

Libretto

1 PROLOGUE: a mother's charm¹

Belit-ili,
Belili.
Baalat,

Lillake.
Lenith
Lamia
Lilitu
Lamashtu
Lailah

Daughter of Hecate.
harlot of hell,
Succubus
Seductress

Beautiful maiden, Queen of night, of storm and wind

Pizna
Naamah,
Karina,
Ayalu...

Out Lilith!
I adjure you, Lilith, in the Name of God,
and of the three angels sent after you,
Senoi, Sansenoi and Semangelof, to remember the vow you made!

I adjure you, Queen of Demons,
and all your multitudes, to cause no harm to my child,
neither during the day nor during the night,
neither through his food nor through his drink,
neither in his heads nor in his heart.

By the strength of these names I adjure you, Lilith,
and all your offspring, to obey this command.

Selah.

Protect this newborn boy from all harm and all evil.
Out Lilith!

¹ The prologue first of all lists many of the names associated with Lilith, from various cultures over the centuries. Then the words of an amulet are sung to keep her away: these amulets have been found in several places, with words, pictures and the names of the angels on them; they were believed to protect against cot-death (a speciality of Lilith).

Amen, Amen,

Selah.

PART ONE

2 THE DANCE OF ALL CREATION.

3 THE CREATION OF ADAM AND LILITH

Seeing that the sky stayed up and the world turned; that night and day worked peacefully together; that the rocks carried their burdens and the sea swelled; that the sap rose, herbs yielded seed and flowers bloomed, God said:

It is good.

Seeing that the waters swarmed with sea monsters, great whales and silver-scaled fish, that birds soared the air sublime and filled the dome of the sky², that song-birds spread their painted wings and crested cockerels kept their morning watch, God said:

It is good.

It is good.

Seeing that the earth brought forth cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth, the wild forest solitaires, the roaming meadow herds, the winged sparkles of insect life and the hairy-maned snake with brazen eyes³, God said:

It is good.

It is good.

Let us now make humankind,
According to our likeness.

God created man and woman. Male and female created he them⁴. From the earth and dust and clay and dirt he fashioned them together. Into their nostrils he breathed life⁵: Joined at the back, twins and equals, he wrenched them apart: Adam and Lilith, King and Queen of the Kingdom of Earth.

(*God*): You have dominion. The world is yours: be fruitful and multiply.

4 LILITH AND ADAM ARGUE

² Genesis 1 v. 20

³ Milton, *Paradise Lost* (PL) book VII line 495

⁴ Genesis 1 v. 27

⁵ Genesis 2 v. 4

duet: Earth and dust and clay and dirt: born as one,
our wrenching apart the first birth pains.

Chorus: She would not lie beneath him

Lilith: We created in the image of God – we the image of God!
Adam: I have dominion

Chorus: She would not lie beneath him

Lilith: We the image of God!
Adam: I have dominion

5 LILITH CALLS THE INEFFABLE NAME OF THE LORD

Yahweh!

6 LILITH'S FLIGHT TO THE RED SEA

Having called the ineffable name of God,
Lilith rose into the cloudless sky
And flew on the breath of the Lord

Away from Paradise
To a land of her own dominion

Into the dayless dark,
The cool still peace of the hollow rocks
There by the Red Sea Lilith made her home

None above her, but many below:
Demonic lovers she took by the score
And populated the night with myriad Lilim.

Adam could not bear this insubordination!

7 ADAM CALLS OUT TO GOD

When she had gone, I cried out to God:

Lord! Hear me!
Where has Lilith gone?
And why?

We ran with the cheetahs, shared nectar with the hummingbirds,
flew on the tail of the Phoenix.
We ate our fill together, drank from the same cup, danced in the starlight glow.

The space beside me aches with emptiness

The grass beneath me withers without her care

Where has Lilith gone?
And why?

Lord, return her to me!

MALE CHORUS:

And God listened, and heard Adam's pain, and sent his three angels over the Red Sea to find Lilith.

Senoi, Sansenoi, Semangelof...

8: THE ENTRANCE OF THE THREE ANGELS

9: THE ANGELS COMMAND LILITH TO RETURN TO ADAM

ANGELS Adam demands your return

LILITH He has his kingdom;
The Lord brought me here.

ANGELS Red Sea, caves of shadows,
Isolation and storms:
Will you not return to paradise?

LILITH How can I return to God's own land
When the demons and I
Have populated our world with Lilim?

ANGELS Return, or we will command the waters
To close on your lascivious head

LILITH I cannot be the lowly one
Hold me under and I will rise

ANGELS Then your demon offspring will perish
One hundred every day
Your name will cause icy fear
To run through the veins of every wife and every mother.

LILITH I cannot return.

10 LILITH'S REPLY

I have been condemned to a new life, been given the gift of death.
No infant is safe from me –
 their eyes will burn for me
 their blood will freeze for me

I will rock them to stillness and beyond

I wanted dominion –
I may only gather the children into my kingdom of darkness

That is my gift
That is my curse.

I give my word, now and always
That your names will protect them.
Your light a charm I cannot break

That is my gift
That is my curse.

11 THE CONDEMNATION OF LILITH

Chorus Out, Lilith!
Gateway to the devil⁶

Let her not into your house
Let her not near your child
Let her not into your house
Let her not near your child

Mother Daughter of Hecate, Harlot of Hell
Succubus, seductress

Chorus Out, Lilith!

Lilith Guard against me!
You shall not see my return.

Chorus Out, Lilith!
Gateway to the devil

Adam Earth and dust and clay and dirt

Lilith Now you see me?

Adam Lilith...

Lilith Now you listen?

Adam I cannot be alone

Chorus Out, Lilith!

Adam Lord, you take so much
And Lilith And leave me only darkness

Lilith I kiss the universe!
I ride with the wind!

⁶ Tertullian, 'De Cultu Feminarum,' section I.I, part 2 (trans. C.W. Marx)

Mother Daughter of Hecate
 Harlot of Hell
 Succubus, seductress

Chorus Out, Lilith!
 Gateway to the devil

Adam It is my sin makes me crave the shadow
 As much as the light

Chorus It is our sin makes us crave the shadow
 As much as the light.

PART TWO

12 ADAM CALLS FOR A MATE

Lord,
My creatures walk before me;
I enjoy them all⁷
But no contentment find.
The brute cannot be human consort,
So fitly in pairs you have combined⁸.

Lord,
In your only-ness you are in yourself perfect⁹;
Man is not so.
Remedy my loneliness,
Lord.

13 GOD REPLIES TO ADAM

It is not good for man to be alone.
What next I bring shall please thee¹⁰
Lie still...

14 THE CREATION OF EVE

God split Adam's left side,
To a wide-open wound with life-blood streaming,
Took from thence a rib, and healed the flesh.

⁷ Genesis 2 v. 21 has been interpreted as Adam trying to mate with the animals – the story perhaps inspired by certain tribes of herdsman for whom such practices were acceptable – before Eve was created.

⁸ PL book VIII l. 391-4

⁹ PL book VIII l. 415

¹⁰ PL viii l.445, 449

And from the bone still warm,
Formed in God's hands
Adam's likeness, his fit help,
His wish exactly to his heart's desire¹¹.

Take her to thy nuptial bower, blushing like the morn¹²:
Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth.

15 ADAM'S JOY

Awake, my fairest, my espoused, my latest found,
Heaven's last best gift, my ever new delight,
Awake! The morning shines, and the fresh field calls us¹³.

Your looks inspire sweetness into my heart,
Unfelt before.

Nothing lovelier can be found
In Woman, than to study household good,
And good works in her husband to promote.¹⁴

Creator, bounteous and divine¹⁵,
I now see Bone of my bone;
Flesh of my flesh,
My self before me:

Her innocence and virgin modesty,
Not obvious, not obtrusive, but retired –
The more desirable¹⁶.

16 BUT THOUGH ADAM'S LIPS SAID EVE, HIS SOUL CRIED OUT LILITH¹⁷

17 EVE'S DREAM

This is my dream...
This is...

Something calls to me
When I look in the mirror¹⁸

¹¹ PL book VIII l. 465 - 470

¹² PL book VIII l. 510-11

¹³ PL book VII l, 17 – 21

¹⁴ PL book IX 232-4

¹⁵ PL book VIII l. 492 - 496

¹⁶ PL book VIII l. 501-5

¹⁷ paraphrase of a line by Armenian poet Avetik Isahakyan

¹⁸ mirrors have long been considered a supernatural passageway between the underworld or 'otherworld' and ours. See for example Terry Pratchett's *Witches Abroad* (1991) – the bad witch (Lilith!) sees and controls people through the mirrors.

Calls to me through the glass
Past the shade

Why do you sleep?

Through the poppy field
Where white rose petals fall and blacken¹⁹

I reach up
My hand is taken

I fly,
And below me is the earth outstretched,
Immense...

I want - to...
I want to - be...

I am tempted
My Lord, I am tempted

I want to be...
To be free...

This is my dream.
It is... just a dream.

18 GOD SENDS AN ANGEL TO REASSURE ADAM AND EVE

Female God realised that evil was astir²⁰
Chorus And called to Him His flaming minister,
 Told him to find Adam,
 Advise him of his happy state
 And guard against complacency;
 Warn him that one already fallen
 Was plotting now the fall of others
 From this state of bliss.

Chorus But what of Eve?²¹

19 ENTRANCE OF THE ANGEL

¹⁹ The pre-Raphaelites created a flower symbology for Lilith: poppies (death and cold) and white roses (sterile passion).

²⁰ PL book V ll.234 – 241 paraphrase

²¹ it is noticeable in Milton that the angel does not address Eve – she who had, after all, had the premonition of danger – instead, talking to Adam only (while Eve prepares dinner for them!). The power and importance of speech (Eve is wordless throughout except to recount her dream, and to call Adam's name) and naming (cf. the prologue, and think of the story of Rapunzel) are highlighted in my libretto.

20 THE ANGEL TALKS TO ADAM

Senoi This I did;
Conversed with Adam friend to friend;²²
Ate with him what Eve prepared,
Savoury fruits, the juiciest gourd,
Nectarous draughts from milky stream²³,
Berry and grape

Chorus But what of Eve?

Senoi We spoke of creation, of evil, of life and the cosmos;
of love and celestial motions.
He, comforted, praised me and honoured,
And I from that thick shade returned to Heaven.

Chorus But what of Eve?

21 LILITH TEMPTS EVE

I was the fairest snake in Eden²⁴!
My hair the first gold²⁵
My tongue the first deceit
My sweat pure nectar

O and Lilith was queen of Adam
All the day and the night as one,
My breath could shake his soul like a feather²⁶.

And Eve shall know the joys of life,
Taste the very life-juice denied to her.

Eve!
Eve!

My fruit is God's creation,
And you are the Queen of the garden.

While Adam talks of the cosmos,
And his place in the world,
Your eyes shall be opened perfectly and clear²⁷;
You shall feel the sparkling drops of life,
New hopes, new joys, tastes divine²⁸.

²² *ibid* line. 303

²³ PL book V l. 306-7

²⁴ Rossetti: *Eden Bower*

²⁵ Rossetti: *Lilith*

²⁶ Rossetti: *Eden Bower*

²⁷ PL book IX l. 707

²⁸ PL book IX l. 985

The freshness on your mouth and the flesh inviting you.

22 ADAM RECEIVES THE APPLE FROM EVE

And so Lilith,
Wrapped in mist of midnight vapours²⁹,
Lilith, who could seduce the very angels,
Passed on to Eve the kernel of life
And love
And death.

O much deceived, much failing, hapless Eve³⁰ –
Veiled in a cloud of fragrance³¹
Such sweet ambush laid for Man:
She pressed her breast of moonlight glow
Against his eager innocence;
Contagious fire darted from her eye³²;

And though Earth felt the wound,
And Nature shuddered and sighed³³,
He tasted of her proffered fruit
And ate his fill.

As with new wine intoxicated both³⁴,
They swam in mirth,
And felt the enflaming spirit
Spreading hot within them.

23 CONDEMNATION OF ADAM AND EVE

chorus: She was alone
She was deceived
And she did eat

Adam: She gave of the Tree to me, and I did eat³⁵.

Chorus: Was she thy God?
Was she made thy guide, thy superior?
Thou didst resign thy manhood!³⁶

Angels Clothe yourselves!
The flaming gates of hell open wide and welcome you,

²⁹ PL book IX l. 158

³⁰ PL book IX l. 409

³¹ PL book IX l. 150

³² PL book IX l. 1035

³³ PL book IX l. 782

³⁴ PL book IX ll. 1005 - 1010

³⁵ PL book X l. 143

³⁶ PL book X l. 145-8

Cursed with mortality!
Death's shadow will follow you always

Adam: All that I eat or drink, or shall beget,
Is propagated curse.
What can I increase or multiply,
But curses on my head?

Chorus: O fleeting joys of Paradise,
Dear bought with lasting woes³⁷!
Why should all mankind
Be condemned for one man's fault?

Adam: Eve, thou serpent –
This is your doing:
Your pride and wandering vanity.
I imagined you wise, constant, true:
But all was but a show –
All but a rib crooked by nature, bent.
Why did God create the frail, the infirm sex,
And you,
A novelty on earth, a fair defect of Nature³⁸?

Eve: Adam! Adam!

Chorus: Return to where he judged you;
Fall before him reverent;
Confess your faults and pardon beg³⁹.

24 ADAM AND THE ANGELS TELL THE REST OF LILITH'S STORY

Adam: I left Eve sleeping
Dreaming of God's vengeance
Shivering in the breeze she could not feel

I could not bear to look upon her blank face
I couldn't stand her submission
Her weakness I could not love

I crept into the night of the nether world
Felt the storm gathering round me
Allowed Lilith to scratch my soul.

Angels: By day we showed Adam the future of Mankind
The mighty kingdoms filling the earth
The first murder, and blood fuelling the land.
The many shapes of death⁴⁰

³⁷ PL book X l. 728 - 732

³⁸ PL book X l.867 - 956

³⁹ PL book X l.1086 - 9

⁴⁰ Milton book XI l. xx

The music, lusts and pleasures of the Godless tribes
War and devastation.

Adam: By night the screech-owl⁴¹ came to me
Golden feathers falling fast on my eyes
Talons matching my pain to hers,
Until I felt my sin bursting from me
Transformed to demonic spawn.

Angels: By day we showed Adam the hope of Mankind
The chosen survivors of the world's ruin,
And God's shining promise arcing through the sky.

Adam: My soul's emptiness
Gradually filling with shame and twisting guilt.

Was it my weakness
Drew me back to Eve?
Duty?
Or one tiny resistant sparkle of hope?

So we clamour at the gates of Paradise
Dying the slow decay, the mortality that is our just fate.

Chorus: So we clamour at the gates of Paradise
Dying the slow decay, the mortality that is our just fate.

25: EPILOGUE: LILITH'S PLAIN

I will meet with the wild beasts, the yelpers,
I will parlay with the island howlers;
Where the satyr cries to his fellow,
There I the screech owl shall fly;
I shall brood in the shadow and never rest...

I will take from the men in the night
I will take from the women by day

Guard against me if you will
My name is multitude

I am queen of Night, of storm and wind,

Pizna

Lillake.

⁴¹ Isaiah ch. 34 v. 14 presents a prophecy of the world as a wasteland because of Mankind's sin; various translations give 'night-creatures' as 'screech-owl' or even 'Lilith': '*Desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; there the night creatures will also repose and find for themselves places of rest*'.

Naamah,
Karina,

Ayalu...

Lilith
Lilith

Belit-ili,
Belili.
Baalat,

Lenith
Lamia
Lilituth
Lamashtu
Lailah

Lilith
Lilith