious morality or the murder of Alex who is pregnant.

High capitalism demands bodily control and the construction of docile bodies and women's bodies came under special scrutiny in the 1970s-1990s. Body culture in this era saw a move from the soft body towards the hard body as politically and culturally acceptable. Beauty was politicised and used to attack feminine emancipation "...like the gold standard...it [the beauty

myth] is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact". (Wolf 12) Consumer and right wing forces shaping gender representations and cultural expectations changed perception of body regulation. To fit into a more public setting, the body and its maintenance was increasingly regarded as the individual's responsibility (Shilling 2012, Turner 1996). The emphasis on the toned body was supported by booming diet and exercise industries. The plethora of celebrity-led exercise books and home videos was led by celebrities like Jane Fonda whose workouts were imbued with Beverley Hills glamour. Fonda's exercise products promoted a lean, youthful, energised look but, in line with political and cultural ideology, their underpinning values were the heteronormative, domesticated and monogamous body (Mansfield 2011). Wolf and Faludi argued that these changes in body culture represented the backlash and attempts to control female emancipation. Similar restrictions were imposed in previous eras when it seemed that female calls for emancipation challenged the status quo. For instance, as shown in the previous chapter, although the corsets and tight clothing of the Victorian age seemed to bind the female body, the seeming free 1960s body was another type of restriction as it relied upon the female body becoming androgynous. Developing this type of restrictive body practice, 1980s fashion depended upon total exposure of the body as the nude body, a machine made taut and toned by gym workouts and strict dieting. The insistence on idealised or impossible body shape and style distracted women from the more important issues associated with equality. What is of more significance is, like the 1960s, lean body shape was presented as natural, a product of self discipline rather than shaping bodywear and corsets.

Along with this more supposed natural female discourse was one that promoted 1970s second wave feminists' attacks on scientific knowledge. Science, it was claimed, constructed either ignored or diminished female agency in evolution and the development of civilization. For instance anthropological models ignored women's part in the development of human evolution (Morgan 1972) histories and religions that either ignored or vilified women's contribution to a culture were challenged. Religion particularly came under attack for its misogyny by feminists such as Stone (1976), Starhawk (1979) and Christ (1979) who took as their inspiration Robert Graves *The White Goddess* to argue that Neolithic and Bronze age cultures were matriarchal but that their religions were suppressed and vilified by Indo-European invaders. This notion was expounded in the 1972 *MS* publication, *Wonder Woman*, discussed in the previous chapter in 1972. Along with Gloria Steinham's introduction there was an interpretive essay based upon the discourses constructing Amazons by Phyllis Chesler who reiterated many of the ideas of Stone *et al* whilst providing little empirical evidence supporting her arguments. Nevertheless, these authors contributed to the growth of goddess cults and neo paganism in the 1970s. Many of those drawn to neopaganism were feminists and feminist academics who were disenchanted with male gods and what they regarded as mysogyny in mainstream religions. Thealogy, the study of the Goddess rather than the God, evolved from these neopagan religions. Neopagan practices also incorporated naturism and nature worship. Neo pagans believed that "divinity is inseparable from nature and that deity is imminent in nature" (Adler, 2006: 23). Two main goddesses attracted neopagans; Gaea the earth mother and the Roman moon goddess, Diana. Dianic Wicca was founded by

Zsuzsanna Budapest, an American author, feminist and witch and founder of Take Back the Night, the anti rape movement. As Magglio noted, these neo pagan religions were mainly taken up by middle class often academics and it was this that was criticised by the third wave feminists in the mid to late 1980s.

Neo pagan feminist values were influential in Perez revision of Wonder Woman which represented Diana as connected with a goddess/super-heroine model that emerged in the 1970s. In Marvel Ms Marvel and The Valkerie articulated feminist values. Two of the X Men, Storm and Phoenix were virtual goddesses; Storm controlled the weather and Phoenix was capable of consuming worlds. Both are intoxicated with their bodies' powers and the joy of flight. At DC Starfire/Koriand'r a member of Teen Titans was a princess who could fly and shoot star bolts from her hands. Like Wonder Woman, Koriand'r was an innocent abroad and had a relaxed attitude to nudity, going to far as to pose for a centerfold. All of these quasi goddesses tended to stay within their superhero circles for their relationships. So their powers appeared less remarkable than those of Wonder Woman whose cast of supporting characters were ordinary people. All represented a negotiation between consumerism and the sacred that also emerged in this era.

### **The Sacrilization of the Secular and the Secularization of the Sacred**

Belk (2013) argues that in contemporary culture the boundaries between the sacred and the secular constantly leak into each other in contemporary culture. There are similarities between consumer practices and behaviors and the sacred transcendent experience. The sacred is constructed against its binary opposite, the profane (Eliade, 1959: 6). The sacred, according to Durkheim (1915), is a collective feeling inspired by a religious or spiritual phenomenon that enables social cohesion.

The sacred can be identified such as contamination where good and evil relics can affect people through contact, sacrifice, ritual, myth (Belk). Together these elements can be incorporated into overlapping themes such as the body, objects and narratives. The sacred manifests itself through the disciplines imposed upon the body in asceticism, ritual, ecstatic experiences (Durkheim, 1915: 8, Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), sacrifice and contamination (whether good or evil). Objects become sacred through mythic narratives, for instance in creation stories, in giving gifts. This becomes significant in contemporary ideas about the sacred. However, the sacred cannot be explained through logic; if the creation story is analysed then it becomes touched by profanity and loses its mystery. Narratives, objects and the movement of bodies also underpin notions of *communitas*. *Communitas* is an intense communal spirit expressed in a shared ritual experience. This might be in a celebration, a christening, a pilgrimage in which people collectively turn their backs on the mundane world and engage with the sacred (Turner and Turner, 1978). Turner (1967) notes that such communal endeavors involve the crossing of thresholds, rites of passage and engagement with liminal spaces and states.

In contemporary consumer culture the sacred manifests itself in politics, science, sports (Hoffman, 1992), art and music. For instance, themes surrounding rock music can evoke the sacred in the ecstasy of being carried away by the music, taking drugs, the worship of the

rock star (Rojek, 2007). The secular is sacrilized through the objects consumers set apart and the spaces they choose to occupy or that become special to them. Sacrilization is not random but associated with hierophany, the manifestation of the sacred through a person, place or object. Hierophany is usually only recognised by a few chosen acolytes. (Eliade 1958: 7) The sacred is also imbued with mystery and inspires awe in what Eliade describes as kratophany, the sacred poser of a thing, "that combine[s] fascination and devotion with repulsion and fear" (1958: 7).

All of these themes can be identified in Perez *Wonder Woman* and collectively they locate Diana/Wonder Woman as a hierophanous object and divine being. However, her promotion as a goddess raises some significant problems for herself and those around her in the trivialization but also the fantasy aspects of consumer culture.

### **Marketing the Sacred: the Goddess and the Iron Maiden**

In man's world, Diana is adopted by Myndi Mayer's PR company and her image is promoted with her new identity, brand Wonder Woman. Diana is represented as a sacred being through body, objects and narratives. She has joy in her natural body which is granted powers beyond the ordinary. Thus her body expresses the joy of "being in the world" (Csordas, 1994: 6) through flight and "the thinking body" (Charlesworth, 2000: 83), the body in tune with its surroundings, experiencing them through synesthesia. Flight incorporates the feeling of the wind with the sounds of the woods and nature. Diana thus experiences ecstasy akin to the religious experience through her joy in her body. As Diana, she is a religious being differentiated from the Olympian gods through her worship, prayers and frequent communing with them in the woods and liminal spaces such as the beach. In addition she is worshipped as a messianic figure by followers of a Diana Cult on a Greek island as her sister Troia discovers (Fig). Her devotion marks her out as divine, if not a goddess, then a sacred being as she takes on many of the attributes of her Roman Goddess namesake: chastity, hunting, affinity with the woodland. However, she is also a princess and has a direct communication with the Gods, often wandering naked through the woods to pray.

Her special relationship with the gods is not granted to ordinary Amazons or mortals. Hence, Hermes gives her sandals to negotiate the mortal man's world and the divine space of Themyscira. Diana is also divine through her costume, based upon the American flag, itself a sacred object, her lasso of truth and her bracelets. All of these objects are sacrilized. Her costume is based upon the American flag because of the sacrifice of a mortal woman, Diana Trevor, who fought alongside the Amazons to contain a demon escape. Her lasso of truth is forged from Gaea's Girdle and through this Diana's power gathers power from the earth<sup>1</sup>. The bracelets, which symbolise the defeat of the Amazons by Herakles through trickery, are a reminder never to succumb to or believe in the promises of man.

---

<sup>1</sup> The history of Gaea's Girdle has been simplified so as to streamline the analysis. Briefly Amazon Queens Hippolyte and Antiope her sister were each given a girdle. Antiope gave her girdle to Hippolyte when Hippolyte's girdle was stolen by Herakles. Antiope then took her Amazon acolytes to wander man's world. The Bana Mughdall, as they became known, stole back Hippolyte's girdle and it became an heirloom, detached from its mythic roots and therefore desacrilized in the profane world. The Goddess Hestia used Antiope's girdle to make the Lasso of Truth. In a storyline where Diana discovers the lost Amazon tribe, the Girdle calls to her lasso and upon retrieval the Girdle once more becomes sacrilized.



Diana's divinity is signalled by the ways time operates for her and the Amazons. They are immortal and exist in mythic time: for immortals time has little meaning. However, Diana's body is not a natural mortal body. She is immortal and thus time has a different meaning for her body. Time becomes significant in Diana's construction as goddess for her body is immortal, before her entry to man's world, she has never seen a child before nor an older woman. Nowhere is this more foregrounded than in the representation of Vanessa and Julia Kapatelis. Both are at liminal stages of female life, Julia in the menopause, Vanessa puberty. these life events demonstrate time as linear, measurable by date and time. Vanessa, a tempestuous teenager, cannot wait for the rite of passage of her first period and announces this in a letter to her mother, "Please note...that on this date, at precisely 1.40 in the afternoon, [I]...became a W-O-M-A-N!...Now that I've grown up, I promise I won't be [stupid] any more" (#41 p13) These rites of passage are not celebrated on Paradise Island as the Amazons are immortal. Time passes differently for them. Time is cyclical. Sacred moment can be experienced through rituals that "imitate a celestial archetype" (Eliade, 1959: 5). An example of this imitation of the mythic moment is provided when the Amazons stage a theatrical event replicating their origins for delegates of the UN ("Forbidden Fruit" #38, 1990, p.2 fig ). This moment, however, is tainted by the incursion of profane time. Lois Lane records the event in a photograph and an article for her newspaper. She trivialises this sacred moment in two ways, by fixing it in linear time but also describing it as "an afternoon matinee at Themyscira's equivalent of the neighborhood Cineplex". (Fig)

Themysciran culture is based upon an Edenic nostalgia in which the rural and the urban coexist in perfect harmony, described in an article by Lois Lane, "Themyscira. The Troy of Priam. The Athens of Pericles. The Rome of Julius Caesar. A city of the ages and for the ages, built of marble and sandstone, acropolis and agora...alive, thriving stirring and spectacular.' (*Wonder Woman* #37 "Strangers in Paradise" December 1989: 21). Like the Garden of Eden crops, hunting and fishing are bountiful (*Wonder Woman* #36 "Changes in the Wind" November 1989). A delegate invited to the Feast of Five on Paradise Island ponders, 'soil is incredible, almost virgin in its purity. Once home was like this. Before Drought and war and pestilence. Before the hatred caused the food to rot in its sacks upon the docks...so that guns could be transported instead.' (*Wonder Woman*, #38 "Forbidden Fruit" January 1990: 6) Themysciran architecture exemplifies the eternal through its representation as the perfect Greek city-state. Its cultural construction is based upon a mixture of myth and religious narratives. Themyscira hails the Garden of Eden but it is also discovered through the parting of the seas by Poseidon. Like Eden, Themyscira can be destroyed when the denizens of Doom's Door escape and, in "Forbidden Fruit" the Amazons downfall is effected by apples. In this case the apples of discord that they eat at the sacred banquet. Through contamination, however, the apples cause conflict at the Feast of Five 'a holiday that combines elements of Christianity's Easter, Judaism's Passover, and the Islam monthy of Ramadam' (5) with the Amazons. Lois Lane's article describing this meeting trivializes and questions the sanctity of the ritual describing Themyscira as a 'Grecian Never-Never Land' (6) with Diana as Peter Pan 'leading us all to a second childhood filled with fairy dust and wonderful thoughts' (6). 'paradise is... such a fragile dream. what harm in letting the sleeper continue for a while?' (14)

## **Consuming/ consumed by the sacred**

Commodification and marketing also desacrilize the sacred (Belk). This is effected in two ways; the trivialization of the sacred through selling kitsch and the affinity of the sacred with the profane. An example of this is in Myndi Mayer selling Wonder Woman dolls for \$150, bracelets of submission to teenage girls or posters so successful Myndi Mayer writes, 'On the merchandising front it seems that stores nationwide can't seem to stock enough Wonder Woman material. Add to that the licensing of Diana's own monthly comic book...various Wonder Woman clothing and motions lines, huge profits are being expected across the board...' (Time Passages # 8 p.20) These objects are misused because they introduce a note of 'mere commercialization' into what is sacred. Posters are used as pinups or are degraded with profane graffiti. The bracelets are supposed to be symbols of female empowerment but they become the means of establishing high school cultural hierarchies where poor children cannot afford them.

Wonder Woman's beauty is a blessing and curse for her mission. In the West beauty is regarded as an attribute of the moral and good but, as Wolf suggests, "if a woman is born resembling an art object, it is an accident of nature...it is not a moral act". (59) Diana is fashioned by Hippolyte as an art object before her transformation to mortal. As an art object there is a distance between her and other women - she can never understand the trials they endure to become beautiful. This idealisation of her body and mind is particularly detrimental to her relationships with men and women in man's world especially in the 1980s. This was an era, as noted above, when politically and culturally the body was used as a means of controlling and setting women against each other.

Yet Diana's beauty is a drawback too, as it detracts from her message, especially to men. As Wonder Woman in man's world, audiences come to her lectures to see her rather than hear her message. At one point, she despairs and asks, "Will I leave man's world having taught people nothing more than my name?" (Blood of the Cheetah #9 p.8). Although she is branded as an empowering figure for young girls and women, her perfection is also a problem. Young girls desire the accessories marketed under her name. Older woman feel uncomfortable around her both personally and because she is a threat to their relationships with men. Although she is moral and ethical, her beauty prevents many other female characters from fully embracing her as sister and they express a range of responses towards her from hostility to envy and desire. Although they call her friend, Etta and Vanessa are wary of allowing their partners from meeting her too often. Vanessa, for instance, knows that Barry, the boy she has a crush on, is only interested in her so he can meet Wonder Woman. She practices telling Wonder Woman to stay away from him (May 1989 issue 16 "Bird of Paradise/ Bird of Prey"). Etta Candy confesses, "You make me feel weird, uncomfortable...Maybe it's because you're so pretty and you never had to diet..." (#43: p.17) Capitalism and the consumer society in effect turns Diana into the iron maiden. In this narrative trajectory, other characters attempt to emulate her beauty, in some cases, with tragic consequences. Perez reveals the conflict between socialised and natural bodies especially in certain characters who express this conflict in their responses to Diana/Wonder Woman. The characters who express a range of often confused attitudes to Diana are Myndi Mayer, a PR woman, Diana's enemy, the Silver Swan and Vanessa's friend, Lucy Spear. All three desire

some aspect of Wonder Woman that in previous eras did not pose a problem. However, given the beauty myth proposed by Wolf, in the late 1980s Wonder Woman is the Iron Maiden, a trap to captivate women fascinated by the beauty myth. This is indicated in Silver Swan's claim that consumerism is, "...promoting Princess Diana as some sort of feminine ideal no real woman could ever hope to become". (WW "Bird of Paradise/ Bird of Prey" May 1989 #16 p.) The remainder of the chapter identifies how the iron maiden metaphor destroys Myndi Mayer and Lucy Spears, two women who seemed to have the beauty, power and intelligence to progress far in the world but instead are destroyed by ambition and desire.

Myndi Mayer, Diana's PR manager, is a good example of the ruthless business woman so condemned by 1980s media and political rhetoric. She is a shrewd manipulator but one who falls for the myth that a woman can have it all that many 1980s films attempted to discredit. In Myndi's first appearance she represents what Entwistle claims is the reciprocal arrangement of the body/self in the articulation of identity. Her body is constructed spatially and temporally in four panels emphasising an aspect of her stylish dress, presence and her embodiment. The first panel emphasises the sound of Myndi with her entry into the story as a fur coat and a pair of stylish stiletto heels 'tak, takking' across the tiled Harvard floors. The second panel emphasises smell, her cigarette smoke wisps across a third of the panel, caressing the "No Smoking" sign, her presence announced by students' reaction shots. The third panel demonstrates her excess, gold bracelets adorn her wrists and she has immaculately manicured nails of bright red. The fourth panel is an over the shoulder shot of Julia's astonished reaction on opening the door (Fig).

Myndi wastes no time in informing Julia she wants to manage Wonder Woman and promises she can make it profitable for her, an offer Julia refuses. Myndi, however, is not easily put off, "If I want to ink the Diana dame, I'll have to get on the professor's good side" (Rebirth # 7 p.15) . The next time Myndi appears she is transformed into a homespun girl-next-door, dressed in jeans hair tied back with slides and a pen substituting for her cigarette. Even so, she cannot totally perform the role, letting slip that with Diana's looks "You're going to be a lot easier to sell...er...promote than I'd thought" (Fig "Rebirth" #7 # 18).

Even in death Myndi is defined by her adoration of designer clothes and brands as noted by detective Eddie Indelicato, "When we got there, Myndi Mayer, the controversial "Publicist to the Stars", was just lying there - a shattered porcelain doll in an Evan Picone suit, the scent of fancy perfume still traceable through the smell of spilt booze and smothered cigarettes. You could tell the girl had class, and the money to pay for it. She had the pampered body of a showgirl. Even the coroner's outline flattered her. I'd seen photos of her. She was about forty but still a looker, in a plastic sort of way' ("Who Killed Myndi Mayer?" #20, p.4) The coroner's chalk outline drawn around Mayer's corpse suggests it is a metaphor of a canvas on which the designer brand collection can be displayed (Cornfield and Edwards, 1983).

Myndi is the typical representation in the 1980s of the unfulfilled career woman a, 'slave to her ambition' (Eve of Destruction #21 p.3). Myndi's downfall is twofold. She allows a man, Skeeter La Rue, a drug pusher to control her and her desire for a dream life. Her need for fantasy is revealed in a story by one of her college friends, Cassie, who claims that Myndi span a story about her father was a fashion consultant claiming he made her dress. Cassie

knows that the dress is from Saks on Fifth Avenue. Even her death is not straightforward as what looks like murder is, in fact, a drug overdose. The sacred and profane are expressed in Diana and Myndi's attitudes towards responsibilities and ethics. Myndi requests that Diana sprinkle her ashes in the waters around Paradise Island (WW Annual #1 Testament 1988). She offers Diana a large sum of money to do this but Diana is surprised that Myndi could not understand that she would have done this for nothing. Diana articulates the attitude that the sacred cannot be trivialised by mere capital.

Lucy Spear, like Myndi Mayer represents a girl who lives through consumerism. She presents the façade of a successful girl, is a cheerleader, smart (she never gets less than 95% in school assignments, popular with boys and exceedingly pretty. Despite her popularity, maturity and beauty, Lucy is unhappy. She feels she cannot live up to her parents' or society's expectations. Although she is more mature than Vanessa she yearns for a childhood she feels was never hers and this may be a reflection of her parents' attitude and expectations for her. Her father wants to keep her as a child When she gets her first period he 'cried like a baby' (*Wonder Woman* #41, "The Ties That Bind" April, 1990: 13). Her mother sends out conflicting signals. When she requests a Wonder Woman doll she tells her she is too old to play with dolls.

The significant moment in Lucy's life is a liminal moment at a carnival held in Beacon Hill told in a story, "Chalk Drawings" that runs parallel to the aftermath of her suicide. Carnival time, as Bakhtin suggests, is a time in which official time is suspended and there is no life outside of the carnival, "During carnival time life is subject only to its own laws...It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part". (Bakhtin, 1968: 20) Carnival is a time when the typical values of the world are turned on their head. Thus, Vanessa describes how this carnival time transforms "our little cosmopolitan neighborhood [into] a slice of real Americana. There was a fresh innocence between us, instead of our typical urban paranoia. Strangers actually smiled at each other and good friends laughed". (Chalk Drawings 46, September 1990: 1). While carnival time is connected to sacred time in that it is cyclical time, in this story sacred and profane time are juxtaposed. The story of this sacred moment is juxtaposed with linear time and Lucy's funeral. Vanessa's memories of this idyllic time are tempered by her memories of Lucy's mockery of her childishness and her remonstrations that Vanessa stop obsessing about when her breasts will develop. When a street artist produces a chalk drawing of Lucy and Vanessa on the pavement, Vanessa profanes the moment with a photograph (fig 12). The representations in this story are similar in their evocation of Baudrillard's simulations as discussed above. The sacred moment of plenitude when all is right with the world is captured by the artist, the chalk drawing is fixed by the photograph. That moment is washed away with the rain but recalled through memory.

Figure 1 Vanessa fixes the sacred moment. "Chalk Drawings" #46, 1990, p.8 and p.12.

While Vanessa envies Lucy's popularity with boys and her fully formed female body, Lucy wants possession of the sacred thing, Wonder Woman. She fills the void by blackmailing her

parents to buy Wonder Woman branded goods to create a collection claiming. 'See this doll? Cost \$150. Lucy begged us to buy it. I said she was too old for dolls...She said if Vanessa could have the real thing in her house she could at least have a doll.' (Chalk Drawings #46, p.19, fig 13) For Lucy, however, the doll is a simulation of the Goddess, much like the icon is a substitute for God in the Middle Ages (Baudrillard). When her consumer goods fail to provide the plenitude she craves, Lucy steals her mother's car keys and suffocates herself with another sacred product, her father's car.

Myndi and Lucy fall prey to the fantasy and desire of consumerism. Eddie Indelicato the detective investigating Myndi Mayer's death unwittingly identifies a connection between Myndi and Lucy "...I (Eddie Indelicato) stared at the photos of Diana, and of Myndi Mayer, another beautiful; bird who just wanted to keep flying higher. Until she ran out of sky." (Who Killed Myndi Mayer? #20 p.22. idea by Carol Flynn). Real life does not offer the plenitude of consumerism. Only through consumption can one connect with the sacred in contemporary culture. Myndi constructs a fantasy world for herself but it is significant she also chooses to take a career in peddling PR dreams. Lucy also constructs a fantasy world with her simulations of the sacred in her collection and Wonder Woman doll.

## Conclusions

In this story arc, Perez constructed a Goddess paradigm for the representation of Wonder Woman that was to endure for twenty three years. It was modelled on an ideal feminist figure connoting power tempered with essentialist feminine virtues of peace, love, justice and forgiveness. In Themyscira he created an Amazon paradise. The sacrilization of Wonder Woman materialised in a story by John Byrne in which she became the Goddess of Truth (*Wonder Woman* #127, November 1997), an honor that was withdrawn several issues later. Successive writers detached her from her Amazon roots and her position as a sacred vessel of the Gods. However, Perez revision and her sacrilization as a saintly figure worked against her for female action heroes and superheroines were entering a new phase by the early 1990s. It would be a phase in which Wonder Woman was regarded as a matronly and rather priggish figure, out of step with the arrival of bad girls, heroines who were overtly sexualised, *uber* violent and attractive to mainly male comics audiences. The 1990s superhero body mirrored violent representations in popular culture, but they also expressed concerns over citizenship and the body.

## Bibliography

- Adler, M. (1986). *Drawing down the moon: witches, Druids, goddess-worshippers, and other pagans in America today*. Boston, Beacon Press.
- Andrae, T. "From Menace to Messiah: the Prehistory of the Superman in Science Fiction Literature". *Discourse*, Summer 1980, v2: pp:84-112.  
<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/41389055?uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21102175241987>

- Bakhtin, M. (1968) *Rabelais and his world*. Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press.
- Belk, R. and Wallendorf, M., et al. (1989) The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior: Theodicy on the Odyssey . *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 16 (June 1989), p.1-39.
- Campbell, J. (1968) *The hero with a thousand faces*. Princeton, N.J.]: Princeton University Press.
- Charlesworth, S.J. (2000) *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Experience*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Christ, C. P., & Plaskow, J. (1979). *Womanspirit rising: a feminist reader in religion*. San Francisco, Harper & Row.
- Cornfield, B. and O. Edwards (1983) *Quintessence*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990) *Flow*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Csordas, T. (1994) *Embodiment and experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Durkheim, E. (1915) *The elementary forms of the religious life*. London: G. Allen & Unwin.
- Baudrillard, J. "Simulations" in Easthope, A., & McGowan, K. (2004). *A critical and cultural theory reader*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press: pp..
- Eliade, M. (1959) *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*. London: Harcourt Brace.
- Eliade, M. (1958) *Patterns in comparative religion*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
- Faludi, S. (1991). *Backlash: the undeclared war against American women*. New York, Crown.
- Graves, R. (1966). *The White Goddess: a historical grammar of poetic myth*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Hoffman, S. J. (1992) *Sport and Religion*. Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics Books.
- Jeffords, S. (1994). *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick, N.J.:Rutgers University Press.
- Lahaye, B. (1976). *The Spirit-controlled woman*. Irvine, Calif, Harvest House.
- Magliocco, S. (2004). *Witching culture: folklore and neo-paganism in America*. Philadelphia, Pa, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Mansfield, L. (2011) 'Sexercise': Working out Heterosexuality in Jane Fonda's Fitness Books. in *Leisure Studies*. 30(2): 237-255.

Morgan, E. (1972) *The Descent of Woman: the Classic Study of Evolution*. London: Souvenir Press.

Reynolds, R. (1994). *Super heroes: a modern mythology*. Jackson, University Press of Mississippi.

Rojek, C. (2007) Celebrity and Religion. In: Redmond, S. and Holmes, S. eds. (2007) *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*. 1st ed. New Delhi, London, New York: Sage Publications, p.171-180.

Shilling, C. (2012) *The Body and Social Theory*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Slotkin, R. (1973) *Regeneration through violence*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.

Starhawk. (1999). *The spiral dance: a rebirth of the ancient religion of the great goddess*. [San Francisco], HarperSanFrancisco.

Turner, B. 1996. *The Body and Society*. London: Sage.

Turner, V. and Turner, E. (1978) *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wolf, N. (1991). *The beauty myth: how images of beauty are used against women*. New York, W. Morrow.

#### Filmography

*9 to 5* (1980)

*Julia* (1977)

*Kramer vs Kramer* (1979)

*Private Benjamin* (1980)

*Silkwood* (1983)

*The Stepford Wives* (1972)

*Superman* (1978)

*The Turning Point* (1977)