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HONR 370

December 14, 2020

The Evolution of Lilith: The World's First Feminist

Introduction

In the beginning, the Book of Genesis reveals that God graced the Earth with the creation of humankind. Male and female, in His image, God spoke the first two humans into existence. Over the centuries of the narrative's circulation, the first man and woman have come to be identified as Adam and Eve, the father and mother of all humankind. However, this narrative is considered by ancient interpreters to be divinely-given, without flaw nor contradiction. This assumption implies one major element of the story has been long misunderstood: the true identity of the first woman.

Before Eve was created from Adam's flesh, it is believed another woman existed; the true first woman — a being named Lilith. As various retellings have accumulated to fortify this theory, Lilith has become a prominent figure in religious mythology, and eventually, feminist literature. The inclusion of Lilith in creation narrative interpretations has facilitated the drastic evolution of her character, originating as an ancient mythic spirit, now praised as the world's first feminist. Not only has this evolution created a permanent figure in religious mythology, it also reveals the transformative, everlasting power of biblical interpretation.

Two Separate Accounts of Creation

Before one can understand the reasoning behind Lilith's association with the creation narrative, it is essential to review the ancient biblical interpretation process. The Hebrew Bible,

in the era of its formation, was believed to be a deliverance of God's word through the writing of His prophets. Therefore, this text was thought to possess an essence of divinity — an unquestionable authority, perfected in content.[1] As ancient readers assumed the text to be cryptic, interpretation was deemed necessary for full comprehension. Under this assumption, any contradiction found within the narrative posed a threat to its immaculate nature.[2] Religious interpreters, unwilling to admit to imperfection, claimed apparent errors in Scripture were misunderstood as such. Instead, they were purposeful and indicative of a deeper, obscure meaning.[3] Passages found to be inharmonious were countered by interpretation, as a multitude of theories and retellings were crafted in explanation of these dissonances. The interpretation process, which prioritized the preservation of flawlessness, served to negate perceived fallacies and answer challenges raised by the ambiguity of the text.

The first instance of discordance occurs within the first two chapters of Genesis, during the summary of the universe's creation. The creation of humankind is specifically mentioned in both chapters, retold in each in an exclusive, asynchronous order of events. Genesis 1:26, which provides a more general overview of God's creation, declares that humans were made to have dominion over all nature. In what is interpreted as a singular act, the following verse presents the simultaneous birth of male and female, spoken into the world by God.[4] The next chapter, which recounts the creation through a more detailed lens, unveils an alternative order, inconsistent with the events of Genesis 1.

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[1] James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*, 41.
[2] Kugel, 40-41.
[3] Kugel, 41.
[4] Gn 1:26-27 (New Revised Standard Version).

In Genesis 2, the first man is formed from the dust of the Earth, then placed in the Garden of Eden. Alone, he is designated to till the garden and steward the animals as their sole overseer. Subsequently, in order to prevent the man's inevitable loneliness, God places him in a deep slumber and forms the woman from his rib.[5] The two humans introduced in Genesis 2 are eventually identified as Adam and Eve and are present throughout the story from this point onward. However, the chronological inconsistency between the two chapters has raised questions amongst ancient religious interpreters, who refused to accept the possibility of textual flaws within the Hebrew Bible. While the second woman, formed from Adam's rib, is explicitly distinguished as Eve, the identity of the first woman, created from the same dust as Adam, remained in question.

Lilith in Ancient Near Eastern Context

Recognized as a separate being from Eve, the woman created in Genesis 1 was identified to be Lilith by classical period interpreters. This figure, however, did not originate from classical interpretations, having already existed for centuries in ancient Sumerian demonology. In order to understand how the character became incorporated into the creation narrative, it is essential to consider her in ancient Near Eastern context.

The name "Lilith" is derived from the word "lilītu," a vampiric, succubus class of female demons, mentioned as early as 2400 B.C. in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.[6] A fragment of this epic, the poem, *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*, is known to be the earliest source to specifically mention Lilith as an individual spirit, under an alternative name, "Lillake."[7] In this tale, the

[5] Gn 2:7-23 (NRSV).
[6] Raphael Patai, "Lilith," 295.
[7] Patai, 295.

Mesopotamian goddess of love and war, Inanna, lovingly nurtures a willow tree with the intention of using it to build herself a throne. Against her will, the demoness, Lillake, alongside an evil dragon and an Anzû bird, invade the tree. The hero, Gilgamesh, in an attempt to rightfully restore the tree to Inanna, slays the dragon, striking fear in Lillake and the Anzû bird and intimidating them into flight. While the bird flies off to the mountains, Lillake flees into the desert, where the lilītu were alleged to wander.[8] As the first major piece of literature to discuss Lilith, this epic poem established a basis from which all future retellings are derived.

The depiction of Lilith, in *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* displays the first instances of several thematic recurrences throughout her historical development. Lilith, as Lillake in this tale, fulfills the role of the antagonist, opposite from the divine feminine figure, Inanna. The juxtaposition between the malefic spirit and the goddess depicts the two women as literary foils to one another. This opposition establishes a conflict of good and evil, repeatedly incorporated into retellings of Lilith. However, as Inanna is excluded from the biblical canon, she is later replaced by Eve.

While Eve is not a goddess herself, she shares striking similarities with her literary predecessor. In another Sumerian legend, the story of "Inanna and Utu," the young goddess loses her innocence and gains understanding of sex after consuming herbs and cedar.[9] This parallels and likely inspired the later Genesis narrative, in which Eve's consumption of the forbidden fruit exposes her to sexual knowledge, such as shame for her own nakedness.[10] Furthermore, Eve's purpose, as the mother of all humankind, is the production and sustenance of human life. This motherly role mirrors Inanna's loving, nurturing temperament in her relationship with the willow

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[8] Patai, 295.
[9] Samuel Noah Kramer, "Bread for Enlil, Sex for Inanna," 118-119.
[10] Gn 3:7 (NRSV).

tree. The resemblances between Inanna and Eve may have contributed to the latter's eventual replacement of the goddess as the foil to Lilith, who is known to symbolize elements antithetical to both of her adversaries.

Shortly after her literary debut in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Lilith is believed to be pictorially represented for the first time in a terracotta plaque known as the Burney Relief. Dated approximately 2000 B.C., the artifact illustrates Lilith as a nude woman with birdlike features, including taloned feet and wings on her back.[11] Heavily associated with the owl, Lilith has historically symbolized elements such as night, predation, and flight, also evident in the *Gilgamesh* tale.[12] Categorized as a class of succubus demons, the lilītu were said to wander the desert throughout the night, seeking men to sexually prey on. Murderous in nature, these spirits produced poison in place of breast milk and were deemed especially harmful to pregnant women and their infant children.[13] As an enemy of mortal women, specifically those with children, the mythological creature is further characterized as the antithesis to the mother archetype. First represented by Inanna, the role of the mother is later fulfilled by Eve.

The expanding fear of the lilītu drove Mesopotamian women to seek preventative measure against harm. In anticipation of being targeted for their pregnancy or motherhood, it became a custom for women to use protective incantations to ward off the baneful spirits.[14] In ancient Syria, women were discovered to hang plaques engraved with these incantations in their homes, hoping to shield themselves from potential attacks.[15] Other magical texts, similar to these prayers against Lilith, were found to be inscribed on the inside of ceramic bowls from periods as

[11] M. T. Colonna, "Lilith, or the Black Moon," 327.
[12] Janet Howe Gaines, "Lilith - Seductress, heroine or murderer?" 12.
[13] Howe Gaines, 12.
[14] Patai, 296.
[15] Howe Gaines, 12.

late as 600 C.E.[16] Not only does the longevity of this practice reveal the credibility to which the myth was held, its wide geographical range exhibits how far throughout the region the legend had circulated.

Biblical interpretations are typically made in context of the geography and time period of the text's composition. Ancient Near Eastern literature, such as the aforementioned *Epic of Gilgamesh*, is notable for containing elements parallel to those found within the Hebrew Bible. Conspicuous similarities between characters, themes, and events have led interpreters to find the biblical canon draws great literary inspiration from its predecessors: the myths communicated throughout the Near Eastern region.[17] One renowned example includes the flood narrative of *Gilgamesh*, which bears indisputable resemblances to the flood recounted in Genesis 6-9.[18] In consideration of this parallel structure, it becomes sensible that a character originating from the same epic, such as Lilith, may also make an appearance in the Hebrew Bible.

While she is not mentioned individually, the lilītu, also referred to by the plural noun, "lilith," is discussed briefly in Isaiah 34:14: "Wildcats shall meet with hyenas, goat-demons shall call to each other, there too lilith shall repose, and find a place to rest."[19] Although the word is mentioned just once in the Hebrew Bible, it is listed among other wild, predatory beasts, which reiterates the fearsome reputation of the legend. The great renown of this folklore, in addition to its acknowledgment in the Hebrew Bible, may have also influenced the incorporation of the infamous myth in later religious literature. Recognition of Lilith in these religious literature, such

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[16] Patai, 297.
[17] Michael D. Coogan and Cynthia R. Chapman, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, 40.
[18] Kugel, 102.
[19] Is. 34:14 (NSRV).

as rabbinic texts, allowed for her transition from ancient Near Eastern folklore into her permanent role in Jewish mythology.

Lilith in Rabbinic Literature

Early rabbinic literature sought to define a basis of ethic and legal codes, contributing to the formation of traditional Jewish practices and beliefs.[20] The earliest association between Lilith and rabbinic Judaism occurs in such literature; namely, the Babylonian Talmud. Disseminated far throughout the ancient Near East by the Talmudic period, the common understanding of Lilith as a demonic spirit is expanded on in this text. Specifically, the Talmud embellishes several preexisting mythological practices and beliefs, including the use of protective incantations and amulets.[21] One such legal code states men are "forbidden to sleep in a house alone," or else, he shall be tempted and seized by Lilith.[22] In continuity with her function as a succubus, the Talmud amplifies Lilith's role as a predatory seductress of men. While these descriptions do not necessarily offer a new perspective of Lilith, the Talmud first intertwines the myth of the succubus and its demonic spawn with the chronicle of Adam and Eve.

Also a source of interpretation, the Talmud proposes a theory in which Adam commits adultery with an unnamed succubus spirit. Following the death of Abel and exile of Cain, the text claims Adam, distraught by the loss of his sons, secludes himself from Eve. While the two eventually reunite for the conception of Seth, Adam and Eve endure 130 years apart from each other.[23] During this isolation, Adam is said to have fathered a myriad of demonic children to an

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[20] Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, 1.
[21] Rebecca Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power: Women as Sorceresses, Exorcists, and Demonesses in Babylonian Jewish Society of Late Antiquity," 343.
[22] Lesses, 357.
[23] Howe Gaines, 14.

unidentified mother.[24] The text refers to the children as "lilim," a masculinized version of "lilith," hinting at a possible relation to the mythological spirit.[25] Moreover, Lilith's role as a succubus and temptress of men provided additional reason for interpreters to speculate she had mothered these children. Although the text does not explicitly identify the succubus as Lilith, Adam's unfaithfulness introduces the concept of his copulation with another woman. As Eve and the succubus spirit are positioned as opposite partners of Adam, this non-canonical scene deepens the developing contrast between Lilith and Eve.

While Lilith and Eve do not interact until later interpretations, contrast between the two figures accumulates through variances in their rabbinic portrayals. One significant Talmudic description of Lilith illustrates her as having long disheveled hair.[26] In cultural context, the legal code strongly advised women to cover their hair in order to convey a sense of modesty. Married women were held especially high to this expectation, since failure to follow the custom was suggestive of adultery.[27] This tradition is believed to have originated as a punishment against all women for Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden. This is further supported by several rabbinic interpretations, claiming Eve was cursed by God to cover herself in shame for her sinful actions.[28] Eve's modesty, correlated to her oppression as a woman in a male-dominated world, is countered by Lilith's freedom of sexuality.

A punished sinner, forced to hide herself from the eyes of the world, Eve is portrayed as a woman bound by divine constraint and oppression. Contrarily, Lilith, although a sinful, demonic

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[24] Wojciech Kosior, "A Tale of Two Sisters: The Image of Eve in Early Rabbinic Literature and its Influence on the Portrayal of Lilith in *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*," 113-114.
[25] Lesses, 357.
[26] Lesses, 357.
[27] Ilan Fuchs, "Hair Covering for Single Women: A New Reading of Mizrahi Halakhic Rules," 38.
[28] Lesses, 358.

creature, is not subject to the same restrictions. She is unholy, therefore she is unbound by God's insistence to exhibit modesty. Often depicted as nude, as in the Burney Relief, Lilith allows her full self to be shamelessly and sensually displayed, while Eve learns to be ashamed of her nudity after eating the forbidden fruit.[29] Lilith's unkempt hair, a symbol of her sexual freedom, is one of her first rebellious expressions of unapologetic femininity.

Rabbinic portrayals of Lilith and Eve clearly establish the two as opposite figures. While Eve acts in obedience to God's instruction, Lilith remains sinful and untamed. However, the absence of direct juxtaposition between the two in rabbinic literature meant they were not yet determined as literary foils to one another. Instead, Eve is contrasted against another figure: the true first wife of Adam, not yet determined to be Lilith.

The theoretical origins of the first wife are rooted in *Genesis Rabbah*, a midrashic text focused heavily on analyzing the minuscule, grammatical details of the Hebrew Bible. Through this meticulous examination, midrashic interpreters discovered a line in Genesis which suggested Adam's confirmation of Eve as his second wife, rather than his first. As translated in *Genesis Rabbah*, Adam, in Genesis 2:23, exclaims "this time (*zot hapa'am*) [this is] bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."[30] This line is interpreted as an intimation that "this time," a woman was created from Adam's body. However, at an earlier time, there must have lived a woman created through alternative methods.[31] *Genesis Rabbah*, through the interpretation of this line, generated the initial theory that Eve was the successor of God's first female creation. The following

[29] Colonna, 326.
[30] Kosior, 117.
[31] Kosior, 117.

depiction of Adam's two wives as contrary to one another inspired the election of Lilith, already opposite Eve in a variety of ways, to fulfill the role of the first woman.

The negative depiction of evil figures, such as Lilith, throughout rabbinic literature would seem to accentuate Eve, God's chosen mother of humankind, in a more favorable light. However, she is also subject to harsh condemnation for her sin in the Garden of Eden. Cursed for her actions, her genealogical line, consisting of all humanity, is plagued by an unholiness from birth defined as original sin.[32] As the source of this irreversible condition, Eve is claimed to be solely responsible for the world's greatest evils, although Adam had also eaten the forbidden fruit. The comfortability of rabbinic writers in mercilessly blaming Eve for humanity's fall from grace arises from an interpretation in *Genesis Rabbah*. Eve's origin from Adam's rib establishes her as his byproduct; therefore, she is deemed to be his inferior.[33] The oppression and objectification of Eve establishes her as a subordinate feminine figure, acceptant of Adam's masculine dominance.

Prior to the fall from grace, *Genesis Rabbah* characterizes Eve as an improved version of the original female prototype, initially rejected by Adam. This first woman is described as being bloodied and covered with discharge, disturbing Adam. Upon Adam's disapproval, God is prompted to recreate a more refined version of the woman in order to appease him. Thus, Eve is created from Adam's rib and delivered into him, adorned in fine jewelry and emanate of beauty.[34] Contrary to the first woman's more natural, raw femininity, Eve's beauty is fabricated through God's delicate design. Furthermore, God's first presentation of Eve to Adam portrays her as an objectified gift, rather than an equal human partner. This rabbinic portrayal of Eve attempts to

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[32] Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings*, 1.
[33] Kosior, 117.
[34] Kosior, 117.

justify her condemnation, dehumanizing her as property of Adam. While the first woman faces Adam's rejection, she is able to escape the suffering caused by his asserted superiority as she passes this role on to Eve.

By the end of the Talmudic period, *Genesis Rabbah* had identified two separate women in the creation narrative. Eve is described as the replacement of the first woman, designed to be beautiful, yet constrained by her inferiority to Adam. Contrarily, the first woman, drenched in blood and rejected by Adam, is barely expanded upon beyond this mere description. Although she is not present within the narrative following Adam's rejection, *Genesis Rabbah* does not specify her whereabouts, nor is her identity ever disclosed.[35] Left open to interpretation, the legend of Lilith, prevalent throughout region and solidified by rabbinic discussion, was able to fill the void in the narrative.

As the ancient Sumerian myth began to converge with interpretations of the Genesis creation narrative, aspects associated with the legend of Lilith were altered to reflect her character in a new context. For example, her preexistent hatred towards women and children was translated into a jealous vengeance against Eve and her descendants for replacing her in the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, her desire to seduce men was later explained to be rooted in Adam's initial rejection of her.[36] With the assistance of these alterations, Lilith's identity as the true first woman rose to prominence, setting into motion her evolution from the nocturnal demoness into the world's first feminist.

The Alphabet of Ben Sira

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[35] Kosior, 117.
[36] Marlene E. Mondriaan, "*Lilith* and Eve - wives of Adam," 756.

The most notable, complete account of the relationship between Adam and Lilith occurs in *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, a retelling of Genesis dated to approximately 10 C.E. Also functioning as a prelude to the ancient Near Eastern mythology, the text reveals how Lilith became a demonic spirit, despite her origins in the Garden of Eden. As stated in Genesis 1, both she and Adam are created simultaneously from the Earth, believed by Lilith to be an indicator of equality between herself and Adam.[37] However, their partnership began to deteriorate when Adam attempted to assert his authority.

Insistent she is meant to lie beneath him, Adam would not accept Lilith's desire to be sexually dominant.[38] Unwilling to assume a subordinate position, Lilith refutes Adam's claim of superiority by arguing their creation from the same dust meant they were equal. When the two are unable to compromise, Lilith cursedly pronounces the Ineffable Name of YHWH, escaping into the air.[39] This retelling pays homage to earlier depictions of Lilith, incorporating elements associated with her character, such as the motif of flight. Illustrated in a new literary setting, these aspects were modified to adapt to the conditions of the creation narrative. Nonetheless, these alterations led to major advancements in the evolution of Lilith.

Recurrent throughout Lilith's history, the motif of flight is used in this retelling to display a new aspect of Lilith's character. Though this may allude to her earlier escape into the desert, mentioned in the *Gilgamesh* tale, the motivation behind her flight is significantly different. Initially, in *Gilgamesh*, Lilith flees in fear of the hero's great strength, after he slays the dragon in the tree.[40] In *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, it is her resistance of Adam's attempt to force her into

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[37] Dan Ben-Amos, "From Eden to *Ednah* - Lilith in the Garden," 56.
[38] Ben-Amos, 56.
[39] Ben-Amos, 56.
[40] Patai, 295.

compliance that causes her abandonment of him.[41] Rather than the fear of masculine power, attributed to Gilgamesh, it is now her unwillingness to submit to Adam's tyrannical masculinity that is her new motivation. This act, rooted in her desire for independence, is famously regarded as Lilith's act of feminism.[42] By liberating herself from male dictatorship, the scene of her flight establishes an explicit concept of feminism present throughout a multitude of retellings to follow.

Once again, Lilith is portrayed as the antithesis to the mother archetype, represented by Eve in this narrative. Following her flight from Eden, *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* claims Lilith finds herself in a desolate place where she encounters the Great Demon. As her new male equivalent, this spirit becomes her substitute for Adam, who, in turn, replaces her with Eve.[43] Similar to Eve's role as the mother of humankind, Lilith and the Great Demon beget legions of children. Unlike the children of Adam and Eve, however, the spawn of Lilith are demonic, inhuman spirits. The parallel formed between the two sets of partners reincorporates the conflict between good and evil present in earlier retellings.

Before Eve is given to Adam, he is unsettled by Lilith's desertion and pleads to God for her return. Henceforth, God assigns three archangels to retrieve her from her new desolate abode. Upon her pending refusal, God commands she must permit one hundred of her children to die each day.[44] Despite this ultimatum, Lilith remains firm in refusing Adam's superiority and declines the angels' offer. Therefore, she chooses to suffer the consequence of sacrificing her children in order to enjoy the pleasure of freedom. Contrarily, Eve is designated specifically for motherhood, though her childbirth is characterized by pain.[45] By choosing herself over her

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[41] Ann R. Shapiro, "The Flight of Lilith: Modern Jewish American Feminist Literature," 70.
[42] Shapiro, 70.
[43] Kosior, 116.
[44] Ben-Amos, 56.
[45] Ben-Amos, 56.

children, Lilith reveals how highly she values her own independence, expanding on the themes of feminism and the importance of self. Eve, on the other hand, passively accepts the agony of motherhood and feminine inferiority.

In order to redesign Lilith as a biblical figure, rather than an ancient Sumerian being, the text aides in the establishment of her character in a religious context. This is accomplished by mentioning the mythological practices associated with the legend, such as the use of incantations, and rerooting them in Jewish concepts. The text claims, in an act of vengeance for God's curse, Lilith declares she will cause sickness among human infants, the descendants of Adam and Eve.[46] She vows only to spare a child from harm if protected by an amulet inscribed with the names of the three archangels sent to retrieve her.[47] The inclusion of the amulets alludes to aforementioned Mesopotamian customs, though its origins are restated to be in Jewish angelology.[48] By incorporating this widespread tradition into the text, the preexistent credibility of the myth is transferred into the narrative, retold with a biblical background. Furthermore, by constructing Lilith's victimization of women and children as a result of her revenge, the Sumerian myth is reformulated in accordance to the women's rivalry in a biblical retelling.

One question that arises from this revolutionary retelling concerns Lilith's disobedience of God's commands. Unlike Eve, who is tempted into sin, Lilith willfully defies God's order to return to Adam and receives his threat against her children as an ultimatum, rather than instruction. By forging a negotiation with the archangels, rather than accepting their divine orders, Lilith exudes an essence of divine authority the angels cannot override.[49] According to

[46] Mondriaan, 756.
[47] Ben-Amos, 56.
[48] Howe Gaines, 14.
[49] Howe Gaines, 15.

God's omnipotence, as it is widely suggested, He should be able to influence Lilith's actions and determine her destiny. However, Lilith, seeming to have no fear of God, confidently defies Him. Inspired by this self-assured, authoritative portrayal of Lilith in *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, several subsequent interpretations explain her attitude by recognizing her as a force nearly as powerful, if not equivalent, to God.

Lilith in Kabbalistic Writings

Writings of the medieval period initiated yet another advancement in Lilith's characterization. Such writings were drafted to complement the traditional Jewish school of mysticism known as the Kabbalah.[50] The Zohar, regarded as the central text of the Kabbalah, contained several new retellings of Lilith derived from preceding depictions. Specifically, *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* was a source of major influence. Since the classical text brought Lilith's apparent divine authority into question, in interpretative fashion, Kabbalistic writers sought to answer this uncertainty through their own retellings. In order to explain Lilith's defiance of God's, the Zohar represents her as a domineering cosmic deity with power comparable to God. Now positioned at a significantly higher status than her earliest form as a minor folkloric spirit, Lilith is elevated to the Goddess of the Underworld through Kabbalistic interpretation.

The Zohar expands extensively on the partnership between Lilith and the Great Demon, first introduced in *The Alphabet of Ben Sira.* Renamed Samael in the text, and equivalent to the Christian figure of Satan, the Great Demon promotes Lilith to the role of Queen of the Underworld through their copulation.[51] No longer a mere mistress of Samael, the Zohar specifies Lilith as his wife, the female counterpart to the Devil. While this pair undeniably serves as a foil

[50] Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar*, 3.
[51] Lilly Rivlin and Henny Wenkart, *Which Lilith? Feminist Writers Re-Create the World's First Woman*, 9

to Adam and Eve, the two more closely parallel God and the Shekhina, the female aspect of His spirit also introduced in the Kabbalah. Lilith's promotion to this extreme position, directly opposite to God, reveals her divine authority, which allows her to challenge, refuse, and negotiate God's orders. Previously insensible as God's creation, Lilith's elevation to a higher degree of jurisdiction, as the personification of all evil, explains her confident attitude.[52] Associated with the female transpersonal shadow, hindered by God's favoritism towards masculine supremacy, Lilith's evil nature is described to be explicitly feminine.[53] Not only does this elevation denote Lilith's growth from a minor spirit to a prominent figure in Jewish tradition, it reveals her to be a powerful force of feminism.

The concept of the feminine transpersonal shadow is further expanded upon in an alternative origin story of Lilith, also presented within the Zohar. Beginning with God's creation of the sun and moon, the Zohar reinstates the conflict between male and female through the use of an extended metaphor. While the sun is associated with masculinity, the moon fulfills the feminine counterpart. With each representative of the two sexes, the luminaries are used as an analogy for human creation.

Although God creates both lights simultaneously, mirroring the first two humans in Genesis 1, the moon is diminished as the lesser light.[54] Dependent on the sun to illuminate the night sky, the moon becomes jealous of the sun's independence. This tension is symbolic of feminine resentment towards masculine dominance. The Zohar claims, from the moon's oppressed, resentful state, the spirit of Lilith is born.[55] Although this retelling deviates from

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[52] Howe Gaines, 17.
[53] Barbara Black Koltuv, *The Book of Lilith*, 8.
[54] Black Koltuv, 5.
[55] Black Koltuv, 6.

Lilith's position as the first woman to be created, it remains constant to Lilith in its theme of feminism.

In continuity with her presentation as a nocturnal demon, Lilith's birth from the moon's indignation is reminiscent of her association with night.[56] However, this interpretation introduces a new understanding of Lilith as more than a spirit or the first woman. Instead, she is representative of the psychological concept of the shadow, also described by medieval astrologists as the "Black Moon Lilith." Present within each sex, the Black Moon is the dark feminine side which signifies an unconscious, hidden nature.[57] Defined by the Zohar as the inspiration behind sensual desires, in men, the Black Moon symbolizes a weakness to female temptation.[58] In women, on the other hand, it is representative of the unconscious sexual power and an internalized acceptance of inferiority to men.[59] According to the Zohar, by knowing Lilith, one may become more conscious of oneself.[60] This understanding of Lilith has facilitated her development as a symbol of feminine strength, albeit typically unawakened, present within each woman.

While *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* establishes the first act of feminism enacted by Lilith, the Zohar expands on her character as a figure of feminism. Through the elevation of Lilith to a more authoritative status, her abandonment of Adam is correlated to her significant empowerment. Although the Zohar attempts to provide alternative views of Lilith, divergent from her role as the first woman, the text holistically deepens her symbolism of an awakened feminine power, allowing for the liberation of herself from the oppression enforced by men.

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[56] Patai, 310.
[57] Colonna, 332.
[58] Black Koltuv, 6.
[59] Colonna, 332.
[60] Black Koltuv, 6.

Lilith's development as a feminist figure is inarguably the most memorable element of her characterization following *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*.

Lilith's Role in the Women's Liberation Movement

Throughout the centuries of Lilith's development, interpreters have attempted to illustrate her in a negative light, broadening her demonic nature and defiance of God. However, what is remembered most fondly about Lilith, from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* onward, is that she is a literary manifestation of women's battle for equality. During the second wave of feminism beginning in the 1960s, the figure of Lilith experienced a revival in fame. In admiration of her anti-misogynistic motivations, feminists declared Lilith to be a literary icon of rebellion against male supremacy.[61] Moreover, the Women's Liberation Movement, led deliberately by Jewish women, gave rise to Jewish Goddess feminism. This subset of feminism reclaimed Lilith, among other figures in the Hebrew Bible, in praise of their acts of feminine autonomy.[62] Despite the historical depiction of Lilith as an ungodly force, she is ardently idolized in the modern era revival of her character as a symbol of feminism.

In a 1972 reimagining of *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, "The Coming of Lilith," Jewish feminist theologist, Judith Plaskow, intensifies the theme of feminism by redesigning the narrative. Ultimately, this allows for Lilith to be illustrated as the first pioneer of feminism. One of the most outstanding aspects of Plaskow's midrashic account is the exclusion of Lilith's preexisting demonic aspects. In accordance with its inspirational source, Lilith, the first wife of Adam, flees from the Garden of Eden upon his assertion of dominance over her. During her exile

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[61] Howe Gaines, 17.
[62] Melissa Raphael, "Goddess Religion, Postmodern Jewish Feminism, and the Complexity of Alternative Religious Identities," 202.

from Eden, following Eve's creation, Adam spreads "fearsome stories of the demon Lilith who threatens women in childbirth and steals children from their cradles."[63] However, Plaskow reveals these myths to be untrue. Although Lilith escapes from Eden, Plaskow excludes her encounter with the Great Demon. As a result, Lilith does not become a malefic spirit, nor does she beget a legion of demonic children. All perceptions of Lilith's wickedness are claimed by Plaskow to originate in Adam's defamation of her character.

By proposing Lilith is not an actual demon, as earlier retellings have insisted, Plaskow strays from the original narrative to create a statement on women's oppression. As Adam has done in the story, Plaskow argues the legend may have been misconstrued to generate a specific, negative view of the character. In a broader discussion, the demonic traits attributed to Lilith, historically composed in writings by men, may have been used to depict women unfavorably. In one 1976 analysis of Lilith, entitled "The Lilith Question," Jewish journalist, Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, describes this phenomenon as Jewish tradition being "contaminated with male bias."[64] Painting Lilith as a victim of this defilement, Plaskow claims she is yet another example of a woman whose dominance is understated by men. By reclaiming Lilith as a true woman, rather than an evil spirit, Plaskow uses the character to exemplify how powerful women are literally and figuratively demonized by male oppression.

Another remarkable trait in Plaskow's midrash is the direct interaction between Lilith and Eve. Previously explained by Adam to Eve as a demon, she is astonished to see Lilith is actually another woman, just as she is.[65] In attempt to return to the Garden of Eden, Lilith meets Eve for

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[63] Judith Plaskow, "Epilogue: The Coming of Lilith," 341.
[64] Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "The Lilith Question," *Lilith*, 1976.
[65] Plaskow, "Epilogue," 342.

the first time. The first two women begin to meet regularly, developing a "bond of sisterhood" as they share stories, laughs, and cries with each other.[66] Over time, Eve begins to display a new attitude towards Adam, though Plaskow does not specify what this change entails. However, one can assume Eve begins to act more assertively, as Lilith demonstrates in *The Alphabet of Ben Sira.* Consequently, God and Adam begin to fear the day the two women return to the Garden together with the desire to restructure the order of the human community.[67] In this meeting of the two women, Lilith is able to inspire another with her progressive ideas.

As Plaskow excludes the notion of Lilith as a demonic being, a majority of the contrast accumulated between Lilith and Eve is eliminated from the narrative. While conflicts between purity and wickedness, modesty and sexuality, and good and evil, are diminished in this narrative, the two women still serve as foils to one another. The main difference between the two occurs in their understanding of freedom. Lilith continues to persist in this modern retelling as a liberated woman, while Eve remains constrained by her own subservience and accepted inferiority to Adam. When the two meet, Lilith is able to share her experience with freedom, enlightening Eve who is previously unaware of this liberty. Despite this contrast, the two remain similar in their powerlessness due to isolation. It is this interaction between them that Plaskow describes as a "sisterhood that grows them into consciousness and action."[68] As Lilith imparts her wisdom unto Eve, her inspiration for change reinstates her as a the first feminist leader.

The character of Lilith, in her most prominent modern reformation, withstands another significant stage of evolution. By deconstructing Lilith's identity as a demon, Plaskow is able to

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[66] Plaskow, "Epilogue," 343.
[67] Plaskow, "Epilogue," 343.
[68] Judith Plaskow, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003*, 84.

reclaim the character as a true woman, rather than a supernatural force. For the first time, Lilith is completely humanized, which aides in Plaskow's audience perceiving her as a realistic inspiration of feminism. Moreover, the connection developed between Lilith and Eve is representative of the relationship between feminist leaders and followers of the Women's Liberation Movement. However, it is the basis in *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* that facilitates this evolution. Lilith's flight from the Garden of Eden, interpreted as a feminist act, is retold by Plaskow in order to solidify the legend of Lilith as both the first woman, and consequentially, the first feminist in biblical mythology.

Conclusion

Lilith's evolution from a mythic spirit to an icon of feminist literature reveals the potential impact of biblical interpretation. Had Lilith not undergone the series of metamorphoses that led to her inclusion in various biblical texts, she may have been forgotten in the history of ancient Near Eastern lore. However, centuries of retellings have kept the legend of Lilith alive, periodically evolving to adapt to the constant changes in the non-canonical biblical narratives. As questions continuously arise surrounding uncertainties in the Hebrew Bible, interpretation serves as a constant instrument in preserving the life of the text. The act of biblical interpretation has the power to sustain the prominence of a legend, which has facilitated the establishment of Lilith as an everlasting figure in religious mythology.

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