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Afterword: Lilith Lives

Lilly Rivlin

Lilith is hot! Known for her multifaceted permutations throughout the centuries Lilith has emerged from her Exile, this time in the guise of a high-powered group of female musicians touring under the name of *Lilith Fair*. In the summer of 1997, *Lilith Fair*, a showcase of female songwriters, organized by Canadian songwriter Sarah McLachlan, launched a thirty-two-city tour with a sold-out show in a 20,000-seat natural amphitheater in the town of George, in Washington State, 150 miles east of Seattle. Ms. McLachlan called Lilith "the world's first feminist." The *Lilith Fair* tour features sixty-one women and their bands—among them Sheryl Crow, Joan Osborne, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Lisa Loeb, Emmylou Harris, Tracy Chapman, and the Indigo Girls. Lilith was relegated for centuries to the demimonde of demons and witches; now, as the icon of *Lilith Fair*, her tale is told on *Good Morning America*, the *New York Times*, cover stories in *Time* and *Entertainment Weekly*, and other publications. The performers say Lilith provides positive role models for their largely young and female audience. In her ode to the fair, singer/poet Kinnie Starr bellowed, "Lilith was banned from the garden of man, but she's back in our face!"

- ◆ In Los Angeles, graffiti scrawled on the side of an underpass wall reads "Lilith Lives."
- ◆ In Tel Aviv, a popular restaurant bears the name of Lilith.
- ◆ A female rock group calling themselves the Bohemian Women's Political Alliance claims Lilith as one of their heroes.
- ◆ In 1998, filmmaker Lynne Sachs released "A Biography of Lilith" a short film depicting her version of Lilith.
- ◆ Early in 1997 *Lilith*, a Jewish women's magazine, celebrated twenty years in existence, and is still going strong.
- ◆ In the fall of 1997, "Lilith," an abstract show of contemporary paintings featuring six New York Jewish artists, opened in The Work Space, an exhibition space in Soho. The artists, all women, approached Lilith each in her own way, but all embody her spirit of risk taking and evoke deep emotions. Artists: Andrea Belag, Cora Cohn, Harriet Korman, Louise Fishman, Melissa Meyer, Joan Snyder.
- ◆ In the same year, in New York City, Deborah Drattell composed an opera called *Lilith*.
- ◆ In the summer of 1995, *Adam and Lilith and Eve*, an opera by John Bramhall, premiered in Maine
- ◆ In 1995, Serpentine, an innovative composer/performer of women-centered vocals and music, recorded her third CD/tape on Goddess Rock Records. It included the haunting song "Lilith" as well "Innana," another undomesticated lady.
- ◆ In 1993, Mari Anne Franzese, trying to decide on a name for her daughter while in labor, heard her husband, Lee Chasen, say, "Let's call her Lilith." The demonology associated with the name scared Mari Anne, but "when I read about Lilith as a Wind Spirit, that brought more balance. When I looked at my daughter's serene face, I thought, 'Welcome home. There was no reason for you to be cast out.' There was a look of recognition on her face, like the lightness of being."
- ◆ In the same year, Liz Lauren Leviton, of Baltimore, Maryland, began her Bat Mitzvah speech with the story of Lilith. "I told my rabbi I wanted to speak about Judaism, feminism, women in the Bible and tie it all to my family. He suggested Lilith," she said.
- ◆ In 1991, David Schechter wrote and Margot Stein Azen created the music and lyrics to a "new musical myth," *Guarding the Garden*, a light-hearted, environmentally sensitive play featuring Adam, Eve, and Lilith.
- ◆ In 1973, sculptor and mask maker Suzanne Benton created a Lilith mask and gave her first of many performances of Lilith's story as part of her series "Ritual Tales of Women of Myth and Heritage." She is still performing.

Lilith has come a long way since the *Daughters of the Moon* zine in December 1972. Though I was pleased to publish an article about her. Sources were scant, mostly writing about mythology—all male (Joseph Campbell).

Throughout history, an archetypal woman [who] exemplifies all the fears elicits," has existed. "She is the exception does not behave in societally approved the crossing of gender lines and the the freewheeling Sumerian goddess Lilith, Adam's first wife of Jewish tradition the Red Sea rather than remain with the object of a nineteenth-century-poet type has always been a male creation according to the prevailing moral

Myth and fantasies evolve as a result of pressures and change. In Victorian England, rights, Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote "Lilith" as an alluring if not dangerous attracts, seduces, and finally strangles her book *The Soul of Lilith*, Marie Perle, a romantic writer, tells the story of Lilith, beautiful, but dead, woman name passionately in love with her. The story is a rian preoccupation with the conflict of art, and soul.

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1. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (Published by Ballantine Books, 1993), p.

Lilith has come a long way since my article appeared in *Ms.* magazine in December 1972. Though the *Ms.* editors I worked with were pleased to publish an article about Adam's first wife, few had heard of her. Sources were scant, mostly arcane, or works of academics writing about mythology—all male (Raphael Patai, Louis Ginzberg, Joseph Campbell).

Throughout history, an archetype representing "the nondomesticated woman [who] exemplifies all the fear and attraction that such a woman elicits," has existed. "She is the exception to the rule, the woman who does not behave in societally approved ways, the goddess who models the crossing of gender lines and the danger that this presents."¹ As the freewheeling Sumerian goddess Inanna (a.k.a. Ishtar, Isis) or as Lilith, Adam's first wife of Jewish legends, who flew off to exile on the Red Sea rather than remain with a controlling husband, or as the object of a nineteenth-century-poet's sexual imagination, this archetype has always been a male creation, transforming and transmuting according to the prevailing moral strictures and morals of the times.

Myth and fantasies evolve as a reaction to prevailing societal pressures and change. In Victorian England, as women demanded their rights, Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote and painted a mythic "Lady Lilith" as an alluring if not dangerous sex object. Her veil of hair attracts, seduces, and finally strangles the victim of her charm. In her book *The Soul of Lilith*, Marie Corelli, a nineteenth-century romantic writer, tells the story of El Rami, a scientist, who brings a beautiful, but dead, woman named Lilith back to life and falls passionately in love with her. The story is characteristic of the Victorian preoccupation with the conflict among reason (science) and love, art, and soul.

In the highly regulated if not constrained societies of Europe and the Middle East, few alternatives to the virtuous mother/wife role for woman existed. Natural, but denied, impulses were relegated to the underworld of witchcraft, dark demonic stereotypes. In some parts of Europe, the myth of the Black Virgin satisfied women's need for a dark archetype.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, self-sufficient women,

1. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, published by Ballantine Books, 1993), p. 25.

inspired by the women's movement, have adopted the Lilith myth as their own. They have transformed her into a female symbol for autonomy, sexual choice, and control of one's own destiny.

With women in some positions of power, our myths and fantasies were bound to change. Since "Lilith" appeared in *Ms.* more than two decades ago there has been a creative burst of works—Midrash, books (biblical studies, Jungian analysis, literature, psychodrama), articles, songs, dances, operas—featuring Lilith in the title role. The stories, essays, poems, and midrashim in this anthology surely illustrate what happens to Lilith when she comes out of women's experience rather than from a man's head.

Although this volume is a selection of Jewish women's writings on Lilith, it is essential to state that Jewish men and non-Jewish men and women have also written about her since she has emerged as a feminist icon.

As John Mendelsohn wrote in his review of the "Lilith" abstract painting exhibition:

Lilith has made it all the way back from pariah to icon. With all the force of the return of the repressed she has entered the feminist pantheon, as goddess, exemplar of female strength, passionate and natural, keeper of dark mysteries. As the literature on Lilith grows, her name appears with increasing frequency in a wide variety of cultural settings.²

Why has Lilith finally taken off? Even the Second Wave of the Women's Movement did not attend to our sensual and sexual impulses. Certainly, there were Nancy Friday and Erica Jong. Betty Dodson painted her clitoris canvases and gave workshops on how to have the cosmic orgasm, but really only in the last decade have a large number of women expressed their sensual and sexual power; for example, *Lilith Fair*, and Naomi Wolf in *Promiscuities*. To paraphrase Lacan, it is only when we women imagine ourselves as subjects that we can be free of masculine paradigms.

The women's movement has made us conscious that the personal is political. My own experience as a girl, and as a woman, in pre-1960s America led me to Lilith. (Until then the only role models I

2. John Mendelsohn, "The Abstract Lilith," *The Jewish Week*, New York, August 29, 1997.

could relate to were two comic book characters (Wonder Woman, Wonder Porter, and Wonder Woman). To me, even before a coherent sense of her independence and need for freedom, I felt alone though clearly I was part of a feminist movement. How wonderful that I was told by a Freudian psychoanalyst that I was not alone because I identified with Lilith. Millions of women have this "sense of freedom" to celebrate freedom, exuberance, and joy.

When men created the myth of Lilith, it remained a man's fantasy. Not until I had a feminist reaction I had to have my own to accept your order in this universe. I had to determine my place in the universe. I had to construct and belong in the realm of the feminine.³ This term was originally coined by Rivièrè, for whom it was symptomatic of my friend said I had to accept my place in this universe, I understood, once I was objectified over these many generations. Women are no longer defined by men. That is why Lilith has many manifestations.

3. *Feminine Sexuality—Jacques Lacan*, trans. Jacques Rose and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose, W. W. Norton, 1982), and
4. Joan Rivièrè, "Womanliness as Manliness,"

could relate to were two comic-strip heroes: Brenda Starr, girl reporter, and Wonder Woman). The specific attributes I latched on to, even before a coherent sense of Lilith had emerged in me, were her independence and need for freedom, her sensuality and sexuality. I felt alone though clearly I was not. And then came the feminist movement. How wonderful it felt as someone who was once told by a Freudian psychoanalyst that I had a character disorder because I identified with Lilith. And how amazing it feels now that millions of women have this "same" character disorder of needing to celebrate freedom, exuberance, sensuality.

When men created the myth of Lilith, she was a stereotype. She remained a man's fantasy. Not long ago a male friend, responding to a feminist reaction I had to his macho remark, said, "You have to accept your order in this universe." He meant that my gender determined my place in the universe. Lacan suggests gender is a construct and belongs in the realm of "masquerade" (both masculine and feminine).³ This term was originally coined by lay analyst Joan Rivière, for whom it was symptomatic of a failed femininity.⁴ When my friend said I had to accept my order—my place essentially—in this universe, I understood, once more, how all women have been objectified over these many generations. And that is the critical difference. Women are no longer accepting being defined and objectified by men. That is why Lilith lives today in all her multifarious manifestations.

3. *Feminine Sexuality—Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York and London: Pantheon Books and W. W. Norton, 1982), p. 43

4. Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as Mascarade," *IJPA* 10, (1929).