Transformation of Lilith in the Pre-Raphaelite Art Movement[*]

Pre-Raphaelite Sanat Hareketinde Lilith'in Dönüşümü

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Abstract

Lilith is a figure believed to have emerged in Ancient Mesopotamia around 2000 B.C. as a symbol associated with the Mother Goddess cult. Over time, the power of the Mother Goddess cult was transferred to patriarchal customs. Concurrently, Lilith herself has been transformed and demonized over an extended period. This study focuses on the art scene of the 19th century, particularly in Victorian Era Britain, where representations of Lilith underwent significant transformation. Lilith's etymological origins, from her emergence in Mesopotamia to her presence in Jewish culture, have been examined to properly understand this transformation. In response to the demonization of Lilith, both as a character and as an image, the 19th-century British art world began to adopt a different perspective. This study investigates Victorian-era social norms for women and their reflection in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, concentrating on the Brotherhood's portrayal of women and the reinterpretation of Lilith in their works.

Keywords: Lilith, The Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, Victorian era, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Feminist art.

Öz

Lilith, M. Ö. 2000'lerde Antik Mezopotamya'da Ana Tanrıça kültüyle ilişkili bir sembol olarak ortaya çıktığı düşünülen bir figürdür. Zaman içerisinde Tanrıça kültleri güçlerini ataerkil geleneklere kaptırmış, Lilith'in kendisi de uzun yıllar süren bu süreç içerisinde dönüşüm geçirmiş ve şeytanlaştırılmıştır. Bu çalışma, Lilith'in temsilinde önemli bir değişimin yaşandığı 19. yüzyıla, özellikle de Viktorya dönemi İngiltere'sinin sanatsal ortamına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma boyunca, 19. yüzyılın ilk yarısında üç Kraliyet Akademisi sanatçısı tarafından kurulan Pre-Raphaelite Kardeşliği'nin Lilith ile nasıl ilişki kurduğunu incelemek ve onun tam anlamıyla feminist bir figüre evrilmeden önceki dönüm noktalarını keşfetmek amaçlanmıştır. Bu dönüşümü daha iyi anlamak için Lilith'in etimolojik kökeninin ve Mezopotamya'da ortaya çıktığı zamandan Yahudi kültüründeki konumuna kadar olan gelişiminin izi sürülmeye çalışılmıştır. Lilith'in hem bir karakter hem de bir imge olarak şeytanlaştırılmasına karşı, 19. yüzyıl İngiliz sanat dünyasının farklı bir tutum göstermeye başladığı görülmektedir. Çalışmada, Viktorya döneminde kadınlara yönelik geliştirilen toplumsal normlara ve bunun Pre-Raphaelite Kardeşliği'ndeki iz düşümüne değinilmiş, ortaya sürülen farklı bakış açıları incelenerek kardeşliğin kadın tasvirlerine ve Lilith'i eserlerinde nasıl yeniden yorumladıklarına odaklanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Lilith, Pre-Raphaelite kardeşliği, Viktorya dönemi, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Feminist sanat.

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Extended Abstract

Women, especially women who have embraced their sexuality and live free from the judgement of men, have been ostracized or described as monsters via mythological creatures and animals as a warning throughout history and in certain cultures, this continues to be the case. Lilith, as an example of these women, has origins dating back to around 2000 BC and is thought to have appeared in history as a figure associated with the cult of the Mother Goddess in Ancient Mesopotamia. Until the 19th century, Lilith was perceived as a monstrous figure and an object of fear due to her defiant and unconventional nature; a dramatic shift from this image began to be seen in this period. This study adopts a qualitative research design, focusing on historical analysis, feminist critique, and iconographic interpretation. By examining historical, literary, and artistic sources, the research aims to trace the conceptual and visual evolution of the Lilith figure, with a particular emphasis on her transformation during the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (P.R.B.) movement. Feminist theoretical approaches were used to analyze how gender representations, especially the construction of female monstrosity, evolved in mythology and visual arts.

The primary method of data collection employed in this study is an extensive literature review, incorporating a wide range of textual and visual materials. In the section that traces the mythological origins of Lilith, foundational works such as Samuel Noah Kramer's *Gilgamesh and the Huluppu-Tree: A Reconstructed Sumerian Text* and R. Campbell Thompson's *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia* were used. Translations of sacred texts, and comparative English sources (with a particular focus on the King James Bible), supplemented this analysis. Additional mythological and feminist interpretations were drawn from works like Raphael Patai's *The Hebrew Goddess*, Filomena Pereira's *Lilith: The Edge of Forever*, Siegmund Hurwitz's *Lilith—The First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine*, and Aynur Çınar's study titled *Lilith: Yahudi Mitolojisinde Ana Tanrıça'nın Düşüş ve Şeytana Dönüşüm Serüveni*. For the analysis of the P.R.B. movement and its approach to female figures, key secondary sources included Ben Griffin's *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain*, Michelle Griffiths' study *'Soul's Beauty' and 'Body's Beauty': The Feminine Figures in the Poems and Paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, and Meltem Yaşdağ's research on symbolism in Pre-Raphaelite painting. Feminist critiques by Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock in *Patriarchal Power and The Pre-Raphaelites*, and Linda Nochlin in *Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman* have shaped critical approaches to the gender dynamics within the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Elizabeth Prettejohn's *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, however, offers a more sympathetic reading of the movement, focusing on its artistic and intellectual contributions. The section examining Lilith's transformation within the P.R.B. drew on primary sources such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* and analytical studies such as Virginia M. Allen's *"One Strangling Golden Hair": Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Lady Lilith.* Primary selection criteria were their direct relevance

to the mythological, theological, and artistic representations of Lilith, academic rigor, historical authority, and the inclusion of feminist theoretical perspectives. Preference was given to peer-reviewed scholarly works, canonical literary texts, primary historical artifacts, and artworks critically recognized within the fields of mythology, feminist theory, and art history. This methodical approach ensured that the study was supported by diverse and authoritative materials, enhancing both the credibility and the interdisciplinary depth of the research.

The Pre-Raphaelites were founded in 1848 by artists who were themselves students of the academy with an interest in nature, poetry, medieval themes and folklore and who developed a belief in the truth of the creative expression of individual artists as opposed to the classical and conventionalized expressions of art espoused by the Royal Academy. Although, the Pre-Raphaelite artists were controversial in their treatment and portrayal of women. Some of the most popular works of Victorian literature and art depicted women who were considered "fallen" in the form of prostitutes and adulteresses, as well as perverted biblical, literary and mythological female figures. However, in the mid-19th century, as women moved towards emancipation, fear and dislike of unorthodox feminine imagery persisted. The relevance of the "fallen" woman as a contemporary social and moral issue reached its peak among Pre-Raphaelite members alongside the writers of the period. The first appearance of Lilith in the Pre-Raphaelite art movement can be seen in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting "Lady Lilith" and poems in the late 1860s and early 1870s, after the dissolution of the Brotherhood. From the late 1850s onwards, Rossetti began to deal with women in a dual structure; using figures such as Mary and Magdalene, Sibyl and Siren, he depicted spiritual women representing goodness on the one hand and sensual, seductive and wild femme-fatale women on the other. Rossetti combined painting and poetry, writing sonnets, ballads and poems about these figures. In the case of Lilith, one can see how Rossetti was influenced by literary works such as Goethe and Keats and religious texts such as the Old Testament and the Talmud. Rossetti associated "Lady Lilith" with a sonnet of the same name but later changed it to "Body's Beauty" and created a dual structure with the sonnet "Soul's Beauty", which corresponds to the painting "Sibylla Palmifera". The distinction between "good" and "bad" women is made here, and Lady Lilith is presented as the antithesis of the Victorian ideal woman. This figure, with her earthly beauty, poses a threat to patriarchal thought by consciously avoiding the gaze of her male viewer. However, it was placed in a room that Victorian society deemed appropriate for women, and as a result, it remains a work produced for the male gaze. Therefore, although feminist criticisms are directed at Rossetti, it is noteworthy that the way he portrays Lilith liberates her from her monstrous aspects and that she has human characteristics, even though she remains dangerous. Where Rossetti creates an interesting- arguably even more important- breaking point for Lilith is in his ballad Eden Bower. With this ballad, Rossetti reinterprets the narrative of the Fall through Lilith's mouth, allowing her to regain her voice after ages, even though a male narrator gave it.

This study identifies several key findings regarding the transformation of the Lilith figure within the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (P.R.B.) movement. Firstly, it was observed that Lilith, originally rooted in ancient Mesopotamian mythology and later developed through theological interpretations, underwent a significant symbolic and conceptual transformation during the Victorian era. The mythological and religious background of Lilith, supported by archaeological findings, revealed the continuity and change in her representation from ancient times to the 19th century. Secondly, the analysis of Pre-Raphaelite artworks demonstrated that the Brotherhood depicted Lilith within a dual framework, portraying women both as spiritually ideal and dangerous seductresses. Rossetti's treatment of Lilith, particularly in Lady Lilith and Eden Bower, reflects this duality and highlights how Lilith was simultaneously liberated from her monstrous origins and re-situated within the constraints of Victorian male gaze expectations. Thirdly, the study integrated critical feminist perspectives from scholars such as Linda Nochlin, Deborah Cherry, and Griselda Pollock, illustrating how feminist art history critiques the P.R.B.'s portrayal of women as reinforcing patriarchal structures. Simultaneously, the incorporation of Elizabeth Prettejohn's more positive interpretations demonstrated the complexity and multiplicity of readings surrounding Pre-Raphaelite depictions of female figures. Lastly, the analysis of John Collier's Lilith painting indicated its importance in the broader visual tradition of Lilith representations, despite the scarcity of accessible scholarly resources concerning its background. A potential thematic connection between Collier's work and Rossetti's Eden Bower was suggested, indicating a continuity of Lilith's reinterpretation beyond the core P.R.B. period.

Keywords: Lilith, The Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, Victorian era, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Feminist art.

Introduction

Women have been marginalized, vilified and even considered the lesser gender in tradition with beliefs held by Aristotle to Freud for thousands of years. The patriarchal system, accepted to have been founded in Ancient Mesopotamia has solidified itself in time as the dominant system. This system, after legitimizing itself and systematically penetrating both societal and economical life, has also changed sexual relationships, thus helping solidify some preconceptions regarding sexual identity and gender roles. The acceptance of notions such as men being more "rational" than women, men "naturally" possessing more strength and women "naturally" being weaker mentally as well, has led to men being perceived as more capable in politics and caused them to represent the state. This also led to men claiming rights over women's sexuality and reproductive rights. Women have not been given these rights because "Men are the subjects of humans relationship with god; women reach god through men" (Berktay, 2019, pp. 32–33).

Women who do not conform to the rules set by the patriarchy have been regarded as monsters being called witches and whores, and they create a single archetype; in its essence, this archetype is a woman who is dangerous and unpredictable. Their habitat is not the Victorian home and the feminized interiors of the house, and they usually live in the wilderness connected to nature. Perhaps the scariest aspect of these women to the patriarchy, which defines them as frightening and abhorrent monsters, is that these women are aware of the power they possess (McCormack, 2021, pp. 213–214). Monster-Woman has appeared in various productions, from fictional texts to mythos. In general, she has turned into a character who is usually greedy and has a sexual appetite that defies societal norms. This has led to her becoming a femme-fatale for the men who desire her. The woman who is the femme-fatale is the subject of a cautionary tale, much like she was, in the witch, whore, monster archetype. She pays for being independent and having accepted her sexual urges, by being cast out of society and being the target of male aggression, eventually being destroyed, thus intimidating women who wish to "have it all" (McCormack, 2021, p. 215).

Lilith appears as one of the characters rooted in Mesopotamia and the Mother Goddess cults, then transformed into the monster and femme-fatale character after patriarchal intervention. The legend of Lilith has been adapted and preserved through the ages by various cultures, always as a cautionary tale that invokes fear. It is not easy to ascertain a clear chronological timeline of the existence of Lilith. However, it can be said that the basis of her story originated in the Middle East, migrated to the West and then the whole world. Stories regarding her appear in a wide range from Coptic, Armenian and Syrian legends to Neo-Greek, Southern Slavic and Russian folklore (Hurwitz, 1992, p. 129). While the origins of Lilith's mythological story are lost to the sands of time, the oldest known traces come from the Ancient Middle Eastern/Near Eastern mythos dating back to the Sumerians (Pereira, 1995, p. 10). The origin of the name Lilith has confounded academics. Etymological research contains many opinions relating Lilith to nocturnal animals and creatures, vampires, a type of wind and even the night itself. R. Campbell Thompson claims that the source of Lilith may come from the Sumerian "LIL" or the Semitic root "חלל" word. Thompson argues that the Hebrew name "Lilith" may have been derived from the Sumerian word for "she-devil" or "Lilitu" (Thompson, 1903, p. xxxvii). Vera Zingsem claims Lilith is connected to the Sumerian word "Lil", which means "storm" and "wind". She also mentions that Lilutu means "she-devil" or "wind spectre" in Babylonian-Assyrian languages. On the other hand, Hall believes Lilith is the feminine form of the word "layil" (night) in Hebrew (Hall, 1898, p. 157). G. R. Driver, an expert in Semitic languages and Orientalist/Eastern Research, found translations of Lilith as "screech-owl" or "night monster" insufficient and studied the relation of Lilith to the jackals of Edom and mythological creatures such as the "onokentaurus" which appear in the Septuagint. Lilith, who was translated as Lamia by Saint Jerome in the Vulgate, is described as a blood-sucking monster that steals babies; this has caused a connection with vampiric themes. Driver also investigates the Akkadian words "lilû" and "lilîtu", which are derived from the Sumerian root "Lil-La", meaning "storm wind", about their connection to Lilith and emphasizes the use of these words in ancient magical talismans (Driver, 1959).

Lilith is expressly considered to be connected to the Sumerian goddess Inanna. Known as the "Master of the Sky," Inanna is associated with both love and sexuality as well as warfare. She embodies masculine and feminine attributes, representing life and death. She is depicted as a winged, armed figure surrounded by stars (Black & Green, 2003, pp. 112–113). Lilith has also been associated with certain female demons in Mesopotamian mythology, particularly the female demons named Lilitu and Ardat Lili, which are essential in understanding the origins of Lilith. Lilitu [1] and Ardat Lili are described as unmarried souls. These overtly sexual demons are known to haunt pregnant women and kidnap children. Lilith's description as a barren demon that secretes venom instead of milk from her breasts and targets newborns[2] in the Jewish tradition may have been influenced by these Mesopotamian demons (Black & Green, 2003, p. 144). Originally regarded as a goddess of prosperity and the spirit of fertility in Sumerian and Assyrian cultures, Lilith was later vilified and reshaped into a "creature of the night" by patriarchal influence. This transformation reflects the demonization of strong goddess figures, such as Inanna, whose contradictory traits of strength and sexuality are thought to have influenced Lilith's darkened image. Lilith appears in the seventh tablet of the Gilgamesh Chronicles as líl-lá-ke, a female figure nesting in the Huluppu tree among other night creatures—an entity identified by Kramer as Lilith.[3] Scholars argue that Lilith represents a dark reflection of Inanna (Kramer & Wolkstein), while Zingsem suggests she once served Inanna before being demonized. In the Gilgamesh Chronicles, the bird, snake, and tree triad reflects Mesopotamian symbolism and hints at Lilith's later association with Adam and Eve in Rabbinic traditions. Inanna's plea for Gilgamesh's help signifies the rise of patriarchy and provides a

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[1] According to Thompson Lilitu is the original word Lilit was taken from. This is shown in Isaiah 34:14 (Thompson, 1903, pp. xxxvi–xxxviii).

[2] Lilith, being a female demon that is barren and hurts children, caused her to be associated with Al Basty (also Albastı) or Al Kardai in Turkish culture. Certain studies claim that there could be a connection between Alu and the Turkish word "Al". Al Basty, who has traits of animals such as birds, dogs and goats alongside human attributes such as a shrouded corpse, a witch and a bride, carries the traits of the mentioned demons-known as a Djinn, fairy, spirit or disease predominantly targeting new mothers and their children, sometimes travellers, men, brides and pregnant women. Akyıldız-Ercan, C. (2013). Mitolojide çocuk katili kadınlar: Lilith, Lamia, Medea. *Journal of World of Turks, 5*(1), 89–103.

[3] See Kramer, 2020, pp. 69-72. For some historical works of art describing the representation of the shift mentioned above, see Burney Relief.

historical and religious foundation for Lilith's reduction of power. This narrative exemplifies how ancient goddesses were demonized (S. Kramer, 1938; Pereira, 1995, p. 26; Zingsem, 2006, p. 31) .

Lilith's influence extended beyond Mesopotamia, evolving as it spread to neighboring cultures. In Greco-Roman mythology, she is linked to Lamia, the child-killer, sharing traits such as hatred toward children, seduction of men, and a serpent-like body. The closest Roman counterpart is Libitina, a goddess of funerals and death, whose hooded cape and large wings are believed to have influenced the modern grim reaper (Grimal, 2012; Smith, 2008). Lamia's origins trace back to Phoenicia or Libya, and like Lilith, she is said to kidnap children and torment mothers. Additionally, Lamia is linked to Lamashtu in Akkadian mythology and is thought to have evolved from Mesopotamian traditions (Van der Toorn et al., 1999, p. 521)

In Jeish culture, Lilith's image has been continuously reinterpreted, appearing in texts and objects, evolving within religious and cultural narratives. The evil attributes inherited from Mesopotamian traditions were incorporated into Jewish magical practices and talismans.[4] The Old Testament, particularly Genesis 1:27, 2:22, and Isaiah 34:14, directly and indirectly reference Lilith. Genesis 1:27 describes a woman created equal to Adam, whereas Genesis 2:22 states she was made from his rib to serve him. Early rabbis interpreted the first woman as Lilith and the second as Eve, a belief supported by Talmudic, Midrashic, and Kabbalistic texts. Isaiah 34:14, which mentions owls roosting near Lilith, strengthens her association with owls and spirits in Jewish tradition.

Although Lilith is absent from the Old Testament, she reappears in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. In "Song for a Sage", she is associated with desert demons and described as a wild wind spirit who kidnaps children, later evolving into a seductive demon in the Talmud era. Lilith's first appearance in the Babylonian Talmud is in Niddah 24b, where she is depicted as a winged demoness with a human face. Eruvin 100b emphasizes her lengthy hair, linking her to Lamia and Lamashtu (Çınar, 2018, p. 379; p. 49; Pereira, 1995, p. 69). Her transformation into Adam's first wife begins in Midrash texts, particularly Genesis Rabba 22:7, where Cain and Abel argue over the "First Eve", who was turned to dust, widely interpreted as Lilith (Kosior,

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[4]   See Nippur bowls and Arslan Tash talismans.

2018, p. 129). *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*[5] (8th–10th centuries) was crucial in defining Lilith's role as Adam's wife, providing context previously absent in the Talmud (Hurwitz, 1992, p. 177). Another key connection is the term "Quippoz" in Isaiah 34:14-15, translated variably as "screech owl" or "snake". The New International Version of the Bible links Lilith to the serpent in Eden, a view solidified in Kabbalist texts, where she, envious of Adam and Eve's happiness, transforms into a snake to seduce Adam. As the serpent in Eden, Lilith became widely accepted in medieval lore (also sometimes in the Renaissance), inspiring numerous depictions of her as a seductive, vengeful snake. For example, in a scene depicted on one of the column bases of the Notre Dame Cathedral from the 13th century, Lilith is shown with a serpent's body from the waist down, leaning toward Eve and watching her as she takes the forbidden fruit.[6] A similar representation appears in one of Raphael's frescos on the ceiling of Camera della Segnatura, where Lilith is portrayed gazing at Adam with desire and longing.[7]

In Kabbalist texts, Lilith evolves beyond Adam's first wife into a cosmic and divine entity. According to *The Hebrew Goddess* by Raphael Patai, mystical traditions describe Lilith and Samael[8] as an androgynous counterpart to

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[5]   In the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, Lilith is created from the same earth as Adam but refuses to be subordinate to him. She speaks God's forbidden name and flees Eden. When three angels attempt to bring her back, she refuses, accepting a curse that causes a hundred of her children to die daily. In return, she vows not to harm infants wearing amulets inscribed with the angels' names. This text has contributed to the increasing recognition of Lilith as Adam's first wife. See (Hurwitz, 1992).

[6]   For further reference, see: Wikipedia (2017). Reliefs, portal of the Virgin, Notre-Dame, Paris. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2017_Notre-Dame_de_Paris_P52.jpg

[7]   The artwork is accessible via the digital collection of the Vatican Museums. For further reference, see: Musei Vaticani (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/stanze-di-raffaello/stanza-della-segnatura/volta.html

[8]   Samael, often translated as "Venom of God", is a complex figure in Jewish mysticism. In Kabbalistic texts, he is paired with Lilith, forming a dark counterpart to Adam and Eve, symbolizing the Other Side (Evil). Their union is described as an intertwined male-female entity, mirroring divine creation but in a corrupt form. As Samael's consort, Lilith is identified with the Serpent, the Woman of Harlotry, and the End of Days, linking them to chaos, temptation, and destruction (Patai, 1968, p. 300). For further information on Lilith's narratives in Kabbalistic texts, see: Patai, R. (1968). *The Hebrew Goddess.* KTAV Publishing House.

Adam and Eve, based on the concept of a celestial androgynous god. Over time, Lilith becomes a seductress and child-killer, luring men at crossroads with viper-bile wine before transforming into a ruthless demon. She is also linked to serpents and the blind dragon Taniniver, who arranged her union with Samael. Their barren marriage reflects the Leviathan myth, where Lilith embodies a distorted path leading men to ruin. By the 17th century, Kabbalist texts describe Lilith as a barren being who sustains herself through seduction and fornication (Patai, 1968, pp. 234–235). Thus, Lilith's transformation from her Mesopotamian origins peaked in this period, solidifying her as a complex figure within Jewish religious and cultural consciousness.

The Image of Woman in The Victorian Era: Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Woman Figure

Throughout history, women who defied societal norms have consistently faced discrimination, a trend that persisted in 19th-century England despite rapid social and political transformations. The Industrial Revolution during Queen Victoria's reign redefined family structures and middle-class values, yet women remained excluded from these progressive changes, as patriarchal society reinforced strict gender roles (Griffin, 2012, p. 133). Middle-class women were expected to remain within the domestic sphere, and those who sought independence were ostracized and labelled as sinners. Lower-class women faced similar constraints, often working as maids, factory laborers, or prostitutes due to economic necessity (Yaşdağ, 2013, pp. 31–33). The era also reshaped female beauty standards, emphasizing a "modest" ideal encompassing physical appearance and moral character. Women were directly associated with beauty, but this beauty was framed within the confines of modesty, obedience, and domesticity, reinforcing their societal roles as wives and mothers. While men expanded their identities with attributes such as "gentlemen" and leadership roles, women remained restricted by both physical and intellectual limitations imposed by society, solidifying their subordinate status.

As a reflection of Beauvoir's well-known phrase, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman", girls were taught the roles of a good wife and mother at a very young age and instructed in the governance of an efficient

home. They were advised to be submissive, hardworking, humble and thrifty. Female fashion of the Victorian Era has evolved alongside these rules and was forced to satisfy conservative mainstream Victorian tastes and qualities. The fashion sense of the era did not represent women as actors or subjects but as objects to look at (Ioannou, 2012). On the stage where these restrictions constrained women, a radical art movement arose that rebelled against not only the circumstances involving women but most societal norms, especially against the teachings of the Royal Academy, the art authority of the country. Formed by academy students William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (D.G.R.), the "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (P.R.B.)" sought a new vision of being displeased by the traditional teaching methods of the academy. Influenced by contemporary poets such as Keats and Tennyson, these three academy-educated artists, influenced by northern European art, sought to develop a style and iconography of their own. Eventually deciding to form a group whose purpose and rules they would determine (Yaşdağ, 2013, pp. 58–59).

In defiance of the teachings of John Ruskin and The Academy, who say that nature is flawed and it is ideal to replicate Raphael, The P.R.B. aimed to approach events with a fresh perspective.[9] Superficially, P.R.B. art is characterized by observing and interpreting nature realistically, focusing on external details for its benefit, using vibrant colors and violent main lines, having artful sincerity, showing an affinity to themes of the Middle Ages and describing Christian topics along with historical and literary subjects in an archaic but naturalistic manner. Pre-Raphaelitism became a statement of "a rebellion against the rules of academics and a return to the belief in the correctness of the artist's creative expression, against the stereotypical and traditional expression of so-called 'classical' art" (Griffiths, 1997, pp. 57–59).

Definitions of family and the place of women developed by Queen Victoria and men of the middle class, whom the Industrial Revolution strengthened have regarded women as two opposing poles. The former description of

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[9]　John Ruskin, in *Modern Painters*, advocates for staying true to nature but not mere replication. He sees nature's flaws as a source of beauty and inspiration, urging artists to study it deeply, much like Raphael did. See Jump, 2020, pp. 678–685.

women as "angels at home", as the virgin Madonna, the good wife and virtuous woman, has generally been held in high regard. In contrast, the latter has been regarded as sexually attractive but scary and demonic seductresses. These women represent the "Magdalene" type of women who are prostitutes and witches, i.e. women who were reviled by society. The male gaze, depending on his desire, has chosen to protect and glorify the virtuous woman while demeaning the evil woman (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 208). Examples of the dichotomy between pure and impure women can be seen in D.G.R.'s *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents*. Depictions of the Virgin Mary in these paintings are religious, chaste, pure of spirit and represent a devoted bourgeoise woman.

In contrast, women who are considered "fallen" have been a subject of interest for artists of the P.R.B. In opposition to the disposition of the male "fallen", which mostly inspires statuesque monuments, the female "fall" has been understood as any sexual activity out of wedlock, whether it be for monetary gain or not, and has inspired an odd sense of awe in the imaginations of 19th-century artists. Linda Nochlin mentions that this phenomenon reaches its peak among authors and critics around the middle of the 19th century in England and has its characteristic formulation among P.R.B. artists and their friends (Nochlin, 1978). D.G.R., among the P.R.B. painters concerned himself with the theme of the fallen woman almost to the point of obsession, not only dedicating some poems and paintings to the subject but also dedicating his painting *Found* (1853 or 1854) which approaches the contemporary subject in an unusually realistic style. According to Nochlin, the mostly incomplete painting "Found", in which a fallen woman who refuses the man trying to save her is depicted, implies that the modern prostitute has no path to salvation. This attitude is morally appropriate for D.G.R alongside his contemporaries. Lustful men who are seen as "real people", however, are not held responsible under similar circumstances.

Nochlin regards D.G.R.'s *Found* and understanding of the fallen woman, intertwined with W. Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience*, dated 1853. Hunt depicts the moment a young woman realizes she is a mistress. The relationship between the man and his female lover is symbolized in a

cat tormenting a bird in the background. The female figure in the painting is suffering the consequences of not conforming to the moral norms of Victorian culture, involving family, home and motherhood. Thus, in Hunt's painting, we see the depiction of a figure opposite to the loyal and religious ideal woman represented in Millais and D.G.R.'s paintings. For a woman, the term fallen carries an irreversible fate; best case, she can be protected by a higher being with feelings of pity and disdain (Nochlin, 1978, p. 152). According to Elizabeth Prettejohn none of the aforementioned paintings directly show the infamous double standard -The social contracts that provide men with more sexual freedom than women- of the Victorian Era. All the paintings discuss societal gender roles and problems in sexual morality on a wide scale. In *Found,* the male innocence is compared to the female sexual experience. In *The Awakening Conscience*, even though the male figure is despicable, the moral solution is not directly provided to the observer, it is unclear whether the "fallen" woman has been irredeemably sullied or the awakening has provided her with moral salvation. These paintings, rather than suggesting a monolithic "Victorian" approach, do not directly lead to absolute consequences and investigate various problems within relationships (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 212).

Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock regard the ideal of the bourgeoise woman to be a structuring component in the organization of male sexuality. According to this, the "impure" woman figure, whether it be Mary or the prostitute in the painting *Found* or the imprisoned woman in *The Awakening Conscience*, has continued to be depicted in paintings in various forms. The theme of the sexually insatiable and seductive woman —especially in D.G.R. and Edward Burne-Jones' paintings and drawings— has been used in abundance in depictions of historical and mythological figures, whose beauty was considered deadly. According to Cherry and Pollock, the depicted women have become schematized, and their facial features have been abstracted over time to become feminine objects to be looked at. Even though these images evoke fear in the male observer, they were fabricated to be chosen and bought. The depicted women are subject to patriarchal power struggles. The man who carries the dominant title is the central observer, the subject of the gaze, and contains the power within to both look upon, fear also define her as a femme fatale (Cherry & Pollock, 1984, p. 497).

As John Berger puts it, the male gaze born of man's pleasures and needs, which shows itself in visual and literary arts, has permeated Western culture. Berger points out that while the object of European nude art is a woman, most artists and owners are men. The behavior of women has been shaped by the way men have treated them, and they have mostly been constrained to viewing their sexuality similarly to men. The reason women have been depicted so differently from men has not been because women were created so differently, but rather the acceptance that men are the "ideal viewer" and the image of women has been edited to flatter their ego (Berger, 1977, pp. 47–48). Nochlin, while describing the heavy influence of the male gaze on nude paintings considered erotic, also points out that there are no examples of erotic art, in the 19th century or directly before and after, that do not contain a female figure. Alongside this, Nochlin points out that there is no art, especially high artwork, that satisfies a woman's desires or fantasies. The erotic object, whether it be part of a woman's body, her clothes or an appearance or pose as a vision of sexual pleasure and seductiveness, is created by men, about women and for male appreciation. According to Nochlin, this situation, while not being a conspiracy plotted by men, is a reflection of women not owning their erotic zones in the art world (Nochlin, 2020, pp. 137–138).

Beginning in the 1860s, the number of portraits that the P.R.B. painted of single women increased, and these figures have generally been regarded as seductive by the male gaze and as dangerous women. Prettejohn, however, calls attention to the possibility of this being part of a "feminist" project devoted to creating images of strong women against the petite and elegant figures of women prevalent in the early Victorian Era. In this context, while the complicated psychology of women was perceived as passive through the male perspective, it could also be read as a statement of the female id, which does not need to conform to the patriarchal world (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 84). According to Cherry and Pollock the knowledge and meaning produced by entities like the P.R.B, are deeply connected with patriarchal governance mechanisms. In specific discourse on Pre-Raphaelitism, regarding female sexuality, gender roles and bourgeoise definitions of sexuality, the subject is discussed with male-focused lust criteria and a phallocentric economy of desire. Seen often in exhibitions,

Pre-Raphaelite artists demonstrated white male history and the cultural activities and imperialist ideologies of white men (Cherry & Pollock, 1984, p. 494).

Prettejohn criticizes Cherry and Pollock's comments on the P.R.B. and claims that they oversimplify the historical conditions of the time the paintings were painted. Criticisms of the patriarchal prejudice of P.R.B. art and the Victorian Era have been displayed as the height of misogyny; however, the reason for this image is that the subjects of gender and sexuality have been opened to fervent discussion and radical changes occurring in Western societies. There is evidence that P.R.B. artists supported women's rights movements. William Michael Rosetti joined rallies for women's right to vote, and Burne-Jones supported his wife, who took part in elections. Prettejohn mentions that it is easy to criticize these artists for not going far enough. Although she also emphasizes that P.R.B. artists were less likely than other artists, both from the 19th century and previous historical eras, to encourage patriarchal ideologies actively (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 84).

In conclusion, depictions of women in the Victorian Era represent a time when gender and sexual morality were under strict scrutiny. The P.R.B. brought a radical perspective to female figures of the era. Their depictions of women as innocent and seductive beings show the transformative nature of the perception of women in the era and the art world. While researchers such as Nochlin and Cherry & Pollock have offered more critical feminist readings of the P.R.B., scholars like Prettejohn have approached the movement from a more favorable perspective. In the art of the era, a new understanding of the dark side of women developed, and figures like Lilith were reinterpreted. In the next chapter, the place of Lilith on the Victorian art stage and her transformation within the P.R.B. movement will be discussed.

Reclaiming the Voice: Transformation of Lilith

After the legends and myths of various cultures, Lilith reappeared on the literary stage once again early in the 19th century. While not directly named in Milton's *Paradise Lost,* she is referred to, similarly to

Michelangelo, depicting Lilith as the serpent who seduces Adam and Eve. Milton also described her as a serpent (Milton, 2021, pp. 84–85). Lilith, who is associated with *Sin* in the second book, is condemned to pain and suffering -particularly in her womb- representing a cruel and deviant love, as the personification of a mother who would destroy her children. This garnered attention from poets and artists (McGillis, 1979, p. 4). At the start of the 19th century, she appeared in the Talmud with her name and character in Goethe's *Faust*[10]. Her next big outing would be in P.R.B. artist and poet D.G.R.'s poem *Body's Beauty* and accompanying painting *Lady Lilith* in the 1860s, followed by a long ballad named *Eden Bower*.

D.G.R.'s career enters a new period as the P.R.B. is in the process of disbanding in 1853. Works of D.G.R.'s second period[11] are influenced by Dante, Malory and Tennyson, who were popular in England at the time alongside subjects of the Middle Ages. His female figures are generally influenced by Dante's *Beatrice*, Malory's *Guinevere* or Tennyson's *Shalott Lady*, taking the shape of ladies of the Middle Ages (Griffiths, 1997, p. 109). D.G.R. created female figures representing two opposing categories benefiting from Catholic art sensibilities, Christian typologies, early Italian and Arthurian Middle Ageism and classical mythology. Before 1865, D.G.R. represented female characters of two classifications, reflecting iconographic models of Middle Age, Renaissance and Baroque artists. Some of the most popular works of Victorian Era art and literature depict prostitutes, fornicating women, evil queens, vengeful goddesses, sirens, sorceresses, demons and witches containing heretical Bible, literary and mythological female figures. In the mid-19th century, women were on a path to liberation; there was, however, a group that was scared

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[10] In the Walpurgis Night scene, Lilith appears as a seductive and formidable figure, even feared by Mephistopheles. He warns Faust about her enchanted beauty, particularly her hair and shimmering ornaments, which serve to entrap men and never release them. See Von Goethe, J. W. (1882). *Faust* (Trans. M. Swanwick). John D. Williams.

[11] Over time, P.R.B. members moved away from collective learning and competition, pursuing individual paths. Led by D.G.R., this shift formed "Aesthetic Pre-Raphaelitism" or "Second Wave Pre-Raphaelitism", which bridged art and craft, laying the foundation for the Arts and Crafts movement. This phase emphasized poetry and blending symbolism with earlier styles, particularly in D.G.R.'s works, which greatly influenced literature. Cherry, D., & Pollock, G. (1984). Patriarchal power and the pre-raphaelites. In L. Parris (Ed.), *The pre-raphaelites* (pp. 480–495). The Tate Gallery and Penguin Books.

of and disliked unorthodox female figures. Members of the P.R.B. and other English authors were greatly interested in the figure of the "fallen woman" as a social and moral issue. In this period, less fortunate female characters, women who were ostracized, have sought a societal rise with the efforts of male figures attempting to "heal" them (Griffiths, 1997, p. 8). Starting in the 1860s, many artists began depicting single female figures with lustful and majestic faces and figures with psychological depth. In the following analyses of Pre-Raphaelitism, these types of female figures were generally regarded and demonized as seductive femme-fatales and presented as a category men enjoy (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 84).

Lilith, capturing the interest of avant-garde artists, also intrigued D.G.R., who depicted mythological and religious female figures. Her moral ambiguity and vilification in Jewish tradition fascinated D.G.R. and his contemporaries. Lilith was not seen as an "evil demo" but as an ordinary woman challenging societal norms in late Victorian England. Within the P.R.B., she symbolized "the woman who refuses to be written", threatening the male soul. D.G.R. reimagined Lilith, shifting her from a Jewish she-demon to a Victorian femme-fatale, blurring the lines between angel and monster (Bullen, 1998, p. 136). While exploring the duality of female representation, he painted *Lady Lilith* (1866–68)[12], embodying bodily and earthly beauty, in stark contrast to *Sibylla Palmifera* (1866–1870) [13], which represents spiritual beauty.

In *Lady Lilith*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti presents a striking portrayal of the mythological figure Lilith seated before a mirror, brushing her long, gold-red hair. Rather than engaging with the viewer, Lilith turns inward, her gaze locked in her reflection, evoking an image of autonomous yet indifferent femininity. On her left wrist, a red thread reminiscent of Jewish apotropaic traditions—particularly those linked to Lilith and Yom Kippur rituals—subtly invokes themes of protection, sin, and atonement. The flowers behind her transition from white to red,

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[12] The artwork's visual can be accessed through the Delaware Art Museum's digital collection. For further reference, see: Rosetti, D. G. (1866-1868). Lady Lilith. Retrieved from https://emuseum.delart.org/objects/6457/lady-lilith

[13] The artwork is available via the Rossetti Archive's digital collection. For further reference, see: Rosetti, D. G. (1866-70). Sibylla Palmifera. Retrieved from https://rossettiarchive.iath.virginia.edu/docs/s193.rap.html

mirroring alchemical symbolism and biblical associations with purity, temptation, and transformation, also representing the union of fire and water. This suggests a metamorphic process tied to Lilith's beauty, immortality, and the pursuit of enlightenment. These roses resonate with Venusian iconography, reinforcing Lilith's alignment with feminine beauty, sensuality, and divine allure (Rossetti, 2018, p. 93).

D.G.R. delivered this painting to its patron between 1868-1869. Within the body-soul duality, Lilith symbolizes the sinful body, while Sibyl embodies the virtuous spirit. D.G.R. wrote a sonnet for each painting, placing them within their frames.[14] Though *Lady Lilith* was initially linked to a sonnet of the same name, the frame featured its revised title, "Body's Beauty", as published in *Poems* (1870, republished 1881) (Allen, 1984, p. 285). While Lilith was determined by Christian patriarchy, in the art of the P.R.B., she is empowered and, to a degree, autonomous. Despite its power of self-creation, it is limited by strict Victorian Era structures. Without even giving her a voice, Lady Lilith's accompanying poem attempts to emphasize Lilith's power over men and the reader through the frozen and immobile nature of the portrait.

The painting's themes—aestheticism, immortality, and duality—highlight Lilith's physical and spiritual evolution (Rossetti, 2018, p. 94). In D.G.R.'s painting, Lilith is not depicted as the traditionally lustful figure but cold and aloof, combing her long, thick hair detached from her surroundings. The summer elements in the background symbolize the maturity of her corporeal beauty. A.C. Swinburne, a prominent Victorian poet and critic, describes Lilith as a darkly desirous figure—apathetic, balanced, attractive, yet entirely self-absorbed—. His view aligns with Frank Kermode, who sees Lilith as a paradox, exuding passion yet emotionally detached. In D.G.R.'s short story, this duality is reflected through Beatrice, representing salvation, and Lilith, symbolizing damnation and desire, a contrast further emphasized in the sonnet "Body's Beauty" (McGillis, 1979, p. 4). The way Lilith presents herself in the mirror symbolizes defiance against male authority. This Lilith represents a figure independent from male control, the "New Woman" against the Victorian Era family. Analysis of several of these early works of Lilith herself shows that they contain the fears and admirations of D.G.R. and his generation. These fears were

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[14] The name of *Sibylla Palmifera*'s accompanying sonnet is *Souls's Beauty*.

born of confronting the "Women's Emancipation Movement" [15] and family planning debates in the 1860s. D.G.R., while adding to the image of Lilith created by Goethe, his interest in the form of the figure remained solid. In this work, Lilith's image takes on a dual identity—a "modern" woman, self-absorbed in her reflection, and a mythical figure rooted in the poet's sexual imagination. By framing his oil painting with his sonnets, D.G.R. offers a direct commentary on the "modern" woman (Allen, 1984, p. 286). As many have pointed out, *Lady Lilith* is a high point in a famous series of half-sized female portraits by D.G.R., starting with the *Bocca Baciata* in 1859. Throughout this period, he created numerous works featuring women brushing their thick hair often modelled by Elizabeth Siddal— his muse and later his wife—and Fanny Cornforth. An example is *Fazio's Mistress*, where Fanny is the model, reinforcing the theme. D.G.R. viewed long, dense hair as a "prison"—constricting yet seductive—an obsession that culminated in *Lady Lilith* (Allen, 1984, p. 288). Inspired by Titian's *Lady at Her Toilette*, D.G.R. mirrored its neckline and dress style. The painting, completed in 1866, exists in two versions. Initially modelled by Fanny, a watercolor version was sold (1864–1867), but when Frederick Leyland, who initially sought *Sibylla Palmifera*, commissioned the piece, he rejected the original face, leading D.G.R. to repaint Lilith with Alexa Wilding's marbled features and gold-red hair. Despite technical differences, the long flowing hair and background remained unchanged, preserving the painting's symbolic essence. In the watercolor version, Fanny Cornforth's softer facial features and darker, more shadowed red hair were replaced by Alexa Wilding's more sculpturesque, marble-like face and luminous gold-red hair.[16]

William Michael Rossetti discovered a letter dated November 18, 1869, addressed to the editor of *The Athenaeum*, containing a detailed explanation of Lilith as a night demon. It is believed that D.G.R. wrote to F.G. Stephens, *Athenaeum* editor and P.R.B. co-founder, to obtain information

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[15] This term generally refers to the movement beginning in the mid 19th Century that fought for the freedom of women. It is a movement where women attempted to free themselves of men's traditional power structures and authority, requesting reforms for basic human rights, education and property rights and equality. See Paletschek & Pietrow-Ennker, 2003.

[16] The image of the artwork can be accessed through the digital collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. For further reference, see: Rosetti, D. G. (1867). Lady Lilith. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/337500

on the topic. Regardless of its source, the letter reflects a perceived connection between Lilith and the English "Women's Emancipation Movement", opening with: "Lilith… was the first strong-minded woman and the original advocate of women's rights" (Allen, 1984, p. 297). As D.G.R. criticized the "New Woman" of the 1860s through Lilith, this perspective was likely widespread. In 1860s London, women's pursuit of public status and autonomy sparked heated debates, and by 1867, women's suffrage was still being dismissed. Writings of the period condemned the "Women's Emancipation Movement", portraying women who rejected motherhood and domesticity as "lacking womanhood". Like Lilith, the "New Woman" was associated with the child-murderer archetype. Lilith remained a recurring motif in D.G.R.'s art, reflecting her dominance over the male psyche. He first depicted her in a drawing referencing Lilith and Lamia's serpent forms, later expanding on this theme in his 1870 ballad *Eden Bower* (Allen, 1984, pp. 292–293; Griffiths, 1997, p. 9).

Eden Bower introduces Lilith, emphasizing her original contribution to the "Fall from Eden" story, focusing on her non-human origins. She is created "like a soft and sweet woman" yet begins as a serpent, later transforming into Adam's wife. The ballad opens as she is exiled from Eden, reuniting with her former lover, the Serpent. Lilith's shapeshifting nature is central to the narrative. Initially a serpent in Eden Bower, God gives her a human form to become Adam's wife but she later seeks to reclaim her original shape. Alongside Talmudic tradition, *Genesis* serves as another potential source for D.G.R.'s reimagining of Lilith, playing on the biblical ambiguity surrounding the creation of Adam's first female companion. By depicting Lilith as a serpent who transforms into a woman, D.G.R. challenges conventional religious narratives and reinforces Lilith's dual nature (Rossetti, 1886, pp. 308–314). Beyond its religious undertones, *Eden Bower* explores Lilith's transformation and shifting power dynamics as Adam's wife. Before her exile, she embraces her new identity as "the earth's new creature". She recalls their sexual union, describing their relationship as one where "Adam was Lilith's slave" and "Lilith was Adam's queen". These verses highlight the significance of her serpent-to-woman transformation, portraying it as a rise in status rather than mere submission (Nizamoğlu, 2021, p. 3).

D.G.R.'s study of Lilith influenced the painting and the book of poems named *Eden Bower*. Knowing Lilith's former character may have caused D.G.R. and Frederic Leyland to want to change the face in the *Lady Lilith* painting. Alexa Wilding's cold and distant face, compared to Fanny Cornworth's soft, contoured face, presents a more dangerous "Eros" figure. It is suggested that D.G.R. used Lilith's figure to symbolize the loss and suffering he experienced after the death of his wife, Elizabeth Siddal. Siddal's death caused D.G.R. to depict Lilith as a personal demon and associate Siddal with a figure that destroyed his hope of having a child and happiness. In this context, a relationship between Lilith, feminism and birth control is formed. Conservatives of the time have considered Lilith's child-killing aspects to be similar to the use of birth control by the feminist movement (Allen, 1984, pp. 293–294). Eventually, Lilith became an early representation of the femme-fatale figure, becoming a symbol of one of the patriarchal thoughts' biggest fears, of women taking control of the decisions regarding their sexuality away from men. Lilith's story is associated with "The Fall", D.G.R.'s takes on her, and the societal developments created by women's rights movements have influenced other artists toward the end of the 19th century.

Influenced by D.G.R., poet Robert Browning also handled Lilith and discussed Lilith and Eve in his 1883 poem *Adam, Lilith and Eve*. In the poem, Browning compares Lilith and Eve, emphasizing the differences in their characters and choices. While Eve is generally described as an obedient and nurturing figure, Lilith represents a self-confident and independent spirit. This duality criticizes the societal expectations of women and the consequences of defying these norms. Browning's Lilith is an evil seductress symbolizing the struggle for identity and autonomy (Browing, 1895, p. 916). Lilith's ability to tell her own story separates her from other rebellious female figures in Victorian Era literature. Browning's poem reflects a period where strong female figures were forced into uncertainty, defined as "feminist self-postponement".[17] Four out of nine poems in his book *Jacoseria* describe historical female figures defying gender roles, which suggests the Lilith myth is a conscious choice.

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[17] This term expresses women's postponement of their personal desires and needs due to societal expectations and roles. Kathleen Blake defines this situation as women sacrificing themselves and putting others' needs before their own. In this context, the way women postponed themselves played an important role in shaping gender roles and representations of women in literature (Blake, 1987, p. ix).

Another artist known to have been influenced by D.G.R. and the women's rights movements of the period, also known to have been influenced by the art of the P.R.B., is the painter John Collier (1850-1934). At the start of the 20th century, John Collier was primarily known for portraits and "problematic" paintings; between 1886 and 1888, he completed three paintings depicting women clad in animal skins. One is the painting *Lilith*, painted in 1887.[18] It is considered that Collier was influenced not only by D.G.R.'s Lady Lilith and Body's Beauty but also by the femme-fatale depiction of Lilith in Eden Bower (Gauld, 2005, p. 39).

In his painting, Collier, who is used to working with nude figures, creates different traits for D.G.R.'s evil lover and mystic demon. It was commented that even though it is presented with uncompromising reality, it cannot be considered a soft and charming woman because it does not contain a drop of human blood. This painting of Collier, which was presented in the Grosvenor Gallery and was open to viewing by invitation only, is also significant. It is considered parallel with protests[19] claiming the corset to be a restrictive garment; the curvy snake represents a constricting outfit. In the painting, the mythological figure is depicted as a nude woman standing in a secluded natural setting, her porcelain-like skin starkly contrasted by the serpent, coiling sensually around her body. Her golden-red hair cascades over her shoulders as she gazes downward, absorbed in a moment of silent, almost ritualistic intimacy with the snake, now tamed, no longer a predator but an extension of her form. This pose, with the subtle turn of her hips, emphasizes the erotic display of the female body while simultaneously denying any direct engagement with the viewer, reinforcing John Berger's assertion that women in Western painting are often posed for male sexual consumption, rather than self-expression.

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[18] The visual representation of the painting is available through the Art UK digital platform. For further reference, see: Collier, J. (1889). Lilith. Retrieved from https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/lilith-65854

[19] The corset was not only a fashion element but also a symbol of society's expectations of women. Women wore corsets with a thin waist, which men generally liked and accepted as the beauty standard. This societal pressure caused many women to endure discomfort and health risks to conform to these ideals. Therefore, the corset became both an object of self-expression and oppression, reflecting the complicated dynamics of gender roles in the 19th century. See Nelson, 2000.

Collier's visual interpretation draws significantly from D.G. Rossetti's *Eden Bower* ballad and his depiction of the femme-fatale, rather than the serene sensuality of *Lady Lilith*. This connection is made clear through the structural parallels between Collier's composition and Rossetti's earlier drawing for the ballad. The red-haired, bare-skinned Lilith is simultaneously constructed as an object of male desire and as an emblem of resistance: The snake encircling her body has been read as a visual metaphor for the constrictive corset—an idea aligned with 19th-century critiques of women's fashion as a symbol of social restriction. While her naked form exposes her to the male gaze, Lilith's defiant rejection of male control and her cold, detached expression challenge the viewer's interpretive authority. Despite the sympathetic visual echo of feminist concerns, Collier's framing ultimately reinscribes the female body within a patriarchal aesthetic of erotic display (Berger, 1977, pp. 62–63; Gauld, 2005, pp. 39–42).

Besides this, Lilith appears as a figure near the end of the 19th century in the literary stage in George Macdonald's 1895 novel Lilith: A Romance, representing men lacking strength and virility. Lilith's affinity to drain men of any activity, livelihood and strength is represented in this book in her transformation to a "White leech" that feeds on the blood of the hero. While there are vampiric themes that could be associated with Lamia, Lilith appears as a strong and defiant female character who earns her voice, saying, "I am what I am; none can take me from me" (Macdonald, 2015, pp. 84–85). French and European authors in the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Victor Hugo and Remy de Gourmont, handle Lilith as a figure that protects female aspects and provides an in-depth look into this character by exploring themes of creation, demons, incubi and succubi.[20] Romantics, discovering Lilith's seductive beauty, describe the femme-fatale image and its demonic influence. The authors drew a portrait of her relationship with a man and carried the myth of Lilith into the human consciousness, solidifying her place.

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[20] The Succubus is a species of female demon that is sexually promiscuous and uses her beauty to seduce men in the night and sometimes bear their demon children. Male versions are called "Incubus". According to the 15th Century text *Malus Maleficarum*, Succubi are barren like other demons. (Smith, 2008, pp. 10-11). Demons such as Lilitu, Lilu and Ardat Lili, mentioned in part two of this study, are regarded as being in the incubi-succubi class. See Patai, 1968, p. 295.

While many authors have not handled Lilith as a central theme in their work, they have made significant contributions to the legend by focusing on women, passion, love and the psychological aspects of their consequences. Lilith represented the personification of the relationship between man and woman, individuality and the rebellious pursuit of self-actualization. Another moralized interpretation suggests that Lilith rejected the chance to live harmoniously with Adam, instead embracing vengeance and reuniting with her serpent lover. Her refusal to accept her prescribed role sets her apart from the biblical Eve, who ultimately becomes a subservient wife to Adam. Lilith refuses the opportunity to lead a happy life with Adam and chooses revenge, opting to get back together with her serpent lover due to her pride. Even when the Talmud gave Lilith a second chance, she refused to return. Lilith has, therefore, been associated with Milton's fallen Eve; however, in deference to Eve, she has rebelled (Pittman, 1974, p. 49) .

The duality between Eve and Lilith has reappeared throughout Western civilization and is reflected in psychoanalytic theory as well. These two figures are often regarded as opposing Archetypes: Lilith represents the dark, instinctual, and destructive feminine force, while Eve embodies the obedient, socially accepted ideal. Jungian interpretations view Lilith as a symbol of feminine pleasure, inner wisdom, and cyclical transformation, including love, death, and rebirth. Psychologically, her character has frequently been analyzed as the embodiment of a problematic female personality—mysterious, rebellious, and emotionally intense. In contemporary feminist analyses, however, Lilith has come to represent the "shadow feminine", reminding us that the hidden depths of womanhood must be acknowledged and embraced. Her association with serpents reinforces her primal instincts, while her inner strength and trust in her intuition elevate her to an empowering archetype (Shapir, 2019, pp. 133-134).

Building upon the psychoanalytic interpretations of Lilith as a shadow archetype, the figure has also been examined through the lens of visual culture and feminist art theory. For example, Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, as articulated in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), highlights how women in visual arts and cinema are often reduced to

passive objects of male desire. Within this framework, Lilith's myth and artistic representations are similarly shaped by patriarchal narratives that render her seductive but voiceless, powerful yet ultimately objectified. Her visual positioning—as a woman seen but not heard—resonates with Mulvey's notion of the female figure being coded for the male spectator's pleasure (Mulvey, 2016, pp. 277–295).

This dynamic of objectification and exclusion becomes even more explicit through Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, which frames figures like Lilith—women who exist outside the boundaries of normative femininity—as threatening, repulsive, and ultimately expelled from the symbolic order. Kristeva's reading helps explain how Lilith's refusal to conform renders her socially and symbolically dangerous. Similarly, Luce Irigaray's critique of phallocentric discourse in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) underscores the silencing of female subjectivity. In this context, Lilith is cast out and deprived of a language to express her own experience—a figure trapped in narratives authored by men (Irigaray, 1987; Kristeva, 1982).

Yet it is precisely this loss of voice and agency that feminist theology begins to reclaim. Judith Plaskow's seminal essay *The Coming of Lilith* (1972) reimagines Lilith not as a demonic threat but as a symbol of female resistance, autonomy and solidarity. This re-narration transforms Lilith from a patriarchally defined outcast into a self-aware agent of feminist awakening (Plaskow, 2005). Through myth, art, and theory, Lilith emerges not only as a reflection of cultural anxieties and gendered control but also as a reclaimed symbol of female autonomy, spiritual resistance, and embodied transformation. Her evolving image revealing the tensions between repression and empowerment across centuries of representation.

Conclusion

Throughout history, women have been marginalized for their independence and sexuality, demonized within the patriarchal order. Since ancient Mesopotamia, female nature has been portrayed as ungoverned

and destructive, legitimizing societal control. Women have been deemed lacking and secondary to men, with those acting independently labelled as witches, whores, or monsters, figures that serve as both a threat to men and a warning to nonconforming women. Lilith, particularly in Abrahamic traditions, is cast as Adam's first wife, stripped of humanity, and reshaped into a malevolent figure. As Freud notes in *Totem and Taboo* (1950), as one mythological phase replaces another, its values are relegated rather than erased, and under patriarchal dominance, Lilith was not erased but transformed (Freud, 1950, p. 30). This shift is mirrored in the serpent's loss of healing properties and subsequent demonization, reflecting an enduring effort to control female power. Despite her Mesopotamian origins tied to Mother Goddess cults, Lilith was increasingly vilified, evolving from a fertility and prosperity figure associated with Inanna into a symbol of sexuality, seduction, and evil. In Jewish tradition, she absorbs her dark Mesopotamian traits, becoming a child murderer, seductive demon, and Adam's first wife. Her transformation in Talmudic and Kabbalistic texts, particularly her serpentine identity and celestial elevation, marks the peak of this evolution. This process shaped her representation across cultures, reinforcing her defiance against patriarchal domination while sustaining her role as a figure of fear and warning in religious and cultural narratives until the 19th century.

The Victorian Era and the 19th century marked a period of intense scrutiny over women's societal roles and sexuality, confining them to domestic spaces while reinforcing rigid gender norms. However, P.R.B. artists challenged traditional female imagery by portraying strong, complex women instead of the conventional "pure" and "impure" archetypes. D.G.R., Millais, and Hunt depicted women in innocent and seductive forms, shedding light on the transformation of female representation and offering a new perspective on gender roles and sexuality. Pre-Raphaelitism expanded the portrayal of women and challenged prevailing gender norms, indirectly supporting feminist ideals and shifting women's societal position. During this period, Lilith underwent a significant transformation in art and literature, evolving from the seductive serpent in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Goethe's *Faust* to a figure gradually shedding her monstrous physical traits while retaining her dangerous nature and

reclaiming her voice. D.G.R.'s *Lady Lilith* captures her feminine beauty and charm yet conveys her inner strength and defiance. Influenced by 19th-century feminist movements, Lilith emerges as a rebellious figure in patriarchal society. P.R.B. artists framed her as a challenge to male domination, thus playing a role in her evolution as a symbol of women's rights and emancipation. Commentary from the same period further cemented her femme-fatale persona, positioning her as a figure who, through sexuality and passion, questioned gender roles and the place of women in society.

Although Lilith earns her voice in examples from MacDonald and D.G.R., this representation also places female subjects under "feminist self-postponement". While women seem to be 'emancipated' by having been given a voice, whether directly in the first person, in cryptic moral ambiguity, or stylistically, they have also been restricted. In depictions of Rosetti and other Pre-Raphaelite artists of Lilith, Lilith has stopped being a myth and taken on the role of "Mythmaker". While retaining many of her "femme-fatale" traits, she has lost her demonic wings and claws. Eden Bower emphasizes this transformation clearly. The painting and poems of D.G.R. represent Lilith not only as an evil figure but also as a character that symbolizes women's inner strength and desire for independence. In this period, Lilith is both a seductive figure and a strong woman who declares her autonomy against the patriarchal order. This transformation allowed Lilith to become both a legendary and a feminist symbol. She is not limited to other narratives, claiming her voice and making it heard.

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