

# **C.J. Brennan's Lilith: Representations of female sexuality in *Poems [1913]***

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Christopher Brennan's poetry has undergone a recent revival of interest, in which important early criticism by A. R. Chisholm, A. D Hope, and Axel Clark has been supplemented by new scholarship, most notably Katherine Barnes's *The Higher Self in Christopher Brennan's Poems: Esotericism, Romanticism, Symbolism*.<sup>1</sup> As David Brooks notes in an editorial for 'Double Exposures', a recent special issue of *Southerly* on Brennan and Hope, 'it has been some time since their work was comprehensively reappraised by multiple hands, in Brennan's case not for almost thirty years' (5). This is an exciting development, for although Brennan's poetry and poetics can be challenging, they have much to offer the contemporary reader.

One element of what makes Brennan challenging to read is his immense knowledge of, and allusion to, various strands of classical mythology. This paper examines one example of Brennan's use of mythological references in his use of Lilith as the primary symbol in *Poems [1913]*. It is argued that this is a particularly intriguing example and one that is likely to appeal to contemporary readers in that the writing and publication of these poems coincided with important milestones in the women's movement. At the height of Brennan's popularity among literary circles in the first decades of the twentieth century, the name Lilith would have been associated with Brennan, while today more readers might be familiar with Lilith as an icon of feminist ideology. However, the issue of women's rights as they impact on Brennan's poetry has largely been ignored by critics. This is despite the fact that Brennan's writing of *Poems [1913]* was contemporaneous with the first wave of feminism, with much of it having been undertaken during the late 1890s.

Brennan's Lilith takes on the dangerous allure of the *femme fatale*, although that is not to suggest that she is given a misogynistic treatment by the poet. On the contrary, it is the freedom from restrictive attitudes towards sex which Brennan advocates as a way forward in the understanding of female sexual identity and desire. Much like later writers such as Zora Cross and Dulcie Deamer, Brennan's Lilith sequence represents a shift towards a more positive construction of female sexuality. In this, Brennan's view conflicts with the general shape of opinion in the 1890s in Australia and internationally, which held that women were morally equal (or superior to) men by virtue of their lack of sexuality. Brennan arguably, through the content of *Poems [1913]* and especially the Lilith sequence, gives female sexuality a treatment that extends beyond binary representations that informed much first wave feminist reasoning on the topic. Indeed, as Frank Bongiorno points out, these debates over sexuality were also closely linked with the idea of 'voluntary motherhood, the idea that a woman ought to have children only when she desired them, and never as an unwanted by-product of male lust' (49).

Motherhood, like female sexuality, is represented in Brennan's Lilith sequence, often intertwined within the poetry between notions of the mother-goddess, and the demon-mother. This essay argues that Brennan's Lilith disrupts the dualist kind of thinking which has linked

man with the mind and woman with the body, and therefore reflects a radical conception of female sexuality for that time.

Brennan's friendship with Dowell O'Reilly, whose provocative views on sexuality and support for the women's suffrage movement are discussed in Bongiorno's article, may provide a context for the poet's treatment of female sexuality as contesting the view represented in mainstream Australia of the 1890s. As Susan Sheridan notes in *Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s*, it was in this decade that 'an alternative begins to emerge, prefiguring the psychological theories of female sexuality which prevailed in the 1920s: the possibility of an active desire in women which is neither mad nor bad, and which does not conflict with her right to autonomy in marriage' (Magarey, 124). Indeed Brennan's *Lilith* poems seem to express this emerging view of female sexuality described by Sheridan, constructing an account in opposition to the norm as it was represented in the media of the time. Popular imagery often visually linked women's sexual purity with national integrity, especially in political cartoons such as 'New South Wales and Her Duty to Posterity' (Anon., 1899) which depicts the colony as a virtuous lady bearing a placard with the word 'NO', as phallic arms representing 'undesirable' elements such as 'black labour' reach towards her.

As Sheridan also notes (Magarey, 124), feminist journals operating out of Sydney during this period—such as Louisa Lawson's *The Dawn* and Maybanke Wolstoneholme's *Woman's Voice*—were strongly of the view that reform of male sexual behaviour was a crucial aspect to women's sexual autonomy. This view was grounded in dualist conceptions of sex as sinful, and woman as morally upright and therefore lacking in sexual desire. An article in *The Dawn* exemplifies this focus on women's sexual autonomy, arguing for divorce reform:

With all due reverence for the sanctity of marriage, can there be anything sacred in the bond which binds a good woman to a sot, felon or brute? Of the three the first is the worst, the felon disgraces her, the brute bruises her flesh and perhaps breaks her bones, but the sot, makes her perpetuate his ignoble race. . . . the confirmed sot, if he possesses enough command of his tottering limbs . . . may then collapse in abandoned beastliness upon the floor or conjugal couch, and proceed to make night hideous for her. (Lawson, 1890)

This passage clearly demonstrates the linking of women's sexual continence and morality through the use of arguments that are both religious and influenced by social Darwinist discourse, and pinpoints the social advantages that this ideology posed for women in the nineteenth century.

While it is important, as Sheridan points out, to acknowledge that 'it is still necessary to challenge the folktale that women wowsers sought to emasculate freedom loving men' (Magarey 115), it is also clear that by envisioning a context for female sexuality outside of this binary, Brennan was not necessarily presenting an attack on contemporary women's approaches, as much as prefiguring their development beyond these restrictions. Nancy F. Cott argued that 'the ideology of passionlessness was tied to the rise in evangelical religion' (221). It is apparent that these ideas, including what Barbara Welter would later term the 'feminization of religion', were being made available and popularised in Australia through

women's journals such as *Woman's Voice*, which quoted generously from the Boston journal *Arena* on the topic of sex reform in the late 1890s (Magarey 117).

Perhaps it is unsurprising then, that Brennan's post-Catholic attitude to female sexuality prefigures the more secular approach that emerged in the early twentieth century. Brennan's concern with gender is framed within what critics have often described as an Edenic quest. Brennan constructs a sense of sacredness about this quest through biblical imagery when he asks the question in the eleventh poem of 'Towards the Source', 'ah, who will give us back our long-lost innocence/ and tremulous blue within the garden' (74). Barnes also points out that to the Romantics, the fall represented the loss of unity with Nature (68). Brennan seems, further, to reiterate theologically the fall from gender equality, describing the lost 'paradise of yore' as one in which the 'twin-born hearts' of man and woman 'went up like morning-praise to God' (74). Whether the symbol of marriage represents unity of the mind and Nature, or whether the unity of man and woman is the desired consequence of the return to a state of unity with Nature loses relevance, as they clearly are inextricably linked in Brennan's mind.

This later, 'lost, androgynous union between Adam and Lilith' (Barnes 73) is a theme Brennan revisits. The poem, 'ah, who will give us back our long-lost innocence' blurs the boundaries of gender,

where we were one with all the glad sun-woven hours . . .  
And rapture of golden morn thrill'd thro' our blood and nerve:  
-our soul knew nothing more than knew the unheeding flowers  
Nor their own beauty's law, nor what it was to serve.

The poem ends with the line, 'if we ne'er behold with longing human eyes/ our paradise of yore, sister, we shall have sought' (75). It is relevant that by addressing a 'sister', Brennan presents a shift from thinking about male and female relationships as purely sexual or marital, as is implied by the preceding Eden imagery. This precipitates the later line in 'poem ix' of the *Lilith* sequence, 'O mother thou or sister or my bride' (132). This familial 'sister' implies that the 'twin-born hearts' are of man and woman as equal representatives of humanity, rather than invoking the gender inequality suggested by Adam and Eve, or indeed more blatantly by *Lilith*.

Brennan's post-Catholic ideology seems to align the female sexuality we encounter in *Lilith* away from sin, and towards beauty and nature. Judith Wright wrote that 'Brennan's foreseen Eden, the second Eden [was one] in which God and man, mind and matter, flesh and soul, and all dichotomies, are reconciled' (82). This revaluing of sexuality generally, including female sexuality, is alluded to through references to both mythological and religious figures. This is most notable in 'the Forest of Night', in which Brennan overtly defends *Lilith* against the mythology that has presented her as demonic.

To suggest, however, that attitudes to women's sexuality could be reduced to the one ideology of 'passionlessness' during the 1890s would be misleading, and New Woman writers were also emerging with a much more forthright approach to sex. Although writing later than Brennan, Zora Cross clearly manifests this shift in representation of women's sexual desire.

Certainly, Cross and Brennan were aware of, and admired each other's work. Ann Vickery notes that when Zora Cross was 'at college, the girls talked about David McKee Wright and Christopher Brennan [and] she obtained a copy of Brennan's *Towards the Source*' (177). Yet while writers such as Cross seem to have adopted Brennan's positive treatment of female sexuality in the early twentieth century, Brennan was exploring these ideas as early as the 1890s.

The links between the New Woman and sexuality are pointed out by Linda Dowling in 'The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s'

The New Woman . . . was perceived to have ranged herself perversely with the forces of cultural anarchism and decay precisely because she wanted to reinterpret the sexual relationship. Like the decadent, the heroine of New Woman fiction expressed her quarrel with Victorian culture chiefly through sexual means—by heightening sexual consciousness, candor, and expressiveness. (435)

While women such as Rosamond Benham, whose publications on the topic reflected the emergent discourse of sexology as a factor opening up new understandings of sexuality, were writing with this candor at the time, it is clear that they were considered transgressive. As Bongiorno notes of publications such as Benham's *Sense about Sex*, 'the rights of even a medical doctor to bring these matters to the public's attention did not go unquestioned, and like many free thinkers of their day, Rosamond and her family found themselves the subjects of state persecution' (50).

This treatment of female sexuality seems to be a reflection of the changes in what constituted femininity amid debates over women's suffrage and changing social roles. The sexual frankness of the New Woman must have represented a shocking affront to Victorian morality, and Brennan's use of Lilith and associated mythology in the context of debates around sexuality arguably reflected the ideals of the New Woman. It is in fact Brennan's invocation of Adam, as much as Eve, which calls attention to the issues of sexuality and gender in religious discourse. According to both the mythological and the religious accounts, Adam, in his associations with Lilith and Eve, emerges as a man with his Edenic bliss twice destroyed by the 'sinful', sexual women. This is potentially a powerfully misogynistic narrative, given that Adam is an everyman.

Brennan's use of both the Lilith mythology and New Testament references to Adam and Eve, however, present a relationship between Adam and Lilith that has suffered from the replacement by Eve. Eve's inclusion in the poems is as a minor character—she is little more than a foil for Lilith, and her transgression in eating the apple from the Tree of Knowledge is omitted from the poetry altogether. Mary as the Second Eve is an idealised figure, while Lilith is the first wife of Adam, and the first Eve. These transmutations of Eve have therefore represented three modes of female sexuality and motherhood; the demonised, the sinful or human, and the deified. Yet Brennan's account disrupts this hierarchy, by refusing to portray the women within the poems according to their usual roles, and by revaluing the sexuality of Lilith.

Brennan was deeply compelled by philosophical questions regarding religion, and specifically the increasingly secular nature of the culture in which he was writing, as Hope, and later, Barnes have pointed out. What Barnes calls the ‘conflict between scepticism and a desire for faith . . . in the late nineteenth century’ (17), is one which clearly manifests in *Poems [1913]*. This conflict between religion and increasing secularisation in the nineteenth century informs the collision of religious and mythological discourses and their concern with sexuality in the Lilith sequence. Brennan’s personal conflict with the Catholicism he had rejected is mirrored in the shifting representations of female sexuality over the course of *Poems [1913]*. Brennan both reinforces stereotypes of domestic love in ‘Towards the Source’ and ‘The Wanderer’, whilst undermining and disrupting these same stereotypes in the Lilith poems. Barnes makes the argument that in light of developments in German Romanticism at the time, in which ‘Nature is regarded as a ‘you’, the trope of marriage becomes appropriate for the reunion of mind and Nature, subject and object, which takes place in the production of poetry’ (68-71). While Barnes does not develop the implications of this trope of gender, this essay argues that Brennan’s Romantic symbolism stands, like contemporary feminist arguments, against the kind of Cartesian dualism which divides man and woman, culture and nature, into oppositions.

Brennan’s use of imagery is often double-edged, and transgresses the traditional symbols around the mythology of Lilith, which depicted her as demonic and symbolised primarily by the serpent. In ‘poem xii’ of the ‘Lilith’ sequence, Brennan describes the ‘oily blur/ of pallor on her suffocating coil’ (143). Brennan’s use of the coiled image of the serpent may reflect more closely the earlier mythological uses of the serpent, as it represented not only sexuality, but rebirth and rejuvenation. As Mary Condren argues, ‘the coiled serpent with its tail in its mouth was a circle of infinitude . . . evolution and reincarnation . . . creation and wisdom were closely bound together, and the serpent was a potent symbol of both’ (8). Brennan’s use of the serpent symbol both utilises and contradicts its commonly understood imbrication of sexuality and danger or death, and seems to be linking sexuality with life, as much as death. However, the serpent is only one of several symbols Brennan associates with Lilith, and she is also commonly symbolised as ‘the rarer rose’ (124), of the three women in the Lilith poems—Eve, Lilith, and subtle references to the ‘miraculous rose of Heaven’, the Virgin Mary.

In addition to the serpent imagery Brennan also utilises the Sumerian iconography of Lilith, when he describes her as having ‘great wings’ (131). By using imagery of wings, Brennan also creates ambiguity, and a merging of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s notion of an ‘angel’ and ‘monster’ binary. Brennan would certainly have been conscious of this duality of the symbol, which suggests that the depiction of ambiguity and complexity in Lilith’s sexuality was a deliberate strategy. Another repeated motif used in place of the serpent in Brennan’s representation is that of the worm. Although this ‘monstrous worm’ is not corporeally associated with Lilith as the serpent is in depictions such as Michelangelo’s, it reflects rather Lilith’s ‘tempting’ of Adam as it exists in ‘the rear cavern of . . . dazzled thought’ (132) for Adam. This is the same ‘worm-brood of terrors unconfest/ that chose henceforth as their avoided nest,/ the mire- fed writen thicket of the mind’ (125) in the ‘Argument’ at the beginning of the Lilith sequence. It is certainly a transformative and transgressive use of serpent imagery, as the worm retains the phallic symbolism of the serpent whilst potentially losing the Christian associations of the serpent with evil.

Rather than operating within the binaries of Virgin or whore, demon or goddess, Brennan's representations of Lilith bridge this dualist kind of thinking, though never consistently. The first two stanzas of 'poem xii' of the Lilith sequence link the etymological connections with night, and with the monstrous, as 'She is the night: all horror is of her' (143). Yet the following stanzas undermine these claims of a totality in Lilith's character, and instead point to the ambiguity of her nature. Johanna Stuckey points out that historically Lilith was not a purely demonic character, and that 'in the Jewish mystical or Kabbalistic tradition, which began in the Middle Ages . . . Demonic nature notwithstanding, it is clear that Lilith was also divine' (Stuckey). To Brennan Lilith encompasses both the Goddess and the Demon, the abject and the sublime. While Brennan undoubtedly utilises this connection of Lilith with night from the outset of the sequence—'She is the night'(143)—he reminds us that darkness is not necessary to her description, adding 'Or she can be pale, under no moon' (143). Likewise, just as she may possess 'terror' in her rage, 'majesty is hers, when marble gloom/ supports her, calm . . .' (143).

This description further suggests that Lilith is neither always 'calm' nor always 'chaotic', she is only 'all terror . . . / when the distemper'd dark begins to boil' (143). So the poem portrays Lilith as constantly shifting, and all-encompassing, so that 'all terror is of her', but so too is 'All mystery, and all love' (143). Interestingly the first and last poems in the sequence end with the image of 'her flung hair that is the starry night'(125) and 'gods and stars and songs and souls of men/ are the sparse jewels in her scatter'd hair' (144). This not only gives the sequence a cyclical symbolism in which both creation and destruction are embraced together—as suggested by the image of the coiled serpent—but also gives a sense of the magnitude of Lilith noted by Judith Wright, as the central figure in the poems (88). Lilith is presented as so much larger than the other symbols within the sequence that in the end these are merely adornments for her hair.

Brennan's use of Lilith and other mythological women in various sections of the poetry reflects Showalter's assessment of Nina Auerbach's *Woman and the Demon*, which 'challenges the feminist critical commonplace that literary stereotypes . . . are male mystifications, reducing and dehumanizing women. Properly understood, she argues, these figures are paradigms, or better, myths of ascendant womanhood' (Jardine and Smith 131). Certainly, to suggest that any portrayal of woman as *femme fatale* is universally misogynistic is a simplistic view that fails to account for the subtleties and multiplicity of sexual representation.

Although Norman Lindsay was of a younger generation than Brennan, his visual works, particularly those such as *The Crucified Venus* (1912), reflect a similar aesthetic. Brennan was good friends with Norman's brother, Lionel. Although Norman Lindsay had been initially very impressed with Brennan's *A Chant of Doom*, he 'grew to loathe Brennan' (Clark 241). Their personal differences notwithstanding, Norman Lindsay's work is perhaps the closest visual art parallel in terms of subject matter to Brennan's work, and indeed the two share a particular branch of Australian creative expression. Peter Kirkpatrick has noted the influence of 'Hugh McCrae, whose Satyrs and centaurs were already corralled into Norman's pantheon' (187). Whilst often celebratory of feminine myth, McCrae's *Satyrs and Sunlight* does not

suggest the kind of engagement with the idea of female sexuality as a site of female empowerment that is evident in Brennan's *Lilith*. Indeed, the Lindsay circle's focus on secular myth of the Greco-Roman tradition to conceptualise 'liberatory' sexuality arguably did not transcend binary representations of female sexuality as Brennan was able to in his *Lilith* sequence. Rather, the Lindsay circle's representations of female as 'siren', would appear to have simply inverted the dichotomy into one of nymphs and wowsers, often reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes, as with the lines, 'The fat young nymphs about me spring,/ I am the lord,/I am the lord,/ I am the lord of everything!' (McCrae 13).

Brennan's *Lilith*, although neither purely a demon-mother nor mother-goddess, still contains symbolic traces of these stereotypes. The Virgin Mary, for instance, is referenced within her maternal character. This is an unusual use of imagery, given that the *Lilith* of Jewish religion is often believed to have been barren and the antithesis of the maternal as idealised by the Virgin Mary, and demonstrates that Brennan's *Lilith* does not conform to either the demonic or deified models. Brennan acknowledges the link between *Lilith* and *Lamia*, in the 'Argument', yet portrays *Lilith* as a character who has been 'misread' by the 'folk's scant fireside law' (125), indicating something of Brennan's intention that *Lilith* should not be seen simply as a demonic figure. In Barbara G. Walker's *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, it is noted that 'During the Middle Ages, *Lamia* became a general term for a witch' (527).

Johanna Stuckey elaborates on this understanding of *Lilith*, pointing out that '[i]ncantation texts . . . tell us a good deal about the role of *Lilith* in Jewish popular religion. *Lilith* seduced men, did everything she could to prevent births, and killed children' (Stuckey). However there is little evidence that Brennan's *Lilith* fits this description, and her 'tempting' of men is the prominent aspect in Brennan's representation. It is this temptress aspect to *Lilith* that is linked rather to the maternal Mary through repeated imagery of the healing 'balm' and soothing 'bosom':

O mother, only,  
 where that thou hidest thee,  
 crown for the lonely brow,  
 bosom for the spent wanderer,  
 or balm for ache. (129)

This mother would seem to be *Lilith*, as this imagery is later reiterated in the poem, 'She is the night: All horror is of her' (143). In the later poem, *Lilith* again possesses these tender maternal qualities, as 'her warm breasts are near in the charm'd air/ of summer eve, and lovingly delude/ the aching brow that craves their tender care' (143). *Lilith* as mother is comfort to the 'lonely brow', selflessly oblivious to her own loneliness as an outcast. *Lilith* here is also linked with notions of suffering: in *The Shadow of Lilith*, the final image is of 'single suffering nests' (123), while *Lilith* is later represented as the 'bleeding rose', a 'rose that bleeds unseen' (124), painfully aware of a 'love that languishes unshared' (124) within her.

Likewise, by juxtaposing the biblical Adam and Eve with the Lilith mythology, Brennan invites comparison of Lilith with Eve. Although it is argued by Axel Clark that Brennan never really left the church during his years as an agnostic, it does seem clear from *The Forest of Night*, in which Brennan challenges the religious hierarchy of sexuality by celebrating the sexuality of the 'demon' Lilith, that he found himself at odds morally with that particular facet of the church's teachings. Certainly women writing in Sydney in the 1920s such as Cross and Mabel M. Forrest would also utilise this aspect of Lilith mythology in terms of explorations of female sexual desire. Deamer would likewise use mythic female figures as sites of female empowerment in *Messalina*—although as Kirkpatrick has noted, sadly 'Deamer's greatest fame continues to rest with her extraordinary career as a bohemian' and, what Deamer would refer to as 'the "never- to- be-dead-and-buried" leopard skin' (103) which she famously wore to the 1923 Artists' Ball.

Yet to have been exploring positive valuations of female sexuality as early as the 1890s is a transgressive act on Brennan's part, whether fully systematic or not, and the rejection of traditional representations suggests thinking in line with later feminist ideas.<sup>2</sup> It would seem that Brennan's portrayal of Lilith reworks the patriarchal versions of pagan fertility, and their appropriations by the church, to suit his own purposes, not least the search within the poet's own psyche. However, the effect of Brennan's text is not, like many representations belonging to the church, to condemn female sexuality. Unlike the traditional portrayals of Lilith, Brennan's sexual representation of Lilith is one in which the 'open'd calyx' of her sexuality is as valued as the closed rose buds traditionally representing virginity. Brennan's use of symbolism, however, produces a definite shift away from representing sexuality in traditional ways. Wright points out in *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*, that

The central symbol of Brennan's Edenic Myth is the Rose. In 'Towards the Source' it is the symbol of the original innocence of the flesh, of youth and joy; but it is also the 'perfect hour' of fulfilment, the nuptial 'rose of all fulfill'd delight'. (84)

Therefore, whilst the conventional or religious symbols surrounding Lilith, Eve and Mary attribute a hierarchy of morality based on the power and sexuality of each, Brennan's own use of the symbol of the rose is fluid and celebratory of both the sexual and virginal, so that the 'heart's rose-flusht dream' may also be 'the plumes of night, unfurl'd' ( 120).

This symbolic use of the rose thus reflects, like the struggle of Lilith and Adam, a philosophical struggle within Brennan between the Christian approach to sexuality, and the celebratory nature of pagan views of sexuality and fertility. Yet Brennan's exploration is, rather than simply a struggle against Christianity, an often ambivalent and intimate struggle in which both sides are given voice. Indeed, the playfulness of the Lilith sequence is countered by the much more traditional representations of matrimony in other sections of the text, such as 'Towards the Source'. In the poem 'Where the poppy-banners flow', the poet proclaims that 'our love is all our task' and portrays a pre-marital sexual innocence as 'hand in hand, as girl and boy/ warming fast to youth and maid,/ half- afraid/ at the hint of passionate joy' (78-9). Brennan, in the Lilith monologue, takes this similar image of Adam 'close-folded to his newer spouse' and subjects it to 'sombre rage that burst the holy bourne/ of garden-joy,

murdering innocence' (136-7). In this way, the more traditional representation of Romantic innocence is taken over by Lilith's knowledge of sexuality and death, with the consequence of undoing this innocence which was holding together the illusory Edenic 'garden-joy'.

Brennan ultimately characterises Lilith as a woman, rather than a demon. His presentation of the myth is of a Lilith without the gothic 'malice of the vampire-witch that drain'd/ fresh blood of fresh born babes . . .' (125). Brennan refers to these claims against Lilith as 'a wicked blast'. Rather Brennan's Lilith is lonely, an outcast 'bleeding rose' full of love, desiring to reclaim Adam as he does her. While Brennan's Lilith has the characteristic allure of the *femme fatale*, Brennan also depicts her as the equal to Adam. Further, Brennan suggests that Lilith is the rightful predecessor of womankind throughout the *Lilith* sequence, in both Brennan's narratorial voice—'she in the delicate frame that was of woman after', and his voice for Lilith: 'I am his bride and was and shall be still' (137). Here the dramatic monologue of Lilith commands the present tense, and asserts a continuum in which Eve does not replace her. In the *Shadow of Lilith* Brennan suggests that this transmutation of 'Eve's wifely guise' into Lilith is the work of 'the enamor'd alchemist', which could be Brennan or Adam, who 'invokes the rarer rose'. Lilith is described as 'a rose that bleeds unseen, the heart of night', with sorrow at a 'love that languishes unshared'. Lilith is here associated with the night, and in possession of 'sweetness' as well as being 'cunning she, the outcast to entice/ to wake with her . . .' (124). This is certainly suggestive of the alluring *femme fatale* aspect which Brennan brings to Lilith, who is erotically charged 'where all the world's desire is wild to merge' into 'that delicious dark between her breasts'.

This essay has argued that Brennan's poetic concerns intersect with those of first-wave feminism, as well as what would become key areas of concern for feminist theory in the twentieth century. Judith Wright's feeling that Christopher Brennan was a poet Australians received in a 'tentative, uncertain' way (243) suggests a similar sense that his poetry was at the forefront of a new way of looking at the world. Although Brennan does not engage directly with debates regarding women's suffrage, his texts certainly demonstrate an awareness of the changing dynamics of gender relations occurring at the time. By juxtaposing Lilith's sexuality with that of Eve, Brennan demonstrates knowledge, through the Biblical and Mythological, of these extremes of representation, whilst avoiding misogynistic and simple binary representations.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See also the recent work of Gregory Melleuish, 'The Master and the Disciples: A.R. Chisholm, Randolph Hughes and Carl Kaeppel on Christopher Brennan', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 32.1, 2008; as well as John Hawke's *Australian Literature and the Symbolist Movement*, University of Wollongong P, 2007, which includes a section on Brennan.
- <sup>2</sup> In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar argue that the production of poetry, novels and paintings around the sexuality of the *femme fatale* serves only to gratify men. Yet Lilith, as a *femme fatale*, in Brennan's recapitulation, seems to serve a philosophical purpose, indeed bridging the gaps within the dualist thinking which Gilbert and Gubar

argue is so damaging to women. The *femme fatale* as symbol in which female sexuality and the feminine within can come to be explored by male writers, then, has perhaps been prematurely dismissed, having been seen merely as a means of titillation.

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