

*“Writing Our Lives’ – a Creative Workshop for the
LJ Day of Celebration, with Nicola Nathan and Janet Burden*



Adam, Eve and Lilith, by Clara Pechansky, Saatchi Art Gallery

Workshop Format

1-to-1, or as a small group

Where are we in our lives? What history has brought us here?

Facilitators' Choices – What and What's Behind?

Back to the Beginning – Eve and Lilith poems

Writing Space, possible sharing afterwards

For Those Whom the Gods Love Less
Denise Levertov

(chosen by Janet Burden)

When you discover
your new work travels the ground you had traversed
decades ago, you wonder, panicked,
'Have I outlived my vocation? Said already
all that was mine to say?'

There's a remedy –
only one - for the paralysis seizing your throat to mute you,
numbing your hands: Remember the great ones, remember Cezanne
doggedly sur le motif, his mountain
a tireless noonday angel he grappled like Jacob,
demanding reluctant blessing. Remember James rehearsing
over and over his theme, the loss
of innocence and the attainment
(note by separate note sounding its tone
until by accretion a chord resounds) of somber
understanding. Each life in art
goes forth to meet dragons that rise from their bloody scales
in cyclic rhythm: Know and forget, know and forget.
It's not only
the passion for getting it right (though it's that, too)
it's the way
radiant epiphanies recur, recur,
consuming, pristine, unrecognized –
until remembrance dismays you. And then, look,
some inflection of light, some wing of shadow
is other, unvoiced. You can, you must
proceed.

- from *Sands of the Well* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1998), p. 96

Lilith's Dance
Micheline Wandor

(chosen by Nicola Nathan)

Lilith sins?

Lilith sings
Lilith speaks many a cross word
Lilith has an anger like love
like a procession of pillars
of fire
Lilith has the delight
of a woman scorned
he modeled me
I was his clay thing
into me he breathed life
I became his golem
I went forth and I destroyed
havoc my middle name

I am the dybbuk of delight
I slip into the souls
of those who need me

perhaps you breathed
just a little
too much life, a snuffle too long
but once tasting the air
I would not be still, not
be silent, not return
to my feet of clay

I will not gather dust
I do not cower beneath
cobwebs
I do not fear the hot streets

I walk
in the middle
of the pavement

I do not hug the shade
of cowardly buildings
I do not stay in my ghetto
but I strut and stride
into the ghetto
of men
I interrupt
the invisible universal
which denies men their souls
and women their being

I do not creep

I do not crawl

see

I am proud

I have taken the cloth
from my mirror
of mourning

for your birthday
(if gods have birthdays)
I shall give you
a mirror

- from *The Dybbuk of Delight: an Anthology of Jewish Women's Poetry* (1995).

Eve to Lilith/Lilith to Eve Michelene Wandor

Eve to Lilith

don't get me wrong - I have nothing against first wives

ok, so you laid him
first; that's merely
a fact of life
so you got to know
all his little habits, like
picking his nose
when he reads in bed

but he didn't do that with you?
I see

I'm not jealous. I don't
believe in jealousy, and what I don't believe in
doesn't hurt me. But tell me
honestly, what did you do to the poor man?
He's a nervous wreck.
He can't stand up to his boss, he has
pains in his side all the time -
I mean, something must have happened
to leave a man
so scarred.

He told me how beautiful you were.
The dark, dramatic type.
Usually he doesn't talk about you
but when we - well, long ago -
when - at night -
we - in the dark, always -
he used to call your name
at a certain moment

It's none of my business but you must have done something very
special
to make a man remember you so

Lilith to Eve

I merely said 'no'.

That's when he gave me
his attention
for the first time

- from *The Dybbuk of Delight: an Anthology of Jewish Women's Poetry* (1995).

New Fruit

Ann Drysdale

In the last knockings of the evening sun
Eve drinks Calvados. Elsewhere in her life
She has played muse and mistress, bitch and wife.
Now all that gunpoint gamesmanship is done.
She loves the garden at this time of day.
Raising her third glass up to God, she grins;
If this is her come-uppance for her sins
It's worth a little angst along the way.
A fourth. Again the cork's slow squeaky kiss.
If, as the liquor tempts her to believe,
The Lord has one more Adam up His sleeve
He's going to have to take her as she is –
Out in the garden in a dressing-gown
Breathing old apples as the sun goes down.

- from *Backwork* (Peterloo Poets, 2002)

Background on Adam's Helpmeets - Excerpt from The Hebrew Myths, Chapter 10, pp. 65-69 (New York: Doubleday). Robert Graves and Raphael Patai

Having decided to give Adam a helpmeet lest he should be alone of his kind, God put him into a deep sleep, removed one of his ribs, formed it into a woman, and closed up the wound, Adam awoke and said: 'This being shall be named "Woman", because she has been taken out of man. A man and a woman shall be one flesh.' The title he gave her was Eve, 'the Mother of All Living.' [1]

Some say that God created man and woman in His own image on the Sixth Day, giving them charge over the world; [2] but that Eve did not yet exist. Now, God had set Adam to name every beast, bird and other living thing. When they passed before him in pairs, male and female, Adam—being already like a twenty-year-old man—felt jealous of their loves, and though he tried coupling with each female in turn, found no satisfaction in the act. [A] He therefore cried: 'Every creature but I has a proper mate!', and prayed God would remedy this injustice. [3]

God then formed Lilith, the first woman, just as He had formed Adam, except that He used filth and sediment instead of pure dust. From Adam's union with this demoness, and with another like her named Naamah, Tubal Cain's sister, sprang Asmodeus and innumerable demons that still plague mankind. Many generations later, Lilith and Naamah came to Solomon's judgement seat, disguised as harlots of Jerusalem'. [4]

Adam and Lilith never found peace together; for when he wished to lie with her, she took offence at the recumbent posture he demanded. 'Why must I lie beneath you?' she asked. 'I also was made from dust, and am therefore your equal.' Because Adam tried to compel her obedience by force, Lilith, in a rage, uttered the magic name of God, rose into the air and left him.

Adam complained to God: 'I have been deserted by my helpmeet' God at once sent the angels Senoy, Sansenoy and Semangelof to fetch Lilith back. They found her beside the Red Sea, a region abounding in lascivious demons, to whom she bore lilim at the rate of more than one hundred a day. 'Return to Adam without delay,' the angels said, 'or we will drown you!' Lilith asked: 'How can I return to Adam and live like an honest housewife, after my stay beside the Red Sea?' 'It will be death to refuse!' they answered. 'How can I die,' Lilith asked again, 'when God has ordered me to take charge of all newborn children: boys up to the eighth day of life, that of circumcision; girls up to the twentieth day. None the less, if ever I see your three names or likenesses displayed in an amulet above a newborn child, I promise to spare it.' To this they agreed; but God punished Lilith by making one hundred of her demon children perish daily; [5] [F]and if she could not destroy a human infant, because of the angelic amulet, she would spitefully turn against her own. [6] [D]

Some say that Lilith ruled as queen in Zmargad, and again in Sheba; and was the demoness who destroyed job's sons. [7] Yet she escaped the curse of death which overtook Adam, since they had parted long before the Fall. Lilith and Naamah [H] not only strangle infants but also seduce dreaming men, any one of whom, sleeping alone, may become their victim. [8] [E]

Undismayed by His failure to give Adam a suitable helpmeet, God tried again, [C] and let him watch while he built up a woman's anatomy: using bones, tissues, muscles, blood and glandular secretions, then covering the whole with skin and adding tufts of hair in places. The sight caused Adam such disgust that even when this woman, the First Eve, stood there in her full beauty, he felt an invincible repugnance. God knew that He had failed once more, and took the First Eve away. Where she went, nobody knows for certain. [9]

God tried a third time, and acted more circumspectly. [I] Having taken a rib from Adam's side in his sleep, He formed it into a woman;

then plaited her hair and adorned her, like a bride, with twenty-four pieces of jewellery, before waking him. Adam was entranced. [10]

Some say that God created Eve [J] not from Adam's rib, but from a tail ending in a sting which had been part of his body. God cut this off, and the stump-now a useless coccyx-is still carried by Adam's descendants. [11]

Others say that God's original thought had been to create two human beings, male and female; but instead He designed a single one with a male face looking forward, and a female face looking back. Again He changed His mind, removed Adam's backward-looking face, and built a woman's body for it. [12]

Still others hold that Adam was originally created as an androgyne of male and female bodies joined back to back. [B] Since this posture made locomotion difficult, and conversation awkward, God divided the androgyne and gave each half a new rear. These separate beings He placed in Eden, forbidding them to couple. [13]

Sources

- [1] Genesis II. 18-25; III. 20.
- [2] Genesis I. 26-28.
- [3] Gen. Rab. 17.4; B. Yebamot 632.
- [4] Yalqut Reubeni ad. Gen. II. 21; IV. 8.
- [5] Alpha Beta diBen Sira, 47; Gaster, MGWJ, 29 (1880), 553 ff.
- [6] Num. Rab. 16.25.
- [7] Targum ad job 1. 15.
- [8] B. Shabbat 151b; Ginzberg, LJ, V. 147-48.
- [9] Gen. Rab. 158, 163-64; Mid. Abkir 133, 135; Abot diR. Nathan 24; B. Sanhedrin 39a.
- [10] Gen. II. 21-22; Gen. Rab. 161.
- [11] Gen. Rab. 134; B. Erubin 18a.
- [12] B. Erubin 18a.
- [13] Gen. Rab. 55; Lev. Rab. 14.1; Abot diR. Nathan 1.8; B. Berakhot 61a; B. Erubin 18a; Tanhuma Tazri'a 1; Yalchut Gen. 20; Tanh. Buber iii.33; Mid. Tehillim 139, 529.

Some of the material included in this booklet has come from:

<http://www.jewishchristianlit.com/>

Space to Write, Reflect, Respond or Rage

