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Abstract

After examining the history of the figure of Lilith in Judeo-Christian myth, Jungian psychology, and Western literature, this paper discusses the three major Lilith-characters in the Narnia series—the White Witch, the Lady of the Green Kirtle, and Jadis, Queen of Charn.

Keywords

Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Jadis; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Lady of the Green Kirtle; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—The White Witch; Lilith (archetype) in the Chronicles of Narnia

Lilith in Narnia

by Glen GoodKnight

Lilith is one of the oldest mythological figures which continues to inspire modern writers and fascinate readers of today. Her precise origins are unclear, but indications led scholars to place her original appearance in ancient Mesopotamia three to four thousand years ago. Lilith type figures appear often in both Semitic and Indo-European folklore, specifically Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Hellenistic, Balkan, Persian, Sabyritic, Ethiopian, and Hebrew mythology.

To bring all these fragments together we get a two-sided picture of the figure of Lilith — that of a child stealing witch-hag and that of a beautiful dream-like seductress.

The phantom hag is associated with a huge host of subservient demons. She is a consort of wolves, and can herself change into a werewolf or vampire form. Her hatred is directed toward babies, young children, and their mothers, whom she seeks to steal, harm or kill out of embittered resentment toward humanity. In Semetic mythology she is a demon of the night, of the wind, and a stealer of the light. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah in chapter 34, verse fourteen in predicting the downfall of Edom, says "And the wild-cats shall meet with the jackals, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; Yea, the night monster shall repose there, and shall find her a place of rest." (The Jewish Publication Society of America translation.) The literal transliteration of the Hebrew letter from the word translated "night monster" are l-i-l-i-th. It is believed that the word "Lullaby" is derived from the Babylonian lilla abi, meaning "Lilith begone." Thus the original purpose of the lullaby was a protective spell sung by the mother to protect her child through the night.

The other aspect of her is related, yet certainly not the same. She is seen as very beautiful, a seductress, and a militant feminist, who seeks to entice men to fall in love with her, only to destroy them by breaking their hearts. Shelly's translation of Goethe's Faust says of Lilith:

Beware of her fair hair! for she excells
All women in the magic of her locks
And when she winds them round a young man's neck,
She will not ever set him free again.

At least from a Western view, the Lilith myth reached its fullest development within Medieval Judaism. It was from this developed form that many modern writers took elements to weave into their own works. The developed myth seen through a Biblical and Jewish lens is basically as follows: Lilith was created by God to be the first wife of Adam. She was created immediately after Adam, and from a separate lump of earth. Because of this separate creation, as it turned out, being not of the same substance as Adam, she was not basically compatible with him, and was not willing to be subordinate to his place as the height of physical creation. Her will was not to go along with her husband's decisions, having a will just as strong and of a different nature than his. As a result she became more and more difficult to live with and implacable. We might say humorously that she was the archtypal shrew. Her complaining against Adam and God continued in the midst of Eden until her assertive and selfish pride could abide it no longer. She demonstrated her



final rebellion by speaking the Ineffable Word — The Holy Name of God, never actually spoken by the Hebrews because of its extreme holiness, but referred to it as the tetragrammaton because the word has five consonants — and took flight through the air, leaving Eden to become the wandering witch and seductress. God then created Eve from the side of Adam, and since she was of the same substance, did not have this basic conflict with her counterpart. Lilith found out of Eve's creation and with prideful jealousy sought to destroy humanity, that is the descendant of Adam and Eve, by both attacking babies and mothers on one hand, and breaking young men's hearts so that they would not seek comfort (and propagation) with women of their own race. In light of Lilith's virulent hatred of the son and daughters of Adam and Eve, it is little wonder that in the Middle Ages she was called "the wife of Satan."

From a Jungian point of view Lilith is the negative Female Archetype. Since she represents all the opposite virtues of ideal female, she would be the negative manifestation of The Great Mother Archetype, the opposite of love and fertility of the human woman.

As was mentioned before, Lilith has continued as a potent symbol into modern literature. Reference to her is sprinkled all through European writings, much as Biblical and Classical characters are. Two novels, to my knowing, bear Lilith as their title. One by George MacDonald in 1895 and the other by F.R. Salmana in 1961. MacDonald's novel takes the Lilith myth and uses it to express his own personal view of the drama of life, without doing damage to the basic structure of the myth. The novel is a series of actual dreams MacDonald actually had, and rewrote many times into a most dream-like vision form before it was finally published. Salamanca's novel deals with a young man in France who falls in love with a mentally ill young woman and the strange destructive experience that follows. The novel has been made into a film starring Jean Seberg.

We know that George MacDonald was a great influence upon the young C.S. Lewis. Lewis has told us that he owed more to MacDonald than any other man, and he edited an anthology of quotes from the wide works of MacDonald, including many from Lilith.

When we come to The Chronicles of Narnia written by Lewis, we find the appearance of Lilith in two and perhaps three of the seven books: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe; The Magician's Nephew, and The Silver Chair. In a tone quite different from his mentor, MacDonald, Lewis uses the Lilith mythos within the Narnian cosmos, yet without doing damage to the basic structure of the myth. The difference in tone comes probably from that fact that MacDonald was writing an adult fantasy and his work emphasizes the seductress aspect as seen through the eyes of Mr. Vane, the young man who falls in love with Lilith. Lewis' works are written through the medium of a children's story, and he stresses the aspect of Lilith's hatred of humanity through children.

In Narnia, Lilith is chosen as the figure to represent evil in the struggle of Good and evil, with Aslan as the Incarnate Good. Some perhaps would mistakenly feel Lewis was a male supremacist in his using a male figure to represent good, and a female for the evil. This would not bear out in such works as Till We Have Faces, where the female characters are treated with great sympathy and understanding. Rather I would think Lewis was possib-

ly reaction to an oft appearing image of Satan as the robust, rebellious male ego in contrast to an image of God and Christ as near anesthetized effeminate effetes. In Lewis' That Hideous Strength, Ransom tells Jane Studdock that "What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it." In Narnia we are told "Aslan is not a tame lion."

In the first book of the series, The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, we find Narnia under the repressive rule of the White Witch who keeps the land "Always Winter and never Christmas." Here the stealer of light theme is changed from darkness to cold and snow. The effect of evil is seen as a chilling sterility. The denial of Christmas indicates no ordinary winter which would have many pleasures as one of the seasons. Rather this is a supernatural winter that has lasted for a hundreded years. It is the depressing parallel of a darkness with no hope of dawn.

In the witch's first appearance, she entices and embroils Edmund into her plot to capture all four children. It is interesting that she feeds Edmund "Turkish Delight," which we are told later is "bad magic food." Edmund is willing to betray his brother and sisters if only he can have some more of it. It is interesting to note that during the 19th Century Turkish Delight, which is a candy much like Halvah (crushed Sesame seeds), often had the ingredient hashish added to it. Perhaps this is the reason that Edmund so earnestly wanted more and more of it.

The Witch feels threatened by the four human children. Not only the Witch, but also Mr. Tumnus and Mr. Beaver are very careful to establish the fact that the children are "The Sons of Adam and The Daughters of Eve." The Witch pretends to be human to be able to claim rulership over Narnia, the implication being that humanity is meant to be the benign natural rulers of the world. Thus the Witch is threatened in her false claim to rule by the appearance of true humanity.

Mr. Beaver very seriously warns the children "... , take my advise, when you meet anything that's going to be Human and isn't yet, or used to be Human once and isn't now, or ought to be Human and isn't, you keep your eyes on it and feel for your hatchet." Lewis' sermonizing here might have been due in part to the several dehumanizing movements that have appeared in our century. He speaks on nearly the same idea in the chapter entitled "Nice People or New Man" in Mere Christianity. In the same passage in Wardrobe we are told that The White Witch is a descendant of Lilith. Thus in essence she is a Lilith figure. She is technically not human, since humanity is descendant from Adam and Eve, Lewis tells us she is one of the Jinn. The Jinn were intelligent and rational beings, either neutrally mischievous or hostile to humanity.

The Lilith myth is also expressed in the Witch's accomplices. The captain of her secret police is Fenris Ulf. 'Ulf' is the Norse word for wolf and the character is taken directly from Norse Mythology.

The Witch is able to change form, and the form of others. She, like the Babylonian Lilith has a large host of deformed demons, who aid her in the death of Aslan.

There is a parallel between Tolkien's Sauron and the Witch, who are both so involved with their own strategems, that despite their intelligence, cannot anticipate the victory of a more transcendant good. Sauron, expecting all others to use the Ring as he would, can not understand the self-sacrificing journey of Frodo. Likewise the Witch, who knows of the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea's demand for justice, and is so eager to make this justice serve her ends, is blind to understand the deeper and higher power of self-sacrificing love. Thus the Deeper Magic from before the Dawn of Time (Love) is put into effect and the Deep Magic from the Dawn of Time (Justice) is transcended, and death itself would start working backwards. Lewis has the Witch say what Satan is likely to have thought at that other sacrifice. The speech reflects the gleeful expectation of the final victory of Evil. It is much like Sauron's bewitchment of Denethor through the Palantir.

The Witch is destroyed at the end of Wardrobe, but Lewis does not specifically tell us she is dead. Rather one feels she becomes a lingering, malicious spirit, deprived of its power and bodily form, seeking to regain its states. In Prince Caspian some Narnians wish to recall her from the dead, so that they can drive the Telmarines from the land.

There is a witch in The Silver Chair, called The Lady of the Green Kirtle. At the Parliament of Owls, one of the members tells us, "A white witch came out of the North and bound our land in snow and ice for a hundred years. And we think this may be one of the same crew."

The Green Witch's origins are not made clearer than this. It would seem that this Witch is not the White Witch in a new form, however she too follows certain characteristics of Lilith. In Silver Chair the witch in the form of a serpent attacks King Caspian's wife, the mother of Prince Rilian. The mother dies of the bite, and later the Witch enchants Prince Rilian, making him her hypnotic slave in the dark Underland. He, under the enchantment, is deeply in love with the Witch in whom he can see no wrong. She is grooming him to be her puppet consort after Narnia is conquered. After the enchantment is broken the Witch in the form of the giant serpent is killed.

In The Magician's Nephew, we are taken back to the beginning of Narnia. Here the Lilith figure is presented with more color and depth than previously. This in part could be due to the different visual representation done by the illustrator, Pauline Baynes.

Here we meet Jadis, Queen of Charn. She is the same character that is later to be the White Witch in Wardrobe, but here she is a sultry, bare armed Amazon. The name conveys both her strong character and her jaded attitude towards reality beyond her own assertive will. The word Charn (with ch = k) is Latin for "flesh". Charn (with ch = ch) reminds one of Charnel House, a place where bodies are stored, a crypt.

In her desire to be unconquered, to win in a power struggle with a sister much like herself, Jadis is unconcerned in destroying all life in her world, as long as this destroys those opposed to her. With all that has been said about ultimate weapons in our century, Jadis surely knew the Ultimate in Ultimate Weapons. It is here that we have the most striking parallel between the Lilith mythos and Narnia: the contrast of The Ineffable Word with The Deplorable Word. There is no comparison between the Holy name of God, and a magic word that can extinguish all life, in their meaning. But both words, in their own ways, represent tremendous power.

In both cases the word was misused by a totally self-centered person for her own ends. The rebellion of Lilith against God is a much more severe and intense act than Adam's later fall. I feel Lewis demonstrates very dramatically the blind tragedy of individuals who seek their own victory above all else. Jadis is at least half right about herself: hers is "a high and lonely destiny." In Descent into Hell Charles Williams asks "don't you know how quiet the streets of Gomorrah are?" (Gomorrah standing for self-love.)

In Magician's Nephew Jadis has a strong Babylonian flavor, which fits the traditional image of Lilith much more than the Queen of Snow and Ice. Jadis is impervious to all she meets. Men are treated condescendingly, but women are beneath her contempt. It is as if she were a third sex, who is in her own eyes higher to men as women are inferior to men.

In Narnia, the Witch, hearing the song, and knowing here is a power greater than her, reacts in hatred. "She would have smashed that whole world, or all worlds, to pieces, if it would only stop the Singing." If she cannot be the Final Power in the newly created world, she decides to thwart the one who is.

Her chance comes in the paradisaical Garden, where she acts as the tempter. The Biblical allusion with the tree in the garden is obvious. Digory is tempted to keep the apple for himself, and return home to heal his very sick mother with it. Jadis promises "All will be well again. Your home will be happy again. You will be like other boys." NC



How like Satan promising Eve "Ye shall be as Gods."

By Jadis using the issue of Digory's sick mother as the emotional lever, she brings the Lilith nature into the temptation. If Digory had done what she suggested, the reader can surmise a worsening of Digory's family life to say the least. She tells Digory, "Aslan is far away," where Lewis strongly implies through symbolism that Aslan is present in the form of the large roosting bird appearing to be asleep.

The Witch has frozen her chance for redemption by climbing over the wall and ignoring the warning: "Take of my fruit for others or forbear. For those who steal or those who climb my wall Shall find their heart's desire and find despair." Jadis does find her desire by eating the apple which makes her immortal, but a one-dimensional immortality, much like the Nazgul: A living death. We leave Jadis-Lilith at this point.

The Lilith mythos will certainly continue to be a valuable archetype in literature and imagination. She is a projected exaggeration of one possible facet of the human personality. Lewis believed that moral choices cause resultant circumstances that are often not foreseen. By attempting to understand the motivations and psychology of Lilith, and by her negative example, we can hopefully have a better understanding of human capacities, and will make more thoughtful choices ourselves.