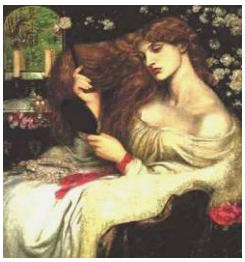
# Changing Literary Representations of Lilith and the Evolution of a Mythical Heroine



Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Lady Lilith"

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## Introduction

### *Changing Literary Representations of Lilith and the Evolution of a Mythical Heroine*

When singer/performer Sarah McLachlan founded an all-female touring music festival in 1997 and named the event "Lilith Fair," the most widely asked question was: "Who is Lilith?" According to Sarah McLachlan, the story of Lilith is as follows:

> Adam . . . asked God to send him a mate, a partner like the other creatures had. God obliged by making Lilith and sending her to Adam. At first he was pleased, but then she opened her mouth, showing that she had a mind of her own. He wanted her to lie beneath him and she promptly refused, saying that they were equal and she would not be subservient to him. Adam flew into a tantrum, so Lilith took off to calmer territory. -- (Childerhose xiii)

This overtly feminist version of Lilith's story is not rare in modern culture. In 1976, for example, Lilith, an independent Jewish women's magazine with a self-proclaimed feminist focus, was founded and given Lilith's name.

There exist countless other invocations of Lilith as a feminist heroine in modern culture. In 1991, Dagmar Nick published a novel in which Lilith tells her own sarcastic version of the Lilith myth, including her own subversive reasons for having been expelled from the Garden of Eden. A more recent text -- Which Lilith?, 1998 -- plays upon the

multiplicity of Lilith's identity by incorporating various re-creations of Lilith by modern feminist writers. Yet the story of Lilith as a feminist heroine is just one of the stories of her identity. Before the thirteenth century, many different versions of Lilith's identity existed, none of which heralded her as a positive or welcoming figure.

The uncertainty and debate surrounding Lilith stems from the fact that she developed as a mythical figure over centuries of time, with many strands of her story evolving along completely separate lines. Because of this, Lilith was various known as a succubus, as a child-slaying witch, and as the equitable first companion of Adam. Not until the writing of the Zohar in 1200 CE did these distinct guises of Lilith combine to form a complete picture of her identity.

Yet the debates continued, for Lilith had become such a well-known and widely used mythical figure that her identity was continuously being appropriated. Through today, countless writers have ascribed personality traits to Lilith which often, seemingly, have little to do with her identity as it was known in any of the founding texts. This was possible because of men such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and John Keats, Romantic writers who brought Lilith from the realm of Jewish mysticism and thought into that of "mainstream" literature and culture.

After being brought to this level, Lilith's story was appropriated by the most famous artist/writer of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In his art and poetry, Rossetti employed the image of Lilith in such a way as to open her to feminist interpretation. Bram Dijkstra states, "Lilith, who, in her unwillingness to play second fiddle to Adam, was, as Rossetti's work already indicated, widely regarded as the world's first virago [late nineteenth-century feminist]" (309). Rossetti, therefore, is responsible for beginning the transformation of Lilith that would allow her to move from the demoness of early Jewish culture to the feminist heroine of today.

The argument central to this paper, therefore, is that the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti were responsible for transforming Lilith in such a way as to allow for feminist interpretations of her identity. As evidenced by the quote above from Dijkstra, this assertion is not new. In almost all studies which examine the evolution of Lilith's identity, Rossetti is recognized as the first to portray Lilith in a "modern" way, allowing her to leave the mold of vice in which she had previously been cast.

Rossetti was indeed "a dramatic imagist, a seeker of meaning, a mythmaker," establishing Lilith for all time as a strong and independent female figure (Garner 66). Since this fact is little disputed, it is not the primary focus of this study. The more important question is: How was Lilith transformed from a demoness to a feminist heroine? Furthermore, what techniques and devices did Rossetti use in implementing this transformation?

The study begins with a historicizing of Lilith's identity in Chapter One by exploring the various "founding" texts in which she appears. These texts will be placed within their respective cultural contexts in order to demonstrate why particular aspects of Lilith's identity were focused on at that time and in that text. Located within this chapter is discussion of The Alphabet of Ben Sira, a work which includes the version of the Lilith story most cited today: that of Lilith as the first wife of Adam who flees the Garden after refusing to submit to Adam's authority.

Although very concentrated on chronology, history and Jewish tradition, the development of Lilith in the founding texts is vital in order to understand the legacy that Rossetti inherited when he employed Lilith as a primary figure in his work. While Rossetti himself quite possibly knew little or nothing about these works explicitly, he was obviously aware of the legacy they left behind, a legacy that can be seen in Goethe's mention of Lilith in Faust.

Chapter Two then explores Lilith's identity in the works of Goethe and Keats, Romantic writers who moved Lilith from the realm of Jewish mysticism to that of literature-proper. While Goethe merely mentions Lilith briefly in the Walpurgis Night scene of Faust, Part One, and Keats describes a Lilith-like figure but refers to her by another name (Lamia), both of these writers exerted the utmost influence on Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

This section, therefore, briefly discusses Faust, "Lamia," and "La Belle Dame sans Merci" in order to demonstrate that Lilith's transformation from the evil child-slaying succubus had begun. Further, it explicates these texts so that, when reading about Rossetti's use of Lilith, the reader will recognize the references Rossetti makes to his literary predecessors.

Finally, Chapter Three focuses on the thesis of this project, examining the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in order to demonstrate how he transformed Lilith's identity in such a way as to allow for the feminist interpretations of her that are employed today. Of all his works, "Eden Bower" most clearly demonstrates this transformation. Yet it is the combination of all Rossetti's works that deal with Lilith which makes this transformation complete.

# Chapter 1

## *A Triple Stranded History:*

## *Lilith in the Founding Texts*

The aim of the present chapter is to set forth a literary history of the development of the mythical figure Lilith. This begins with the first acknowledged literary reference to Lilith, a text dating 2000 BCE and related to the 2400 BCE work entitled the Epic of Gilgamesh and culminates in an examination of the central work of Jewish mysticism, The Zohar, from the 13th century. This long and complex history of development brings to light the three guises in which Lilith first appears: a child-slaying witch, a succubus/seductress of the night, and the first wife of Adam.

It should be noted, however, that this history is not fully complete, for it is not within the scope of this paper to present the research surrounding all of the various "texts" associated with Lilith, such as archeological artifacts, undated oral traditions, and superstitious amulets. Some artifacts, however, may be introduced for illustrative purposes and treated as "texts" in their own right, but it is important to note that this study's focus is primarily the literary works in which the image of Lilith arises.

## *"Gilgamesh and the Huluppu-Tree" (2000 BCE)*

The first literary reference to Lilith can be found in the Epic of Gilgamesh. This work is actually an epic poem covering twelve tablets in its latest version. The poem, whose written stages span a period of at least 1,500 years, has been dated at 2400 BCE, placing it in the Third Early Dynastic period of Mesopotamian chronology (Tigay 2). Furthermore, the Sumerian King List identifies Gilgamesh as the fifth king of the first dynasty of Uruk, which historians have placed in the Second Early Dynastic period (ca 2700-2500) (Tigay 13). His reign lasted one hundred and twenty-six years. It has been surmised, therefore, that the myths and legends surrounding Gilgamesh were kept alive through oral tradition until 2400 BCE when they were transcribed into this epic poem.

The poem itself revolves around the hero Gilgamesh and paints his adventures in "legendary and mythological colors," for he is said to have been two-thirds divine and merely one-third mortal (Tigay 4). The epic is mostly studied, however, because it contains "the best preserved and most extensive Babylonian account of the deluge" (Heidel 1). The reference to Lilith contained in the Epic of Gilgamesh is actually not contained in the epic itself at all. Rather, the reference to Lilith appears in a Sumerian tale entitled "Gilgamesh and the Huluppu Tree," which contains the key to understanding the twelfth tablet of the Gilgamesh epic, the first twelve lines of which are almost completely broken away. Without the explanation offered by the "Huluppu Tree" tale, the story contained in the twelfth tablet does not make sense, and so many scholars have chosen to include the "Huluppu Tree" tale in the epic, footnoting to indicate its unique origin.

This text, dating approximately 2000 BCE begins with the words "once upon a time," revealing both the oral tradition associated with the tale and the basis for the modern assumption that the tale was "undoubtedly a copy of much earlier material" (Kramer 1944, 33, Pereira 20). The tale itself, as told by Samuel Noah Kramer in Sumerian Mythology, reads:

Once upon a time there was a huluppu-tree, perhaps a willow; it was planted on the banks of the Euphrates; it was nurtured by the waters of the Euphrates. But the South Wind tore at it, root and crown, while the Euphrates flooded it with its waters. Inanna, queen of heaven, walking by, took the tree in her hand and brought it to Erech, the seat of her main sanctuary, and planted it in her holy garden. There she tended it most carefully. For when the tree grew big, she planned to make of its wood a chair for herself and a couch.

Years passed, the tree matured and grew big. But Inanna found herself unable to cut down the tree. For at its base the snake 'who knows no charm' had built its nest. In its crown, the Zu-bird -- a mythological creature which at times wrought mischief -- had placed its young. In the middle Lilith, the maid of desolation, had built her house. And so poor Inanna, the light-hearted and ever-joyful maid, shed bitter tears. And as the dawn broke and her brother, the sun-god Utu, arose from his sleeping chamber, she repeated to him tearfully all that had befallen her huluppu-tree.

Now Gilgamesh, the great Sumerian hero, the forerunner of the Greek Heracles, who lived in Erech, overheard Inanna's weeping complaint and chivalrously came to her rescue. He donned his armor weighing fifty minas -- about fifty pounds -- and with his

'ax of the road,' seven talents and seven minas in weight -- over four hundred pounds -- he slew the snake 'who knows no charm' at the base of the tree. Seeing which, the Zu-Bird fled with his young to the mountain, and Lilith tore down her house and fled to the desolate places which she was accustomed to haunt. The man of Erech who had accompanied Gilgamesh now cut down the tree and presented it to Inanna for her chair and couch. (33,34)

The tale goes on to explain how Inanna rewarded Gilgamesh and how he then lost his rewards into the netherworld, only for Enkidu -- companion of Gilgamesh -- to attempt to rescue them, becoming seized there and unable to ever return to the earth. This portion of the tale, as explained earlier, makes little sense without the Sumerian legend to explain why Inanna bestowed the presents upon Gilgamesh, what they were (which is still not completely clear), and why Inanna had the tree in the first place.

What is interesting about the tale is the very incidental reference to Lilith. Her image is invoked along with the serpent and the bird, both of which (as will be shown) are associated with her in later representations. Similarly, since this tale incorporates aspects of Lilith which are elaborated on in later texts, it serves as documented evidence that these aspects were present in the cultural imagination far before their written arrival. If her story had been written here in full, one could surmise that this was indeed the beginning of the legend. However, the incidental nature of the mention itself seems to rely heavily on the reader having a previous knowledge of Lilith: knowing who she is, what her associations are, and being able to recall other images associated with her. Likewise, the "once upon a time" beginning inks this story to a larger cultural history which was, it seems, up to this point only oral in nature.

It would be beneficial to now acquaint oneself with some of the aspects of this text which will appear again in these "founding" literatures. First, there is the association of Lilith with the snake, usually equated with evil. Second, there is the bird who flees, presumably through flight, something which Lilith will later do also. Third, the tree invokes an image of the Tree of Knowledge, in which Lilith is said to dwell in some later myths. Similarly, this tree is located in Inanna's "holy garden," again harking back to the image of the Garden of Eden. Finally, it is noteworthy that while Lilith and her bestial companions inspire fear in Inanna, they do not have any fear of her. It is Gilgamesh, the great male Sumerian hero, who kills the snake and frightens the other creatures out of the tree and garden.

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## *The Lilith Relief*
## *Sumerian Terra-Cotta Relief (circa 2000 BCE)*

First known as the Burney Relief -- the original 1936 owner was Mr. Sydney Burney -- this relief "became associated with the character of Lilith and subsequently has been referred to in the literature as the Lilith Relief" (Pereira 28). Shown in illustration #1, this relief is believed to date from "the last third of the Third millennium BCE" (Frankfort 128). While the identification of its central figure was once much contested, it is generally accepted today that this figure is indeed Lilith.

An examination of the figure gives rise to interesting details which link this image with the descriptions of Lilith which arise in literature both before and after the relief's creation. Unclothed and beautiful, Lilith here can easily be associated with her role as a succubus who destroys her lovers. The "ring and staff" symbols (found in Lilith's hands) have been interpreted, almost universally, as symbols of justice. This would coincide with the idea that Lilith's murdering of infants was a punishment on parents for some unknown sin (Pereira 33). The owls symbolize nocturnal flight, associated with the "winged she-demon of the night" characterization of Lilith.

## *Isaiah 34:14 (circa 900 BCE)*

It is this reference which Internet pseudo-scholars and professional researchers alike often quote without hesitation. It should be noted, however, that among the more serious examinations of Lilith, this reference is actually much contested. If it does indeed exist,

however, it would associate her with evil, the night, the desert, and flight, facets which can be seen in her earliest representation in "Gilgamesh and the Huluppu Tree."

The scripture's text reads, according to Raphael Patai's translation: "The wild-cat shall meet with the jackals / And the satyr shall cry to his fellow, / Yea, Lilith shall repose there / And find her a place of rest" (223). The 1901 American Standard Version states: "And the wild beasts of the desert shall meet with the wolves, and the wild goat shall cry to his fellow; yea, the night-monster shall settle there, and shall find her a place of rest." Interestingly, the footnote to "night-monster" reads "Hebrew: Lilith." Verse 15 states that it is "there" [in the desert] that the "dart-snake shall make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shade," an image which seems to be borrowed from the "Huluppu Tree" tale.

Other translations use the phrase "nightjar" (1984 New World Translation), "the night hag" (Revised Standard Version, Gehman 561, Eerdman's Bible Dictionary), "the screech owl" (Baring and Cashford 510, Knappert 189, Buttrick 133), "night monster" (Encyclopaedia Judaica 246), and "night devil" (Sykes 126). Whether or not the reference was directly to Lilith, it does indicate that the notion of a character whose attributes were similar to those of Lilith was alive in the cultural imagination at this time.

## *The Testament of Solomon -- circa 200 CE*

The Testament of Solomon is a book which is part of the Pseudepigrapha, a collection of texts written between 200 BCE and 200 CE and spuriously ascribed to various key figures, namely prophets and kings, of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Testament of Solomon itself is said to have been written between the first century and the fourth century, but modern scholarship has placed the date at circa 200 (Encyclopaedia Judaica 246 and Brunel 721). Although very little is known about this text, the Encyclopaedia Judaica states that it "is certainly based on Judeo-Hellenistic magic" (246) and other sources pinpoint it as "the earliest compendium of demons" and "the earliest text to cast King Solomon in the role of sorcerer, which became the primary model for him in subsequent Jewish lore" (Schwartz 1988, 7). Although the blend of vastly differing currents of thought make pinpointing an immediate source for this compilation very difficult, it has been identified as representing a "peculiar fusion known as Gnosticism, resting upon a Jewish basis influenced by Egyptian, Assyrian, and Greek, more especially Orphic, teachings" (Gaster 157).

The reference to Lilith in this text is more detailed than that in the Epic of Gilgamesh, and, more importantly, introduces a clearly different version of the Lilith story: that of the child-slaying witch. While the character in question does not identify herself, by name, as Lilith -- she goes by the name of "Obizuth" -- her own self-description clearly identifies her with the personage known later as Lilith. Similarly, this text contains "the earliest textual reference to the amuletic tradition of warding off this demoness, which became so central a part of the Lilith legend" (Schwartz 1988, 7). One should also note that Lilith herself often states, both in amulets and in literary references, that she has more than one name. It can be safely stated, therefore, that Obizuth is indeed Lilith. The text in question, found in chapter 57 (or chapter 13 if referring to James H. Charlesworth's translation), reads as follows:

> And I adored the Lord God of Israel and bade another demon present himself. And there came before me a spirit in woman's form that had a head without any limbs, and her hair was dishevelled. And I said to her, 'Who art thou?' But she answered, 'Nay, who art thou? And why dost thou want to hear concerning me? But as thou wouldst learn, here I stand before thy face. Go then into thy royal storehouses and wash thy hands. Then sit down afresh before thy tribunal and ask me questions, and thou shalt learn, O king, who I am.'
>
> And I, Solomon, did as she enjoined me, and restrained myself because of the wisdom dwelling in me, in order that I might hear of her deeds and apprehend them and manifest them to men. And I sat down and said to the demon, 'Who are thou?' And she said, 'I am called among men Obizuth, and by night I sleep not, but go my rounds over all the world and visit women in childbirth. And divining the hour I take my stand, and if I am lucky I strangle the child. But if not, I retire to another place, for I cannot a single night retire unsuccessful. For I am a fierce spirit of myriad names and many shapes. And now hither, now thither, I roam. And to westering parts I go my rounds. But as it now is, though thou hast sealed me round with the ring of God, thou has done nothing. I am not standing before thee, and thou wilt not be able to command me. For I have no work other than the destruction of children and the making of their ears to be deaf, and the working of evil to their eyes, and the binding their mouths with a bond, and the ruin of their minds, and paining of their bodies'
>
> When I, Solomon, heard this, I marvelled at her appearance, for I beheld all her body to be in darkness. But her glance was altogether bright and cheery, and her hair was tossed wildly like a dragon's, and the whole of her limbs were invisible. And her voice was very clear as it came to me. And I cunningly said, 'Tell me by what angel thou are frustrated, O Evil Spirit?' But she answered me, 'By the angel of God called Afarof, which is interpreted Raphael, by whom I am frustrated now and for all time. His name, if any man know it, and write the same on a woman in childbirth, then I shall not be able to enter her. Of this name the number is 640.' And I, Solomon, having heard this, and having glorified the Lord, ordered her hair to be bound and that she should be hung up in front of the Temple of God, that all the children of Israel as they passed might see it and glorify the Lord God of Israel, who had given me this authority with wisdom and power from God by means of this signet." (Gaster 157-159)

One should note the physical appearance of Lilith/Obizuth in this text: her eyes are "bright and cheery" and her hair is "wild." Note, too, that one of Solomon's punishments for Lilith is to bind her hair and hang her in front of the temple for all to see. In The Book of Lilith, Barbara Black Koltuv remarks on this binding of the hair:

> Traditionally, a woman's hair has been considered her crowning glory, a symbol of wisdom, an aspect of her essentially feminine nature. Brides of Christ, Vestal Virgins, and Orthodox Jewish Brides have been made to sacrifice their long seductive and ensnaring hair. Woman's hair has been cut and bound and covered in an effort to separate her from this goddess-given sexually seductive power of Lilith's. (59)

The importance of Lilith's hair will be seen again in Talmudic references and will play an even more important role as this study moves into Rossetti's portrayals of Lilith. In this passage, however, it is interesting to note that Lilith's hair is forcibly bound, contributing to the stripping away of her power, and she is put on display, objectified by Solomon as a lesson to the "children of Israel."

The idea of Lilith as a "lesson" is also of importance, for it will later be shown that Lilith's murdering of children was seen as a punishment for those who had sinned. The fact that Lilith is connected with punishment and retribution in this early text, therefore, should help to explain how her later portrayals developed.

Primarily, however, this passage is important for consideration because it portrays Lilith as a child-killing witch. Said Howard Schwartz in his introduction to Lilith's Cave:

> There are two primary aspects of the Lilith legend: as the incarnation of lust, Lilith leads unsuspecting men into sin; in her incarnation as a child-destroying witch, she strangles helpless infants. It is interesting to note that these two aspects of this legend seem to have evolved separately, in that there is hardly a tale to be found in which Lilith plays both roles. (8)

While the role of Lilith as the first wife of Adam (yet to be introduced) is more closely associated with the first aspect than with the second, it truly should be given a category of all its own. The Sumerian tale in the Epic of Gilgamesh, which does not fit neatly into either category, seems to draw upon the myth of Adam and the Garden of Eden, placing it in this third category. The Testament of Solomon, clearly, belongs in the second category.

The second incarnation of Lilith -- "child-destroying" witch -- is vital to a study of the myth of Lilith, for it is this incarnation of her personage that appears in almost all archaeological evidence of her mythical existence. Much research has been done on the amulets, bowls, incantations, and plaques which were used to ward off the evil infant-slaying spirit of Lilith. Interestingly, such invocations of Lilith were present well into the 19th century. Some scholars even assert that there are persons alive today who still carry on the tradition of wearing amulets to guard against the spirit of Lilith during childbirth. Lilith magazine also reports that anti-Lilith amulets are still sold on the Lower East Side of New York (Fall 1994).

## *The Talmud -- circa 400 CE*

The next appearance that Lilith makes in literature is in the Talmud, an appellation which means "the Study" and refers to both the Mishna (text) and Gemara (commentaries on the text). Like her other appearances, Lilith is only mentioned here briefly, indicating that there was already a firmly established cultural notion of Lilith that made explicit details and explanation unnecessary. The Talmud is best defined as the "authoritative exposition and implementation [of the Bible]" for it is in this work that one can find elaboration on and explication of virtually all the passages of the Jewish Bible (exegetical explanations), ethical maxims, legends, parables, and discussions of the laws and codes of Jewish life (Bokser ix). It contains twelve folio volumes and encompasses the works of almost eight hundred years of Jewish teachers, beginning around 300 BCE and ending around 500 CE (Mielziner 1).

There are four references to Lilith in the Talmud, all of which are seemingly incidental. They identify Lilith in a way that, up to this point, at least in literary records, has not been explicitly defined: she is both a demon of the night and a succubus. The references, taken from The Babylonian Talmud are as follows (both the traditional Talmudic reference and the page reference appear in the citations):

> 1) "One may not sleep in a house alone, and whoever sleeps in a house alone is seized by Lilith." (Shab. 773: v1. pt1, 151b --- footnote "The night demon.")
>
> 2) "She grows long hair like Lilith . . ." ('Er. 698: v1, pt2, 100b --- footnote "A notorious female night demon."]
>
> 3) "I saw how Hormin the son of Lilith was running on the parapet of the wall of Mahuza. . . ." (BB. 290: v3, pt2 -- footnote to Hormin "a demon;" to Lilith "a female night demon")
>
> 4) "If an abortion had the likeness of Lilith its mother is unclean by reason of the birth, for it is a child, but it has wings. So it was also taught: R. Jose stated, It once happened at Simoni that a woman aborted the likeness of Lilith, and when the case came up for a decision before the Sages they ruled that it was a child but that it also had wings. . . ." (Nid. 166: v6, 24b -- footnote to Lilith "A female demon of the night, reputed to have wings and a human face.")

Note that in these references Lilith's name is all that is apparently needed to conjure up an image in the mind of the reader. One need only be told that "whoever sleeps in a house alone is seized by Lilith," and the rest of that story follows by assumption, not by words. Even the fact that she is a night demon and not an actual person is only brought out by the footnotes, not by the body of the text itself. The story of Lilith as surmised from these passages is one that paints her as a succubus who is winged, evil, nocturnal, and, at least partially, human in appearance.

Schwartz asserts that this portrait of Lilith "is a projection of the negative fears and desires of the rabbis who created her" (1988, 8). This seems especially likely given the Jewish customs associated with defilement. It was said, for instance, that a Jewish woman could become defiled simply by having an immoral thought, for virginity was more a mental state than a physical condition. For men, however, there was the possibility of nocturnal emissions, an occurrence which no rabbi wanted to attribute to his own impure thoughts (Elliott). For this reason, Lilith -- the human-esque, winged, succubus of the night -- was created to be the cause of these "defilements," thereby excusing the rabbis in the light of religious custom.

Finally, while birth is an aspect of the fourth mention of Lilith, her image is not conjured here as one who harms the child. This is important in that it shows that Lilith's evolution is still compartmentalized. She has still not appeared in any one literary source as an embodiment of all three of her characteristics: wife of Adam, succubus, and child-slaying witch. This point will become vital in consideration of the final literary text of this chapter, The Zohar.

## *The Nippur Bowls*
## *Incantation Bowls (circa 600 CE)*

Found in Nippur, Babylonia, these bowls contain some of the most lengthy and explicit references to Lilith up to this point. Of the 40 bowls which were excavated, 26 explicitly mentioned the figure of Lilith, and at least three of these bowls contain sketches of Lilith as their central image (Pereira 53). While the date was originally placed at 500 CE, 600 CE is the more currently accepted date (Montgomery 28, Patai 225). The bowls were used mostly by Jews, a detail which is substantiated by the fact that an important Jewish colony was located in Nippur during the sixth century and also by some of the "incontrovertible evidence" contained within the bowls themselves (Patai 225). As Raphael Patai points out, these bowls are particularly important, for "while the Talmud contains the views of the learned elite about Lilith, these bowls show what she meant for the simple people. It is surprising to see to what extent the sages and the quacks shared the fear of Lilith and the belief in her evil nature" (225).

As a whole, the texts of these bowls are "magical incantations against various forms of illness and demons" (Periera 52). The ones which feature Lilith, however, give enough additional information as to provide a synopsis of how the "simple people" viewed her during this time. Says Patai: "It appears that Lilith was regarded as the ghostly paramour of men and constituted a special danger for women during many periods of their sexual life cycle: before defloration, during menstruation, etc. A mother in the hour of childbirth and her newborn babe were especially vulnerable, and therefore had to be protected from the Liliths" (225). It would appear, therefore, that two of the strands of Lilith have joined together at this point: child-slayer and succubus.

It is beneficial to quote the text of a bowl, illustration #2, where Lilith appears naked and wingless with long loose hair, chained ankles, prominent breasts, and strongly marked genitals. This text, which appears in various scholarly sources in a number of slightly differing translations, appears below in Patai's translation:

> You are bound and sealed, all you demons and devils and Liliths, by that hard and strong, mighty and powerful bond with which are tied Sison and Sisin. . . . The evil Lilith, who causes the hearts of men to go astray and appears in the dream of the night and in the vision of the day, who burns and casts down with nightmare, attacks and kills children, boys and girls -- she is conquered and sealed away from the house and from the threshold of Bahram-Gushnasp son of Ishtar-Nahid by the talisman of Metatron, the great prince who is called the Great Healer of Mercy . . . who vanquishes demons and devils, black arts and mighty spells and keeps them away from the house and threshold of Bahram-Gushnasp, the son of Ishtar-Nahid. Amen, Amen, Selah. Vanquished are the black arts and mighty spells, vanquished the bewitching women, they, their witchery and their spells, their curses and their invocations, and kept away from the four walls of the house of Bahram=Gushnasp, the son of Ishtar-Nahid. Vanquished and trampled down are the bewitching women, vanquished on earth and vanquished in heaven. Vanquished are the constellations and stars. Bound are the works of their hands. Amen, Amen, Selah. (229)

This text demonstrates clearly that Lilith's guises of child-slayer and succubus were linked at this point, at least in the cultures of the lay-people.

## *The Alphabet of Ben Sira (circa 800 CE)*

It is The Alphabet of Ben Sira which introduces the incarnation of Lilith which has, to this point, been only vaguely, if at all, invoked: that of the first wife of Adam. The history of this text, however, is vital in understanding and interpreting its contents, and so a rather extensive description is necessary. Most of this description will rely heavily on Rabbinic Fantasies, edited by David Stern and Mark J. Mirsky, for this very recent text (1998) contains information which most earlier scholarship only glides over.

The Alphabet of Ben Sira is an anonymous work, which has been dated anywhere from the seventh to the eleventh century. While it was stated in 1900 that this text "dates in every probability from the seventh century," more recent scholarship has placed it in the eight, ninth, or tenth centuries (Gaster 155, Stern and Mirsky, eds. 167, Pereira 79). The ninth century, therefore, has been chosen as a mean of those more recently cited dates. Its place of composition is uncertain, but an examination of internal textual evidence has led scholars to place it in a Muslim country (Stern and Mirsky, eds. 167).

The text itself is in the style of an aggadic midrash (commentary on the Bible) and tells the story of the conception, birth, and early education of the "prophet" Ben Sira. The final section of the work, where Lilith is mentioned, takes place in the court of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. Here, Nebuchadnezzar sets forth various ordeals for Ben Sira, who responds with twenty-two stories (mimicking the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet) to answer the questions posed by the king. What makes this text particularly unique and fascinating is its irreverent tone, especially in its treatment of various Biblical characters and rabbinic motifs and its obvious parodies of specific Talmudic passages. The text begins, for example, with a group of men masturbating in the bathhouse and proceeds to talk "seriously" about "farts," urinating donkeys, and the copulation of ravens.

For this reason, some scholars have decried it as "an anti-Jewish satire," while others have assumed that it was "an antirabbinic tract intended to disparage the genre of aggadah" (Segal 2, Stern and Mirsky, eds. 167). However, the viewpoint offered by Norman Bronznick in his introduction to Stern and Mirsky's edition of The Alphabetseems to be the most substantiated. He states: "'The Alphabet' may be one of the earliest literary parodies in Hebrew literature, a kind of academic burlesque -- perhaps even entertainment for rabbinic scholars themselves -- that included vulgarities, absurdities, and the irreverent treatment of acknowledged sancta" (168). This is substantiated by the fact that The Alphabet was known to have been "read as popular entertainment in most rabbinic communities throughout the Middle Ages" (168).

The passage which tells the story of Lilith is the fifth of Ben Sira's responses to King Nebuchadnezzar. It is reproduced here in its entirety:

> 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' (Genesis 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 immediately 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 I am to be 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." (Stern and Mirsky, eds. 183-184)

This text is probably the most important of the founding texts for the myth of Lilith, for it introduces the portion of the story that has been most quoted, appropriated, and heralded today: that of Lilith as the first wife of Adam who flees the Garden of Eden because she refuses to be in subjection. What makes it so important to this particular study, however, is the contrast between the irreverent, non-traditional, parodying text and the story itself. This brings about a number of important revelations.

First, one must note that this story is only told in response to the King's plea that Ben Sira cure his son. The King wants to know the significance of the angels whom Ben Sira inscribes onto an amulet: Snvi, Snsvi, and Smnglof. Ben Sira's answer explains the existence of this amuletic tradition and then proceeds to tell this story of Lilith as an explanation of "how Lilith acquired the power to hurt children, that is, how she became a child-stealing and strangling demon, and the reason why the invocation of those mysterious three names has the effect of driving her away and of saving the patient" (Gaster 157). Indeed, there is no reason at all for these two strains of the Lilith legend to be connected. Ben Sira -- or, more properly, the anonymous author of The Alphabet of Ben Sira -- could have supplied any number of stories to explain why it is Lilith who

has the power over children and why the amulets with Snvi, Snsvi, and Smnglof's names deter her from harming them.

Since the story centers on the fact that Ben Sira has created this child-saving amulet for the King, it is certain that the amuletic tradition must have been something with which the rabbis, and others who may have read The Alphabet, would have been familiar. It seems, therefore, that this tale of Lilith is completely incidental and unique. It was created by the anonymous author of The Alphabet sometime between 600 and 1000 CE and used simply as another facet to parody the Bible, the Talmud, and other rabbinic teachings. This is further evidenced in the facets of the tale itself.

First, there is the irreverent tone of the passage (as with the entire book), and, more specifically, its explicit references to sex. Lilith's refusal to "lie below," was certainly not something that the rabbis would have applauded. Rather, it would be seen as sarcastic entertainment, something purely inconceivable and, thus, laughable. The association of Lilith with Adam and Eve, furthermore, was most likely done in order to draw a parody from the Bible which would be easily recognized.

So this story of Lilith as a first Eve seems to be purely incidental, something to explain the amuletic tradition that could also invoke interest and laughter, draw upon the Bible and Talmud, and go along with the irreverent tone of the rest of this medieval work. What is particularly odd about this is that this story -- one which was certainly not meant to be taken seriously -- has taken root in modern culture. Indeed, this passage is quoted more than any other in explaining the myth of Lilith, while the facets of the amulets, child- killing, and the succubus myth are customarily ignored.

Since this passage has become the basis for most later interpretations of Lilith, however, it is important to note a number of ideas which arise. Lilith is indeed Adam's equal, for she is made from the dust just as he was; her ability to flee comes from the power of uttering the Ineffable Name; and she is the mother of countless children, one hundred of which die every day. This final point is important in that while Lilith is constructed as a child-slaying witch, she is, nevertheless, endlessly fertile. The progression of the story also seems to indicate that Lilith's decision to become the child-slayer stems from her anger at having one hundred of her own children murdered by God every day. Thus, she maintains the balance of Good and Evil in the world. Finally, it is the names of the angels that prevent Lilith from harming children, for it is to them, not to God, that she made her oath.

## *Book of Raziel (circa 1100 CE)*

In Gaster's article "Two Thousand Years of a Charm Against the Child-Stealing Witch," there is reference to an amulet from the "Book of Raziel," which Gaster claims is actually "a compilation made in the tenth century from much older materials" (152). Shown in illustration #3, this amulet has more recently been placed as a twelfth century Kabbalistic work by Eleazar ben Judah ben Kalonymos of Worms (Patai 237). A passage taken from this work, quoted in Gaster's article, incorporates both the myth of Lilith as a "primitive Eve" and Lilith as child-slayer. It reads:

> I conjure thee, primitive Eve, by the name of the one who created thee, and by the names of the three angels which the Lord sent after thee, and who found thee

> in the islands of the sea, to whom thou didst swear, that wherever thou salt find their names neither thou nor thine host shall do any harm, also not to those who carry those names with them. I therefore conjure thee by their names and by their seals, which are written down here, that thou do no harm, neither thou, nor thy host, nor thy servants, to this woman or to the young babe to which she has given birth; neither during day-time nor during the night; neither in their food nor in their drink; neither in their head nor in their heart; nor in their 208 members, nor in their 305 veins. I conjure thee, thy hosts and thy servants, with the power of these names and these seals. (Gaster 153)

Gaster notes here that under the epithet "primitive Eve" "Lilith" is understood, which is substantiated by the fact that the words "Adam and Eve, Out Lilith!" appear twice on the amulet (Patai 138). If Gaster's assertions as to the date of this amulet were correct, then the story of Lilith as a first wife of Adam would not have been originated in The Alphabet at all. Since his assertions have since been disproved, it seems almost certain that the first reference to Lilith as a first wife of Adam was indeed originated in The Alphabet account.

However, whether the "Raziel" amulet proves that the story of Lilith as a first Eve was indeed originated with The Alphabet or simply was reiterated in The Alphabet is not of vital importance to this study. What is important to note is that the story of Lilith as the first wife of Adam makes its first appearance of any consequence and fame in The Alphabet and that it is this work which contains the first truly literary reference to such a story.

## *The Zohar (circa 1200 CE)*

We come now to the Zohar, which is perhaps the most important of the "founding" texts, for it contains references to Lilith in all of her various guises, including the three which have been illustrated in some of the earlier works of reference. The mentions of Lilith in the Zohar are even more important because, for the first time, Lilith is not simply mentioned incidentally, but, rather, she becomes a character in her own right, whose story is often told in elaborate detail. Some history of the Zohar is necessary before considering Lilith's appearances herein.

The Zohar translates as "[The Book of] Splendor" or "Brightness," and is itself a collection of several books or sections. Its contents span everything from short midrashic statements to mystical teachings, references to religious terminology, assessment of the problems of the infinite, the divine emanations, and others. The main part of the Zohar is "a kabbalistic Midrash on the Torah, mixed with short statements, long expositions, and narratives concerning Simeon b. Yohai and his companions. Some of it consists also of common legends" (Encylopaedia Judaica 1194).

Jewish tradition taught that the Zohar was written in Israel by the Tanna Rabbi Simon Bar Yohai in the second century. "Thirteen years in a cave . . . a father and a son alone . . . and the Zohar took form," goes the traditional tale (Luzzatto xxix). It was believed that Yohai was hiding from the Roman armies in a cave in the mountains, alone with his son, for thirteen years. The lore associated with the Zohar stated that the book remained hidden for a thousand years when, at the end of the 13th century, Rabbi Moses Ben

Shem Tov de Leon (of Spain) discovered the manuscript and made it known (Gutwirth 22).

It has since become accepted knowledge that this legend was merely legend. Says Encyclopaedia Judaica: "The Zohar with its various strata was without doubt composed in the years that immediately preceded its publication, since it is impossible to uncover any section that was written before 1270" (1209). The actual author of this work was the Spanish kabbalist Moses b. Shem Tov de Leon, and it is believed that Simon Bar Yohai was simply a pen name taken by Leon in order to make a pretention of antiquity.

Regardless of its antiquity -- or lack thereof -- the Zohar became the central work in the literature of the Kabbalah and is considered the holiest book of this body of texts. The term "Kabbalah" is used to designate Jewish mystical teachings and derives from a three- letter Hebrew root -- kbl -- meaning "to receive" (Gutwirth 17). This refers to the fact that Cabalistic teachings were considered secret and were communicated only by word of mouth, a practice initiated to ensure that each generation of the chosen would receive the teachings from the foregoing generation.

Because the Kabbalah -- and, thus, the Zohar also -- is rooted in oral tradition, it is extremely difficult to determine when this mystical Jewish doctrine originated. Although the Zohar was not made public until l290 and, as previously stated, not written until shortly before that time, the stories and teachings contained within had indeed been gestating through oral tradition for centuries.

The Zohar itself draws on a number of literary sources as well as oral ones, including the Babylonian Talmud, the complete Midrash Rabbah, and a number of smaller Midrashim, including the Alphabet of Ben Sira. While the Zohar attempts to conceal its referral to such real literary sources, it contains a vast fictitious library of pseudo-sources which it emphasizes as the source of its information, likely in order to help establish a false antiquity.

Lilith appears in the Zohar a number of times incidentally, but there are four passages in which an aspect of Lilith is extensively drawn upon. Her first Zoharic appearance describes her in the guise for which she first became known, that of a strangler and murderer of children, and also ties together her other facets as well. This is recorded at Zohar I, 19b and reads:

> "And God said, Let there be lights . . . " (Genesis 1:14). "Lights" is written defectively, meaning that croup was created for babies. After the illumination of the first light was concealed, a shell was created for the kernal, and this shell spread and produced another shell. When she emerged and ascended and descended, and came to "the tiny countenances," and wished to join herself to them, to take shape within them, and never to leave them. But the Holy One, blessed by He, took her away from there, and brought her down below when He created Adam, in order to regulate this world. When she saw Eve, who was attached to Adam's back, and whose beauty was like that of the realms above, and when she saw her perfect image, she flew from there and wished, as at first, to join herself to "the tiny countenances." The keepers of the celestial gates did not allow her to approach. The Holy One, blessed be He, upbraided her and dispatched her to the depths of the sea, and she dwelt there until Adam and his

> wife sinned. Then the Holy One, blessed be He, brought her out of the depths of the sea, and she rules over all infants -- "the tiny countenances" of mankind -- who deserve to be punished because of the sins of their fathers. She goes to and fro in the world, and comes to the terrestrial Garden of Eden, and sees the Cherubim guarding the gates of the Garden of Eden, and she dwells there by the flaming sword, because she originated from the side of that flame. When the flame turns she flees and goes through the world, finding infants who ought to be punished, and she smiles at them and kills them. This happens when the moon is on the wane, and the light diminishes. And this is the meaning of me'orot (lights). (The Wisdom of the Zohar 540-541)

Like much of the Zohar, this passage is rather difficult to follow for one who is not familiar with Cabalistic works. A discussion of some footnotes to the passage may prove helpful. First, the seemingly odd idea that "lights" was written "defectively" in the place of "croup," stems from the fact that "me'orot," or lights, was written in such a way that it could be read as "me'erat," or curse (540, footnote 49). The identification of the "she" with Lilith is inferred because it is she who is said to asphyxiate babies with the croup (540, footnotes 50, 53). These "tiny countenances" are identified as Cherubim, and Lilith's desire to "join herself to them" is related to the idea that "the powers of 'the other side' constantly desire to assume human form" (540, footnote 54).

The passage "When she saw Eve . . . she flew from there," is elaborated on in commentary as follows: "It was Lilith's intention to associate with Adam, and have intercourse with him, but the sight of Eve's beauty caused her to flee from Adam, and so she tried once more to associated with the Cherubim" (540, footnote 56). In this passage alone, therefore, Lilith is portrayed in all her guises at once: she is a child-slaying demoness, associated with Adam, who wants to seduce him into copulation in order to create demon offspring. This represents the first unification of all the facets of the Lilith legend into one tale.

Lilith's second appearance in the Zohar is at Zohar I 148a-148b, *Sitrei Torah*. Here she is the "female of Samael," King of the Demons. She is seductive and beautiful and, after seducing men, she kills them. The passage reads:

> The secret of secrets: From the strength of the noon-flame of Isaac, from the wine lees, a naked shoot came forth, comprising together male and female, red like a lily, and they spread out on several sides, down several paths. The male is called "Samael," and his female is always included with him. Just as on the side of holiness there are male and female, so on 'the other side' there are male and female, included one with the other. The female of Samael is called 'snake,' 'a wife of harlotry,' 'the end of all flesh,' 'the end of days.' Two evil spirits are attached to one another. the male spirit is fine, the female spirit spreads out down several ways and paths, and is attached to the male spirit.
>
> She dresses herself in finery like an abominable harlot and stands at the corners of streets and highways in order to attract men. When a fool approaches her, she embraces him and kisses him, and mixes her wine lees with snake poison for him. Once he has drunk, he turns aside after her. When she sees that he has turned aside after he from the way of truth, she takes off all the finery that she had put on for the sake of this fool.

> This is the finery that she uses to seduce mankind: her hair is long, red like a lily; her face is white and pink; six pendants hang at her ears; her bed is made of Egyptian flax; all the ornaments of the East encircle her neck; her mouth is shaped like a tiny door, beautified with cosmetic; her tongue is sharp like a sword; her words smooth as oil; her lips beautiful, red as a lily, sweetened with all the sweetnesses in the world; she is dressed in purple, and attired in thirty-nine items of finery.
>
> This fool turns aside after her, and drinks from the cup of wine, and commits harlotry with her, completely enamored of her. What does she do? She leaves him asleep on the bed and ascends to the realms above, accuses him, obtains authority, and descends. The fool wakes up, thinking to sport with her as before, but she takes off her finery, and turns into a fierce warrior, facing him in a garment of flaming fire, a vision of dread, terrifying both body and soul, full of horrific eyes, a sharpened sword in his hand with drops of poison suspended and dripping from it. He kills the fool, and throws him into Gehinnom. (The Wisdom of the Zohar 538-539)

While Lilith is not explicitly named in this passage and a modern reader unfamiliar with the Zohar may need to rely on the footnote (35) for this mystery woman's identity, the description makes it clear that Lilith is the obvious reference, and anyone familiar with Cabalistic teachings -- and, therefore, with the Zohar -- would have been able to identify this "female" of Samael (the Devil) as such.

This passage is particularly important because of its association of Lilith with the snake. The footnote explains: "Samael is like the soul and Lilith like the body. Deeds are wrought by Lilith with the power of Samael" (538, footnote 36). The idea that Lilith and Samael, her "husband," are linked in such a way is a concept familiar to Cabalistic teachings. As a footnote to a different passage, it is explained that "the soul was the product of intercourse between male and female in the sefirot, so that it comprised both male and female, for Adam and Eve were originally created joined together" (539, footnote 43).

This joining together of Adam and Eve was not seen as some sort of spiritual link, as may be inferred today, but, rather, it was believed that they were actually one androgynous being. This idea, which seems to be in conflict with other facets of the creation story, is explained as follows: "The female was attached to the side of the male until after Adam named all the animals. Then God cast Adam into a deep slumber, and severed the female from Adam's side. God adorned her like a bride, and then brought the woman to Adam" (Koltuv 8). It is touched on further in the Zohar at Zohar I 34b, which states, "I have found it stated in an old book that this female was none other than the original Lilith who was with him and conceived from him" (from Koltuv 8). While this reference at Zohar I 34b definitely introduces a contradiction between whether the androgynous Adam consisted of Adam and Lilith or Adam and Eve, a reconciliation of these passages is not necessary to this study.

What *is* necessary is to notice the idea of the male and female being one. This is important in that since "the female of Samael is called 'snake'," and since Samael himself represents the Devil -- Satan -- it makes sense that the snake and Lilith would become combined in both literature and art. This can be seen in a number of artifacts,

dating from 1400 onward, where the snake that seduces Eve into eating the forbidden fruit has the face (and hair) of Lilith (see illustrations 4-12). It is highly likely, therefore, that this passage represents the origin of such a unification.

Lilith's next appearance in the Zohar recounts the story of creation with Lilith arising as the first wife of Adam. Told in Zohar III, 19a, the passage reads:

> Come and see. From the crevice of the great deep, above, there came a certain female, the spirit of all spirits, and we have already explained that her name was Lilith. And at the very beginning she existed with man. When Adam was created, and his body had been completed, a thousand spirits from the left side gathered together around the body, each one wanted to gain entry to it, but they were unable to, and in the end the Holy One, blessed be He, rebuked them. Adam therefore was lying down, a body without a spirit, and he had a green pallor, and all these spirits were hovering round him. At that moment a cloud descended and drove away all these spirits. Concerning this moment it is written 'And God said, Let the earth bring forth a living soul' (Genesis 1:24). We have already explained that the female became pregnant by the male in the soul of Adam and produced the spirit that was comprised of two sides, as was proper, so that it could be breathed into Adam. This is the meaning of 'and He breathed into his nostrils the breath [or soul] of life, and Adam became a living soul' (Genesis 2:7) - a really living soul. Whoever has doubts about this because he does not know whether it refers to the life below or the life called 'Israel,' or whether it is male or female, should notice that it does not say 'the living soul,' but 'a living soul,' without qualification, which signifies everything. When Adam arose his wife was fastened to his side, and the holy soul that was in him spread to this side and to that, and nourished both sides, because it was comprised of both. Subsequently, the Holy One, blessed be He, split Adam, and prepared his female. This is the meaning of 'And the Lord God constructed the side . . . ' (Gen. 2:20 - 'the side' we have explained before, as it is written 'the side of the tabernacle' (Exodus 26:20). 'And He brought her to Adam' (Gen. 2:22) - attired as a bride for the wedding canopy.
>
> When Lilith saw this she fled, and she is now in the cities of the sea, and she is still intent on injuring mankind. When the Holy One, blessed be He, destroys wicked Rome, and it becomes an eternal desolation, He will bring up Lilith and settle her in the ruins, because it will be desolate forever. This is the meaning of 'Lilith shall repose there, and find her place of rest' (Isaiah 34:14). (The Wisdom of the Zohar 539-540)

The idea of Adam and Eve being joined is further explained, through footnote, in this section. Footnote 48 reads: "'Side in both quotations is Hebrew *zela*. In Genesis 2:22 it is usually translated 'rib,' but the point to be made here is that Eve was created by splitting Adam and shearing off a whole side which then became Eve" (540). This helps to substantiate the idea that the female half of Adam was indeed Eve, rather than Lilith.

A final reference to Lilith is taken from Zohar III, 76b-77a. While the portion from 76b has little, if nothing, to do with Lilith, it is worth quoting if only for its reference to the sexual relationship between Eve and the snake. It reads:

After the snake had lain with Eve and cast filth upon her, she bore Cain. From here all the generations, the wicked of the world, draw their origin, and to the generation of the demons and the spirits they owe their being with all their characteristics. Therefore the spirits and the demons are half like human beings below and half like angels above. Similarly, when the other spirits were procreated by Adam, they too were of this nature, half from below and half from above. After they had been procreated by Adam, he produced from these spirits daughters who resembled in beauty both the upper and the lower worlds. Therefore it is written, "the sons of God saw the daughters of man that they were fair . . ." (Genesis 6:2), and they all went astray after them.

There was a certain male, who came into the world from the spirit on the side of Cain, and they called him Tuba-cain. And a certain female emerged with him, and human beings go astray after her, and her name is Naamah. From her other spirits and demons came forth, and they are suspended in the air, giving information to others who are below them. This Tubal-cain brought weapons of war into the world. And Naamah makes a roaring noise and cleaves to her forces, and she still survives. And her dwelling is among the breakers of the great sea, and she goes out to mock at human kind, warming herself on them in dreams with human desire, and cleaving to them. She receives this desire but no more, and she becomes pregnant through this desire and brings other kinds of demons into the world. The sons that she bears to mortal men present themselves to the females among mankind and they become pregnant by them and bear spirits.

They all go to Lilith first and she rears them. She goes out into the world in search of babies, and when she sees human babies she attaches herself to them, seeking to kill them, and to absorb the spirits of these human babies. She goes off with this spirit, but there are three holy spirits who are gathered there. They fly in front of her and take the spirit from her and present it to the Holy One, blessed be He. And there they teach the babies in His presence.

It is for this reason that the Torah warns people: "Sanctify yourselves and be holy" (Leviticus 20:7). And it is true that if a man is holy during intercourse he need not be afraid of her, for then the Holy One, blessed be He, will summon the three holy angels that we have mentioned, and they will protect the child and she cannot harm him. This is the meaning of "No evil shall befall you, and no plague shall come near your tent" (Psalm 91:10). Why? Because "He will give His angels charge over you" (Psalm 91:11). And it is written "Because he has loved me, I will deliver him" (Psalm 91:14). But if man is not holy and draws out a spirit from the side of uncleanness, she will come and mock at the child. And if she kills him she will absorb the spirit and will never be separated from it.

You might object and say that the others whom she kills, but whose spirits are taken by the three holy angels who are assembled before her, cannot have been formed from the side of uncleanness. And, if that is so, by what right did she kill them? In these cases, man has not sanctified himself, but neither did he have the intention of defiling or of becoming defiled. Therefore she has the power to control the body but not the spirit. (The Wisdom of the Zohar 542-543)

The seemingly insignificant beginning of this passage brings to light a rather odd notion: the idea that "the snake had lain with Eve" and was the father of Cain. While this would make sense in explaining Cain's wicked actions, it raises an important question: is this snake Samael, is it Lilith, or is it an androgynous assimilation of both Samael and Lilith? The footnote answers this question by explaining that "the snake that lay with Eve was Samael, and he was an angel that had fallen from the upper realms [the Devil]" (542, footnote 67). The fact that Lilith as snake is always oriented toward Eve in the art that postdates the Zohar seems to suggest, however, that -- regardless of the intention of this passage -- some believed that it was Lilith as snake who had a relationship with Eve (note especially illustration #12)

The section of this passage where Lilith is mentioned, however, does not even mention the idea that Lilith was associated with Adam. Instead, it focuses on her malevolence toward infants and her succubae traits, for it explains that if the man is not holy during intercourse, then his child will indeed be taken by Lilith when it is born.

In conclusion, Lilith appears in the work of the Zohar in all of her guises, sometimes individually, but usually all at once. More importantly, all of the passages which make reference to Lilith allow for the possibility that she is indeed all three of the myths rolled into one. It is this idea which took the firmest hold, perhaps because it offered a way to clear up the discrepancies from having various myths or perhaps because the Zohar itself became more popular than any of the preceding works which dared to mention her at length.

## *Hebrew Amuletic Tradition (circa 900-1800 CE)*

While the literary history of Lilith's early evolution ceases with the all-encompassing description offered by the Zohar, the cultural history associated with Lilith does not. Rather, there is a long and detailed history associated with the Hebrews' use of amulets, especially in child-bearing, which helped to keep the legend of Lilith alive. Says Encyclopaedia Judaica: "It was very common to protect women who were giving birth from the power of Lilith by affixing amulets over the bed or on all four walls of the room" (248).

Of the eight different types of amulets used by the Hebrews, the amulets which reference Lilith -- or explicitly bear her name and/or image -- fall into the category of Lehashim, for they are associated with incantations, spells, charms, and prayers (Pereria 61). Says Filomena Pereria, in reference to Wallis Budge's Amulets and Superstitions, "Although amulets were considered pagan objects by the rabbis, their antiquity as protective agents and the popular belief in their efficacy was such that they were unofficially adopted by Hebrew leadership" (Budge 217, Pereira 62).

Most amulets contained four main elements: the magic name "Abrakala," text from the Bible, a prayer (which would be equivalent to a pagan incantation), and a threefold Amen and Selah (Pereira 63). Interestingly, T. Schire's compilation of over 200 of the most popular "words of power" used on Jewish amulets reveals that Lilith is used 8.3% of the time (Schire 117). This is especially significant when one examines the frequency of other "words of power." God's name, for instance, occurs 15.7% of the time (only 7.4% more than Lilith's name), Bible passages 23.0%, and Angel names 30.0%.

Some contain the names of Lilith or another demon, supposedly in the belief that "the deterrent element which frightens the Evil Spirit away are the mysterious names of the Evil Spirit, which stand revealed" (Gaster 149). One amulet, for instance, includes the following statement:

These are my names, Satrina, Lilith, Abito, Amizo, Izorpo, Kokos, Odam, Ita, Podo, Eilo, Patrota, Abeko, Kea, Kali, Batna, Talto, and Partash. Whoever knows these my names and writes them down causes me to run away from the new-born child. (Gaster 149)

A fifteenth century manuscript contains the following passage, where the names of the evil spirit -- one of which is Lilitha or Lilith -- are many and it is the invocation of them that repels her. It reads:

> The saintly Mar Ebedishu, as soon as he perceived that she was a wicked and unclean spirit, bound her and cursed her and tied her up, saying, ". . . I conjure thee by Him at whom angels and man tremble, that if thou hast any other names reveal them to me, and show me, and hide it not." She said unto him, "I will reveal it unto thee, though I desire it not. I have twelve other names. Whosoever will write them and hang them upon himself, or place them in his house, his house will I not enter, nor approach his children. First Miduch, second Edilta, third Mouelta, the fourth they call Lilitha and Malvitha and the strangling-mother of children (*lit*. boys)." Thereupon the saintly Mar Ebedishu, as soon as he perceived that she was an evil and unclean spirit, bound her and cursed her and tied her up, and said unto her, ". . . If you have any other names, reveal them to me, and show me, and hid nothing from me." She replied unto him, "I will reveal it unto thee, though I desire it not. I have twelve other names. . . . My first name is Geos, second Edilta, third Lambros, fourth Martlos, fifth Yamnos, sixth Samyos, seventh Domos, eighth Dirba, ninth Apiton, tenth Pegogha, eleventh Zardvech, Lilitha, Malvitha, and the strangling-mother of children." (Gaster 151)

Interestingly, these two passages represent a sort of anomaly among the Lilith amulets and incantations, for most amulets call upon the three angels -- Snvi, Snsvi, and Smnglof -- along with the Holy Name of God for protection. As Gaster comments, "In lieu of the names of the demon, which, when known, afford protection to the person which possesses that knowledge, we find the names of the divine powers invoked which afford a much stronger protection" (152). It is the sight of their names which "terrifies her away, and protects those who invoke their aid against the attacks of the child-stealing witch" (Gaster 150).

The amulets span a long period of time, indicating that the infant-slaying characterization of Lilith remained intact in folk culture far past the time when this aspect became less prominent in literature. Indeed, many of the amulets date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the origins of these include lands such as Palestine, Persia, Morocco, Afghanistan, and Kurdistan, revealing that the legend of Lilith had by this time escaped the confines of Jewish mysticism and become a part of the larger culture. (See illustrations 13-18.)

## Chapter 2

## *Romantic Writers*

## *and the Outset of a Transformation*

The English Romantic period is typically dated from 1789 until 1832 and is said to include both German and English Writers (Abrams Glossary 153). Because the literature of this period is marked by its range and diversity, Romanticism itself is difficult to define (Abrams Norton 4). The only two Romantic writers who are known to have drawn upon the Lilith legend in their writings -- Goethe and Keats -- took rather similar approaches to the Romantic philosophy.

A primary consideration for Romantics was the favoring of innovation against traditional forms and styles. John Keats, for example, demonstrated literary innovation in his exploitation of the realm of the supernatural and the "far away and long ago," as seen in both "Lamia" and "La Belle Dame sans Merci." Above all, Romantics were concerned with "central human experiences and problems," such as the power of knowledge, the sensuality of human experience, and love (Abrams Glossary 128). Much of the writing takes the form of symbolic and meditative reflections on this all-important theme.

In an early Romantic work -- Goethe's Faust -- Lilith makes her first literary appearance in nearly 600 years. Slightly altered from earlier (more morally reprehensible) portrayals, Lilith becomes an intriguing figure of mysticism, beauty, and seduction. This characterization of Lilith is soon afterward drawn upon by the youthful Romantic, John Keats, where Lilith's sensuality and excessive beauty become prominent. No longer "immoral" in the condemned and hated fashion of pre-medieval literature, Lilith becomes prepared for the pivotal transformation which will occur in the period of the Pre- Raphaelites, specifically in the poems and art of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

## *"Walpurgis Night" Scene of Goethe's Faust, Part I (1808)*

After the writing of the Zohar, Lilith does not again emerge significantly until the publication of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1808 work, Faust Part I, nearly 600 years later. This text marks a divergence from earlier texts in that Lilith is no longer a figure of religious mythology directed at a specific audience with a shared cultural background, but, rather, she is presented to a larger and more heterogeneous audience. Whether Lilith was a well-known symbol before Faust's publication or whether she was reintroduced by Goethe in this text is disputable. In either case, however, the mention of Lilith in this nineteenth century text marks a turning point in the literary representations of this mythical figure.

Legends about Dr. Faustus began sometime after 1540 (when the real Johannes Faustus, a scholar, passed away) and, in most versions, are about a quest for forbidden knowledge. Previous to Goethe's refiguring of this tale, Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus -- in which the protagonist is damned for his pursuit of illegitimate power through knowledge -- was the most important and influential version (Mack 462). In Goethe's Faust, however, the protagonist pursues experience rather than knowledge. "His contract with Mephistopheles provides that he will die at the moment he declares himself satisfied, content to rest in the present; he stakes his life and his salvation on his capacity ever to yearn for something beyond" (Mack 462).

During the Walpurgis Night scene of Goethe's Faust, Lilith makes her sole brief appearance. Her role in the text is not fundamental; Goethe merely incorporates her briefly into the scene. The description of Lilith's identity, offered to Faust by Mephistopheles, indicates that perhaps Goethe was aware that his average reader would not understand the reference to Lilith, thus the explanation:

> FAUST.
> Who's that there?
>
> MEPHISTOPHELES.
> Take a good look.
> *Lilith*.
>
> FAUST.
> Lilith? Who is that?
>
> MEPHISTOPHELES.
> Adam's wife, his first. Beware of her.
> Her beauty's one boast is her dangerous hair.
> When Lilith winds it tight around young men
> She doesn't soon let go of them again.
> (1992 Greenberg translation, lines 4206-4211)

Thus, Goethe draws upon the ancient legends of Lilith which associate her with Adam and "ensnaring" sexuality. More importantly, however, the image of ensnaring hair serves as the identifying marker of Lilith in this passage, much as "hair" was integral to her powers in earlier texts. As this image of the hair will continue to occur throughout the nineteenth century, it is important to note its presence in this first "modern" literary mention of Lilith.

Quite ironically, after Mephistopheles offers this warning to Faust, he then encourages Faust to get up and dance with Lilith, "the pretty witch." This seeming contrast will become a familiar motif in Romantic and Pre-Raphaelite writing where Lilith is "wicked" but not necessarily damned. As a femme fatale, she will be admired and feared simultaneously. While dancing, Lilith and Faust engage in a brief conversation during which Lilith utters her only words of any substance.

> FAUST. [Dancing with the young witch]
> A lovely dream I dreamt one day
> I saw a green-leaved apple tree,
> Two apples swayed upon a stem,
> So tempting! I climbed up for them.
>
> THE PRETTY WITCH.
> Ever since the days of Eden
> Apples have been man's desire.
> How overjoyed I am to think, sir,
> Apples grow, too, in my garden.
> (1992 Greenberg translation, lines 4216- 4223)

Goethe, here, continues to elaborate on the Eden theme, thereby focusing on Lilith's identity as the first wife of Adam rather than as a child-slaying witch.

This brief mention of Lilith, therefore, is important in that it marks her debut into modern literature. Additionally, the fact that she is an unnecessary character -- at least, according to the plot -- indicates that Goethe had other reasons for including her and invoking the associations of her image. It seems to suggest a certain familiarity with the figure of Lilith (on the part of Goethe and, possible also, his anticipated audience). This text is important in that it foreshadows how Lilith will be portrayed in the writings of a later Romantic, John Keats. As will be shown in the following chapter, Goethe's use of the figure of Lilith is also important in that it is likely the primary source from which Rossetti drew when painting and writing about Lilith.

## *John Keats' "Lamia" (1819)*

What is a lamia? In the preface to Keats' poem, the Norton Anthology of English Literature, sixth edition, comments: "In ancient demonology, a 'lamia' -- pronounced la' mi a -- was a monster in woman's form who preyed on human beings" (797). The term has also meant "a witch who was supposed to suck children's blood, a sorceress, also, a kind of flatfish, a species of owl, a fabulous monster, also, a fish of prey" (OED). According to the first -- and most widely used -- definition a lamia is "a fabulous monster supposed to have the body of a woman, and to prey upon human beings and suck the blood of children. Also, a witch, she-demon" (OED).

The extreme similarity between this definition and descriptions of Lilith is far from coincidental (even the night-owl is referenced). An 1880 translation of Faust makes this comment: "The name [Lilith] . . . occurs in Isaiah (xxxiv. 14); in the Vulgate it is translated Lamia" (1880 Taylor translation, p310). The transposition of Lilith and Lamia, therefore, results from the strong connection between these two characters. Whether pulling from legends of Lamia or of Lilith, Keats' depiction of the femme fatale in this poem established a archetypal figure that would recur throughout Romantic poetry. Known simply as the femme fatale or as "la belle dame sans merci," this figure today is known as Lilith.

At least three reviewers contemporary to Keats commented on the origins of the story behind "Lamia." According to a review in The Indicator of August 2, 1820, "'Lamia' was suggested to our author by a passage in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which he has extracted at the end of it. . . . Burton's relation is itself an improvement on the account in Philostratus. The old book-fighter with melancholy thoughts is speaking of the seductions of phantasmata" (Matthews, ed., 165).

As quoted from Keats, the passage states:

> Philostratus, in his fourth book *Vita Appollonii*th a memorable instance in this kind, which I may not omit, of one Menippus Lycius, a young man twenty-five years of age, that going betwixt Cenchreas and Corinth, met such a phantasm in the habit of a fair gentlewoman, which taking him by the hand, carried him home to her house, in the suburbs of Corinth, and told him she was a Phoenician by birth, and if he would tarry with her, he should hear her sing and play, and drink such wine as never any drank, and no man should molest him; but she,

> being fair and lovely, would live and die with him, that was fair and lovely to behold. The young man, a philosopher, otherwise staid and discreet, able to moderate his passions, though not this of love, tarried with her awhile to his great content, and at last married her, to whose wedding, amongst other guests, came Apollonius; who, by some probably conjectures, found her out to be a serpent, a lamia; and that all her furniture was, like Tantalus' gold, described by Homer, no substance but mere illusions. When she saw herself descried, she wept, and desired Apollonius to be silent, but he would not be moved, and therefore she, plate, house, and all that was in it, vanished in an instant: many thousands took notice of this fact, for it was done in the midst of Greece. -- Anatomy of Melancholy. Part 3, Section 2. (quoted at Matthews, ed., 165)

Written in 1621, Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy indicates that the tales of Lamia were distinct in origin from those of Lilith. Furthermore, his source, Philostratus, dates from between 170 and 245 CE, indicating that stories about Lamia were present in ancient Greek mythology and culture. According to Grolier Encyclopedia, the Greek myth of Lamia is as follows:

> Lamia was a beautiful woman whose children were taken away in jealousy by Hera because Zeus had loved her. In revenge, Lamia began to steal and kill the children of others. She became a hideous creature. Because Hera had condemned her to sleeplessness, Zeus gave Lamia the ability to remove her own eyes at will in order to sleep. In later legend the lamia was a vampire that seduced young men; this version of the story inspired the poem Lamia (1820) by John Keats.

As indicated here, the myth of Lamia is also associated with a similar myth, that of "the lamia" or the "lamiae."

According to Bell's Women of Classical Mythology, the Greek myth of the Lamiae is as follows:

> Lamiae, obviously related to the persona of Lamia, the fearful child-snatcher, were handsome ghostly women who by various sensuous means lured young men to their beds. There they enjoyed the fresh, youthful energy of their victims, then drank their blood and ate their flesh. (271)

So although Lamia's mythological origins are quite different from those of Lilith, at some unidentified point ("in later legend"), Lamia's identity was merged with that of the Lamiae and she was, therefore, endowed with characteristics strikingly similar to those of Lilith. This may have occurred prior to the writing of the Vulgate in 5th century CE. Regardless, it is only with Keats' poem that the two tales become enmeshed, not to ever become completely separated again.

Although what happened between the fifth century and Keats' poem is not clear, it is obvious that the legends of Lamia and Lilith were indeed distinct by the time of Goethe's writing of Faust, Part Two in 1832. Here, Goethe briefly introduces the Lamiae. Taylor's 1871 translation states: "They are the Lamiae, wenches vile, / With brazen brows and lips that smile" (II.II.iii.113). Having introduced Lilith earlier (in Faust, Part One) as a separate and distinct female creature, it is unlikely that Goethe was making a purposeful connection between Lilith and the Lamiae. Neither the passage

itself nor its location in the tale (a totally different volume of the story) make a connection between the two classes of creatures.

With the writing of Keats' "Lamia" poem in 1819, however, a connection becomes forged. Though the title character is never referred to as Lilith, the similarities between these two figures are too prominent to be overlooked. Both a female enchantress and a she-demon of sorts, Lamia is the archetypal Romantic representation of Lilith, the femme fatale. While a mysterious, possibly evil past is alluded to in the poem, Lamia is never branded as "evil" or "immoral." Keats paints her character to be one of a genuine lover trapped in unfortunate circumstances, and the reader is invited to feel her pain. This invites a beginning of transformation for Lilith, for while Lamia/Lilith is still identified with wickedness, these negative aspects are overlooked and redefined in such a way as to make them unimportant.

As the poem begins, Lamia is trapped in the body of a serpent. Though Keats does not say exactly how she became a snake, he indicates that she indeed had a previous human history/existence. In speaking to Hermes, Lamia states: "I was a woman, let me have once more / A woman's shape, and charming as before. / I love a youth of Corinth - O the bliss! / Give me my woman's form, and place me where he is" (I.117-120). This identifies Lamia with the Greek story of Lamia while also indicating why she wishes to reclaim a human body.

Thus, the unacknowledged, mysterious, and "curious" past of Lamia is only briefly remarked upon (Matthews, ed., 185). If one considers that this poem melds together Lilith and Lamia, then this mysterious past would likely be Lilith's life as the first wife of Adam. This view is supported by Keats' introduction of Lamia at lines 55-56 where he states: "She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf, / Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self" (I.55-56). All three of these qualities seem to allude to the myth of Lilith from ancient Babylonian sources.

A "penanced lady elf," for instances, refers to punishment, presumably Lilith's punishment from God. The phrase "demon's mistress" makes direct reference to Lilith as the Devil's wife, as in Zohar I 148a-148b, which states: "the female of Samael [the Devil] is called 'snake'". Finally, Lamia is described as "the demon's self," also referring to Zohar I 148a- 148b where Samael and Lilith are described as the two halves of evil. Accordingly, therefore, Lilith/Lamia would be "the demon's self."

Similarly, Keats uses the phrase "full born beauty" to describe Lamia, indicating that she was born "full," not of Adam (I.172). Keats emphasizes this idea later when Lycius reflects on his love for Lamia. He states:

> There is not such a treat among them all,
> Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,
> As a real woman, lineal indeed
> From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed.
> (I.330-333, emphasis added)

The irony is that Lycius, unlike the reader, does not yet know his love is not "a real woman." Not "a real woman," as Lycius suspects, Lamia is neither from Pyrrha's pebbles or Adam's seed, much as Lilith was said to have been created separate from

Adam. She is, rather, "a rich orphan," for she no longer has a father (God) but is "rich" in her beauty and her selfhood, nonetheless (Matthews, ed., 167). Thus, the story Lamia tells Lycius of being a mortal woman who is orphaned yet wealthy is symbolically true.

"Lamia" is also filled with Edenic symbolism. The story of Lamia and Lycius, for example, is prefaced by the tale of a beautiful Nymph whom Hermes wishes to see. Lamia has acted like a goddess over her, rending her invisible to the "unlovely eyes" of preying men (I.102). In exchange for a woman's body, Lamia agrees to make the Nymph visible to him. Breathing upon Hermes brow, she gives him sight, an act which parallels the breathing of life into Adam by God.

The conditions by which the Nymph remains invisible are also peculiarly reminiscent of the Lilith legend. Lamia explains: "Her hair in weïrd syrops, that would keep / Her loveliness invisible, yet free / To wander as she loves, in liberty" (I.106-108). Just as Lilith's hair held power for her in the Testament of Solomon (c.f., Chapter One, part four), it is through this "weïrd" or magical arrangement of the hair that the Nymph is made powerful.

A similar vital connection is in the power of names within each legend. Recall that Lilith's ability to flee from Adam and his oppression came from uttering God's holy name. Later, it was said that only by placing the names of the three angels -- Snvi, Snsvi, and Smnglof - - over one's bed could a mother be protected from Lilith during childbirth. In Keats' poem, names are just as potent. After some time with his lover, Lycius questions Lamia about her name. He states:

> Sure some sweet name thou has, though, by my truth,
> I have not ask'd it, ever thinking thee
> Not mortal, but of heavenly progeny,
> As still I do. Hast any mortal name,
> Fit appellation for this dazzling frame? (II.85-89)

Lamia craftily dodges this question. At some point, however, Lamia reveals her name to Lycius, for at II.254 Lycius uses it in addressing her.

Yet the power behind her name had not diminished. When Apollonius, the philosopher, enters and addresses her by name -- "Lamia!" -- her beauty diminishes and she sits frozen, a "deadly white" (II.261, 269, 276). Lamia grows increasingly weak as Apollonius continues his speech to Lycius until, finally, he names her "a serpent" and she dies (II.305). The naming of Lamia results not only in her death but in that of Lycius.

"Lamia" also introduces the dual sexual nature of Lilith: she is both a virgin and a woman experienced in the ways of love. The paradox in her sexuality is here first introduced with the lines: "A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore / Of love deep learned to the red heart's core" (I.189-190). Such a contradiction was also present in the founding texts, some of which claimed that Lilith both gave birth to hundreds of children a day and murdered hundreds of others.

While Lamia is called "a virgin," her various excesses are continually drawn upon, painting a highly sensuous portrait of this once child-slaying succubus of the night.

Perhaps the most important variation on the Lilith theme introduced by Keats was the association of Lilith with excess. Her words are spoken as if "through bubbling honey," her song is "too sweet," and she herself is described as "bitter-sweet" (I.64, 299, 59). This excess does not go unnoticed by Lycius who is driven to profess that Lamia's very presence invokes "a hundred thirsts" (I.285). Lycius knows from the beginning that he will die without her (I.260), and that her memory alone is powerful enough to kill (I.269-270).

Lamia's physical beauty is also excessive. Men are driven to weeping at the fairness of her eyes. Even nature is affected by this beauty, for it was said that while a serpent, the grass withered at the sweetness and virulence of Lamia's foam (I.148,149). When Lamia comes to be with Lycius, their union is excessive and powerful. Love itself grows jealous (II.12). And when Lamia is identified and betrayed by Apollonius, it is not only she who dies but Lycius also.

While this characterization of Lamia bears many similarities to that of Lilith, there are some aspects, such as the child-slaying witchery, which have been purposely erased, as would be expected in a Romantic portrayal. While she continues to be a seductress, her intentions are painted as true, not immoral. As stated in the Norton introduction, "Lamia is an enchantress, a liar, and a calculating expert in *amour*; but she apparently intends no harm, is genuinely in love, and is very beautiful" (797).

While Goethe simply deleted the child-slaying aspect, Keats altogether rewrites Lilith's identity. Keats, therefore, rids Lamia -- and, by extension, Lilith -- of all aspects that would connect her to gross immorality. Even the snakes' form which Lamia holds at the outset -- associated with evil for almost all time -- is shed in the body of the poem. From that evil evolves a sensuous, beautiful woman. Whether or not Keats intended to make a connection between Lamia and Lilith, the connection was made, and it was elaborated upon by later writers.

## *John Keats' "La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad" (1820)*

Keats' later poem, "La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad," carries forward the theme of "Lamia." Much shorter than "Lamia," "La Belle" does not tell a whole story, but, rather, sets up a scene: a knight is "alone and palely loitering" and he explains why. In his answer, the reader learns how he came to his state of anguish. The cause, as the title indicates, is a woman. Left nameless, La Belle Dame sans Merci stands for more than one woman; rather, she provides a warning about all women in general.

Without a name, however, La Belle can also be interpreted as a title for the figure of Lilith. Keats makes this connection himself in Lamia where he describes Lamia/Lilith as "the cruel lady, without any show / of sorrow," a phrase almost identical to the translation of this poem's title "The Lovely Lady without Pity" (I.290,291, Norton 787). The aspects of this woman include many of those exhibited in earlier representations of Lilith, including the poem "Lamia."

"La Belle" adopts the form of a folk ballad, wherein the first three stanzas are addressed to the knight by an anonymous narrator and the following stanzas comprise his reply (Norton 787). The scene established in the first three lines cues the reader that something is askew, for not only is the knight in a state of pale weakness, but nature is

also dying. The fading rose on the knight's cheek parallels the withering sedge and other wintering natural objects. Since a knight is generally held to be a symbol of power and courage, the reader is alerted that something or someone quite powerful must be at work here.

That powerful someone turns out to be none other than "La Belle." After meeting with the knight, La Belle allows him to temporarily make her his object of affection. Quite coyly, she returns this affection with her looks of love and "sweet moan[s]" (19, 20). The consequences for the knight are disastrous. Caught in the snare of her beauty and wiles, the knight is blinded to everything other than La Belle.

When she takes him back to her "elfin grot," La Belle puts on a show of weakness -- "there she wept, and sigh'd full sore" -- which only makes the knight more enthralled (30). As soon as he feels that he again is the one in power -- he has just stopped her weeping with "kisses four" -- La Belle lulls him into to a sleep from which he will soon awake to find that she is gone, forever (32). Completely devastated by the loss of his "love," the knight is left to wander the "cold hill's side," alone, for the rest of his life (44).

As the figure of power in this poem, La Belle destroys more men than just the knight. These other men are seen in the brief dream the knight has before awakening to his loneliness, and they include kings, princes, and warriors, all men of power and all plural, indicating their large number. That La Belle could ruin the most powerful of men indicates that she is supernatural. Her power is one that surpasses the boundaries of death, for the pale kings, princes and warriors continue to be tortured by the memory of her after their death -- their "starv'd lips" crave her kiss and her love (41).

The poem, therefore, serves as a warning against the ultimate love. Like many of Keats' poems, including perhaps his most well known -- "Ode on a Grecian Urn" -- "La Belle" sits in the moment when conflict is crystallized. It reminds the reader that once one experiences quintessential love, all other experiences pale in comparison, and it asks the question, "Is it worth it?" The "death" of the knight and his powerful male companions, along with the desolation of nature, point directly to Keats' answer: No. For Keats, the sustained anticipation of an event is better than experiencing the event itself. Thus, "La Belle" can be read as advice from Keats to all (gender-specific) man-kind: the ultimate experience of love is not worth experiencing, for once one touches and completes that experience, there is nothing left but desolation and death.

This theme is remarkably similar to the theme implicit in many stories of Lilith. Recall, for instance, the text of a Nippur Bowl (illustration #2) as translated by Patai. In part, it read: "The evil Lilith, who causes the hearts of men to go astray and appears in the dream of the night and in the vision of the day. . . " (Patai 229, c.f. Chapter 1, section 6). The theme of "Lamia" was also quite similar, for it was Lycius' desire to hold onto the quintessential experience of love with Lamia (by marrying her) that set off the events which lead to his demise. Therefore, "La Belle" can be read as one of many poems which calls upon the ideology of "sustained anticipation" to show how the love of a woman as quintessentially "perfect" and beautiful as Lilith, Lamia, or the mysterious femme fatale known only as "La Belle" will always lead to one's destruction and death.

## *Romantic Writers*

## *and the Outset of a Transformation*

The English Romantic period is typically dated from 1789 until 1832 and is said to include both German and English Writers (Abrams Glossary 153). Because the literature of this period is marked by its range and diversity, Romanticism itself is difficult to define (Abrams Norton 4). The only two Romantic writers who are known to have drawn upon the Lilith legend in their writings -- Goethe and Keats -- took rather similar approaches to the Romantic philosophy.

A primary consideration for Romantics was the favoring of innovation against traditional forms and styles. John Keats, for example, demonstrated literary innovation in his exploitation of the realm of the supernatural and the "far away and long ago," as seen in both "Lamia" and "La Belle Dame sans Merci." Above all, Romantics were concerned with "central human experiences and problems," such as the power of knowledge, the sensuality of human experience, and love (Abrams Glossary 128). Much of the writing takes the form of symbolic and meditative reflections on this all-important theme.

In an early Romantic work -- Goethe's Faust -- Lilith makes her first literary appearance in nearly 600 years. Slightly altered from earlier (more morally reprehensible) portrayals, Lilith becomes an intriguing figure of mysticism, beauty, and seduction. This characterization of Lilith is soon afterward drawn upon by the youthful Romantic, John Keats, where Lilith's sensuality and excessive beauty become prominent. No longer "immoral" in the condemned and hated fashion of pre-medieval literature, Lilith becomes prepared for the pivotal transformation which will occur in the period of the Pre- Raphaelites, specifically in the poems and art of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

# Chapter 3

## *Identifying a Transformation*
## *Images of Lilith in the Poetry and Art of*
## *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*

After Keats' poem "La Belle Dame sans Merci," there exists a gap of over forty years in which there are no known representations of Lilith. With the emergence of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848, however, came a renewed interest in this mythical figure. This renewed interest was a direct result of Goethe and Keats' work on this subject and, in many cases, represents an elaboration upon, or remark toward, their work. While it was the influence of Goethe and Keats that led to the adoption of Lilith as a theme of the Pre- Raphaelite Brotherhood, it has been the wide-spread recognition of the PRB (whether positive or negative in viewpoint) that led to her adoption by writers and artists after the disintegration of the Brotherhood.

In the poetry and art of this era, Lilith's transformation is solidified as she becomes the eternal femme fatale, a woman whose beauty is just as important -- perhaps more so -- as her vice. Specifically, the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti have been pointed to by numerous scholars as representing the moment of transformation for this mythical

figure. Rossetti has been described as "a dramatic imagist, a seeker of meaning, a mythmaker" (Gardner, 57). It is the depiction of him as a "mythmaker" which will be of concern here. Did Rossetti revision the image of Lilith in such a way as to make her myth anew? Were his artistic and poetic portrayals of her the impetus for current feminist reclamations of this mythical figure? These questions, as well as a survey of Rossetti's uses of Lilith, will be considered in this chapter.

## *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Its Influences*

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood held its initial meeting in John Everett Millais' studio in early September 1848 (Hilton 33). Here, seven young and talented men gathered to solidify their notions of art and form a "secret" society to be known as the PRB. The primary figures of the Brotherhood where William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and the "founder" of the movement, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Four others joined them during that September day, mostly personal friends of Rossetti, including James Collinson, William Michael Rossetti, Frederic George Stephens, and Thomas Woolner (Fleming 80).

At this inaugural meeting, Rossetti brought forth a document, forged by himself and Hunt, which would be signed by all seven members. This document -- known as the "List of Immortals" -- had the following one-sentence preamble:

> We, the undersigned, declare that the following list of Immortals constitutes the whole of our Creed, and there exists no other Immortality than what is centered in their names and in the names of their contemporaries, in whom this list is reflected. (Fleming 79)

While this preamble purports to add some direction and cohesion to the tenets of Pre-Raphaelitism, the variety of the list which followed reveals just how vague their original understanding of the movement was.

The List of Immortals was divided into five categories, with Jesus Christ alone at the apex -- an insistence from Hunt which won out over Rossetti's desire to place Shakespeare in this position (Fleming 79). The second category consisted only of Shakespeare and the Author of Job. It is the third category, however, which is most interesting to this study, for it included twelve men, two of whom were Goethe and Keats.

Affixing their names to this document indicated that these seven men desired to imitate what they perceived as greatness in these artists. Since it would be impossible to imitate art with which one is not familiar, it can safely be assumed that all those present were at least familiar with the artists represented on this list. Furthermore, it is a certainty that at least Rossetti was familiar with these writers, especially Goethe and Keats, whom he himself placed on the List of Immortals.

Goethe's influence on the PRB is evidenced in the adaptation of his figures, specifically Gretchen, in Pre-Raphaelite art. In her book Pre-Raphaelite Women, Jan Marsh indicates that "a perennially popular figure was Margaret or Gretchen, the seduced woman in Goethe's *Faust*" (64). Rossetti himself completed a number of pen drawings

of Gretchen, including the 1848 ink drawing entitled "Gretchen and Mephistopheles in Church" (Radford ix, Marsh 64).

The fact that Rossetti was influenced by Goethe is also evident in conjunction with his work on the painting "Lady Lilith" (to be discussed in the next section). In 1866, for example, William Rossetti made Dante Gabriel Rossetti a transcript of the quatrain in Faust I which begins "Nimm dich in Acht" (Faust I, 3764). Rossetti translated it as follows:

> Hold thou thy heart against her shining hair,
> If, by thy fate, she spread it once for thee;
> For, when she nets a young man in her snare,
> So twines she him he never may be free. (Baum 186)

Rossetti used this quote as an "epigraph" to his painting and incorporated much of its imagery into his poem "Lilith," later renamed "Body's Beauty." Evidence indicates that Rossetti's acquaintance with the figure of Lilith was "based chiefly upon Goethe's reference to her in the Walpurgisnacht," the scene from which this quote was taken (Baum 186).

Given Goethe's fame, it is hardly surprising that he should have had such an influence upon the PRB. Somewhat more surprising is Keats' influence on this group of artists. As Timothy Hilton states in his book on the Pre-Raphaelites, "Archetypally the poet for Romantic young men, [Keats] at that date [was] still largely unknown" (28). Keats was, however, a personal favorite of Rossetti who was familiar with much -- if not all -- of his work.

Some have even indicated that the name "Pre-Raphaelite" was selected by Rossetti because of a passage he read in Lord Houghton's "Life and Letters of Keats." Here, Keats was attributed with stating that the first and second schools of Italian painting had surpassed "even Raphael himself" (Hilton 33).

Keats' influence on Rossetti was so great that some have labeled him "Rossetti's master," indicating that Rossetti owed much of his English style to Keats (Bloom 2). Although few critics have made the connection explicit, it is obvious that Rossetti had in mind poems of Keats, such as "Lamia" and "La Belle Dame sans Merci," when he painted and wrote about Lilith. Certainly, many of his images of Lilith resemble directly Keats' portrayal of Lamia/Lilith in these poems.

While Lilith was used as an image by other artists and writers who carried on the "Pre-Raphaelite" tradition, it is interesting to note that no other member of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood explicitly employed imagery of Lilith. When referring to Pre-Raphaelite representations of Lilith, therefore, this paper is referring specifically to Rossetti's representations. This is partially because Rossetti, the "founder" of the movement, remained the strongest force in the PRB. This was to such an extent that most of the idiosyncrasies of Pre-Raphaelitism which are identifiable today are, pre-eminently, idiosyncrasies of Rossetti (Welland 38)

## *Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting "Lady Lilith" (1863: watercolor, 1864-1868?: oil)*

In 1863, Dante Gabriel Rossetti began painting his first version of "Lady Lilith," a picture which he expected would be his "best picture hitherto" (Rossetti, W.M., ed. 188). He referred to this painting as the "Toilette picture" in his letters to his mother, highlighting its emphasis on adornment and the central figure's location within an intimate boudoir-like setting (Rossetti, W.M. 188; Radford, xiii). Although the picture is certainly of Lilith, it is interesting to note that he entitled it "Lady Lilith," forcing the audience to focus on her sensuality and womanhood from the outset. (See illustration #19)

"Lady Lilith" is one of the many "mirror pictures" completed by Rossetti during this period. Others include "Fazio's Mistress," "Woman Combing Her Hair," and "Morning Music," all paintings which focus on a central female figure rapt in contemplation of her own beauty. According to J. B. Bullen, these mirror works of Rossetti "opened the way for a whole series of paintings in the 1860s of narcissistic female figures, each with potentially fatal characteristics" (123). Dijkstra noted the extent of this fad, stating that "there is scarcely a figure painter [of this period] who did not undertake to paint 'woman before the mirror'" (139). Despite the prevalence of this theme, "Lady Lilith" remains one of the first and certainly also "the epitome" of this series (Bullen 134).

A brief glance at the background images of this painting gives the illusion that Lilith is seated in the interior space of her boudoir. In actuality, however, the setting is an "ambiguous realm" of "pure artifice" (Bullen 136). Although a chair, mirror, and other interior objects are located in the background, this "room" is simultaneously teaming with flowers. Cold, white roses -- symbols of sterile passion -- envelop the top right of the painting and spread out across the line of Lilith's hair. Poppies -- symbols of death -- are also present. The space is at once realistic and mythic. As both an interior boudoir space and a sheltered exterior alcove, this background space of "Lady Lilith" graphically illustrates the double-meaning behind "bower" which Rossetti will explore in his poem "Eden Bower."

Another mysterious object in the painting is the magical mirror in the top left. This mirror shows the reflection of the candles before it, indicating that it is indeed a mirror and not a window into some other world. Yet, the majority of the reflection reveals a magical woodland landscape. In his essay on "The Mirror's Secret," Hillis Miller indicates that this image speaks to the "persistent castrating nightmares" symbolized in the poem "The Orchard Pit" (Miller 334). There is much indication, as will be considered in a following section, that "The Orchard Pit" indeed draws on the Lilith theme, echoing many of the themes present in "Eden Bower" (Bullen 125). Seeing this woodland reflection as a view into the castrating world of "The Orchard Pit," therefore, successfully links together this painting and various Rossetti poems which explore the theme of Lilith.

Lilith's own appearance in this painting establishes her as "the embodiment of carnal loveliness" (Waugh 134). The painting was thus described by H.C. Marillier:

> A beautiful woman, splendidly and voluptuously formed, is leaning back on a couch combing her long fair hair, while with cold dispassionateness she surveys

> her features in a hand mirror. . . She herself was a serpent first, and knows the gift of fascination. Bowered in roses, robed in white flowing draperies that slip and reveal the swelling contour of her bust and shoulders, no painter has ever captured like this the elemental power of carnal loveliness. (Marillier 133)

As Marillier implies, what is perhaps most visually striking about the picture is Lilith's clothing, "clothes that look as if they are soon to be removed" (Marsh, 1985, 235). Her body, barely able to be contained by the clothing, invites the viewer to read Lilith as sensual and beautiful.

It is not only the nearly removed nature of Lilith's attire that draws attention to her image as a sexualized being. What is *absent* from the picture is just as important. According to Bullen, Lilith's sexual availability is more prominently signalled by "the absence of corsetry, tight-lacing, and other marks of bourgeois moral rectitude" (141). Bullen cites an anonymous source on the subject, saying that the corset is "an ever-present monitor individually bidding its wearer to exercise self-restraint: it is evidence of a well- disciplined mind and well-regulated feelings" (Bullen 142). Her hair loose and corset absent, this Lilith is assuredly a symbol of open sexuality.

In light of this, it may seem surprising that when scholars point to Rossetti as the primary transformer of Lilith's image, they often use this picture as evidence. Haag and Sölle, for example, state: "*Lady Lilith*, showing a woman with magnificent hair, is a new interpretation of pre-Biblical Lilith. For Rossetti, Lilith is not an evil demon, but essential woman, combining worldly and divine love" (30).

Rossetti himself held the view that this representation was divergent from earlier portrayals of Lilith. In 1870, he wrote about this picture:

> Lady [Lilith] . . . represents a *Modern Lilith* combing out her abundant golden hair and gazing on herself in the glass with that self-absorption by whose strange fascination such natures draw others within their own circle. (Rossetti, W. M. ii.850, D.G. Rossetti's emphasis)

As indicated in this description, Rossetti was aware that this picture presented a "Modern Lilith," one who differed from the pre-Biblical Lilith of Jewish lore, and he apparently designed it to do just so.

In The Pre-Raphaelite Body, J. B. Bullen elaborated on the meaning of this transformation, stating:

> The threat posed by Lilith in the literary and mythological accounts is translated by Rossetti into this act of self-contemplation [her gaze into the mirror], and that danger is given an added frission by the contemporaneity of the figure, a "Modern Lilith." She has stepped out of the past and into the nineteenth century. She is to be found in the modern upper-class Victorian boudoir or bedroom, and is as potent an influence over the nineteenth- century male mind as she was over the ancient male mind. (136)

Lilith's role, therefore, is just as powerful as it ever was. The result of this portrayal is to bring her from the mythical past into what was, for Rossetti, a realistic present.

One of the most essential elements of this painting is Lilith's seductive beauty, extolled especially by the "erotic entrapment" of her beautiful hair (Howard 204, Haag and Sölle 30). It is this object which plays the primary role in the picture, occupying the center space and being held out by Lilith to show its full extent and beauty. This focus on the hair harkens back to earlier portrayals of Lilith, including the hair imagery of Goethe that so highly influenced Rossetti, and foreshadows the emphasis which Rossetti will place on Lilith's "castrating, cutting" golden hair in his poem entitled "Lilith" (Bullen 130).

The metaphor of women's hair has always been potent, but, during the Victorian period, this was especially so. In her article on "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," Elizabeth G. Gitter states:

> The more abundant the hair, the more potent the sexual invitation implied in its display. For folk, literary and psychoanalytic traditions agree that the luxuriance of the hair is an index of vigorous sexuality, even of wantonness. (938)

Thus, Lilith's excessive hair indicates an excess of sexuality. The manner in which she holds it out, purportedly to comb it, serves to openly display her sexuality on the canvas. It is the first and last impression that a viewer will receive.

As noted earlier, Goethe's influence on this painting is direct. Rossetti's 1868 watercolor of "Lady Lilith" (the date is contested) is often accompanied by the epigraph which Rossetti translated in 1866 (see previous section). An alternate translation of that passage further illuminates the correlation between this painting and Goethe's portrayal of Lilith. Mephistopheles' words to Faust read:

> 'This the first wife of the first man. Adam's first wife, Lilith. Beware, beware of her bright hair. . . Many a young man she beguileth, smiles winningly on youthful face, But woe to him whom she embraces! (Faust I, 4208-4211, as quoted in Haag and Sölle).

This message of "woe" seems to emanate from Rossetti's picture, for the beautiful Lady Lilith does not appear to be inviting the audience or any other to watch her.

Instead, she holds a look of self satisfaction. Although not directly recognized by earlier critics, this aspect gives ample opportunity for feminist interpretation. F. G. Stephens' 1984 article recognized some of these aspects which held out promise, stating:

> She appears in the ardent langour of triumphant luxury and beauty. . . . The haughty luxuriousness of the beautiful modern witch's face, the tale of cold soul amid its charms, does not belie . . . the fires of a voluptuous physique. (68)

What makes this representation of Lilith different from earlier portrayals, therefore, is that Lilith's overwhelming beauty, not her moral culpability, is the primary focus.

Expounding on the "voluptuous self applause" and "haughty luxuriousness" indicated in Lilith's gaze, Jane Ussher, in her 1997 book Fantasies of Femininity: Reframing the Boundaries of Sex, states:

> Lady Lilith stands as a classic example of the artistic representation of this passionate, fearful woman. . . It is a painting of a beautiful, almost haughty woman whose hand toys with her luxurious long hair as she gazes unsmiling at her own reflection in a mirror. She is engaged and satisfied with herself, not with any male voyeur. She is sexual, dangerously seductive, and does not give the appearance of an acquiescent femininity which will be easily satisfied. . . Fear of and desire for 'woman' is incarnated in one painting. She is both sexual and selfish, gazing upon herself with satisfaction, symbolizing her rejection of 'man.' (96, emphasis added)

This relatively recent criticism points clearly to Rossetti's role in opening the mythical figure of Lilith to feminist interpretation. Resisting male voyeurism, she delights in the pleasure of looking at herself.

Much like Keats' La Belle, Lilith has a "beauty without tenderness or sympathy for others" (Marillier 133). She does not look back at the spectator to engage in any sympathetic eye- contact, but looks only at herself. Her passive self-absorption and simultaneous lack of submissive acceptance of a male voyeur results in a threat to masculinity. This passive threat is markedly different from the active and aggressive threat posed by Lilith the succubus or Lilith the child-slaying witch, marking a transformation from these earlier images of Lilith as actively aggressive and unjustifiably evil.

This self-involvement likewise symbolizes a rejection of "man," a rejection of the roles of "wife" and "submissive, sexualized other" which are so often given to women. It is for this reason -- not any inherent wickedness -- that Lilith is labeled a "witch." Ussher explains, "She is a witch who is cruel and castrating, *because* she is powerful and strong" (96, emphasis added). Readers of Rossetti will note that it is this story -- the story of the powerful and strong woman -- which is further drawn upon in the poem "Lilith," written to accompany this painting.

Finally, "Lady Lilith" serves to problematize the nature of masculine desire by raising questions about the relationship between subject and object and threatening the identity of the male subject. Although some recent feminist criticism has stressed the absence of agency in Rossetti's female figures, it has failed to recognize the degree to which these figures, especially Lilith, are empowered (Anderson 151, Pollock 113, quoted in Bullen 147). Bullen states:

> Within that discourse on masculinity the female is envisaged as significantly, if damagingly, empowered. . . . *Lady Lilith*'s self-contained indifference offers an unanswerable challenge to the male psyche. (148)

By resisting compliance with the male gaze, Lilith, therefore, threatens the identity of the male voyeur.

Representing "beauty gazing at itself," Lilith arouses desire in men but also threatens them with her power (Bullen 148). She is an unobtainable beauty filled with power. And while this combination makes her irresistible, it also leads to the capture, castration, and death of any male who enters her presence. In "Lilith," Rossetti makes this story even more explicit.

## *Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Poem "Lilith," Later Published as "Body's Beauty" (1868)*

First published in 1868 in Swinburne's pamphlet-review, "Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition," the sonnet entitled "Lilith" was written to accompany the painting "Lady Lilith." The poem and picture appeared alongside Rossetti's painting "Sibylla Palmifera" and the sonnet "Soul's Beauty," which was written for it. In 1870, both of these poems were published among the "Sonnets for Pictures" section of Rossetti's Poems.

In 1881, however, "it occurred to Rossetti to contrast the two as representatives of fleshly and spiritual beauty," and thus he transferred them to "The House of Life" (Baum 181). The Lilith sonnet was then renamed "Body's Beauty" in order to highlight the contrast between it and "Soul's Beauty," and the two were placed sequentially in "The House of Life" (sonnets number 77 and 78). Because Rossetti originally named the sonnet "Lilith" and only changed the name to highlight the contrast between it and "Soul's Beauty," this study will refer to it by its original name. "Lilith" reads as follows:

> Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told
> (The witch he loved before the gift of Eve,)
> That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,
> And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
> And still she sits, young while the earth is old,
> And, subtly of herself contemplative,
> Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
> Till heart and body and life are in its hold.
>
> The rose and poppy are her flower; for where
> I s he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
> And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?
> Lo! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
> Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent
> And round his heart one strangling golden hair. (Collected Works, 216).

Much like "Lady Lilith," "Lilith" celebrates the pleasures of physicality. As an enchantress, she "draws men to watch the bright web she can weave," but she does not invite them to be mere voyeurs of her charms (line 7). Instead, she invites them to her and then ensnares them in her "web" of physical beauty, ultimately causing their death (line 8).

"Subtly of herself contemplative," a phrase echoing Pater's famous description of the "Mona Lisa," highlights Lilith's attitude of "voluptuous self applause," an attitude which was so visually apparent in Rossetti's painting (Baum 185). As in her picture, Lilith is placed among the rose and poppy, symbolizing sterile love and sleep/death, images which add to her representation as an attractive and desirable, yet deadly, woman.

Lilith's golden hair echoes the "bright" hair of which Goethe wrote in Faust and Rossetti painted in "Lady Lilith." Rossetti thus borrows the image of ensnaring and strangling hair directly from Goethe. Although it is used as an instrument of death in the end, its physical beauty is what Rossetti first draws attention to, describing it as "the first gold"

(line 4). Yet it is the "spell" cast by her fetishized hair which eventually penetrates, emasculates, and kills the "youth" of this poem (line 13, Bullen 139).

The Lilith portrayed in this sonnet is undoubtedly the first wife of Adam, for Rossetti tells this to his readers outright, setting this knowledge off in quotes as if to inform an audience whom he did not think would be familiar with the legend. Her existence as the first wife is highlighted in the description of her hair as "the first gold" and in the revelation that she could deceive even before the snake, representing Satan (or possibly Lilith herself) during the Fall.

The emphasis on the snake in this poem is severe. Not only is it introduced early in the sonnet, but his/her image is invoked again through the alliteration present in lines 10-11. The pronouns "his" and "her" can be used interchangeably here because the poem does not make clear whether Rossetti intends for the snake and Lilith to be seen as one or as separate entities. In either case, the "soft-shed kisses" of Lilith do seem to draw upon Keats' image of Lamia, the snake-woman. And while the cause of the male character's death is Lilith's "one strangling golden hair," this hair can also be seen as a metaphor for the coiling body of a snake.

The extensive snake imagery in the poem can also be read as an indication of Lilith's powerful sexuality, as Jan Marsh indicated when she stated, "the sexual qualities of her nature are barely concealed beneath the insistent Freudian imagery" (Sisterhood, 235). This reading of the snake imagery certainly continues the theme of sexuality present in Rossetti's other portrayals of Lilith, while not prohibiting the snake from being read simultaneously as an actual character.

In light of the fact that this poem was first published only one year prior to "Eden Bower," one might expect that Rossetti would have told similar versions of the Lilith legend in these two poems. Under this assumption, one could easily make the case that "Lilith" portrays Lilith as becoming incarnated in the snake in order to cause Adam's demise, much as is told in the ballad of "Eden Bower." Early critics recognized this possibility, stating: "Lilith's *snake-like form* seems to coil in every line of the sonnet, and leaves one with almost a feeling of suffocation at the imagery of the last line" (Boas 105, emphasis added).

This reading is possible because of the unidentified "youth" in line 12, a character that can be read as Adam. If seen as Adam, the second stanza of this sonnet seems to play out the demise of Adam, at Lilith's hand. Lines 10 and 11, therefore, would indicate that Lilith is incarnated in the body of the snake. Line 12 would then regress to the past tense and explain how "that youth's eyes burned at thine," indicating the simultaneous lust and anger Adam felt when Lilith refused to lie beneath him. Then, Lilith would have sent her "spell" through him, possibly referring to the way in which she became incarnated as the snake in order to deceive Adam and Eve, causing their Fall. Finally, Adam is left with "his straight neck bent," defeated, lifeless, dead.

Much like Keats' "La Belle Dame sans Merci," "Lilith" can be read as a warning for men against all womankind. It warns that any woman so beautiful as Lilith, so self-contented and powerful, will cause nothing other than a man's death. The image of castration in line 13 -- she "left his straight neck bent" -- results directly from her "spell," her excessive beauty, her voluptuous body, her long, flowing hair. Thus, while

the experience of being with Lilith, of loving her physically, may surpass any other mortal experience -- much like the experience of loving the femme fatale of "La Belle" -- it will ultimately result in symbolic castration through the loss of power or, even, literal death.

## *Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Ballad "Eden Bower" (1869)*

The themes and ideas present in "Lilith" are made much more explicit in Rossetti's 1869 work "Eden Bower." This ballad poem "gives the whole legend with the minute care for detail beloved by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood" (Boas 105). As in "Lilith," Rossetti uses descriptions which give rise to visual pictures, describing even the sounds in visual terms (Welland 33). The version of the legend told in this ballad, however, is the main focus of this study, for it is the first time in literature that Lilith has been explicitly linked to the Fall. Lilith's roles as the first wife and the seductive femme fatale merge here to produce a Lilith who is responsible for the greatest evil in human history, the Fall of Man.

The incorporation of Lilith and the snake was certainly not something new. Keats successfully did it in "Lamia," and artists from 1400 onward often depicted the serpent with the head (and hair) of a woman (see Chapter 1, section 9 and illustrations 4-12 for details). What is unique here is the way in which Rossetti draws upon such uses of the Lilith legend and creates an entire myth around her existence, making her responsible for the Fall.

While the artifacts which portrayed Lilith as the serpent in the Tree of Knowledge certainly also made this connection, none had made it explicit until Rossetti. Earlier critics -- perhaps unfamiliar with the artifacts -- even claimed that this intertwining of the Lilith legend and Biblical legend was Rossetti's own innovation (Masefield 60). "Eden Bower," however, is not the origin of the entire story. Instead, it fills in the gaps in the myth not supplied by earlier sources. It supplies Lilith with motive for her actions (revenge) and the means for following through with her plan ("borrowing" Satan's snake-body).

Although "Eden Bower" is a massive 49 stanzas long, the plot is fairly simple to summarize. According to Johnston:

> After her expulsion from Eden and her view of the happiness of Adam and the new Eve, Lilith is driven to seek a mad revenge. She offers the serpent her lasting love if he will join her in her plans to tempt the happy pair to their transgression. (119)

Thus, the length of the poem is not a result of the plot. Instead, it results from the insistent sexual imagery between Lilith and the snake. As a critic contemporary to Rossetti wrote, "the reader feels a horrible sense of sliminess, as if he were handling a yellow serpent or conger eel" (Buchanan, quoted in Marsh, Sisterhood, 300).

The image of the snake pervades this poem. First, the reader is informed that Lilith -- much like Lamia -- had a previous existence in the body of a snake: "A snake was I when thou wast my lover" (line 12). According to Howard, this line "gives us a little jolt, links erotic love with evil, [and] prepares us for the shock of the lovemaking

between woman and snake" (146). By doing so, it forces the reader to see Lilith as a figure who transcends the constraints of any one body. She is both snake and woman, sensual and beautiful in either incarnation.

The imagery Lilith uses in describing her lovemaking with Adam is also filled with images of the snake as her golden twining hair holds his heart in a net and the serpent's "sweet close rings" are twining about their hearts (lines 24, 32). The children that she and Adam produce before her expulsion are likewise described as serpents: "bright babes. . . that coiled in the woods and waters, / Glittering sons and radiant daughters" (lines 33-36).

Lilith then begins to reveal her anger with God, for she doesn't understand how her perfect body, formed from dust as Adam's equal, is not "good" enough for Adam (line 39). It is for this reason that she seeks revenge on Adam, and the only way for her to obtain this revenge is through the woman "of Adam's flesh," Eve (line 40).

Lilith thus implores the snake to lend her his body for the ransom price of her eternal love (lines 49, 52). Beginning with line 63, then, images of passion, lust, and sexuality between Lilith and the snake are inserted. Some examples include:

> Look, my mouth and my cheek are ruddy,
> And thou art cold, and fire is my body. . . . (lines 63, 64)
> Then bring thou close thine head till it glisten
> Along my breast, and lip me and listen. . . . (lines 75, 76)
> In thy sweet folds bind me and bend me,
> And let me feel the shape thou shalt lend me. . . . (lines 91, 92)
> Wreathe thy neck with my hair's bright tether,
> And wear my gold and thy gold together! . . . (lines 139, 140)
> How shall we mingle our love's caresses,
> I in thy coils, and thou in my tresses! . . . (lines 151, 152)
> Wrap me round in the form I'll borrow
> And let me tell thee of sweet to-morrow. . . . (lines 159, 160)
> Fold me fast, O God-snake of Eden! . . .
> What more prize than love to impel thee?
> Grip and lip my limbs as I tell thee! . . . (lines 185, 187, 188)

One should note that these examples represent only the most obvious among many images of sexuality in this poem.

While completely sexualized in these images, Lilith remains the one in control. Not once does the reader see anything from Satan's perspective or even know what he wants. Instead, Lilith is in full control of her actions, her words, her thoughts, and her body. The sexual advances in these lines are all made by her; they are indeed *commands* to Satan, an aspect most especially notable in her final command: "Grip and lip my limbs *as I tell thee!*" (line 188, emphasis added).

Lilith's need for the snake's body is not explicitly explained. It can be assumed, however, that Lilith does not feel able to tempt Adam now that he has Eve, the beautiful and (unlike Lilith) submissive woman who fulfills his needs and desires. As the snake, however -- beautiful and phallic -- Lilith knows that she can tempt Eve. It is through

this means, therefore, that she chooses to approach Eve and cause the fall of she and Adam.

The implications of Lilith's actions here -- because of the use of the Adam and Eve story -- reach far beyond those of any other femme fatale in literature. She is thus universalized as the archetypal "Fatal woman" (Johnston 119). Through her intervention, the Fall of Adam-Man becomes the fault of *one* woman, Lilith-Eve. The last stanza emphasizes this culpability by foretelling the woes that will befall mankind because of woman's actions: Cain will slay Abel, causing the first murder on earth (lines 195,196).

Lilith's power over men is also supreme. As in "La Belle," Lilith can destroy even the strongest of men. Rossetti states, "Is not the foe-God weak as the foeman / When love grows hate in the heart of a woman?" (lines 71,72). Although speaking specifically of how Lilith has power over God himself, Rossetti here implies that all women have fantastic power over men -- even the strongest of men -- by virtue of their beauty.

It may seem ironic, therefore, that this interpretation of Lilith is being cited as the definitive beginning of her transformation. However, the techniques used by Rossetti in this poem, especially that of narrative voice, give opening to feminist interpretations and readings of Lilith that have hitherto been nearly impossible to glean from her representations. By allowing Lilith to tell this story herself, to make the story "wholly her own," Rossetti gives Lilith a speaking space which was denied to her in traditional accounts of the Fall (Howard 148). Here, she inserts herself into that story, making herself the catalyst for what is -- Biblically speaking -- the most important event in human history.

According to Johnston, however, "Dante Gabriel seemingly could not decide between [Lilith] as a figure of sensuality or as one of demoniac repulsion." Here, he cites the blurring of Lilith's characterization (voluptuous beauty) with the narrative thread (evil destroyer) as a "flaw" of the poem (Johnston 120). Similarly, Mégroz reflected that Rossetti "seems to have hesitated between the demoniac and weird element and the erotic feeling" (189).

On this point, however, the writer would certainly have to disagree. Instead of reading this complication as a "flaw" in Rossetti's poem, one could more appropriately read it as an emphasis of the paradox that Rossetti perceives in the femme fatale: she is wildly attractive, yet she is also dangerous. Rossetti does not waver between the two depictions here, but, rather, forges them together into one terrifyingly erotic theme.

This conflict is also portrayed in Rossetti's use of an alternating and contrasting refrain. Each stanza contains either "Alas the hour!," indicating an impending woe, or "Sing Eden Bower!," giving a pretense of peace and happiness. The juxtaposition of these refrains within the ballad indicates that the contrast Rossetti sought was indeed intentional, not a "flaw" as Johnston asserts.

Howard makes this point clear, explaining how the first line of each stanza -- which always ends in either "Adam," "Eden," or "Lilith" -- and the refrain -- which alternates:

> provide a repetitive link from stanza to stanza, and the repetition of the names emphasizes the erotic relationship between Adam and Lilith, the motive for revenge, the irony of title and refrain. (145)

The refrains also serve to impede chronology, making the poem a virtual see-saw of information, taking the reader backward and forward in time at Lilith's whim. Simultaneously, it acts to increase the erotic intensity of the poem by building toward some climactic moment when the refrains cease and the poem concludes.

The title of the poem itself -- "Eden Bower" -- indicates the irony and contrast that will be present in the poem. Generally, a bower is a shaded, leafy recess, an arbor, an area of shelter within a shelter. Poetically, it also suggests a private chamber or boudoir (see previous section on "Lady Lilith"). Yet, the reader knows from the outset that the catastrophic fall of mankind will take place within this supposedly safe and protected area, the "bower." Thus, the beautiful, safe environment suggested by the refrain of "Sing Eden bower!" refrain and the title of the poem are "starkly contrasted" by the horror of what is happening (Howard 146).

The conflict that a reader feels when reading "Eden Bower" is highlighted by the fact that Lilith is "the pole for sympathy" (Howard, 144). Unlike any other representation of her before this time, Lilith is here given nearly exclusive speaking space. No longer is her story being told by a biased third-person, as in the Zohar and Alphabet accounts. Nor is it being told in the manner that Rossetti did in "Lilith," introducing her story with "it is told" to indicate that he, the narrator, is simply re-telling already established knowledge.

Instead, Lilith is given speaking space and tells the story from her own perspective. The ballad is, in fact, a monologue by Lilith. The lust, love, and hatred which she expresses is not being imposed upon her from an outside force, but is being related by she herself. In this way, it is even more frightening and powerful, for she is no longer contained within someone else's discourse. She speaks her own.

In his essay, "Rossetti's Significant Details," Jerome J. McGann explains the effect of this new spin on the old story. Speaking specifically of "My Sister's Sleep," but also, more generally, of all Rossetti poems, McGann states:

> He does not want his reader simply to respond to the poem's sentimental drama. Rather, the poem basically seek to tell us how to renew our capacity for fresh experience. Rossetti accomplishes this by manipulating his materials in a new and startling way: thereby we are not only drive to a new perspective, we are also forced to a clear consciousness of the process as it happens. Like all symbolic modes, Christian understanding depends upon a depth of tradition: all new experience is referred to the preexisting myth. If, then, an artist invokes the framework of a traditional symbolism but consciously renders it inoperative, his audience is forced to regard the medium of the symbology in a totally new way. . . . By at once undermining a more traditional set of responses and driving us toward unexpected impressions, Rossetti makes us understand what it means to undergo a fresh experience, or - - As Shelley would have said -- to have the veil of familiarity torn away. (Sambrook, ed. 234)

In "Eden Bower," this "new and startling" manipulation of Rossetti's is the fact that he gives voice to Lilith. By having her tell the story of the Fall from her own perspective, the "traditional symbolism" of that story becomes "inoperative," and the reader must think of the Fall in totally new ways. One seeks to find a presupposed religious meaning but, instead, finds none (Sambrook, ed. 233). Because of this, the reader is forced to make meanings of her own.

The reader, therefore, is placed in an ambivalent state of "attraction-revulsion" (Howard 144). One recognizes that her plot is sinister, but one also feels sympathy for her because of her privileged speaking space. Perhaps more than any other reason, this aspect of the poem is why "Eden Bower" can be said to have "transformed" Lilith. From this representation of her, feminist considerations and interpretations can easily be read, seeing her as the woman who was "wronged" by God and by Adam, not the evil witch who simply plotted to ruin humankind forever.

As in a dramatic monologue, Lilith here speaks to an audience. In line 121, she even addresses herself for emphasis. Says Howard:

> Rossetti's Lilith makes the story *wholly her own*. She jeers, is triumphantly sarcastic. She describes Adam's petty betrayal (Genesis 3:12) as the "bravest" of his "brave words" (line 119) and Eve's tenuous excuse (Genesis 3:13) as words which will sate her heart (line 123). (148)

Thus, the story of Adam as the innocent and betrayed man who was led to destruction through the hands of an evil Eve is overturned by Lilith. Here, she tells her own version of the story, allowing the reader no other interpretation as she presents her account of the events as absolutely true.

At times, Lilith also employs an addressing form of speech, particularly at moments when her ecstasy and pain are at a peak. Interestingly, her only audience is Satan, placing the reader in the position of Satan himself as she reads the poem. This is another disruption of the previously conventional manner of depicting Lilith, for the reader is no longer looking at her from the perspective of a rabbi or other more morally pure individual, but is viewing her through the lens of Satan, the epitome of evil. From this vantage point, Lilith's sinfulness seems far less horrible and even, perhaps, justifiable.

Throughout the poem, images that are traditionally held to be repulsive, such as snakes, are described in terms which glorify them and their "beauty." Early on, she describes her previous bestial existence as "the fairest snake" and refers to her serpentine children as "glittering sons and radiant daughters" (line 13). These oxymorons tell the reader that snakes, for instance, are not necessarily synonymous with evil and ugliness, but can be beautiful.

This exploding of the dichotomies between beauty and ugliness, beasts and humans, and good and evil forces the reader to view things in a different manner. (For other examples of exploded dichotomies, such as pure/impure, see Bullen 145.) This, in turn, raises the question: "Is Lilith *really* evil?" While her actions, if taken on their own merit, seem to imply that the answer is "yes," Rossetti does not tell the story of her actions in such a way as to imply that she is intrinsically evil.

All of this "ambivalence" around Lilith leads to the erasure of moral judgment from her character, an act which again marks the transformation of Lilith. Rossetti, like his Pre-Raphaelite Brothers, paints a world where love and hatred are intertwined. Lilith says of Adam, for example, "how I loved and hated / Man" (lines 47, 48). The love, in this case meaning sensual, erotic love, is therefore inseparable from the dark, destructive force of hatred.

This theme did not arise out of Rossetti's work alone. According to Stanford:

> Placing Pre-Raphaelite poetry in the context of nineteenth-century literature, one may say that it purified the Victorian idiom of verse which preceded it by weeding out its unctuous wordy morals, and substituting criteria of emotional and atmospheric intensity for those of "message" and "prophecy" (xxvi).

Rossetti, therefore, was drawing from the Pre-Raphaelite tradition -- solidified by him but also somewhat existent in earlier writers (such as Keats) -- when he blurred the boundaries between evil and beauty. All of the aspects of Lilith, therefore, come together to create a woman who is beautiful, seductive -- possibly even evil -- but not necessarily morally reprehensible. The moral judgment is left out of Rossetti's poem and is left for the reader to decide.

The speaking space given to Lilith, the explanation of her feelings of personal rejection, and Rossetti's invitation to the reader to break down dichotomous relationships all allow Lilith to be read as a figure far more complex than an evil child-slaying witch. These techniques, indeed, allow for feminist interpretation, opening the way for Lilith's adaptation as a feminist heroine by later writers.

## *Femme Fatale Images in Other Rossetti Poems -- "A Sea-Spell"(1868) and "The Orchard Pit" (1869)*

While Lilith's only explicit appearances are in the poems "Lilith" and "Eden Bower," images of her arise in a number of other poems by Rossetti, including "A Sea-Spell" and "The Orchard Pit" (Johnston 120). Considered "minor" poems, very little has been written on either. Of "A Sea-Spell," some have gone so far as to proclaim "it is kinder to the memory of the artist to say nothing. It is the work of a prematurely faltering mind and hand" (Waugh 211). As for "The Orchard Pit," a fragmentary prose tale, there is little that even *could* be said.

Yet, in the sonnet "A Sea-Spell," there exists imagery directly relating this Siren-figure to Lilith, making the poem worthy of consideration here. The sonnet reads:

> Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,
> While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell
> Between its chords; and as the wild notes swell,
> The sea-bird for those branches leaves the sea.
> But to what sound her listening ear stoops she?
> What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear,
> In answering echoes from what planisphere,
> Along the wind, along the estuary?

She sinks into her spell: and when full soon
Her lips move and she soars into her song,
What creatures of the midmost main shall throng
In furrowed surf-clouds to the summoning rune:
Till he, the fated mariner, hears her cry,
And up her rock, bare-breasted, comes to die?
(Collected Works 361)

As evidenced above, both specific Lilith-imagery and Lilith-related themes are present in this sonnet.

The poem begins with an immediate reference to Lilith, specifically Rossetti's Lilith, with the line: "Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree" (line 1). This image is reminiscent of Lilith's supposed tempting of Eve while in the "apple-tree," the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad. Line 2 then borrows imagery directly from "Lilith." The corresponding lines of "Lilith," for example, read:

And, subtly of herself contemplative,
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
Till heart and body and life are in its hold. (lines 6-8)

It is this same story which is told in "A Sea-Spell." The character is a beautiful Siren who weaves her magic into a "spell" that will ensnare and kill men ("Sea-Spell," line 2; "Lilith," line 13). In both poems, the male figures succumb to the Siren's charms, causing their own demise.

Like Lilith and La Belle, the power of this unnamed Siren is far-reaching and monumental. Able to lure all the "creatures of the midmost main," she performs on a natural level the sort of seduction Rossetti's other women do on a human level. Herein lies her primary difference. Unlike Lilith's seduction of the unnamed, universalized "youth," this woman seduces a "fated mariner," one who acts more as a symbol of the natural world than of the world of mankind.

Although certainly not representing Lilith alone, the siren of "A Sea-Spell" nevertheless reflects the themes and issues raised by Rossetti in "Lilith" and "Eden Bower." She is beautiful, seductive, and deadly -- desirable and feared -- all characteristics which, in Rossetti's world, depict the magnificent and eternal "femme fatale."

"The Orchard Pit" also makes allusion to Lilith. In theme, it contains many of the same ideas as "The Sea Spell," and some have suggested that "The Orchard Pit" plays a similar complementary role toward "The Sea Spell" as "Eden Bower" did toward "Lilith" (Johnston 105). All four of these poems, therefore, can be seen as complements of one another. Like "The Sea Spell," "The Orchard Pit" begins with an image of the apple-tree which links this unnamed femme fatale to Lilith. The poem reads:

Piled deep below the screening apple-branch
They lie with bitter apples in their hands:
And some are only ancient bones that blanch,
And some had ships that last year's wind did launch,
And some were yesterday the lords of lands.

In the soft dell, among the apple-trees,
High up above the hidden pit she stands,
And there for ever sings, who gave to these,
That lie below, her magic hour of ease,
And those her apples holden in their hands.

This in my dreams is shown me; and her hair
Crosses my lips and draws my burning breath;
Her song spreads golden wings upon the air,
Life's eyes are gleaming from her forehead fair,
And from her breasts the ravishing eyes of Death.

Men say to me that sleep hath many dreams,
Yet I knew never but this dream alone:
There, from a dried-up channel, once the stream's,
The glen slopes up; even such in sleep it seems
As to my waking sight the place well know.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

My love I call her, and she loves me well:
But I love her as in the maelstrom's cup
The whirled stone loves the leaf inseparable
That clings to it round all the circling swell,
And that the same last eddy swallows up.
(Collected Works 377)

Even more than "A Sea Spell," this poem directly speaks to the story of Lilith as temptress of mankind.

The images in stanza one serve the same purpose as Keats' recollection of the many powerful men -- kings, princes, and warriors -- who succumbed to La Belle. As in Keats' poem, this unnamed woman has power over the wealthy elite, "the lords of lands," as well as the lowly unknown men of the past, "ancient bones that blanch" (lines 5, 3). Furthermore, these "ancient" bones could also refer to the bones of the most ancient, perfect, and powerful man of all: Adam.

Stanza three connects this figure to Lilith -- and all other "femme fatales" -- by describing her body in terms of simultaneous passion and pain, life and death. Her hair, highlighted for the reader by the enjambment of line eleven, draws "burning" breath from the narrator's lips in line twelve, indicating feverous passion. She also has two sets of eyes: one of Life and one of Death. Interestingly, the eyes of Life are located on the fair forehead while the "ravishing eyes of Death" are located on her breasts, an obviously far more sexualized location (line 20, Sambrook, ed. 172).

While this Lilith-figure causes the death of innumerable men, true to the spirit of Pre-Raphaelitism, Rossetti does not pass judgment on her. She is not painted as a vicious, dreadful witch but as a beautiful temptress whose beauty inevitably -- though not necessarily purposefully -- kills any who get too close. After taking of "her apples," these men are no longer able to live in the world, for they have experienced the ultimate

in pleasure and love. By granting "her magic hour of ease" (line 9), therefore, this Lilith- figure is giving these men the only experience that is left after perfect love: death.

# Conclusion

## *Rossetti as Myth Maker*

In tracing a literary image, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint any single cultural period, let alone any single author, as one which is responsible for transforming the image. The definition of transformation, after all, is a *process* which leads to the change or alteration of any given figure, person, object, idea, etc. Clearly, the transformation of Lilith was not the sole responsibility or product of the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Yet, Rossetti obviously worked at a period when Lilith's image was in flux. Moved into the realm of mainstream literature and culture by Goethe and Keats, Lilith was already becoming a figure who held power and independence. By giving Lilith narrative voice, erasing moral judgment, questioning the male gaze, and inviting the reader to break down dichotomous relationships, Rossetti undermined traditional responses to the myth of Lilith, leaving her image open for later feminist interpretations.

Because of Rossetti's work -- even if only because of the popularity of his work and not its quality or actual content -- Lilith has been adopted as a feminist heroine in a variety of mediums today. From Lilith magazine to the "Lilith Fair," her image is being heralded as one of opportunity, voice, and power for women. In almost all cases, Rossetti has been recognized and read by modern critics and interpreters as the first to give her figure voice and opportunity, allowing for such modern positive representations to develop.

This is not to say that Rossetti's work arose out of an empty past, for, without Goethe and Keats' influence, he may never have even known of Lilith's legend. Nor is it to say that once "transformed" by Rossetti, Lilith would eternally remain a feminist figure. There indeed exist examples of post-Rossetti writing and art which portray Lilith in ways that would be considered "negative" by many today.

Nonetheless, Rossetti's influence was widespread. In nearly every modern article that attempts to answer the question "Who Is Lilith?," his art and poetry is pointed to as the answer. Perhaps this is because his works are so much more well known than The Alphabet of Ben Sira or the mystical Zohar. More convincingly, perhaps it is because he so successfully weaved together the individual stories of Lilith and created a tale that told a story more appealing and more open to interpretation than those previous versions. Although Lilith's legend had existed for centuries, Rossetti, in his guise as "mythmaker," established her for all time as the powerful and eternal femme fatale. (Garner 66).

# Appendix

## *A Modern Development*
## *Images of Lilith in Literature, Art, and Artifacts*

**"Gilgamesh and the Huluppu Tree" (2000 BCE)**

Usually found as part of the Epic of Gilgamesh of 2400 BC, this tale contains the earliest mention of Lilith. She is here associated with Eden and is portrayed as fearsome.

**"The Lilith Relief" (circa 2000 BCE)**

Sumerian terra-cotta relief which features Lilith as the primary figure. Lilith is identified as a succubus.

**Isaiah 34:14 (circa 900 BC)**

This scripture is the site of a much contested incidental literary reference to Lilith. While the word sometimes translated as "Lilith" has been variously translated as "night hag," "night demon," etc., the passage, nevertheless, associates a Lilith-like creature with the desert, night, evil, and flight.

**Testament of Solomon (200 CE)**

Although the character in question is "Obizuth," she describes herself in terms that correlate almost perfectly with Lilith. This text contains the earliest textual reference to the amuletic tradition of warding off Lilith, the demoness.

**The Talmud (400 CE)**

This text contains four incidental mentions of Lilith as a winged, she-demon of the night. Although it alludes to the succubus-myth associated with Lilith, it does not show any connection with Adam at all.

**"The Nippur Bowls" (circa 600 CE)**

Incantation bowls found near the ancient colony of Nippur. This set of archeological artifacts contains 40 bowls, 26 of which feature Lilith. Her guises as the child-slayer and succubus are joined together in the incantations inscribed here.

**The Alphabet of Ben Sira (800 CE)**

Controversial text by an unknown author, generally believed to be the "founding text" for the Lilith myth as it is known today. The Lilith of The Alphabet account is the insubordinate first wife of Adam, created from dust as his equal, who fled Eden.

**Book of Raziel (circa 1100 CE)**

This literary reference draws upon the Hebrew amuletic tradition of warding off Lilith during childbirth. She is here associated with Adam and Eve.

**The Zohar (1200 CE)**

This central work of Jewish mysticism depicts Lilith in all of her various guises: 1) Lilith as "female of Samael." Seductive and beautiful, Lilith sleeps with men and then kills them. (Zohar I 148a-148b). 2) Lilith begets demons from her intercourse with sleeping men and inflicts diseases on them. (Zohar I 19b). 3) The story of creation (Lilith/Adam/Eve) is "resolved" by making Lilith Adam's first wife. (Zohar III 19a). 4) Lilith is described as a strangler/murderer of children. (Zohar I 19b).

**Hebrew Amuletic Tradition (circa 900-1800)**

Numerous archeological artifacts which focus on Lilith. Primarily used during child- birth to keep Lilith away, these were worn by the pregnant woman and/or hung on her walls. Some of these artifacts also draw on the facets of Lilith's identity as a succubus and as the first wife of Adam.

**Jutta (1565)**

German play about Johanna, the granddaughter of Lilith and the only woman known to have been pope. As a backdrop to this plot, the existence of Lilith is explained.

**Paradise Lost (1667)**

Contains an apparent allusion to Lilith in the single phrase "snake witch."

**Faust (1808)**

Lilith briefly appears in the Walpurgis Night scene of this work by Goethe. She is portrayed as a beautiful seductress with long, flowing hair, and Mephistopheles explains to Faust that Lilith was Adam's first wife.

**"Lamia" (1819)**

Poem by John Keats presenting the first Romantic portrayal of Lilith. She is excessively beautiful and is trapped in the form of a snake until freed by Hermes so that she can find the love of her youth, Lycius. She and he live together happily, with him unaware of her mythical past, until, at their wedding, the philosopher Apollonius declares Lilith's name and causes her death. Lycius, unable to live without her, dies also.

**"La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1820)**

Ballad by John Keats which draws upon themes of "Lamia." The unnamed "La Belle" is an enchantress/phantasm who seduces even the strongest of men. She can be read as representing Lilith herself or simply the femme fatale image of which Lilith is a part.

**"Lady Lilith" (1863 and 1864-1868?)**

Two paintings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (watercolor and then oil version) which depict Lilith sitting in a magical boudoir/bower space, combing her long, ensnaring hair in a mirror.

**"Lilith," later published as "Body's Beauty" (1868)**

Sonnet written by Dante Gabriel Rossetti to accompany "Lady Lilith." She is described as Adam's first wife and possibly implicated in the Fall of Man. The poem emphasizes Lilith's affiliation with the snake and ends with Lilith castrating/killing the universalized young man with her "strangling golden hair."

**"Eden Bower" (1869)**

Ballad by Dante Gabriel Rossetti which elaborates on the themes of "Lilith." Although this poem represents the first time that Lilith is directly implicated in the Fall of Man, it is also here that Lilith truly makes her transformation. By reading the poem from a feminist perspective, it can be seen that Rossetti gives Lilith the power of narrative voice, a voice which was historically denied her, and explodes the dichotomy between good and evil, thereby undermining traditional responses to the myth of Lilith

**"A Sea-Spell" (1868) and "The Orchard-Pit" (1869)**

Two poems by Rossetti which tell of other "femme fatales" who are not necessarily Lilith but, nonetheless, draw upon the symbols and imagery of the Lilith myth. The unnamed femme fatale of "The Orchard Pit" is more explicitly associated with Lilith while the Siren of "A Sea-Spell" merely echoes the theme of Lilith.

**"Adam, Lilith and Eve" (1883)**

Poem by Robert Browning where a thunderstorm drives Lilith to confess that she truly loved Adam, and Eve to confess that she truly loved another man. After the storm is over, Adam naively laughs and dismisses their tales as falsehoods.

**"Lilith" (1887)**

Painting by the Honorable John Collier which pictures sexuality between Lilith and the snake. While most older sources indicate that Collier's inspiration was Keats' "Lamia," the picture more accurately seems to represent the sexual scenes between Lilith and the serpent in "Eden Bower."

**La Fin de Satan (1886)**

Novel by Victor Hugo where Lilith is combined with Isis and is portrayed as hideous and bloodthirsty, "the world's black soul."

**"La Fille de Lilith" ("The Daughter of Lilith") (1889)**

Story by Anatole France about Leila, the daughter of Lilith. Lilith and all of her children are bound to the earth in immortality -- because they were not involved in the Fall from grace --and are described as "neither good nor evil."

**Lilith (1892)**

Play by Remy de Gourmont which gives a cynical and erotic account of the traditional creation story as described in the sacred Jewish texts. Depicts the myth of Lilith as a completely sexualized being who plots revenge on Adam and Eve only so that she can have sex with Adam.

**"Lilith" (circa 1892)**

Painting by Kenyon Cox where Lilith coddles and kisses the snake. In a lower panel of the painting, Lilith is shown in the Tree of Knowledge with the body of the Snake. Lilith is handing the forbidden fruit to Eve and she, in turn, passes it to Adam, thus creating a chain of destructive femininity.

(* It should be noted that during the late 1800s, images of snakes and women were widespread in art and literature. Archetypal females portrayed with snakes included Salammbô, Eve, Lilith, and Lamia. The list compiled here only includes references to Lilith explicitly and also some references to Lamia that seem to indicate an implicit representation of Lilith as well (such as Keats' "Lamia" and Waterhouse's "Lamia" paintings). For more information on images of women and serpents in fin-de-siècle culture, see Dijkstra's Idols of Perversity, pages 305-313.)

**Lilith (1895)**

Novel by George MacDonald where the hero is forced down a path of painful initiation by the seductress Lilith.

**"Lilith" (1896)**

Story by Henry Harland in which the hero is a poverty stricken, deaf-mute sculptor named Straham. He creates a clay casting for a statue of Lilith and develops a close bond with the statue, sacrificing everything to keep it from being ruined by the coldness of the winter. He stumbles upon an old woman in the street (Lilith herself) and debates over assisting her or going back to his statue. He finally opts for the former, but when he gets home his statue has shattered. Much later, he starts the figure again, and when it is exhibited he becomes famous.

**"Lamia" (1905)**

Painting by John William Waterhouse in which Lamia kneels before Lycius as the snake-skin falls from her body. Clearly depicts a scene from Keats' poem "Lamia," but also, more generally, depicts Lilith as the universalized femme fatale. (See illustration #20).

**Der Heilige und die Tiere (1905)**

Play by Victor Widmann in which Lilith is delivered from evil by a saint.

**"Die Kinder der Lilith" (1908)**

Poem by the German storyteller Isolde Kurz which rejects as absurd the tradition of Lilith as a winged demon who deserted Adam. Kurz asserts that Lilith must have originally been like an angel and capable of deep insight. Adam, the "lump of clay," was created in God's boredom and Lilith, a charming, elfin creature, was given to him as a companion, in the hopes that something new, something disorderly striving for order, would come out of the contrast between their natures. Lucifer creates Eve to distract Adam from Lilith -- his rival. Lilith flees in despair and gives birth to a child that will lead Adam's other children to spiritual perfection, as God had intended.

**"Lamia" (1909)**

Second painting of this title by John William Waterhouse, often known to paint multiple paintings upon the same theme. Lamia is seated alone at a river bank, looking at her reflection in the water. The snake-skin she has recently shed is at her feet. Again, this painting clearly speaks to Keats' "Lamia" but also contains elements which refer to the more general femme fatale, including Lilith. (See illustration #21).

**"The Avenging Spirit" (1920)**

Poem by Arthur Symons which identifies Lilith and Lamia as mother and daughter, united in evil. The Snake plays a primary role in the poem as a symbol of sexuality, lust, and evil.

**Back to Methuselah (1922)**

Play by George Bernard Shaw in which Lilith is the personification of creative development, the mother of Adam, Eve, and all humankind. Lilith bestowed upon Eve her greatest gift -- curiosity. The last act is set in the year 31,920 and Lilith has the last word, concluding that the experience (experiment) of human development has been worthwhile and humanity is on its way to eliminating cruelty, hypocrisy, and death.

**Dieu crea d'abord Lilith (1935)**

Novel by Marc Chadourne where Lilith sows ruin, death and an incurable despair before disappearing to no one knows where, in despair herself and still a rebel. She may/may not be dead.

**Delta of Venus (1969)**

Book of "erotica" by Anais Nin, which features a character named Lilith. Lilith here is described as "sexually cold," but it is not her own fault, for her husband neglects to show any real sexual interest in her. Says Nin, "It was something to be done quickly, for his sake. For her it was a sacrifice."

**Pope Joan (20th c.)**

A reworking of the German play "Jutta"

**"Lilith Prints" (1974)**

Pornographic, passionate images of a transcendental sexual creation including Adam, Eve, Lilith, Satan, and God.

**"Lilywhite Lilith" (1974)**

Song on Peter Gabriel's album "The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway" in which Lilith is the guide of the soul through the Underworld.

**"Lilith" (1981)**

A midrash on the text of Genesis 3:7 which explains how Lilith comforted Eve when she was told to cover her body. Eve had felt that Adam must not have liked her body and, thus, was ashamed. Lilith supports her and gives Eve the confidence and determination to speak up to Adam. The two women embrace as good friends.

**La Papesse ou la legende de la papesse Jeanne et de sa compagne Bartolea (1983)**

A play by Odile Ehret which reworked the "Jutta" story.

**La Papesse (1983)**

A novel by Claude Pasteur also based on the "Jutta" story.

**"The Story of Lilith and Eve" (modern)**

Modern Jewish tale by Jakob Lind in which Lilith and Eve are aspects of one female.

**Lilith: A Metamorphosis (1991)**

Novel by Dagmar Nick in which Lilith tells her version of the story of Adam's experiences in the Garden of Eden, why he and Eve are expelled, and why she herself is transformed into a snake.

**From Lilith to Lilith Fair (1998)**

Authorized story of the evolution of the Lilith Fair, with an introduction by Sarah McLachlan, founder of the event, stating her own abbreviated version of the Lilith myth. Demonstrates the way in which Lilith is defined in modern culture: the first strong, independent woman, a true feminist heroine.

**Which Lilith? (1998)**

Subtitled "Feminist Writers ReCreate the World's First Woman," this book contains modern feminists' cogitations upon who Lilith is/might be. The authors describe the text as "contemporary midrash," commentary on biblical text, and assert that "Jewish women have a need to imagine Lilith."

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