



UNIL | Université de Lausanne

Unicentre

CH-1015 Lausanne

<http://serval.unil.ch>

---

*Year : 2022*

## The Many Faces of the New Lilith: Transforming Fear and Desire in Modern Media

Ivana Erard

Ivana Erard 2022 The Many Faces of the New Lilith: Transforming Fear and Desire in Modern Media

Originally published at : Mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Lausanne

Posted at the University of Lausanne Open Archive.  
<http://serval.unil.ch>

### **Droits d'auteur**

L'Université de Lausanne attire expressément l'attention des utilisateurs sur le fait que tous les documents publiés dans l'Archive SERVAL sont protégés par le droit d'auteur, conformément à la loi fédérale sur le droit d'auteur et les droits voisins (LDA). A ce titre, il est indispensable d'obtenir le consentement préalable de l'auteur et/ou de l'éditeur avant toute utilisation d'une oeuvre ou d'une partie d'une oeuvre ne relevant pas d'une utilisation à des fins personnelles au sens de la LDA (art. 19, al. 1 lettre a). A défaut, tout contrevenant s'expose aux sanctions prévues par cette loi. Nous déclinons toute responsabilité en la matière.

### **Copyright**

The University of Lausanne expressly draws the attention of users to the fact that all documents published in the SERVAL Archive are protected by copyright in accordance with federal law on copyright and similar rights (LDA). Accordingly it is indispensable to obtain prior consent from the author and/or publisher before any use of a work or part of a work for purposes other than personal use within the meaning of LDA (art. 19, para. 1 letter a). Failure to do so will expose offenders to the sanctions laid down by this law. We accept no liability in this respect.

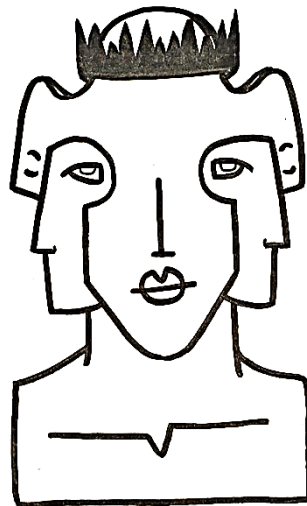
THE MANY FACES OF THE NEW LILITH:  
TRANSFORMING FEAR AND DESIRE IN MODERN MEDIA

---

Ivana Erard

Under the supervision of Prof. Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet

Expert: Dr. Marie-Emilie Walz



University of Lausanne - Faculty of Arts  
Master Thesis of Arts in English Language & Literature

August 2022

*Cover art by Simon Caviezel*

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deepest appreciation of my supervisor, Professor Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, for her invaluable feedback, encouragement and patience throughout the writing of this mémoire. I am greatly indebted also to my teachers at Unine and Unil, who have greatly shaped my understanding of the world and my research interests, and to Dr. Marie Walz for accepting to be my expert on this mémoire.

Words cannot express how grateful I am for my family, and for my parents, Henri and Angela Erard, who have supported me unconditionally throughout my studies and who provided the environment I needed to thrive academically.

Lastly, I would like to mention my friends and all those without whom this journey would have been a lot more lonely. Special thanks should go to Simon Caviezel and Guy Da Costa for their precious nuggets of wisdom and proof-reading, and for sharing the ups and downs inherent to the process of writing a mémoire.

# Table of Contents

---

<b>I. Introduction</b> .....	1
INTEREST IN THE SUBJECT-MATTER .....	1
METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION OF THE CORPUS .....	2
HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF LILITH .....	6
<b>II. Lilith the Shapeshifter in Angela Carter’s <i>The Passion of New Eve</i> (1977)</b> .....	12
THE PASSION OF NEW EVE IN CONTEXT.....	14
“DELIGHT AND DISTURB”: THE GOTHIC EROTICISM OF LEILAH/LILITH.....	18
TERRIBLE MOTHERHOOD .....	26
“ONE WOMAN IS ALL WOMEN” : LILITH AND EVE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS.....	34
<b>III. Lilith the Vampire in <i>Bordello of Blood</i> (1996)</b> .....	44
OBJECTIFICATION, EMPOWERMENT AND THE MALE GAZE .....	47
MARKERS OF OTHERNESS.....	57
<b>IV. Lilith the Witch in <i>Chilling Adventures of Sabrina</i> (2018-2020)</b> .....	74
LILITH, THE HISTORICAL WITCH AND THE MYTHOLOGICAL WITCH .....	76
LIBERATION AND THE COST OF INDIVIDUALISM.....	88
THE PASSION OF LUCIFER MORNINGSTAR AS GOTHIC PARADIASTOLE.....	96
<b>V. Conclusion</b> .....	101
<b>VI. Bibliography</b> .....	103
PRIMARY SOURCES .....	103
SECONDARY SOURCES .....	104
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	108
<b>VII. Appendix</b> .....	109
THE ALPHABET OF BEN SIRA.....	109
JUDITH PLASKOW’S “THE COMING OF LILITH” .....	110
THE PASSION OF LUCIFER MORNINGSTAR.....	112

## I. Introduction

---

*Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode.*

Angela Carter in "Notes from the front lines" 26

### INTEREST IN THE SUBJECT-MATTER

My interest in Lilith's story is motivated by a variety of personal interests and academic pursuits. Throughout my studies in English, I have been heavily influenced by intersectional approaches to gender, class, race and sexuality and how they relate to modern issues in contemporary literature and pop-culture. In particular, I am very interested in the study of media written by and/or geared towards women, which have historically been dismissed as too sentimental, immoral, or not literary enough. What motivates me to write a *mémoire* on Lilith is rooted in these interests and in my fascination of her as a popular character. Originally, it is her appearance in many of the tv shows I have watched that sparked this interest. Shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Mutant Enemy Productions 1997-2003), *True Blood* (HBO 2008-2014), *Shadowhunters* (Disney/ABC 2016-2019), *Supernatural* (The WB/The CW 2005-2020) and *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (Netflix 2018-2020), feature Lilith in turn as the mother of all demons, the original vampire, the queen of hell, Satan's concubine, the first woman and Adam's first wife before Eve. Although these portrayals of Lilith take many liberties from the original myth (if ever there was one), the idea of an extremely powerful, complex, and unapologetically sensual female character resonated deeply within me.

The more I have researched the figure of Lilith, the more I became aware of her cultural significance and impact – through the sheer quantity of characters bearing her name as well as the many intersections arising in the literature. For this *mémoire*, one approach was dismissed

quite early, as it has already been explored in depth by experts. Namely, chronological approaches from religious studies, which have looked at the emergence of the myth of Lilith from ancient Sumerian liturgy to its first appearance in the Hebrew bible and its evolution in Judaic tradition in the Middle Ages, to her revival by second-wave feminists of Jewish origins in the seventies<sup>1</sup>. Finally, I have decided to pursue my interest in contemporary literature and pop-culture through a comparative and intersectional analysis of post-feminist iterations of Lilith. My research focuses on reworkings of the myth of Lilith as a supernatural Other in late twentieth and early twenty-first century media.

## METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION OF THE CORPUS

In this section, I lay out my main hypothesis, present the corpus of this mémoire, propose a chapter plan and define the three methodological approaches used throughout my work.

My hypothesis for this mémoire is that the myth of Lilith has entered the collective occidental consciousness as an archetype of femininity, fear, and desire. The works I have chosen to analyze in order to explore this thesis feature common thematic patterns and characterizations of monstrous and hypersexualized femininity. From the comparative analysis of the three, prototypical characteristics of what I would call “The New Lilith” can be drawn. The New Lilith, almost becoming a stock-character for any sexy demon character, is a heavily sexual(ized) female character of great power who troubles the established order of the narrative world. She is a true shapeshifter who borrows characteristics from Jewish and Christian theologies as well as ancient mythology. She is imbued with traits found in other female monsters in the collective consciousness, like the vampire seductress, the witch, or the succubae, all at the intersection of femininity, fear, and desire.

---

<sup>1</sup> Although my analysis will not focus on this perspective, a section of this introduction is dedicated to the historical background behind the myth of Lilith (see “History and Origins of Lilith” p. 6).

I argue that her story crystallizes antediluvian fears around female sexuality, like the fear of being seduced and taken advantage of, the fear of sexual aggression and rape, or the fear of sterility. Gothic horror is thus a genre in which a figure like Lilith thrives. Finally, the New Lilith blurs the ancient antithetical relationship between her and Eve, as personifications of good and evil, of innocence and perversion, and of promiscuity and virginity. Thus, her purely villainous or antagonistic role is questioned. Doubly othered, her name is now symbolic of struggles for equality and complex femininity.

In order to explore this thesis, I have chosen as my primary sources Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), the horror/comedy film *Bordello of Blood* (1996), and Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020). I have made this selection with the intention of representing the variety of Lilith narratives in modern media, although not extensively. The first reason is that these works are products of their time. Indeed, the publication of Angela Carter's novel coexists with a revival of Lilith by second-wave Jewish feminists, *Bordello of Blood* is a horror/comedy that was first imagined by Robert Zemeckis (responsible for the *Back to the Future* trilogy) as an exploitation film that would surf on trends for horror flicks, and *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (CAOS for short) is a widely successful Netflix series and a very recent take on the myth of Lilith, heavily imbued with third-wave feminist ideology. Second, they are representative of the different media and genres in which Lilith is found – namely a dystopian, science fiction novel (*New Eve*), a horror/comedy, B series film (*Bordello*) and an edgy, supernatural teen series (CAOS). I could also have included iterations of Lilith in video games and in comic books – as there are many, but in regard to the scope of a mémoire and to my areas of expertise, they were not included as primary texts.

My analysis uses the novel, the film and the tv series as case studies in subgenre to propose prototypes of the New Lilith. They essentially function as steppingstones towards a wider constellation of Lilith(-like) narratives and open analysis to the continued relationship



between female sexuality and fear in the contemporary cultural consciousness. As the choice of corpus calls for it, comparative analysis is particularly relevant to this *mémoire*. More specifically, I am interested in the idea that the material should not be considered in hierarchical relations, but rather in terms of their cultural relevance and relationship to each other. Hence, this *mémoire* compares Lilith in three works as a named character with recognizable attributes.

What is more is that Lilith's Other status calls for a sensitive and intersectional study of her representation in media. In this *mémoire* I understand intersectionality – a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (although the approach was developed before that), as a framework of analysis which considers how one person's identities can shape their experiences with discrimination or privilege. In other words, the impact of all factors of identity and identification, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, (dis)ability, age, religious or economic background intersect in the way individuals act and are treated<sup>2</sup>. In the case of Lilith, intersectional concerns cannot be avoided, and I argue that in modern media, she is othered by her gender, her race and her supernatural status.

The third approach which is relevant to this *mémoire* is post-feminism. Although it is difficult to define a term so full of contradictions, I rely on the definition of what Rosalind Gill calls "post-feminist sensibility":

[T]he notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. These themes coexist with, and are structured by, stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to 'race' and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability as well as gender.

Gill 149

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, consider the different experiences of the factory worker, of the factory worker's wife and of the black factory worker's wife.

Working in association with an intertextual analysis, the definition of post-feminism offered by Gill includes the continued ambivalence found in modern attitudes to feminism and feminist themes in media. In relation to the New Lilith, a post-feminist approach frames ambiguous discourse about feminine strength and empowerment while restraining them to villainous and morally flawed characters.

Following this introduction, each chapter focuses on one of those three primary sources in their chronological order of publication (or release). First, chapter II. corresponds to Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*. It contextualizes Carter's iconoclastic Lilith within the mythmaking endeavor of second-wave feminists and the premises of her Americanization. It establishes the interconnectedness of fear and desire in her characterization and comments on her shapeshifting as a metaphor of the social constructedness of femininity. Another section focuses on Lilith's difficult relationship to motherhood – encompassing the issues of choice and bodily autonomy and a discussion of mythmaking in relation to Mother and Nature Goddesses. Then, chapter III corresponds to the movie *Bordello*. It is sectioned into two parts, one that studies the film through the framework of the objectifying male gaze, and one that focuses on the markers of otherness associated with Lilith in *Bordello*. I distinguish three markers of otherness: settings and place, monstrosity, and queerness. Finally, chapter IV corresponds to the analysis of Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. It is concerned with the proximity of Lilith's symbolism to the figure of the witch, who has similarly been reappropriated by the women's liberation movement. Another section considers Lilith's narrative arc of emancipation from patriarchal subordination, how it appeals to the American ideology of individualism and how that diminishes her feminist impact. Lastly, it discusses the moral ambivalence of her mythos within the diegesis of the series, with the argument that the morality play in the episode *The Passion of Sabrina Spellman* functions as a self-referential and polysemic gothic paradiastole.

## HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF LILITH

In this section, I summarize the origins of the myth of Lilith from its antique and traditional sources to its revival by feminists of Jewish origins in the seventies, highlighting the key attributes of the myth as it evolved through the centuries. This section is mainly drawing from Michèle Bitton's *Lilith Ou La Première Ève: Un Mythe Juif Tardif (Lilith or the First Eve: A Late Jewish myth*, my translation) as well as Ann Shapiro's and Michele Osherow's defining works on reworkings of the myth in literature.

The history of Lilith's myth is a very old one. In her essay, Bitton dates its apparition to Akkad, in Mesopotamia, a few thousand years BCE. Then, "Lils" designated in a generic way hostile force of nature, like the wind, the tempest, the thunder, which were personified by genderless demons, who were only later differentiated into male and female demons. In later Sumerian liturgy, "Lilitu" was the sacred prostitute and courtesan of the great goddess-mother Inini. Beautiful and adorned, she was sent to seduce men by Inini. In pre-Judaic civilizations, Lilith's importance is known to us through the numerous mentions of exorcism spells or protective amulets. Indeed, in the Masoretic Hebrew Old Testament<sup>3</sup>, Lilith only appears once, as one of the twelve beasts that will invade Edom on Judgement Day (Isaiah's Apocalypse 34:14). Interestingly, Greek, and Roman versions of the Bible have added to the list of Lilith's attributes by replacing her name with better-known mythological figures such as the Siren, or the Lamia:

Grimal's dictionary of Greek and Roman mythology reports that she "was originally an attractive young girl, who Zeus, among many others had loved. But every time she gave birth to a child, Hera in her jealousy would arrange for it to die... Lamia in her desperation went to

---

<sup>3</sup> The Masoretic Text (MT) is the Hebrew Bible transmitted by the Massorah, which has served as the basis for many Protestant translations of the Old Testament, such as the King James Bible. (Wikipedia)

hide in a solitary cavern where she became a monster, jealous of mothers happier than her, of whom she kidnapped and devoured the children.”

Bitton 117<sup>4</sup>, my translation

In this passage explaining Lamia’s story, we can see the emergence of an important attribute of Lilith, which is the relationship to infantile mortality and painful motherhood, as an example of the influence of different cultures on Lilith’s myth.

Going forward in time is the Talmud, a collection of rabbinic writings that have stood as a primary source of religious law and Jewish theology. In the earlier Jerusalem Talmud (second to fifth century CE), Lilith appears as one of the four mother demons, who each stand for a moral vice: physical pleasure, straying of the mind, superstition, and ignorance. Ignorance is represented by Lilith, who “only likes darkness and is the mortal enemy of childhood” (Bitton 118, my translation). In the later Babylonian Talmud (third to sixth century CE.), Lilith takes the form of a long-haired, winged succubus, a female demon who attacks at night and preys on men (117). There, Bitton explains the symbolism of Lilith’s wings as a signifier of both animality and knowledge – a contradiction with the attribute of ignorance previously described. In addition, she argues that in Judaic tradition, long hair is a signifier of dangerous femininity and immodesty, and links it to feminine historical practices such as covering or shaving one’s hair (118).

One text that has contributed to the fixation of Lilith’s traits more than any other is the Alphabet of Ben Sira<sup>5</sup>, from which the modern interpretation of the myth derives. In this

---

<sup>4</sup> [Le]dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine de Grimal rapporte qu'elle « était originellement une séduisante jeune fille, que Zeus, parmi tant d'autre avait aimée. Mais chaque fois qu'elle mettait un enfant au monde, Héra dans sa jalousie s'arrangeait pour le faire périr... Lamia dans son désespoir, s'en fut se cacher dans une caverne solitaire où elle devint un monstre jaloux des mères plus heureuses qu'elle, dont elle ravissait et dévorait les enfants » (Bitton 117, original)

<sup>5</sup> The Alphabet of Ben Sira is an anonymous piece of Rabbinic literature, probably written between 700 and 1000 AD. (Wikipedia). A complete translation is featured in the appendix of this mémoire, p. 109.

version, Lilith rebels by refusing Adam's sexual dominance as well as God's authority and going as far as pronouncing His name. She is presented as the anti-thesis of Eve, causing the death of infants, and being cursed to a form of sterile motherhood. This legend is a rabbinic *midrash*, which is a form of Judaic Bible interpretation that aims to solve discrepancies or contradictions within the sacred text. In this case, it responds to the two accounts of female creation found in the Genesis of the Rabbinic Bible:

And God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:27

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and he slept, and He took one of his sides, and He closed the flesh in its place.

And the Lord God built the side that He had taken from man into a woman, and He brought her to man.

Genesis 2:21-22

Hence, the legend of Ben Sira solves this inconsistency by introducing Lilith as Adam's first wife (Osherow 69-70), and as God's failure to create a worthy aide for Adam before Eve. This is quite telling of the subservient position of women in the society the *midrash* was written in, as Bitton writes:

The Legend of Ben Sira retells the divine failure to create a First woman who would suit Adam, it retells the subjugation of woman to man, doubled by the subjugation of Lilith to the angels and to Lilith's defeat before magico-religious practices. Lilith's vain desire for an "unusual" sexual embrace would be the impossible expression of enunciating an autonomous female sexual desire in the cultures assigning women to the service of men.

Bitton 121<sup>6</sup>, my translation

---

<sup>6</sup> « La légende de Ben Sira redit l'échec divin A créer une Première femme qui convienne A Adam, elle redit l'assujettissement de la femme à l'homme, doublée par l'assujettissement de Lilith aux anges et par la défaite de Lilith devant des pratiques magico-religieuses. Le désir vain de Lilith à une étreinte sexuelle « inhabituelle »

What is more is the multiple verses in the Zohar<sup>7</sup> describing magical practices as a defense against demons and Lilith, such as protective spells and amulets. Bitton links these practices to the negatively connotated association of witchcraft and femininity in Judeo-Christian tradition. In its treatment of Lilith's myth, the Zohar develops on the version found in the Legend of Ben Sira's, and introduces the concept of Sammael and Lilith as a couple of extremely powerful demons, which then evolved into the idea of Lilith as a bride of Satan (Bitton 122).

By examining the figure of Lilith up until this point, several key characteristics seem to emerge. Lilith has demonic or evil tendencies, she is associated with sexual violence and perversion, and she has a negative relationship to motherhood and early childhood. Physically, she is of incredible and inhuman beauty, with symbolic traits such as long hair and wings. These attributes are completed by the characterization of Lilith in opposition to Eve, by the theme of rebellion and sexual autonomy, and by her partnership with Satan. Lilith constitutes an ambivalent figure between earlier magico-religious practices and Judaism, due to her relationship to witchcraft and dark magic. Overall, her myth is multiform, full of the ambiguities, contradictions, and complexities of the civilizations it has lived through.

For Bitton, the myth of Lilith as a demonic archetype has been present in European literature (French, English, German) since the Middle Ages and has become as culturally significant as Oedipus' (126). Citing authors like Victor Hugo, Guillaume Appollinaire and Anatole France<sup>8</sup>, she notes however that Lilith's revival in the seventies by the first groups of Jewish American feminists has dismissed this literary filiation in favor of the antique and traditional sources, and more particularly the Legend of Ben Sira (127). This movement of reappropriation was initiated in the seventies by second-wave feminists of Jewish origins,

---

serait l'expression impossible de l'énonciation d'un désir sexuel féminin autonome dans les cultures assignant la femme au service de l'homme. » (Bitton 121, original)

<sup>7</sup> After the Bible and the Talmud, the Zohar (approx. thirteenth century CE) is the third sacred text of Judaism.

<sup>8</sup> Other influential authors who have evoked Lilith are Robert Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, C.S Lewis, Goethe (non-exhaustive list)

whose secular feminist beliefs clashed with a practice of Judaism that would not include them or their lived experience (Shapiro 2010). Hence, the rewriting of Lilith's story came as a reconciliation of feminism and Judaism, celebrating Lilith as a powerful symbol of rebellion against patriarchal rule. Perhaps the most significant work to emerge from this phenomenon is Judith Plaskow's 1972 *midrash*, "The Coming of Lilith"<sup>9</sup>. Ann Shapiro summarizes the tale as follows:

[She] wrote a new *midrash*, where she not only eliminated Lilith's daemonic aspects, but reimagined the story so that Eve finally met Lilith on the other side of the garden wall, where they talked and cried "till the bond of sisterhood grew between them"

Shapiro 70

In a 2005 essay, Doretta Cornell contextualizes Plaskow's work within an effort by religious scholars and creative writers to reexamine and reimagine the position of women in religious texts, and especially in the Bible. As Cornell analyzes the many modern reinterpretations of Eve's myth and, by proximity, Lilith's, she concludes that "women have begun to reclaim the heritage of their faith and to find in them a source of strength and encouragement in their own personal spiritual journeys" (Cornell 105). In parallel, Shapiro argues that literary revisions of Lilith stem from

a paradigm [...] where Jewish women writers in particular either described the flight from an oppressive patriarchal marriage, where the sensual protagonist expresses her rebellion by taking a real or imagined lover, or a reconciliation and reaffirmation in sisterhood, as suggested in Plaskow's *midrash*."

Shapiro 70

In terms of genre, Lilith's appearances in pulp and science-fiction created "a new feminine image, a diversification of women's role in contemporary culture" and "reflect[ed] the myths

---

<sup>9</sup> "The Coming of Lilith" is reproduced in full in the Appendix, p.110

and experiences of alien minorities, namely Jewish and African-American women” (Osherow 68).

Hence, the Lilith who emerged in the second half of the twentieth centuries has evolved from her antique and traditional counterpart. This “New Lilith” is certainly powerful and feared, but her violent actions are presented rather as vengeance and rebellion from injustices rather than the expressions of pure evil. She is no longer the one-dimensional antithesis of Eve, as their differences are blurred and narratives of sorority or even romance between the two come to light. Finally, Lilith becomes an intersectional figure whose double otherness (as “Jewish” and as “woman”) invites a socially conscious analysis.



## II. Lilith the Shapeshifter in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977)

---

Angela Carter's *Passion of New Eve* is the ambitious story of Evelyn – an English, chauvinist man who is forcefully made to transition into the New Eve, a supposedly perfect creation of American femininity. Set in a dystopic and decaying version of America which is on the brink of civil war, the novel functions as a parodic patchwork of Western mythology which explores the social constructedness of femininity. Here, Lilith is a shapeshifter. First, she is Leilah – “all flesh”, passive, sensual stripper, the perfect victim and whore, then Sophia – “all mind”, guerilla warrior, wise teacher, guardian priestess. Finally, Lilith's “whole” form is revealed to Eve at the end of the novel, where she helps and protects a pregnant Eve, and a “bond of sisterhood” develops between them.

As a reminder, the historical characteristics of Lilith proposed in the introductory chapter are demonic or evil tendencies, association with sexual violence and perversion, a negative relationship to motherhood and early childhood, incredible physical beauty, and inhuman features such as wings, a moral and aesthetic opposition to Eve, and a partnership with Satan. Most importantly, she is an ambivalent and multiform creature. This changing nature is ever present in Angela Carter's representation of Lilith in *New Eve*, a novel that thematizes transformation. Some elements of the New Lilith are already present in this novel, like intersectional Otherness, postfeminist ambiguity, and cultural hybridization. In this chapter, I argue that Lilith's shapeshifting is symbolic of a new kind of representation that recognizes femininity's plurality as well as its constructedness.

It will be noted that throughout this chapter, pronoun usage and character names may seem incoherent. This is due to a moral conundrum, and there is in fact no critical consensus among *New Eve* scholars. As this is a story of a forced transition, assigning a gender to Eve/lyn is delicate and can be questioned. How I chose to go about this is that I have used the pronoun and name of the character that corresponds to their gender presentation on a case-by-case basis.

To me, this approach seems most relevant to Carter's proximity with the theory of gender as performance. So, Evelyn ("he/him") is used to describe the character pre-transition, when presenting as masculine, and Eve, or the new Eve ("she/her") is used to describe the character post-transition. Since there is no clear threshold in the character's gender presentation, Eve/lyn ("(s)her") is used in the time between the physical surgery in Beulah and the completion of the psychological transition, sometime in Zero's harem.

In addition, Tristessa's *actual* gender identity is never made explicit by the character herself. Throughout the novel, the pronouns by default are "she/her", until it is revealed that Tristessa has a penis. After that, Eve and Carter use "he/him" to refer to them. But it is important to keep in mind that there seems to be no "right" answer to this, as we do not have access to Tristessa's interior life. For this reason, I have used mostly "she/her" and sometimes "they/them". Although it is not an issue of gender, there is variation in the presentations of Lilith's aliases as well. A rule of thumb I have adopted is that I use either the name of the shape she is in (here, Leilah or Sophia), or as Lilith if I am referring to the character as a whole.

This chapter is divided into four subsections. The first one contextualizes *The Passion of New Eve* as contemporaneous to second-wave feminism and to the feminist revival of Lilith's myth in women's science fiction. It goes over Carter's anti-essentialist attitude to gender and myth and her part in the hybridization of Lilith's legend. The second section inspects the themes of sexuality and horror together, as well as Carter's use of Gothic tropes, which she uses to dismantle traditional dichotomies of victim and abuser – thus exposing the moral nature of Leilah/Lilith's dangerous femininity and Otherness. The third section considers the theme of motherhood in the novel, which seems intimately linked to the social construction of femininity. By exploring the themes of choice, bodily autonomy and loss, I argue that Carter's complex representations of motherhood unite Eve and Lilith's experiences. Finally, I discuss the changing relationship between Eve and Lilith as a new model of complex femininity through

the themes of transformation, imitation, and self-regulation as symbolized by the recurring imagery of the mirror.

#### THE PASSION OF NEW EVE IN CONTEXT

First published in 1977 by Victor Gollancz<sup>10</sup>, Carter's novel coexists with "second-wave" feminist movements, who were (among other things) campaigning for equality in the private sphere with the slogan "the personal is political". At the time, the movement is headed by numerous Jewish feminists. Critic Ann. R. Shapiro associates second-wave feminism to a plethora of feminist scholars and critics of Jewish (secular) origins<sup>11</sup>. To her, Jewishness and Womanhood constituted a fertile soil for critical and militant thinking. Indeed, these two identities entailed a double alienation, completed by a "distrust of public authority and a reliance on private bonds" fostered by growing up in the years after World War II, a "devotion to the text and to education" and a "strong commitment to each individual's social responsibility" (Gubar quoted by Shapiro, 69).

This rich cultural background and the need to rewrite the relationship between Judaism and femininity thus foreground these women's activism. As an example, Michèle Bitton recounts that in the seventies, the first Jewish-American feminist groups were calling for a reform of the *halakha*<sup>12</sup> which would allow them to participate in studies and ceremonies as men were (Bitton 127). But this theological impulse is not limited to Judaism, argues Doretta

---

<sup>10</sup> British house specialized in science fiction, fantasy, and horror, who published authors like John Le Carré, George Orwell and George R. R. Martin.

<sup>11</sup> Shapiro draws from Susan Gubar's 1994 essay "Eating the Bread of Affliction", which cites women such as "Adrienne Rich, Carolyn Heilbrun, Florence Howe, Annette Kolodny, Alicia Ostriker, Nancy K. Miller, Judith Gardiner, Nina Auerbach, Naomi Weisstein, Lillian Robinson, Elizabeth Abel, Rachel Brownstein, Rachel Adler, Judith Plaskow, Blance Weissen Cook, Natalie Zemon Davis, Estelle Friedman, Linda Gordon, Linda Kerber, Ruth Rosen, Susan Suleiman, and Marianne Hirsch." (Shapiro 68). Shapiro also mentions Gloria Steinem, Gerda Lerner, Bella Abzug, Robin Morgan, Shulamith Firestone, Andrea Dworkin, Ellen Moers and many others.

<sup>12</sup> Jewish custom law

Cornell, who explains that in those years, “many women found a dearth of representation in religious literature.” (91). She writes:

One aspect of the difficulty was that even when women did appear in these texts, they were presented in ways that women found strange and alienating or blatantly distorted to support patriarchal assumptions about women. The extremes of the choices faced by religious women seemed to be (a) abandoning the religions on which they had based their lives, in order to be true to their own experiences of divinity and spirituality; (b) submitting to an understanding of themselves that denied their own experiences; or (c) re-reading and re-interpreting the scriptures to rewrite theology and spirituality, incorporating women's lived experience.

Cornell 91-2.

What Cornell associates with the choice (c) is represented by the scholarly effort to revise Eve’s myth in Christian theology, but the same phenomenon undoubtedly explains Lilith’s resurgence.

As is established in the introduction, Ben Sira’s legend, is now considered as *the* direct source of modern interpretations of the myth of Lilith. Those modern interpretations see Lilith’s creation as Adam’s equal and her subsequent refusal to submit as an empowering and feminist tale. As explained in the previous chapter, an extremely significant piece of rewriting of Lilith’s myth is proposed by the Jewish-American feminist Judith Plaskow in 1972. “The Coming of Lilith” is a *midrash* that establishes Lilith as a symbol of women’s liberation and sisterhood in Judaism. Plaskow’s addition regarding the bond between Eve and Lilith and her demonization of Lilith is influential of the subsequent literary reproductions of their myths, including Carter’s. In addition, Lilith gave her name to one of the dozens of Jewish-American feminist magazines that emerged in the seventies. The magazine *Lilith*’s first edition came out in 1976 – a year before Carter’s novel, and is still active today<sup>13</sup>.

---

<sup>13</sup>Still significant in 2022, Lilith’s name is used by feminist associations in the US and in Europe, although they are not necessarily Jewish. A local example is the Lausanne-based association “Lil!ith”, which is “an association of homosexual women created in december 1994 in Lausanne as a response to the lack of a structure of support for Lesbian women in the Vaud canton.” (my translation, from their website: <https://www.associationlilith.ch/1-association>, Accessed 23.04.22)

Undoubtedly, Carter's literary career is contemporaneous to great religious and political reform, and *The Passion of New Eve* is deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian culture and mythology. However, Carter herself is an atheist, a conviction which she describes as "a very rigorous system of disbelief." (Carter in Marie Mulvey-Roberts 151). Mulvey-Roberts writes:

Carter's atheism informed her feminist, political and ideological outlook on the world, while her approach to religion was part of her 'demythologising business' (Carter, 1997c: 38). She used radical scepticism to attack religion which, in having been built on myths, she saw as 'extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree', a witty inversion of Christ's dictum: 'And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free' (John 8:32, KJV).

151

Angela Carter's "demythologizing business"<sup>14</sup>, represents a vastly different use of myth than her feminist peers of the second-wave who saw the process of mythmaking as a reconciliation with their faith. It can be said that what Carter tries to do is not to offer a new spiritual interpretation of myth, but to destroy established patriarchal tales by means of mimicry and parody.

For Paulina Palmer, Carter's feminist approach is closer to Butlerian theories of gender performance that evolved in the nineties, which are by definition anti-essentialist (Palmer 24-6). In short, Judith Butler argues that gender is a socially constructed and discursively maintained illusion. Also drawing from Joan Riviere's 1929 essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade", Palmer provides analytical tools to examine the transgressive nature of Carter's representations of femininity. Moreover, according to gender performance theorists, the parodic performance of essentialized femininity has the effect of exposing its inauthenticity and participates in deconstructing patriarchal ideology of gender.

Finally, the fact that Carter – an atheist, British writer of Anglican background, calls upon Lilith's symbolism in a dystopian satire of America ironically illustrates the broader integration

---

<sup>14</sup> See Carter, "Notes from the Front line". 27

of Lilith into Anglo-American cultural consciousness as well as her myth's miscegenation with Christian imagery. In an essay about the Americanization of Lilith's legend, Geoffrey and Avi Dennis confirm this idea:

Lilith's trajectory and revision through pulp visual narratives over the past forty years, from demon harridan into a feminist antihero, a mother seeking redemption through her daughter, and even a superhero teammate, mirrors Judaism's changing status from despised to accepted and unremarkable American faith. Moreover, the continuous hybridization of Lilith's story with Christian motifs, classical mythology, contemporary tropes, and American founding myths is a striking example of the larger acculturation of Jewish tradition into American pop culture.

Dennis and Dennis, 75

I argue that this hybridization is central to the representation of Lilith in Carter's *New Eve*, as well as the rise of Lilith representation in "high" and "low" culture in the twentieth century. Because of their similarities, it would be interesting to know whether Carter read Plaskow, but in any case, I would argue that the sheer number of iterations of Lilith in this period is sufficient to have influenced Carter's writing, especially in pulp visuals and science fiction novels which we know heavily influenced her.

Science fiction, and particularly women's pulp<sup>15</sup>, is one of the fictional genres in which representations of Lilith have boomed in the latter half of the twentieth century in a process that Michele Osherow calls "revisionary mythmaking". She explains:

That Lilith should appear in science fiction is not at all surprising. In a genre in which women generally take the form of the alien other, Lilith is right at home: she's immortal, powerful, strong, feared, sexual, and midrash even tells us she can fly. It is perhaps ironic that stories associated with the future should so heavily feature reproductions of an ancient female.

Osherow 71

---

<sup>15</sup> The first example of Lilith's presence in pulp is C.L. Moore's "Fruit of Knowledge" (1940, republished 1975). Osherow writes: "Moore's revision begins to reckon the historically polar identities of Lilith and Eve. Moore's characterization of the Queen of Air and Darkness indicates an emerging awareness of the complexities of Lilith's history. This revisionist work moves Lilith into a place where she may be viewed as vital, powerful, and sacred. Lilith remains active at the end of Moore's story, present in all her awesome mystery." (75) Another example is Octavia Butler's *Dawn* (1987)

Hence, the irony of Carter's *New Eve* is that her speculative fiction is nothing but rooted in ancient, male-authored iconography. In an illuminating essay on Carter's fetishism, Christina Britzolakis remarks:

Her attempts to imagine "a new kind of being, unburdened by the past", in the absence of any contemporary realization of this vision, have to work upon the pre-feminist myths, allegories and iconographies of the past."

Britzolakis 50

In short, Angela Carter's work is primed by its contemporaneity with women's liberation movements in the seventies, although her feminism is closer to queer and gender performance theories that have risen to popularity in the nineties. *The Passion of New Eve* and its representation of Lilith draw from the "revisionary mythmaking" of women's SF writing, and distance themselves from its Judaic origins.

#### "DELIGHT AND DISTURB"<sup>16</sup>: THE GOTHIC EROTICISM OF LEILAH/LILITH

In this section, I discuss the characterization of Leilah/Lilith as a creature that inspires both desire and horror and Carter's reliance on Gothic tropes to expose the ethics of male fears of female sexuality.

As seen in the introduction, the combination of fear and desire is an inherent part of Lilith's historical characteristics. This is integrated thematically in *P g y " Gdepictio* of sexual violence and perversion, which remain connected to desire throughout the novel. Indeed, Eve/lyn's journey is characterized by the association of suffering with sexual desire and arousal. In the opening pages of the novel, Evelyn reminisces about going to the movies with his nanny and watching Tristessa. He describes this nostalgic and sexually formative memory:

---

<sup>16</sup> Phrase coined by Bristow and Broughton, see "Introduction" p. 2

[T]he sharp, sweet sting of ice against my gums were intimately associated with my flaming, pre-adolescent heart and the twitch in my budding groin the spectacle of Tristessa's suffering always aroused in me.

Carter 8

So, Evelyn's masochistic streak developed in his childhood. In his adult sexual life, this has translated into cruel and sadistic tendencies, alienating his relationships with women. In her treatment of Evelyn's misogyny, Carter makes it clear that "the man's systematic mistreatment of his lovers is not an innate sexual drive but is instead the result of how he has been culturally taught to view femininity" (Makinen 156). Particularly, Hollywood's essentializing depiction of femininity (and especially Tristessa's) as defined by pain and passivity is responsible for how he "has learnt to disparage women and treat them as victim" (Makinen 156). Throughout the novel, Eve/lyn's relation to women is defined by the intersection of fear, pain, and pleasure.

Besides the scene of fellatio at the cinema, the first example of this attitude that I want to discuss is his relationship with Leilah – Lilith's first avatar in the novel. Indeed, sexual violence is centerfold to their dynamic, as she is subject to his worst abuses. However, Leilah seems to elude the traditional victim status. Their first encounter, where Evelyn chases her through a serpentine city in decay is reminiscent of a conservative strain of Gothic fiction, as explained by Gina Wisker:

[It] focuses on male sexual violence and features virginal women pursued through dark dungeons and along dank corridors by powerful, predatory men. (...) Since numerous Gothic tales feature cavernous dungeons and labyrinthine corridors, they seem to represent male anxieties about both female sexuality and the domestic sphere. In his illuminating introduction to *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, Chris Baldick emphasizes the distinctly sexual fears evident in the incarcerating designs of the genre. 'The imprisoning house of Gothic fiction', he writes, 'has from the very beginning been that of patriarchy.' And the imprisonments of the Gothic house are certainly a symptom of considerable cultural unease with the family home and the women who inhabit it.

Wisker 118

Erard 19



If Carter uses the gothic trope of pursuit, she playfully inverts the dynamic. Unsettlingly, it is the male pursuer who feels vulnerable. Eve/lyn recounts:

But, in the grip of such savage desire, I was unable to sustain fear as fear. I only felt it as an intensification of the desire that ravaged me. [...] For one moment, one moment only, just before she touched me, just as she touched me with the enamelled [sic] blades of her fingertips, just as I crossed the filthy threshold of that gaunt, lightless, vertical, extinguished apartment block, all tenanted by strangers, my senses were eclipsed in absolute panic. This panic bore no relation to any of the titillating fears I had, up to that moment, experienced in the city; it was an archaic, atavistic panic before original darkness and silence before the mystery of herself she unequivocally offered me. [...] I dropped down upon her like, I suppose, a bird of prey, although my prey, throughout the pursuit, had played the hunter.

Carter 24-5

This experience of mystical terror, reinforced by the katabatic<sup>17</sup> rhetoric of the passage illuminates the strange power dynamic of their relationship in which prey becomes hunter. In this dynamic, Leilah takes on the role of the gothic *skandalon*, at the origin of the genre's scandalous nature. Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet explains:

[F]rom the Greek *skandalon*, meaning a trap, snare, or stumbling block, we could say that gothic fiction is scandalous not only because it deals with transgression (such as murder, forced confinement, physical violation and psychological torture) but also because it makes the possibility of knowing and judging transgression itself into a stumbling block by questioning the terms that define wrong-doing as such.

Monnet 1-2

To this definition of *skandalon*, I want to add a second meaning, which is “any person or thing by which one is (entrapped) drawn into error or sin.” (Thayer and Smith<sup>18</sup>). In parallel, Lilith/Leilah personifies a specific female archetype: the temptress. Beyond her power of temptation, Leilah scares Evelyn not just because of the loss of his own self-control but also because she too is sexually threatening:

---

<sup>17</sup> Katabasis: descent into the underworld.

<sup>18</sup> See “Greek Lexicon entry for Skandalon”. In *The NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon*. 1999.

Sometimes, when I was exhausted and she was not, still riven by her carnal curiosity, she would clamber on top of me in the middle of the night, the darkness in the room made flesh, and thrust my limp cock inside herself, twittering away as she did so like a distracted canary, while I came to life in my sleep. Waking just before she tore the orgasm from me, I would, in my astonishment, remember the myth of the succubus, the devils in female form who come by night to seduce the saints.

Carter 27

Interestingly, this passage qualifies Leilah in two ways, as a bird, and as a succubus, and I would add that it is not the only time that she is described as either a mythological creature or as an animal. In fact, she is also described as “more demented bird than woman” (19), as “a little fox pretending to be a siren”, as a “prey”, a “bird-like creature” (20), a “mermaid” (22), or “dressed meat” (31). If we recall Lilith’s historical description as a winged female demon who preys on men at night, this scene surely evokes the same characteristics, while also playing with Western mythologies of dangerous femininity and ancient male fears.

For Gina Wisker, the Gothic is distinguished from conventional horror by the processes of “[d]isempowerment, dismemberment, dehumanization” (119), which cause deep and unsettling terror. If Leilah is dehumanized (described as not human), disempowered (raped and forced to abort), and dismembered (described as sexualized body parts), those processes are also at work for Eve/lyn. Eve/lyn is quite literally *dismembered* by Mother, *disempowered* as (s)he is stripped of personal bodily autonomy through a forceful transition and repeated rapes, and *dehumanized* by being treated worse than a pig in Zero’s harem and more symbolically, by being transformed into the new Eve. In this novel, the male protagonist is a typical Gothic villain only in theory, and the abuser/victim dichotomy is subverted. Merja Makinen contextualizes Carter’s attitude to female sexual violence:

Carter has certainly had some influence on this widely publicized shift in feminist fiction because her work in the 1970s gained notoriety for going against the grain of the widespread contemporary feminist belief that violence emanated from an exclusively male source. By putting forward affirmative representations of sexually violent women, both *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Sadeian*

Erard 21

*Woman* deliberately critique what was the dominant Anglo-American feminist dichotomy of male aggressors and female victims.

Makinen 150

To this day, Carter's representations of female violence may shock readers who may not view this violent role reversal for its cathartic and transgressive purposes. This is a valid impression, but the shocking, scandalous nature of her writing remains powerful when looked at through an ethical lens.

Indeed, Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet argues that it is its moral function that defines the gothic as a genre:

The gothic is also deeply and inevitably ethical, preoccupied as it is with ghosts, monsters, murders, and bizarre circumstances that raise troubling questions about cultural norms and complacencies. Angela Carter has suggested that "provoking unease" is the "singular *moral* function" of the gothic.

Monnet 3

In response to this, I argue that a sense of pervasive unease is painted on every page of Carter's *New Eve*. Indeed, in New-York's apocalyptic atmosphere, enormous flesh-eating rats roam the streets, poverty is a state of mind and guerilla politics are out of control. The desert is unforgiving, lawless and sterile. Beulah is a place of religious zeal and entrapment. Zero's house a wordless and reeking cage, and Tristessa's glass palace reminiscent of Dante's second circle of hell<sup>19</sup>. Those topoi of unease are defined by a sense of physical or psychological isolation, a form of claustrophobic entrapment, the inability to speak out or to be recognized as a victim, and the reversal of moral *differend*.

---

<sup>19</sup> Dante's second circle of hell (Canto V) is reserved to the lustful, who are sentenced to spin in an endless tempest for all eternity. Compare the destruction of Tristessa's house: "The air was full of flying glass and shattered furniture; the house was now spinning so fast the stagnant waters of the pool reflected only a glittering blur. (...) His face was contorted in outrage. Round and round and round, he went, and now the house began to keel over. (...) Objects, waxen limbs, chairs, chunks of glass, all that remained within the rib-cage, slithered down into the water; the splashing drenched us," (Carter 139-41)

The concept of *differend* proposed by Jean-François Lyotard designates “conflict between (at least) two parties, which cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments” (Lyotard in Monnet, 9). Applied to the gothic, this concept relates to victimhood:

A young woman (or lower-class man [...]) terrorized by a patriarchal figure whose power and reputation guaranteed him a virtual indemnity against her potential accusations. In American history, this happened to be the legal situation of many women, and also of African American slaves, non-heterosexuals, and other categories of persons whose sufferings had no language and title in American courts or culture [...]. Correspondingly, American Gothic literature often features first-person narration by a character whose voice carries no weight because he or she is considered mad or religiously fanatical, or otherwise discredited [...]. Yet the reader is invited to judge for herself whether or not to credit such a protagonist’s narrative against a larger social and cultural context that would tend to disenfranchise it.

Monnet 9

Applied to *New Eve*, this lack of a shared moral framework explains Evelyn’s strange detachment from the political war lead by women and black people in the US, as he probably does not understand the secular injustices that have pushed them to this extreme violence. This lack of self-awareness explains attitude towards Leilah, whom he blames for *his* abuses as well as his baffled reaction at being considered a criminal in Beulah, not until Mother condescendingly explains it:

The matriarchs, I surmised, had captured me; and they perceived me a criminal because I was imprisoned, although I knew of no crime which I had committed.

53

“And you’ve abused women, Evelyn, with this delicate instrument that should have been used for nothing but pleasure. You made a weapon of it!”

65-6

Then, his awe and terror upon being brought in front of Mother is a new feeling to him; “I became aware of an appalling sense of claustrophobia. I’ve never suffered from the condition before but now I wanted to scream, I gagged, I choked.” (63). I would argue that this

Erard 23

phenomenon is a marker of the beginning of his psychological transition, as he is forced to experience a sense of claustrophobia – normally a “female” form of embodied knowledge.

Another example of this is Eve’s confinement at Zero’s ranch. There, the women are submissive servants who are not allowed to speak and who self-regulate in order to attract their abuser’s favor, thus fostering a climate of delation and psychological isolation. What is interesting about the cult created around Zero is that it is actively and enthusiastically maintained by its victims, whose belief system is twisted to reinforce the psychological hold Zero has over them. I argue that this self-perpetuating ecosystem exposes the mechanisms at work in a patriarchal society, in which women are both victims and perpetrators. In that regard, Carter unsettles the traditional narrative device of female victimhood through entrapment by forcing a former abuser to exist in the uncomfortable skin of the oppressed Other. Makinen explains:

As Carter observes in her essay ‘Love in a Cold Climate’, the ‘passion’ of the novel’s title refers not only to sexual desire but also to ‘the process of physical pain and denigration that Eve undergoes in her apprenticeship as a woman’. Exploited by Zero, Eve has to learn that there is nothing inevitable, natural, or right about the sexual abuse of women.

Makinen 159

Effectively, this represents a brutal denouement of the victim/abuser *differend* in the narrative, as Eve’s time at the ranch is another reminder of the of the gothic’s moral ambivalence.

As mentioned in the introduction, the original Lilith is doubly Other; she is a woman, and she is Jewish, and as a consequence, she stands at the intersection of gendered and racial/religious discrimination<sup>20</sup>. In *New Eve*, Lilith is not marked as Jewish but is a black woman. Indeed, Evelyn explains that Leilah: “has been doubly degraded, through her race and through her sex” (Carter 37). Historically and geographically, it makes sense that Lilith would

---

<sup>20</sup> In many ways, Judaism can be considered an ethno-religion, therefore antisemitism constitutes both a racial and religious discrimination.

not be white, and Carter is not the first to portray her as a black woman. Other examples are discussed by Osherow, who points to the heavy symbolism of a black Lilith:

[Octavia] Butler invests her heroine with the myths and experiences of alien minorities: Jewish and African American women. And Butler is not alone in this practice. In her "Lilith Poems," Alicia Suskin Ostriker also depicts Lilith as an African American. (...) The Lilith informed by Jewish legend and African American women's experience symbolizes strength, union, and promise.

Osherow 80

Furthermore, the stories of black women in America exist in the proximity of Lilith's myth. In *New Eve*, Lilith's blackness marks her otherness and her marginal status, as she inherits the deep generational trauma of African American women, as Osherow argues, there is "[a] dire likeness shared by Lilith and the female black slave is the vulnerability of these women to sexual assaults" and to "have their children appropriated by others." (Osherow 79). In addition, Lilith's physical descriptions evoke the colonial imagery of a Black Venus. Christina Britzolakis writes:

The representation of Leilah in the novel parodies the 'Jeanne Duval' cycle of poems in the *Fleurs du mal*. [...] Leilah, of whom Evelyn claims, 'I never knew a girl more a slave to style', is part prostitute, part female performer, obligingly transforming herself every evening under his gaze into an exotic and fetishized *q d l g v [".ff. ø c t v 0 "*

Baudelaire's nostalgia is seen as one aspect of a broader Western colonial imaginary which linked blackness, degeneration and prostituted female sexuality in a multitude of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century representations.

Britzolakis 51-2

In other words, the representation of a black Lilith can be a relevant depiction of the modern intersectionality of gender and race, as well as a symptom of the myth's absorption into Anglo-American consciousness.

In *New Eve*, the Other (Leilah) is marked by her gender, her race and her inhumanity, partially explaining Evelyn's violence towards her. The violence Leilah is subjected to is informed by Science Fiction tropes in which "controlling the female alien is a way of

controlling the abject, the unknown.” (Roberts in Osherow 74). According to Wisker, a similar mechanism is common to the horror genre:

In so far as the genre embodies and dramatizes the rejected Other (the monstrous, unsafe self that dwells within), horror writing certainly encourages us to confront our worst fears — fears that can bring about the hope of imagining change.

Wisker 117

It is important to keep in mind the idea that the gothic manifests the fear of the “unsafe self that dwells within” as for Evelyn, violence constitutes a failed attempt at regaining control over his sense of self, which is endangered in the presence of Lilith, the *skandalon*.

### TERRIBLE MOTHERHOOD

As discussed in the introductory chapter, another aspect of Lilith’s character is her negative association with motherhood and infancy. In *The Passion of New Eve*, motherhood is central to the construction of womanhood, and Carter’s Lilith takes on a key role in the author’s criticism of essentialized femininity. In fact, for Carter, maternity and maternal instinct are not innate and natural characteristics of womanhood, but the result of social construction. In her treatment of motherhood and maternity, Carter raises issues of choice, bodily autonomy, and loss.

In *New Eve*, Leilah goes through a bloody abortion at the hand of a Haitian woman in Harlem. The sheer horror of Leilah’s botched operation reminds us of Lilith’s attributes in relation to motherhood, where she is associated with loss and premature death. This follows how Lilith’s maternity is portrayed in women’s science fiction, as explained by Osherow:

[W]hile writers of women's utopian and science fiction frequently valorize motherhood, there remains an expressed anxiety about that state. Female characters acknowledge the necessity of procreation, but we can also find examples of those who resent the imposition of reproduction. These same women are frequently very independent, sexual, and threatening. [...] Mother Lilith, with all her imperfections, draws our attention to a different aspect of motherhood than that associated with Eve. Instead of birthing and nurturing children, Lilith causes us to consider the difficulties of loss or separation from them.

Furthermore, Leilah's terrible experience installs the ambivalent relationship to maternity in *New Eve*, a disenchantment that complexifies the portrayal of motherhood as the panacea of femininity.

In the novel, Leilah's story brings forth the notion of choice – or lack thereof, as a source of female anxiety. Although it is unclear whether or not Leilah would have wanted to be a mother, the anxiety around pregnancy described by Osherow reveals an insight into the anger and resentment felt by Leilah, which is that she did not have a choice. She did not choose to be fertile or infertile, nor did she choose when or how she could conceive a child:

She ground up glass and ate it but she vomited it all up helplessly and then, weak and sick she demanded in hysterical falsetto that I marry her. She said it was my duty to marry her. She issued voodoo threats against my manhood; she told me a chicken would come and snap my cock off, but I did not believe that. All this witchery offended my European sensibility; it seemed to me her pregnancy had unhinged her. As soon as I knew she was carrying my child, any remaining desire for her vanished. She became only an embarrassment to me. She became a shocking inconvenience to me. (...) I told her firmly that she could not marry me and she must have an abortion. She sprang at me from the bed and tried to scratch out my eyes with her poor fingernails on which the purple enamel was now pitifully chipped.

Carter 32-3

Here, Evelyn fails to understand Leilah's motives for going to the abortionist, and he dismisses her as hysterical and illogic ("It is her fault" 36). But this choice is made purposefully. Indeed, Leilah knows that if she wants a future for herself and for her baby, Evelyn should marry her, which he refuses. So, choosing the way to end her pregnancy can be seen as a way for her to take back control over her body.

The emphasis on Leilah's choice echoes Gill's definition of post-feminism; "the notion that femininity is a bodily property" and "a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment" (149). With the rise of feminist movements in the 60s and 70s which advocated for legalized abortion and access to contraception, the question of choice became a focal point



of feminist activism. If the novel mentions the IUD (“She kept a hieroglyph of plastic in her womb, to prevent conception.” 9), neither Leilah nor Eve have the ability to make an informed choice on their reproductive rights, and Leilah’s brutal abortion sets the tone for the rest of the novel.

By problematizing the topic of bodily autonomy, *New Eve* exposes a certain anxiety about maternity. Eve’s first period is a testimony of this:

And then a crippling pain like a kick in the kidneys heralded my first flow. I dabbled my finger in the bright, brown blood; I could scarcely believe it dribbled out of me but there was no way of staunching it, the source lay deep inside me, beyond my own volition, the emblem of my function. [...] I could conceive of no real existence beyond the date set for conception. I was as terrified of motherhood as any woman born.

Carter 80

In this passage, I want to highlight the words “beyond my volition, the emblem of my function”, which powerfully express Eve’s lack of choice as well as the purpose of her creation. She is made woman against her will and is supposed to go through a pregnancy, all this justified by Mother’s higher purpose. But this begs the question, by stripping away someone’s choice over what happens to their body in the name of a better, truer faith, is Mother acting any different than the system of belief she aims to destroy? While *New Eve* introduces motherhood and the ability to procreate as a necessary feature of womanhood, Carter’s thesis is more nuanced than that. In fact, the novel shows us that fertility and being a mother are never completely natural, but a part of “the social creation of femininity.”

This is shown on at least two levels, the biological and the psychological. To start, Eve/lyn’s biological ability to conceive is surgically manufactured, and so Eve is not a “natural” woman. (“For I am not natural, you know – even though, if you cut me, I will bleed.”<sup>21</sup>, Carter

---

<sup>21</sup> This might be a reference to Shakespeare’s Shylock: “If you prick us, do we not bleed?” in *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 3 scene 1.

50). Neither is Tristessa, who is no longer considered a woman once it is revealed that they have male sexual organs. In a way, the inauthentic biology of maternity in Carter's work contradicts conservative arguments that often use biological sex as unquestionable "proof" of the binary of gender.

Then, Eve/lyn's psychological, "interior" transition is the result of learned behaviour; it does not come naturally. As a part of Eve/lyn's psychological transition, (s)he is shown various conditioning programs, such as reproductions of:

every single Virgin and Child that had ever been painted in the entire history of Western European art, projected upon my curving wall in real-life colours and blown up to larger than life-size, and accompanied by soundtrack composed of the gurgling of babies and murmuring of contented mothers; this was intended to glorify the prospect before me. There was also a videotape intended, I think, to subliminally instill the maternal instinct itself; it showed cats with kittens, vixens with cubs, the mother whale with her offspring, ocelots, elephants, wallabies, all tumbling and suckling and watchfully tending, furred things, feathered things, flippered things[...]

Carter 72

Here, the reader understands that maternal instinct is not a natural urge, but a socially constructed one. Similarly, Zero's wives are made to "learn the disciplines of motherhood" (94) from babying piglets. The grotesque nature of this fictional custom highlights the incongruities in the socialization of little girls in our society, where their interactions with dolls train them to accept and desire motherhood as the ultimate purpose of their gender.

This confirms that possessing the physical attributes of the "female" sex does not automatically instill maternal instinct into Eve. Thus, it can be deduced that this disposition is not natural, in contradiction with Sophia's prior affirmations about Eve's transition:

A complete woman, yes, Sofia assured me; tits, clit, ovaries, labia major, labia minor... But, Sophia, does a change in the coloration of the rind alter the taste of a fruit? A change in the appearance will restructure the essence, Sofia assured me coolly.

Carter 68

The extent to which the transformation of one's exterior appearance can change one's interiority is dismissed by Butlerian gender theory, as explained by Paulina Palmer:

Gender, [Butler] argues, rather than reflecting an essence, is constituted through a set of 'discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex'. This has a bearing on sexual politics. It provides us with a means to denaturalize and deconstruct the conventional view of reality as interior essence and the belief, related to it, that heterosexual gender roles are 'normal' and 'natural'.

Palmer 24-5

For Butler, then, there is only the sum of all exterior performative actions. Following this, Eve's achievement of the female form is not constricted to having "tits, clit, ovaries, labia major, labia minor", but it is the result of a "set of discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex."

Carter's anti-essentialist attitude to motherhood is also shown in the ambivalent character of Mother. At first, her awe-inspiring appearance and power evokes many other "goddess-mother" figures<sup>22</sup>, as listed by Sophia in her chant (Carter 61-2). Some of the deities/supernatural beings Mother is associated with are Danae, Demeter, Cerridwen, Kali, Aphrodite, Cybele, Artemis, and Hecate. Interestingly, some of the deities listed are also intertwined in the history of Lilith's myth. For example, Demeter is the mother of Persephone, the goddess of the Underworld in Greek mythology, a title often shared by Lilith. In parallel, Carter's Mother is also Lilith's natural mother.

Like Eve, Mother's physical attributes are unnatural, she's "a complex mix of mythology and technology" (48). She is statuesque, terrifying, "breasted like a sow" (59). Eve/Lyn ponders:

Her purple nipples would shake with the vibrations of her oratory and, even when I was most carried away by it, I would wince at a little at such a gross modulation of the flesh that had once been the negative, since black, twin of my new flesh. She had been a little girl, once, quite slim and supple.

---

<sup>22</sup> This is a non-exhaustive list. A more complete analysis of Mother's mythology is out of the scope of this *mémoire*.

And now look at her! What rage, what desperation could have forced her to mimic in her own body the refolding form of many-breasted Artemis, another sterile goddess of fertility?

Carter 77

Here, Eve/lyn's male gaze is repulsed by Mother's appearance, whom (s)he compares to the figure of Artemis of Ephesus (see Figure 1).

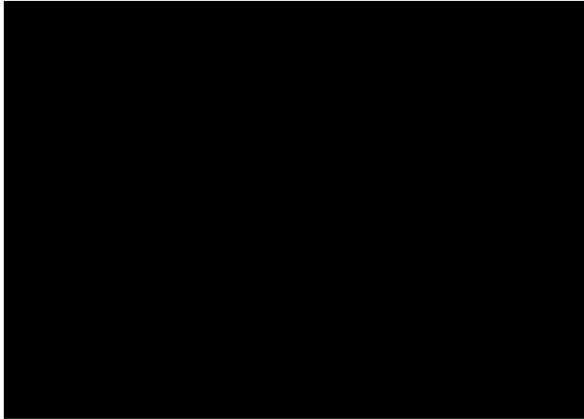


Figure 1 - Artemis of Ephesus, 1st cent. CE Roman copy. Statue in the Museum of Efes (Turkey)<sup>23</sup>

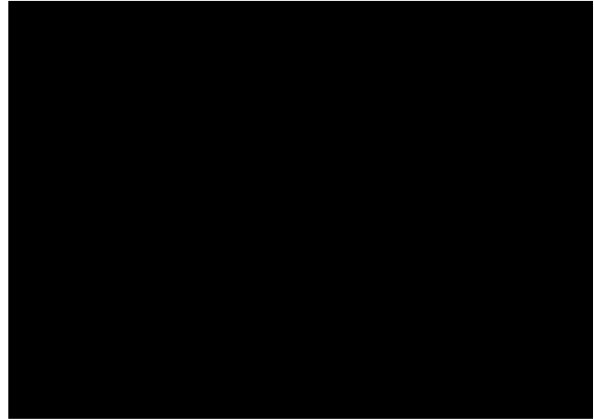


Figure 2 - Mother in "Tristessa, the Opera". 2018. Royal Swedish Opera.<sup>24</sup>

If Eve's new appearance reflects the ideal feminine form as imagined by Hollywood and magazine culture, Mother's surgically enhanced body represents the opposite symbolism: the abject, the monstrous facet of motherhood. Although I would be wary of psychoanalytical analysis, I am interested in Julia Kristeva's model that associates motherhood and fear in her approach to the Abject. Gina Wisker uses this to explain Mother's characterization:

In Kristeva's view, the painful rejection of the maternal body prefigures the extradition of women from predominantly male social territory to the borders of the imagination. The main cultural consequence of abjecting the maternal body is that women — whether idealized or demonized — remain definitely so 'other' that they must be restrained or destroyed.

Wisker 120

<sup>23</sup> Available at: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EfesMuseumArtemis.jpg>. Accessed 28.03.22

<sup>24</sup> Due to copyright concerns, the original link to this image cannot be reproduced in the Serval version of this mémoire.

As we have seen, it is not the only instance when the maternal body inspires disgust, horror, or unease in the novel, and as soon as he knows Leilah is pregnant, Evelyn loses “any remaining desire for her” (Carter 32).

Another example is Zero’s pigs, whose filthiness cakes the women of the harem, their inferiors. One of them tells Eve that once “she discovered a sow in farrow in the women’s dormitory, in labor on her own mattress, and Zero ordered her to play midwife just as if the sow had been a human mother” (Carter 95). The ironic parallel between Mother’s physiology and the sow marks the farcical nature of motherhood in *New Eve*: a filthy pig is shown as much reverence as a mighty goddess. The humanization of the animal characterizes the degradation of Zero’s women, and in parallel, the sacrality of Mother is downgraded by its proximity to the grotesque cult of the pigs. At the end of the novel, Mother “has voluntarily resigned from the god-head”, “[w]hen she found she could not make time stand still, she suffered a kind of... mental breakdown.” (174). Now “a lone, mad old lady” (176), Mother seems powerless. Her carefully constructed myth reveals itself to be as inauthentic as Eve’s or Lilith’s femininity.

Furthermore, Mother, Eve and Lilith stand as symbols for distinct archetypes of motherhood: the goddess mother, the virgin mother and the demonic mother. In creating this triad, Carter evokes the ancient mythologies of triform goddesses: the Fates, the Norns<sup>25</sup>, Triple Hecate<sup>26</sup> (see Figure 3), or the Crone, Mother, and Maiden<sup>27</sup>.

---

<sup>25</sup> Three deities in Norse mythology, responsible for shaping the fate of human beings, also had an ambivalent relationship with infants.

<sup>26</sup> Also referred to as Hecate, Artemis, Selene (by their Greek names, also “Trivia” for the Romans), goddesses, represent the three phases of the moon, three stages of life and the underworld, the earth, and the sky.

<sup>27</sup> Popular deities of wicca and neopaganism derived from Hekataion, also referenced in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (see chapter IV, p.76)



Figure 3 - Roman Statue of Hekataion (Triple Hecate), 2nd Century A.D., MET Museum<sup>28</sup>

In linking those figures together, we are tempted to interpret them as some kind of proof of primitive matriarchy (as structuralists may have done to the myth of Lilith, Bitton 132).

Indeed, imagining that at a point in history, women were not subject to male domination is an efficient political motor, although it is erroneous (Bitton 133). But according to Makinen, Carter's representation of Mother goes against the glorification of divine femininity of her peers of the second-wave:

The two-page incantatory list of mythical figures [...] links her to mother goddesses and nature goddesses around the world. Readers of *The Sadeian Woman* will know that Carter saw the radical feminist romanticization of Mother Nature through such goddess-worship as 'silly' - nothing but 'consolatory nonsense': 'This theory of maternal superiority is one of the most damaging of all consolatory fictions . . . it puts women in voluntary exile from the historical world, this world'

Makinen 160

In fact, Carter's representations are iconoclastic, anti-essentialist versions of those triadic goddesses. Mother is violent and inspires disgust, Eve is a technological fabrication, and Lilith's complex shapeshifting impedes any definitive classification. As Lilith says, no symbol or myth can survive in a time of moral *differend*:

---

<sup>28</sup> Source: MET Museum website. Available at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/256523>, 11.03.22

[W]hen there was a consensus agreement on the nature of symbolic manifestations of the spirit, no doubt Divine Virgins, Sacred Harlots and Virgin Mothers served a useful function; but the gods are all dead.

Carter 175

Finally, motherhood in *New Eve* plays with and denigrates idealized representations of motherhood. Mother and Eve cannot be taken as models of femininity, for they are too imperfect and nuanced. Mirroring their desacralization, Lilith's final form is not the traditional antithesis of Eve. She is no longer a demon who preys on men and children at night. In Carter's world, she becomes pregnant Eve's protector in the midst of civil war, providing her with food and shelter. After all her trauma, Eve's nights are filled with nightmares, but in Lilith's company, she falls into "a very deep, dreamless sleep as if Lilith's presence were some protection against the perils of the night" (Carter 176).

"ONE WOMAN IS ALL WOMEN"<sup>29</sup> : LILITH AND EVE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Historically, Eve and Lilith have been depicted as polar opposites of femininity: one blonde, chaste, pure, and submissive; the other dark, threatening, and sexual. Originally separated in traditional male narratives, the dichotomy of their representations divided conceptions of womanhood. On the other hand, many modern representations breach the divide between them, following Judith Plaskow's example in "The Coming of Lilith"<sup>30</sup>. In the second half of the twentieth century, writers have brought Eve and Lilith together as victims of the patriarchy, as sisters, or as lovers. From the seventies onward, their characterization evolves towards more nuance and complexity, as is the mainstream conception of womanhood – one woman can be a mother *and* be sensual, intelligent *and* caring, a victim of men *and* a fierce avenger.

To understand the construction of femininity in Carter's *New Eve*, it is important to consider her female characters together, and how the themes of transformation, imitation, and

---

<sup>29</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, p. 58

<sup>30</sup> See Annex, p. 110.

self-regulation<sup>31</sup> impact them. Eve's femininity is not fully achieved through her bodily characteristics, or through Sophia's psychosurgery. Instead, I believe the transformation happens when she is subjected to male violence and interiorizes its objectifying gaze as well, and that it is perfected through the imitation of the women around her. In this section, I argue that the symbol of the mirror in the novel is a metaphor for the internalized male gaze.

This passage illustrates well the symbolism of mirrors in *New Eve*, because it introduces pivotal points to my argument:

I would lie on her bed like a pasha, smoking, watching, in her cracked mirror, (...). Her beauty was an accession. She arrived at it by a conscious effort. She became absorbed in the contemplation of the figure in the mirror but she did not seem to me to apprehend the person in the mirror as, in any degree, herself. The reflected Leilah had a concrete form and, although this room was perfectly tangible, we all knew, all three of us in the room, it was another Leilah.

Carter 28

First, Leilah's beauty is not natural, but a conscious effort. Second, it is a scene where a woman is being watched by man as she watches herself. Third, the mirror is cracked and the woman watching herself experiences a split of the self. In a single scene, Carter establishes three points: (1) The accession to femininity as a conscious effort. (2) The violent inescapability of the male gaze. (3) The flawed and fragmented nature of the transformation.

The first point is that the accession to femininity is a conscious effort. This mirrors Mother's declaration that "[t]o be a man is not a given condition, but a continuous effort." (Carter 63). Again, there is nothing natural or authentic about Carter's representations of womanhood. Instead, they construct themselves by means of imitation. One example of this is

---

<sup>31</sup> Postfeminist media culture definition provided by Rosalind Gill: "First, the dramatically increased intensity of self-surveillance, indicating the intensity of the regulation of women (alongside the disavowal of such regulation). Second, the extensiveness of surveillance over entirely new spheres of life and intimate conduct. Third, the focus upon the psychological – the requirement to transform oneself and remodel one's interior life." (155)



that Leilah models herself on Evelyn's desires. In the passage below, he describes the nature of her shapeshifting:

She was a perfect woman; like the moon, she only gave reflected light. She had mimicked me, she had become the thing I wanted of her, so that she could make me love her and yet she had mimicked me so well she had also mimicked the fatal lack in me that meant I was not able to love her because I myself was so unlovable.

Carter 34

Here, Evelyn's take is that Leilah reflects what he does not like about himself. This drives him to violence and away from her. So, Evelyn's uneasiness around her can be explained by a mirroring mechanism, in which his dread is rooted in his perception of himself:

She can never have objectively existed, all the time mostly the projection of the lusts and greed and self-loathing of a young man called Evelyn, who does not exist either.

Carter 175

Then, the horror and disgust that Leilah inspires in Evelyn is integral to his perception of her as Other: it is easier to reject her than it is to "acknowledge the specific individual that is Leilah" (Makinen 157).

But, if Lilith's shapeshifting reflects Evelyn's inner representations, Eve's femininity is constructed in reflection of Leilah's as well. For example, the scene where Evelyn contemplates Leilah getting ready integrates him in the process; it does not happen independently of him: "we entered the same reverie, the self-created, self-perpetuating, solipsistic world of the woman watching herself being watched in a mirror that seemed to have split apart under the strain of supporting her world" (Carter 30). Here, the symbolism of the mirror represents a threshold in the accession to womanhood. Another instance of this is Eve/lyn's reaction when (s)he looks in the mirror after the surgery:

But when I looked in the mirror, I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself, for this one was only a lyrical abstraction of femininity to me, a tinted arrangement of curved lines. [...] I looked again and saw I bore a strong

Erard 36

family resemblance to myself, [...]. I was a woman, young and desirable. [...] They had turned me into the Playboy center fold. I was the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in my own head. I had become my own masturbatory fantasy.

Carter 74

Similarly to Leilah watching herself in the mirror, Eve/lyn does not recognize the young woman in the mirror as her/himself. There, it is understood that the experience is dysphoric, and that transition is not complete. Interestingly, the construction of the new Eve's appearance is based on the ideal of "the Playboy center fold" (74), "a blueprint taken from a consensus agreement on the physical nature of an ideal woman drawn up from a protracted study of the media" (78). The irony in this transformation is that Eve's physical beauty is designed in the continuity of the established cultural ideal.

But then, is it even possible to imagine a standard of beauty outside of our patriarchal way of seeing? In his 1972 essay<sup>32</sup> on art criticism and social representations, John Berger explains:

One might simplify this by saying: *men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object -- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.

Berger 47

According to him, "[w]omen are depicted in a quite different way from men – not because the masculine is different from the feminine – but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male" (64). This reasoning is accompanied by an illuminating exposé on representations of female nudity in European art, from medieval depictions of Adam and Eve to sixteenth century *vanitas*<sup>33</sup>, about which he writes:

---

<sup>32</sup> Based on the BBC television series of the same name.

<sup>33</sup> Wikipedia: "A *vanitas* is a symbolic work of art showing the transience of life, the futility of pleasure, and the certainty of death, often contrasting symbols of wealth and symbols of ephemerality and death."

The mirror was often used as a symbol of the vanity of woman. The moralizing, however, was mostly hypocritical. You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting *Vanity*, thus morally condemning the women whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure. The real function of the mirror was otherwise. It was to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight.

Berger 51

Here, he argues that the spectacle of these representations implies a male spectatorship, and the implicit assumption that women's bodies are under constant scrutiny holds a symbolic violence.



Figure 4: "Lady Lilith". Oil on canvas by Gabriel Dante Rossetti, Italy, 1866-1868. Delaware Art museum. <sup>34</sup>

In *New Eve*, this violence is summarized well by one scene. After escaping the desert, the new Eve witnesses a crime scene. A husband has murdered his wife and children, and kills himself after. The wife's body is described as such: "Her hair was still in rollers under a gauze scarf, she'd been gunned down with a lipstick in one hand and a mirror in the other." (Carter 166). This woman's death, in the middle of her transformation, hair and make-up unfinished is a striking image of passivity, and her corpse is only the object of the husband's violence, theatrically staged. Agency, then, seems hopelessly male.

---

<sup>34</sup> Due to copyright concerns, the original link to this image cannot be reproduced in the Serval version of this mémoire. This applies to all further blacked out images which are not paired with an access link.

Also relevant is the fact that the success of femininity is measured against male standards of perception. For women, the performance of their gender results in self-objectification, where “the objectifying male gaze is internalized to form a new disciplinary regime.” (Gill 152). The mirror thus becomes a visual metaphor of this often-unconscious system of discipline. Consider this quote by Margaret Atwood, in *The Robber Bride* (1993):

Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy: that you're strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. Even pretending you aren't catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you're unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur.

Atwood 471

This rather depressing conclusion exemplifies the oppressive feeling that the male system of representation cannot be overcome – however unnatural and absurd it may be.

For Eve, life in Zero's harem is an “extensive study of feminine manners” (101), where she mimics his wives in “the way they moved and the way they spoke” (100). So, Eve's accession to femininity is a performance in imitation: “I was tense and preoccupied; although I was a woman, I was now also passing for a woman, but, then, many women born spend their whole lives in just such imitations” (Carter 101). However, the process of imitation is deeply flawed, and there is no perfect and original representation.

Finally, the flaws in the social construction of femininity are made visible by the imagery of the mirror's degradation. Indeed, the mirrors in the novel become progressively damaged. From Leilah's “mirror that seemed to have split apart under the strain of supporting her world” (30), to the one in Zero's house, “a broken mirror with a sand-caked gilt frame and glass so freckled I could hardly make out New Eve's reflection in it” (94), to the one in the uterine cave by the sea:

[A] fine mirror in a curly, gilt frame; but the glass was broken, cracked right across many times so it reflected nothing, was a bewilderment of splinters and I could not see myself nor any portion of myself in it.

Carter 181

And finally, Tristessa's house:

At night, dreaming, I go back again to Tristessa's house, that echoing mansion, that hall of mirrors in which my whole life was lived, the glass mausoleum that had been the world and now is smashed.

191

So, the mirrors of the novel become progressively more damaged and lose their reflective purposes. This could be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the fragmentation of the mirror can signify a sort of fragmentation of the self. Eve's trauma endured in the accession to womanhood could be seen as the cause of her identity's dissolution and the dissociation experienced by women upon confronting their reflected self.

On the other hand, the fragmentation of the mirror could signify the deconstruction of the concept of femininity itself. Then, if the mirror symbolized Eve's internalized male gaze, its destruction symbolizes the deprogramming of gender, or the "discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex" (Butler in Palmer, 24). It is perhaps what Carter means by the pressure of the wine making the bottle explode<sup>35</sup>. I favor the second, more optimistic interpretation because of its unifying prospect.

Indeed, Lilith's shapeshifting happens in parallel with Eve's transition, and her trajectory moves rather towards wholeness than towards division. At first, Lilith takes on the form of Leilah, the rejected other and the mirror of Evelyn's misogyny. Then, she takes on the form of Sophia, whose description is the opposite of Leilah's:

---

<sup>35</sup> See the opening quote of chapter II., p.12

And the girl who led me by the intransigent hand walked as if in possession of a virginity so absolute no key on earth would ever be fierce or subtle enough to try it; she was the perfect child of the heroic sunlight and her name was Sophia.

Carter 56

Where Leilah embodies lust, danger and darkness in continuation with Lilith's traditional characteristics, Sophia embodies wisdom and sunlight ("Lilith, all flesh, Sophia, all mind", Carter 175). What is more is the vastly different association with the mirror, as Eve/lyn recounts:

She looked, however, entirely and comprehensively clothed, even though so much of her skin was showing; she looked like a woman who has never seen a mirror in all her life, not once exposed herself to those looking glasses that betray women into nakedness.

Carter 54

Here, the mirror seems to have no power over Sophia, where Leilah was subjugated to it. The antithetical characterization of Leilah and Sophia may call back to traditional representations of Eve and Lilith, but here, this duality is made to exist in one character: Lilith.

At the end of the novel, Lilith gives Eve the novel's most complete explanation of her nature:

'Lilith is my name,' she said. 'I called myself Leilah in the city in order to conceal the nature of my symbolism. If the temptress displays her nature, the seducee is put on his guard. Lilith, if you remember, was Adam's first wife, on whom he begot the entire race of the djini. All my wounds will magically heal. Rape only refreshes my virginity. I am ageless, I will outlive the rocks.' [...] 'And what is the function of such a being?' she asked in her fresh, dark voice. "'To interpret and convey messages to the gods from men and to men from gods, prayers and sacrifices from the one and commands and rewards from the other.' That's how Plato, for one, defined us."

Carter 174-5

Here, Lilith's quote refers directly to Plato's *Symposium*<sup>36</sup> which discusses the meaning of love. According to one of the dialogues, the spirit of Love (*Eros*) is not a god but "a great daemon" (Plato 201d), whose function is to be the intermediary between humans and the gods. So, the

---

<sup>36</sup> See Plato's *Symposium* lines 203ab

function of Lilith/Sophia – or the philosopher (the one who loves wisdom, *philo-sophia* in greek), is to formally educate the new Eve on gender norms, as her “governess under the earth” (Carter 175).

But in this passage, Lilith’s tone is sarcastic, so this given explanation has to be considered with nuance. In a way, the reader is warned not to take it too literally. Moreover, there is irony in the use of platonic philosophy itself. Indeed, Carter is referring to one of the most famous forefathers of Western philosophy, whose very heritage she abhors, as a base for her new mythology of femininity. In *Notes from the Front line*, Carter writes:

Western European civilisation as we know it has just about run its course and the emergence of the women's movement, and all that implies, is both symptom and product of the unravelling of the culture based on Judeo-Christianity, a bit of Greek transcendentalism via the father of lies, Plato, and all the other bits and pieces.

Carter 28

I would argue that this only adds to the novel’s mythological patchwork and serves to weave conflictual representations of femininity together. According to Gina Wisker, this strategy is not new for Carter. Commenting on a scene from *The Company of Wolves*, she writes:

This episode highlights Carter’s favourite rhetorical trope - the oxymoron, which involves the paradoxical twinning of opposites. In yoking opposites together — such as self/Other, good/evil — her work declines to privilege one version of identity and its exclusive values over another.

Wisker 125

Thus, Lilith’s shapeshifting in *The Passion of New Eve* can be seen as a response to reductive and essentialist depictions of femininity.

To conclude, the findings of this chapter point to Lilith’s shapeshifting as symbolic of a new kind of representation that recognizes femininity’s plurality as well as its constructedness. First, I have highlighted the contemporaneity of Carter’s work with the political and cultural context surrounding the figure of Lilith in the seventies as well as her iconoclastic attitude to

mythmaking. The second section focuses on the Gothic ambivalence of Leilah as a character who is both victim and perpetrator and defined a key characteristic of the New Lilith, which is her *skandalon* powers. The third section explores the theme of motherhood as an unnatural and socially constructed feature of femininity, going over Carter's rejection of Mother Goddesses as an archetype that works against the liberation of women. Finally, the last section focuses on the symbolism of the mirror as a metaphor for the performance of femininity as a learned behavior acquired through suffering and objectification.



### III. Lilith the Vampire in *Bordello of Blood* (1996)

When *Tales from The Crypt Presents: Bordello of Blood* was released in cinemas in the summer of 1996, the kind of feminist discourse offered by Angela Carter and her second-wave contemporaries had integrated the mainstream cultural field. This is supported by Rosalind Gill in her paper on the postfeminist sensibility that arose in the nineties. There, she writes that “feminist discourses are expressed within the media rather than simply external, independent, critical voices.” (161) But according to Gill, this liberalization of feminist principles entails an ambivalent sensibility towards “a feminism that is part of common sense yet also feared, hated and fiercely repudiated.” (161). In this neoliberal paradigm, it is unsurprising that representations of Lilith from the period juggle between a mix of feminist and anti-feminist discourse by attempting to transform a symbol of female empowerment into a marketable stock-character. The failure to solve this conflict may be one of the explanations for the film’s commercial and critical failure, along with chaotic production conditions<sup>37</sup>. Although it was originally meant as an exploitation film<sup>38</sup> when scenarists Bob Gale and Robert Zemeckis (*Back to the Future*) first wrote it, *Bordello* was a true box office bomb with an estimated \$13’000’000 budget and grossing only about \$6’000’000 in the US and Canada<sup>39</sup>. On IMDb, it is rated 5.3/10

---

<sup>37</sup> Some of the problems mentioned in the *Tainted Blood* documentary:

The script was a student project of Gale and Zemeckis’, that was only picked up by Universal Studios because Gale threatened to leave the studio. Dennis Miller did not want to do the movie unless he was paid \$1mio., so 750’000 were taken out of the SFX budget. He refused to come on set, improvised all of his lines, and was generally unpleasant to everyone during production. His co-stars had to re-shoot scenes to fit Miller’s improvisations that didn’t match the lines they had learned, and essential background information had to be cut from the film. Filming took place in Vancouver instead of Los Angeles because of petty union drama. At the time, special effects and other technical expertise was not as developed in Vancouver. Filming took place in August, which left three hours of nighttime a day for filming. Angie Everhart went through a very public break-up in the middle of filming, making her performance at work suffer. (*Tainted Blood* documentary)

<sup>38</sup> “An exploitation film is a film that attempts to succeed financially by exploiting current trends, niche genres, or lurid content. Exploitation films are generally low-quality “B movies”. They sometimes attract critical attention and cult followings.” (Wikipedia)

<sup>39</sup> Source: Internet Movie Database (IMDb), “*Bordello of Blood*”, available at: [www.imdb.com/title/tt0117826/?ref=tttr\\_tr\\_tt](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0117826/?ref=tttr_tr_tt). Accessed 14.05.22

stars and scores only 15% on Rotten Tomatoes' tomatometer<sup>40</sup>, with generally negative reviews from critics<sup>41</sup> :

Vampires aren't the only things in *Bordello of blood* that can't stand up to daylight. Neither can the plot.

*New York Times*, 2000

Triple the length of its cable television inspiration, *Tales From the Crypt Presents Bordello of Blood* is triple the gore, triple the naked women, but not, alas, triple the fun.

*Washington Post*, 2002

Adolescent boys might groove to the mix, but most other ticketbuyers will avoid this tawdry opus like the plague. [sic]

*Variety*, 2008

As those reviews suggest, *Bordello of Blood* is a B-series movie with predictable plot, cheap effects, gratuitous nudity and contrived humour.

However, the movie seems to have gathered more positive reactions from fans of the *Tales from the Crypt* franchise<sup>42</sup> and amateurs of the horror/comedy genre – who would see it as a campy spoof with fun eye-candy. In a making-off documentary included in the 2015 collector's edition, Blu-ray release of *Bordello*, Angie Everhart (Lilith) calls it a cult classic. Nevertheless, the purpose of this chapter is not to judge the quality of the film, but to see it as an illustration of representations of Lilith in the nineties and how her myth has been integrated into and transformed by American pop-culture and ideology. Moreover, *Bordello's* heavy use of stock-characters and well-established tropes is an advantage to my research as it allows an intertextual approach.

---

<sup>40</sup> Source : [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/tales\\_from\\_the\\_crypt\\_presents\\_bordello\\_of\\_bloo](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/tales_from_the_crypt_presents_bordello_of_bloo), Accessed 14.05.22

<sup>41</sup> Source : [www.rottentomatoes.com/m/tales\\_from\\_the\\_crypt\\_presents\\_bordello\\_of\\_blood/reviews](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/tales_from_the_crypt_presents_bordello_of_blood/reviews), Accessed 14.05.22

<sup>42</sup> *Tales from the Crypt* was originally a series of horror comic books published by EC Comics (1950-55). Among the many adaptations of the original concept is the HBO series of the same name (1989-96), and a cartoon series *Tales from the Cryptkeeper* (1993-99). *Bordello* is the second installment of a *Tales from the Crypt* trilogy picked up by Universal Studios, after *Demon Knight* (1995). Because of the commercial failure of *Bordello*, the release of third film (*Ritual*, 2002) was postponed and ultimately released as a standalone film.

*Bordello of Blood* opens in Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, where a crew of locals is led by Vincent Prather (Phil Fondacaro) on an adventure quest in the wilderness. Following a treasure map, they find in a cavern the coffin of Lilith, Mother of All Vampires (Angie Everhart). After an extradiegetic introduction from the Crypt Keeper, the action continues in a small town deep in the Bible belt<sup>43</sup>, where the film introduces Katherine Verdoux (Erika Eleniak) and her brother Caleb (Corey Feldman). The two seemingly have nothing in common; where she is extremely religious and orderly, he listens to punk rock music and wears leather jackets. On a night out, Caleb Verdoux visits Lilith's Bordello and disappears, pushing his sister to hire a sarcastic and macho private investigator, Rafe Guttman (Dennis Miller).

The plot of the movie revolves around Rafe's investigation and the mysterious disappearances in town. It is revealed that men are lured to Lilith's whorehouse with the promise of the best sex of their lives, only to be eaten alive by Lilith and her vampire progeny. The murder of those "sinners" is orchestrated by Katherine's boss, slimy televangelist Reverend J.C. Current (Chris Sarandon), who wants to cleanse the town. When Lilith escapes his control, the Reverend joins Rafe and together they kill all of Lilith's girls with super soakers filled with Holy Water and eventually, Katherine kills Lilith. After that, Rafe and Katherine seem to get along a lot better, as she is no longer disgusted by him and even flirts with him. In the final scene, it is revealed that Katherine was turned by Lilith, and she attacks Rafe.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses the movie in relation to Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze as an objectifying device. Applying this concept, I highlight the ambivalent treatment of this representation of Lilith as an extremely powerful character whose knowingness of the male gaze allows her to use her body and sexuality to her advantage. In the second part of this chapter, I look at the markers of otherness that define *D q t f g* Lilith. ~~First~~ I examine the movie's treatment of places and settings as

---

<sup>43</sup> According to screenplay, fourth draft p.9

markers of marginality and otherness. Second, I remind of Lilith's *skandalon* powers and discuss the meanings behind her status as a female vampire. Finally, I analyze Lilith's queerness and her ambivalent relationship to Katherine as an Eve figure.

#### OBJECTIFICATION, EMPOWERMENT AND THE MALE GAZE

There is no difficulty in finding examples of the male gaze in *Bordello*, a movie written and directed by men who wanted to sell the movie to other men. As mentioned before, the production process was chaotic. What is more is that it is imbued with the male gaze. Starting with the cast of the two female leads, there is little doubt on their appearance being the prime factor. Erika Eleniak known for her role in *Baywatch* (NBC, 1989-2001) was chosen to play Katherine, and Angie Everhart, a supermodel with almost no acting experiences was chosen to play Lilith. Responsible for those casting decisions is Joel Silver, executive producer of *Bordello*. According to the *Tainted Blood* documentary, Silver thought that casting supermodels in movies instead of trained actresses was "the next big thing". Concurrently, Sylvester Stallone, who worked with him on *Assassins* (1995), introduced him to Everhart (his fiancée at the time) and suggested her for the role.

In the same documentary, we learn about a "very suggestive and sexy scene" between Lilith and Katherine which was added to the screenplay at the last-minute, a scene which Erika Eleniak refused to do, because after quitting *Baywatch*, she wanted to change her image and to be taken more seriously as an actress. For the same reason, Eleniak asked for a re-write of her character who was originally written as an ex-pornstar and then as a stripper. These anecdotes not only further demonstrate the film's hellish production conditions, but they also highlight the film's clear intent for its female characters, which is for them to look good on screen. Voyeuristic and often pornographic in its treatment of the female body as an object, this film appropriates the myth of Lilith for an always already male viewership.

Now, it is useful to define what the male gaze is. In the previous chapter, I refer to John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), which develops the idea that representations of femininity in art history are designed by and for male spectatorship by default. Later on, psychoanalytic critic Laura Mulvey has adapted the concept to filmic representations using Freudian *scopophilia*<sup>44</sup> (pleasure in looking) in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). Aside from its psychoanalytic frame<sup>45</sup>, I hold Mulvey's development of the concept as a key tool for my analysis of this movie. She writes:

There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience.

Mulvey 25

In other words, Mulvey distinguishes three looks in her film theory: 1. the camera filming the action on screen, 2. the audience who watches the movie in the theater (or at home), and 3. the characters at each other. Mulvey then argues that the first should not be directly apparent to the male spectator, whose look is both the same and more important as the camera's and the protagonists'. As an example, in *Bordello*, Rafe's lingering look upwards Katherine's leg is visible through the camera's movement, and stands for the audience's look (see Figure 8). I develop this example later on. Furthermore, Mulvey's theory of the male gaze relates to the assumption that in mainstream film, the representation of femininity is defined by male spectatorship within the diegesis of the movie as well as outside of it, in the audience. As a result, the female body is reduced to a sight, a passive spectacle all the while the male protagonist and his audience remain active subjects.

---

<sup>44</sup> According to Mulvey, the "scopophilic instinct" is the "pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object". (25)

<sup>45</sup> For example, seeing "the female image as a castration threat" (Mulvey 25). Putting this idea in parallel with Lilith's threat to Rafe "First I'll rip your dick off, then I'll grind your balls into guacamole" (*Bordello*, 01:16:50) can be interesting, but a psychoanalytical approach is beyond the scope of this paper.

In my analysis of *Bordello*, I identify two ways in which the male gaze objectifies the female form for its own satisfaction. The first way is that it portrays the female body as an object to look at, and the second is that it frames it as an object to control and subjugate. *Bordello*'s portraying of the female body as an object to look at is quite obvious in its constant use of female nudity. Examples are, close-ups on faceless body parts (Figure 5, Figure 6), entrapped or tortured bodies (Figure 10), lingering camera movements following the male protagonists' gaze (Figure 8), or shot composition in which the female body serves as a framing device (Figure 9). Secondary female characters (Lilith's vampire prostitutes, girls at the sports bar, or a background stripper) are all clearly objectified in this way. Although a few of them are named (Tamara, Patrice, Tallulah) and seem active, in this diegetic world their role remains passive and the spectacle of their body is obvious, as shown in the two screenshots below.

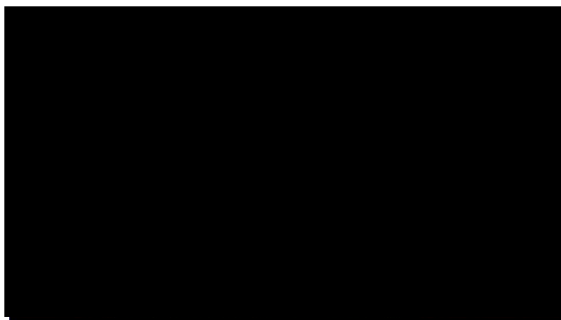


Figure 5 – (00:17:29)

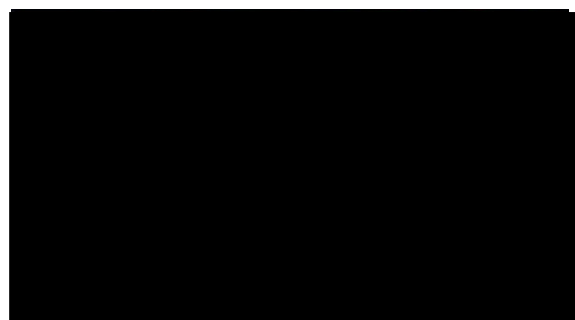


Figure 6 – (00:20:20)

Here, the three looks are reunited and what the camera shows is what the male protagonist and the male audience see together. This look corresponds to what Laura Mulvey defines as the device of the show-girl. For her, the “performing woman” soothes the “shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (Mulvey 20), without breaking the narrative's believability, since performance is part of the diegesis itself. Mulvey explains that the impact of this overt sexual performance suspends the parameters of time and space.

Similarly, conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism. One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative; it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon, rather than verisimilitude, to the screen.

By extension, *D q t f s depiction* of women as fragmented body parts rather than a whole and nuanced being is an essentializing device which provides a simplified idea of femininity that denies its subjectivity. In chapter II, I argue that objectification is a gothic process. Now, I want to put in perspective this type of shot composition and camera movement with Gina Wisker's definition of the processes at hand in the gothic genre: "disempowerment, dismemberment, dehumanization" (119). In this case, I am particularly interested in the process of dismemberment. I argue that through the male gaze, the camera's focus on female body parts entails a kind of metaphorical dismemberment, which is in turn dehumanizing. In this sense, *Bordello's* pornographic gaze holds a symbolic violence.

Furthermore, in *Bordello*, the pleasure in looking at dismembered body parts is not only metaphoric. Towards the end of the movie, in the "Ballroom Blitz"<sup>46</sup> scene where Rafe and the Reverend shoot the prostitutes with Holy Water super soakers (from 01:08:34), a pair of legs and a torso detached from its head stumbles into the frame (Figure 7).

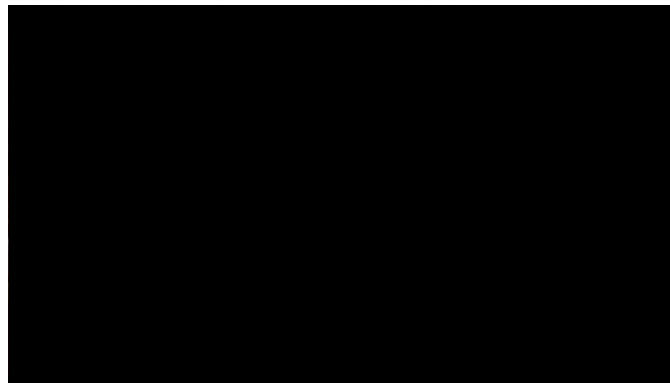


Figure 7 - Ballroom Blitz scene (01:09:39)

Behind her as she catches on fire, there is a painting of a naked woman wearing a blindfold. Here, the figurative dismemberment of the woman in the painting only highlights the literal dismemberment of the dying vampire. As the girls' flesh explodes and melts, the two

<sup>46</sup> "Ballroom Blitz" by band Sweet being the soundtrack of this scene.

protagonists continue making puns and take joy in the massacre. As the Reverend aims at a vampire hiding behind a table, the camera zooms in on his face. He is febrile, a bit shaky and he grins, signifying the pleasure he has in killing.

With slight remorse, the Reverend asks “My God, what have we done?”, to which Rafe answers: “Don’t flake on me man, they’re vampires, send them to hell” (01:10:25-01:10:30). This interaction is interesting, because it shows the justification of extreme violence with otherness. These vampires are not human, and therefore they are not worthy of compassion which means that killing is not morally reprehensible. In addition, the pleasure found in dismembering and killing the vampires is significant because they represent a threat to the patriarchal order of the town – they are a danger to men and they are out of control. Their death is thus a metaphorical device that reinstates order and control of the female body.

It is ironic, though, that their very existence is the Reverend’s responsibility. As he is the one who ordered Lilith’s resuscitation for the purpose of eradicating sinners, he materialized his own religious fear and repulsion of sexuality. Then, the murderous rampage represents an exorcism of his own demons and repressed desires. In addition, while the vampires are murdered mercilessly, this man whose moral flaws are made obvious throughout the movie is offered redemption in a scene of messianic self-sacrifice. With this double-standard, substituting “vampires” with “women” would provide an interesting social commentary. Here, the analogy can be summarized thusly: men who transgress are portrayed with nuance and are treated with compassion, while women who threaten the status quo are punished with extreme violence. As Gina Wisker argues, horror is “a genre dominated not only by male practitioners, but also male fears of female sexuality and female subjectivity” (Wisker 116). In the vampire prostitutes’ deaths, it is not only the figurative threat of their monstrosity which is eliminated, but also their potential subjectivity.



The “Ballroom Blitz” scene and Tammy’s subjugation can be compared to closural devices present in horror literature. For Gina Wisker, it is a genre that “unleashes anxieties and fantasies about forbidden areas of our lives” (116) but “frequently features closural devices that return us to safety and order, and such devices habitually reinforce the status quo.” (117). In parallel, the diegetic world created by the male gaze provides a shallow projection of men’s fear of female sexuality and subjectivity, which is exorcized through closural devices that restore the patriarchal order. Those devices effectively soothe any anxieties of monstrous femininity and the fear sparked by desiring them. Another example of a closural device that reinforces the status quo of *Bordello*’s diegetic world is in Lilith’s lore. Indeed, the key to control Lilith and the way to “kill” her are introduced early on and implicitly reassures the audience that this monster can be controlled.

Throughout the film, the notion of control is quite important and it directs the narrative. In her definition of the male gaze in mainstream cinema, Laura Mulvey writes:

The man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extradiegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle. This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor co-ordination.

Mulvey 20

Here, Mulvey explains that the male protagonist is a device for the male gaze to exist on screen without disturbing verisimilitude (or the fourth wall). The term “screen surrogate” is quite important, as it describes the male protagonist as an idealized, better self with whom the

spectator can identify. So, this mirrored self is a stand-in for the spectator who transcends the fourth wall and is able to better control the narrative. In opposition, the female characters and bodies are either props or problems to fix rather than complex people with whom one can have meaningful relationships. In the previous chapter, I established that the mirror can be seen as a metaphor for the performance of femininity as a spectacle. Here, I would argue that the male gaze as an objectifying and normative cultural practice is itself a performance of masculinity.

Similarly, the male gaze controls the narrative of *Bordello*. The crypt keeper's extradiegetic introduction and conclusion frame the story into a narrative told by a male creature to another male monster. In this homosocial context, then, the audience is asked to identify with the main protagonist and screen surrogate: Rafe Guttman. Throughout the movie, he seems relatively in hold of his emotions, and remains somewhat righteous. He stands out from other men because he resists the charm of Lilith and her peers, and his one-in-a-million blood type brings Lilith's interest to him. In addition, his trajectory follows an almost messianic structure, where he gets to save the day and Katherine from the claws of the evil Lilith. More often than not, the camera movements follow his gaze, for example in Figure 8). Here, the audience and the male protagonist share the same look.

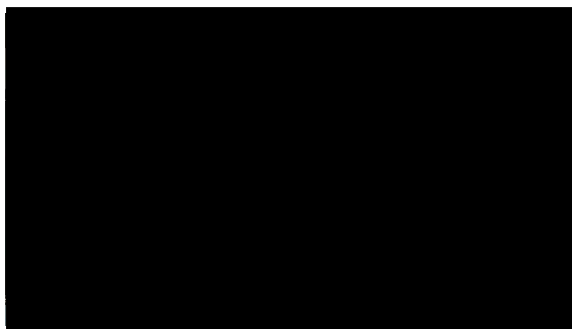


Figure 8 - Rafe looks up at Katherine's legs, and the camera tilts upwards. (01:23:05-01:23:11)



Figure 9 - Rafe investigates as two bar-goers watch. (01:25:53)

Another instance of the movie representing male subjectivity vs. female objectivity is in the shot composition, where female background characters with or without clothes frame the action

(for ex. Figure 9). The girls in this shot are framing the male protagonist's discussion with another man, only speaking and moving when a drink is spilled on one of them. In analogy, female experience only frames and supports the male hero's narrative, and the feminine object-body thus breaks the tension of the horror plot by assuming the role of either eye candy or comic relief.

Another example of the male gaze is the bondage scene of Tammy (Figure 10), in which Rafe reverses the threat posed by Tammy's overt and dominant sexuality by tricking her into a form of submissive entrapment.



Figure 10 - Rafe tricks Tammy (00:44:33)

In that scene, the gaze of the camera and the male protagonists' are not the same, and yet it is quite clearly depicted from and for a male point of view; it does not empathize with the woman's fear and vulnerability, but it praises the male character's cleverness in overcoming a dangerous woman. In fact, the audience's look on the scene is not simply sharing Rafe's excitement over seeing the vampire prostitute tied up, as Rafe seems quite immune to the spectacle in front of him. Rather, the audience witnesses the protagonists' cool nonchalance and therefore can identify with Rafe's projected "superior" maleness. More obviously, this scene (and other scenes in which women are tied up, trapped or tricked<sup>47</sup>) appeal to both the male characters'

---

<sup>47</sup> For example, the scene where Katherine is tied up by Lilith, with her vampire brother looking over with disturbing enthusiasm (01:07:38)

look and the audience's, who find a visual and moral satisfaction in masculine violence and domination. For Lisa Tuttle, this is problematic:

There is no reason why men should not explore their own fears and fantasies, but when they lose sight of the existence of an encultured male bias and mistake it for universal 'human nature'; when they forget there are other ways of being and feeling; when they confuse patriarchal social structures with natural law; when they perpetuate stereotypes and mistake their own fantasies for objective reality - then we're all imprisoned by their limitations, and horror becomes another kind of pornography.

Tuttle, quoted by Wisker, 117

Seeing horror as pornography illuminates the purpose of a movie such as *Bordello*, in which the depiction of male violence against women is a pleasurable spectacle for an always already male audience.

Despite all of this, there is some ambivalence in the characterization of Lilith in *Bordello*. Although she is hypersexualized and built for the male gaze, she stands as an empowered and strong female antagonist. Accompanied by all the symbolism lent by her name and its mythos developed over centuries, Lilith is capable of extreme violence. She is very intelligent and unapologetically sexual, and knows how to use her body to shift perception to her advantage. As an example, she suggests deep-throat to one of her victims, before extending her tongue down his throat and ripping his heart from his ribcage before eating it (00:21:00). Lilith's knowingness of the male gaze is quite perceptible in the hypnosis sequence (Figure 11, Figure 12), where she shapeshifts into stereotypical male fantasies to try and seduce Rafe. If we remember correctly, this is quite similar to Leilah's embodiment of Evelyn's pornographic ideal in *The Passion of New Eve*.



Figure 11 - Lilith as a cheerleader (00:47:33)

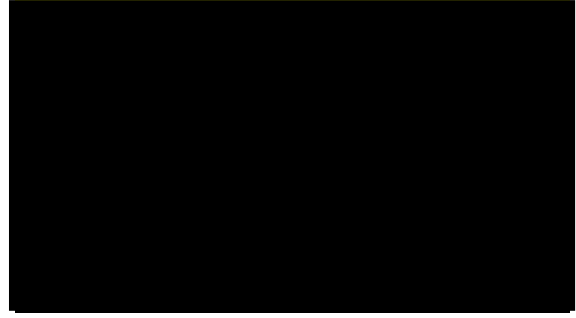


Figure 12 - Lilith as Marilyn Monroe (00:47:48)

At the end of the scene, Lilith transforms into Katherine, Rafe's ultimate fantasy, and offers him an illusion in which Katherine is attracted to him. Here, Lilith's ability to perform for the male gaze can be construed as a form of empowered mimesis. Though there are limits to the transgressive power of women using male perception for their advantage, this ambivalence is significant for the evolution of the new Lilith, which echoes Gill's reflection on the contradictions of a postfeminist media culture discussed previously.

Furthermore, Lilith's many misandrist remarks (for ex.: "Men, such babies", 01:42:46) make her a terribly fun villain, similar to Angela Carter's Mother. In the same line of thought, her violence is focused at men only, until the very end where she tells Katherine: "You know, I've never killed a woman before." (1:15:21). Another example of Lilith's more positive relationship to women is her vampire progeny. By giving them immortality and superhuman strength, she lends her girls her seductive powers to use against men. On the other side, the men she turns (Caleb and Jenkins), are not given the same privileges; their transformation is incomplete and she simply uses them for her purposes: for Jenkins, luring more men to her brothel, and for Caleb, tricking Katherine and Rafe. The reason behind this Lilith's distaste for men is never explicit, but one could infer that for her, this is a form of revenge for centuries of male violence.

Interestingly, for some radical feminists, the inversion of the systemic violence perpetrated onto women can be a useful consciousness-raising tool that exposes the absurdity

of patriarchal rule, though it is an imperfect one that may only reproduce the existing system without offering a viable alternative. Hence, the proposition of misandry as a radical feminist exercise and activist tool has received a lot of controversy, for example Alice Coffin's *Le Génie Lesbien* (2020), Blythe Robertson's *How to Date Men When You Hate Men* (2019) or Valerie Solanas' *SCUM Manifesto* (1967).

To summarize what has been said in this section, I argue that in *Bordello of Blood*, the objectifying power of the male gaze is present both within the narrative and outside of it. In this movie, the female body is depicted first as an object to look at, and second as an object to control, while the male protagonist is the "screen surrogate" of the (also male) audience who can identify with the hero's more perfect maleness. Nonetheless, I address the ambivalence of this representation of Lilith as an extremely powerful yet hypersexualized villain whose knowingness and utilization of the male gaze coexists with essentializing characterization and underdeveloped drive and aspirations.

## MARKERS OF OTHERNESS

One characteristic of Lilith's that remains in her modern evolution is the fact that she carries markers of Otherness. In this section, I examine three of them: place and setting, monstrosity, and queerness.

### **Places and Settings of Marginality**

In the movie, place and setting associated with Lilith are signifiers of marginality and Otherness. The setting for the movie's opening is Tierra del Fuego (Figure 13), which is represented as a deep and luscious forest that can be crossed on horseback through misty pathways and that is peopled by wig-wearing skeletons. In short, it is a remote, exotic and dangerous place.



Figure 13 - Men on horseback through Tierra del Fuego (00:00:31)

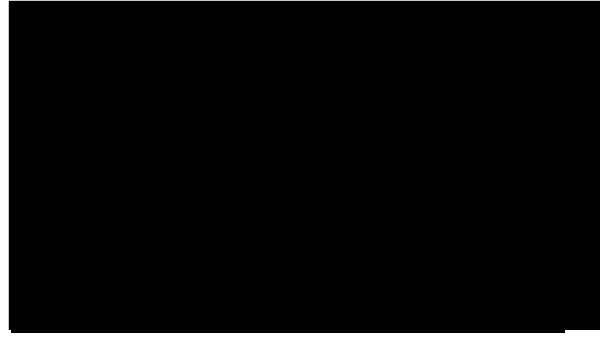


Figure 14 - Statue of Jesus carrying a cross outside of Lilith's tomb (00:02:42)

These characteristics match with previous representations of Lilith as inhabiting spaces outside of society, but it also features a strange patchwork of mythos. There are allusions to natives' as well as colonizers beliefs about Lilith. Here, Lilith's Middle Eastern origins are erased and replaced by strange visual crossovers. Indeed, outside of Lilith's cavern, there is a statue of Christ holding a cross (Figure 14), which would concur with the story that Catholic colonizers came to Tierra del Fuego four centuries ago to hide Lilith's corpse. But then, Lilith's tomb (Figure 15) is engraved with skulls and other approximations of symbols from ancient civilizations from South America. Why would Catholic conquistadors engrave a coffin with symbols from another system of belief?

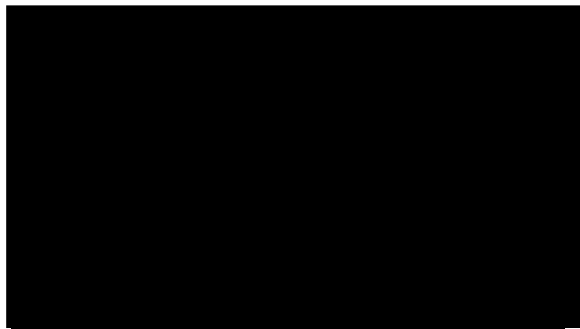


Figure 15 - Lilith's coffin (00:03:01)

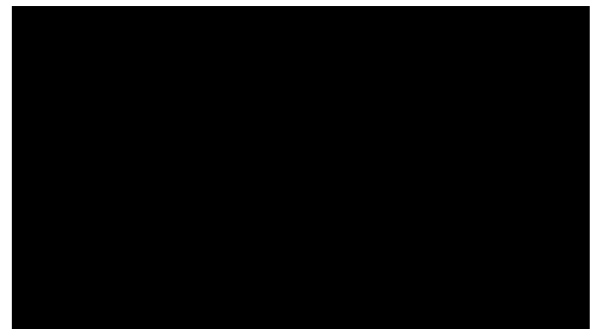


Figure 16 - The Key to control Lilith (00:06:50)

In addition, the Key that can control Lilith has Jewish stars of David on it (Figure 16). Moreover, Rafe is Jewish (he wears a Star of David pendant), and that makes him special to Lilith and/or immune to her charm. At the end of the movie, Lilith's quartered heart is consecrated by a rabbi, but we are left to guess exactly what that means. My hypothesis is that it would make her vulnerable to the star of David in the same way she is vulnerable to the cross.

This confusing mix of possible origins makes it difficult to analyze the lore of Lilith in *Bordello*. However, if we consider the intent to highlight her ancient age and to render her Other, the clumsy portrayal of mystery and exoticism makes more sense. I would argue that the movie's lore stands in a sort of limbo of appropriation where it has partially moved away from Judaic legend, but is not completely Americanized yet.

Another setting for Lilith is the whorehouse/funeral house (Figure 17, Figure 18). The house is first introduced by night in dark and stormy weather, which is a classic gothic horror setting. This is highlighted by Caleb's remark that it looks like the Addams family's manor.

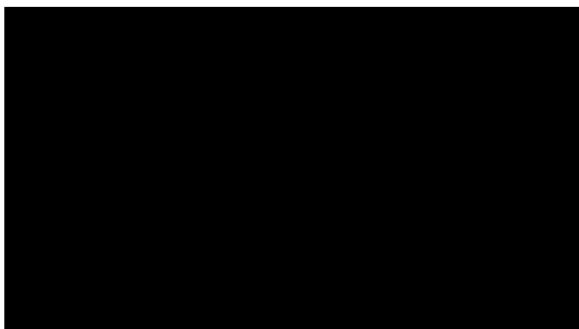


Figure 17 - The house at night (00:14:47)



Figure 18 – The house during the day (00:27:38)

During the day, its roman columns and surrounding willows evoke antebellum plantation houses, which also evokes the tradition of the Southern Gothic a genre set in the American South. According to Matthew Wynn Sivils, the Gothic landscape is visually defined by overgrown vegetation, decaying structures and an uneasy atmosphere:

This atmosphere is further enhanced by the common spectacle of abandoned, rusting or otherwise disintegrating shacks, trucks, tractors and other artefacts of a not-too-distant past, which, in their weed-wrapped embrace, seem emblematic of humanity's legacy in the South. These scenes render a well-known brand of Southern sublime, a lushness flecked with decay.

Wynn Sivils 83

The legacy of the South is without a doubt enmeshed with the legacy of slavery and racial violence. Although references to the horrors of slavery, segregation and other continued systems of oppression remain marginal in *Bordello*, subtle hints at this is that the town is situated somewhere in the Bible belt, that a few confederate flags appear throughout the film,



the presence of a powerful and corrupted super church, religious zeal, and that Lilith's lore is related with colonial imperialism.

Despite all of this, the film is impressively apolitical and devoid of explicit racial tensions, though the relative absence of non-white people is significant<sup>48</sup>. This tension is not dissimilar to what David Greven describes in "The Southern Gothic in Film", about "works [that] indulge in stereotypes while bizarrely revising and repressing historical trauma" (482). He uses another critics' definition to expand on this:

For a film to engage with Southern gothic, it must first invert or eliminate a sense of realism; the cartoonish subversion allows the American filmmaker to re-define questions of class, race and gender in an unapologetic and largely exploitative way. Further, it presents an arena in which directors and screenwriters can present cultural stereotypes and racialized violence in a consequence-free environment.

(Crank in Greven 482)

This is a very good explanation for *Bordello*'s ambivalent treatment of social issues, where it visually and thematically alludes to otherness, marginality and exoticism but never engages politically with them. For Lilith, place and setting are subtle markers of her otherness because she exists in spaces outside of society and traditional femininity by making the places she inhabits dangerous for men. More so than in the margins, Lilith is present down and under. Indeed, in order to find her, one must go down; digging down to find her sepulture, or going down to find her brothel. This is not unlike the process of going down in Carter's novel, where Beulah and Mother's cavern by the sea are spaces outside of society, that allow female dominance and violence, or Lilith's role as Queen of the Underworld in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*.

---

<sup>48</sup> Corey Feldman, who plays Caleb Verdoux is of Jewish descent, but that seems irrelevant to the character's background. Besides the Whoopi Goldberg cameo, the only non-white actor is Juliet Reagh (Tallulah), who is from Trinidad and of Indian descent. In addition with the scripts' description of the bordello : "A beautiful Asian woman gyrates on the dance floor" (19), sexual fetishization cannot be seen as positive representation. Then, Miguel and the locals are played by white actors with grotesque Spanish accents. In the script, they are called "camposinos" [sic]. A campesino is an umbrella term for a native from rural Latin America (often an immigrant to Mexico or the US).

The setting of the brothel illustrates the constant ambivalence of the very male narrative of *Bordello*. Sometimes, we are “in” on the joke with the prostitutes and Lilith, who are knowingly performing male fantasies to their advantage, and Caleb and his friend are blinded by the spectacle in front of them and ignore the danger they are in. In relation to the brothel as a motif in Carter’s fiction, Paulina Palmer argues that it is a place that allows the subversion of femininity. She writes:

The brothel has, of course, strong associations with femininity - femininity of a disreputable kind. In fiction it is generally depicted as the location of ‘bad girls’ or is represented as a context of female exploitation and oppression.

Palmer 39

In a way, this also applies to *Bordello*, where the brothel is a place associated with disreputable femininity. But then, Lilith’s brothel inverts the relation of exploitation, and the prostitutes perform their sexuality in order to trick men and exploit *them* instead. In other settings, maleness is predominant: from the sports bar to Rafe’s office, the Reverend’s super church, and even Katherine and Caleb’s family home, men are the ones who take up physical space. They are the ones who speak, the ones who control their surroundings. On the contrary, meeting *D q t f Lilith under the earth* (down the cavern and through symbolic hellfire to the brothel) weakens patriarchal rule and puts men in danger – as she kills many in those places. In parallel, the final scene where she is killed is architecturally the opposite: a huge open space composed of thousands of transparent glass panes.

### **Lilith, Monstrous Skandalon**

In *Bordello of Blood*, one marker of Lilith’s otherness that takes the precedent over social or ethnic difference is her monstrosity. In the movie, her human form is of a conventionally attractive and sexy woman, but her monstrosity is established from the start and reminded in the end under the shape of a bony and slimy monster. Throughout, monstrous qualities are shown to remind us of Lilith’s otherness, with a phallic tongue that extends unnaturally far or

with her fangs appearing. When she is ready to attack, or when she is on the prowl, animalistic sound bites of felines or rattle snakes can be heard, further emphasizing her difference. More specifically, *Bordello's* Lilith is a vampire. Some of Lilith's characteristics or powers are: immortality, superhuman strength, shapeshifting, the ability to create new vampires, hypnosis and mental manipulation, a greater resistance to Holy Water than her vampire offspring, and she does not appear in photo or film.

All of these seem to match quite well with the characteristics of classic pop-culture vampires, but there is a characteristic of this Lilith in which I am particularly interested: her powers of seduction, her *skandalon*<sup>49</sup> powers. From the Greek *skandalon*, the term means “a trap, snare or stumbling block” (Monnet 1) or “any person or thing by which one is (entrapped) drawn into error or sin” (Thayer and Smith). Needless to say, *Bordello's* Lilith fits this description as much as Carter's Lilith, as her purpose is to lure men with the promise and sex in order to kill them, and so both of them are sexually threatening and reverse the prey/hunter gothic trope discussed in the previous chapter.

Hence, it is not surprising that a creature such as Lilith would be associated with the vampire, archetype of hypersexualized and dangerous femininity. Amanda Hobson, editor of *Gender in the Vampire Narrative* writes about the figure of the overtly sexual female vampire:

The archetype of the female vampire as the sexual temptress has been a part of vampire fiction since Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and the Brides in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Our visual culture emphasizes the voracious sexuality of the female body and more so of the female vampiric body. The vampire seductress fills our imaginations as she embodies contradicting ideals of femininity, such as fragility, strength, beauty, and power.

Hobson 9

What Hobson describes here is key to understand the evolution of Lilith's myth. As discussed before, her story has been influenced by the cultures and civilizations it has lived through, from

---

<sup>49</sup> See chapter II., p.20

ancient Akkad to the French Romantics and now American pop-culture. Bearing similar imagery and themes to Lilith's story, the lore of female vampire characters easily meshes with modern representations of dangerous and sexual women such as her. Unsurprisingly, representing Lilith as a vampire was not an original idea when *Bordello* was released.

In the introduction to chapter II., I have established that the myth of Lilith surged in popularity in the 1970's. Almost at the same time, Lilith was represented as a vampire in her first comic book appearances. In their article discussing the appropriation of Lilith into American culture through her appearances in comic books, George and Avi S. Dennis mention examples such as *Vampirella* #9 (1971)<sup>50</sup>, *Eerie* #47 (1973), or "the first fully developed serial character that drew on her name and story", Marvel's 'Lilith, Daughter of Dracula'" in 1974 (81-2). According to the two authors, those earlier representations of a vampiric Lilith have integrated contemporary social issues like feminist empowerment, sexual violence, reverse discrimination and motherhood, all this with varying degrees of faithfulness to Lilith's Jewish origins<sup>51</sup> and other "mythological mash-ups"<sup>52</sup>. Those appearances nonetheless defined some of the *visual* characteristics of a modern Lilith as a dark-haired "goth" or dominatrix with unrealistic body proportions (see Figure 19, Figure 20).

---

<sup>50</sup> An interesting fact for intertextuality is that Angela Carter has written about female vampires as well, in *Vampirella*, a radio play for the BBC (1976), and "The Lady of the House of Love" in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979)

<sup>51</sup> Namely Ben Sira's legend or medieval and kabbalistic interpretations (as in the Zohar)

<sup>52</sup> Dennis and Dennis's term, see p. 85.



Figure 19 - "Lilith, Daughter of Dracula" in *The Haunt of Horror*, Marvel, 1974. (Dennis and Dennis p.83)

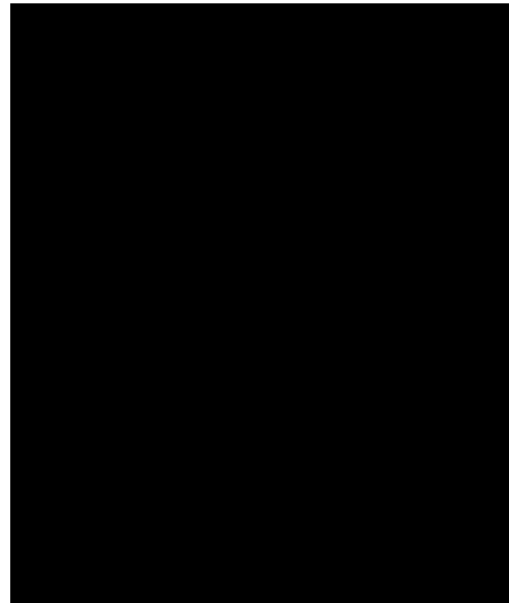


Figure 20 - Lilith in "Rise of Midnight's Children", Marvel, 1992. (Dennis and Dennis, p.87)

In their article, Dennis and Dennis provide an illuminating analysis of the male gaze in *Vampirella*:

Both [Vampirella and Lilith] are the cartoon embodiment of women designed for the voyeuristic pleasure of “the male gaze.” While very powerful within their narrative mythos, their illustrated acts (and postures) are subordinate to the desire of the presumed male readership—female bodies in contorted motion, often bathed in blood; frequent full frontal, back-, and up-shots of the female form that fill the panel; chests leaning in toward the reader; and plot developments that involve languid reclining, bathing, being bound, imprisoned, and tortured.

Dennis and Dennis 90

Here, we can see that some of the same techniques are used in *Bordello*'s depiction of Lilith, and the composition of the panel can be compared to the shot composition in audiovisual pieces of media – only the look of the camera is different. Sound and movement do not change the male gaze-y features of comic book women, who were already drawn by men and for men and their pleasure in looking and looking to control the female body. Both comic books and *Bordello*'s representations of Lilith feature vampiric femininity through a hypersexualized and voyeuristic lense as well as the ambivalence posed by female characters that are both very powerful *and* in service of the male gaze.

Now that I have laid down some of the background context of depicting Lilith as a vampire, I want to discuss the movie's utilization of the vampires, or the undead as markers of otherness. For Lisa Cunningham, "[b]eing dead is the epitome of being Othered" (1). In the film, this assumption is confirmed by the destruction of the undead female vampires in the "Ballroom Blitz" scene discussed earlier, but also in its necrophilia jokes. To further illustrate this idea, I want to look in more detail at the disturbing autopsy scene where a woman's corpse and the release of post-mortem gases is sexualized and toyed with (Figure 21).

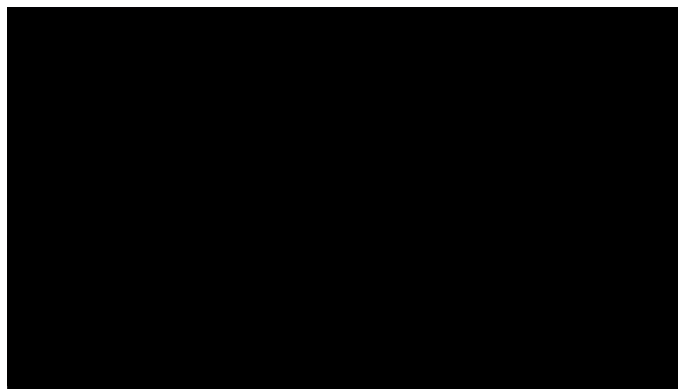


Figure 21 - Cunningham plays with Mrs. Factor's corpse (00:34:30)

What one realizes in thinking about this scene is that even in death, this woman is denied bodily autonomy, dignity, and subjectivity. In this case, being dead is synonym to being othered which in turn leads to a loss of respect and empathy. Another difference between her body and the other women murdered or tortured throughout the movie is that she is not conventionally attractive, which may partially explain why this scene is particularly disturbing, as perhaps the scopophilic look no longer applies. Unlike the monstrous female vampires, the dead cannot fight back and the dehumanizing actions of the coroner follow through with all the impunity of abusive men in the real world. Then, this situation may be more disturbing than the vampires' death, because unlike this poor woman, they are perceived as dangerous. Extending the analogy, one could argue that the justification of sexual violence through victim-blaming<sup>53</sup>, follows the

---

<sup>53</sup> i.e. focusing on the victim's clothes, attitude or location instead of the abuser's actions

same logic. When a woman's behavior derives from the accepted model for femininity, she becomes a threat and must be controlled.

Throughout the centuries, Lilith's myth has been imbued by male perception of female sexuality as dangerous, through the fear of what is Other. Overall, I argue that vampires seem to stand as metaphors for social issues and anything that concerns difference or the perception of deviance. In a narrative where the hero must fight female vampires, the final victory over the monsters is an exorcism of the man's own fears, and it confines the uncontrollable being to the margins or sentences it to death. As a vampire, Lilith's supernatural otherness stands as another manifestation of male fears of femininity, as a *skandalon*. Discussing the meaning behind the fear of the female vampire, Gina Wisker writes:

Vampires traditionally invade the space of the home and the body, and so they represent our fears of invasion by Otherness. Male vampires, including Dracula, frequently epitomize threats to men's ownership of women's sexuality. Similarly, female vampires often represent male anxieties of sexually voracious women.

Wisker 126

Concurrently, Hobson's analysis uses a similar argument:

Female vampires often have perverted natures, prey upon children, and eschew normative reproduction and motherhood. In this way, they have been portrayed as beautiful predators, sexually and emotionally devouring their prey, standing as a perfect metaphor for cultural fears about strong, independent women and female sexuality.

Hobson 3

Similarly, *Dracula* and her "offspring" threaten men's control over their own sexuality to use it against them, provoking their demise. The transformation by Lilith of young women is more than a simple vampiric contagion, it also eschews the normative definition of motherhood, which we know is key to Lilith's myth. Also noteworthy is that unlike the traditional male vampires, those present in the movie are weak, stupid and perverted as well as being subservient to Lilith. This can somewhat be compared to the nature of the relationship

Erard 66

between Mother and her priestesses in Beulah as nurturing and empowering, while men are abused and tormented by them.

A contiguous creature to the hypersexualized female vampire is the succubus, female demon that preys on men at night to drain them of their vital energy – their semen (or blood, for a vampire):

These monstrous women slowly kill their prey, luring them into unproductive sexual encounters, draining them of blood and their perceived masculine essence—their semen, which has become a trope prominent particularly within vampire pornography of the contemporary era. Women’s bodies and their sexuality are a problematic entity enticing men to spiritually bereft and physically exhausting sexual encounters, leaving the man weakened and demoralized.

Hobson 11

Like Lilith, succubae invert the gendered dynamic of the prey/hunter. Another pop-culture succubus movie has a similar attitude towards men: *L g p p k h g* (2009). In a deleted scene from the movie<sup>54</sup>, the protagonist, a possessed high-school student, Jennifer (Megan Fox) is confronted by her best friend, Needy (Amanda Seyfried) for murdering her male classmates:

NEEDY. You’re killing people !

JENNIFER. No, I’m killing boys.

Now considered a cult classic, *L g p p k h g* was originally a box-office bomb, like *Bordello*. In cause, poor marketing that targeted adolescent boys by showing off Megan Fox’s body and featuring her sexually connotated scenes, instead of marketing it to the young girls who were the original target of the film’s feminist (and misandrist) message. Indeed, reversing the traditional prey/hunter dichotomy can be quite subversive and cathartic because it offers a diegetic world where women are in power and men vulnerable. In parallel, Lisa Cunningham argues that the coupling of “sexuality and sexually-desirable “pretty” women” with “over-the-top bloody violence” in *Bordello* may have the positive implication of “highlight[ing] the

---

<sup>54</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mxjt8XyVJqU>. Accessed 18.05.22.



ridiculousness of denying violent behavior, even possibility, in definitions of womanhood.” (Cunningham 6).

### **The Queering of Eve and Lilith**

Another marker of difference in *Bordello* is Lilith’s queerness, which draws on the archetype of the lesbian vampire in Gothic fiction. On the topic, Lisa Cunningham writes:

Horror narratives comment on specific structural dichotomies, such as heterosexual/homosexual or male/female or privileged/oppressed, often by locating these binaries in characters who are placed in opposition to one another, one quality and character clearly marked “good” and the other “bad.”

Cunningham 5

So, the narrative space offered by horror provides social commentary on cultural binaries, and “[t]he focus of much lesbian Gothic is on questions of sexuality and normality raised by such borderline creatures as werewolves and vampires”. (Wisker 126-7). In sum, if a character is depicted as supernaturally Other, metaphors of social difference, marginality and oppression may be inferred.

Lisa Cunningham remarks that “[t]here is no single positive heterosexual interaction in *Bordello of Blood*: the men are often abusive and always abused” (11). The violent relationship of men and women in this movie puts into perspective the results of systematic othering – which hinders any genuine interpersonal relationships between oppressor and oppressed. One of the ways this occurs is the many jokes about male homosexuality as a better alternative to being with women, like Rafe’s “You’re reminding me why being married to you drove me to the brink of homosexuality.” (00:24:22) to his ex-wife. Thus, in a paradigm ruled by male domination, fulfilling any sustainable heterosexual love can seem a lost cause<sup>55</sup>. In *Bordello*’s extremely sexist diegetic world, homosocial and homoerotic tensions take the precedent.

---

<sup>55</sup> See Mona Chollet’s « Réinventer l’amour : comment le patriarcat sabote les relations hétérosexuelles » (2021). To my knowledge, no English translation was published yet.

But in parallel, those homoerotic relationships are still imbued with the male gaze, as Hobson explains:

Sexual violence is indelibly linked to the image of the vampire, with the penetrative bite inflicted through coercion or preternatural physical strength. This highly sexualized act of the bite articulates fears of miscegenation, women's sexuality, and homosexuality, and it also highlights concerns about lack of self-control and sexualized violence. Bonnie Zimmerman writes, "The male vampire has been used to suggest that heterosexuality is sometimes indistinguishable from rape ... The function of the lesbian vampire is to contain attraction between women within the same boundaries of sexual violence, to force it into a patriarchal model of sexuality" (1981, p. 23)."

Hobson 11

In short, there is an association of vampires with sexual violence. The vampiric bite as a device alludes to penetrative rape, almost always piercing an intimate spot on the body (the neck, the inner thigh). However, a vampire biting into someone's wrist is very often non-sexual, consensual and practical (often to save someone or feeding a "good" vampire). In pop-culture representations (like in Figure 22 and Figure 23), the erotic connotation of the bite and the fact that it often happens through coercion or violence may appeal to a scopophilic and sadistic male gaze.

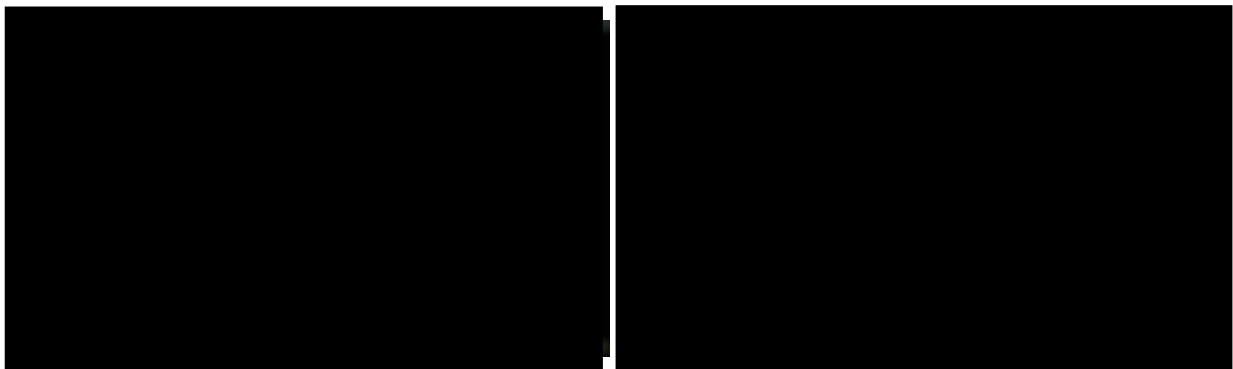


Figure 22 - The Vampire Diaries, Klaus and Caroline

Figure 23 - True Blood, The Vampire Queen and a victim

Then, lesbian vampires would be a mirrored version of the male gaze's relationship with sexual violence. In *Queer Zones*, Sam Bourcier consecrates a chapter to the lesbians of Eressos<sup>56</sup> sexual practices and to the relationship between blood and lesbian sexuality. Coining the term

---

<sup>56</sup> A popular vacation destination for lesbian women.

“lesbian blood”, which he differentiates from the “natural” blood of menstruation (74<sup>57</sup>), he explains its major importance in the safe sex discourse in relation to lesbian culture. In continuity with this thesis, Bourcier analyzes lesbian vampire movies:

[N]ot only do lesbian vampires movies and lesbian SM sex offer raw representations of lesbian sex (which are not that numerous), but also that they treat the issues of power and gender dynamics in lesbian sex and relationships. Therefore, most of these movies evoke power dynamics by staging erotic relationships between two women one of which – the predator – takes control.

my translation, Bourcier 74<sup>58</sup>

Bourcier’s analysis evokes the stereotypical lesbian dichotomy of butch/femme also discussed by Judith Butler, Bourcier comments on power dynamics in representations of lesbian women. Indeed, these imitate the gendered dynamics of heterosexual relationships in which the “masculine” partner has inherent power over the “feminine” partner.

In particular, the scene in which Katherine is in bondage at the mercy of Lilith (01:06:59 – 01:07:36) corresponds to such a trope. There, Lilith pats Katherine down, touching her breasts while her victim struggles against her bonds, while her brother watches on with extreme enthusiasm. Following this, the scene fades to black with heavy hints at sexual aggression. We can infer from the end of the movie that Lilith’s bite occurs off-screen after this, and perhaps the sex scene which Eleniak refused to film. The script features an additional detail before cutting away from this scene, a piece of dialogue after Lilith draws Katherine’s skirt upwards with a finger: “Mmmm... I knew I smelled blood.” (89). This comment alludes to Bourcier’s analysis of “lesbian blood”, although here it is probably Katherine’s menstrual blood. Contextualized with efforts from safe sex activists during and after the AIDS crisis, this scene

---

<sup>57</sup> As Sam Bourcier is a non-binary trans man, the pagination I use in my thesis corresponds to an older edition published under Sam Bourcier’s AFAB name (Marie-Hélène)

<sup>58</sup> Original : « [N]on seulement les films de vampires lesbiens et le sexe SM lesbien proposent des représentations crues du sexe lesbien (qui ne sont pas si nombreuses), mais aussi qu’ils traitent des rapports de pouvoir et des rôles de genre dans le sexe lesbien et les relations lesbiennes. De fait, la plupart de ces films évoquent des dynamiques de pouvoir en mettant en scène des relations érotiques entre deux femmes dans laquelle l’une - la prédatrice - prend le dessus. » (Bourcier p. 74)

refers to contemporaneous fears of contagion among the LGBTQ+ community, where Katherine is contaminated with vampirism by Lilith's bite and blood<sup>59</sup> rather than with HIV. In *Bordello*, then, the tension between Katherine; pure and innocent prey, and Lilith; shameless predator, is reminiscent of the well-established narrative of lesbian vampires as violent aggressors. This depiction of Lilith's attraction to another woman constricts her to a familiar "way of seeing" attraction to women, one that entails domination and violence: one that is masculine.

The dichotomy between Lilith and Katherine (or Eve) comes after centuries of pathologizing female sexuality in popular culture. I have mentioned before that the social construction of femininity has been constricting the experience of womanhood to two essentializing categories: the virgin and the whore, the pure and the depraved, the Jackie or the Marilyn: Eve or Lilith. Ultimately though, something "wrong" is found in both archetypes and there seems to be no correct way to be a woman. For Hobson, "[t]he images of female sexuality oscillate on a dichotomous framework of frigidity and hypersexuality—both must be cured and contained" (10). In *Bordello*, Katherine is criticized for being boring and stuck-up (i.e. not granting Rafe access to her body), and Lilith is demonized for her deviant sexuality (i.e. being too open about sex). For example, when Rafe tells Lilith: "You gotta see a vampire shrink" (01:16:31). Also important is the fact that the relationship between the two is subordinated to heterosexual pairings (Lilith and Rafe and Rafe and Katherine). Arguing with Katherine, Lilith says: "You could have his mind and I could have his body" (01:14:50). This statement is interesting when looking at the relationship between Lilith and Eve, who are often seen as particularly connected to the body (Lilith) or to the mind (Eve). Again, this is something that I have discussed in the previous chapter when comparing Carter's Leilah and Sophia. By

---

<sup>59</sup> The series *True Blood* (HBO) also features a vampiric Lilith. In this series, she is the first vampire ("the Progenitor") created before Adam and Eve and whose blood, a potent hallucinogen, is worshipped by religious fanatics in season 5 and 6 of the show. Here, consumption of Lilith's blood leads to increased appetite for vampires who perpetrate savage massacres.

containing the relationship between the two women into a twisted love triangle with a man, the narrative holds in check the relationship's subversive potential and reinstates the male screen surrogate as the central figure of the movie. Following the logic of closural devices that should restore the patriarchal order in which both are "cured and contained", the movie should have ended in Lilith's destruction and Katherine enthusiastically reciprocating Rafe's advances.

However, the movie's twist where Katherine becomes a sort of new Lilith and attacks Rafe leaves an exciting ambiguous tone to the movie's resolution. Indeed, the killing of Lilith and her progeny had restored patriarchal order to the movie's diegesis, but Katherine's new status denies such a simplistic outcome which can be seen as empowering. It conciliates the good girl/bad girl dichotomy offered by *Bordello* until then and works against the tendency of horror writing to "figur[e] women as either malevolent femmes fatales or idealized, doll-like icons" which "makes women into either bloodthirsty vampires or quaking violets." (Wisker 116). At the end of the movie, Katherine's faith has been tainted by the reverend's actions and she has inherited Lilith's *skandalon* powers. This ending unsettles the neat closure offered by the "Ballroom Blitz" scene and contributes to the ambivalent gender politics of the movie by offering an alternative model of femininity which joins Lilith and Eve against men. An epilogue in which Katherine navigates her new powers and identity with intelligent confidence is not unimaginable.

To conclude, in this chapter, I have analyzed the character of Lilith in horror comedy *Bordello of Blood* (1996), a B-series movie that nonetheless corresponds to Lilith's gradual integration into mainstream American culture and to the ambivalent gender politics of the nineties. In the first section, I have applied Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze to the film's treatment of the female body, coming to the conclusion that it is treated as an object to look at, to dominate and to control. This occurs thanks to the male screen surrogate (Rafe Guttman) and through narrative devices that restore patriarchal order. In the second and final section, I have

analyzed some of the movie's markers of otherness that characterize Lilith. First place and setting, then, monstrosity, and finally queerness.

My main takeaway, which comes back in every part of my analysis is the ambivalence of *Bordello's* Lilith. Indeed, this Lilith exists in an extremely sexist diegetic world and her very presence threatens the small town's patriarchal order. Her knowingness of the male gaze and *skandalon* powers make her very dangerous for the poor men who meet her, yet her origin story is dependent on a man's will to resuscitate her to perpetrate his own agenda. Alternating between controllable and uncontrollable, *Bordello's* Lilith materializes men's secular fears and desires. In comparison with earlier versions of Lilith, this one stands in between ancient representations, Judaic tradition and Anglo-American culture. This representation borrows from pre-established cultural monsters, like the vampire and the succubus and revels in the legacy of the gothic genre. Then, the myth is transferred to the paradigm of consumer culture and liberal progressivism and loses some of its key characteristics in the process. Then, Lilith's markers of otherness are moving away from the political message that they bore in the seventies. As she is no longer Other through her gender, race, religion or sexuality, but through her monstrosity, Lilith's supernatural otherness becomes a distant cypher for a kind of feminism that is sellable to a male audience.

#### IV. Lilith the Witch in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020)

---

*Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020) is a Netflix and Warner Brothers adaptation of the comics of the same name written by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa<sup>60</sup> and published by Archie Horror (2014-present). The story of Sabrina Spellman belongs to the “Archieverse”, where she appears for the first time in 1962 before becoming an important character in the comics. In 1996, the comics are adapted into a family-friendly television sitcom, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (ABC 1996-2003) and reaches worldwide audiences. Although they share some similarities, the Netflix series is closer to the modern comics version – a darker and more mature take on the original comics. After four seasons and despite protests and petitions from fans, *Chilling Adventures* is cancelled by the network, seemingly in favor of its sister show, *Riverdale* (The CW 2017-), which Netflix broadcasts outside of the US.

*Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (CAOS for short) tells the coming of age of Sabrina Spellman (Kiernan Shipka) a sixteen year-old half-witch, half-mortal who is torn between Good and Evil. In the series, she has to choose between the Path of Light, which is the mortal world of Baxter High with her friends Harvey (Ross Lynch), Roz (Jaz Sinclair) and Susie (Lachlan Watson), or The Path of Night: her witch aunts, the Church of Night and the Academy of Unseen Arts. As a part teen romance, part gothic horror series, CAOS is often compared with other supernatural teen shows like *Buffy* and *Charmed* that feature ambitious young women fighting monsters and falling in love. The series is often lauded for its rich intratextuality and many references to pop-culture, classical literature and Biblical material. In this series, Lilith (Michelle Gomez) starts out as a villain who serves the Dark Lord (Luke Cook). As the seasons go by, this character grows more complex and empathetic. Like other modern iterations of Lilith, she is the heir of comic book Lilith and the already established comic book persona of Madam Satan. In continuation with the post-feminist ambiguity in many modern

---

<sup>60</sup> Showrunner of *Chilling Adventures* and *Riverdale*

representations of Lilith, the series has been praised for its treatment of feminist and intersectional issues, its diverse cast and important political messages but also criticized for its sometimes superficial “pop-feminist” rhetoric and overall contribution to white feminism.

This Lilith is a simplified version of the legend of Ben Sira, kabbalistic interpretations and the Zohar. In parallel, her lore is imbued with Christian myth as well as tropes inherited from classical literature and American pop-culture. In the series, Lilith’s backstory is that when she refused to submit to her first husband, Adam, God cast her out of the Garden to the mortal realm as punishment. There, she met Lucifer Morningstar<sup>61</sup>, fallen angel. With her magic, she healed the wounds on his back, where his former wings were. At first, she is charmed by his angelic beauty and agrees to serve as his handmaiden under the promise that she would become Queen of Hell, ruling by his side as his equal. With time, his demeanor and appearance changed, he became violent and abusive towards her. The promise to make her his equal never came to fruition, as she remained his foot soldier. While this information is given to the audience throughout the series, the main characters do not know of Lilith’s true nature until much later in the narrative. Before that, she impersonates Mrs. Wardwell, a religious and mousy teacher. She uses her magical powers, intelligence and position of authority to manipulate Sabrina into following The Path of Night and fulfilling the prophecy of the Apocalypse.

My thesis for this chapter is that *Chilling Adventures* typifies contemporary (post)feminist mythmaking by summoning Lilith and the figure of the witch into a flawed narrative of sisterhood and liberation characterized by a certain moral ambiguity. In this chapter, the methodology focuses less on the analysis of cinematography and more on narrative techniques and close reading. The first section establishes the link between the myth of Lilith, the historical persecution of witches, the recuperation of the witch in the women’s movement and its treatment in the series as an example of the cult of Divine femininity. The second section

---

<sup>61</sup> Interchangeably named Lucifer, Satan or Dark Lord.



focuses on Lilith's character arc in *CAOS* and her struggle towards liberation. Finally, the last section explores "The Passion of Sabrina Spellman" (S2E13<sup>62</sup>) as a gothic paradiastole of Lilith's story which highlights the importance of interpretation and perspective in cultural theatre of mythmaking.

## LILITH, THE HISTORICAL WITCH AND THE MYTHOLOGICAL WITCH

Historically, the figure of the witch is intimately linked with the history of patriarchy and the persecution of women. The archetype as we know it now is loosely based on the historical witch trials that have occurred in the Middle Ages and Early modern period in Europe. Reaching a highpoint during the Counter-Reformation, the witch trials are responsible for a number of victims reaching the tens of thousands<sup>63</sup>, most but not all of them being women. In "The Contemporary Witch, the Historical Witch and the Witch Myth", Bovenschen et al. argue that this brutal annihilation was made possible by the great socio-economic, political and religious instability of the period:

When the witch pogroms began, Europe was already in turmoil: religious wars, Reformation and Counterreformation, peasants' revolts, the persecution and execution of heretics, inflation, famine, the dissolution of the guilds, the development of new means and techniques of production, an increasingly monetary economy, population growth, a huge surplus of women, the pauperization and brutalization of large segments of society – the list could go on and on.

Bovenschen et al., 95

In this climate, Christianity's legitimization crisis, the Church's quest for hegemonic power and the institution's need to control the masses is responsible for the "witch hysteria" and the bloody

---

<sup>62</sup> The episodes of this series are chapters numbered from 1-36, but in order to avoid confusion between those and the numbered chapters of this *mémoire*, I use the term "episode" instead of "chapter, and "season" instead of "part".

<sup>63</sup> There seems to be no precise scholarly consensus as records are incomplete and do not include all regions in Europe nor do they count deaths by lynching or deaths following poor imprisonment conditions (Source: Wikipedia, "Witch trials in the early modern period". Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witch\\_trials\\_in\\_the\\_early\\_modern\\_period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witch_trials_in_the_early_modern_period), Accessed 13.07.22)

massacres exacted on the people accused of witchcraft. In this period, the Church had a shift of discourse surrounding ancient beliefs:

[T]he Church, which had for centuries defined any belief in demons as heresy, now had no choice but to make use of the surviving remnants of old heathen beliefs to shore up its crumbling edifice. Witches were acknowledged as evil, but even in evil, masculine supremacy had to be guaranteed: Satan was enthroned.

Bovenschen et al. 97

So, the Church went from denying the existence of demons, magic and witchcraft to utilizing them as scapegoats for the populace's misery, and feeding into the mass hysteria. Thus, the witches pogroms can be explained first as an effective tool of social regulation in chaotic times, and then as a natural consequence of the increasing masculine fears of femininity. In this paradigm, the systemic assignment of evilness to women was still subordinated to the patriarchal authority of an ultimate Evil, Satan. This is exactly the hierarchy presented in *CAOS*, as the witches' powers are granted to them by the Dark Lord in exchange for their servitude and devotion.

In the pilot of *CAOS*, (Chapter 1: October Country), Ms. Wardwell, a teacher in Greendale's Baxter High and "unofficial town historian" explains the story of the Greendale Thirteen to a visibly shaken young girl who was attacked in the woods:

Everyone knows about the witch hunt in Salem, but there was one right here in Greendale... 1692. Thirteen Witches were hung in the forest, and their angry spirits have haunted the woods ever since.

"October Country", S1E1 (08:00)

In *CAOS*, the Greendale Thirteen were sacrificed by their coven so that they could appease the townspeople's bloodlust and avoid further conflict. As a side note, in contrast with historical witch trials such as Salem's, the witches of the Church of Night possessed actual magical powers, and so they were neither defenseless, nor innocent.

In the early seasons of the show, the Churches of Darkness – the overarching religious institution that rules over all witches’ covents (including Greendale’s Church of Night), is presented in opposition with the Roman Catholic Church. In many ways, it seems to reject Judeo-Christian morality and customs. In terms of vocabulary, anything we would normally call holy becomes unholy (Holy Sacrament becomes Unholy Sacrament; godly becomes ungodly, blessed becomes cursed, et cetera). Otherwise, crosses are turned upside down or transformed into pentagrams, the cinematography is unfocused and asymmetrical, and Holidays are renamed after their original pagan name and/or reinvented to fit the “witchy” aesthetic of the series. Thus, Christmas is Yule, Valentine’s is Lupercalia and Thanksgiving becomes the Feast of Feasts (a cannibal ritual).

In the witches’ world, morality is relative. When Sabrina asks Faustus Blackwood, the High-Priest of her Church, about the Dark Lord being the embodiment of Evil, he answers: “Incorrect! He is the embodiment of free will. Good. Evil. Those words matter to the False God, but the Dark Lord is beyond such precepts.” (S1E2, 03:02-03:30). Here, the ideology of the coven led by Faustus Blackwood is opposed to the concept of morality as promoted by Christian doctrine. Another example of this is the morality play put on by the Academy of Unseen Arts depicting the Fall of Lucifer after he questions God:

LUCIFER (NICK). What kind of God denies his followers pleasure?

GOD (AMBROSE). The one God. The true God. All knowing, all powerful.

LUCIFER. But if God is unable to prevent evil, then he is not all-powerful.

GOD. Heresy ! [*tears one wing away from Nick*]

LUCIFER. If God is unwilling to prevent evil, then he is not all good.

GOD. Heresy ! [*tears the other wing away from Nick*]

“The Passion of Sabrina Spellman”, S2E13 (44:28-45:05)

So, the beliefs of the Churches of Darkness have their origins in Lucifer’s rebelling against God’s hegemonic power, highlighting the hypocrisy of Christian doctrine. In response to this,

I would argue that the Churches of Darkness' emphasis on freedom and individual choice is reminiscent of the United States' liberal rhetoric and its struggle with the separation of Church and State as well as the predominance of the protestant work ethic. In many ways, Satan may be seen as an allegory of capitalism and its fallacious promise of self-determination and individual freedom.

Another way in which the Churches of Darkness are at odds with the Roman Catholic Church is that it seems rather progressive when it comes to sexuality. Indeed, it is accepted and encouraged outside of the boundaries of heterosexual marriage. For example, Sabrina's aunts have raised her together without the influence of a man and are both two very powerful and knowledgeable women. But the Church of Night remains a deeply patriarchal institution in which the submission of women is maintained by its hierarchical structure. At the top is the Dark Lord, to whom all witches and warlocks pledge their souls on their sixteenth birthday:

You swear to obey without question any order you may receive from the Dark Lord or from any figure he has placed in authority over you. ... You swear to give your mind, body, and soul unreservedly to the furtherance of the designs of our Lord Satan

“The Dark Baptism”, S1E2, (43:33-45:58).

After the Dark Lord, the hierarchy is as follows: the highest representative of the Dark Lord is the Anti-pope, who presides over the Witches' Council. The Witches' Council dictate the Churches of Darkness's laws and doctrine. The Churches of Darkness are separated into covens, each headed by a High-Priest. For Sabrina's coven, the Church of Night, the High-Priest is Father Faustus Blackwood (Richard Coyle). During his “reign”, Faustus has pushed for regressive and sexist policies, with the help of The Judas Society, an extremist group of young men handpicked to do his bidding. After breaking away from the Churches of Darkness<sup>64</sup>, Blackwood renames the coven “The Church of Judas”. It upholds five tenets:

---

<sup>64</sup> Similar to how Henry the VIIIth separated from the Roman Catholic Church.

1. The Sons of Satan are the heirs of the Earth. Take what thou wilt, as is your right, by fire, blood, or deceit.
2. Mortals are the swine of the Earth. We must not lay with them.
3. The Sons of Satan are the swineherds of man.
4. As Lilith served Satan, so must witches serve warlocks.
5. Warlocks shall claim dominion in the Church of Night just as their Father rules over Hell.

“Blackwood”, S2E16 (20:23-21:07)

These reinterpretations of the Satanic Bible are clearly sexist and xenophobic (considering mortals and witches are two different races).

Another component of this religion is that witches have to be virgins before their Dark Baptism. One of Sabrina’s aunts, Zelda (Miranda Otto), is worried that her long-term boyfriend may have “defiled” her : “Witch law forbids novitiates from being anything less than virginal” (S1E1, 42:19-42:25). This aspect of purity culture is reinforced when we learn before Zelda’s union to Faustus Blackwood that the Dark Lord possesses some feudal right to visit any bride on the eve of her wedding. Then, Indie Reijnierse’s analysis of the “Feast of Feasts” episode (S1E7) highlights the level of indoctrination in the coven:

The extent to which the women of the Church of Night crave praise and recognition from the Dark Lord becomes evident during the Feast of Feasts, as it portrays the women’s desire to become the queen of the feast, because then their “spirit will reside in the Dark Lord’s heart,” even though this means they will be sacrificed and eaten by the rest of the coven (“Feast of Feasts” 17:43 – 18:13).

Reijnierse 20

Here, the women idealize a tradition that puts them at harm. Their religious zeal and respect for the institution maintain them in a state of subordination to the patriarchal figures of Faustus Blackwood, the anti-pope, and the Dark Lord, similarly to how in *The Passion of New Eve*, the women of Zero’s harem actively maintain their subordinate state<sup>65</sup>.

---

<sup>65</sup> See chapter II., p. 24

In her paper “Leaving my girlhood behind”, Megan Henesy discusses the issues of consent and choice during the trial of Sabrina (S1E3). In this episode, Sabrina is accused of not signing her name into the Book of the Beast, which formally pledges her soul and servitude to the Dark Lord. Interestingly, Henesy finds many parallels between the rhetoric of Father Blackwood’s prosecution and the language used to discredit and shame victims of sexual abuse during their trial. She also contextualizes the episode’s release:

[It] was released the same year that both the President of the United States and his nominee for Supreme Court Justice, Brett Kavanaugh, resisted accusations of historic sexual assaults and by playing with the concept of a flawed and often misogynistic legal system, it continues the themes of “puritanical masculinity” seen on both sides of Greendale’s magical divide, as well as challenging what is currently happening in America.

Henesy 1154

Of course, we now know the extent of the damage of Donald Trump’s Supreme Court nominations on the rights of women, when on June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States overturned *Roe vs. Wade*, a 1973 landmark decision that guaranteed the Constitutional right for an abortion.

The series’ ability to mirror its fictional preoccupations with contemporary feminist issues is certainly a strength, although some ambiguity remains in its message:

One element which makes the witch/feminist dichotomy complex in *Chilling Adventures* is the inclusion of the Church of Night as a dark mirror to Christian patriarchy, both legitimising Sabrina’s family as “real” witches, while removing much of the power of independence attributed to the image of the witch in feminist discourse.

Henesy 1148

For Reijnierse, the accumulation of discursive violence and depiction of women’s submission make the series anti-feminist. While I agree with some of her arguments – such as the series’ problematic catering to white feminism, I am not convinced by the idea that any of the scenarios mentioned above constitute anti-feminist discourse in themselves. Often, the depiction of an

unjust system does not necessarily glorify it, in the same way that the creators of *Mad Men* are not pro-smoking just because Don Draper smokes a lot. On the contrary, I would argue that throughout the *Chilling Adventures*, patriarchal structures are clearly repudiated by increasingly rebellious female characters, and male authority is heavily undermined by the end of the show. Indeed, the charismatic leader Faustus Blackwood is clearly a villain and a fraud, the Anti-Pope and the council are sleazy and corrupt, and Satan is an arrogant and selfish man whose power is finite.

Moreover, *E C Q Attitude* to feminism plays with the figure of the witch as a symbol of liberation. In the series, the witches have nothing to do with the evil step-mother from Snow White, or *Bewitched*'s quirky housewife. For example, Henesy associates Sabrina's aunts with "the mythical postfeminist witch", as described by critic Diane Purkiss:

A liberated "healer and midwife" living alone on the edge of a village, who derived mystical knowledge from a "half-submerged pagan religion", and was tortured to death because her "freedom and independence threatened men". ([Purkiss]1996, 7). Sabrina's aunts fit this description: they live on the edge of the town, they are midwives and herbalists, neither is married and they are both sexually active.

Henesy 1148

Another interesting parallel is that Sabrina and her friends get involved in the political life of their high-school. In the pilot episode, Sabrina and Roz create a club in response to their friend Theo (Susie, before his transition) being bullied by jocks:

SABRINA. The football players are a symptom, but the disease goes much deeper, into the bedrock of this school. So, that's where we fight it, with a club. For young women to meet and bolster each other. Where we can discuss issues and problems we're facing and come up with proactive solutions.

ROZ. You mean, like, a club to topple the white patriarchy?

HARVEY. Wait what?

SABRINA. Exactly. To mobilize and protest if we need to get political, to fight when we need to fight, to defend each other. So Susie never feels alone, so none of us do.

ROZ. But won't Hawthorne block this? I mean he wouldn't let me start a Daughters of the Black Panthers club last year.

“October Country” S1E1 (22:40 - 23:10)

In this interaction, we can see the characters' awareness of intersectional concerns of gender and race, creating a club that would address jointly the issues of misogyny, systemic racism and LGBTQ+ revendications. This club, which they name WICCA (Women's Intersectional Cultural and Creative Association), is reminiscent of WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell<sup>66</sup>).

WITCH is a group of radical feminists founded in New-York in 1968 as an off-shoot of Consciousness Raising group NYRW, that put on theatrical “zap-actions” denouncing, for example, the stock-market or the institution of marriage (Michals 54-55). Their manifesto calls upon the mythicized idea of the witch as a symbol for women's liberation:

WITCH is an all-woman Everything. It's theater, revolution, magic, terror, joy, garlic flowers, spells. It's an awareness that witches and gypsies were the original guerrillas and resistance fighters against oppression – particularly the oppression of women – down through the ages. Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, nonconformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary. (This possibly explains why nine million of them have been burned.)

WITCH Manifesto, cited in Eller 53-54

This manifesto's strength is poetically and symbolically charged, although it is historically inaccurate. The number of nine million victims of the witch hysteria is a wild estimate made by German author Gottfried Christian Voigt in 1784, which proved especially resilient into “feminist and neo-pagan literature” (Wikipedia: “Witch Trials in the Early Modern Period”). Semantically, “[t]he word “witch” experienced the same transformation as the word “queer” or

---

<sup>66</sup> According to Debra Michals, the acronym would change according to the event they were protesting she cites “Women Interested in Toppling Consumption Holidays, for a Mother's Day protest; Women's Independent Taxpayers, Consumers and Homemakers; Women Inspired to Commit Herstory” (Michals 67)



"proletarian": it was adopted by the person affected and used against the enemy who had introduced it" (Bovenschen et al., 86).

To this day, the image of the witch is utilized by feminists all over the world. During protests, it is not rare to see and hear slogans like "Hex the Patriarchy" or "We are the granddaughters of the witches you couldn't burn" (or on t-shirts, mugs and phone cases). The sheer amount of merchandising featuring this type of slogan and other generic symbolism, like broomsticks, cauldrons, pentagrams is symptomatic of the popularity of feminist imagery and discourse. I would argue that the absorption of myth into mainstream neoliberal shows the limits of myth-making as a political endeavor. Furthermore, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* itself exists because of the commodification of the witch, as we cannot pretend that Netflix's and Warner Bros' agenda is anything but to be profitable. That the show happened to be picked up by a big network and that it is popular does not make it inherently *bad*, and it should not dismiss all of the important themes and messages it carries, but it is important to keep that in mind when analyzing it. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the witch, like Lilith, has lost some of its radicality as it was integrated into mainstream culture.

One of the essential features of *CAOS*'s feminism is the evolution of the coven away from the worship of the Dark Lord and away from patriarchal structures of power. Visually, the shift can be observed for example in the statue featured in the entrance hall of the Academy. First, it is a statue of the Devil (Figure 24) then it is replaced by a statue of Blackwood and a little girl kneeling at his side (Figure 25), before Zelda smashes it to pieces with a hammer, leaving only the little girl intact (Figure 26) and finally being replaced by a statue of the three-in-one (Figure 27), resembling the roman statue of Hekataion shown in chapter II<sup>67</sup>.

---

<sup>67</sup> See chapter II., p.32

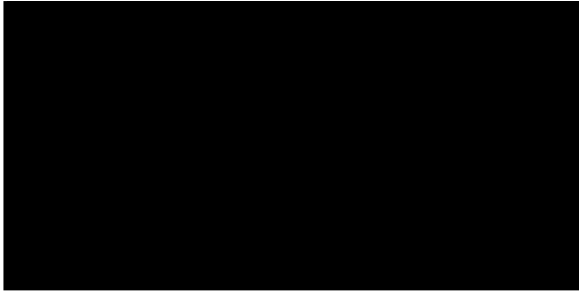


Figure 24 - Statue of the Dark Lord (S1E10, 12:12)



Figure 25 - Statue of Faustus Blackwood (S2E19, 15:58)

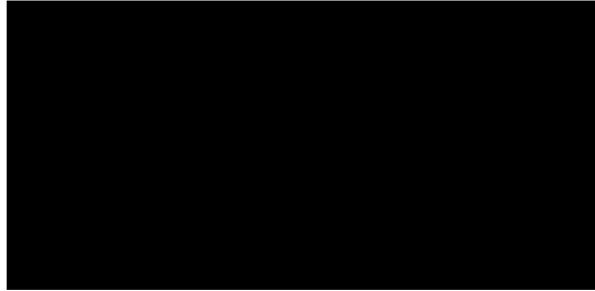


Figure 26 - Zelda destroying Faustus' statue (S3E21, 10:29)



Figure 27 - Statue of the three-in-one (S4E29, 09:37)

The statue in the Academy clearly demonstrates the evolution of the coven’s faith, but what it also shows is the place of women in the hierarchy. First, Satan’s statue is represented as Baphomet, a figure conflated with “The Sabbatic Goat” by Eliphas Lévi (1856) a winged, goat headed-being raising two fingers and accompanied by two serpents. This representation is used by the real-life Satanic Temple in their iconography and for one monument,<sup>68</sup> and holds rich symbolism about binarism and balance. Though in the context of the series, the only explanation for his appearance is that after the Fall, he went through a slow metamorphosis and became a “thing of Darkness” (S2E20, 18:02-18:30). Then, Faustus’ statue replaces a patriarchal figure with another. Here, Judas is depicted in Blackwood’s likeness holding a book and a cane. The man is in a position of authority over the submissive little girl, both physically and intellectually. The scene where Zelda, a proper and hoisty woman smashes the statue is powerful, as she lets go of her usual restraint to metaphorically take revenge on a man who

---

<sup>68</sup> In 2018, the Satanic Temple filed a \$150 million copyright lawsuit against Netflix and Warner Bros for using a statue very similar to theirs, and for causing “injury to its business reputation”. Available at : <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/11/08/the-satanic-temple-sues-netflix-warner-bros-for-150-million.html>. Accessed 20.07.22

abused her and hurt the people she cares about, while also destroying the last remnants of his hold over the coven. Finally, the statue of Hecate – a benevolent and protective goddess, reconciliates the witches’ need for guidance and spirituality with their femininity. This is somewhat like the second-wave feminist endeavour of mythmaking as a reconciliation of their spirituality with the lived experience of femininity.<sup>69</sup>

After Faustus’ Blackwood’s defect and the Dark Lord’s defeat, Zelda Spellman steps up as the Academy’s directrix and takes care of the students that are still alive with the help of Hilda and other wayward witches. She renames the Coven “The Order of Hecate”, and from this moment, they worship the three-in-one goddess, representing the three stages of the moon and the three stages of a witch’s life: “The Crone is the keeper of mysteries and arcane wisdom. [...]. Next is our Mother. She can create life and withstand the terrible pain of childbirth. [...] Our Maiden represents curiosity, pursuit of knowledge, and boundless potential.” (S4E29, 10:11-11:10). Effectively, this “new” Faith acknowledges the multiplicity of feminine experience – not only in the three-in-one, but because the coven now integrates witches who were previously rejected by the institution and those whose magical practices differ from the “New England” witches’ – like Mambo Marie’s Haitian voodoo.



Figure 28 - The Order of Hecate prays to the three-in-one, S3E28 (26:19)

Here, the new religion merges experiences of Otherness into a coherent unity: sisterhood. Throughout the series, a difficult situation is often fixed with a group incantation and is often a powerful show of solidarity and sisterhood (Figure 28) I argue that this newly formed sisterhood

---

<sup>69</sup> See chapter I., p. 10.

is more an adaptive response to persecution and hardship, and less the expression of a metaphysical principle unifying all women.

Without a doubt, the show's discourse of witchcraft and femininity emerges from the women's movement's appropriation of ancient myth. For Bovenschen et al., this is a "antihistorical, primeval mythological method" (88), and it is dangerous when used as proof of the existence of matrifocal societies. In addition, a problematic aspects of the belief in ancient Mother-Earth Goddesses is that it *can* be and *has* been recuperated by reactionary and fascist propaganda glorifying motherhood and domesticity, reducing women to their biological functions (Bovenschen et al. 115). As an example, this specific incantation can be compared to the Mother soliloquy from *The Passion of New Eve*<sup>70</sup>:

We call forth the witches from the shade. Those who came before us, and died, so that we might live. Visit us, Sisters. Intercede on our behalf. [...] I call forth the powers of Lilith of Aradia, of Morgan le Fay. [...] I call on Black Annis, I call on Anne Boleyn. I call on the Witch of Endor [...]. I call on Hecate, on Artemis, on Luna to expel this demon [...]. I call on Hildegard of Bingen, I call Marie Laveau. I call Tituba, I call Mary Bradbury. [...] I call Nehman, Badb, Macha. [...] I call Circe, I call Moll Dyer. I call on Juventas, the virgin, on Juno, the mother. [...] I call upon Sybil Leek. I call upon Priscilla Spellman. I call upon Frances Spellman. I call upon Evanora and Locasta Spellman. [...] Come forth, Kindly Ones. Come forth, Mother of Darkness. Lend us your power. [...]

S1E6 (36:47-39:05)

Although this incantation belongs to an exorcism performed in season one – before the coven's shift of faith, it illustrates well the series' treatment of feminist mythmaking. This incantation mixes fictional, folkloric, mythological and historical witches, women accused of witchcraft and persecuted women of mostly Western origins. It elevates them to the same plane of existence through their perceived martyrdom; "[t]hose who came before us, and died, so that we might live". In my opinion, this reveals another important feature of the symbolism behind

---

<sup>70</sup> See chapter II., p.30.

the archetype of the spiritual witch: the notion that womanhood is defined by suffering.

Supporting this, Bovenschen et al. explain:

A further investigation of the reason for the mobilization of old and new myths and feminine symbols within the women's movements points to the unique durability and consistency of different mythological schemata throughout history. The threatening film vamp is still equipped with the same attributes Esther Harding ascribes to her Earth Mother; witches are accused of crimes similar to those which made the *femme fatale* of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels and dramas such a menacing literary persona. Woman as sphinx, as demon, as unbridled sensual creature, at the extreme even in possession of the infamous *vagina dentata*, wafts through the annals of cultural history

Bovenschen et al. 90

To paraphrase, they argue that feminist mythmaking is a response to sexist archetypes and narratives that have always existed; oppression leads to resistance and resistance leads to mythmaking. Hence, sisterhood can be seen as reaction to the shared experience of pain, oppression, and otherness, as a unifying and liberating interpretation of old and new myth, history and folklore.

In relation to Lilith, this resonates with Michèle Bitton's and Angela Carter's skepticism over the ideology of divine femininity<sup>71</sup>. For them, it dissociates women from history and their lived reality, and they see the phenomenon more as a seductive escapist fantasy than as an efficient tool for change. Having established this, the proximity of "The New Lilith" with other archetypes of femininity in contemporary (post)feminist discourse is understandable.

#### LIBERATION AND THE COST OF INDIVIDUALISM

In this section, I examine *CAOS*'s portrayal of Lilith as a witch, her individual arc of liberation from Satan's domination, and discuss the idea of sisterhood as a necessary tool of resistance against patriarchal oppression.

---

<sup>71</sup> See chapter II., p.33

As a reminder of the findings of this mémoire so far, I have first observed a general departure from Jewish origins, through Christianization and Americanization. Second, social commentary on intersectional oppression seems to have been sublimated into supernatural otherness as a gothic corrupting force – the *skandalon*. Third, I have established that Lilith’s ambivalent feminism and misandry can be explained by the hegemony of the male gaze in our neoliberal paradigm as well as the cognitive ease of inverting existing structures of power over imagining a utopia of equality. Finally, the New Lilith is still concerned with issues of motherhood and fertility, and has a more nuanced relationship with her Eve counterpart.

There are many similarities between the Lilith of *New Eve*, the Lilith of *Bordello* and the Lilith of *Chilling Adventures*. Compared to the previous two Lilith that have been analyzed in this mémoire, this one is interesting because of the format she belongs to. As a character that appears in a four seasons-long series, she is able to change and become more complex throughout the journey. In her trajectory from being the accomplice of male domination to finding solace and protection in sisterhood, Lilith’s evolution mirrors the coven’s shift of faith.

At the beginning of the series, Lilith uses feminist discourse to manipulate Sabrina and grooming her into fulfilling Satan’s wishes. After killing Sabrina’s favorite teacher, she impersonates her to better control the teenager. In Ms. Wardwell’s skin, she encourages Sabrina to fight Greendale’s “culture of puritanical masculinity” (S1E1) and supports the creation of WICCA as faculty adviser – but she nudges Sabrina to hurt her friend’s bully and Principal Hawthorne:

LILITH. And Principal Hawthorne is the most intolerant, the most buffoonish, the most misogynist of all. When will the world learn? Women should be in charge of everything. [...]

SABRINA. Hawthorne’s a bully... and I wish someone would teach him a lesson.

LILITH. Why not you? [...]

LILITH. He’s scared of spiders you know.

“October Country”, S1E1 (21:11-22:12)

Here, Lilith's goal is to use Sabrina's caring nature and political consciousness to push her to do evil, to take the Path of Night and sign the Book of the Beast. She does so successfully after reviving the Greendale Thirteen, where she manipulates Sabrina into signing by presenting this as the only way to have enough power to protect the mortals of Greendale and save her friends:

I know you're scared, Sabrina. Because all women are taught to fear power. Own your power. Don't accept it from the Dark Lord. Take it. Wield it. Save your friends. [...] Dig deep. It isn't just power, Sabrina. It's rage. It's the desire to change the world and the will to do it.

"The Witching Hour", S1E10 (40:03-46:53)

On Sabrina's level of understanding, this is an empowering speech which is the logical continuation of her core beliefs and motivations. In reality, Lilith's psychological manipulation pushes her to do the exact opposite and the audience is complicit with the maneuver. Framing the ritual as a way for Sabrina to take back control is symptomatic of the postfeminist affinity for "individualism, choice and empowerment" (Gill 149).

Moreover, Sabrina's bargain with the Devil can be compared to how women (and people in general) actively maintain patriarchy and capitalism because they perceive it as beneficial to their individual, liberal interest. In my opinion, this is the driving force behind Lilith's actions throughout the series. After having rescued Sabrina from a sleeping curse, Lilith's response to Sabrina asking about the rest of her family is quite telling: "Self-preservation, my dear, it's the only thing that matters" ("Dreams in a Witch's House", S1E5, 37:22-37:28). In season one, Lilith's actions are directed by the belief that it is in her best interest to serve Lucifer which means using her *skandalon* abilities to corrupt the young witch. She believes that by serving Satan, she will rule over Hell by his side, as his equal. Of course, this is not true, Satan is abusive to Lilith and he never gets close to fulfilling this promise.

In "The Mephisto Waltz" (S2E20), Lilith recounts her fall from Eden, how she and Lucifer found each other, how she healed his wounds and took care of him. In the beginning, their dynamic was already hierarchical (see below).



Figure 29 - "I was His handmaiden, and He... He was my master." (S2E20, 02:50-03:00)

When Sabrina asks her why she does His bidding, Lilith explains that he promised to make her Queen of Hell, and that it was all she ever wanted (S2E20, 16:53-17:18). When Sabrina expresses her disbelief at why she believed him, Lilith tells her that she does not understand, and that he was kind and gentle, at first.

LILITH. The more time passed since the Fall, the more He... He turned into this... thing of Darkness

SABRINA. And why do you still serve Him? Even now

LILITH. It's all I've ever known.

SABRINA. What a terrible, weak, reason

"The Mephisto Waltz", S1E20 (18:02-18:36)

In what is probably the first honest conversation between the two characters, Lilith reveals the mechanisms responsible for her subordination to Lucifer. In psychology, "traumatic bonding" theory is one of the theoretical explanations for why victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) stay with their abusive partner and why they return to the relationships. Similar to Stockholm Syndrome, traumatic bonding "holds that strong emotional attachments are formed by intermittent abuse", implying a self-perpetuating cycle (Dutton and Painter, 1993). This conception contradicts the tendency to blame victims of abuse for not leaving or for "not having seen it coming", exemplified here by Sabrina's remark ("what a terrible, weak reason"). Here, I would argue that Lilith and Satan's relationship is a textbook example of traumatic bonding, and would explain why she returns to him after the worst abuse.



In season two, Lilith starts questioning him after she learns that Sabrina is not meant to simply serve as his new foot soldier, but rather to be the Herald of the Apocalypse and become Queen of Hell in her place. One element of Lilith's earlier rebellion is her relationship with Adam Masters. Mary Wardwell's fiancé. When he surfaces, she is confronted with the possibility of "normal" domestic life, although she is skeptical of it, as showed when the two discuss marriage:

LILITH. And have you really, ever, really thought, about what a marriage is?

ADAM. Oh, it's two people declaring their love for each other, for the world to celebrate. It's a blessing.

LILITH. For the man, perhaps, but if it were really a blessing, truly a desirable state, would we need to dress it up with lace, silk, and frill? Litter the bride's path with rose petals? No, but we do, because marriage is a walk down the primrose path towards a woman's destruction. It's nothing less than the complete obliteration of a woman's personhood. It takes everything from her. Her body, her independence, even her soul, and gives nothing in return. Nothing she'd want, at any rate. Those are my true feelings about marriage.

"Blackwood", S2E16, (32:58 – 24:00)

Here, Lilith's response is quite telling, as she argues that it is not in her best interest to commit to a man within institution of marriage. Her keen awareness of the false promise of marriage may stem from the abusive nature of her previous relationships (with Adam in Eden and with Lucifer since his Fall). After this, Adam does his best to reassure her and asks her to consider moving halfway across the world with him. For Lilith, he represents the possibility of a peaceful domestic life and a mutually-nurturing relationship.

But this hope is denied to her in the most violent way when the Dark Lord organizes a somber dinner where he impersonates Adam Masters until Lilith discovers that her fiancé is the meal. He tells her: "Did you really think you could deceive me, Lilith? Our bond is eternal. Our bond is unbreakable." (S2E17, 36:20), hinting at their perpetual cycle of control and abuse. Here, the lesson may be that all of Lilith's power, intelligence and resourcefulness are insignificant in comparison with millennia of subjugation and self-perpetuating power imbalance.

Circling back to the argument of Satan as the embodiment of capitalistic and patriarchal domination, this scene seems to highlight the failure of individualism to guarantee “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness<sup>72</sup>” as promised by the American Dream. In Lilith’s case, liberation comes from the opposite strategy, which is community and sisterhood. At the end of the second season, Lilith allies herself with Sabrina and the rest of her community to fight the Dark Lord. The scene that follows Satan’s (temporary) defeat (Figure 30, Figure 31) is interesting, because it can be seen as a powerful bonding moment between Sabrina and Lilith.

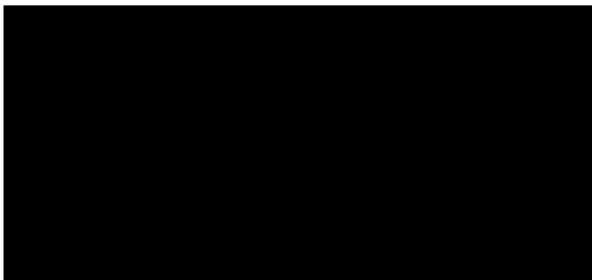


Figure 30 - Sabrina hands Lilith her crown (S2E20 53:56)

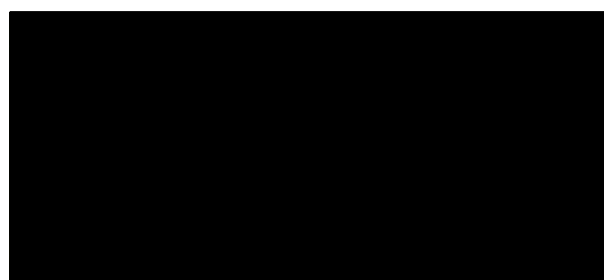


Figure 31 - Lilith kisses her forehead and restores Sabrina's powers (54:09)

Indeed, Lilith is no longer threatened by Sabrina’s status and she even has a motherly, affectionate gesture towards the teenager, suggesting that the two have overcome their differences and will work together in the future. In terms of the series’ feminist narrative, it is an adequate choice to include such a scene in a season finale because of the positive progress it demonstrates. This builds up to what I would call a “sisterhood trope”, a narrative in which female characters realize that they are not in competition with each other, deconstruct their internalized misogyny and form an alliance to liberate themselves from oppression. In reality, though, this alliance is temporary and it only occurs because their respective interests happen to align. When asked why she is turning against the Dark Lord now, Lilith’s answer is telling:

LILITH. Well, perhaps someone’s defiance has given me hope. That my story isn’t finished yet. That my destiny hasn’t been decided yet.

SABRINA. I don’t believe you.

---

<sup>72</sup> From The Constitution of The United States.

LILITH. Fine, it's because I want the throne and crown. I've worked for them, I've earned them, they're mine. And if He won't give them to me, then let's gut the bastard and I'll take them for myself.

“The Mephisto Waltz”, S2E20, (00:31:03-00:31:25)

So, Lilith's objective has not changed out of a moral epiphany or a deeper change of heart and she does not suddenly become “good” – what she truly wants is revenge and power, and this is the way to obtain those.

In season three, the progress of the “sisterhood trope” is quickly undermined when Lilith welcomes Sabrina and her friends in Hell by finding very creative ways to torture them, up until it is more convenient for her to make another deal with Sabrina. Indeed, Lilith's legitimacy as Queen of Hell is being challenged by the realm's aristocracy, and she needs Sabrina to formally crown her and recognize her rule in front of the court. The Kings of Hell disagree:

This is treason! Heresy! Lilith is a concubine, not a queen. We do not recognize her, she was Lucifer's whore. The realms are in chaos, and the Earth, the Pit, the Heavens, the Cosmos, they all reject Lilith's claim to the throne.

“The Hellbound heart”, S3E21 (48:02-48:19)

In the absence of Lucifer, the ultimate patriarch of the series, the balances of power are not reequilibrated in Lilith's favour. Her legitimacy is questioned because of the male figures of power hold prejudices against her gender and her lack of royal blood. As a response, Sabrina declares herself Queen of Hell and designates Lilith as her regent. While Sabrina is more legitimate than Lilith because of her royal blood, she is half-mortal and has never lived in Hell. Here, Sabrina's nobility is counteracted by intersectional concerns of gender, race and citizenship. So, the two women are forced to collaborate to hold off reoccurring patriarchal threat.

Another element pointing to Lilith's moral ambiguity is her relationship to motherhood. When the Dark Lord escapes his flesh prison, Lilith knows that he will come for her for revenge after her betrayal. She uses trickery to become pregnant with Lucifer in order to protect herself

as long as she carries their child. It works until King of Hell and Caliban<sup>73</sup> curse her pregnancy, speeding it along at a horrifying pace. In terrible pain, Lilith seeks safe haven asylum at the Academy, and gives birth with the help of the coven (“The Weird One” S4E31).

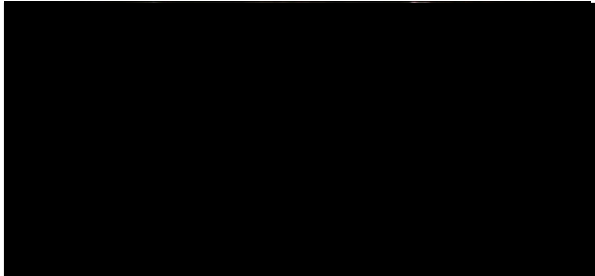


Figure 32 – Lilith screaming in pain surrounded by The Order of Hecate S4E31 (21:29)

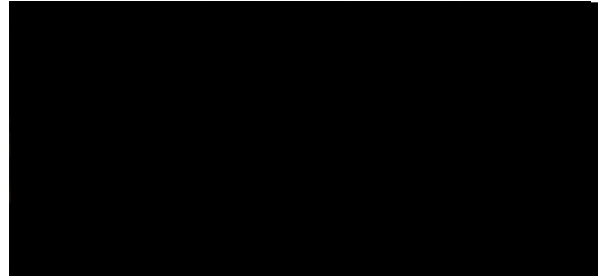


Figure 33 – The Order of Hecate sharing Lilith's pain S4E31 (21:49)

While lightning and thunder rage outside, the witches stand in a circle around a wailing Lilith (Figure 32, Figure 33). Zelda leads the coven in a magical ritual that relies on the bond of sisterhood: “We, your sisters, are here for you. We will give you strength. We will share your pain. Dark Mother, Hecate, we call upon you. Come to us! Make Lilith’s pain our pain so she may push” (S4E31, 21:54-23:22). This scene is interesting, because it associates the pain of childbirth with womanhood, reinforcing the importance of martyrdom in the construction of sisterhood.

After giving birth to a baby boy who she calls Adam, Lilith remains at the academy as a refugee with the objective of staying there until her son comes of age and challenges the Dark Lord so she can obtain the title of Queen Mother. Later, in her desperation to protect her child from being raised by Satan, she kills baby Adam and serves him as a meal to him. This act of violent resistance further paints Lilith as an ambiguous gothic villain *and* victim. Her entrapment is so tightly wound that she commits an atrocious act of violence against an innocent because she perceives it is the only choice that she has left. After Satan refuses to kill her to

---

<sup>73</sup> The Kings of Hell’s champion for the crown of hell, molded out of clay from the Pit of Hell. The name references Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

punish her for murdering their son, he takes away her magical powers and condemns her to roam the mortal realm forever. There, immortality deprives Lilith of the last freedom she might have: choosing to end her life. In the end, the close proximity she has developed with the order of Hecate gives her information that she believes she can use as leverage to have Satan restore her powers, and so she betrays Sabrina (S4E36)<sup>74</sup>. This betrayal shows that the bond of sisterhood functions as an artificial performance that is not sustainable in a liberal and unequal system that promotes individualism.

### THE PASSION OF LUCIFER MORNINGSTAR AS GOTHIC PARADIASTOLE

If factually, Lilith does not become morally “good” throughout the series, it is nonetheless interesting to see that she becomes more likeable and empathetic. In her definition of the gothic, Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet describes gothic villains as “rarely simply evil” and “notoriously mixed characters, possessing admirable or at least attenuating features as well as terrible flaws.” (Monnet 23). This is the case with Lilith, whose moral flaws can be put into perspective with her victimhood and individual trajectory of liberation within a patriarchal social and cultural context. In fact, Lilith’s moral function in *Chilling Adventures* can be seen as a subject of moral *differend*<sup>75</sup> that is almost entirely dependent on interpretation.

An example of the importance of perspective when it comes to Lilith’s morality is that in the same episode, she called “Lucifer’s whore” by the Kings of Hell, she is also elevated to the status of deity in a modified Hail Mary:

Hail Lilith, full of disgrace, / cursed are you amongst women, / and cursed is the fruit of thy womb, demons./You fled the garden where the weak ones dwelled / and did not live in shame. / Unholy Lilith, Mother of Night, / pray for us sinners, / now and at the witching hour of our death. / Praise Madam Satan.

---

<sup>74</sup> When Satan refuses to restore her powers, Lilith stabs him the back and drinks his angelic blood while she straddles him and reminisces on their past.

<sup>75</sup> “conflict between (at least) two parties, which cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments” (Lyotard in Monnet, 9), see chapter II., p.23.

Here, Lilith’s traditionally negative characteristics are praised with the same reverence as the Virgin Mary. In fact, she is the antithesis of the Virgin Mary; she usurps the appearance of a trusted motherly figure to manipulate Sabrina, she is anything but virginal, a literal man-eater who ultimately murders her newborn son. Moreover, the very fact that she is a witch places her in opposition with Mary. Indeed, Bovenschen et al. explain that the witch trials occurred at the height of the cult of Mary and are symptomatic of the scission of “the witch in the service of Satan” and “Mary, handmaiden of the Lord, the denatured, desensualized woman” (103) into moral opposites.

To further illustrate this point, I argue that the morality play in “The Passion of Sabrina Spellman” (S2E13)<sup>76</sup> is a paradiastole, which corresponds to a “rhetorical re-description, i.e., the retelling of a narrative in a completely different moral light. For example, greed can be characterized as entrepreneurial spirit, modesty as frigidity, or prudence as cowardice.” (Monnet 10). *The Passion of Lucifer Morningstar* is a morality play based on the sacred texts of the Churches of Darkness, which the Church of Night has regularly put on throughout its history. On one level, it is a paradiastole of Satan’s Fall from heaven, retold from a perspective in which Lucifer’s rebellion against God is righteous. On the same level is the paradiastole of Lilith’s myth from Ben Sira and Judaic Kabbalah, retold from a Christianized point of view<sup>77</sup>. But the level I am interested in is self-referential to Lilith’s story within the diegesis of the series, as the play is a retelling from the perspective of Faustus Blackwood and his patriarchal gaze.

---

<sup>76</sup> A complete transcription of the play is available in the appendix, see Annex, p. 112

<sup>77</sup> For example, there is no “Hell” in the Judaic conception of the afterlife.

Indeed, Blackwood's adaptation of the sacred text is clearly sexist and emphasizes Lilith's submission and inferiority to Lucifer, which differs from Lilith's own perspective and from the satanic bible. Zelda Spellman remarks:

I'm curious about your adaptation, Father Blackwood. There are some departures from our sacred Satanic texts. Lilith... For instance, *I* don't recall her wandering helplessly in the wilderness. She provided for herself, like a survivalist.

"The Passion of Sabrina Spellman" S2E13 (15:25-15:45)

Another element obscured in Blackwood's story is that Lilith also helped Satan healing his wounds, although a vague allusion to a mutually beneficial arrangement may be contained in Lucifer's "Cura me sus cipis, damnationem aeterno" (49:20), which would roughly translate to "Take care of me, and you will receive eternal damnation". But even if it is mentioned, the fact that it is in latin is an obscuring factor for the audience of the play and of the series, who might not take the time to translate it<sup>78</sup>. In fact, the young witch who originally plays Lilith does not know the meaning of what she is declaiming (see Appendix 5.3, scene 6, rehearsals). Here, it is not far-fetched to imagine Faustus leaving the dialogue untranslated on purpose. So, in Blackwood's adaptation, Lilith's submission is rooted in a meritocratic power imbalance where she is indebted to Lucifer saving her, whereas the version mentioned by Zelda acknowledges her survivalist skills, and Lilith's version highlights how much he needed her.

The play also paints Lilith as inconsistent and greedy: she refused submission to God and Adam but easily accepts her subservience to Lucifer because he offers her power. She is particularly admiring of him: "Your wisdom amazes me. You see mysteries and know secret things" and simultaneously self-deprecating "I wish I were worthy of such a station" (47:19-49:24). All of this is significant, because this version of the myth directly supports Blackwood's highly misogynistic tenets of the Church of Judas, which justify the dominion of warlocks over

---

<sup>78</sup> As is specified in the appendix, Netflix's own translation is flawed and should not be taken to literally.

witches by romanticizing Lilith's submission to the Dark Lord. Similarly, feminist retellings of the myth of Lilith describe her refusal to submit to God and to Adam as an empowering tale of liberation, while she used to personify the myth of demonic femininity and served as a cautionary tale against women's independence and sexual autonomy.

As a conclusion, Lilith's trajectory in *CAOS* stands as the result of the commodification of a symbol of empowerment and sisterhood. As a morally ambivalent character, her individual struggle for liberation appeals to the American ideology of self-determination without dismantling completely the structures of powers that have subjugated her. As Queen of Hell, she does not question the existing theocracy of Pandemonium, nor the ethics of owning souls like property. Here, the success of one woman in overcoming her own victimhood does not translate into a general betterment of the lives of the oppressed, but she integrates the ruling class and contributes to maintaining it. In popular culture, the archetype of the liberal "feminist" is ironically coined "the girlboss". The girlboss is a woman who is praised as a feminist symbol for attaining a position of power, influence or opulence without necessarily *being* a feminist, with examples ranging from Frida Kahlo to Margaret Thatcher.

Opening the concept of paradiastole to the two previous chapters, I would argue that each corresponds to a retelling of the myth from a different perspective, resulting in polysemous, self-referential mythmaking. In her 1998 paper on the subject, Leah Ceccarelli defines two types of polysemous meaning-making: "resistive reading" and "strategic ambiguity". Resistive readings "are made by audiences and undergird rebellion against a dominant authorial interpretation", while strategic ambiguity "is likely to be planned by the author and result in two or more otherwise conflicting groups of readers converging in praise of a text." (Ceccarelli 404). To those two reception-based approaches, she adds the critical approach "hermeneutic depth", which is about "arguing that *both* an interpretation *and* its



opposite are sustained by the text”, and asking the audience to “accept the multiplicity of meanings to fully appreciate the text's deeper significance”. (Ceccarelli 408).

In parallel, each piece of work that mobilizes the myth of Lilith can be considered as its own polysemous interpretation of her story. I would class Judith Plaskow and Angela Carter’s use of the myth into the category of resistive reading, where they offer a feminist reinterpretation of a myth formerly utilized as a cautionary tale against dark femininity. Then, *Bordello* could be categorized as strategically ambiguous in its retelling of the myth. Indeed, the film pleases the male gaze while also integrating postfeminist rhetoric and tropes, resulting in a Lilith who could be appreciated by a diverse audience (although its commercial failure hints that the strategy was not successful). Finally, the fact that *CAOS*’s Lilith is subjected to coexisting interpretations *within* the diegesis of the series would cast her as an example of hermeneutic depth.

## V. Conclusion

---

This research aimed to identify the characteristics of the New Lilith in a comparative analysis of three works in which she appears. After all this, it can be concluded that Lilith's story is a powerful one. It has a lot to say about gender politics, and the narratives in which she appears are revealing of how the dominant culture constructs women's identities – and how those constructions are tied up with broader social attitudes toward gender, power, and sexuality. This section ties together the findings of this mémoire and evokes the commonalities between the three works analyzed. First, in *The Passion of New Eve*, Lilith's physical and internal transformations are symbolic mirrors of the constructedness of femininity as a spectacle. In *Bordello of Blood*, Lilith is a product of the objectifying male gaze which reflects the nineties' ambivalent attitude to feminist discourse while also standing at the intersection of ancient myth and mainstream American culture. Finally, *CAOS*'s Lilith's trajectory of liberation appeals to the American ideology of self-determination and individual success, highlighting her cultural integration into wider cultural consciousness and the depreciated impact of mythmaking as a radical feminist endeavour.

In addition to this, all three iterations take interest in representing femininity as an identity constructed around martyrdom. My finding is that in those narratives, womanhood is not innate or natural, but rather the product of pain and suffering internalized into a constitutive identity. This shared victimhood may explain the wide appeal of Lilith's myth and other cultural narratives of female liberation, as the representation of this cultural Other gives power and voice to those who exist in the margins of society. Another recurrent concept that has emerged in the analysis of *New Eve*, of *Bordello* and of *CAOS* is Lilith's ambiguity. As a morally ambivalent character, she fluctuates between subject and object, victim and abuser, saint and witch, her liminal existence seems to challenge the status quo and binary systems of judgement.

What is more is that her ambivalence is a testimony of the possible political ramifications of mythmaking as a cypher for cultural power dynamics. Then, the polysemy of Lilith's Otherness resonates with the rejection of cultural binaries occurring in the cultural studies field, where the approaches of queer, postcolonial, Marxist and environmental studies are conscious of the interconnectedness of the structures of powers responsible for inequalities. In this paradigm, fighting the patriarchy requires the deconstruction of binary gender roles, it requires addressing economic injustices, it requires dismantling white supremacy and repairing the ongoing damages of slavery and colonialism, and it requires a complete redefinition of Man's relationship with the natural world. These new perspectives could constitute an exciting opening for politically-motivated rewritings of the myth of Lilith. Or as Carter puts it, making "old bottles explode."

On the subject of my contribution to the field of cultural studies, I hold that this *mémoire* has contributed to filling a gap in the literature concerning modern iterations of Lilith. Indeed, the historical and religious studies approaches to Lilith hold a significant portion of the research on her character (Bitton, Plaskow). They are completed by comparative studies of specific iterations of Lilith in women's science fiction (Osherow), in second-wave feminist Jewish literature (Shapiro) and in comic books (Dennis and Dennis). Illuminating research on my primary corpus exists, with contributions from gender studies and gothic scholars (Bristow and Broughton, Mulvey-Roberts, Hobson, Cunningham, Henesy), but with the exception of Reijnerse's student thesis, none have focused solely on the character of Lilith (as represented in the primary corpus). My main limitation throughout this thesis has been its scope, as the quantity of content may have lessened the depths the analysis could go to. Although I am satisfied with the findings of this research, future studies might enrich my conclusions by applying this character-study framework to other modern representations of Lilith.

## VI. Bibliography

---

### PRIMARY SOURCES

- !Shoutfactory. "Tainted Blood" in *Tales from the Crypt Presents Bordello of Blood*,  
*E q n n g e v q*. 2005. Available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q54IBrGRo3E&list=PLqVoRc4VFVcyXaTGQzjbPhb4jLXC-iaAT](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q54IBrGRo3E&list=PLqVoRc4VFVcyXaTGQzjbPhb4jLXC-iaAT). Accessed 12.05.22.
- Aguirre-Sacasa, Roberto, and Robert Hack. 2018. *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina Book One: The Crucible*. New York: Archie Comic Publications.
- Atwood, Margaret. *The Robber Bride*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993.
- Back to the Future*. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Screenplay, Bob Gale and Robert Zemeckis. 1985. Universal Pictures, Amblin Entertainment.
- Baywatch*. NBC, 1989-1990. Syndication, 1990-2001.
- Ben Sira*. The Alphabet of Ben Sira. (Date Unknown). Trans. Norman Bronznick. Available at: [www.lilithgallery.com/library/lilith/The-Bible-of-ben-Sira.html](http://www.lilithgallery.com/library/lilith/The-Bible-of-ben-Sira.html), Accessed 21.08.21.
- Bible Hub. "Genesis 1:27" Available at: <https://biblehub.com/genesis/1-27.htm>. Accessed 04.08.22
- . "Genesis 2:21" Available at: <https://biblehub.com/genesis/2-21.htm>. Accessed 04.08.22.
- . "Isaiah's Apocalypse 34:13". Available at <https://biblehub.com/isaiah/34-13.htm>. Accessed 04.08.22
- Bordello of Blood*. Directed by A.L. Katz and G. Adler. Crypt Keeper Pictures, 1996.
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Mutant Enemy Productions, 1997-2003.
- Carter, Angela. *The Passion of New Eve*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1977.
- Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. Dir. Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa. Netflix/Warner Bros, 2018-2020.
- "Constitution of the United States". Library of Congress. Available at: <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/>. Accessed 04.08.22.
- L g p p k h g* Dir. Kar'yn Karpman. Fox Atomic, Dune Entertainment, 2009.
- Plaskow, Judith. *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics*, 1972-2003. Beacon Press, 2015. Pp. 34-35.

*Shadowhunters*, Disney/ABC, 2016-2019.

*Supernatural*. The WB/The CW, 2005-2020.

*Tales from the Crypt Presents: Bordello of Blood*. Directed by A.L. Katz and G. Adler.  
Universal Studios, 1996.

*Tales from The Crypt*. (Comics). EC. Comics, 1950-1955.

*Tales from the Crypt*. (TV series). Created by William Gaines and Steven Dodd, HBO, 1989-1996.

*True Blood*. HBO, 2008-2014.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Berger, John. 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Company and Penguin Books.

Bitton, Michèle. « Lilith Ou La Première Ève Un Mythe Juif Tardif ». *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions*, vol. 35, no. 71, EHESS, 1990, pp. 113–36.

Bourcier, Marie-Hélène (Sam). “Sœurs de sang : S/M et sexe à risques chez les lesbiennes d’Eressos » in *Queer Zones : politiques des identités sexuelles des représentations et des savoirs*. Paris : Balland. 2001. pp. 63-78.

Bovenschen, Silvia, et al. “The Contemporary Witch, the Historical Witch and the Witch Myth: The Witch, Subject of the Appropriation of Nature and Object of the Domination of Nature.” *New German Critique*, no. 15, 1978, pp. 83–119.

Bristow, Joseph, and Broughton, Trev Lynn. “Introduction”. In *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*. Eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton. Routledge: 2014. Pp. 1-23.

Britzolakis, Christina. “Angela Carter’s fetishism”. In *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*. Eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton. Routledge: 2014. Pp. 43-58.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Carter, Angela. “Notes from the Front Line”. In *Shaking a Leg*. Ed. Jenny Uglow. New-York: Penguin Books, 1998. Pp.26-30.

- Castillo, Michelle. "The Satanic Temple Sues Netflix for \$150 Million for Using a Statue of a Demon God in 'The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina.'" *CNBC*, 8 Nov. 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/08/the-satanic-temple-sues-netflix-warner-bros-for-150-million.html>. Accessed 24.07.2022.
- Ceccarelli, Leah. "Polysemy: Multiple Meanings in Rhetorical Criticism." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 84, no. 4, Nov. 1998, pp. 395–415.
- Coffin, Alice. *Le Génie Lesbien*. Paris: Grasset, 2020.
- Cornell, M. Doretta. "Mother of All the Living: Reinterpretations of Eve in Contemporary Literature". *Wiley*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2005, pp. 91–107.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics". *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989. Pp. 139–167.
- Cunningham, Lisa. "Queerness and the Undead Female Monster" in *The Laughing Dead: The Horror-Comedy Film from Bride of Frankenstein to Zombieland*. Ed. Rowman and Littlefield, 2016.
- Dennis, Geoffrey, and Avi S. Dennis. "Vampires and Witches and Commandos, Oy Vey: Comic Book Appropriations of Lilith". *Shofar*, vol. 32, no. 3, Purdue University Press, 2014, pp. 72–101.
- Dutton, Donald, and S. L. Painter. "Traumatic Bonding: The Development of Emotional Attachments in Battered Women and Other Relationships of Intermittent Abuse." *Victimology*, vol. 6, Jan. 1981, pp. 139–55.
- Eller, Cynthia. *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America*. Boston: Beacon, 1993.
- Gill, Rosalind. "Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility" *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol.10(2). Los Angeles, SAGE Publications, 2007, pp. 147-166.
- Greven, David. "The Southern Gothic in Film: An Overview". In *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*. Ed. Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow.. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 473-486.
- Gubar, Susan. 1994. "Eating the Bread of Affliction: Judaism and Feminist Criticism." *Tulsa University Journal*, vol. 18, no. 2, University of Tulsa, 1994, pp. 293–316.

- Henesy, Megan. “‘Leaving My Girlhood behind’: Woke Witches and Feminist Liminality in Chilling Adventures of Sabrina.” *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 21, no. 7, Oct. 2021, pp. 1143–57.
- Hobson, Amanda and Anyiwo, Melissa (eds). *Gender in the Vampire Narrative, Teaching Gender*, vol. 8, Sense Publishers: Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei 2016.
- Internet Movie Database (IMDb). “Tales from the Crypt presents Bordello of Blood”. Available at: [www.imdb.com/title/tt0117826/?ref\\_=ttr\\_tr\\_tt](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0117826/?ref_=ttr_tr_tt). Accessed 14.05.22.
- Lilith Association. “L’association”. Available at: [www.associationlilith.ch/l-association](http://www.associationlilith.ch/l-association), Accessed 23.04.22
- Lilith Magazine. Available at: <https://lilith.org/>. Accessed 24.07.22.
- Makinen, Merja. “Sexual and textual aggression in The Sadeian Woman and New Eve”. In *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*. Eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton. Routledge: 2014. pp. 148-165.
- Monnet, Agnieszka Soltysik. “Introduction”. In *The Poetics and Politics of the American Gothic: Gender and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. GB: Ashgate, 2010. Pp. 1-29.
- Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. 1975. In *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1989. pp. 14-26.
- Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. “Angela Carter’s ‘rigorous system of disbelief’: religion, misogyny, myth and the cult” in *The Arts of Angela Carter: A Cabinet of Curiosities*. Ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts. Manchester: MUP, 2019. Pp. 151-170.
- Osherow, Michele. ‘The Dawn of a New Lilith: Revisionary Mythmaking in Women’s Science Fiction’. *NWSA Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 68–83.
- Palmer, Paulina. “Gender as performance in the fiction of Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood”. In *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*. Eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton. Routledge: 2014. Pp. 24-42.
- Plato, *The Symposium*. 2008. Ed. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C Sheffield. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Cambridge University Press.

Reijnierse, Indie. *U g n n k p i " v j g " V j k t f " Y c x g < " N k n k v j ø u " N g i g*  
*Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. 2021. Utrecht University Student Thesis. Available at:  
<https://studenttheses.uu.nl/handle/20.500.12932/39684>. Accessed on 10.07.22

Riviere, Joan. 1929. "Womanliness as masquerade". *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*,  
vol. 10, pp. 303–313.

Robertson, Blythe. *How to Date Men When You Hate Men*. New-York: Flatiron Books, 2019.

Rotten Tomatoes. "Tales from the Crypt presents Bordello of Blood". Available at:  
[www.rottentomatoes.com/m/tales\\_from\\_the\\_crypt\\_presents\\_bordello\\_of\\_blood](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/tales_from_the_crypt_presents_bordello_of_blood).  
Accessed 14.05.22

Shapiro, Ann R. "The Flight of Lilith: Modern Jewish American Feminist Literature". *Studies  
in American Jewish Literature* (1981-), vol. 29, Penn State University Press, 2010, pp.  
68–79.

Solanas, Valerie. *SCUM Manifesto*. 1967. Paris: Olympia Press, 1968.

Thayer and Smith. "Greek Lexicon entry for Skandalon". In *The NAS New Testament Greek  
Lexicon*. 1999. Available at: [www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/skandalon](http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/skandalon).  
Accessed 26.02.22.

Wikipedia.

---. "Alphabet of Sirach". Available at:  
[www.en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Alphabet\\_of\\_Sirach&oldid=1051374161](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Alphabet_of_Sirach&oldid=1051374161).  
Accessed 23.10.2021.

---. "Exploitation film". Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exploitation\\_film](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exploitation_film).  
Accessed 11.05.22.

---. "Masoretic Text". Available at :  
[www.en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Masoretic\\_Text&oldid=1055318587](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Masoretic_Text&oldid=1055318587).  
Accessed 15.11.2021.

---. "Vanitas". Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanitas>. Accessed 20.03.22.

---. "Witch trials in the Early modern period". Available at:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witch\\_trials\\_in\\_the\\_early\\_modern\\_period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witch_trials_in_the_early_modern_period). Accessed  
13.07.22.



Wisker, Gina. "Revenge of the living doll: Angela Carter's horror writing". In *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*. Eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton. Routledge: 2014. Pp. 116-131.

Wynn Sivils, Matthew. "Gothic Landscapes and the South". In *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*. Ed. Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow.. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 83-94.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Artemis of Ephesus, Statue in the Museum of Efes, Turkey. Available at: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EfesMuseumArtemis.jpg>. Accessed 28.03.22

Mother in "Tristessa, the Opera". 2018. Royal Swedish Opera. Due to copyright concerns, the original link to this image cannot be reproduced in the Serval version of this mémoire.

Roman Statue of Hekataion or Triple Hecate, 2nd Century A.D., MET Museum. Available at: [www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/256523](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/256523), Accessed 11.03.22.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. Lady Lilith. 1866-1868. Delaware Art museum. Due to copyright concerns, the original link to this image cannot be reproduced in the Serval version of this mémoire.

True Blood Wiki. "Gallery: Sophie-Anne Leclerc". Due to copyright concerns, the original link to this image cannot be reproduced in the Serval version of this mémoire.

Vampire Diaries Wiki. "Entry for Niklaus Mikaelson". Due to copyright concerns, the original link to this image cannot be reproduced in the Serval version of this mémoire.

## VII. Appendix

---

### THE ALPHABET OF BEN SIRA

Soon afterward the young son of the king took ill, Said Nebuchadnezzar, "Heal my son. If you don't, I will kill you." Ben Sira immediately sat down and wrote an amulet with the Holy Name, and he inscribed on it the angels in charge of medicine by their names, forms and images, and by their wings, hands, and feet. Nebuchadnezzar looked at the amulet. "Who are these?"

"The angels who are in charge of medicine: Snvi, Snsvi, and Smnglof. After God created Adam, who was alone, He said, 'It is not good for man to be alone' (Gen. 2:18). He then created a woman for Adam, from the earth, as He had created Adam himself, and called her Lilith. Adam and Lilith began to fight. She said, 'I will not lie below,' and he said, 'I will not lie beneath you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while am to be in the superior one.' Lilith responded, 'We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth.' But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the air. Adam stood in prayer before his Creator: 'Sovereign of the universe!' he said, 'the woman you gave me has run away.' At once, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent these three angels to bring her back.

"Said the Holy One to Adam, 'If she agrees to come back, fine. If not she must permit one hundred of her children to die every day.' The angels left God and pursued Lilith, whom they overtook in the midst of the sea, in the mighty waters wherein the Egyptians were destined to drown. They told her God's word, but she did not wish to return. The angels said, 'We shall drown you in the sea.'

"'Leave me!' she said. 'I was created only to cause sickness to infants. If the infant is male, I have dominion over him for eight days after his birth, and if female, for twenty days.'

"When the angels heard Lilith's words, they insisted she go back. But she swore to them by the name of the living and eternal God: 'Whenever I see you or your names or your forms in an amulet, I will have no power over that infant.' She also agreed to have one hundred of her children die every day. Accordingly, every day one hundred demons perish, and for the same reason, we write the angels' names on the amulets of young children. When Lilith sees their names, she remembers her oath, and the child recovers."

The Alphabet of Ben Sira 23a-b, Tr. Norman Bronznick

#### JUDITH PLASKOW'S "THE COMING OF LILITH"

IN THE BEGINNING, the Lord God formed Adam and Lilith from the dust of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. Created from the same source, both having been formed from the ground, they were equal in all ways. Adam, being a man, didn't like this situation, and he looked for ways to change it. He said, "I'll have my figs now, Lilith," ordering her to wait on him, and he tried to leave to her the daily tasks of life in the garden. But Lilith wasn't one to take any nonsense; she picked herself up, uttered God's holy name, and flew away. "Well now, Lord," complained Adam, "that uppity woman you sent me has gone and deserted me." The Lord, inclined to be sympathetic, sent his messengers after Lilith, telling her to shape up and return to Adam or face dire punishment. She, however, preferring anything to living with Adam, decided to stay where she was. And so God, after more careful consideration this time, caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam and out of one of his ribs created for him a second companion, Eve.

For a time, Eve and Adam had a good thing going. Adam was happy now, and Eve, though she occasionally sensed capacities within herself that remained undeveloped, was basically satisfied with the role of Adam's wife and helper. The only thing that really disturbed her was the excluding closeness of the relationship between Adam and God. Adam and God just seemed

to have more in common, both being men, and Adam came to identify with God more and more. After a while, that made God a bit uncomfortable too, and he started going over in his mind whether he may not have made a mistake letting Adam talk him into banishing Lilith and creating Eve, seeing the power that gave Adam.

Meanwhile Lilith, all alone, attempted from time to time to rejoin the human community in the garden. After her first fruitless attempt to breach its walls, Adam worked hard to build them stronger, even getting Eve to help him. He told her fearsome stories of the demon Lilith who threatens women in childbirth and steals children from their cradles in the middle of the night. The second time Lilith came, she stormed the garden's main gate, and a great battle ensued between her and Adam in which she was finally defeated. This time, however, before Lilith got away, Eve got a glimpse of her and saw she was a woman like herself.

After this encounter, seeds of curiosity and doubt began to grow in Eve's mind. Was Lilith indeed just another woman? Adam had said she was a demon. Another woman! The very idea attracted Eve. She had never seen another creature like herself before. And how beautiful and strong Lilith looked! How bravely she had fought! Slowly, slowly, Eve began to think about the limits of her own life within the garden.

One day, after many months of strange and disturbing thoughts, Eve, wandering around the edge of the garden, noticed a young apple tree she and Adam had planted, and saw that one of its branches stretched over the garden wall. Spontaneously, she tried to climb it, and struggling to the top, swung herself over the wall.

She did not wander long on the other side before she met the one she had come to find, for Lilith was waiting. At first sight of her, Eve remembered the tales of Adam and was frightened, but Lilith understood and greeted her kindly. "Who are you?" they asked each other, "What is your story?" And they sat and spoke together, of the past and then of the future. They talked for many hours, not once, but many times. They taught each other many things, and told each other

stories, and laughed together, and cried, over and over, till the bond of sisterhood grew between them.

Meanwhile, back in the garden, Adam was puzzled by Eve's comings and goings, and disturbed by what he sensed to be her new attitude toward him. He talked to God about it, and God, having his own problems with Adam and a somewhat broader perspective, was able to help out a little—but he was confused, too. Something had failed to go according to plan. As in the days of Abraham, he needed counsel from his children. "I am who I am," thought God, "but I must become who I will become."

And God and Adam were expectant and afraid the day Eve and Lilith returned to the garden, bursting with possibilities, ready to rebuild it together.

Plaskow p. 34-5

#### THE PASSION OF LUCIFER MORNINGSTAR

This is a transcription the morality play featured in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, S2E13 "The Passion of Sabrina Spellman", including rehearsals. I have included stage directions and context in italics and separated it into scenes. Note that scene four and five may be inverted in the chronology of the play.

Latin utterances are reproduced to the best of my ability and understanding of the actors' pronunciation. An attempt at translating them was made, but it proved too difficult because of *E C Q* ~~im~~perfect translation and my surface-level knowledge of the language. they are never captioned, and having found no indication online of production hiring a competent consultant for *E C Q* ~~Latin~~ spells, it is wiser not to assume too much about their meaning outside of tone and context.

#### THE PASSION OF LUCIFER MORNINGSTAR

Adaptation by Father Faustus Blackwood

SCENE 1: LUCIFER, GOD.

*Heaven*

LUCIFER (NICK). What kind of God denies his followers pleasure?

GOD (AMBROSE). The one God. The true God. All knowing, all powerful.

LUCIFER. But if God is unable to prevent evil, then he is not all-powerful.

GOD. Heresy ! [*tears one wing away from Nick, he falls to the ground*]

LUCIFER. If God is unwilling to prevent evil, then he is not all good.

GOD. Heresy ! [*tears the other wing away from Nick*]

LUCIFER. You are a False God.

GOD. I cast you out of Heaven for all eternity, Morningstar.

LUCIFER. I shall go happily. The sheep will follow you, but I will lead the Children of Night to freedom!

(44:34-45:37)

SCENE 2: LILITH, STOLAS.

*Wasteland*

STOLAS (AGATHA). Mistress Lilith, wait.

LILITH (SABRINA). Oh Stolas, the Garden was my rightful home, but I've been cast out for refusing to lie beneath Adam and kneel before the False God. Two things I will never do. [*said with sarcasm*]

(45:48-46:06)

SCENE 3: LILITH, LUCIFER, STOLAS

[*Enter Lucifer*]

LUCIFER (NICK). There is no need to wander the wasteland, no need to starve and die.

LILITH (SABRINA). Who are you?

LUCIFER. I am Lucifer. Once, I was called Morningstar. We have a common enemy.

LILITH. He's a man, as are you.

LUCIFER. No, I am the angel who will help you get your revenge. Kneel before me, acknowledge that I am your Dark Lord, and I will give you power, eternal life, and eventually, if you serve me well, a throne by my side in Hell.

LILITH. What do you think, Stolas?

STOLAS (AGATHA). It seems a small price to pay, to bend the knee. He offers you so much.

LUCIFER. Do not answer me yet. Follow me to my home in the fires of Gehenna, and you will taste how sweet your new life could be.

[*They exit the stage*]

(46:06-30-47:08)

SCENE 4 (rehearsals) LILITH, LUCIFER

*N k n k v j " c p f " N w e k h g t ø u " h k t u v " p k i j v " v q i g v j g t . " I*

LUCIFER (NICK). Lilith, why do you lie so far away from me? Come closer

LILITH (SABRINA). I will not lie beneath you, but only by your side

LUCIFER. Is that what you said to your husband, Adam? Aren't you cold, woman?

LILITH. Yes. I've been cold since the Garden

LUCIFER. Come closer then –

*[e c o g t c " v k n v u " q x g t . " P k e m " ] w v u " c " j c p f " q x g t "*

– and I'll keep you warm.

(14:52-15:20)

SCENE 5 (rehearsals), LILITH, LUCIFER

LILITH (DORCAS) Why Lord, did you exile me from your Kingdom?

LUCIFER (NICK). Lilith, you look to the False God for answers and understanding, but none are coming. You are forsaken in his eyes.

LILITH. He cast me out, Lucifer, as he did you, when I did nothing more than ask for equality.

(11:12-11:28)

SCENE 6 (rehearsals)

LILITH (DORCAS). [*kneeling*] At fidem tibi domino obscuro...

DORCAS. Am I saying it right?

ZELDA. Not remotely, do you even know what it means?

DORCAS. Umm...

It means "I curse the False God! [*throws play on the floor, gestures to her chest*] And submit my fealty to you, Dark Lord"

LUCIFER (NICK). Cura me sus cipis, damnationem aeterno

(24:37-24:57)

SCENE 6: LILITH, LUCIFER

*Gehenna*

LILITH (SABRINA). Life is untroubled in this cave with you here, Lucifer Morningstar. Your wisdom amazes me. You see mysteries and know secret things. But my heart and thoughts drift back to the Garden... And Adam.

LUCIFER (NICK). Why shouldn't we stay here? Where we're free of the False God's petty tests. Together we can bring the truth of the Morningstar to the masses, and you'll rule beside me as my Queen.

LILITH. I wish I were worthy of such a station.

LUCIFER. Oh Lilith. Give yourself to me, and I will make you worthy

*[They kiss, strings play an emotional melody]*

LILITH. *[kneels]* Maledictus vir dei hec falsa iugo prebeo at fidem tibi domino obscuro eo.

LUCIFER. Cura me sus cipis damnationem aeterno

*[They hold hands and the curtain is drawn]*

(47:19-49:24)