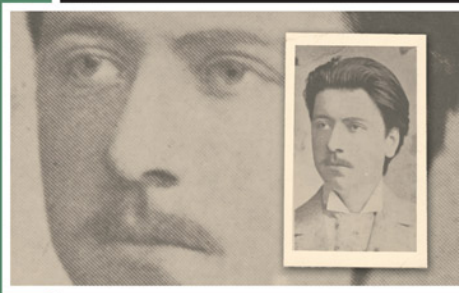


The Higher Self in Christopher Brennan's *Poems*

Esotericism, Romanticism, Symbolism

Katherine Barnes



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The Higher Self in
Christopher Brennan's *Poems*

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VOLUME 2

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Dedicated to the memory of Dymphna Clark

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Many thanks to my husband Chris, my sons Jeremy and Russell, and my daughters Rosie and Meredith for their support.

ABBREVIATIONS

- ANU Australian National University
- BA *From Blake to Arnold: Selections From English Poetry (1783–1853)*, ed. C.J. Brennan, J.P. Pickburn and J. Le Gay Brereton, London: Macmillan, 1900.
- CB Axel Clark, *Christopher Brennan: A Critical Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980.
- DA Stéphane Mallarmé, *Les Dieux antiques*, Paris: Rothschild, 1880.
- KFSA Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler et al., 35 vols., Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958–.
- F C.J. Brennan, *Poems*, Sydney: Philip, 1914; *Poems [1913]*, ed. G.A. Wilkes, facsimile edn, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1972.
- FL Fisher Library, University of Sydney, NSW.
- MZ Menzies Library, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT.
- ML Mitchell Library, Sydney, NSW.
- NLA National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT.
- NS Novalis, *Schriften*, ed. Paul Kluckhorn and Richard Samuel, 5 vols., Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–88.
- OCM Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bertrand Marchal, 2 vols., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 65, 497, Paris: Gallimard, 1998, 2003.
- OCB Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Y.-G. le Dantec, rev. Claude Pichois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 1, 7, Paris: Gallimard, 1975.
- OCN Gérard de Nerval, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Guillaume, Claude Pichois et al., 3 vols., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 89, 117, 397, Paris: Gallimard, 1984–1993.
- P *The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, ed. A.R. Chisholm and J.J. Quinn, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962.
- PLNSW Public Library of NSW.
- SLNSW State Library of NSW, Sydney, NSW (the former Public Library of NSW).

- ST Christopher Brennan, *Christopher Brennan*, ed. Terry Sturm, Portable Australian Authors, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984.
- V *The Verse of Christopher Brennan*, ed. A.R. Chisholm and J.J. Quinn, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1960.
- WWB *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic and Critical*, ed. Edwin J. Ellis and W.B. Yeats, 3 vols., London: Quaritch, 1893; New York: AMS, 1973.

INTRODUCTION

More than thirty-five years ago, Judith Wright, Australian poet and scholar, described the Australian response to the poetry of Christopher Brennan as “tentative, uncertain”. Brennan, she believed, was the primary, indeed virtually the only, Australian contributor to what she called the “long philosophico-poetic argument of the West”. The tentative local reception of his work, however, derived from his readers’ lack of familiarity with the intellectual and artistic context in which he wrote: “The field he chose for his poetry was conspicuously un-Australian; the argument he pursues requires a background that was never provided here”.¹

In many ways the situation in Australia has worsened since Wright made her comments.² Only a handful of Australian universities now include Brennan in offerings in Australian literature—let alone setting him alongside writers from continental Europe and the English-speaking world in the kind of course where his work would make most sense. What Wright described as uncertainty has developed into widespread neglect or, oddly enough, disapproval. Since Modernism accustomed readers of poetry to the language of everyday speech, Brennan’s Victorian diction and dense, difficult verse have come to seem unfamiliar, almost embarrassing.

But perhaps Wright had a point. If we were to explore the “background that was never provided here”, might we not find Brennan to be different from what we had taken him to be, and better, perhaps, than we had ever imagined? Perhaps we might begin to understand why the French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, responding to the gift of Brennan’s early collection *XXI Poems*, had

¹ Judith Wright, “Christopher Brennan”, *Southerly* 30 (1970), p. 243.

² This remains true in spite of ground-breaking work carried out by G.A. Wilkes and A.R. Chisholm in the 1950s and 60s, later research into German Romantic influences on Brennan by Noel Macainsh and into French Symbolist influences by Lloyd Austin and Wallace Kirsop, among others, as well as some exploratory work into Brennan’s esoteric and mystical sources by Dorothy Green and A.D. Hope. Apart from relatively short monographs by Randolph Hughes, Wilkes (in this case, a reprint of a series of articles), Chisholm and James McAuley, the only book-length study of Brennan is Axel Clark’s critical biography (1980). If we look for recognition of Brennan outside Australia itself, we find that only a handful of non-Australians,

spoken of “une parentée [sic] de songe” between Brennan and himself.³ We might even find that we had been neglecting and disapproving of a poet who could hold his own on the world stage, who was tackling some of the big ideas of the Romantic-Symbolist era while all the approval was going to his compatriots Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson for their ballads and stories of bush life.

I have written this book to provide the kind of context that I think we need to grasp if we are to understand and evaluate Brennan’s poetry properly. Following the threads of Brennan’s own interests, I have found that insights from Western esotericism, Symbolism and Romanticism illuminate his poetic project in especially useful ways. Western esotericism is a complex of interconnected currents including alchemy, Hermeticism, theosophy and Rosicrucianism, arising out of the Gnosticism and Neoplatonism of antiquity. Symbolism is a literary and artistic movement of the latter part of the nineteenth century that Brennan himself believed was inextricably linked with the earlier (and persisting) movement of Romanticism. Scholar as well as poet, Brennan was caught up in the big religious and philosophical questions of the century in which he was born. He understood how esoteric and mystical thinking had helped to build the movements of Romanticism and Symbolism. He drew on these insights to build his own work of art, a book entitled simply *Poems*, published in 1914.

Poems grapples with some of the most profound thinking of the Romantic and Symbolist movements, exploring the notion of a higher or transcendent self constituted by the union of the human mind

notably François Boisivon, Antoine Denat, Simone Kadi, Paul Kane and Jean Seznec, have published on Brennan. See François Boisivon, “Notes sur Christopher Brennan (1870–1932), *Musicopoematographoscope* et sa traduction”, *Le Nouveau recueil* 56 (2000), pp. 42–45; Antoine Denat, “Christopher Brennan, comparatiste australien”, *Carrefours critiques*, vol. 2 of *Vu des antipodes*, Paris: Didier, 1967, pp. 14–24; Simone Kadi, *Christopher Brennan: introduction suivie de 12 poèmes, textes, traductions et commentaires*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005; Paul Kane, “Christopher Brennan and the Allegory of Poetic Power”, in *Australian Poetry: Romanticism and Negativity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 78–94; and Jean Seznec, “Les Dieux antiques de Mallarmé”, in *Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry: New Essays in Honour of Lloyd Austin*, ed. Malcolm Bowie, Alison Fairlie and Alison Finch, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 259–82.

³ “a kinship of dream”. Rosemary Lloyd weighs the significance of this comment in the light of Mallarmé’s responses to other authors who had sent him their poetic work in “Mallarmé Reading Brennan, Brennan Reading Mallarmé” in *Australian Divagations: Mallarmé and the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jill Anderson, New York: Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 18–22.

and Nature. Brennan's achievement in producing such a work in colonial Sydney, where literary and intellectual developments in *fin-de-siècle* Europe were accessible only through reading and limited correspondence, is remarkable. The poetry is, I grant, complex and difficult, but the effort of establishing an appropriately broad intellectual context within which to understand it is fully repaid by the work itself. At a time when the meaning traditionally inhering in systems of religious understanding and myth had been fairly comprehensively stripped away, for many, by more than a century of scepticism, Brennan gave old (sometimes very old) materials not only a new form, that of the Symbolist *livre composé*, but a fresh relevance.

* * *

Brennan lived in Sydney all his life, except for two years as a student in Berlin. He was born in 1870 into a family of Irish immigrants (his father was a brewer, and later kept a pub in inner Sydney) and educated at St Ignatius' College, Riverview, and the University of Sydney.⁴ A precocious student, he had made a major discovery about the descent of the texts of Aeschylus by the time he was eighteen. The foundation of his later scholarly expertise in German and French literature was laid during his years in Berlin (1892–4) on a travelling scholarship from Sydney University; his interest in English literature, already established, was further extended there.

Brennan returned from Berlin in 1894 without the higher degree he was supposed to have acquired. He had, however, acquired a German fiancée, Elisabeth Werth, who travelled to Australia to marry him at the end of 1897. He was employed at the Public Library of NSW from 1895 until 1909, when he was appointed to Sydney University as an assistant lecturer in modern literature, teaching German and French. In 1920 he became associate professor in German and comparative literature. This made him the first professor of comparative literature in Australia. As Antoine Denat comments:

la vaste culture du nouveau professeur l'avait préparé à ce rôle : également instruit des langues grecque, latine, allemande et française (sans

⁴ Biographical information included in this book is drawn from Axel Clark, *Christopher Brennan: A Critical Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980, hereafter abbreviated to CB.

compter sa langue maternelle), Brennan représentait à cette époque à Sydney le type même d'un certain cosmopolitisme littéraire.⁵

Brennan's marriage to Elisabeth eventually foundered, and they had been living separately for some time when, in his fifty-third year, he began a relationship with a woman seventeen years his junior. Vie Singer was a New Zealander, and she had been married before. Unlike Elisabeth, she shared many of his literary and intellectual interests. Brennan and Vie set up house together in 1923, much to the consternation of people they knew and, more seriously, of Brennan's colleagues at the university. In spite of this, the relationship blossomed, seeming to produce in Brennan a new lease of creative life: the quality of the handful of love poems he wrote at the time is evidence of this. It all ended suddenly with Vie's accidental death in 1925; she was run over in the early hours of the morning by a tram returning to the depot. To compound the tragedy, Brennan was dismissed by the University of Sydney in the same year because his scandalous relationship had been made public in proceedings in the divorce court. He appreciated the full irony that his exposure and dismissal occurred when Vie was already dead. It is hard to believe now, of course, that he could have been dismissed for such a reason. After losing his position, his associated scholarly projects and his livelihood, Brennan lapsed into poverty and alcoholism. A small group of supporters, some of them members of the university senate acting in an unofficial capacity, took it upon themselves to cushion him from the worst consequences of his fall in the years before his death in 1932.⁶

It was in Berlin in 1893 that Brennan began writing poetry seriously. His total output was not large. Two small collections of verse, *XVIII Poems* and *XXI Poems*, appeared in 1897, the first privately printed. These were precursors of his main work, *Poems*, a collection of just over a hundred pieces.⁷ Other works by Brennan include *A Chant of*

⁵ Denat, p. 14: "Christopher Brennan, comparatiste australien", *Carrefours critiques*, vol. 2 of *Vu des antipodes*, Paris: Didier, 1971, p. 14: "The vast knowledge of the new professor had prepared him for this role: equally versed in Greek, Latin, German and French (not to mention his native language), Brennan represented the very type of a certain literary cosmopolitanism in the Sydney of the time".

⁶ See Richard Pennington, *Christopher Brennan: Some Recollections*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1970, pp. 12–16, 24–34.

⁷ Often referred to as *Poems (1913)* or *Poems [1913]*.

Doom and other verses (1918) and *The Burden of Tyre*, written in 1900–1901 in response to the Boer War but published only in 1953. A collected edition of his poetry, *The Verse of Christopher Brennan*, was published in 1960, edited by A.R. Chisholm and J.J. Quinn, and a companion volume, *The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, followed in 1962. The *Prose* collection includes the text of Brennan’s series of lectures “Symbolism in Nineteenth Century Literature”, delivered in Sydney in 1904, as well as his article “German Romanticism: A Progressive Definition” (1920), which according to the editors of *Prose* was written about ten years before publication and “handed round among his senior German students at the University as a sort of introduction to his lectures on German Romanticism”.⁸ In 1900 Brennan edited an anthology of English poetry, *From Blake to Arnold*, with J.P. Pickburn and J. Le Gay Brereton; Brennan himself was responsible for the introduction, critical essays and notes. In 1981 his *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope* and *Pocket Musicopoematographoscope*, written for private entertainment, were published in a facsimile edition.⁹ Terry Sturm’s Portable Australian Authors edition, *Christopher Brennan* (1984), includes selected correspondence as well as a number of Brennan’s prose writings, particularly on Australian topics, not published elsewhere. François Boisivon’s translation of the *Musicoematographoscope* into French appeared in 2000, and Simone Kadi’s translation of twelve of the *Poems* in 2005.

Most of the pieces in *Poems* were written before 1900, but the work of rearrangement, including the addition of extra pieces where the structure required it, continued sporadically until the time of publication. The chronology established by Wilkes in *New Perspectives on Brennan’s Poetry* [1953] and extended in “The Art of Brennan’s *Towards the Source*” (1961) shows that considerable restructuring took place between 1899 and 1906. The two final sections were completed in 1908.¹⁰ The work is arranged in five major sections: “Towards

⁸ C.J. Brennan, *The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, ed. A.R. Chisholm and J.J. Quinn, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962 (hereafter abbreviated to P), p. 395.

⁹ Brennan first read the *Coup de dés* in its original version in the Paris journal *Cosmopolis* of May 1897. See Axel Clark, Introduction to Christopher Brennan, *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope* and *Pocket Musicopoematographoscope*, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1981, p. [3].

¹⁰ G.A. Wilkes, *New Perspectives on Brennan’s Poetry*, Sydney: Halstead Press, [1953], pp. 15–23 and “The Art of Brennan’s *Towards the Source*”, *Southerly* 21 (1961), pp. 29–33.

the Source”, “The Forest of Night”, “The Wanderer”, “Pauca Mea” and “Epilogues”. Within the sections some poems are arranged into numbered sequences while others are formed into groups, marked off by blank pages. Epigraphs written by the poet himself introduce a number of sub-sections, and there are several interludes between sections. Some poems function as preludes to sections. It has not been possible to discuss all of the *Poems* in this book. The Wanderer sequence, which has attracted more critical attention and been more frequently anthologised than other poems by Brennan, is not extensively discussed.

* * *

Brennan was familiar with a number of currents that are now included in the scholarly field of Western esotericism: alchemy, Rosicrucianism, Kabbalah (although not necessarily the Christian Kabbalah established in the Renaissance most definitively by Pico della Mirandola) and theosophical movements, especially the doctrines of Jakob Boehme. Wouter J. Hanegraaff describes the field in the following way:

From a strictly historical perspective, western [...] esotericism is used as a container concept encompassing a complex of interrelated currents and traditions from the early modern period up to the present day, the historical origin and foundation of which lies in the syncretistic phenomenon of Renaissance “hermeticism” (in the broad and inclusive sense of the word). Western esotericism thus understood includes the so-called “occult philosophy” of the Renaissance and its later developments; Alchemy, Paracelsianism and Rosicrucianism; Christian and post-Christian Kabbalah; Theosophical and Illuminist currents; and various occultist and related developments during the 19th and 20th centuries.¹¹

Ancient sources of esoteric currents, including Neoplatonism and Gnosticism (Brennan was interested in both), share the notion of an emanated, rather than a created, universe and hence the idea that all Nature, even the inanimate, conceals a living spark of the divine. Among nineteenth-century expressions of esotericism, Brennan knew of the ‘esoteric Christianity’ of Edward Maitland and Anna Kingsford and various publications by the Theosophist G.R.S. Mead; he also

¹¹ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Some Remarks on the Study of Western Esotericism”, *Theosophical History: A Quarterly Journal of Research* 7 (1999), pp. 223–4.

owned a number of works by authors of the Neorosicrucian movement in late nineteenth-century France including the self-styled ‘Sar’ (Joséphin) Péladan and Jules Bois. Evidence of this comes from published articles and lectures as well as the contents of his library. We have his notes on the early chapters of the first volume of the edition of *The Works of William Blake* by Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats, in which Yeats interprets Blake’s poetry in the light of the doctrines of Boehme and Emanuel Swedenborg; and his copies of Yeats’s *Rosa Alchemica* triptych.¹² According to unpublished research by Robin Marsden, he had access to a number of books by Bulwer Lytton in the library of the Goulburn Mechanics’ Institute during the time he spent as a teacher at St Patrick’s College, Goulburn (1891), including *Zanoni* (1842), *A Strange Story* (1862) and *The Coming Race* (1871).¹³

The term ‘esotericism’ itself is never used by Brennan. The group of terms he employs in the Symbolism lectures to describe the provenance of the esoteric doctrine of correspondences is “mystical”, “the mystics” and “mysticism”. Brennan is not alone in using ‘mysticism’ in this way. In his study *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), Arthur Symons interprets the movement in terms of mysticism, commenting:

[T]he doctrine of Mysticism, with which all this symbolical literature has so much to do, of which it is all so much the expression, presents us, not with a guide for conduct, not with a plan for our happiness, not with an explanation of any mystery, but with a theory of life which makes us familiar with mystery, and which seems to harmonise those instincts which make for religion, passion, and art, freeing us at once of a great bondage.¹⁴

Brennan’s lecture “Vision, Imagination and Reality” demonstrates his fascination with visionary experiences, including those of Plato and the Neoplatonists, Pascal, Jan van Ruysbroeck, Maitland,

¹² Brennan’s copy of *The Secret Rose* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1897), in which “Rosa Alchemica”, the first of these stories, appears, is in MZ, PR5904.S3 1897; *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi*, London: Clay, 1897, is in the ML, RB/2425.

¹³ Marsden recorded the contents of the library at the time it was dismantled (pers. comm., September 2005). For comments made by Brennan on this library in 1901, see P, p. 24.

¹⁴ Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 1899; 2nd ed., London: Constable, 1908, pp. 173–74.

Kingsford, Swedenborg and Yeats, as well as those described in the publications of the Society for Psychical Research.¹⁵ Unlike the presentation of mysticism in Symons' work, however, Brennan's study of the ideas of the mystics in relation to Symbolism employs concepts, and draws on writings, that are now included in the scholarly field of esotericism.

In *Access to Western Esotericism*, Antoine Faivre proposes four essential criteria for 'esotericism': correspondences; living nature; imagination and mediations; and experience of transmutation. Of these, the notion of correspondences is the most important for Brennan. Faivre describes it in this way:

Symbolic and real correspondences [...] are said to exist among all parts of the universe, both seen and unseen. ("As above so below.") We find again here the ancient idea of microcosm and macrocosm or, if preferred, the principle of universal interdependence. These correspondences, considered more or less veiled at first sight, are, therefore, intended to be read and deciphered. The entire universe is a huge theater of mirrors, an ensemble of hieroglyphs to be decoded.¹⁶

As we will see, Brennan himself was deeply interested in the historical development of this notion, although neither his scholarly work nor his poetry can be said to fulfil all four of Faivre's criteria.¹⁷

Brennan's understanding of esoteric and mystical currents put him in a privileged position for understanding the religious affinities of certain aspects of Romantic and Symbolist thought. The article on German Romanticism shows that Brennan gave Novalis the credit for introducing "the (real) mystical element into Romanticism" while subjecting that mysticism to "hard and continuous reflexion".¹⁸ For Friedrich Schlegel,¹⁹ the "ideal synthesis of perfection" was regarded as unattainable, this attitude being the basis of Romantic irony, "at once a bitter acknowledgement of one's own impotence to attain to the absolute, and a proud manifestation of one's freedom from the bonds of the temporal and particular".²⁰ Unlike Schlegel, Novalis

¹⁵ P, pp. 22–30.

¹⁶ Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 10.

¹⁷ For more on the notion of correspondences, see pages 150–151 below.

¹⁸ P, pp. 390–91.

¹⁹ Further references in the text to Schlegel should be taken to refer to Friedrich, except where the Schlegel brothers are referred to jointly.

²⁰ P, pp. 383–84.

“conceives the ideal synthesis as attainable through art”.²¹ The sixth Symbolism lecture suggests that historically, Symbolism is “a cross-fertilization of poetry by mysticism” and that the result of this cross-fertilisation has been an elevation of poetry. Brennan proposes that the claim of Symbolism “to possess a religious and moral element” is “justified by the nature of the fundamental concept of art”, beauty. This he defines as “the occasion, object and symbol of a thoroughly satisfying total experience, a harmonious mood of our real self, a mood which is a figure of the final harmony and perfection”.²² These comments give a good indication of what Brennan himself understood by the term Symbolism: a kind of poetry which gives expression to a transcendent self by using natural objects as symbols, and which therefore has a religious dimension.

* * *

The notion of the higher self is indebted, historically, to mysticism.²³ According to mystical and esoteric ways of thinking, human beings possess a faculty within which the divine can come into being. Writers of *Naturphilosophie* such as Paracelsus identify this faculty with the human imagination, which was thought to be capable of quickening the ‘spark’ of the divine that has remained within all created beings since they lost their original divine status, so as to bring about a *Wiedergeburt* or second birth.²⁴ Somewhat ironically, it was in Enlightenment Germany, particularly, that the mystical bent of Pietism and the esoteric current of ‘spiritual’ alchemy coalesced in Illuminist and Masonic groups, making mystical and esoteric ways of thinking part of the heritage of German pre-Romantic Idealist philosophers

²¹ P, p. 392.

²² P, pp. 171–72.

²³ The notion is common to many forms of mysticism, including Sufi mysticism, but the discussion in this book limits itself to Western traditions and their roots in antiquity.

²⁴ This discussion of the higher self is an introduction to arguments presented in much more detail later in the book. For more on Comte and Leroux, see discussion beginning on page 22 below. A detailed discussion of Boehme’s idea of the ‘mirror’ of God begins on page 53; for more on Boehme, mysticism, Neoplatonism, spiritual alchemy, Pietism, *Naturphilosophie* and Masonic groups, see pages 80–95. A more detailed discussion of the thought of Kant and Fichte begins on page 63, and Kant’s attitudes to art are discussed on pages 97–100. Exponentiation in German Romantic thought is discussed on pages 211–213.

such as Immanuel Kant and J.G. Fichte. Spiritual alchemy employed the transmutation of base metals into gold as a metaphor for the release of the 'seed' of God, or spark of the divine, in the soul.

Kant's 'transcendental self' was conceived to explain the paradoxically double status of human beings, simultaneously determined, with respect to the physical world, and free, with respect to the noumenon or ideal world. Fichte definitively formulated the dilemma which Kant had been attempting to resolve as a split between subject and object. Following the thinking of Kant and Fichte closely, early German Romantic thinkers such as Novalis and Schlegel felt that Fichte's reduction of the outer world of Nature to a mere reflection of the absolute ego was intolerable. Instead, they spoke of a reunion of the human being and the natural world, humanising Nature by considering it as a complementary self with whom human beings needed to be reunited. Just as we routinely use metaphors derived from the scientific thinking of our own time (relativity, for instance), these German thinkers used recently developed mathematical concepts as a metaphor for the superior or meta-self that could be generated if mind and Nature were reunited: they spoke of exponentiation, of 'raising' the self 'to a higher power'.²⁵

A complex group of influences, including Neoplatonism, fed the Romantic movement. In addition to the mystical 'spark' and the alchemical 'seed', the Neoplatonic notion of return to the One also had a significant influence. In the seventeenth century, the German theosophist and mystic Jakob Boehme had taught people to think of the imagination as the lost divine partner of the self, the other half of an androgynous union. Boehme's ideas were transmitted to the early German Romantic thinkers in complex and often indirect ways, as we will see, but his notion of imagination as the reflection or 'mirror' of the godhead provided one powerful paradigm for Romantic thinking about imagination. The human activity that was to bring about this higher form of the self, constituted by the reunion of the human mind and its complement, Nature, was the creation of art. Kant went beyond the limitations he had himself set down in his

²⁵ Following John Napier's introduction of natural logarithms in the seventeenth century, Leonhard Euler (1707–1783) carried out fundamental work on exponentiation in St Petersburg and Berlin. It was he who introduced the mathematical symbols e (often called Euler's number) and i , the square root of (-1) . See David M. Burton, *The History of Mathematics: An Introduction*, Boston: Allyn, Bacon, 1985, p. 503.

first Critique to suggest that the imagination can intuit in art what the reason can never provide access to—the noumenon.

Brennan wrote most of his *Poems* in the final decade of the nineteenth century, at the very end of the Romantic period. What he inherited from the movement, above all, was this notion of a self raised to a higher power, a higher self, which could be achieved, as much as this could ever be possible, through the creation of art. He was deeply familiar with Romantic thinking; he was also aware of how the more recent movement of Symbolism had adopted and adapted Romantic emphases. As its name suggests, Symbolism had extended the Idealist and Romantic notion that art reunifies mind and Nature by using Nature as symbol to suggest what is beyond the power of words to express directly. At the same time, in keeping with the increasing secularisation of the period, Symbolist thought found the divine within the self or not at all, so that Mallarmé could speak of “Divinity” as “never other than the Self”.²⁶ This was in keeping with the development of interest in a ‘religion of humanity’ in the early part of the nineteenth century by thinkers such as Comte and Leroux and was not incompatible, either, with developing notions of the human unconscious as something which might take the place of God for those sceptical of traditional religions.

Brennan himself does not employ the term ‘higher self’. In his fullest exploration of the artistic union of the human mind and Nature, the sixth Symbolism lecture, he suggests that poetry “has become our medium of communication with the transcendent, a transcendent which [. . .] has been placed, with all its mystical paradise, in ourselves”.²⁷ This suggestion of an inner locus of transcendence becomes more specific in his references to a “transcendental self” and a “real self”: “[o]ur transcendental self is becoming increasingly explicit”;²⁸ “[b]eauty is the occasion, object and symbol of a thoroughly satisfying total experience, a harmonious mood of our real self, a mood which is a figure of the final harmony and perfection”.²⁹ In the lecture on Mallarmé, he refers to a “true self”,³⁰

²⁶ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bertrand Marchal, 2 vols., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 65, 497, Paris: Gallimard, 1998–2003 (hereafter abbreviated to OCM), vol. 2, p. 238; “la Divinité, qui jamais n’est que Soi”.

²⁷ P, p. 157.

²⁸ P, p. 166.

²⁹ P, p. 172.

³⁰ P, p. 143.

and he uses the term again in a translation of Mallarmé's "Bucolique" included in that lecture: "one could pursue one's true self through the forests from scattered symbol to symbol towards a source".³¹ I have used the alternative terms 'higher self' and 'transcendent self' to cover Brennan's variety of terms.

* * *

The focus of this study is *Poems*. I argue that the fundamental principle informing the structure of *Poems*, regarded as a single unified work or *livre composé*, is the establishment of a correlation between human experience and the daily and yearly cycles of Nature. *Poems* is an attempt to bring into being an art work in keeping with the "vrai culte moderne" proposed by Mallarmé in an 1886 letter to Vittorio Pica (which Brennan knew from *La Revue indépendante* of March 1891), in which the book, "le livre", was to have a critical role.³² In the lecture he gave on Mallarmé as part of the series of public lectures on Symbolism given in Sydney in 1904, Brennan presents this conception in the following terms, drawing on two pieces from *Divagations*, "Crayonné au théâtre" and "Catholicisme":

What now is the form of that art-work which is to satisfy all our spiritual needs?

1. It is a myth. Not a particular legend, but a myth resuming all the others, without date or place, a figuration of our multiple personality: the myth written on the page of heaven and earth and imitated by man with the gesture of his passions.
2. It is a drama: for nature is a drama and as Novalis had said, "The true thinker perceives in the world a continued drama"; "In the people all is drama". It is the assimilation of our inmost passion to the tetralogy of the year. But a drama again, as it was a myth. There is no limited fable, no individual hero. We, who assist at it, are, each of us in turn and all of us together, the hero.³³

³¹ P, p. 152.

³² See Stéphane Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, ed. Henri Mondor and Lloyd James Austin, Paris: Gallimard, 1959–85, vol. 3, p. 73. This letter is quoted on pages [136]–137 of Brennan's autograph copies of the poems of Mallarmé, "Quelq'es [sic] Vers de Mallarmé épars aux feuilles" (in Mallarmé Box 2, St John's College Library, Cambridge).

³³ P, p. 145.

Evidence from Brennan's articles on Mallarmé, as well as annotations to texts in his library, indicates that the Australian poet considered this enterprise, at once religious and artistic, in the light of the wider pre-Romantic and Romantic concern with the reunion of the human mind and the natural world, and of the esoteric notion of correspondences between the mind, Nature and the divine.

My first chapter draws on materials available to Brennan in the Public Library of NSW to establish an intellectual and religious context in which to make sense of his interest in notions of a higher self; it then turns to a number of poems, mainly from "The Forest of Night", that seem to deal directly with such a notion. In the second and third chapters I focus on the Lilith sequence. Lilith was the first wife of Adam (according to Hebrew legend rather than the book of Genesis), preceding Eve. In my view, Lilith is Brennan's central symbol of the possibility that a higher self might be constituted by the union of the human mind with Nature. The Lilith sequence is explored in the light of pre-Romantic notions of the transcendental self (Kant) and the absolute ego (Fichte) as well as Romantic interest in the power of art to establish a new mythology and to provide access, however tenuous, to the transcendent. Romantic and mystical ideas of an inner route to the transcendent are linked with Brennan's exploration of an inner abyss. I suggest that the figure of Sophia appearing in the writings of seventeenth-century German mystic Jakob Boehme became an important paradigm for Brennan's Lilith.

In the fourth chapter, I discuss Brennan's notion of moods as an aspect of the union of mind and Nature that could be enacted in art, arguing that Brennan developed the Symbolist interest in moods for himself by weaving together material from German Romanticism, from early prose writing by W.B. Yeats, and from Mallarmé's *Les Dieux antiques*, a translation and adaptation of George Cox's *A Manual of Mythology in the Form of Question and Answer*. Evidence for the importance of Mallarmé's notion of the 'Tragedy of Nature' for Brennan's conception of his poetic work is drawn from the annotations to Brennan's copy of *Les Dieux antiques*. In the fifth chapter, I examine Brennan's elegy to Mallarmé, "Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed", drawing evidence for my interpretation from works by Mallarmé that the Australian poet had read. I suggest that Brennan may have linked Mallarmé's notion of transposition to exponentiation metaphors of German Romantic writers such as Novalis, who talks about raising the self to a higher power.

The sixth and seventh chapters consider the fundamental organisational principles upon which *Poems* is based. Chapter Six looks at three poems that function as preludes within the structure of the work as a whole and shows that all three (although in very different ways) link the seasonal cycle with stages of life. Chapter Seven considers a number of individual poems and sequences of poems linking certain times of the day or year to particular human emotions or experiences, arguing that Brennan has arranged his poetry so as to effect “the assimilation of our inmost passion to the tetralogy of the year”.

Wright sees evidence of delusions of grandeur in the possibility that Brennan attempted a task of this magnitude. This is her comment on the statement from the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé that we looked at above:

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that here we have a backstage glimpse into the writing of *Poems 1913*, its motivation and its plot, and perhaps even into Brennan’s secret opinion of its writer too.

This is no denigration of Brennan; if his opinion of himself was high, it was rightly so. His insights into literature, his scholarship and his powers of synthesis were far—very far—beyond those of many of his contemporaries. But short-cuts to a great work are treacherous. ‘The myth written on the page of heaven and earth and imitated by man with all the gesture of his passions’—the *grande œuvre*, the absolute poem—there can be no short cuts to that, no plotting, no by-passing of the original struggle with sense, perception, emotion, life itself; all must be sacrificed, and first of all, perhaps, the secret conviction that the poem is in one’s grasp, or can be.³⁴

Brennan, implicating his own enterprise in the phrase “we, who assist at it”, is claiming to be a contributor to this project but not to have achieved “the absolute poem” by himself. Possible nuances of the French verb *assister à*, to be present at or witness, could further qualify his claim to participate in the artistic “culte moderne”.

In keeping with the seriousness of his project, Brennan paid careful attention to formal and spatial aspects of the appearance of his text, such as typography and *mise en page*. The appearance of the work accords with Mallarmé’s suggestions about the functional “silence”

³⁴ Judith Wright, “Christopher Brennan”, in *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 95.

of the blank spaces surrounding the poem, as described in the preface to *Un Coup de dés n'abolira jamais le hasard*:³⁵

Les « blancs », en effet, assument l'importance, frappent d'abord ; la versification en exigea, comme silence alentour, ordinairement, au point qu'un morceau, lyrique ou de peu de pieds, occupe, au milieu, le tiers environ du feuillet : je ne transgresse cette mesure, seulement la disperse.³⁶

No poem occupies more than half the page, and most occupy much less. The space surrounding each individual poem augments the blank pages separating one section from another. Poems are mostly placed high on the page, except for the four-line epigraphs. These appear either at the very top or the very bottom of their pages, the loneliness of their appearance in keeping with the prophetic utterances they represent. Expressive typography distinguishes poems with particular structural roles—epigraphs, interludes, the prelude to the entire work—as well as separating off poems in an impersonal voice in the Lilith sequence from poems in other voices. No page numbers or poem numbers appear in the text (except that some poems within sequences are numbered with Roman numerals), capitalisation is restricted to the beginnings of sentences, and the tables, including the table of contents, appear at the end, as in a French text. A number of aspects of this arrangement are apparent in the facsimile edition published by Wilkes in 1972,³⁷ but there the reproduction of the text on much smaller pages significantly alters the artefact by reducing the ratio of blank paper to text.

* * *

Most early drafts of what became *Poems* were written while Brennan was working at the Public Library of NSW (now the State Library of NSW). Traces of his activities there may be found in the old card catalogue, now relegated to one of the lower floors, where there are

³⁵ “A throw of the dice will never abolish chance.”

³⁶ OCM, vol. 1, p. 391: “The ‘whites’ take on significance, strike one first of all; the versification required it, like a surrounding silence, usually, at the point where a scrap, lyric or of few feet, occupies, in the middle, around a third of the page. I don’t infringe this limit, only disperse it”.

³⁷ C.J. Brennan, *Poems*, Sydney: Philip, 1914; *Poems [1913]*, ed. G.A. Wilkes, facsimile edn, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1972, hereafter abbreviated to F.

still cards in his distinctive handwriting in the drawers. Printed library catalogues, in some cases turned back to front, became notebooks. His job seems to have left him plenty of time for his own reading and writing, but he was known for his ability to catch up quickly on his work (mainly cataloguing) when necessary.

When A.G. Stephens of the *Bulletin* wrote an obituary for Brennan in 1932, this is what he said about Brennan's time at the library:

The prime of his youth and brilliant proven talent as scholar, philosopher, master of six languages—English, Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian—and original writer in prose and verse, was spent in “cupboard-musty weeks” as a cataloguer at Sydney Public Library, 1895–1909; thirteen years.³⁸

There is a strong implication of wasted talent in Stephens' obituary. Popular belief that Brennan wrote salacious poetry seems to have contributed to his being passed over for positions at the University of Sydney on several occasions, and it was not until he was thirty-nine that he was finally appointed there. As we will see in succeeding chapters, however, he did not waste his time during those years of “cupboard-musty weeks” (a quotation from one of the *Poems*). Turning his mind to the search for a substitute for the religion of his childhood, he explored the self and the higher self, tackling the question head-on in a number of important pieces in *Poems*, which we will examine in the first chapter.

³⁸ A.G. Stephens, “Chris: Brennan. On a Three-Legged Stool”, *Daily Mail* (Brisbane), 5th November 1932.

CHAPTER ONE

DIVINITY AND THE SELF

Introduction

In 1879, nine years after Brennan's birth, Marcus Clarke wrote in the *Victorian Review*:

[W]e cannot open a newspaper or a review without being made painfully aware that the solemn reverence with which the sacred mysteries of religion were once treated has disappeared, that periphrases innumerable are resorted to in order that writers may avoid admitting the possibility of miraculous occurrences, or of seeming to acquiesce in a belief in the supernatural. Among the best intellects of our time, how few are there who freely accept the dogmas of the priesthood, and among the priesthood itself how many are there who sadly seek to believe at once in fact and fable, and to reconcile the revelations of religion with the revelations of science. For this class, the struggle between science and religion is fraught with terrible interest. They would fain believe, despite their reason; they are compelled to reason, despite their belief.¹

The conflict between scepticism and the desire for faith in the Australian state of Victoria in the late nineteenth century was a matter of personal observation for Clarke. Here he notes that writers in the popular press strive to avoid even the appearance of belief in the supernatural, while the dilemma is even more pressing for those in the priesthood. Believing that some kind of religion is “a political necessity”,² Clarke hopes for a new form of religious expression, with a different object of veneration, that does not depend on belief in the supernatural:

Mankind, freed from the terrors of future torments, and comprehending that by no amount of prayers can they secure eternal happiness for their souls, will bestow upon humanity the fervour which they have

¹ Marcus Clarke, *Marcus Clarke: For the Term of His Natural Life, Short Stories, Critical Essays and Journalism*, ed. Michael Wilding, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988, pp. 672–78.

² Clarke, p. 676.

hitherto wasted in sighs and hymns. [. . .] The progress of the world will be the sole care of its inhabitants; and the elevation of the race, the only religion of mankind. And this consummation of civilization is nearer at hand than many think. “The demonstrably false,” says a writer in the *North American Review*, “now exists in occasional and limited survivals,” and if the process of popular enlightenment continues in the future as in the present, “a twentieth century will see for the first time in the history of mankind a civilization without an active and general delusion”.³

Clarke’s naïve hope for a utopian future of “civilization without delusion”, the title under which the piece was later republished, seems ironic in hindsight. During the later nineteenth century and after, many people in the West transferred their allegiance to alternative forms of religious expression, which they did not necessarily subject to the same sceptical scrutiny which had led them to abandon their previous affiliations.

Eleven years after the publication of Clarke’s comments, when Brennan was a student at Sydney University, he read Herbert Spencer’s *First Principles* (1862). This was the immediate cause of his abandoning the Catholicism of his childhood and upbringing for agnosticism. T.H. Huxley invented this term in 1869 to contrast his uncertainty with the certainty or ‘gnosis’ (knowledge) of others. Although agnosticism was often taken as a synonym for atheism or scepticism, the main agnostics (Spencer, Huxley, Stephen and Tyndall) did not feel those terms accurately represented their position, which was one of genuine ‘un-knowing’.⁴ Brennan, however, adopted agnosticism as “a positive intellectual position, an equivalent of his lost faith”, according to Clark.⁵ Although Spencer’s position was, and is, often interpreted as one of pure materialism in the face of an irrelevant, if existing, Absolute, Brennan considered it an alternative kind of religious thinking, directed towards a divinity beyond rational knowledge. In his autobiographical fragment entitled “Curriculum Vitae”, he declares that at this time (1890) he was “already beginning to elaborate a special epistemology of the Unknowable, which was the Absolute”.⁶

³ Clarke, pp. 682–83.

⁴ James C. Livingston, “British Agnosticism”, in *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, ed. Ninian Smart, et al., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 233–34.

⁵ CB, p. 33.

⁶ C.J. Brennan, *Christopher Brennan*, ed. Terry Sturm, Portable Australian Authors, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984 (hereafter abbreviated to ST), p. 177.

Spencer's survey of "Ultimate Religious Ideas" in *First Principles* avoids the wholesale dismissal of all religious positions, even though he demonstrates to his own satisfaction "that Atheism, Pantheism, and Theism, when rigorously analysed, severally prove to be absolutely unthinkable".⁷ Beneath the dogmas of all religions, in Spencer's opinion, lies the "mystery ever pressing for interpretation" of the world itself.⁸ "The inscrutableness of creation" is reflected in "altars 'to the unknown and unknowable God,' and in the worship of a God who cannot by any searching be found out".⁹ According to Spencer, such theological statements as "a God understood would be no God at all" and "to think that God is, as we can think him to be, is blasphemy" represent advances towards the true underlying principle of religion, "this deepest, widest, and most certain of all facts—that the Power which the Universe manifests to us is utterly inscrutable".¹⁰ Brennan's adoption of the Spencerian Unknowable as a religious position, a belief in a God who cannot be known, can be seen, therefore, as a justifiable response to the text, and we can understand his desire to develop "a special epistemology of the Unknowable", although this is apparently an oxymoron (as no doubt Brennan himself, looking back in 1930, was aware).

Brennan's Master of Arts thesis, "The Metaphysic of Nescience" (1891), represents a further development of this position. The word 'nescience', a synonym for agnosticism, is one used by Spencer himself. The point of departure of the thesis is the Kantian deduction that the noumenon (the unknown ultimate reality) is not accessible to the faculty of reason, a deduction which inspired the Romantics to discover other human faculties which are not so limited—faculties of vision, imagination and intuition.¹¹ Brennan concludes his thesis with a bold statement:

[. . .] it may not be altogether out of place to say, that to me there appears to be no fundamental incoherence between knowledge and

⁷ Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, 1862; 5th edn, London: Williams and Norgate, 1890, p. 43.

⁸ Spencer, p. 44.

⁹ Spencer, p. 45.

¹⁰ Spencer, p. 46.

¹¹ For a discussion of the influence of Kant on the thought of the German Romantics, see pages 63–65 and 97–100 below.

existence, and that the last altar of religion is that on which Paul found engraven, Ἄγνωστο θεο—to the unknown and unknowable God.¹²

It was on the basis of his success in his Masters studies in philosophy that Brennan gained the opportunity to study overseas.

During his time in Berlin, Brennan began to explore possible alternative versions of the “unknown and unknowable God”. This involved an investigation of Gnosticism.¹³ This term refers to a group of related religious expressions from the early centuries AD with a strongly dualist emphasis; these movements came to be rejected as heretical by early Church writers such as Hippolytus, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. With its emphasis on ‘gnosis’, or knowing, Gnosticism could be considered antithetical to agnosticism. Gnosticism appealed to Brennan, however, because it substituted for a personal (or knowable) God the notion that human beings themselves are of divine origin.

Brennan’s earliest known encounter with the doctrines of Gnosticism was in 1893, when he read Flaubert’s *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. In the front of his copy Brennan wrote notes under headings including Gnosis, Manichaeism, Judaism, Montanism, Tertullian, Unitarianism and Arius.¹⁴ Notes on Gnosis are broken into two sections, “A. Demiurgus subordinate” and “B. Demiurgus evil”.¹⁵ Systems listed under the first section include Basilides and the two schools of Valentinus. The Ophites and Marcion are listed under the second section. Under “Manichaeism” Brennan writes “Persian Gnosis (B)” and “Mani”. A note referring to his first reading of the work in 1893 implies later readings.¹⁶ It is not possible to establish to which reading the notes belong, but the depth of his interest is obvious.

¹² Christopher Brennan, “The Metaphysic of Nescience”, ML MSS 1663/20, item 2, Peden Family Collection, p. 51.

¹³ See CB, p. 71.

¹⁴ Gustave Flaubert, *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, Paris: Charpentier, Fasquelle, 1893. These notes are written on the front endpapers, right-hand side.

¹⁵ In Gnostic thought, the demiurge was the creator of this world, an inferior or even evil god. In some systems of Gnosticism, the demiurge is identified with the God of the Old Testament, who deprived human beings of the knowledge of good and evil. See I.P. Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism*, trans. H.S. Wiesner and I.P. Couliano, New York: HarperSan Francisco-HarperCollins, 1992, pp. 120–21.

¹⁶ On leaf A, Brennan has written: “lu la première fois à Berlin, Nürnbergerstr. 41 I, pendant le bel été” (“first read in Berlin, 41 Nürnberger Street, during the lovely summer”).

In Gnostic and mystical ways of thinking about divinity, Brennan found an alternative to the idea of a personal God.¹⁷ On December 14th, 1900, he wrote in a letter to F.S. Delmer:

I have been reading Blake's prophecies and am now proceeding, along the track of the Gnostics, towards the East, to find a mysticism without personal God or personal immortality, wherein to forget the vain hubbub of the West with its parochial religions and no less parochial atheisms [. . .] and its generally noisome worship of the Demiurge.¹⁸

He had bought G.R.S. Mead's *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* that same year (the year of its publication),¹⁹ and his annotations indicate his interest in establishing connections between Lilith and figures of Eden in Gnostic myth, even though he had completed his Lilith sequence in 1899.²⁰ In 1904 he wrote positively of the Gnostics in one of the Symbolism lectures:

I have often been struck by the parallels between modern symbolism and a school of theology which I originally began to study out of mere curiosity and without any reference whatever to symbolism. These are the Gnostics, the fountain-heads of one of the great streams of mysticism in the West. What they offered in theology was an eirenicon, a theory which would explain and justify all special religions. However, the spirit

¹⁷ Holdings of the PLNSW dealing wholly or significantly with Gnosticism included the following: Albrecht Dieterich's *Abraxas: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des spätem Altertums*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1891, accessioned 1901; H. de Flers' *Des Hypothèses: Gnose synthétique*, Paris: privately printed, 1897, accessioned 1901; Henry Longueville Mansel, *The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries*, London, Murray, 1875; G.R.S. Mead's *Simon Magus: An Essay*, London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892, accessioned 1901 and *Pistis Sophia*, (same place and publisher, 1896), accessioned 1902; and C.W. King's *The Gnostics and Their Remains, Ancient and Medieval*, 2nd ed., London: Nott, 1887, accessioned 1888. In 1894, the library acquired Hippolytus' *The Refutation of All Heresies*, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 6, transl. J.H. MacMahon, Edinburgh: Clark, 1868.

¹⁸ Letter to Frederick Sefton Delmer, 14th December 1900, FL Brennan Papers 001. This letter sounds as if Brennan is considering adopting the doctrines of Gnosticism as a personal religious position. However, this comment was made during the Boer War, and its criticism of the "generally noisome worship of the Demiurge" is primarily directed towards the triumphalist British rhetoric of God and country which Brennan loathed. Thus the primary application of this statement is political.

¹⁹ His copy is dated only by year, 1900. It is likely that he is speaking of reading Mead's book when he mentions "proceeding, along the track of the Gnostics, towards the East".

²⁰ Brennan later gave this book to L.H. Allen, who subsequently became a lecturer in English at the Australian National University. Both owners have marked the book, Brennan in lead pencil and Allen, it seems, in red and blue pencil.

of Urizen triumphed and they were cast out as heretics, with many accusations of evil thinking and evil living. I would compare symbolism or poetry with their eirenicon. It offers a theory of the world which is also a fact, a theory from which every religion must set out.²¹

In spite of his rejection of the Catholicism of his family and childhood, his continuing interest in finding an alternative form of religious expression with which he could at least partly identify is clear.

Looking for a human divinity

In response to the conflicting pressures of scepticism and the desire for faith, there had been widespread interest during the early nineteenth century in developing a universal religion, which could be thought of as either extending or superseding Christianity. Pierre Leroux (1797–1871) was probably the first to use the term ‘religion of humanity’, in 1838.²² For a brief period, Leroux was part of the community of the Saint-Simonians, sharing their belief that religion is a necessary foundation for society.²³ Leroux aspired to create a new form of religious expression, based on Christianity but surpassing it, as Christianity itself had been surpassed by “Dieu présent dans l’humanité”.²⁴ Jesus became the symbol “de l’Homme-Dieu, du Dieu-Homme, du Dieu-Humanité”.²⁵ For Leroux, “poets and mystics were to become the revealers of the new religion”.²⁶ Inspired by the poetic doctrine of symbol and correspondence, a commonplace by 1830, Leroux made the symbol, the means of representing the invisible by the visible, part of his reformed Saint-Simonian vision of society.²⁷

The positivism of Auguste Comte (1798–1857) included a religious ideal as well as the ‘positive’ philosophy and political theory. His

²¹ P, pp. 160–61.

²² D.G. Charlton, *Secular Religions in France 1815–1870*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 82–3.

²³ See Warwick Gould and Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Myth of the Eternal Evangel in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 1987, rev. and enl. edn, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, p. 67 and Charlton, *Secular Religions in France*, pp. 83–84.

²⁴ Charlton, *Secular Religions in France*, pp. 84–85: “God present in humanity”.

²⁵ Quoted in Gould and Reeves, p. 107: “of Man-God, of God-Man, of God-Humanity”.

²⁶ Gould and Reeves, p. 67.

²⁷ Paul Bénichou, *Le Temps des prophètes : doctrines de l’âge romantique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1977, p. 340.

‘religion of humanity’ addressed the scepticism of the age by replacing God with Humanity itself, to be known as “le Grand Être”. Charlton expresses the advantages nicely:

Instead of worshipping an imaginary god, separate from the world and human activity, men will devote themselves to a deity that unquestionably exists and that demands no less reverence and service than the gods of the past—demands, indeed, even more, for its very ‘preservation and development’ will rely on our love for it. Positivist religion thus satisfies the intellect in that its object is real, not illusory, and, unlike Saint-Simonism, it provides a tangible deity who can be symbolized in the guise of great men of the past.²⁸

In fact, “for a time the Church of Humanity actually flourished, with temples chiefly in France and England”.²⁹ The religion of humanity had its own calendar of festivals, as Charlton indicates:

[Comte] established a cult of ‘sociolatriy’, with a logically ordered list of festivals celebrating the ‘fundamental social relations’ (humanity, marriage, the paternal, filial and fraternal relations and that of master and servant), the ‘preparatory states’ of man’s religious development [. . .], with even a ‘General Festival of Holy Women’ carefully provided for the extra day in leap years. [. . .] He prescribed the ‘social sacraments’ of presentation, initiation, admission, destination, marriage (not before twenty-eight for men and twenty-one for women), maturity, retirement, transformation, and (seven years after death, so all-inclusive are Comte’s provisions) incorporation.³⁰

In Sydney, a freethought hall devoted “to teaching the highest of all religions—the Religion of Humanity” was built in 1890.³¹ Although Comte’s religious positivism could not be further in spirit from the Unknowable God of the Gnostics and mystics, its identification of humanity with divinity could have helped prepare the ground for a notion of the higher self.

Translations by Ernest Renan and George Eliot ensured a wide reception for David Friedrich Strauss’s influential essay in ‘higher’ criticism, *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*, published in 1835. Eliot’s English version, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, came out in 1846,

²⁸ Charlton, *Secular Religions in France*, p. 89.

²⁹ Gould and Reeves, p. 66.

³⁰ Charlton, *Secular Religions in France*, pp. 88–89.

³¹ Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879–1939*, Kensington: NSW University Press, 1986, p. 35.

and Renan's *La Vie de Jésus* in 1863. The scepticism of the later nineteenth century, a well-established heritage of the Enlightenment, was immensely strengthened by this work. Renan's introduction denies the authenticity of miracles. In the earlier *L'Avenir de la science—Pensées de 1848* he had pronounced "il n'y a pas de surnaturel".³² Upon these grounds, Renan builds an interpretation of Christ as "merely the greatest of 'the sons of men'", a point of view in keeping with the religion of humanity espoused by Leroux and Comte.³³

Renan's scepticism is, however, modified by Romantic enthusiasm. His *Poésie des races celtiques* (1859), on which Matthew Arnold drew for *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), promotes the literature of the Celts as an important source of inspiration for Romantic writing, the Celts being seen as exemplary in their employment of the faculty of imagination. Renan describes the "ideal and representative character" of Arthurian legend; this alone is able to explain "why a forgotten tribe on the very confines of the world should have imposed its heroes upon Europe, and, in the domain of imagination, accomplished one of the most singular revolutions known to the historian of letters".³⁴ At the end of the work, the conflict between scepticism and the desire to believe is resolved by recourse to works of the imagination:

Which is worth more, the imaginative instinct of man, or the narrow orthodoxy that pretends to remain rational, when speaking of things divine? For my own part, I prefer the frank mythology, with all its vagaries, to a theology so paltry, so vulgar, and so colourless, that it would be wronging God to believe that, after having made the visible world so beautiful he should have made the invisible world so prosaically reasonable.³⁵

Clearly mythology, which does not claim to be true in the way that theology does, exercised a strong appeal for Renan; the work of imagination has its own, superior, authenticity.

Hutchison's English translation of Renan's *Poetry of the Celtic Races* was in the Public Library of NSW while Brennan was working there, accessioned in the 1890s. A number of other books available to Brennan in the library, including studies of psychology, psychic

³² Ernest Renan, *L'Avenir de la science—Pensées de 1848*, 1890; Paris: Calmann-Lévy, n.d., p. 47.

³³ Charlton, *Secular Religions in France*, p. 18.

³⁴ Ernest Renan, *The Poetry of the Celtic Races, and Other Studies*, trans. and ed. William G. Hutchison, London: Scott, [1896], p. 28.

³⁵ Renan, *Poetry of the Celtic Races*, p. 59.

research and mysticism, postulate some version of a higher self. Brennan could have found pertinent material in a variety of very disparate sources.

Theories of the unconscious, such as that of Eduard von Hartmann, developed in a climate of widespread interest in various possible conceptions of a universal religion of humanity. The English translation of Hartmann's *Philosophie des Unbewusstseins* (1869), entitled *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, was acquired by the Public Library of NSW in the year of its publication, 1884. In an 1895 article in the *Revue blanche*, which Brennan collected, Jules Laforgue relates Hartmann's work to trends away from personal conceptions of God (agnosticism, for instance):

Il est un domaine qui, on le sait, vient d'ouvrir à la science les forêts vierges de la vie, c'est l'atmosphère occulte de l'être, l'inconscience ; ce monde réservait à la créature débarrassée de ses dieux personnels, conscients et parfaits, mais que ne trompaient pas ses siècles d'adoration perpétuelle, le dernier divin, le principe mystique universel révélé dans la *Philosophie de l'Inconscient* de Hartmann, le seul divin minutieusement présent et veillant partout, le seul infallible—de par son inconscience—, le seul vraiment et sereinement infini, le seul que l'homme n'ait pas créé à son image.³⁶

When he speaks of the “créature débarrassée de ses dieux personnels, conscients et parfaits”, Laforgue's sentiments resemble those expressed by Brennan in rejecting a personal or knowable God. Evidently Laforgue felt that Hartmann's unconscious met the need of his age for a credible form of religious expression. Not having been created by humanity “in its own image”, the unconscious, considered as a divine force, is felt to be immune to religious scepticism, although it is not clear why it should not itself be considered a creation of the human mind.

Hartmann presents his philosophy of the unconscious as a form of monism. He relates it to religious and philosophical systems of the past, including mysticism and pantheism, as well as to the conceptions

³⁶ Jules Laforgue, “L'Art moderne en Allemagne” in *La Revue blanche* 9 (1895), p. 293: “There is a domain which, as we know, has just opened up to science the virgin forests of life. It is the hidden atmosphere of being, unconsciousness; this world reserved for the creature divested of its personal, conscious, perfect gods, but whom centuries of perpetual adoration [of them] have not led astray, the ultimate divine principle, mysterious and universal, revealed in Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, the only divinity present in every smallest detail and keeping vigil everywhere, the only infallible—because of its unconsciousness—the only truly and serenely infinite [element], the only one which mankind has not created in its own image”.

of Kant, Fichte and Schopenhauer.³⁷ According to Henri F. Ellenberger, the Romantic psychologist Carus “was the source of Von Hartmann and of the later philosophers of the unconscious”.³⁸ Hartmann envisages the unconscious as a world-soul, an ‘All-One’, of which every individual consciousness is a part, posing the question “why should not an unconscious world-soul be simultaneously present and purposively efficient in all organisms and atoms [. . .]?”³⁹ He rejects “the old prejudice that the *soul* is the *consciousness*”, emphasising that the unconscious, rather than consciousness, is the highest manifestation of humanity. He states:

Only when one has come to see that consciousness does not belong to the *essence*, but to the *phenomenon*, that thus the plurality of consciousness is only a *plurality of the appearance of the One*, only then will it be possible to emancipate oneself from the power of the practical instinct, which always cries “I, I”, and to comprehend the essential unity of all corporeal and spiritual phenomenal individuals, which Spinoza apprehended in his mystical conception and declared the One substance.⁴⁰

In this system, individuals become a plurality only of functions, not of substances, as the essence of the One must preserve its own unity. There exists only one individual, “the One Absolute Individual, the single existence, *which is All*”.⁴¹ The individual ego is merely phenomenal:

I am a phenomenon, like the rainbow in the cloud. Like it, *I* am born of the coincidence of relations, become another in every second because these relations become other in every second, and shall dissolve when these relations are dissolved. What is *substance* in me is not *I*.⁴²

Hartmann’s debt to German Romantic psychology is apparent here. As Brennan knew, Novalis described the dissolution of the self in both the *Hymnen an die Nacht* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.⁴³

³⁷ For a fuller discussion of conceptions of the self in Kant and Fichte, see pages 63–67 below.

³⁸ Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, London: Allen Lane—The Penguin Press, 1970, p. 208. For a discussion of early German Romantic notions of the unconscious, see page 000 below.

³⁹ Eduard von Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, trans. William Chatterton Coupland, English and Foreign Philosophical Library, London: Trübner, 1884, vol. 2, p. 226.

⁴⁰ Hartmann, p. 226.

⁴¹ Hartmann, p. 240.

⁴² Hartmann, p. 243.

⁴³ In his article on German Romanticism, Brennan quotes passages from both works. The first is “Die Sternwelt wird zerfließen / Zum goldnen Lebenswein, /

Although Neoplatonism is not among the systems with which Hartmann compares his monism in his chapter “The All-Oneness of the Unconscious”, his notion of the world-soul and its relationship to the plurality of existences is close to Neoplatonic ways of thinking. Neoplatonism, founded by Plotinus in the third century AD, made an important contribution to mystical tradition, and Brennan refers to Plotinus’ experiences of mystical ecstasy in his lecture on “Vision, Imagination and Reality” (1901).⁴⁴ Bertrand Marchal points to common ground between Hartmann’s unconscious and mysticism: “L’Un-tout [. . .] c’est précisément la formule de toutes les mystiques, qui visent toujours l’unité de l’absolu et de l’individu, étant entendu que cette unité n’est ici rien d’autre que celle de l’inconscient et du conscient”.⁴⁵ Hartmann’s insistence that multiplicity is actually “only a plurality of the appearance of the One”, as well as his conception of the unconscious as an “All-One”, depend on a similar explanation to that of Neoplatonism of the interrelatedness of everything in existence.

In a chapter entitled “The Unconscious and the God of Theism”, Hartmann attempts to demonstrate the superiority of his idea of the unconscious to any conception of God as a conscious being. Although it must be designated by the negative prefix “un-”, the unconscious is free from the limits of consciousness (somewhat like the “unknowable” God of Spencer) and might be more accurately designated as the “*super-conscious*”.⁴⁶ Unlike the transcendent God of Theism, the unconscious is a divine force within the human being:

A God whose reality only consists in his spirituality, and whose spirituality is manifested exclusively in the form of consciousness, undeniably

Wir werden sie genießen, / Und lichte Sterne sein” (Novalis, *Schriften*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 5 vols, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–88, hereafter abbreviated to NS, vol. 1, p. 153): “The star-world will dissolve / Into the golden wine of life; / We will savour it, / And be shining stars”. The other is “Wir nur sind am hohen Ziele, / Bald in Strom uns zu ergießen, / Dann in Tropfen zu zerfließen, / Und zu nippen auch zugleich” (NS, vol. 1, p. 362): “We alone have reached our high purpose, / Soon to flow into the stream, / Then to dissolve into drops / And to sip there at the same time”. See P, p. 385.

⁴⁴ P, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Bertrand Marchal, *La Religion de Mallarmé : poésie, mythologie et religion*, Paris: Corti, 1988, p. 25: “The One-All [. . .] is precisely the expression employed by all the mystics, who always aim for the unity of Absolute and individual, it being understood that this unity is nothing other than that of the unconscious and the conscious”.

⁴⁶ Hartmann, p. 247. In England, A.R. Orage was also interested in superconsciousness. He was a member of the Theosophical Society, interested in Neoplatonism,

becomes with distinct consciousness also a God *parted realiter from the world*, an external transcendent Creator. On the other hand, he who seeks and desires an *immanent* God, a God who descends into our breast and dwells therein, a God in whom we live and have our being [. . .] must make clear to himself that the All-One can only indwell in individuals if it is related to them as the essence to its phenomena, [. . .] without being parted therefrom by a consciousness of its own [. . .], if the All-One diffuses itself as *impersonal* Will and *unconscious* Intelligence through the universe with its personal and conscious individuals.⁴⁷

We observe that Hartmann's unconscious fulfils a religious function, acting as an inner, immanent divinity superior to "an external transcendent Creator". It is a substitute for God, superior to God because unlimited by consciousness, but located within the human being to the extent that the unconscious of every individual is merely a function of one Universal force.

In England, Frederick Myers (1843–1901) "expected the emergence of a new religion that would combine the universally appealing elements of Christianity, such as immortality, with a scientific apprehension of the world".⁴⁸ His desire to find empirical evidence for human immortality, the survival of the personality after death, was very different from Hartmann's desire to abolish individual consciousness in favour of a universal unconscious, but Hartmann and Myers had a common desire to reconcile the scepticism born of a scientific world-view with fundamentally religious needs.⁴⁹ In 1874 Myers and others, including Henry Sidgwick and Edmund Gurney, began an investigation of psychical phenomena which aimed to find evidence of human immortality. Such investigations drew heavily on the evidence of abnormal psychical states, which had attracted much interest in the wake of mesmerism, and later of spiritualism. In 1882 their research culminated in the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research, with which William James, Henri Bergson and Carl Jung

and published *Consciousness: Animal, Human, and Superman* in 1907. Like the Canadian Richard Maurice Bucke (*Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*, 1901), whom he read, he was interested in superconsciousness as a further stage in the evolutionary development of human consciousness.

⁴⁷ Hartmann, p. 253.

⁴⁸ Frank M. Turner, *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974, p. 117.

⁴⁹ Myers' findings were published posthumously in 1903 in *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*. This book did not arrive in the PLNSW until 1911.

later cooperated.⁵⁰ The group looked to abnormal states of consciousness, including mediumistic trance, for evidence of the existence of a non-material aspect of human existence that might continue after death. Brennan quotes Myers in the Symbolism lectures and also refers to the work of the SPR.⁵¹

Shadworth Hodgson (1832–1912), a British philosopher and disciple of Coleridge whose work Brennan admired, was also interested in the possibility of human immortality and speculated about a possible mechanism for its occurrence. Brennan cross-references Hodgson's *Metaphysic of Experience* in his annotations to Mead's *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten*:

Hodgson (Metaphysic of Experience) takes from Stewart & Tait the idea of a body formed of rarer matter (ether e.g.) & organized within the earthly body to act as a vehicle for consciousness after death.⁵²

Mead has been discussing the theory of the Gnostic Docetae that when Jesus was baptised he acquired a 'spiritual body', which survived the crucifixion of his physical body. What Hodgson himself says is this:

Those cerebral re-actions which sustain the volitions of a conscious agent, from birth to death [...] I suppose to exercise an organizing influence either upon the ethereal substance which we may take as still belonging partly, or upon some other substance which at present belongs wholly, to the unknown region of Matter, existing within the brain [...]. During life there is no traceable reaction from this new organism upon the brain, within which it is being produced; but it becomes capable, on the dissolution of the body, of surviving as an independent organism in that unknown material region, to which the material out of which it was organized originally belonged, carrying with it the memory of those acts of choice, to which it owes its organization.⁵³

This is evidently an attempt to provide a physical basis for what was traditionally regarded as an event occurring in the non-material realm of the soul or spirit, and it is interesting that Brennan sees a connection with the doctrines of some of the Gnostics. Here, Hodgson postulates

⁵⁰ Turner, p. 55.

⁵¹ P, pp. 79–80. *Phantasms of the Living*, a work by Myers, Gurney and Frank Podmore, was in the PLNSW by 1895. Brennan refers to Podmore in his lecture "Vision, Imagination and Reality".

⁵² Annotation to Mead, *Fragments*, p. 221. This comment is in Brennan's handwriting.

⁵³ Shadworth Hodgson, *The Metaphysic of Experience*, London: Longmans, Green, 1898, vol. 4, pp. 394–95. Brennan's copy of Hodgson's *Time and Space: A Metaphysical Essay*, London: Longmans, Green, 1865, is in MZ.

some kind of organism that exists within the living human being but is able to transcend physical death.

The ‘esoteric Christianity’ of Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) and Edward Maitland (1824–1897) emphasised that an inner, higher self may be released by a process of regeneration. The partnership of Kingsford and Maitland began in 1873. Maitland had lived in Australia in the 1850s, helping to found the Goulburn School of Arts, whose library Brennan used while he was teaching in Goulburn in 1891,⁵⁴ and forming a long-lasting friendship with Margaret Woolley, widow of Sydney University’s first principal and professor of classics, and an early member of the Theosophical Society. Kingsford’s background was in freethought, anti-vivisectionism, women’s rights and vegetarianism. The two were associated with the Theosophical Society in London for a time, and subsequently with the Hermetic Society, also in London.

A number of books by Maitland and Kingsford were acquired by the NSW Public Library between 1877 and 1902.⁵⁵ Their works argue a traditionalist position. Frank Paul Bowman explains what this term refers to:

The word does not mean today what it meant then. Traditionalism proposed that a universal revelation of religious truth had been given to man by God at the beginning of history, and transmitted—or corrupted—by man ever since, but vestiges of it remained in the traditions of humanity. [. . .] Traditionalism led to a renewed interest in mythology, conceived [. . .] as the corrupted embodiment of divine revelation. [. . .] Above all, it revalidated mythology as the vehicle of a profound truth [. . .].⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Dorothy Green, “Edward Maitland”, in *Between Two Worlds: ‘Loss of faith’ and Late Nineteenth Century Australian Literature*, ed. Axel Clark, John Fletcher and Robin Marsden, Sydney: Wentworth, 1979, p. 27. See P, p. 24.

⁵⁵ These include Maitland’s *The Pilgrim and the Shrine* (1868) and *England and Islam* (1877), Kingsford and Maitland’s *The Perfect Way* (1887) and their edition of *The Virgin of the World* (1885). Evidence from Brennan’s lecture “Vision, Imagination and Reality” (1901) indicates his familiarity with, and enthusiasm for, *The Perfect Way* and *England and Islam*, as well as for *The Keys of the Creeds*, *The Soul and How It Found Me*, and the *Life of Anna Kingsford* (P, pp. 24–5). Unpublished research by Robin Marsden indicates that Brennan had access to several of Maitland’s books in the library of the Goulburn Mechanics’ Institute: *The Higher Law*, *The Pilgrim and the Shrine*, and the novel *By-and-by*.

⁵⁶ Frank Paul Bowman, “Illuminism, Utopia, Mythology”, in *The French Romantics*, ed. D.G. Charlton, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 79. For more on traditionalism, see Antoine Faivre, “Histoire de la notion moderne de Tradition

Kingsford and Maitland found a common esoteric meaning in various religious currents of antiquity. In one of the introductory essays to their edition of the Hermetic text *Koré Kosmou, The Virgin of the World*, Maitland makes substantial claims:

All history shews that it is to the restoration of the Hermetic system in both doctrine and practice that the world must look for the final solution of the various problems concerning the nature and conduct of existence [. . .]. For it represents that to which all enquiry—if only it be true enquiry, unlimited by incapacity, and undistorted by prejudice—must ultimately lead; inasmuch as it represents the sure, because experimental, knowledges, concerning the nature of things which, in whatever age, the soul of man discloses whenever he has attained full intuition.⁵⁷

Together with Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, Hermeticism is one of the important ancient sources of esoteric currents. Kingsford and Maitland represent the Hermetic texts as being of great weight and antiquity, claiming “[t]hat the doctrine contained in the Hermetic books is in part, at least, a survival from the times of ancient Egypt”.⁵⁸ The Egyptian religion itself is seen, with the Indian, as the origin of Greek philosophy and hence Western culture; the Hermetic texts are regarded as transitional between paganism and Greek civilisation. Greek myths themselves conceal “profound occult truths”. The underlying message of the tradition—the hidden meaning—is the potential of the human being to become divine, through a spiritual death and rebirth which reverse the effects of the Fall into material existence.

Brennan’s position on the question of the antiquity of the Hermetic literature may be indicated by the entry in his handwriting under “Hermes Trismegistus” in the library card catalogue:

Under the name of Hermes, the Greek equivalent of the Egyptian god Thoth, was collected a body of literature purporting to be a revival of the ancient priestly lore of Egypt. It dates from the first three centuries AD, was composed in Egypt, and contains mystical elements derived from Neoplatonism, Judaism etc. The works have been variously

dans ses rapports avec les courants ésotériques (XV^e–XX^e siècles)”, in *Symboles et Mythes dans les mouvements initiatiques et ésotériques (XVII^e–XX^e siècles) : Filiations et emprunts*, Special Issue of *ARIES* (1999); pp. 7–48 and Bowman, pp. 78–80. A further discussion of traditionalism begins on page 000 below.

⁵⁷ Edward Maitland, “The Hermetic System and the Significance of its Present Revival” in *The Virgin of the World of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus*, trans. and intro. Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, London: George Redway, 1885, p. xviii.

⁵⁸ Edward Maitland, “The Hermetic Books” in *The Virgin of the World*, p. vii.

regarded as authentic Christian teachings and as a pagan attempt to imitate and rival Christianity.⁵⁹

Interestingly, although Brennan's scepticism seems more than justified in the light of the bold claims of Kingsford and Maitland, recent scholarship is tending towards supporting the contention that older material of Egyptian provenance is embedded within the Hermetic texts.⁶⁰

Brennan describes Maitland's first work, *The Keys of the Creeds*, as "a volume of pure gnosticism".⁶¹ In this work, Maitland proposes a reinterpretation of the Fall and salvation in terms of access to the soul, regarded as a higher part of the self:

The fall [...] consists in man's becoming aware that his real does not equal the ideal he is able to imagine; or, conversely, in his attaining a sense of perfection beyond that which he is able to realise. It is thus the birth of the soul, or faculty whereby we are enabled to rise from the finite to the infinite, from the real to the ideal, from the earth to God, and to know that from which we have sprung, and to which it is our highest function to aspire.⁶²

Within human beings is a latent potential which needs to be recognised and reclaimed as a lost heritage ("that from which we have sprung"). Maitland argues against a personal deity, claiming that only the "uninstructed materialising masses" should be encouraged to think of the Trinity in personal terms; for the "spiritual and philosophic thinker", the Trinity refers to principles rather than Persons.⁶³

In 1885 the Public Library of NSW had acquired another work arguing a traditionalist position: Godfrey Higgins' *Anacalypsis: An Attempt to Draw Aside the Veil of the Saitic Isis; or, An Inquiry into the Origin of Languages, Nations, and Religions* (1836). Higgins' two volumes represent, by his account, many hours of gruelling research—"I believe I have, upon the average, applied myself to it for nearly *ten* hours daily for almost *twenty* years"—as a result of which the author eventually concluded "that the original doctrine, though perhaps the secret

⁵⁹ This is in the old card catalogue, SLNSW, Sydney.

⁶⁰ See Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English Translation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. lii–lviii.

⁶¹ P, p. 24.

⁶² Edward Maitland, *The Keys of the Creeds*, London: Trübner, 1875, p. 39.

⁶³ Maitland, *Keys*, p. 28.

doctrine of the Romish church, was uncorrupted Gnosticism,—the Pandæan religion of the Golden Age, when no icons were used, and when the Gods had no names”; and further, that the doctrines taught by both Jesus and Ammonius Saccas “were the ancient, oriental, uncorrupted Gnosis or Wisdom, which I have shewn existed in all nations and all religions”.⁶⁴ The library also held a number of other works arguing some version of a traditionalist position, including two works by Madame Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: a Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (1878) and *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy* (1897) and one by Marie, Countess of Caithness, *The Mystery of the Ages, Contained in the Secret Doctrine of All Religions* (1887). We have no direct evidence of Brennan’s familiarity with any of these works.

The English version of Carl Du Prel’s *The Philosophy of Mysticism*, which was acquired by the Public Library of NSW in the year of its publication (1889), was dedicated “To the honoured memory of Mrs. Anna Kingsford, M.D., at whose instance it was undertaken”, and makes reference to Hartmann’s study of the unconscious.⁶⁵ This book takes the phenomenon of somnambulism as its point of departure for the study of mysticism.⁶⁶ Somnambulism had been of great interest to Romantic psychology, being seen as a trance-like state in which the inner being could make contact with the spiritual realm.⁶⁷ Du Prel (1839–1899) was known in Theosophical circles as a “leading contributor” to *The Sphinx*, a German periodical “devoted to the historical and experimental proof of the supersensuous conception of the world on a monistic basis”, according to the Theosophical magazine *Lucifer*.⁶⁸ Du Prel’s book postulates a “transcendental Subject”⁶⁹ which is accessed during the abnormal psychical state of mysticism; dream is “the portal to the dark region where we are to find the metaphysical root of man”, and a movable “threshold of sensibility” that separates normal consciousness from the workings of the transcendental

⁶⁴ Godfrey Higgins, *Anacalypsis, An Attempt to Draw Aside the Veil of the Saitic Isis; or, An Inquiry into the Origin of Languages, Nations, and Religions*, 2 vols, London: Longmans, 1836, vol. 1, pp. v, 801; vol. 2, p. 448.

⁶⁵ Carl du Prel, *The Philosophy of Mysticism*, trans. C.C. Massey, vol. 1, London: Redway, 1889, p. 135.

⁶⁶ Du Prel, p. 141.

⁶⁷ Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France*, New York: Schocken, 1976, p. 128.

⁶⁸ “Theosophical and Mystical Publications”, *Lucifer* 1 (1887–88), p. 79.

⁶⁹ See Du Prel, pp. 130–65.

world. The transcendental subject is a member of a dual ego, one part of which belongs to this world and the other (called the “alter ego”) to the transcendental world.⁷⁰ Du Prel credits Mesmer with the first discovery of the mobile “threshold of sensibility” that explains the mechanism of mystical vision:

The mystical phenomena thus become intelligible from the movability of the threshold of sensibility. They are transcendental faculties, reactions of the soul, conformable to law, on external influences which remain normally unconscious because going on below the threshold [...] it is one and the same threshold which hides from our consciousness the transcendental world, and from our self-consciousness the transcendental subject.⁷¹

Mysticism, it seems, draws on “transcendental faculties”, specially equipped to reveal the transcendental world to consciousness and the transcendental self to the conscious self. The transcendental subject it reveals is “the common cause of body and mind” and, as such, is continuous before and after death.⁷² It is clear that Du Prel, like Myers, is looking for evidence of human immortality and a mechanism that might explain it, and using the evidence of altered states of consciousness to do so.

“Twilights of the Gods and the Folk”

A number of pieces in Brennan’s *Poems* create a context in which the notion of an inner, higher self may be explored both as a psychological entity (the unconscious mind) and as an alternative form of religious belief. Two significant sequences of poems on the theme of the passing away of religions occur in “The Forest of Night”. The first begins halfway through “The Quest of Silence” with “A gray and dusty daylight flows” and includes about eight poems. The other occupies most of “The Labour of Night”, including the sequences entitled “Wisdom” and “Twilights of the Gods and the Folk”. Towards the end of this group of poems, attention is gradually transferred from the passing of religions to the possibility of a new religious form, especially in the two final pieces, grouped under the title “The Womb of Night”.

⁷⁰ Du Prel, pp. 136, 132, 139.

⁷¹ Du Prel, p. 129.

⁷² Du Prel, p. 134.

In “A gray and dusty daylight flows” (1903), the emptiness of a world stripped of religious meaning is conveyed by the image of a ruined church. When Brennan interprets Mallarmé’s famous sonnet “Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx”, commonly referred to as the “sonnet en -yx”, in one of his “Minuits chez Mallarmé” articles, he suggests that it is a poem about the departure of the gods. The missing funerary vessels (“Que ne recueille pas de cinéraire amphore”, line 4)⁷³ of Mallarmé’s poem are away drawing tears from the Styx, representing, for Brennan, “the majesty anterior to the gods [. . .] the symbolism latent in this whole episode, [. . .] they pass, it remains”.⁷⁴ He explains further:

[. . .] the gods are dead—we must go beyond and behind them to the precedent majesty of Styx. The symbols have lost their meaning: those seven stars in the northern sky are neither Kallistô nor the Bear, nor the Wain, nor the *septem triones*—they are just “le septuor de scintillations”, and wait to be read anew.⁷⁵

He takes Mallarmé’s image of the seven stars reflected in a mirror in an empty room as itself a symbol of the loss of meaning from symbols.⁷⁶ His own ruined church is such a symbol.

The present dilapidation of the building in Brennan’s poem is contrasted with its former role as a communal centre where worshippers had gathered “on labour-hardened knees” (line 4). Whereas once the rose window “compell’d to grace / the outer day’s indifferent stare” (“grace” should be interpreted in its religious sense), now the daylight has a “disenhallow’d face” (lines 11–13). The “gray and dusty” daylight of the first line anticipates the unglamorous “gray day” in which the speaker finds a kind of resolution at the end of the Wanderer sequence. The word “dusty” has similar connotations to the dust out of which Adam was created, and to which human bodies return at death. The poem expresses the dilemma a world empty of religious significance poses for its inhabitants.

⁷³ “Which no funerary amphora receives”.

⁷⁴ P, p. 362.

⁷⁵ P, pp. 363–64.

⁷⁶ In the notes he made to this poem in his edition of Mallarmé’s 1899 *Poésies*, which he had interleaved and rebound (ML SAFE1/205), Brennan makes a further connection to the conversation between Apollo and Mnemosyne (muse of memory) at the end of Keats’s *Hyperion* (*Poésies de Stéphane Mallarmé*, Brussels: Deman, 1899, folio opposite p. [110], verso).

Although “A gray and dusty daylight flows” marks the passing of Christianity as the focus of communal life and sense of meaning, its emphasis on absence implies something to come. The “absence” of the rose, stated in the third line and reiterated with slight variation in the last line, recalls “l’absente de tous bouquets” of Mallarmé’s “Crise de vers”, the ideal flower which no actual bouquet includes but which all bouquets suggest.⁷⁷ The poem also echoes Mallarmé’s poem “Sainte”, in which the instrumental music of a pictured saint (the title of the original version identifies her as Saint Cecilia) is transformed into the music of a harp created by the evening flight of an angel:⁷⁸

A ce vitrage d’ostensoir
 Que frôle une harpe par l’Ange
 Formée avec son vol du soir
 Pour la délicate phalange

Du doigt que, sans le vieux santal
 Ni le vieux livre, elle balance
 Sur le plumage instrumental,
 Musicienne du silence.⁷⁹

The “painted plume” of Brennan’s angels (line 9) invokes Mallarmé’s angel, with its music of silence, while the absent rose suggests the possibility of another rose.

The poem which follows, “Breaking the desert’s tawny level ring”, also uses the method of evocation by absence. Here, a desert oasis, a cell “where once the god abode”, has become “a burning desolation” (line 6). Three columns indicate that this place was once the focus of human worship, but the accompanying shade and water, which would make this a place where both physical and spiritual needs might be satisfied, have disappeared, so humans (“its leaning maid”, line 4) are also absent. The hope once aroused by an oasis in the desert has not been fulfilled. Although this poem and the previous one have similar themes, the tones are markedly different. In

⁷⁷ OCM, vol. 2, p. 213.

⁷⁸ Henry Weinfield, trans. and ed., *Collected Poems* by Stéphane Mallarmé, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, p. 85.

⁷⁹ OCM, vol. 1, pp. 26–7: “At this monsterness window, lightly brushed by the harp formed by the Angel with its evening flight, for the delicate joint of a finger which, without either the old sandalwood or the old book, it balances on the instrumental plumage, musician of silence”.

the second poem no grounds for optimism about the future, even in absence, are offered.

One of the poems in "The Quest of Silence", "Out of no quarter of the charted sky", evokes the Ragnarök, the passing of the Norse gods at the end of history. Brennan uses the conversion of the Norse peoples to Christianity to depict the cataclysmic effect of the end of a religion. The event is seen from the perspective of the Norse "folk", the gods in whom they believed having ceased when "in the smitten hero-hand the sword / broke" (lines 7–8) and "a tragic flare / told Valhall perish'd" (lines 9–10). For these "folk", it is the end of the world ("the trump that sings behind the end / exults alone", lines 3–4). Their land is barren and infertile ("the land's inflicted blight", line 6), the result of the battle in which they have been defeated as well as of the loss of the gods who ensured its fertility. The end of another immense cycle of history, the destruction of a star, has hurled to earth a meteorite ("the stranger stone [. . .] thunder-hurled") which stands as a symbol of the destruction of worlds, including that of these "folk". Such a loss of communal religious faith inculcates "despair" (line 10), leaving an empty place, formerly occupied by the gods, within the human psyche ("all disinhabited, / a vault above the heart its hungering led", lines 11 and 12). Such emptiness may be filled by a higher self.

The sequence of seven poems under the title "Twilights of the Gods and the Folk" in "The Labour of Night", mostly written in 1900, develops and extends the theme, imagery and atmosphere of "Out of no quarter of the charted sky". "Twilights" refers both to the passing of the gods (especially those made familiar through the Nibelung cycle and Wagnerian opera) and to the daily 'death' of the sun at dusk. The voice of the earlier poems is that of the "folk" themselves; as the sequence proceeds, these "little folks, once brave" (number III, line 13) yield their place as spokespeople, first to their conquerors (number V), whose victory is hollow because the god they follow has absconded, and then to a more representative voice (numbers VI and VII) speaking on behalf of an entire humanity bereft of their gods. The physical setting is bleak and cold; Brennan may well have had in mind the *Fimbulvetr* (Fimbulwinter), which, according to Norse legend, would precede the end of the world. The second stanza of the first piece describes the "dawn [. . .] chill about our going forth", the black earth, "with presage of a ne'er-vouchsafed flower" and the bitter "sleety north". In the fourth piece, the

grief of the folk at the loss of their hero-god is mirrored in the sweeping winds and rain of autumn, which seem to give expression to their loss:

Each autumn of her dolorous year shall have
lost winds that sweep the obscure storm of our griefs
where drear hills hide the little folks, once brave,
and rain in the dark on mounds of all foil'd chiefs. (lines 11–14)

The bleakness of the physical landscape corresponds to, and helps to convey, the bleakness of spirit of the people. In this fourth piece especially, the sense of loss is vividly imagined and expressed.

In the third poem of the sequence, “In that last fight upon the western hill”, we understand that the hero whose death has left the folk bereft is a pagan sun-hero; his adventures are those of the sun itself as it travels through the sky. The “last fight upon the western hill” is the fight of the sun against the darkness, whose victory is inevitable in spite of the hope that the sun may undergo an alchemical transformation into enduring gold (“high in the golden limbeck of the west / as whom the hour should momentarily invest / Hesperian, flesh exempt from blight and frost”, lines 9–11).⁸⁰ The defeat of the sun-hero by darkness figures the defeat of the pagan Norse religion when Iceland, the origin of the verse and prose Eddas which are our main source for Norse legend, accepted Christianity in AD 1000. This is evoked in the line “and the mount smoked and trembled, and thou wert lost”, which clearly refers to the giving of Old Testament law on Mount Sinai. In keeping with the Gnostics’ interpretation of the Old Testament, Brennan links the parts of Christianity of which he disapproves with the God of the Old Testament, interpreted as an evil demiurge. It is the actions of such a demiurge which bring about the end of the pagan religion of the sun.

The Norse hero to whom this piece most likely refers is Balder. In Mallarmé’s *Les Dieux antiques*, which Brennan had owned since 1896, Balder is discussed in the context of the “Crépuscule des Dieux”. His destruction by means of the mistletoe, the only vegetation

⁸⁰ “Hesperian” means ‘of the west, evening or sunset’; it also evokes the mythical Garden of the Hesperides of Greek myth (so-called because it was in the west), where the golden apples grew and were plucked by Hercules, interpreted as a sun-hero in a tradition going back, as Joscelyn Godwin points out (*The Theosophical Enlightenment*, SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 27) to Macrobius (fifth century AD).

from which he was not magically protected, is compared to the destruction of Adonis, another dying and returning fertility god.⁸¹ As a fertility god, Balder's loss would bring winter ("our wintry musings", line 16). However, whereas other fertility gods, such as Adonis, are said to return from the land of the dead every year, Balder is fabled to return only at the end of time, following the cataclysmic Ragnarök.

After the revelation in the fifth poem of the sequence that the race of conquerors have now lost the god they followed against their own better judgement ("who had dwelt right fain in vales of love and mirth; / but thy dire hest summon'd us at our birth", lines 6–7), the sixth and seventh poems widen the application of the earlier pieces, bringing in gods from other mythologies: Kronos and Moloch. Once these gods have been deposed, their fabled deeds are subject to doubt and suspicion: "who knows if ever, radiant-curl'd, / thou didst abash the chaos, seeing thee hurl'd / by crouching hate to join the sullen mould" (number VI, lines 6–7). The possibility is entertained that the resolution of despair and death may come only after cataclysm: "far the white hour when our darkling prayer / must be consumed and wrathful love shall slay" (number VII, lines 12–13). Such a cataclysm is imagined at the end of the first poem in the "Womb of Night" sequence, which follows immediately after these two poems:

Oh that all ends of the world were come on us
and fire were close beneath earth's stubborn crust,
and all our days were crumbling, ruinous (lines 12–14).

The coming of a day of reckoning for the entire human race is envisaged, even wished for, as a catastrophe out of which an entirely new world might appear.

Apart from the Norse Ragnarök, Brennan is likely to have drawn on the eschatology of other religions. The disapproving lines in

⁸¹ OCM, vol. 2, pp. 1470–71. The theory that Balder was a sun-hero was promulgated by Müllenhof as late as 1908, although according to John Martin, it "waned with the fashion of meteorological interpretation of mythological themes" (John Stanley Martin, *Ragnarök: An Investigation into Old Norse Concepts of the Fate of the Gods*, Melbourne Monographs in Germanic Studies 3, Assen: Van Gorcum, Prakke, 1972, p. 115). Maitland's reduction of all myth to solar myth in *The Perfect Way* and *The Keys of the Creeds* must also have contributed to Brennan's interest in pagan solar religion.

number III about the coming of the Old Testament law to Iceland tend to remove Christianity from the picture, but the apocalyptic imagery in the Hermetic text *Asclepius* would have presented Brennan with another powerful series of images. There we read of the abandonment of Egypt's religious belief, of foreign occupation and the replacement of the outward symbols of religious affiliation, the temples and shrines, with symbols of death:

And yet, since it befits the wise to know all things in advance, of this you must not remain ignorant: a time will come when it will appear that the Egyptians paid respect to divinity with faithful mind and painstaking reverence—to no purpose. All their holy worship will be disappointed and perish without effect, for divinity will return from earth to heaven, and Egypt will be abandoned. The land that was the seat of reverence will be widowed by the powers and left destitute of their presence. When foreigners occupy the land and territory, not only will reverence fall into neglect but, even harder, a prohibition under penalty prescribed by law [. . .] will be enacted against reverence, fidelity and divine worship. Then this most holy land, seat of shrines and temples, will be filled completely with tombs and corpses.⁸²

This catastrophe will affect the heavens as well as the earth:

How mournful when the gods withdraw from mankind! [. . .] Then neither will the earth stand firm nor the sea be sailable; stars will not cross heaven nor will the course of the stars stand firm in heaven. Every divine voice will grow mute in enforced silence. The fruits of the earth will rot; the soil will no more be fertile; and the very air will droop in gloomy lethargy.⁸³

The effect on the earth includes the loss of fertility. We know Brennan was familiar with the figure of Asclepius; in the notes he prepared for writing the Lilith sequence, he refers to the sacerdotal snakes of “Hermes and Aesculap”.⁸⁴

Brennan's “hung stars” (number II, line 13) could owe something to this Hermetic imagery. They also contribute to a deliberate echo of Mallarmé's “sonnet en -yx”. The French poet's “Maint rêve

⁸² Copenhaver, p. 82.

⁸³ Copenhaver, p. 82.

⁸⁴ This is not evidence for his familiarity with the text, but given his interest in Hermeticism, it seems unlikely that he would not have known this, the earliest known and most widely disseminated of the Hermetic texts.

vespéral brûlé par le Phénix”⁸⁵ in the third line of that sonnet is echoed in the “phoenix-birth” that Brennan’s stars will experience after being consumed in the “night’s pyre” (line 14). In warring “against their cherish’d name” (line 13), the stars reject traditional symbolic associations of the constellations; the “phoenix-birth” after the cataclysm will have to provide them with new meanings. Brennan’s stars, like the former constellation in the “sonnet en -yx” (now merely a group of stars), are all that remains of an old order whose meaning will have to be reforged.

Esoteric wisdom

A sequence of four poems with the title “Wisdom” immediately precedes the “Twilights of the Gods and Folk”. Here the figures of the historical King Solomon and the Preadamite Solomons of Arabic legend are the focus of an exploration of esoteric traditions, which are seen to have retained their power to signify, at least potentially.⁸⁶ The perception of lasting relevance distinguishes them from the superseded religions of the Twilight sequence.

The three books comprising the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) and the Song of Songs, are traditionally associated with King Solomon. By the first century BC, according to Pablo A. Torijano, “a new portrait of Solomon arose that described him as endowed with secrets and esoteric knowledge, i.e., as a powerful exorcist. From then on Solomon and demonology appeared together”.⁸⁷ In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, dated

⁸⁵ “Many an evening dream burnt by the Phoenix”

⁸⁶ There is some dispute about the intended order of the four sonnets in the Wisdom sequence. They were printed as I, II, III and IIII in *Poems*, but in the Table of Contents they appear in the sequence IIII, I, II, III. Chisholm alters the order to agree with the Table of Contents in V, pp. 262–3, but Wilkes retains the original order in the introduction to F, arguing “this is the order in the proof copy, and as ‘Wisdom’ is one of the series in which Brennan chose to number the poems, the compositor would presumably have had before him texts of Nos 74–6 headed ‘I’, ‘II’ and ‘III’, and of No. 73 headed ‘IIII’, in order to have set them with these headings. The ‘Table’ may have been compiled hastily, for in itemizing No. 68 Brennan overlooked ‘Terrible, if he will not have me else’ as one of the units of ‘Lilith’” (pp. 18–19). This is in spite of having supported Chisholm’s order in “The ‘Wisdom’ Sequence in Brennan’s Poems”, *AUMLA* 14 (1960), p. 47. Agreeing with Wilkes’s later argument, I follow the original order of the poems.

⁸⁷ Pablo A. Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, p. 41.

to the first century AD, Solomon appears as a possessor of hidden knowledge to be passed on to students.⁸⁸

The first three poems of Brennan's Wisdom sequence deal with the historical Solomon; the fourth deals with the so-called Preadamite Solomons, a race of elemental spirits who existed, according to Arabic legend, before Adam was created. In the second appendix to his *Voyage en Orient* (1851), Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855), an author whom Brennan knew well, compares these beings with the elemental spirits of European tradition:⁸⁹

Peut-être les Européens se rendent-ils compte difficilement de ce qu'entendent les Orientaux par les races préadamites.—Ils supposent que la terre, avant d'appartenir à l'homme, avait été habitée pendant soixante-dix mille ans par quatre grandes races créées primitivement, selon le Coran, « d'une matière *élevée, subtile et lumineuse* ».

C'étaient les Dives, les Djinns, les Afrites et les Péris, appartenant d'origine aux quatre éléments, comme les ondins, les gnomes, les sylphes et les salamandres des légendes du Nord. Il existe un grand nombre de poèmes persans qui rapportent l'histoire détaillée des dynasties *préadamites*.⁹⁰

Rosicrucian versions of European elemental spirits appear in the *Entretien du Comte de Gabalis* (1670) of the Abbé de Villars. A translation of this work, *The Diverting History of the Count de Gabalis* (1714), was acquired by the Public Library of NSW in 1880.⁹¹

The first poem in Brennan's sequence recounts the meeting of Solomon, referred to only as "he", with the Queen of Sheba, "she",

⁸⁸ See Torijano, p. 91.

⁸⁹ According to Axel Clark, Brennan offered A.G. Stephens a note on Nerval for the *Bulletin* in 1898. As Clark remarks, "the note on Gérard de Nerval was never published which is a real loss, because (he told Stephens) the note contained 'certain remarks on mystery & obscurity—some might say, *apologia pro arte mea*'" (CB, p. 144). Later, two articles on Nerval appeared in the *Bookfellow* as part of the series "Studies in French Poetry 1860–1900". See P, pp. 347–54.

⁹⁰ Gérard de Nerval, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Guillaume, Claude Pichois et al., 3 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 89, 117, 397, Paris: Gallimard, 1989–1993, hereafter abbreviated to OCN, vol. 2, p. 837. "Perhaps Europeans realise only with difficulty what the Orientals mean by the Preadamite races. They think that, before the earth belonged to humankind, it was inhabited for seventy thousand years by four great races originally created, according to the Koran, from matter that was *elevated, subtle and luminous*. These were the Dives, the Djinns, the Afrites and the Péris, originating out of the four elements, like the ondines, the gnomes, the sylphs and the salamanders of the legends of the North. There are many Persian poems which recount in detail the history of these *Preadamite* dynasties".

⁹¹ Montfaucon de Villars, *The Diverting History of the Count de Gabalis*, 2nd edn., London: Lintott, 1714.

known elsewhere as Belkiss or Balkiss.⁹² Solomon's wisdom is "sterile" (line 4) before their meeting. Belkiss is endowed with "lonely beauty", but perhaps with something else as well. She comes from Arabia, blessed with the heat of a "chymic sun" (line 7). The word "chymic" suggests alchemy, itself a word derived from the Arabic language. We may draw the inference that the Queen brings to Solomon from Arabia the secret wisdom of esoteric traditions. The union proves fruitful: "desert blossom'd where she came" (line 11), and although the sand has long since covered over their traces, "one yellow desert" (line 14) still joins them.

The identification, common in legend, of the Queen of Sheba with Lilith adds a further dimension to this poem. In a story in the Koran, in which Belkiss is not mentioned by name, King Solomon demonstrates that the Queen is a demon by forcing her to lift her skirt to walk across a glass floor which she believes to be water, revealing her hairy legs.⁹³ In other versions of this story Lilith appears as the protagonist. Gershom Scholem makes the following comments about the connection between the two in Jewish legend:

Widespread, too, is the identification of Lilith with the Queen of Sheba—a notion with many ramifications in Jewish folklore. It originates in the Targum to Job 1:15 based on a Jewish and Arab myth that the Queen of Sheba was actually a jinn, half human and half demon. This view was known to Moses b. Shem Tov de Leon and is also mentioned in the Zohar. In *Livnat ha-Sappir* Joseph Angelino maintains that the riddles which the Queen of Sheba posed to Solomon are a repetition of the words of seduction which the first Lilith spoke to Adam. In Ashkenazi folklore, this figure coalesced with the popular image of Helen of Troy or the Frau Venus of German mythology.⁹⁴

In Brennan's Wisdom sequence, then, the Queen of Sheba is a version of Lilith.

In the second and third poems of this sequence, Solomon has dramatically extended his powers. The Solomon of the second piece has put elemental spirits to work building the Temple, and kept them at work by ensuring that his body appears to be supervising

⁹² I follow Brennan in referring to her as Belkiss. See P, p. 160.

⁹³ See A.D. Hope, "Brennan's Lilith", in *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 105–6.

⁹⁴ Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, New York: Quadrangle—New York Times, 1974, p. 358. The "Frau Venus of German mythology" appears in *Poems* as Holda. See discussion on pages 223–25 below.

the workers even after he has died.⁹⁵ The “Afrits” of the third line of this poem are elemental spirits, like those mentioned by Nerval. They reappear in the fourth poem of the sequence. In the third poem Solomon is buried in a tomb beneath the Temple, guarded by a seraph, waiting, like King Arthur in British legend, for the day when he will be restored to life. In the meantime his “word of might” is “figured in solid fire” and is therefore still “sterile” (line 14). This “solid fire” links the poem to the next one, where it appears in the breasts of the Preadamite Solomons.

It is well known that William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786) influenced the fourth poem.⁹⁶ Brennan had bought the 1893 edition of *Vathek* with a preface by Mallarmé in 1895.⁹⁷ There is another likely source for this poem as well: the interpolated story of the Queen of Sheba in Nerval’s *Voyage en Orient*. The primary interest of Brennan’s piece lies in the outcome, which is different from that of Beckford’s story, a difference consistent with Nerval’s reworking of the material. In both Beckford’s and Nerval’s stories, a significant part of the action takes place in the legendary subterranean sanctuary of fire beneath the mountain of Caf, but this sanctuary has opposite values in the two tales. The first stanza of Brennan’s poem recreates the legendary setting:

In Eblis’ ward now fall’n, where wisdom rose,
beyond the East and past the fane-strown sands,
are jasper caverns hewn of Afrit hands,
whereover Caf hath hung its huge repose.

In *Vathek*, the wicked Caliph and his wife receive their just deserts at the hands of Eblis (Satan) himself, because their desire to gain the power and riches of the Preadamite wizards is evil. In Nerval’s story, the subterranean cavern belongs to the race of Cain.⁹⁸ Both the artisan of Solomon’s Temple, the Masonic hero Adoniram, and the Queen of Sheba, whose lover he becomes, belong to this race as descendants of fire. Solomon, whose God is a kind of inferior demiurge, is the unsuccessful lover; Nerval champions the esoteric above conventional morality.

⁹⁵ Wilkes and Chisholm draw attention to the incident in the Koran (ch. 34) on which this account is based. See Wilkes, “The ‘Wisdom’ Sequence”, p. 49 and Chisholm, *The Forest of Night*, pp. 91–2.

⁹⁶ The influence of *Vathek* on Brennan is discussed in Wilkes, “The ‘Wisdom’ Sequence”, p. 48 and Chisholm, *The Forest of Night*, pp. 89–90.

⁹⁷ William Beckford, *Vathek*, pref. by Stéphane Mallarmé, Paris: Perrin, 1893.

⁹⁸ OCN, vol. 2, p. 718.

Brennan's third stanza draws a different moral from Beckford's tale.⁹⁹ Whereas Beckford's characters are punished with a living flame burning in their hearts, now visible through the crystal their chests have become, Brennan's wizards have a "ruby of harden'd flame, an ice-bound woe" (line 9). This is similar to the "solid fire" of the dead King Solomon in the previous poem. It seems to represent latent power, ready to be reawakened in the future, a "woe" but not a hellish, intolerable burning. In the subterranean palace of Nerval's story, the element of fire is imprisoned within stone so that fire may be struck from it again later to warm a cooling earth. This is consistent with the ability of a wizard or magus to transmit power into gems, explained by Walter Pagel:

Mighty power is wrought in Words, Plants and Stones. According to neo-Platonic as well as Paracelsian speculation, the *magus* transfers the powers of the stars to plants and in particular to gems—these are the *Gamaheu* of Paracelsus and may be regarded as the successor of the Gnostic and Abraxas gems with their characteristic graven images.¹⁰⁰

The rubies into which Brennan has converted Beckford's hell-fire, like these magical stones, may be thought of as storing esoteric wisdom for the future.

Brennan may or may not have known this magical tradition. He must have known, though, the famous image of the "hard, gem-like flame" in the conclusion to Walter Pater's *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*.¹⁰¹ As Pater (1839–94) explains:

Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to

⁹⁹ The provenance of the second stanza of Brennan's poem is not clear, although the rose in the pavement is reminiscent of the rose on the ceiling of the initiatory chamber in Yeats's story "Rosa Alchemica". It is clear that the rose in Brennan's poem is coloured by the rays of the sun, obviously coming in through a narrow aperture, or perhaps a series of apertures.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Pagel, "Paracelsus and the Neoplatonic and Gnostic Tradition", *Ambix* 8, 3 (1960), p. 156.

¹⁰¹ A late (1925) article by Brennan on "The Aesthetic Novel" mentions Pater's *Renaissance* (see P, p. 183). According to Clark, Brennan's enthusiasm for Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* began in 1891, while he was teaching at Goulburn, and he reread this book twice during his time in Berlin and once again on his return to Sydney. It seems unlikely, then, that he would not have familiarised himself before too long with the well-known *Renaissance*.

us,—for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. [. . .] Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening.¹⁰²

Although Pater is referring to art rather than magic, his image of a flame which is “gem-like”, like the power-storing gems of magical tradition, expresses the possibility of preserving for the future some refined essence, a “focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy”. Art, Pater suggests, can “maintain this ecstasy” beyond its momentary manifestation.¹⁰³ Brennan’s “ruby of harden’d flame”, too, conveys latent power.

While the poems of the Wisdom sequence, then, take their place with the “Twilights of the Gods and the Folk” among the poems dealing with the passing of religions, a sense of potential for the future is conveyed by the imagery of solidified fire in the fourth poem. This is consistent with the continuity of esoteric traditions emphasised by Brennan in the first of the Symbolism lectures, where he traces the history of the notion of correspondences from Ecclesiasticus to the Middle Ages:

Its statement goes back—I do not pretend to be able to fix a limit—to Ecclesiasticus, that ‘all things go by opposed couples’; occurs again in the so-called Smaragdine Table of Hermes, that ‘as things are below so are they above: all things which are on earth exist in heaven in a heavenly manner, all things which are in heaven exist on earth in an earthly manner’; it is the fountain-head of that flood of symbolism which, swelling high in Gnosticism, flows down the Middle Ages in the different channels of Catholic orthodoxy, Rosicrucianism, and Kabbala, with sediments of alchemy and magic, those queer attempts to realize the symbol in the department of practice.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, 1873; rev. and enl. edn, London: Macmillan, 1888, p. 249.

¹⁰³ For more on Pater’s “hard, gem-like flame”, see page 220 below.

¹⁰⁴ P, p. 52.

The first poem of the Wisdom sequence emphasises that the relationship of Solomon and Belkiss took place long ago, its traces remaining only in story. The second and third poems stress that King Solomon has been entombed for a very long time, while the fourth poem shows the powers of the Preadamite Solomons solidified into stone. The hints in the third and fourth poems, however, that both the historical and the Preadamite Solomons might be reawakened at some future time, and that their powers remain latent, give esoteric wisdom a different status from the religions evoked in the Twilights sequence. Whereas other religions, linked to a particular community of people, pass away completely, esoteric wisdom endures in the traditions that preserve it, somewhat equivocal in its value (“an ice-bound woe”) but by no means as absolutely bad as it appears in *Vathek*.

“My hidden country”

One of the two Epilogues comprising the last section of Brennan’s *Poems*, and several important pieces from “The Twilight of Disquietude” and “The Quest of Silence”, explore the notion of a higher self, located within the psyche but possessing aspects of divinity. The first Epilogue draws on mystical theology for its exploration of an ecstatic experience in which the self is united with the divine. The poem describes an inner “peak”, located “deep in my hidden country”, where the speaker is exposed in imagination to the elements, in the close embrace of night and its starry “shaken hair of gold” (line 16). Unlike almost all the other poems, the two Epilogues have titles: the first is “1897” and the second “1908”. The dates refer to important periods of Brennan’s life. 1897 was his last year of “waiting and dreaming” before Elisabeth’s arrival in Australia in December;¹⁰⁵ in 1908 Brennan was teaching for the first time at Sydney University, albeit in a casual capacity, first delivering evening lectures in Latin and later teaching modern literature as well. The title of the very first of the *Poems*, “MDCCCXCIII: a Prelude”, recalls another significant year. These two poems complete the symmetrical arrangement of the work.

¹⁰⁵ “Waiting and Dreaming” is the title of the chapter referring to this period of Brennan’s life in Clark’s biography.

In the sixth stanza of “1897”, Brennan refers to the Æons of Gnostic cosmology. In a work whose title is apposite to the quest for a higher self, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (1893), Oxford professor F. Max Müller (1823–1900) identifies the hierarchies of angels described by Pseudo-Dionysius¹⁰⁶ with the Æons, hypostases appearing in Gnostic systems such as those of Basilides, the Docetae and Valentinus (who had thirty Æons, grouped into eight, ten and twelve).¹⁰⁷ According to Dionysius, the angels were charged with the task of mediating the divine light to human beings. In Müller’s view, the object of the Dionysian mystical quest is a God who is unknowable:

The highest scope with Dionysius was assimilation to, or union with God. In order to reach this union the truly initiated have to be released from the objects and the powers of sight before they can penetrate into the darkness of unknowledge (ἀγνοσία). The initiated is then absorbed in the intangible and invisible, [. . .] in virtue of some nobler faculty united with that which is wholly unknowable, by the absolute inoperation of all limited knowledge, and known in a manner beyond mind by knowing nothing.¹⁰⁸

In Brennan’s poem the “darkness of unknowledge” embraced in a mystical perception of God, as the speaker turns away from the senses in favour of the imagination, is figured as night itself, the union as a sexual one:

There I alone may know the joy of quest
and keen delight of cold,
or rest, what time the night with naked breast
and shaken hair of gold,

¹⁰⁶ The identity of the author of the texts falsely attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian mentioned in the seventeenth chapter of the Biblical book of Acts, is still unknown. According to Paul Rorem, “[t]hey were actually written some five hundred years later, although we do not know precisely when or where. [. . .] The personal identity of the writer is still a mystery, and he is known only and awkwardly as Pseudo-Dionysius, or Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite” (Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 3). The influence of these texts, *The Divine Names*, *The Mystical Theology*, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and the *Letters*, had a profound impact on the development of mysticism, extending over many centuries, thanks to the ninth-century translation by Scotus Erigena. The library of the Goulburn Mechanics’ Institute held a copy of the *Opera S. Dionysii*, according to Marsden’s unpublished research.

¹⁰⁷ F. Max Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, London: Longmans, Green, 1893, pp. 461–84. This work was acquired by the PLNSW in 1894.

¹⁰⁸ Müller, *Theosophy*, pp. 478–79.

folds me so close, that her great breath would seem
 to fill the darkling heart
 with solemn certainty of ancient dream
 or whisperingly to impart
 æonian life, larger than seas of light,
 more limpid than the dawn [. . .]. (lines 13–21)

Writers such as Novalis, Keats and Wordsworth were interested in the relationship between mystical vision and poetic inspiration, and their influence is apparent in this poem. Brennan's "pools of clearest blue", "glad wells of simple sooth" and "glacier springs" (lines 9–11) recall the visions poets are granted in pools or fountains of water in works of Novalis and Keats. In Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the young poet after whom the novel is named has a prophetic dream in which visions appear when he steps into a fountain located in a cave.¹⁰⁹ In Keats's *Endymion*, a poet is granted special powers of expression after bathing in an "inspired place" (Book II, lines 830–39). In the notes he wrote in *From Blake to Arnold* on Wordsworth's Immortality ode, Brennan glosses "thy being's height" ("Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height") as "those regions of the soul remote from the dailiness of existence, whereupon, as the sunken sun upon mountain summits, the splendour of eternity yet falls".¹¹⁰ Brennan's mountain "deep in my hidden country" recalls Wordsworth's phrase.

According to Müller, the mystical stages of ascent towards the divine in the system of Dionysius culminate in "unification with God" and "deification [. . .], a change into God".¹¹¹ When the ascent is achieved in Brennan's poem, the speaker makes a Promethean challenge to the reigning divinity: "there, when my foot hath touch'd the topmost height, / the fire from heaven is drawn". It is only at this point that the self yields: "only upon my secret starry height / I abdicate to God" (lines 31–32). The Promethean challenge is further developed as an antinomian rejection of Old Testament law, and the God who gave it, in the second-last stanza:

¹⁰⁹ NS, vol. 1, pp. 196–97. A detailed discussion of the influence of Novalis on Brennan begins on page 67 below.

¹¹⁰ C.J. Brennan, J.P. Pickburn, and J. Le Gay Brereton, eds., *From Blake to Arnold: Selections from English Poetry (1783–1853)*, London: Macmillan, 1900, p. 160 (hereafter abbreviated to BA).

¹¹¹ Müller, *Theosophy*, p. 481.

If any murmur that my 'sdainful hand
withholds its sacrifice
where ranged unto the Law the peoples stand,
let this blown word suffice [. . .].

Brennan's abandonment of the notion of Hell, the ultimate form of punishment under the "Law" of God, and his adoption in 1890 of the notion of an unknowable God, may be seen as the foundation of the mystical theology of the self adopted here.

Two poems Brennan planned in late 1898 or early 1899, when Hartmann's work on the unconscious had been available for some time, convey the speaker's longing to gain access to the hidden depths of his own being. The poems appear consecutively in the first main section of "The Forest of Night", "The Twilight of Disquietude". "The mother-deep, wise, yearning, bound" creates an image of "the mother-deep", located "beneath my heart" (lines 1-2). "What do I know? Myself alone" refers to "the sleeping depths", which are too profound to be affected by any actions undertaken by the speaker (line 7). I believe that both the "deep" and the "depths" refer to a higher self, which Brennan thought of as the human unconscious. The "solitary eyelit-slits" through which alone this realm may be glimpsed ("The mother-deep", line 6) reflect the influence of Blake's insistence in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that "man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern", that is, through the senses, whereas "if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite" (Pl.14).¹¹² While Brennan's first poem expresses a mood of frustration that the higher self or unconscious is inaccessible ("there lies no way into the deep / that is myself, alone, aghast", lines 11 and 12), the second poem describes the attempt to gain access to it: "What do I seek? I seek the word / that shall become the deed of might / whereby the sullen gulfs are stirr'd / and stars begotten on their night" (lines 9-12). The old stars have been dislodged from their place by the loss of faith (of apparently apocalyptic dimensions) portrayed in "Disaster drives the shatter'd night". To gain access to the inner abyss or "gulf of uncreated night" (line 2) would forge that abyss into a new creation, signalled by new stars.

One poem, placed by Brennan in the section dealing with the passing of old religions in "The Quest of Silence", uses the device

¹¹² Brennan first read Blake in Berlin. See CB, p. 71.

of the doppelgänger to help establish the notion of an alternative self. The setting of “Lightning: and momentarily” draws on European conceptions of the Orient. Lightning-flashes reveal glimpses of an Arabian city, a mirage. On the battlements appears a figure whose face, under the “high turban’s plume”, is that of the speaker himself (line 20). Explorations of the transcendental self such as those of du Prel, as well as literary explorations of the doppelgänger in the stories of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Edgar Poe, are obviously relevant, but the Oriental setting may be directly indebted to Nerval’s explorations of the double in the *Voyage en Orient* and *Aurélia*.

Like the story of the Queen of Sheba, Nerval’s “Histoire du Calife Hakem” is interpolated in the *Voyage en Orient*. Caliph Hakem has a double called Yousouf, who belongs to the religion of the Druzes. Only the Caliph is ever aware of the resemblance between the two, which is so marked that Yousouf is able to take Hakem’s place even with his wife. Perhaps, suggests the narrator, Yousouf is a “Ferouër”, a supernatural being from the Zoroastrian religion whose role resembles that of a guardian angel. In Nerval’s *Aurélia*, too, the double plays an important role. In this work, published posthumously in 1855, Nerval explores the dreams and visionary states characteristic of his own mental illness. The work begins with a vindication of such states as points of entry into the invisible world.¹¹³ In the first part of *Aurélia*, the narrator experiences the sensation of having been doubled: “il me semblait [. . .] que mon âme se dédoublait pour ainsi dire,—distinctement partagée entre la vision et la réalité”.¹¹⁴ Seeking to explain this experience, he has recourse to “une tradition bien connue en Allemagne, qui dit que chaque homme a un *double*, et que, lorsqu’il le voit, la mort est proche”.¹¹⁵ Later the double assumes the power to act independently, even bringing off a marriage with Aurélia herself, whom the narrator can only dream of marrying. The narrator asks himself:

Mais quel était donc cet Esprit qui était moi et en dehors de moi ?
Était-ce le *Double* des légendes, ou ce frère mystique que les Orientaux
appellent *Ferouër* ?—N’avais-je pas été frappé de l’histoire de ce chevalier

¹¹³ For more on the beginning of *Aurélia*, see pages 218–19 below.

¹¹⁴ OCN, vol. 3, p. 701: “It seemed to me [. . .] that my soul split itself into two, so to speak—distinctly divided between vision and reality”.

¹¹⁵ OCN, vol. 3, p. 701: “a tradition well known in Germany, according to which everyone has a double, and, when seen, [it means that] death is near”.

qui combattit toute une nuit dans une forêt contre un inconnu qui était lui-même ? [...]

Une idée terrible me vint : « L'homme est double », me dis-je.¹¹⁶

Here we have the idea of an inner double who is part of oneself, a higher or more successful part.¹¹⁷ Considering Brennan's poem in the light of Nerval's explorations of the doubled self helps to explain not only his placement of a poem of the higher self among others dealing with the passing of religions, but also the prophetic tone of the piece.

* * *

The poems and sequences discussed in this chapter establish a sense of the transience of religions. Esoteric traditions alone, perhaps, have an enduring relevance. Some of the poems raise the possibility that we might be able to discover something within the self that could somehow transcend everyday reality and that might even be able to renew the signifying power of old symbols. Brennan uses the symbol of Lilith as a focus for his exploration of these issues in *Poems*.

In the next chapter we look at the first three poems of the Lilith sequence, exploring these dense and difficult poems in the broad intellectual context that is required to grasp their concerns and the implications of their imagery. We find Brennan weaving together notions derived from religion, philosophy and psychology to create a symbol of what was for Romanticism humanity's lost heritage: an inner capacity to intuit the noumenon (or the divine, or the Absolute) operating through the faculty of imagination. Bypassing discursive reasoning, such a faculty could provide access, even if only provisional, to the "Unknowable".

¹¹⁶ OCN, vol. 3, p. 717: "But what, then, was that Spirit which was both myself and beyond myself? Was this the legendary *Double*, or that mysterious brother whom the Orientals call *Ferouër*? Hadn't I been struck by the story of this knight who fought all night in a forest with a stranger who [was] himself? A terrible idea came to me: 'Man is double,' I said to myself".

¹¹⁷ Arthur Rimbaud is rather more well-known than Nerval for his formulation of the doubled self, "je est un autre".

CHAPTER TWO

MIRROR AND ABYSS

Brennan, Yeats and Boehme

In 1893 Edwin Ellis and W.B. Yeats published their edition of *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic and Critical*. It was Yeats who wrote most of the long section in the first volume entitled “The Symbolic System”,¹ in which he used his knowledge of the writings of Jakob Boehme (1575–1624) and Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) to help interpret Blake’s symbolism. An enterprise of this nature, inspired by common esoteric and mystical interests between Blake, writing at the beginning of the English Romantic period, and Yeats, writing at its very end, must have been of particular interest to Brennan. In fact, his own enterprise in *Poems* is underpinned by an awareness of the complex relationship between esoteric and Romantic ways of thinking, which he encountered in Yeats’s approach to Blake and was able to explore more widely through his knowledge of European Romanticism.

The notes Brennan made on this material during his preparation for writing the Lilith sequence afford some important insights into the origins of his Lilith, Lady of Night, and her relationship with Adam.² In his second chapter, Yeats refers to the cosmogony of Boehme. Brennan’s notes concentrate on the figure Boehme called Sophia, the ‘mirror’ or ‘looking-glass’ of the godhead, a powerful paradigm of the imagination as mediator between the noumenal and the phenomenal realms. Clearly, Brennan appreciated the significance of this paradigm and wanted to consider Lilith in relation to it. Here is one of the passages in which Brennan was interested, with italics

¹ See Allan Wade, *A Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats*, 1951; 3rd edn, rev. and ed. R.K. Alspach, [London]: Hart-Davis, 1968, p. 241.

² Christopher Brennan, Notebook FL RB509.1/26, folio [6], recto. This notebook is an old printed library catalogue in which Brennan has written from the back to the front. Folio numbers have been attributed in these citations. We know these notes were made after 11th January, 1898, as they include a reference to the paper “Fact and Idea”, delivered on that date.

indicating the material he extracted (Yeats refers to “Boehmen”, a variant of Boehme):

Like Boehmen and the occultists generally, [Blake] postulates *besides the Trinity a fourth principle, a universal matrix or heaven or abode*, from which, and in which all have life. It is that represented by the circle containing the triangle of the ancient mystics, and may be described as the *imagination of God, without which neither Father, Son, nor Spirit could be made manifest in life and action*. In one of the aphorisms written in the Laocoon plate, it is called “*The Divine Body*” [. . .]. To this emanation, to give it the Blakean term, of the Father, is applied constantly by Boehmen the word “*looking-glass*” [. . .]. *God looking into this mirror, ceases to be mere will, beholds himself as the Son, His love for His own unity, His self-consciousness, and enters on that eternal meditation about Himself which is called the Holy Spirit*. [. . .] *This Holy Spirit, or “Council”, is the energy which wakes into being the numberless thought-forms of the great mirror, the immortal or typical shapes of all things, the “ideas” of Plato. It and the mirror make up together divine manifestation. At first the thought-forms subsist and move in this universal “imagination which liveth for ever” without being manifest to themselves and each other as separate individualities, not being lives but thoughts of the universal life. Then comes the contrary of the universal life, “the reaction of man against God”, the longing of the shapes and thought-forms for a vivid sensation of their own existence. Desire is its name, and to it Boehmen traces the fall into physical life.*³

Characteristically, Yeats seeks to syncretise Boehme’s cosmogony with that of other esoteric writers, beginning “like Boehmen and the occultists generally”. He describes how the “looking-glass”, which is emanated from the godhead itself, functions as the divine self-consciousness. The looking-glass holds the “thought-forms” (resembling Plato’s ‘ideas’), which will later become separate existences in the material world.⁴ The mirror itself is, in fact, “the imagination of God, without which neither Father, Son, nor Spirit could be made manifest in life and action”, the foundation of God’s creation of the physical universe. It participates in the divine Quaternary, as a fourth

³ William Blake, *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*, ed. Edwin John Ellis and W.B. Yeats, 3 vols., London: Quaritch, 1893; New York: AMS, 1973 (hereafter abbreviated to WWB), vol. 1, pp. 246–7. Although Yeats employs Boehme’s Trinitarian expression in discussing the primary myth of the Boehmian cosmogony, his presentation is overtly Platonic and occultist, less Christian than Boehme. His presentation entirely omits Boehme’s association of the figure with the divine Wisdom (Sophia).

⁴ “Thought-Forms” later became the title of an influential publication by two prominent Theosophists, Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater.

member added to the conventional Trinity comprising Father, Son and Spirit.

Yeats describes how, in Boehme's cosmogony, the divine imagination was itself subject to a Fall into materiality as the forms in the mirror sought separate existence. The mirror itself, the divine imagination, is subject to the tension of contrary principles, "the seeking and alluring, masculine and feminine, repulsive and attractive, of corporeal life", opposing impulses upwards to the divine and downwards towards entrapment in the material:

when the lives become spectres or selfhoods, the mirror, in its turn, grows spectrous, and is changed into a "vortex", seeking to draw down and allure. It ceases to be a passive maternal power and becomes destroying. This double being of *corrupted spirit and mirror is the serpent-woman of the first night of "Vala" and the virgo-scorpio of the ancient occultists. It is "the delusive goddess Nature"*.⁵

Italics again indicate what Brennan extracted in his notes. In an important response to the text of Yeats, Brennan wrote "Lilith" beneath the following: "The corrupted spirit & mirror also spectrous [...] The delusive goddess nature: virgo-scorpio".⁶

Yeats's "delusive goddess Nature" is an important source for Brennan's Lilith. In the notes for the lecture on Blake in his 1904 lecture series on Symbolism, Brennan refers to "the delusive goddess Nature, the serpent-woman who is the mother of this world of mystery and jealousy".⁷ As we will see, Brennan draws both on the image of the serpent-woman and on Yeats's interpretation of the Bohemian 'mirror' in his presentation of Lilith.

We can imagine Brennan, his interest aroused by his reading of Yeats, searching the library in which he worked for further information on Boehme. There he would have found T. Rhys Evans' translation of Hans Lassen Martensen's *Jacob Boehme: His Life and Teaching* (1885) and Franz Hartmann's *The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme: The God-Taught* (1891), the two studies of Boehme which Yeats himself seems to have used most extensively. Although Yeats owned the four-volume Law edition of Boehme (which Brennan himself acquired in 1903, a gift from the mother of his friend John le

⁵ WWB, vol. 1, p. 249.

⁶ Brennan, FL Notebook RB509.1/26, folio [11], recto.

⁷ P, p. 101.

Gay Brereton), he “preferred to work through compendia”.⁸ In addition to works specifically on Boehme, the Sydney library also held William Howitt’s translation of Joseph Ennemoser’s *The History of Magic* (1854). This work contains numerous quotations from Boehme, drawn from the text prepared by Julius Hamberger for publication, together with an enthusiastic discussion of the teachings.

From these texts, Brennan could have built up a more substantial understanding of Boehme’s mirror. Martensen quotes from Boehme’s *Menschwerden*, or *Of the Becoming Man or Incarnation of Jesus Christ* to explain the metaphor of imagination as a looking-glass:

For the nothing causes the willing that it is desirous, and the desiring is an Imagination wherein the Will in the Looking-glass of Wisdom discovers itself, and so it imagines out of the abyss into itself, and makes to itself in the imagination a ground in itself, and impregnates itself with the Imagination out of the Wisdom, viz.: out of the virgin-like looking-glass, which, there, is a mother without generating, without willing.⁹

It is a fault of imagination which causes Adam to fall as he imagines himself into earth rather than heaven:

Into whatever the imagination of the spirit enters, such it becomes through the impress of the spiritual desire. Therefore God forbade Adam, while still in Paradise, to eat in imagination of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, else he would fall into misfortunes and death, and die to the heavenly kingdom, as indeed happened.¹⁰

Adam’s lapse of imagination causes his sleep in the Garden of Eden: he “slept away the angelic world, and awoke in the outer world”.¹¹ This sleep signifies his becoming ignorant of his heavenly origin, and his subsequent surrender to the kingdom of the stars, that is, the power of fate. As a result of this sleep, Eve is created: “in place of the retreated heavenly virgin, the terrestrial woman”.¹²

⁸ Ian Fletcher, “The Ellis-Yeats-Blake Manuscript Cluster”, *The Book Collector* (Spring 1972), p. 91.

⁹ Quoted in Hans Lassen Martensen, *Jacob Boehme: His Life and Teaching*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1885, footnote to p. 59.

¹⁰ Quoted in Joseph Ennemoser, *The History of Magic*, trans. William Howitt, London: Bohn, 1854, p. 324.

¹¹ Quoted in Ennemoser, p. 305.

¹² Ennemoser, p. 306.

The Argument to the Lilith sequence

Adam's abandonment of his heavenly partner Lilith for Eve forms the basis of the action in Brennan's Lilith sequence. This sequence of twelve poems comes about two-thirds of the way through "The Forest of Night", the second of the five main sections in *Poems*. It is preceded by three other sequences, "The Twilight of Disquietude", "The Quest of Silence" and "The Shadow of Lilith", and followed by another, "The Labour of Night" (this contains the two subsidiary sequences discussed in the previous chapter, "Wisdom" and "Twilights of the Gods and the Folk"). The first two poems in the Lilith sequence are in italics. Expressive typography distinguishes poems in an impersonal third person (which have a kind of choric function) from those using a first person voice or addressing a second person. This helps to establish a dramatic interplay of voices. In his large *Musicopoematoscope*, inspired by Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*,¹³ Brennan makes use of as many as eight voices, each distinguished by different styles of handwriting.

In the Argument to the sequence, a third-person narrative presents Lilith in her essential relationship to Adam: preceding Eve as his first wife ("she, in the delicate frame / that was of woman after, did unite / herself with Adam in unblest delight", lines 2–4), Adam proving himself "un-capacious" of their union and engendering offspring of fear and terror within the human mind itself ("who, uncapacious of that dreadful love, / begat on her not majesty, as Jove, / but the worm-brood of terrors unconfest / that chose henceforth, as their avoided nest, / the mire-fed writhen thicket of the mind", lines 6–9).

There are a number of nineteenth-century literary explorations of Lilith by means of which Brennan could have become familiar with details of the myth.¹⁴ Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote two, "Body's Beauty" and "Eden Bower". One of these portrays Lilith as "subtly of herself contemplative". This suggests that Lilith regards herself in a mirror, a point in common with the Bohemian looking-glass of

¹³ See page 5 above.

¹⁴ I am indebted to Jessica Coates' thesis on Lilith for the identification of other versions of the Lilith myth in English ("The Primitive Eve", Honours sub-thesis, Australian National University, 1997).

God.¹⁵ The other makes a strong identification between Lilith and the snake in the Garden of Eden; Brennan's imagery of snakes and serpents is in keeping with this. In Theodore Wratishaw's "L'Éternel Féminin" (1893), Lilith speaks of the "hot snakes of my lascivious hair" (line 10). Remy de Gourmont wrote a play entitled *Lilith*, first published in 1892, and Anatole France's *Balthazar* (1889) includes the story "La Fille de Lilith".¹⁶ She also appears in Victor Hugo's *La Fin de Satan* (published 1886). Although it is interesting to speculate about Brennan's awareness of Talmudic and Kabbalistic developments of the Lilith myth, particularly in view of references he makes to the Kabbalah elsewhere, the aspects he develops in the Lilith sequence need not be dependent on any specialised knowledge of such sources.

Bearing in mind Brennan's association of Lilith with the "delusive goddess Nature" described in the Ellis and Yeats edition of Blake, it is important to recognise that Brennan's Lilith, "by her Hebrew name / Lady of Night" (line 1), is an aspect of Nature. Brennan's notes show that he believed the name Lilith is derived from "Hebr. Lil, night". The etymological notes of Cheyne and Black in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (1902) give an idea of contemporary thinking regarding the cognates of Lilith.¹⁷ In Cheyne we find, as alternatives to Lilith, "night-monster", "screech-owl" (denoted "AV wrongly") and "lamia".¹⁸ As we will see, the structure and content of *Poems* is evidence of the importance that Brennan attached to times of the day and seasons of the year as aspects of Nature with which human beings might imaginatively associate the cycles of their own lives. "The Forest of Night" is at the heart of this endeavour.

In the Lilith sequence, Brennan suggests that Lilith as Night (that is, as an aspect of Nature) represents a complete self which human beings lack or have lost and to which they might attain, momentarily,

¹⁵ Brennan was also familiar with Mallarmé's imagery of mirrors in poems such as the *Scène to Hérodiade*. See discussion beginning on page 205 below. No doubt he would have taken a certain satisfaction in the fact that Mallarmé's cat was called Lilith, if he had been aware of this.

¹⁶ Evidence from the annotated bibliography in Brennan's edition of Remy de Gourmont's *Le Livre des masques: portraits symbolistes* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1896) indicates that he knew Gourmont's *Lilith*. Brennan has ticked *Lilith* in a list of the author's works on the page opposite the half-title page.

¹⁷ For more on Cheyne's studies of Isaiah as a source for Brennan's Lilith, see Appendix 2.

¹⁸ Hope points out that Babylonian representations picture Lilith with owls, signifying a goddess of night (Hope, "Brennan's Lilith", p. 102).

by imaginatively uniting their minds with Nature. The Argument to the sequence establishes at the outset that humankind has lost, with Lilith, something transcendent. The initial union of Adam and Lilith achieved “*unblest delight*”, the word “*unblest*” probably implying that God, who might have blessed it, had no part in a transaction for which even his existence was not required. Whereas the legendary Lilith was the one at fault in breaking the relationship with Adam, Brennan’s Adam, not his Lilith, is “*incapacious*” (line 5). By means different from those he uses to establish the “pale absence of the rose” in “A gray and dusty daylight flows”, but with similar effect, Brennan creates the impression of a loss, a lack, an absence, at the beginning of the Lilith sequence, and this lack, together with the implied possibility of something to fill it, provides the impetus for the entire sequence. The lack is emphasised by the “*doubt of his garden-state*” and the “*arrowy impulse to dim-descried o’erhuman bliss*” aroused by the Chimera (line 12) and the “*hint of nameless things reveal’d*” in the siren’s song (line 16). Adam is supposed to be in a “*garden-state*”, that is, in Eden before the Fall, but the first lines of the Argument imply that the real Fall, from his completeness in union with Lilith, has already taken place. At the same time, the possibility of restoring the former relationship, of finding Lilith beautiful again rather than timorously shunning her, is established as a possibility. The word “*dread*” changes its value significantly over the course of the Argument, first designating how the relationship appears to the “*incapacious*” Adam in the phrase “*that dreadful love*” (line 5), and later becoming a more positive epithet for “*her that is the august and only dread, / close-dwelling, in the house of birth and death*” (lines 24–5), suggesting that if Adam were to overcome his incapacity, he might regard Lilith very differently.

Some notes made in preparation for writing the sequence describe Lilith changing “to demon (serpent)” after the rift with Adam.¹⁹ This is reflected in the tenth line of the poem (“She, monsterward from that embrace declined”). The entry on Lilith in Collin de Plancy’s *Dictionnaire Infernal* (1825) could have supplied Brennan with an explanation for the decline of Lilith. According to this text, Lilith may be compared to gods of antiquity such as Jupiter and Apollo, whose

¹⁹ See *The Verse of Christopher Brennan*, ed. A.R. Chisholm and J.J. Quinn, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1960 (hereafter abbreviated to V), p. 292.

amorous liaisons with human beings met with disapproval in “la mythologie moderne, qui considère l’amour, et souvent même les plaisirs conjugaux, comme des péchés damnables”.²⁰ Such gods and goddesses have been relegated by the Church to the status of demons.

The association of Lilith and her avatars, the “*serpent-wives*” (line 19), with hybrids of woman and snake implies androgyny. Under a heading “Serpents”, Brennan’s notes list the sphinx, the python, gorgons, hydras, chimeras and griffins, as well as “sacerdotal snakes: Hermes & Aesculap”.²¹ The serpent is sacred to Asclepius and Hermes.²² Medusa, mentioned under the heading “Night” in the same notes, is also associated with snakes.²³ Blake’s serpent-woman appears in the following passage of *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*:

Mingling his brightness with her tender limbs, then high she soared,
 Half woman and half spectre. All his lovely changing colours mix
 With her fair crystal clearness. In her lips and cheeks his poisons rose
 In blushes like the morning, and his scaly armour softening,
 A monster lovely in the heavens or wandering in the earth,
 With spectre voice incessant wailing in incessant thirst,
 Beauty all blushing with desire, mocking her fell despair,
 Wandering desolate, a wonder abhorr’d by gods and men [...] (Night 1,
 lines 150–57)²⁴

Ellis and Yeats take this to imply that androgyny was part of the early conception of the hybrid Blake describes. In the section of Ellis and Yeats’s third volume entitled “Fragments”, the editors write: “The idea grew with contemplation. In the poem we no longer have merely the *virgo-scorpio*, the woman-serpent, the mixture of beauty and desire”. They also describe a drawing on the back of one of the pages of “fragments” which “shows the back of a woman who is seated in the coils of a serpent, whose body seems to have grown from her thighs like the fishy half of a mermaid”.²⁵ The mermaid is an obvious symbol of androgyny.

²⁰ Collin de Plancy, *Dictionnaire Infernal ou Bibliothèque Universelle*, 1818, 2nd edn., Paris: Mongie, 1825, vol. 1, p. 454: “Modern mythology, which considers love, and often even conjugal pleasures, to be mortal sins”. This book was acquired by the PLNSW in 1872.

²¹ V, p. 293.

²² These are the serpents which are associated with modern symbols of medicine.

²³ Brennan associates Medusa with Lilith in the annotations to Mallarmé’s *Les Dieux antiques*, probably made in 1896. A detailed discussion of these annotations begins on page 144 below.

²⁴ WWB, vol. 3, *Vala*, p. 6.

²⁵ WWB, vol. 3, “Fragments”, p. 147.

Lilith's offspring are described as a "worm-brood" in line 7 of the Argument, furthering the imagery of serpent or dragon. The word "writthen" (line 9), intertwined, plaited or spirally twisted, echoes William Morris's line in *The Earthly Paradise* (which Brennan first read in 1892), "[full] of intertwining writthen snakes" (I, 258).²⁶ During the process of Lilith's "decline", her avatars appear in myth and legend as hybrids of woman and serpent: chimera, siren, Lamia, Melusine. In legend, the chimera has a serpent's tail. According to Brennan's notes, the siren and Lilith both have a single tail, the siren having "scales of snake or fish". Lamia was a monster who could appear as a beautiful woman, in legend having the form of a serpent. Melusine appeared as a woman, but her true form was half-woman, half-serpent; she gave birth to monstrous children, as Brennan mentions in his notes. Brennan did not need to have read Freud to be well aware of the association of snakes with male sexuality. An examination of the *Subject-Index of the Books in the Author Catalogues for the Years 1869-95* shows various listings under the heading "Serpent Worship", with cross-references to such headings as "Primitive Religions" and "Natural Theology".²⁷ Readers interested in Symbolism are referred to associated categories which include "Phallic Worship" and "Serpent Worship".²⁸ The masculine-feminine hybridity of Lilith's avatars is strong evidence that Brennan had androgyny in mind as constituting the original, lost union of Adam and Lilith.

The idea that the archetypal human being was androgynous is of ancient provenance, and Brennan could have found it in a number of sources. One of the most important is Plato's *Symposium*, where we learn that human beings were originally one androgynous being that was cut into two, producing a sense of loss which compels each half to seek out its complement (189E-193D).²⁹ In the *Orphic Hymns* the Moon, associated with Night, is also androgynous. The thirteenth-century Zohar or Book of Enlightenment, one of the principal texts of the Kabbalah, portrays Adam and Lilith as, originally, a single androgynous being:

²⁶ Robin Marsden, "Christopher Brennan's Berlin Years 1892-1894", *Quadrant* 21, no. 11 (1977), p. 38.

²⁷ *Subject-Index of the Books in the Author Catalogues for the Years 1869-95*, Sydney: Turner & Henderson, 1903, p. 767.

²⁸ *Subject-Index 1869-95*, p. 821.

²⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. and ed. Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989, pp. 25-30.

When these letters [comprising the divine name “Adam”] descended, all was as one in consummation: male and female. The female cleaved to his side until He cast sleep upon him and he slumbered, lying on the site of the Temple below. The blessed Holy One sawed him, adorned her as one adorns a bride, and brought her to him, as is written: *He took one of his sides and closed up the flesh in its place* (Genesis 2:21). [. . .] This is the original Lilith, who accompanied him, was impregnated by him, and taken away from him (1:34b).³⁰

The separation of Adam and Lilith, then, represents the division of one being into two.

Boehme’s looking-glass, Sophia, was also part of a single androgynous being. According to Martensen,

Adam was originally androgynous [. . .]. Certainly, he had a bride. But this bride, this wife of his youth, to whom he became unfaithful, was the pure, chaste maiden, the heavenly Sophia, Wisdom, that dwelt in him. [. . .] In union with this heavenly spouse, Adam was to have multiplied himself in a supernatural way, and was to have produced out of himself beings like himself, in whom the maiden could dwell.³¹

Martensen’s representation of the doctrine (and his outline of the connections with Plato and the Kabbalah) emphasises that Boehme’s Adam has lost, in Sophia, part of himself, the other half of an androgynous union, and that this signifies the loss of higher or transcendent powers.

German Romanticism adopted from works associated with Pietism a model of humanity as originally androgynous, and took much further the idea that Nature itself was the partner of humanity in this primal union. According to Sara Friedrichsmeyer, the idea of androgyny aroused considerable interest among German writers of the early nineteenth century. Ricarda Huch was the first to identify the model in Romantic literature.³² In contrast to the direct influence of esoteric sources on Blake’s early English Romanticism, Boehme’s Sophiology came indirectly to early German Romanticism via the writings of Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714): *Das Geheimnis der göttlichen*

³⁰ *The Zohar*, trans. Daniel C. Matt, Pritzker edn, vol. 1, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 217.

³¹ Martensen, p. 234.

³² Sara Friedrichsmeyer, *The Androgyne in Early German Romanticism: Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis and the Metaphysics of Love*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1983, p. 39. Brennan quotes Huch in “German Romanticism: A Progressive Definition” (see P, p. 391).

Sophia (*The Secret of the Divine Sophia*, 1700), in which Sophia is represented as Adam's "inner bride" who had been lost "through his own desire", entailing the loss of Paradise itself; and also his poems, entitled *Göttliche Liebesfunken aus dem großen Feuer der Liebe Gottes in Christo Jesu* (*Divine Sparks of Love from the Great Fire of the Love of God in Christ Jesus*). The Berleburg Bible, a scriptural exegesis based on the interpretations of various mystics including Boehme, was popular among Pietists and provided another important means of transmission of Bohemian Sophiology to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³³ Friedrichsmeyer believes that the Romantics' interpretation of Nature as a complementary opposite to the human being was an important reason for their interest in androgyny:

In the protean concept "nature" many Romantics found an image for the realm to which they sought access. Besides providing a developmental pattern which dictated an organic unfolding of the coming together of antipathies within the individual, nature, they believed, was also man's complementary opposite. [. . .] Seemingly paradoxical, this conception of nature as the structural model for human progress as well as man's complementary opposite was [. . .] important for the Romantic adaptation of the androgyne.³⁴

In the light of Brennan's scholarly specialism in Romanticism, especially early German Romanticism (the *Frühromantik*), the Romantic model of Nature as a complementary self, which was originally paired with humanity in an androgynous union, is of particular interest in interpreting his version of the relationship of Adam and Lilith.

Romantic notions of a transcendent or higher self were founded on the Idealist philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and J.G. Fichte (1762–1814). Around a decade after the Lilith sequence was completed, Brennan had this to say about the indebtedness of the German Romantic writer Novalis to Kant and Fichte:

[Novalis] starts, philosophically, from Kant. Kant had left an irreconcilable dualism in knowledge: on the one hand the synthetic activity of the transcendental ego, on the other a crude unknowable datum, a surd. The development of German idealism is an attempt to work that surd out. Fichte's attempt is the boldest. The dualism is not to be tolerated: but on purely intellectual grounds no preferential proof

³³ Friedrichsmeyer, p. 36. See Paola Mayer, *Jena Romanticism and its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme: Theosophy, Hagiography, Literature*, McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Ideas 27, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1999, pp. 36–7.

³⁴ Friedrichsmeyer, p. 50.

can be found for either term of it. Our decision will depend, then, entirely on our conception and valuation of our own moral freedom and dignity. Fichte, setting out from an impassioned theory of ethical freedom, demands freedom of the cognitive ego (the “transcendental”, not the empirical). This creates the non-ego or object by “positing” [. . .]: setting itself as thesis, it thereby posits the world as antithesis: reflection gives the synthesis as being wholly contained within the *Ich*.³⁵

Brennan goes on to quote Huch regarding the resolution of the subject-object split by means of a reunification at a higher level: “Die Romantiker hatten das Verdienst einzusehen, dass die Erkenntnis, die die Einheit der Natur zerstört, dennoch ihr Heil und das Mittel zu einer Wiedervereinigung auf höherer Stufe ist”.³⁶ We should be in no doubt that Brennan’s grasp of the relationship of German Romantic thought to Idealist philosophy made him perfectly capable of making the possibility of a “Wiedervereinigung auf höherer Stufe” the focus of the central sequence in *Poems*.

In the *Foundations of the Metaphysic of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that a human being can be both part of the phenomenal world and part of the noumenon. His “transcendental self” is an attempt to resolve the clash between the existence of human beings in a physical universe and their ability to transcend being finally determined. Copleston explains the clash:

How can we harmonize the physical world, the sphere of determinism, with the moral order, the sphere of freedom? It is not simply a matter of juxtaposing the two worlds, as though they were completely separate and independent. For they meet in man. Man is both an item in Nature, in the physical system, and a moral and free agent. The question is, therefore, how can the two points of view, the scientific and the moral, be harmonized without denying either of them. This [. . .] is Kant’s fundamental problem.³⁷

Kant’s transcendental self operates in what he calls “transcendental freedom”, which applies only to “that ‘intelligible’ or transcendental realm to which categories like causality do not apply”.³⁸ In the earlier

³⁵ P, pp. 390–91.

³⁶ P, p. 391: “The Romantics had the merit to comprehend that the knowledge which destroys the unity of Nature is still to its benefit and the means of a reunification at a higher level”.

³⁷ Frederick Copleston, *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Leibniz*, vol. 4 of *A History of Philosophy*, New York: Image-Doubleday, 1962–7, p. 67.

³⁸ Roger Scruton, *Kant, Past Masters*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 60.

Critique of Pure Reason (1781), Kant argues that pure reason cannot arbitrate on the three ultimate questions—free will, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul—a limitation that both reduces the status the Enlightenment had allotted to reason and implies that the human mind is lacking in faculties to intuit the noumenon, the realm of the “thing-in-itself” as opposed to things as perceived by an observing mind. For example, he argues that, although reason is able to conceive of a first cause or highest being, “this does not signify the objective relation of an actual object to other things, but only that of an *idea* to *concepts*, and as to the existence of a being of such preeminent excellence it leaves us in complete ignorance” (A579/B607).³⁹

In spite of this earlier limitation, Kant postulates that it is necessary to regard oneself, paradoxically, simultaneously as noumenon, from the point of view of freedom, and phenomenon, from the point of view of the causality to which physical life is subject.⁴⁰ According to Roger Scruton, Kant “wavers between the doctrine that the transcendental self is a kind of perspective, and the doctrine that it is a distinct noumenal thing”.⁴¹ In avoiding conceiving the self, like Leibniz, as a monad “existing outside the world that it ‘represents’ [by its point of view], incapable of entering into real relation with anything contained in it”, and dealing with the issue of the relation of the self to its own action, Kant proposes that we must exist “both as an ‘empirical self’, within the realm of nature, and as a transcendental self, outside it”.⁴²

The attempt of Fichte, following Kant, to imagine the origin of being and consciousness by recourse to the idea of a transcendental ego prior to both subject and object, had an important influence on thinkers of the early Romantic period such as Schlegel and Novalis. They found it wanting, however, in that it reduced Nature to a mere function of the absolute ego. Fichte’s system is founded on the analogy of human self-consciousness. He invites the reader:

³⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 557.

⁴⁰ Scruton, p. 60.

⁴¹ Scruton, p. 62.

⁴² Scruton, p. 66.

Merke auf dich selbst: kehre deinen Blick von allem, was dich umgiebt, ab, und in dein Inneres—ist die erste Forderung, welche die Philosophie an ihren Lehrling thut. Es ist von nichts, was ausser dir ist, die Rede, sondern lediglich, von dir selbst.⁴³

As it uses human self-consciousness as an analogy of the primary act by which the absolute ego sets or “posits” an object over against itself, Fichte’s thinking has some important points in common with the Boehmian looking-glass or self-consciousness of the godhead. In the opinion of Andrew Weeks, “Fichte is the pivotal figure in discussions of the affinities of mysticism with Idealism and Romanticism” for this very reason.⁴⁴ Critical of Kant’s concept of the ‘thing-in-itself’, Fichte embarks on “a radical excision of the very thought of a thing-in-itself. For the mind, everything—even the thought of something outside it—is posited within itself”.⁴⁵ Following on from the primacy of the ego over the thing,

Fichte’s *Science of Knowledge* begins with the concept of the ego, which is a pure activity that posits itself to itself as the non-ego merely that it may have a field in which it can realize itself, by an “infinite striving” against a resisting non-self toward an approachable yet inaccessible goal of absolute freedom.⁴⁶

⁴³ J.G. Fichte, *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes sämtliche Werke*, ed. I.H. Fichte, Berlin: Veit, 1845, vol. 1, p. 422: “Pay attention to yourself: turn your gaze away from everything that surrounds you, onto that which is within—is the first demand which Philosophy makes of her disciple. The discourse speaks of nothing that is outside you, but solely of you yourself”.

⁴⁴ Andrew Weeks, *German Mysticism from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History*, SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 219. See also Ernst Benz, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, trans. Blair R. Reynolds and Eunice M. Paul, Pittsburgh Theological Monographs 6, Allison Park, Pennsylvania: Pickwick, 1983, p. 24. Benz claims that the “idealistic concept of the Self in Fichte is directly influenced by the theories of German mysticism of the Middle Ages”. In *The Secret Societies of All Ages and Countries*, Charles William Heckethorn expresses the opinion that “[t]he greatest philosophic thinkers of this and the preceding century have drunk at the spring of Böhme’s writings; and the systems of Leibniz, Laplace, Schelling, Hegel, Fichte, and others, are distinctly permeated by his spirit” (1875; rev. and enl. edn, London: Redway, 1897, vol. 1, pp. 205–6). This work was acquired by the PLNSW in the year of its publication.

⁴⁵ Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 196.

⁴⁶ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 173.

The non-ego (*Nicht-Ich*) to which Brennan refers in his article is part of a dialectic in which the ego engages in a constant striving, *Streben*, against the resistance, *Anstoss*, of the *Nicht-Ich*.⁴⁷ The *Nicht-Ich* is fundamentally *within* the subject. Nature as such is beyond the scope of the system, as “Fichte suggests that nature cannot be grasped by the I: when the I thinks it sees nature, it is merely encountering a ‘creation of the imagination’. The I is a subjective, self-enclosed center that exists in an ideal realm, separate from the real”.⁴⁸ Fichte emphasises that his system deals not with the individual self, but with the absolute self or the transcendental ego, “a supra-individual intelligence, an absolute subject”,⁴⁹ thus protecting himself against solipsism.

Kant’s transcendental self and Fichte’s absolute ego were both important models for early German Romantic ways of thinking about the relationship between the mind and the outer world. Like Schlegel, who reacted against the Fichtean non-ego as “the purely negative [. . .] foil or barrier with reference to which the Ego defines itself”,⁵⁰ Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenburg, 1772–1801) was dissatisfied with Fichte’s conception of the non-ego.⁵¹ An important passage in his short novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* describes the destructive effects of setting subject and object against one another:

Es mag lange gedauert haben, ehe die Menschen darauf dachten, die mannigfachen Gegenstände ihrer Sinne mit einem gemeinschaftlichen Namen zu bezeichnen und sich entgegen zu setzen. Durch Übung werden Entwicklungen befördert, und in allen Entwicklungen gehen Teilungen, Zergliederungen vor, die man bequem mit den Brechungen des Lichtstrahls vergleichen kann. So hat sich auch nur allmählich unser Innres in so mannigfaltige Kräfte zerspaltet, und mit fortdauernder

⁴⁷ La Vopa, p. 200. La Vopa points out that the term *Streben* comes from the Lutheran tradition, “evoking the ‘inner’ struggle for spiritual perfection” and that “it is not surprising that Fichte turned to it to evoke the dynamics of selfhood. He was not rejecting the model of spirituality in which the term had long been central, but recasting it” (p. 203).

⁴⁸ Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al., eds., *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, trans. Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 52.

⁴⁹ Frederick Copleston, *Fichte to Hegel*, vol. 7 of *A History of Philosophy*, New York: Image-Doubleday, 1962–7, p. 18.

⁵⁰ Mayer, p. 176.

⁵¹ Marshall Brown, *The Shape of German Romanticism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979, p. 152.

Übung wird auch diese Zerspaltung zunehmen. Vielleicht ist es nur krankhafte Anlage der späteren Menschen, wenn sie das Vermögen verlieren, diese zerstreuten Farben ihres Geistes wieder zu mischen und nach Belieben den alten einfach Naturstand herzustellen, oder neue, mannigfaltige Verbindungen unter ihnen zu bewirken. Je vereinigter sie sind, desto vereinigter, desto vollständiger und persönlicher fließt jeder Naturkörper, jede Erscheinung in sie ein: denn der Natur des Sinnes entspricht die Natur des Eindrucks; und daher mußte jenen früheren Menschen alles menschlich, bekannt und gesellig vorkommen, die frischeste Eigentümlichkeit mußte in ihren Ansichten sichtbar werden, jede ihrer Äußerungen war ein wahrer Naturzug, und ihre Vorstellungen mußten mit der sie umgebenden Welt übereinstimmen, und einen treuen Ausdruck derselben darstellen.⁵²

The separation of objects from the observing mind of the subject is correlated with a split within the subject, and the loss of the capacity to reunify inner faculties is seen as a kind of disease. On the other hand, the word “übereinstimmen” in the last line signifies a healthy reunification in which mind and Nature accord, harmonise, or correspond. Further light is thrown on Novalis’ sentiments by M.H. Abrams’ explanation that the Romantics thought of the Fall as separation from Nature:

[T]he radical and cardinal malaise of man, because it is both the initial cause and the continuing manifestation of his evil and suffering, is the separation with which consciousness and reflection begins [sic] [. . .] in the split, as it was variously expressed, between ego and non-ego, subject and object, spirit and the other, nature and mind. The primal fracture which results when man begins to reflect, and so to

⁵² NS, vol. 1, pp. 82–3: “It may have taken a long time before people thought of signifying the manifold objects of their senses with a common name and setting them in opposition to themselves. Through practice, developments take place, and in all developments divisions and analyses take place, which can appropriately be compared to the refraction of light beams. In the same way our inner self has only gradually split itself into such manifold powers, and this split will also increase with continuous practice. Perhaps it is only a diseased tendency of later human beings to lose the capacity to recombine these scattered colours of their mind and bring about at will the old, simple condition of nature or effect new, manifold connections among them. The more united they are, [the more united,] the more completely and personally each natural body, each phenomenon flows into them, since the nature of the mind corresponds to the nature of impressions, and that is why to those earlier human beings all must have seemed human, familiar, and companionable, the freshest originality must have been visible in their opinions, every one of their utterances was truly a work of Nature, and their conceptions had to be in accord with the world surrounding them and present a true expression of it”. Brennan quotes from *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* in the Symbolism lecture on Novalis (P, p. 108).

philosophize, is usually conceived as having two dimensions, one cognitive and the other moral. The first of these manifests itself in a split between his mind and outer nature, and the second manifests itself in a split within the nature of man himself.⁵³

Both the inner and the outer split described by Abrams are apparent in *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs*.

Novalis' novella emphasises the need for a restored harmony between human beings and Nature. In the second part of the novel, the objects arranged in a room speak of their desire for human beings to grasp the "inner music of nature":

"O! daß der Mensch", sagten sie, "die innre Musik der Natur verstände und einen Sinn für äußere Harmonie hätte. Aber er weiß ja kaum, daß wir zusammen gehören, und keins ohne das andere bestehen kann. Er kann nichts liegen lassen, tyrannisch trennt er uns und greift in lauter Dissonanzen herum. Wie glücklich könnte er sein, wenn er mit uns freundlich umginge, und auch in unsern großen Bund träte, wie ehemals in der goldnen Zeit, wie er sie mit Recht nennt. In jener Zeit verstand er uns, wie wir ihn verstanden. Seine Begierde, Gott zu werden, hat ihn von uns getrennt, er sucht, was wir nicht wissen und ahnden können, und seitdem ist er keine begleitende Stimme, keine Mitbewegung mehr [. . .]."⁵⁴

The sense of the harmony of Nature, the ability to carry a harmonising part with its elements, has been lost since the Golden Age. Marshall Brown suggests that the restoration of harmony, the bringing of reason into harmony, is the theme of the work as a whole:

The word *Stimmung* used by the playmate in reference equally to the unity of man with nature and to the emotional basis (the "mood") of this unity is perhaps the key to the whole story. The playmate tries to restore the apprentice's feeling for nature and for "the spirit [. . .] which surrounds you like an invisible beloved." He tries to recenter the apprentice in nature [. . .].⁵⁵

⁵³ Abrams, pp. 181–82.

⁵⁴ NS, vol. 1, pp. 95–96: "O! That man," they said, "could understand the inner music of Nature and had a sense for outward harmony. But he scarcely knows that we belong together, and that nothing can exist without the other. He can't leave anything alone, he divides us tyrannically and pounds away in noisy dissonances. How happy he could be, if he treated us kindly, and entered our great company, as it was once in the Golden Age, as he rightly calls it. Then he understood us as we understood him. His desire to become God divided us from him, he sought what we can neither know nor divine, and since then he is no longer an accompanying voice, a common movement".

⁵⁵ Marshall Brown, pp. 153–54.

The trope of musical harmony conveys the idea of union without conflation into one.

Both Schlegel and Novalis wanted to elevate Nature into the non-material realm by thinking of it as a *Du*, a ‘thou’ or intimate ‘you’. Schlegel proposes substituting a *Du* for Fichte’s non-ego. As Paola Mayer comments, “Schlegel objected to Fichte’s characterisation of the Non-Ego, proposing instead a live ‘you’: ‘Nicht Ich ein leeres Wort; es sollte Etwas heißen. Ich ist sehr gut, weil es das sich selbst Constituirenden so schön bezeichnet.—Die $\sigma\theta$ [Synthese] wäre dann ein Du’”.⁵⁶ In the Cologne lectures on the history of philosophy, Schlegel says:

Dies führte geradewegs zu einem *Glauben an ein Du*, nicht als ein (wie im Leben) dem Ich Entgegengesetztes, Ähnliches (Mensch gegen Mensch, nicht Tier, Stein gegen die Menschen), sondern überhaupt als ein Gegen-Ich, und hiermit verbindet sich denn notwendig der Glaube an ein *Ur-Ich*.⁵⁷

From the original ‘I’ develops a counterself which must be treated as a ‘you’. Subsequently the ‘I’ and this ‘you’ must be reunited, in “ein liebevolles Einswerden des *Ichs* mit dem, was der Gegenstand des *Ichs* ist, dem *Du*”.⁵⁸ According to Behler, Schlegel’s critique of the Fichtean model of the relationship of the ‘I’ and the ‘Not-I’ “can be characterised as an objection to making only the Ego the centre of ‘spirit, life, activity, movement, and change’ and reducing the non-Ego or nature to a state of ‘constant calm, standstill, immobility, lack of all change, movement, and life, that is, death’”.⁵⁹ Novalis too employs the concept of the *Du*. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the wise Sylvester says to Heinrich, “Nur die Person des Weltalls vermag das

⁵⁶ Mayer, p. 176, n. 170: “Not-I an empty word; it should be called Something. I is very good because it so neatly describes the act of self-constitution. In that case, the synthesis would be a You”.

⁵⁷ Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* (hereafter abbreviated to KFSa), ed. Ernst Behler et al., Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958–, vol. 12, p. 337: “This led directly to a *belief in a You*, not as something (as in life) to which the I is opposed, but similar (human being against human being, not animal or stone against human beings), but fundamentally as a counterself, which means that belief in an *Ur-I* has emerged”.

⁵⁸ KFSa, vol. 12, p. 351: “A loving union of the *I* with that which is the object [of love] of the I, the *You*”.

⁵⁹ Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, Cambridge Studies in German Romantic Literary Theory, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 191.

Verhältnis unsrer Welt einzusehn".⁶⁰ In *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs*, the relationship of a poet with Nature is described as an 'I-you' relationship: one of the novices says, "Wird nicht der Fels ein eigentümliches Du, eben wenn ich ihn anrede?"⁶¹

If Nature is regarded as a 'you', then a trope of marriage becomes appropriate for the reunion of mind and Nature, subject and object, which takes place in the production of poetry. In the *Allgemeine Brouillon* Novalis wrote, "Die höhere *Phil[osophie]* behandelt die *Ehe von Natur und Geist*".⁶² The young disciple in Novalis' *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* elaborates on the idea of a marriage with Nature in the following terms:

Er fühlt sich in ihr, wie am Busen seiner züchtigen Braut und vertraut auch nur dieser seine erlangten Einsichten in süßen vertraulichen Stunden. Glücklich preis' ich diesen Sohn, diesen Liebling der Natur, dem sie verstatet sie in ihrer Zweiheit, als erzeugende und gebärende Macht, und in ihrer Einheit, als eine unendliche, ewigdauernde Ehe, zu betrachten.⁶³

Brown comments of this passage:

With the proper love [. . .] an observer will recognize in nature neither the Fichtean object world nor simply a narcissistic reflection of his own desires and abilities, but another subject—an *alter ego* in the truest sense—to respond to him and confirm him in his sympathies

⁶⁰ NS vol. 1, p. 331: "Only the person of the universe has the power to apprehend the [system of] relations of our world" (the word *Person* has more strongly human connotations in German than it necessarily does in English). As René Wellek puts it, the Romantic conception of nature is "as an organic whole, on the analogue of man rather than a concourse of atoms" ("The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History", *Comparative Literature* 1, no. 1 (1949), p. 161). Hanegraaff points out that, in such a conception of nature, Romantic thinking at this point coincides with esotericism (one of the essential criteria for which, according to Faivre, is the notion of "living nature") (Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Romanticism and the Esoteric Connection", in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, p. 244).

⁶¹ NS, vol. 1, p. 100: "Does not the rock become a specific you, the moment I address it?"

⁶² NS, vol. 3, p. 247: "Higher philosophy deals with the marriage of nature and spirit".

⁶³ NS, vol. 1, p. 106: "He feels in it as at the breast of his modest bride and trusts only to her the insights he has gained in sweet intimate hours. I praise this son, this favourite of Nature, as fortunate, whom she allows to contemplate her in her duality, as procreative and productive power, and in her oneness, as an infinite, everlasting marriage".

for the world around [. . .]. The lover of nature feels that it is separate from himself, but also feels their “wedded” unity.⁶⁴

Thus, the sense that Nature represents the lost complementary self of an originally androgynous union and the tendency of Schlegel and Novalis to view Nature as “another subject” are both ways of rejecting the reduction of Nature to the purely material and advocating a reunion of mind and Nature.

* * *

The idea of a marriage between the human being and Nature, to be achieved in the creation of poetry, is of immense importance to Brennan. In his review of Victor Daley’s *At Dawn and Dusk* (1898) he says:

[T]hat Beauty which poetry would achieve, is a new creation out of the old and lasting matter—Man and Nature: both being fused together in unity, that the soul may confer on outer beauty significance and in return receive, what belongs to it by right of birth, all splendour and glory—a nuptial exchange.⁶⁵

This sentiment, expressed at the time Brennan was planning and beginning the Lilith sequence, is in close accord with Novalis’ notion of a marriage of the human mind with Nature. The terms in which Brennan speaks of the role of poetry in the achievement of this union indicate that he accorded to *poesis*, the production of poetry, a religious dimension. Poetry is “a new creation out of the old and lasting matter”. In his introduction to *From Blake to Arnold*, Brennan develops the notion of poetry as the vehicle of an exchange between, and a union of, the spiritual and the material:

Poetry is the evidence of the adequacy of the human soul to all that is beautiful: in it there is an exchange between the two, the soul receiving a body of beauty, and conferring on the material world true significance.

This I hold to be the fundamental imaginative act [. . .].⁶⁶

The trope of a “nuptial exchange” is used again in the Symbolism lectures. The repetition three times between 1898 and 1904 of the

⁶⁴ Marshall Brown, p. 155.

⁶⁵ P, p. 190.

⁶⁶ BA, p. xviii.

idea of a harmonious exchange between the spiritual and the material indicates its importance in Brennan's thought.

In his handling of the figures of Adam and Lilith in the Argument, it seems that Brennan was engaging in a theorisation of his own poetic enterprise. The lost, androgynous union between Adam and Lilith, a loss which dominates Adam even in the Garden of Eden (as well as beyond it), symbolises the gulf between mind and Nature, subject and object, perceived by the Romantics. The possibility of restoring intimacy between Adam and Lilith (in keeping with a single being, rather than two separate ones) is suggested in the lines "*close-dwelling, in the house of birth and death / and closer, in the secrets of our breath*" (25–26). Union with Lilith might represent the achievement of a higher self transcending the merely material, if it could be achieved.

In the final line of the Argument, the stars of Lilith's night are suddenly revealed. Her "flung hair that is the starry night" reminds us of the alluring but dangerous hair of Goethe's Lilith in the Walpurgisnacht scene of *Faust I*, which Mephistopheles warns Faust about:

Nimm dich in Acht vor ihren schönen Haaren,
Vor diesem Schmuck, mit dem sie einzig prangt!
Wenn sie damit den jungen Mann erlangt,
So läßt sie ihn so bald nicht wieder fahren. (2, iv)⁶⁷

Brennan's Lilith is not as unambiguously sinister as Goethe's. There is much in Martensen's description of the abandoned Bohemian Sophia trying to call Adam back to herself that illuminates Brennan's Lilith:

Nor was the relation to the maiden, the heavenly Sophia, in every sense abolished. For she, the heavenly, chaste, modest, and pure maiden, could not forget her favourite, her Adam. Sometimes she displayed herself to him by night as a constellation shining before him at an infinite distance, reminding him of the eternal, heavenly, paradisiacal regions, stirring in him wondrous yearnings and mighty thoughts. Sometimes she sought him at lonely hours, and met him in solitary paths; just as even now she seeks those true lovers who are willing to prepare for her an abode in their hearts.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ "Beware of her lovely hair, which is her only ornament. If she gets the young man with it, she won't let him go again soon."

⁶⁸ Martensen, p. 236.

Here is Adam's lost birthright, his higher power, figured as the heavenly Sophia, who constantly appeals to him through the beauty of the starry sky to restore the original androgynous union. Unlike Brennan's Lilith, this Sophia is uncompromised by sexuality and also unthreatening. As we have seen, however, the decline of Brennan's Lilith into ambiguity and threat has been caused by the suspicion engendered in the human mind because it fails to understand her and fears its own higher destiny.

There is a suggestion in the Argument, too, of the ambiguity of another snake-like woman, the alluring creature of "Le Serpent qui Danse" from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the *livre composé* by French poet and prose writer Charles Baudelaire.⁶⁹ Baudelaire's poem plays with ambivalence: the woman he addresses has eyes in which "se mêle / L'or avec le fer" (lines 15–16).⁷⁰ Her hair is like a "mer odorante et vagabonde" upon which the speaker sails "comme un navire qui s'éveille / Au vent du matin" (lines 7–10).⁷¹ The poem finishes by comparing the taste of the woman's saliva with a Bohemian wine, "un ciel liquide qui parsème / D'étoiles mon cœur" (lines 35–36).⁷² The final stanza of the last poem in the Lilith sequence extends the imagery of the last lines of the Argument and echoes the poem by Baudelaire: "All mystery, and all love, beyond our ken, / she woos us, mournful till we find her fair: / and gods and stars and songs and souls of men / are the sparse jewels in her scatter'd hair". Brennan's "scatter'd" echoes the sense of Baudelaire's "parsème", while "sparse" echoes its sound.

"The watch at midnight"

The extended vista of stars left as the final impression of the Argument is abruptly extinguished by the two words—"dead stars"—which begin the second piece, "The watch at midnight". The positive tone is

⁶⁹ Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Y.-G. le Dantec, rev. Claude Pichois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 1, 7, Paris: Gallimard, 1961 (hereafter abbreviated to OCB), p. 28: "The dancing serpent". The previous poem in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, "Avec ses vêtements ondoiyants et nacrés", also uses snake imagery for a woman. Brennan began reading Baudelaire in 1891.

⁷⁰ "gold mingles with iron".

⁷¹ "a fragrant and restless sea"; "like a ship that stirs in the morning wind".

⁷² "a liquid sky that scatters my heart with stars".

replaced by a sense of anxiety and doubt. Midnight becomes a “*granite cope*” in which the stars “*blindly grope*” and flight becomes impossible (“*the wing is dash’d and foil’d the face*”, line 4). Whereas the word “*cope*” can refer either to a cloak or to a vault or expanse, “*granite*” makes it clear that here it is a question of limiting the expanse, creating an impenetrable ceiling beyond which thought cannot extend.

Debts to Baudelaire and to Mallarmé are apparent in this imagery.⁷³ One of Baudelaire’s “Spleen” poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* begins “Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle”, conveying a sense of the sky weighing down like a lid on the spirit of the speaker.⁷⁴ In the second stanza of this poem, “l’Espérance, comme une chauve-souris, / S’en va battant les murs de son aile timide”.⁷⁵ hope itself is restricted in a similar way to Brennan’s “*dash’d*” wing. In his essay on Victor Hugo, Baudelaire writes of his subject’s treatment of heaven: “Quel que soit le sujet traité, le ciel le domine et le surplombe comme une coupole immuable d’où plane le mystère avec la lumière, [. . .] d’où le mystère repousse la pensée découragée”.⁷⁶ The ambiguity of the French word *ciel*, meaning either sky or heaven, allows the restriction of the physical sky to become a metaphor for a heaven whose mystery does not reveal itself to human speculation. In Mallarmé’s sonnet “Quand l’ombre menaçait de la fatale loi”,⁷⁷ the speaker’s dream (“*rêve*”) is vulnerable, in danger of perishing beneath the funereal ceilings (“*sous les plafonds funèbres*”) of the night sky (lines 2–3). The night becomes an ebony room (“*salle d’ébène*”) where the garlands (“*guirlandes*”) of the constellations contort themselves in a death-agony as they lose the meaning human mythology once imparted to them (lines 5–6). In Mallarmé’s *Coup de dés*, we find a wing which is “par avance retombée d’un mal à dresser le vol”.⁷⁸

⁷³ Brennan’s reading of Mallarmé began in 1893.

⁷⁴ OCB, pp. 70–71: “When the low, heavy sky presses down like a lid”.

⁷⁵ “Hope, like a bat, goes off striking the walls with its timid wing.”

⁷⁶ OCB, pp. 709–10: “Whatever the subject, heaven dominates, hanging over him like an unchanging dome from which mystery and light wing their way, where mystery repulses discouraged thought”. We know from the Symbolism lectures that Brennan was familiar with this essay (P, p. 55).

⁷⁷ OCM, p. 36: “When the shadow of the deadly law threatened”.

⁷⁸ OCM, pp. 370–71: “fallen back in anticipation of difficulty taking flight”. The two *Musicopomatographoscopes* Brennan produced in response to the *Coup de dés* were written in 1897, before the Lilith sequence was begun.

Gardner Davies takes the “wing” of Mallarmé’s poetry as a metaphor for nostalgia for the ideal.⁷⁹ Brennan, too, represents a state of mind in which the wing is “dash’d” and heaven closes in. A “watcher” (to whose “watch at midnight” the title refers) appears in lines 5–8, questioning whether his own imagination has created the sense of a restricted universe apparent in the first four lines: “*is this your shadow on the watcher’s thought / imposed, or rather hath his anguish taught / the dumb and suffering dark to send you out, / reptile, the doubles of his lurking doubt*”. In Baudelaire’s “Quand le ciel bas et lourd”, hope is defeated, and “l’Angoisse atroce, despotique, / Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir” (lines 19–20).⁸⁰ Anguish is a state of mind which Baudelaire conveys by imagery of entrapment and limitation. In Mallarmé’s “sonnet en -yx”, anguish is a lampbearer at midnight, which “soutient [. . .] / Maint rêve vespéral brûlé par le Phénix” (lines 2–3);⁸¹ rather than signifying only despair, as in Baudelaire’s poem, the sense of anguish for Mallarmé is the means by which dreams are sustained. For Brennan’s watcher, the “dead stars” are “*doubles of his lurking doubt*”, recalling the “*doubt of his garden-state*” mentioned in the Argument, which has become metaphysical doubt that anything is left of his “*eternity*”, his quasi-divine union with Lilith, but a “*wreck*” in “*the broad waste of his spirit*” (lines 13–14). The doubts, like the “*worm-brood of terrors unconfest*” that were engendered in the human mind after the rift between Adam and Lilith, are “*reptile*”: serpentine, creeping, perhaps recalling the “reptiles of the mind” in Blake’s “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”, although they do not refer to the same thing.

The sudden change from the sense of expansion at the end of the first Lilith piece to the contraction conveyed in the second could be indebted to Yeats. In his examination of Blake’s “Symbolic System”, Yeats discusses two poles or extremes, “the limit of contraction and the unlimited expansion”, or, in Yeats’s preferred terminology, “the personal and impersonal”.⁸² After his explanation of the Fall of the Bohemian mirror, Yeats suggests that Blake diverges from Boehme in refusing to attribute to “desire” the responsibility for the Fall:

⁷⁹ Gardner Davies, *Mallarmé et le drame solaire*, Paris: Corti, 1959, p. 50.

⁸⁰ “Anguish, terrible, despotic, plants its black flag on my bent head”.

⁸¹ “supports many an evening dream burnt by the Phoenix”.

⁸² WWB, vol. 1, p. 242. This is also discussed in Martensen, p. 126.

It was only when limited to its own narrow experience and divorced from imagination by what Blake calls reason, “its outward bound”, that desire brought corporeality to impede life in its action. This reason is the eternal “no” warring on the eternal “yes” of God, and the creator of the opaque, the non-imaginative, the egoistic.⁸³

The reference here to “the opaque” gives a useful insight into Brennan’s contrast between the expansive universe of stars and the “*granite cope*” which impends over the watcher.

Yeats goes on to describe Blake’s opinion of ‘reason’, not interpreted as ‘intellect’ but as the restriction of human consciousness to the input of the senses:

It closed up the forms and thoughts and lives within the narrow circle of their separate existence, whereas before they had “expanded and contracted” at will, hiding them from the light and life of God, and from the freedom of the “imagination which liveth for ever”.⁸⁴

In Yeats’s view, Blake’s rejection of the central role accorded to reason by the Enlightenment is personified in the figure of Urizen:

He is Reason, the enemy of inspiration and imagination. Urizen before he sought dominion as Reason was wholly subordinate and enwrapped in the divine fire and as such was a principle of spiritual or imaginative order, but separating himself from the Divine, as the cold light of the mind, he [...] was transformed into the cause of the formalism and deadness of unimaginative thought and of the rigidity and opaqueness of iron and stone.⁸⁵

Reason produces a retreat into materiality. Brennan’s image of a “*granite cope*” that restricts the penetration of the mind conveys something like Yeats’s “rigidity and opaqueness of iron and stone”. The change of imagery between the end of the previous poem and the beginning of this one produces the impression of a contrast between expansion and contraction that conveys a restriction of imaginative vision of the kind Yeats discerns in Blake.⁸⁶ Brennan’s imagery conveys not only the religious dilemma of a nineteenth-century mind for

⁸³ WWB, vol. 1, p. 247.

⁸⁴ WWB, vol. 1, p. 248.

⁸⁵ WWB, vol. 1, p. 252.

⁸⁶ Brennan deals with this aspect of Blake’s thought in the third Symbolism lecture. He says: “We are in bondage because of the contraction of our life. We have shrunk up into that matter, that body which is, after all, but ‘a portion of soul discerned by the senses’, and, forgetting that the senses are only ‘the chief inlets of the soul in this age’, we have put all our trust in them: ‘Man has closed himself up until he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern’” (P, p. 91). This

which faith in some kind of metaphysical Absolute seems simultaneously desirable and unthinkable but also the contraction of mind brought about by dependence on reason instead of imagination. In the light of Brennan's association of Lilith with the fallen Bohemian mirror, the contrast of imagery suggests that Lilith herself, symbolising imagination as well as Nature, provides a possible solution to the quandary in which the watcher finds himself. Like Blake, Brennan deals with the Fall in order to consider the present situation of human beings.

Brennan's reading of Blake would have lent support to associating Lilith with imagination. In *Jerusalem*, Blake describes "Imagination" as "the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus, blessed for ever", with which "Abstract Philosophy" is at war (Pl. 5, lines 58–9). Later in the work, Blake develops this identification of Christ and imagination further, suggesting, in a passage Brennan quotes in the Symbolism lecture on Blake, that Christianity itself is nothing other than the exercise of imagination:

I know of no other Christianity and no other Gospel than the liberty both of body and mind to exercise the Divine Art of Imagination—Imagination, the real and eternal World of which the Vegetable Universe is a faint shadow.⁸⁷

This is consistent with the Bohemian paradigm of imagination, the mirror in which are formed the creative ideas of the godhead being comparable with Blake's "real & eternal World". The contrast between expanded and restricted vision conveyed in the transition between the first two poems of the Lilith sequence supports the suggestion that the positive aspect of Lilith is a symbol of the human faculty of imagination.

"The plumes of night, unfurl'd" and the inner "abyss"

The third poem in the Lilith sequence, "The plumes of night, unfurl'd", plays a crucial role in the sequence as a whole, marked by the transition from italic to Roman type. Here, for the first time, a voice

lecture makes it clear that Brennan largely accepts the interpretation of Blake offered by Ellis and Yeats.

⁸⁷ Brennan quotes this passage in the Symbolism lecture on Blake (P, p. 94) as evidence of Blake's 'revolutionary' attitude to religion, since "he made art—which for him was one with prophecy, or the revelation of the eternal—the only means of salvation".

addresses to the watcher, as second person, a kind of sibylline prophecy. The quest for an Absolute existing above and beyond his own situation is condemned as futile. The voice warns that the Infinite is to be found not beyond but within, not in a different kind of reality beyond time and space, but in the midst of time and material being.

As the poem begins, night is experienced as a kind of death. The "plumes" waved by night over the watcher's head belong to the symbolism of funerals: "The plumes of night, unfurl'd / and eyed with fire, are whirl'd / slowly above this watch, funereal" (lines 1-3). As we have seen, funerary imagery is found in Mallarmé's "Quand l'ombre menaça de la fatale loi" and the "sonnet en -yx" (although Brennan's choice of imagery is different). Whereas the stars at the end of the Argument had a positive value and those in the second poem were "dead", the fiery stars which turn the "plumes of night" into peacock feathers are somewhat equivocal. The "vast" of the second part of this stanza, in which "no way lies open" and "a placid wall" seems to restrict the watcher, may refer to the sea, lying below the watcher as the night sky lies above. In the second stanza, the ambition of the watcher to bestow meaning on the hour by accomplishing something significant ("some throne thou think'st to win / or pride of thy far kin") is shown to be futile, like the attempt to draw water with a sieve, a task to which the mythical daughters of Danaus were condemned in Hades ("thy grasp a Danaid sieve", line 12). In the third stanza, the frustration of the preceding poem is revisited and the attempt to escape from despair by penetrating new metaphysical heights is condemned because "the heart eludes thee still".

In the fourth stanza, the outer abyss which the watcher has tried vainly to penetrate is matched with an inner abyss, "of this / the moment sole, and yet the counterpart". "Moment" can refer to a hinging point (usually in physics), a crisis or the distance between two poles. The outer abyss in Brennan's poem hinges on the inner, or the inner abyss is the critical point of the outer. The metaphor is not sufficiently clear to be fully imagined by the reader. An obligation is laid on the watcher: "thou must house it, thou / within thy fleshly Now, / thyself the abyss that shrinks, the unbounded hermit-heart". The sense of limitation, frustration and boundedness established in the second poem and the first part of this one may be redressed by finding "the unbounded hermit-heart". "Shrinks" is ambiguous: it could refer to the timorous retreat of the watcher or

imply that the abyss itself is reduced or brought under control by being embraced as an inner reality. As we learn at the beginning of the final stanza, the inner abyss, characterised by anguish in its “paining depths”, has its own heights and “vision’d shores”. It is, however, “uncrown’d”, not yet having been established as a ruling influence within the watcher. Therefore, it “implores” the discouraged watcher to turn his attention towards it. There will be no external resolution of the speaker’s quest, no answering voice from the universe; he must seek an answer within the limits of his own humanity.

If we wish to understand Brennan’s recommendation of a way leading through an inner abyss, we should start with one of his most important sources, Novalis. In the collection of aphorisms published as *Blüthenstaub* in the *Athenaeum*, Novalis says:

Die Fantasie setzt die künftige Welt entweder in die Höhe, oder in die Tiefe, oder in der Metempsychose zu uns. Wir träumen von Reisen durch das Weltall—Ist denn das Weltall nicht *in uns*? Die Tiefen unsers Geistes kennen wir nicht—Nach Innen geht der geheimnißvolle Weg. In uns, oder nirgends ist die Ewigkeit mit ihren Welten—die Vergangenheit und Zukunft.⁸⁸

Whereas human imagination locates the world to come in far removed heights or depths, Novalis suggests that the universe is to be found within ourselves, in “depths” of our spirit with which we are unacquainted. The way into the self is “mysterious”. Like Christ, whose claim that “the kingdom of heaven is within you” is reported in Luke’s Gospel (17:21), Novalis declares that the worlds of eternity, even the past and the future, are within us or nowhere.

We have already seen that Novalis was strongly indebted to Kant and Fichte for the notion of a transcendental self and its relationship to the external world. Such a notion did not begin with German pre-Romanticism, of course, and Brennan himself was familiar with a number of other ways of thinking that contributed over many centuries to the development of a notion of an inner transcendent self.

⁸⁸ NS, vol. 2, p. 417–8: “Imagination places the future world either in the height, or in the abyss, or in a relation of metempsychosis to ourselves. We dream of travelling through the universe—is not the universe within us? The depths of our spirit are unknown to us—inwards goes the mysterious way. Eternity with its past and future worlds is within us, or nowhere”. The extent of Brennan’s familiarity with Novalis’ aphorisms can be gauged from the fourth Symbolism lecture (P, pp. 108–113).

One route goes through Neoplatonism and the mystery religions; interest in these ways of thinking was revived by nineteenth-century scholars of mythology such as Friedrich Creuzer. Another route runs through alchemy and mysticism to Boehme, German Pietism and the philosophy and psychology of the *Frühromantik*. (As we have seen, some of these influences, such as that of the Bohemian notion of androgyny on Novalis, were quite indirect.) In antiquity, there are common roots in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, with which Brennan was also familiar. Taking a closer look at some of these ways of thinking provides an important context for understanding the reference to the inner abyss.

Brennan's notes draw heavily on texts relating to the mystery religions.⁸⁹ They begin "Hebr. Lil, night = mystery". There is a reference to the Homeric "Hymn to Demeter", which describes the founding of the most important of the Greek mystery religions, that of Eleusis. "Hecate, thinking tender thoughts" appears in the notes beneath the reference to the "Hymn to Demeter", in which Hecate appears as goddess of the moon, not yet "declined", to use Brennan's term from the Argument, into the patron of witchcraft she became later in history. Later in the notes Brennan says of Baubo, who appears in other versions of the Demeter story as the epitome of crudeness (as well as in the Walpurgisnacht section of *Faust*): "eternal hideousness: pass beyond the human focus and the central core is seen to be horror". He mentions serpents as a symbol of "old night" and comments: "Apollo's victory [;] observe he slew in the Python the *horror* of mystery, not mystery itself, for he too spoke in oracles and song". This grouping of associations suggests that an interest in the chthonic aspects of Greek myth and the mystery religions has contributed to Brennan's ideas of Lilith as symbol of night. In addition to the *Homeric Hymns*, Hesiod's *Theogony* and the *Orphic Hymns* were important sources of information about the mystery religions for Brennan. The hybrid Ceto described by Hesiod, half beautiful nymph, half monstrous snake, who gives birth, like Brennan's Lilith, to monstrous children and their descendants (Ceto's children include Cerberus, the Hydra, the Chimera, the Gorgons and the Sphinx), is clearly relevant to Brennan's Lilith. The imagery Brennan employs for the beauty of night also recalls that of a number of the

⁸⁹ See V, pp. 292–94.

Orphic Hymns, particularly those to Hecate (number 1), night (number 3), the stars (number 7) and the moon (number 9).

The Neoplatonist writers who succeeded Plotinus applied an allegorising hermeneutic to accounts of the mystery religions of antiquity, interpreting them in terms of the regeneration of the soul. Plotinus (AD 204 or 205 to 270) had taught that human beings are souls fallen away from the One through their desire for independence and differentiation. In Plotinus' account of the origin of human beings, we read:

[M]ay we not say, that prior to this subsistence in becoming to be, we had a subsistence as men in true being, though different men from what we now are, and possessing a deiform nature? We were likewise pure souls, and intellects conjoined with universal essence, being parts of the intelligible, not disjoined or separated from it, but pertaining to the whole of it. For neither are we now cut off from it. But even now, the man which is here wishing to be another [and better] man, accedes to the man which is there, and which finding us, (for we were not external to the universe,) surrounds us with himself, and conjoins himself to that man which each of us then was. [. . .] After the same manner we become both the man which is in the intelligible, and the man which is here. As long, also, as we continue to be what we were before, we are not different from man in the intelligible. But we then become different from it through that which we afterwards add to it, the prior man [which we received from the intelligible world] being torpid, and being after another manner present with us.⁹⁰

Of Plato's works, those of most interest to the Neoplatonists were the more metaphysical ones: the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium* and *Timaeus*. Plotinus' successors Porphyry (c. 232–early 300) and Iamblichus (end of third century–c. 326) drew on non-Platonic sources as well, particularly the *Chaldean Oracles*, one of a number of collections of fragments (including the *Orphic Hymns* and the *Sibylline Oracles*) which were available to those seeking sacred texts associated with traditional sources of wisdom. Iamblichus wrote a work on the Egyptian Mysteries, the *de Mysteriis*. Porphyry “equipped [the *Chaldean Oracles*]

⁹⁰ Plotinus, *Treatises of Plotinus; viz. On Suicide*, trans. Thomas Taylor, London: printed for the translator, 1834, pp. 40–42. We have no direct evidence as to what edition of Plotinus Brennan might have read, but it is likely it was a Greek or Latin text. The PLNSW held Adolphus Kirchoff's edition of the *Plotini opera*, with Greek text (Leipzig: Teubner, 1856). For the sake of consistency, Plotinus is quoted in this book in Thomas Taylor's English translation.

with a commentary harmonising their teaching with Neoplatonism, and for Iamblichus and the Athenian School they became the supreme authority, exceeding even Plato".⁹¹ Neoplatonism became the official teaching of Plato's Academy in Athens in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Luc Brisson describes how Neoplatonists opposed the mounting power of Christianity in their application of allegory to myth and the mystery religions:

A l'aube de l'ère chrétienne en effet, se développa avec de plus en plus de force un courant allégorique original [. . .]. Les mythes et les mystères doivent être considérés comme deux moyens complémentaires utilisés par la divinité pour révéler la vérité aux âmes religieuses. Les mythes apportent cette révélation par l'intermédiaire de récits, alors que les mystères la présentent sous la forme de drames. [. . .] Ce mode de transmission implique l'emploi d'un discours codé, d'un discours à double entente, qui s'inscrit dans la mouvance du secret, où tout se trouve exprimé par énigmes et par symboles. Le poète n'est plus de ce fait un philosophe qui s'ignore, mais un théologien qui s'ingénie à transmettre avec prudence une vérité à laquelle la philosophie permet un accès direct.

[L]es Néo-platoniciens déploierent tous leurs efforts pour établir un accord complet entre la doctrine platonicienne considérée comme une « théologie » et toutes les autres théologies grecques, celles qu'on trouvait chez Homère, Hésiode, Orphée et dans les *Oracles Chaldaïques*.⁹²

Porphyrus's reading of Homer's account of the Cave of the Nymphs (*Odyssey* XIII 102–112) in terms of the descent of souls into generation and their ascent as immortals is an example of the allegorising hermeneutic of the Neoplatonists and its promotion of the doctrine

⁹¹ R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, Classical Life and Letters, London: Duckworth, 1972, p. 105.

⁹² Luc Brisson, *Sauver les mythes*, vol. 1 of *Introduction à la philosophie du mythe*, Paris: Vrin, 1995–6, p. 10: "At the dawn of the Christian era a novel allegorical movement developed more and more strongly. Myths and mysteries have to be regarded as two complementary means used by the divinity to reveal the truth to religious souls. Myths provide this revelation through stories, whereas mystery presents it in the form of dramas. This mode of transmission entails the use of a coded discourse, a discourse with a double meaning, which comes within the sphere of the secret, where everything is expressed by enigmas and symbols. Therefore the poet is no longer a philosopher unknown to himself but a theologian who strives to transmit ingeniously, with circumspection, the truth to which philosophy permits direct access. The Neoplatonists put all their effort into establishing a complete accord between the Platonic doctrine as 'theology' and all the other Greek theologies, which one found in Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus and in the *Chaldean Oracles*".

of the spiritual death and regeneration of the soul. The notion of a coded or occulted message, and the desire to assert an accord among the sacred texts of antiquity that Brisson mentions, are important aspects of the Neoplatonic reading of the myths and mysteries and were taken up again by nineteenth-century scholars of mythology.

The English Romantics were able to read the works of the Neoplatonists in the translations of Thomas Taylor, a contemporary of Blake. Taylor translated passages exemplifying the Neoplatonic allegorising readings of Plato, the *Chaldean Oracles*, the *Homeric Hymns*, Homer's Cave of the Nymphs and the Egyptian and other mystery religions. In Brennan's own time, G.R.S. Mead and other members of the Theosophical Society edited and reissued various works by Taylor. Yeats used Taylor in his discussion of the Neoplatonist interpretation of Homer's Cave of the Nymphs in his essay "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1900), which Brennan knew, although not, of course, before writing the Lilith sequence.

The reading of myth and mystery as symbolic revelation of an ancient religious teaching established during the heyday of Neoplatonism from the third to the sixth centuries AD was given new currency in the nineteenth century by Friedrich Creuzer (1771–1858)⁹³ and his successors. Creuzer suggested in a study published in 1808 that Greek myths had to be interpreted with the aid of Neoplatonic allegorising readings, which saw them as accounts of the regeneration of the soul.⁹⁴ He had been influenced by the theories of Joseph von Görres (1776–1848), who argued for a higher truth that was common to the myths of India, Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, China and Greece, as well as to the German spirit.⁹⁵ Creuzer gave the ideas of Görres a more moderate expression, arguing like him that Greek religion derived from India:

Indian priests migrating to a spiritually impoverished Greece brought with them the high, pure monotheistic Indic religion in its originally pure symbolic forms. But to satisfy the ignorant popular Greek needs,

⁹³ Brennan mentions Creuzer in the article on German Romanticism (P, p. 386).

⁹⁴ Christophe Jamme, *Époque moderne et contemporaine*, vol. 2 of *Introduction à la philosophie du mythe*, Paris: Vrin, 1995–6, p. 67.

⁹⁵ Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680–1860*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972, p. 382. Joseph von Görres' five-volume *La Mystique divine, naturelle et diabolique*, translated into French by Charles Sainte-Foi (1854), was acquired by the PLNSW in 1885.

the symbols had to be adjusted to the crude native polytheism and demands for stories and myths. Still, the priests preserved and concealed the purer teachings in the symbolism of the mystery cults, and Creuzer found such traces in Orphism, in Eleusinian and Samothracian mysteries, in Pythagoreanism, or in Neoplatonism.⁹⁶

Creuzer was the first in the nineteenth century to distinguish the chthonic, Apollonian and Dionysiac cults among the Greek mystery religions.⁹⁷

In addition to the Neoplatonic tradition that the myths and mysteries concealed in allegory a secret doctrine of the regeneration of the soul, the traditions of spiritual alchemy, which taught the transmutation of the soul, were also important influences on German Romantic thinking about the self. These traditions were transmitted via the teachings of Boehme, but also through Pietism and the alchemical emphases of eighteenth-century Masonic groups. Alchemical doctrines regarding the regeneration of the self provide another important context for Brennan's reference to an inner abyss.

Boehme's notion that the individual is the site for the rebirth of God, for the expression of which he employed alchemical imagery, appealed to thinkers of the nineteenth century because of its potential adaptation to a secular notion of the self. Alexandre Koyré's *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme* explains the attraction of alchemical symbolism for Boehme, as well as Valentin Weigel (1533–1588) and Caspar Schwenkfeld (1489–1561), in terms of a salvation which is *ab intra* rather than *ab extra*:

Un trait commun unissait, en effet, tous ces opposants : pour eux, le salut, la justification, la régénération (la seconde naissance, *Wiedergeburt*) étaient et devaient être quelque chose de réel, quelque chose qui se passe dans l'âme *réellement*, quelque chose qui l'illumine, la transforme, la régénère *réellement* et *effectivement*. Pour tous la justification, à laquelle est subordonné le salut du pécheur, se produit dans l'âme même de l'homme, se fait *ab intra* et non *ab extra* ; l'âme justifiée est une âme purifiée ; une âme renouvelée. Il est fort compréhensible que rien ne

⁹⁶ Feldman and Richardson, p. 387.

⁹⁷ Creuzer's distinction between the chthonic, Apollonian and Dionysian was given its best-known expression later in the nineteenth century by Friedrich Nietzsche, whose *Birth of Tragedy* (1872) drew on Creuzer's *Symbolik* for this distinction and attributed the rise of Attic tragedy to the reconciliation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Brennan knew Nietzsche's writings well; evidence from his annotated copies of Nietzsche's works indicates the extent of his interested response, even though negative comments are made in the Symbolism lectures.

leur ait semblé plus apte à rendre, à illustrer, à symboliser, à expliquer et à saisir ce processus que les formules et les notations de l'alchimie. En effet, c'est que l'alchimie, sinon la conception grandiose d'une transformation universelle, la science qui explique comment, tout en restant lui-même « en un plomb vil l'or pur s'est mué », et qui enseigne d'autre part comment, par une « purification » qui le libère de ses impuretés, par une « calcination » qui brûle et qui détruit les éléments hostiles s'opposant à sa « régénération », par une « sublimation » enfin qui restitue au métal son éclat et sa vie primitive, le « plomb vil » finit par redevenir de l'or, qu'il n'a « au fond » jamais cessé d'être.⁹⁸

Koyré points out that Boehme followed the German mystic Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1327) in using alchemical imagery to express mystical ideas,⁹⁹ in his view, alchemy provided a conceptual and metaphysical apparatus for speculative mysticism.

Boehme further developed the alchemical notion of the 'seed' in the soul to express his elevated conception of the potential status of human beings. In its spiritual application, alchemy drew analogies between the development of the 'seed' of gold, thought to exist in base metals, into pure gold and the restoration of the 'spark' of divinity within the human being to its fullest, divine level. The idea that the spark is already within, waiting to be released, clearly appealed to Koyré, writing his study in 1929, not so many years after Brennan was following up his own interest in Boehme. According to Koyré, "c'est l'homme lui-même qui en soi porte son paradis et son enfer ;

⁹⁸ Alexandre Koyré, *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme*, 1929; Burt Franklin Research and Source Works Series 174, New York: Franklin, 1968, p. 44: "In fact a common trait unites all these opponents [Boehme and his precursors]: for them, salvation, justification, regeneration (the second birth, *Wiedergeburt*) were of necessity something real, something which actually takes place in the soul, something which illuminates it, transforms it, regenerates it *actually* and *really*. For everyone, justification, to which the salvation of the sinner is subordinated, is produced in the very soul of man, is achieved *from within* and not *from outside*; the justified soul is a purified soul, a soul renewed. It is completely understandable that nothing seemed to them more appropriate to express, illustrate, symbolise, explain and grasp this process than the formulae and expressions of alchemy. As a matter of fact, alchemy, on the one hand the grandiose conception of a universal transformation, the body of knowledge which explains how, while remaining itself, 'pure gold is transformed into base lead', on the other hand teaches how, by a 'purification' which frees it from its impurities, by a 'calcination' which burns and destroys the hostile elements opposing its 'regeneration', by a 'sublimation', finally, which restores to the metal its brilliance and its primal life, the 'base lead' ends by becoming gold again, which it never, 'fundamentally', has ceased to be".

⁹⁹ Koyré, *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme*, p. 45.

nous sommes ce que nous faisons de nous ; [. . .] le salut suppose une vie nouvelle, vie spirituelle, qui se prolonge et s'exprime dans la vie organique".¹⁰⁰ The notion of the latent divinity to be sought and found within the self was the point at which Boehme's thought could be readily secularised and assimilated to nineteenth-century interest in the unconscious.

Boehme is also an important source for Brennan's term "abyss". Boehme used *Ungrund* for the original nothingness, lacking any ground at all, from which the Deity developed. Martensen comments:

It may be noticed, from an historical point of view, that Böhme's doctrine of the Abyss is closely related to that of the Kabbala, which also commences with "God in indifference", Ensoph (not anything), out of which the varieties, the Sefhirim or Lights, then stream forth. It also reminds us of the Gnostic *Bythos*, the groundless Abyss which is wedded to Silence, the first *syzygy* in the Valentinian system. This *Bythos* (βυθός) the Gnostics designate as *προπάτωρ*, Father before Father, and as *προαρχή*, beginning before beginning. They thus conceive of God from the outset as *in potentiâ*, an obscure possibility out of which He evolves Himself into actuality.¹⁰¹

In English translations of Boehme, "Abyss" was used for the indescribable source of the godhead, from which issues the "Byss" or "Ground" of everything that comes into being. Martensen's comment illustrates the tendency, so apparent in authors from the turn of the twentieth century such as Edward Maitland and G.R.S. Mead, to compare and conflate currents of Western esotericism.

The "mysterious inner way" proposed by Novalis cannot be directly linked with Boehme's concept of the inner 'Tincture' that can bring about the rebirth, the *Wiedergeburt*, of the soul. Paola Mayer's study of the reception of Boehme by the Jena Romantics disputes widely accepted views of the influence of Boehme on Novalis, claiming that the reception was late and limited; Novalis was primarily interested in Boehme as a poet, as he is portrayed in the poem "An Tieck", dedicated by Novalis to the friend who directed him towards Boehme. Mayer notes that Novalis' previous exposure to the ideas of Neoplatonism, *Naturphilosophie* such as that of Paracelsus, and alchemy, as

¹⁰⁰ Koyré, *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme*, p. 46: "People carry their own paradise and hell within themselves; we are what we make of ourselves; [. . .] salvation entails a new life, a spiritual life, which persists and expresses itself within organic life".

¹⁰¹ Martensen, p. 123.

well as his familiarity with Sophia mysticism via his Pietist upbringing, meant that there was little new for him in Boehme by the time he began to read him in 1799 (Novalis died in 1801).¹⁰² Mayer distinguishes his reception of Boehme from the much more substantial reception by Schlegel and Schelling.¹⁰³

As we have seen, radical Pietism, such as that of Gottfried Arnold, was an important means of transmission of Boehmian thinking to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰⁴ This was true both in communities of believers and in Masonic and Rosicrucian groups influenced by Pietism. Arnold's *Kirchen- und Ketzehistorie* (*History of Churches and Heretics*, 1699) was widely read for generations after it was written; it was praised by Herder, and Goethe acknowledged its influence.¹⁰⁵ The foremost theologian of the Romantic age, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), had a radical Pietist upbringing and education, like Novalis himself, among the Moravian Brethren or *Herrnhuter*, a community founded by Count Zinzendorf in 1722. This group, like other radical Pietist groups, emphasised the inner life. Roger Ayrault comments: “le piétisme transplantait le miracle dans l'homme, dans l'ordre des faits spirituels, dans les secrets de la vie intérieure”.¹⁰⁶ Apart from the teachings of Boehme, Pietism drew on other esoteric currents, as Ayrault explains:

L'inefficacité relative des oracles bibliques dans le processus de la conversion disposait les esprits à recourir, pour le déclencher, aux antiques sources de connaissance qui recevaient un prestige évident de leur interdiction par les Eglises : cabalisme, occultisme, théosophie, magie, alchimie. Et comme elles ramenaient toutes à l'unité du monde créé, et notamment à l'identité du « dedans » et du « dehors », elles suggéraient de porter dans un « royaume des esprits » le miracle appréhendé au cours de l'expérience intérieure. A partir d'un repliement de l'être sur son moi le plus secret, le piétisme allait durant tout le siècle pénétrer d'irrationalisme l'ensemble de la vie spirituelle.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Mayer, pp. 78–79.

¹⁰³ See Mayer, chapters eight and nine.

¹⁰⁴ See pages 88–89 above.

¹⁰⁵ Mayer, pp. 37–8.

¹⁰⁶ Roger Ayrault, *La Genèse du romantisme allemand : situation spirituelle de l'Allemagne dans la deuxième moitié du XVIII^e siècle*, Paris: Aubier, 1961, vol. 2, p. 419: “Pietism was transplanting the miracle into the human being, within the order of spiritual phenomena, the secrets of the inner life”.

¹⁰⁷ Ayrault, p. 419: “The relative inefficacy of the biblical oracles in the process of conversion disposed people to turn to ancient sources of knowledge to initiate it, which acquired an obvious prestige because they were forbidden by the churches:

The apparent influence of Boehmian ideas on such writers as Novalis, therefore, must be assessed in the light of important indirect means of transmission, as described by Ayrault. Masonic and Rosicrucian groups such as the “Gold- und Rosenkreuz”, which was heavily influenced both by Pietism and by alchemy, were another important means of transmission of the doctrine, common to spiritual alchemy and Boehme, of the inner rebirth of the divinity within the soul.¹⁰⁸ By various means, then, Novalis and others became familiar with alchemical and Boehmian doctrines of the inner transformation of the self.

Historically, the notion of a “repliement de l'être sur son moi le plus secret” is pivotal in the transition from an outer to an inner Absolute. According to Georges Gusdorf, “[l]es penseurs romantiques, à l'âge du système du monde de Laplace et de la chimie de Lavoisier, sont revenus aux sciences occultes ; ils retrouvent un sens profond dans l'astrologie et l'alchimie officiellement délaissées”.¹⁰⁹ Further, the true Great Work of alchemy was the transformation of the self:

le Grand Œuvre ne limite pas son ambition à la recherche intéressée des techniques pour la production du métal précieux. L'alchimiste travaille à sa propre transmutation ; sa tâche externe est le symbole d'une chasse de l'être, d'une ascèse qui lui donnera la maîtrise de l'absolu.¹¹⁰

Ernst Benz explains that the notion of the centrality of the self in German Romantic thought and Idealist philosophy was indebted to mystical doctrine, especially the notion of the ‘spark of God in the soul’ employed by Meister Eckhart. He comments: “The absolute,

kabbalism, occultism, theosophy, magic, alchemy. And since they all came back to the unity of the created world, and notably to the identity of the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’, they proposed carrying into a ‘realm of the spirit’ the miracle apprehended in the course of experience. Setting out from a person’s withdrawal into the most secret self, Pietism was to infuse the whole of the spiritual life with irrationalism throughout the entire century”.

¹⁰⁸ See Christopher McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason: Eighteenth-Century Rosicrucianism in Central Europe and its Relationship to the Enlightenment*, Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History 29, Leiden: Brill, 1992, especially chapter 5.

¹⁰⁹ “At the time of the world-system of Laplace and the chemistry of Lavoisier, Romantic thinkers returned to the occult sciences; they rediscovered a profound meaning in the officially abandoned [fields of] astrology and alchemy.”

¹¹⁰ Georges Gusdorf, *Du néant à dieu dans le savoir romantique*, Bibliothèque scientifique, Paris: Payot, 1983, p. 398: “The ambition associated with the Great Work is not limited to self-interested research into techniques for producing precious metal. The alchemist works at the transmutation of his very self; his outward task symbolises a quest for being, an asceticism which will give him mastery of the Absolute”.

seen by philosophers of preceding centuries as in a transcendent hereafter far away from us, becomes real in the consciousness of man, in the mind conscious of itself, in the Self".¹¹¹ According to Weeks, Eckhart's "small spark" (*Fünklein*) is "the divine force [. . .] created in the image of the transcendent Godhead", the "highest and innermost part of the soul". Within the soul, the Son of God is "reborn again and again" in "an eternal Now [. . .] identical with the utterance of the eternal Word in John 1:1".¹¹²

The German word *Gemüth*,¹¹³ mind or soul, took on a special sense in mystical tradition. Eckhart's *Fünklein* was passed on to Johannes Tauler (1300–61) as the spiritual faculty of human beings, the *Seelengrund*, *Seelenfünklein* or *Gemüth*.¹¹⁴ In the *Naturphilosophie* of Paracelsus (1493–1541), the soul or *Gemüth* was seen as the inner opening to the invisible world, the part of the human being in which images are conceived.¹¹⁵ According to Boehme, the "divine image, our living mirror", dwells within in the *Gemüth*, "consubstantial with it but nevertheless separate from it".¹¹⁶ For Novalis, both the individual and the world had a *Gemüth*. In his *Teplitz Fragments*, we find an aphorism which defines *Gemüth* as an inner harmony of the spiritual powers, involving the entire soul: "*Gemüth—Harmonie aller Geisteskräfte—Gleiche Stimmung und harmonisches Spiel der ganzen Seele*".¹¹⁷ Poetry is, like philosophy, "eine harmonische Stimmung unsers Gemüths".¹¹⁸ After the end of the Golden Age, according to the *Hymnen an die Nacht*, "Ins tiefre Heiligtum, in des Gemüts höhern Raum zog mit ihren Mächten die Seele der Welt—zu walten dort bis zum Anbruch

¹¹¹ Benz, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, p. 21.

¹¹² Weeks, *German Mysticism*, p. 81.

¹¹³ For the sake of consistency the older spelling with a final "h", used by Brennan himself, is adopted here, rather than the modern *Gemüt*.

¹¹⁴ Weeks, *German Mysticism*, p. 96.

¹¹⁵ Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, trans. Christine Rhone, SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000, pp. 102–3.

¹¹⁶ Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, p. 141. For a discussion of Brennan's use of the term *Gemüth* in a similar way in his article on German Romanticism, see page 133 below.

¹¹⁷ NS, vol. 2, p. 613: "Gemüth—harmony of all spiritual powers—equable mood and harmonious interplay of the entire soul". Brennan glosses this aphorism as "highest mood and harmonious equilibrium of all the powers of the soul" (P, p. 388).

¹¹⁸ NS, vol. 3, p. 558: "a harmonious mood of our *Gemüth*".

der tagenden Weltherrlichkeit".¹¹⁹ According to another of Novalis' aphorisms, the visible world will be redeemed by becoming *Gemüth*: "Wird nicht die Welt am Ende, *Gemüth*?"¹²⁰ Schlegel uses the term *Gemüth* for the faculty of intuiting the spiritual, essential to poetry:

Keine Poesie, keine Wirklichkeit. So wie es trotz aller Sinne ohne Fantasie keine Außenwelt gibt, so auch mit allem Sinn ohne Gemüt keine Geisterwelt. Wer nur Sinn hat, sieht keinen Menschen, sondern bloß Menschliches: dem Zauberstabe des Gemüts allein tut sich alles auf.¹²¹

The magic wand of *Gemüth* opens everything. It is the supreme faculty of inner beauty and completion, surpassing spirit and soul:

Sinn der sich selbst sieht, wird Geist; Geist ist innre Geselligkeit, Seele ist verborgene Liebenswürdigkeit. Aber die eigentliche Lebenskraft der innern Schönheit und Vollendung ist das Gemüt. Man kann etwas Geist haben ohne Seele, und viel Seele bei weniger Gemüt. Der Instinkt der sittlichen Größe aber, den wir Gemüt nennen, darf nur sprechen lernen, so hat er Geist. Er darf sich nur regen und lieben, so ist er ganz Seele; und wann er reif ist, hat er Sinn für alles. Geist ist wie eine Musik von Gedanken; wo Seele ist, da haben auch die Gefühle Umriß und Gestalt, edles Verhältnis und reizendes Kolorit. Gemüt ist die Poesie der erhabenen Vernunft, und durch Vereinigung mit Philosophie und sittlicher Erfahrung entspringt aus ihm die namenlose Kunst, welche das verworrene flüchtige Leben ergreift und zur ewigen Einheit bildet.¹²²

¹¹⁹ NS, vol. 1, p. 145: "The soul of the world penetrated the deeper sanctuary, the higher sphere of the *Gemüth*, with its powers—to rule there until the onset of the dawning world-splendour".

¹²⁰ NS, vol. 3, p. 654: "Will not the world eventually become *Gemüth*?" It should be noted that Novalis' use of the word *Gemüth* can be interpreted in an entirely different way. Ernst Behler takes him to refer to the human mind, and especially its powers of language, when he draws analogies between the *Gemüth* and both poetry and nature (*German Romantic Literary Theory*, pp. 204–5).

¹²¹ KFSa, vol. 2, p. 227: "No poetry, no reality. Just as, in spite of all our faculties, there is no outer world without imagination, so also, even with all that the mind can do, there is no spiritual world without *Gemüth*. Whoever has only mind does not see the human being, but only what is crudely human: everything opens itself up only to the magic wand of the *Gemüth*".

¹²² KFSa, vol. 2, pp. 225–6: "Mind that is aware of itself becomes spirit; spirit is inner sociability, soul is latent good-humour. But the real vital power of inner beauty and perfection is *Gemüt*. One can have a little spirit without soul, and much soul with little *Gemüt*. But the instinct for moral greatness that we call *Gemüt* must only learn to speak and it possesses spirit. It needs only to be roused and to love, to become all soul, and when it is mature, it has feeling for everything. Spirit is like a music of thoughts; where soul is, there feelings too have shape and form,

Romantic psychologists of the unconscious were also interested in the hidden powers of the *Gemüth* (in its specialised sense), associating it specifically with the visionary states of dream and mesmeric trance, which were thought to liberate a higher self. In his study *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, Ellenberger connects interest in the *Gemüth*, which he describes as “the most intimate quality of emotional life”, with interest in “all manifestations of the unconscious.” He lists as examples “dreams, genius, mental illness, parapsychology, the hidden powers of fate”.¹²³ We have already observed the connection made by Du Prel between somnambulism and mystical vision, particularly the possibility of obtaining access to the transcendental subject in such abnormal states of consciousness. Brennan also had access in the NSW Public Library to Paul Carus’ study of psychology, *The Soul of Man* (1891), which includes chapters on double personality, hypnotism and somnambulism.¹²⁴

Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert (1780–1860), one of the leading Romantic psychologists of the unconscious, entitled a series of lectures “The Night-Side of Nature”, his title inspired by Edward Young’s *Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742–45).¹²⁵ In the lectures Schubert follows German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) in proposing the idea that the original or archetypal human being was designated as the reflection of Nature,

noble proportion and bewitching colouring. *Gemüt* is the poetry of lofty reason, and, through its union with philosophy and moral experience, there arises from it the nameless art which seizes the chaotic transitoriness of life and fashions it into eternal unity”.

¹²³ Ellenberger, p. 200.

¹²⁴ Paul Carus, *The Soul of Man* [Chicago: Open Court, 1891: title page missing]. In the early years of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schelling had suggested in his unfinished work *Die Weltalter* that sleep resembles other altered states of consciousness such as vision or mesmeric trance and facilitates the emergence of a higher self: “Why do all great doctrines so unanimously call upon man to divide himself from himself, and give him to understand that he would be able to do anything and could effect all things if he only knew to free his higher self from his subordinate self? It is a hindrance for man to be posited-in-himself; he is capable of higher things only to the extent that he is able to posit himself out of himself—to the extent that he can become *posited-outside-himself* [außer-sich-gesetzt], as our language so marvelously expresses” (F.W.J. von Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, trans. Judith Norman, in *The Abyss of Freedom and Ages of the World*, The Body in Theory: Histories of Cultural Materialism, Ann Arbor: University Press of Michigan, 1997, p. 163).

¹²⁵ Benz, p. 67.

the means by which Nature can contemplate herself.¹²⁶ Some of the content of these lectures (given in Dresden) and other works by Schubert reached Australia indirectly via Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature or Ghosts and Ghost Seers*.¹²⁷ As Crowe acknowledges,

There are two or three books, by German authors, entitled, "The Night Side," or, "The Night Dominion of Nature," which are on subjects more or less analogous to mine. Heinrick (sic) Schubert's is the most celebrated amongst them; it is a sort of cosmogony, and is written in a spirit of philosophical mysticism which is unpleasing to English readers in general.¹²⁸

Crowe quotes, in what is presumably her own translation, Schubert's idea that there might be a universal symbolic or hieroglyphic language of dreams, based on images:

"This symbolical language which the Deity appears to have used [. . .] in all his revelations to man, is in the highest degrees, what poetry is in a lower, and the language of dreams, in the lowest, namely, the original natural language of man; and we may fairly ask whether this language, which here plays an inferior part, be not possibly the proper language of a higher sphere, whilst we, who vainly think ourselves awake, are in reality buried in a deep, deep sleep, in which, like dreamers who imperfectly hear the voices of those around them, we occasionally apprehend, though obscurely, a few words of this Divine tongue".¹²⁹

This, a primary thesis of Schubert's major work, *The Symbolism of Dreams* (1814), suggests a fundamental affinity between dream and poetry. Schubert suggests that the language of dream and poetry may be the true language of the higher state of the self.¹³⁰

Novalis draws on the association of sleep with vision and the revelation of messages from the unconscious mind in the *Hymnen an die Nacht* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. In the former, night promotes the poet's visionary experience at the grave of his beloved, releasing in the poet his own "entbundner, neugeborner Geist" and allowing him

¹²⁶ Albert Béguin, *L'Ame romantique et le rêve : essai sur le romantisme allemand et la poésie française*, Paris: Corti, 1960, p. 104.

¹²⁷ The third edition of this work (1853) was acquired by the PLNSW in 1883.

¹²⁸ Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature or Ghosts and Ghost Seers*, 1848; 3rd edn., London: Routledge, 1853, p. v. Crowe notes (p. 14) that she also draws upon the works of Kerner, Jung-Stilling, Werner, Eschenmayer, Ennemoser and Passavant.

¹²⁹ Crowe, pp. 52–3.

¹³⁰ Béguin, p. 111.

to glimpse her “verklärten Züge”.¹³¹ This vision is described as “der erste, einzige Traum”¹³² which has changed night itself into a heaven lit by the beloved. Night is “geheimnisvoll” (mysterious) and “unaussprechlich” (inexpressible) as well as “heilig” (sacred).¹³³ Above all, night is “ahndungsvoll”; for Brennan, *Ahn[d]ung* signifies the divinatorial or prophetic power of intuition.¹³⁴ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* promotes dream as a means of vision. Although the father of Heinrich, the chief protagonist, argues that the days of “direct intercourse with heaven” by means of dreams have passed, the dream he recounts, and several significant and premonitory dreams experienced by Heinrich, suggest otherwise. In disagreeing with his father, Heinrich comments:

Ist nicht jeder, auch der verworrenste Traum, eine sonderliche Erscheinung, die auch ohne noch an göttliche Schickung dabei zu denken, ein bedeutsamer Riß in den geheimnisvollen Vorhang ist, der mit tausend Falten in unser Inneres hereinfällt?¹³⁵

If dream could pierce through that “mysterious curtain”, it would provide insights into the inner, higher world it concealed.

* * *

As we have seen, strong esoteric and mystical traditions, supported by aspects of pre-Romantic philosophy, underpin the idea of a higher self with particular imaginative powers that is regenerated after experiencing a form of spiritual death. In fact, the various lines of historical development we have traced, one from Neoplatonism to nineteenth-century studies of mythology, another from alchemy and

¹³¹ NS, vol. 1, p. 135: “liberated, newborn spirit”; “transfigured features”.

¹³² “the first, unique dream”.

¹³³ NS, vol. 1, p. 131.

¹³⁴ NS, vol. 1, p. 131. The word *Ahndung* (now *Ahnung*) is described by Brennan as one of the “*driving* forces of poetry”, the other being *Sehnsucht* (longing). Whereas the relevant sense of the modern *Ahnung* is a presentiment or foreboding of evil, Brennan glosses *Ahndung* as “a *Sehnsucht* that is beginning to become conscious of its *Etwas* and its *Woher?*, of its object and its direction” (P, pp. 388–89). In his translation of Novalis’ *Hymnen an die Nacht* in the Symbolism lectures, he gives “full of sweet boding” for *Ahndung* (P, p. 116).

¹³⁵ NS, vol. 1, pp. 198–99: “Is not every dream, even the most confused one, an extraordinary phenomenon, which even without [necessarily] thinking of it as having been sent from God, is a significant rent in the mysterious curtain which falls in a thousand folds into our inner life?”

mysticism through Boehme, Pietism, and Rosicrucian or Masonic groups to the Romantic psychology of the unconscious, are by no means unconnected. As Hanegraaff remarks, “Neoplatonism and Hermeticism were inextricably linked in the popular religious eclecticism of the second half of the 18th century, and it should be recognised that much of what the Romantics called Neoplatonism either belonged to or was perceived in close connection with the domain of esotericism”.¹³⁶

Novalis’ association of night, intuition, dream and vision provides a strong foundation for Brennan’s complex exploration of the watcher’s search for meaning. The syntactical arrangement of the final stanzas of “The plumes of night” places “thyself the abyss that shrinks, the unbounded hermit-heart” in apposition to “the mightier heart untold / whose paining depths enfold / all loneliness, all height, all vision’d shores” (lines 24–27). This intimation that there could exist a “mightier heart” that has not yet been sufficiently known to be described implies that the watcher is at a similar stage of questioning to the speakers of “The mother-deep, wise, yearning, bound” and “What do I know? myself alone”. The inner abyss is not represented as a definitive solution to the despair conveyed in the previous poem. The watcher is enjoined merely to entertain it as a possibility: “the abyss uncrown’d, / blank failure thro’ each bound / from the consummate point thy broken hope implores” (lines 28–30). Furthermore, the choric voice exhorts the watcher to accommodate that “abyss” within the constraints of everyday life: “thou must house it, thou, / within thy fleshly Now” (lines 22–23). Rather than rejecting material existence in favour of the spiritual, as some of its sources do, the Lilith sequence, as it continues, implies that the material and the spiritual need to be reunited.

¹³⁶ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998, p. 419.

CHAPTER THREE

ART AND SILENCE

In the remaining poems of the Lilith sequence (some so short as to be almost fragmentary, some very long), Brennan wrestles with the question of the unknowable Absolute, forging connections between Gnostic and Neoplatonic solutions to the problem on the one hand, and Romantic and Symbolist formulations of the issue on the other. Gnostic formulations of the original ‘nothing’, from which Silence proceeds as a primary hypostasis, are juxtaposed with the French Romantic *néant* and the Mallarméan ‘silence’ as the poetry explores what might precede discourse itself, and what capacities human beings might have to intuit it. The Bohemian paradigm of imagination takes its place as one important precursor of pre-Romantic and Romantic theories of art.

The Romantic view of imagination

One of Kant’s primary legacies to the Romantic period was the central role he gave to the imagination, and it is impossible to fully comprehend Romantic views of imagination, symbol and myth without understanding Kant’s contribution. As we have seen, his view that attaining knowledge of the three fundamental metaphysical questions via pure reason is impossible leaves us, at the end of the first *Critique*, with a conundrum. It appears as though human beings have no faculties at all for intuiting the “crude unknowable datum”, as Brennan puts it, of the noumenon.¹ Kant’s attempt to resolve this problem depends on the faculty of imagination, which he believes is able, unlike reason, to give expression to the Ideas of the noumenon. His *Critique of Judgment* (1790) in a sense transgresses the limits he established himself in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. James Engell argues that Kant, in developing his ideas on imagination, attempts to combine the approach of the British empiricist school with a stream derived

¹ See p. 63 above.

from Leibniz, Wolff and Baumgarten and influenced by Shaftesbury, Spinoza and Jacobi, a stream that “had a strong Platonic flavor and introduced Plotinus in earnest to German thought”.² Engell discusses as one example of the intense interest in the imagination in 1770s Germany the four studies of imagination by Leonhard Meister (1741–1811) and comments:

The roots of Meister’s theme run back through notions of poetical frenzy and religious mysticism, through Spinoza and Boehme, both of whom Meister cites, and into the religio-philosophical mysteries of the neo-Platonic, cabalistic, and Egyptian schools, all of which had been uncovered since the middle of the eighteenth century in Germany by systematic studies in the history of philosophy and the fine arts.³

Obviously the Platonic stream on which Kant was drawing owed at least an indirect debt to some of the thinkers whose work Brennan explored when he was creating the symbol of Lilith: Boehme, the Neoplatonists, and the mystery religions of antiquity.

Above all, Kant depended for his ideas about imagination on the work of Johann Nicolaus Tetens (1736–1807). In Engell’s view,

the works of Kant form an isthmus across which ideas passed and were transformed as they migrated from the Enlightenment to Romanticism. Kant added much, especially in his transcendental deduction, aesthetics, and the notion of synthesis. Yet he received the idea of imagination primarily from Tetens [. . .].⁴

The work of Tetens explores “how the psyche, through complex and interconnected faculties, relates itself to the outside world”.⁵ Tetens’ notion of a “split (*Kluft*) between the human psyche and nature” was at the root of the Romantic desire for reunification with Nature. Engell explains:

[. . .] Romanticism was to heal this gash. Tetens expresses the split in four ways: the mind and the world (nature), internal and external, the transcendent and the sensory, subjective and objective. These polarities later become pairs of those very “contradictions” and “opposites” that, for Schelling and Coleridge, only the imagination, or art, can unify and thus join the soul of man to nature.⁶

² James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 128.

³ Engell, p. 103.

⁴ Engell, p. 118.

⁵ Engell, p. 119.

⁶ Engell, p. 128.

The mystical notion of a reunification of Nature and mind had its counterpart in late eighteenth century psychology: imagination was regarded as the faculty which connects outer and inner worlds and makes it possible to intuit the noumenal world. Imagination creates images for Ideas; this faculty, rather than reason, is “our window on the intellectual world, a world in which reason is imprisoned until freed by the imagination”.⁷ For Kant, the imagination is a unifying faculty, the particular province of the person of genius, who gives expression in creative art to ‘aesthetic ideas’. According to Engell, “Kant works toward a concept of imagination that will synthesise the two strains of thought, empirical and transcendental”.⁸

Creative genius brings about the unification of mind and Nature by creating the “aesthetic idea”, which Kant explains in the *Critique of Judgment* in the following way:

[. . .] by an aesthetic idea I mean a presentation of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e. no [determinate] *concept*, can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it.⁹

Mary Warnock’s gloss clarifies this: “[c]reative genius [. . .] consists in the ability to find expression, although inevitably not complete expression, for the ideas which are to be apprehended in, or glimpsed beyond, objects in the world”.¹⁰ The imagination of the poet has the power to mediate between the phenomenal and the noumenal world, using the objects of the former as symbols of the latter. As Warnock puts it,

[. . .] the imagination, in its specifically aesthetic function, can present [an aesthetic idea] to us, not directly, but in symbolic form. The poet, Kant says, ‘transgressing the limits of experience, attempts with the aid of imagination to body forth the rational ideas to sense, with a completeness of which nature affords no parallel.’ It is through such symbolism that we seem to be able to breach the otherwise impenetrable wall between ourselves and the world of ideas. And this amounts to a kind of hint that we can after all penetrate the appearance and reach the reality behind it. [. . .] [A] tremendous weight is [. . .] laid

⁷ Engell, p. 126.

⁸ Engell, p. 132.

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. and ed. Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987, p. 182.

¹⁰ Mary Warnock, *Imagination*, London: Faber, 1976, p. 62.

on the word 'idea' as the name of that which as it were bridges the gap between reality and our thought of it; and as ideas are at least most nearly to be approached by imagination, a weight is also laid upon the word 'imagination'.¹¹

The role of the creative artist takes on immense significance. It is in the work of art that we proceed beyond discourse, beyond rational thought, to give expression to the noumenon. This is how Warnock explains Kant's view of the role of artistic genius:

Symbols [. . .] do the best they can by means of analogy and suggestion. What we perceive as sublime in nature, or what we appreciate or create in the highest art, is a symbol of something which is forever beyond it. The man of artistic genius is the man who can find new ways of *nearly* embodying ideas; and in his attempts imagination has a creative role.¹²

Kant's 'aesthetic ideas' "transcend the limits of possible experience while trying to represent, in 'sensible' form, the inexpressible character of the world beyond", according to Scruton.¹³ Symbols have the potential to bring about the reunification of the noumenon and the material world.

Imagination, the faculty for intuiting and expressing the unknowable, is located within the human mind. As Engell remarks,

With Kant, the stage was set in Germany for the entrance of the romantic faith in the imagination, for he suggests that this "blind power, hidden in the depths of the soul," affords the most satisfactory answer to the puzzle of man's relationship to nature and his ability to experience and react to nature as one unified being.¹⁴

Romantic writers such as Friedrich Schiller, Novalis and Schlegel develop the idea further. Schiller (1759–1805) agrees that art embodies the ideal, "not to be mistaken for reality itself but [. . .] a calling on reality to attain a higher state".¹⁵ According to Behler, Novalis was impressed by Shakespeare's description of the faculty of imagination in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (V, i), which he was reading at

¹¹ Warnock, p. 65.

¹² Warnock, p. 63.

¹³ Scruton, p. 88.

¹⁴ Engell, pp. 133–34.

¹⁵ Engell, p. 237.

the time he formulated his own notion of transcendental Idealism as the fusion of subject and object, real and ideal.¹⁶

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven:
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name. (lines 12–17)

Shakespeare gives powerful expression to the notion that imagination embodies ideas that cannot otherwise be conveyed. Schlegel says in the *Dialogue on Poetry* (1800) that it was in Shakespeare that “ich das eigentliche Zentrum, den Kern der romantischen Fantasie setzen möchte”.¹⁷

Schlegel links the transcendental power of poetry with the creation of mythology. According to one of the *Athenaeum* fragments, the essence of “Transzendentalpoesie” lies in “das Verhältnis des Idealen und des Realen”.¹⁸ The “Speech on Mythology”, which forms part of this work, claims that what contemporary poetry is lacking is mythology. Schlegel proposes that the project of creating a “new mythology” is pressing, and that such a mythology should encompass all the other arts:

Die neue Mythologie muß im Gegenteil aus der tiefsten Tiefe des Geistes herausgebildet werden; es muß das künstlichste aller Kunstwerke sein, denn es soll alle andern umfassen, ein neues Bette und Gefäß für den alten ewigen Urquell der Poesie und selbst das unendliche Gedicht, welches die Keime aller andern Gedichte verhüllt.¹⁹

According to Behler, Schlegel believed that Idealist philosophy in its development from Kant to Fichte could underpin such a project, which when fully realised would go beyond Idealism to produce “a new and equally boundless realism” (“ein neuer ebenso grenzenloser

¹⁶ Behler, p. 46.

¹⁷ KFSa, vol. 2, p. 335: “I would like to fix the actual centre, the essence of the Romantic imagination”.

¹⁸ KFSa, vol. 2, p. 204: “transcendental poetry”; “the relation between ideal and real”.

¹⁹ KFSa, vol. 2, p. 312: “The new mythology must, in contrast, be forged from the deepest depths of the spirit; it must be the most artful of all works of art, since it should encompass all the others, a new bed and vessel for the ancient, eternal fountainhead of poetry and even the eternal poem, which conceals the kernels of all other poems”.

Realismus").²⁰ In one of the *Ideen*, Schlegel says "der Kern, das Zentrum der Poesie ist in der Mythologie zu finden, und in den Mysterien der Alten. Sättigt das Gefühl des Lebens mit der Idee des Unendlichen, und ihr werdet die Alten verstehen und die Poesie".²¹ Mythology, for Schlegel, unites "life" with "infinity". In such a context, we can readily understand the rise of studies of mythology as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century, and the influence of scholars such as Max Müller.

At Christmas, 1894, Brennan was given a volume of the poetry of Keats, which he read intensively between Boxing Day and New Year's Eve. We can detect in his annotations, as he responded to Keats's representation in *Hyperion* of the Titans yielding place to newer gods, an important early formulation of the function of myth and its power to express humanity's most fundamental hopes and desires. Beside the speech in Book II where Oceanus refers to "a fresh perfection [. . .] / A power more strong in beauty, born of us / And fated to excel us" (lines 212–14), Brennan wrote: "The essence of the poem: for what other idea is presented to us than the passing of discrown'd dreams?" This comment suggests that, to Brennan, the superseded gods of old religious systems reflect human aspirations ("dreams") of former times. At the end of Book II, where Keats portrays the discomfiture of Saturn (line 391), Brennan wrote, "The most regal of dreams is the last to die". As Clark records, Brennan wrote a long note at the point where Keats's poem breaks off:

Was Keats at last conscious of the poet's secret? Certainly he has here wrung the secret out of an old legend, put there unconsciously by the race. Did he divine that the ascent from dream to dream was the life of man's soul, seeking to recover its remember'd heaven? Certainly he has written this idea; the dreams die, but their soul, the memory of that ancient heaven, Mnemosyne, lives for ever, inspiring each new dream in turn to seek its ancient wings.²²

To this he added his initials and the date, as if to record an important moment in his life.

²⁰ Behler, p. 162; KFSa, vol. 2, p. 315.

²¹ KFSa, vol. 2, p. 264: "The core, the centre of poetry is to be found in mythology, and in the mysteries of antiquity. Saturate the feeling of life with the idea of the eternal, and you will understand the ancients and poetry as well".

²² CB, p. 87.

As we have seen, Brennan's article on Mallarmé's "sonnet en -yx" speaks of the time when "the gods are dead" and "[t]he symbols have lost their meaning".²³ For Brennan, the midnight setting of Mallarmé's poem symbolises "the dead hour of the passing of the symbols", while the "nixie . . . défunte nue en le miroir" (lines 11–12) represents "a symbol into which man had put his soul, now passed out of her".²⁴ Again, Brennan seems to be finding common themes in Keats and Mallarmé: to him, both deal with the passing of old symbols and imply that those symbols need to be renewed or "read anew",²⁵ that each new generation must endeavour to give "wings" to its own dreams. As a late Romantic, responding to desires for the recreation of mythology expressed by both German and English writers of the Romantic period, and interpreting Mallarmé's Symbolist poetry in this light, Brennan must have felt that the project of recasting myth so it could give expression to the "dreams" of his own time was a crucial one.

*Five short pieces: from "The trees that thro' the tuneful morn had made"
to "The anguish'd doubt broods over Eden"*

The fourth poem of the Lilith sequence dramatises the problem of the dissociation of the natural world from its traditional symbolic role in myth. Like "The Watch at Midnight", it is a sonnet printed in italic type; this poem, however, is placed further down the page than the other, making it appear almost completely surrounded by blank space. As an utterance it is incomplete, finishing with a semi-colon which leads into the poem on the next page; this, together with the predominance of silence-signifying space, suggests fragmentation or incoherence, an impression which the last line with its punctuation signifying incompleteness ("commencing, failing, broken, scents or sighs:") conveys more overtly. Unlike the three preceding pieces, the poem is set at the onset of night, looking back at the preceding morning and afternoon. The octave establishes a setting in what is to become the Forest of Night.

²³ See page 35 above.

²⁴ P, p. 362: "nixie naked and dead in the mirror". Brennan himself uses the word *nixie* to translate *nixe*.

²⁵ P, p. 364.

The imagery employed in the first two lines intimates that a story, a myth, is suggested by light beams striking through the forest shade. The trees provide “bride-dusk” for the union of the “beams that pierce” and the “melting shade”. We think, perhaps, of one of the accounts in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: an assault by the god on a retiring nymph, whose initial resistance melts into something else, submission or perhaps enjoyment. This suggestion is supported by echoes of Mallarmé’s “L’après-midi d’un faune” later in the sonnet. Brennan’s “vision’d white / of limbs that follow their own clear delight” (lines 11–12), where the nominalisation of the adjective “white”, placed at the end of a line, adds emphasis, recalls Mallarmé’s “blancheur animale au repos” which “ondoie” “sur l’or glauque de lointaines / Verdures dédiant leur vigne à des fontaines” (line 29).²⁶ Mallarmé’s poem uses the verb “s’exhaler” (line 18) for the air emerging from the faun’s pan-pipes as he plays; Brennan uses “exhales” in line 13 of his sonnet.²⁷ Mallarmé’s faun carefully considers whether the nymphs he may have seduced (he’s not sure) might have been nothing more than the natural objects associated, in legend, with the nymphs, “un souhait de tes sens fabuleux”,²⁸ the final word drawing attention to the creative power of story-telling. The cold blue eyes of one could derive, perhaps, from a spring; the warmth of the other might be simply the breeze of a warm day stirring his fleece (lines 9–11). As Robert Greer Cohn shows, though, the faun proceeds to point out that there is in fact no water or breeze, so perhaps the nymphs do exist after all.²⁹

Later in the day the trees of Brennan’s poem are in “hieratic” or priestly mood (line 4), but their solemn self-assurance is disrupted by the coming of night. Brennan seems to suggest that the confidence of the natural world in its power to symbolise, to be the foundation

²⁶ OCM, vol. 1, p. 23: “animal whiteness in repose”; “undulates”; “on the glaucous gold of the distant verdure dedicating its vine to fountains”.

²⁷ Gardner Davies comments of Mallarmé’s use of the same word in “Toast funèbre” (line 17), “[l]e verbe *s’exhaler*, que les symbolistes affectionnent particulièrement, n’a si l’on supprime les nuances, que le sens de *s’exprimer*” (Gardner Davies, *Les « Tombeaux » de Mallarmé*, Paris: Corti, 1950, p. 32): “the word *s’exhaler*, which the symbolists particularly favoured, simply means ‘express oneself’, if one suppresses the nuances”.

²⁸ “a wish of your fabulous [in its non-colloquial connotation] senses”

²⁹ Robert Greer Cohn, *Toward the Poems of Mallarmé*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965, p. 18.

of a consistent system of myth, has been disturbed: the “foreblown wind” makes the trees “bow” before it (line 7). In the sestet, the Edenic “garden” which had concealed the whiteness “of limbs that follow their own clear delight” (line 12) begins to stammer something towards the “inaccessible skies” from which, as we know from the second poem of the sequence, no voice expressing concern will answer. The colours of daylight, “emerald depths”, “vision’d white” give place to the “black and ominous” appearance of the trees at night.

There are two separate pieces on the next page, the first in Roman type and the second in italics; one is placed at the very top of the page, the other about two-thirds of the way down. The first poem represents the inarticulate snatches of speech addressed by the garden, or the human beings within it, to the “mother” they are longing for. Dashes indicate where fragments are broken off, and all lines are end-stopped. Another dash finishes the utterance, indicating its tentative and incomplete nature. Although longed for as “crown for the lonely brow, / bosom for the spent wanderer” (lines 3–4), the mother seems to be hiding (line 2), “undiscoverable” (line 8), “too vast to find” (line 9). The reference to the “wanderer” recalls the “*wide / way of [Adam’s] travail*” after the expulsion from Eden mentioned in the Argument (line 15). The second piece is only two lines long. It ends with a semi-colon, introducing the speakers of the next poem, the “distant stars” who are “disdainful” of the other speakers’ efforts to find the “mother”. The stars appear detached, remote, having no particular responsibility to carry meaning on behalf of those on earth. Alliteration in the second line creates a symmetrical pattern (“distant stars”; “disdainful song”) around the central word “dropt”, enhancing the sense of detachment.

The longer poem in Roman type which follows (“They said, because their parcel-thought”) explains the stars’ disdain. In the first two stanzas, they record unsympathetically the complaint of the flagging seekers, and in the remaining three stanzas they scornfully condemn their failure. The speakers of “O mother, only” become “they” at the beginning of the first and second stanzas, an impersonal and dismissive form of address. Having complained that the mother is “too vast to find” in the previous piece, they are accused of “parcel-thought”, since they can neither expand sufficiently to encompass her nor pursue to its conclusion the contraction into inner space which the choric voice of “The plumes of night” has recommended.

In the first stanza of this poem, “they” can neither “her shadowy vast embrace, / nor be refurl’d within that nought / which is the hid heart of all place”. We know from the Symbolism lectures that Brennan admired Blake for his emphasis on inner, rather than outer, space. In *Jerusalem* Blake refers to the “Grain of Sand in Lambeth”, which has an inner opening “into Beulah”. With reference to *Jerusalem* 13, 30–55, Brennan says:

Observe in this how Blake contemptuously speaks of that “false infinite”, which is such a bogey for so many people, the infinity of astronomical space. The minute particulars are, for him, life and consequently real: the blankness of space is nothing. Expansion outwards is downwards, into the indefinite—which Blake hated; inwards, upwards. Thus it is that the divine vision is hidden in a grain of sand during the reign of Satan.³⁰

For thought to be “refurl’d” into “the hid heart of all place” it must abandon the outer “abyss”, according to the choric voice of “The plumes of night, unfurl’d”. The contrast between “refurl’d” and “unfurl’d” emphasises the reversion from infinite space to the inner infinite.

The “nought” which is “the hid heart of all place” is the ultimate negative.³¹ The Gnostic notion of the ‘nothing’ from which everything derives, the doctrine of ‘negative theology’ and the French Romantic concept of the *néant*, help to explain why a negative should take on positive value in this piece and in others to follow in the sequence. Hippolytus explains the concept of an original “nothing” in the Gnostic system of Basilides in the following way:

Since, therefore, “nothing” existed,—[I mean] not matter, nor substance, nor what is insubstantial, nor is absolute, nor composite, [nor conceivable,] nor inconceivable, [nor what is sensible,] nor devoid of senses, nor man, nor angel, nor a god, nor, in short, any of those objects that have names, or are apprehended by sense, or that are cognised by intellect, but [are] thus [cognised], even with greater minuteness, still, when all things are absolutely removed,—[since, I

³⁰ P, pp. 96–97.

³¹ The “nought” becomes a recurring motif in Brennan’s large *Musicopoematoscope*, appearing as the single word “O” on page [12], which becomes “the perfect circle of exclamation” on page [13]. This “O” is the only way the author can refer to himself, as “Shame [. . .] / forbids / nay / self-effacement / virginal [. . .] / refuses / to breathe / beyond the perfect circle of exclamation / the name”. Later, the nought recurs as the “zeros” which indicate the emptiness of the utterances of Brennan’s critics: “some casual vastitude / or emptiness / of mouths / whose rondure / attests / the zeros that would mimic speech” ([20]).

say, “nothing” existed,] God, “non-existent” (whom Aristotle styles “conception of conception,” but these [Basilians] “non-existent”), inconceivably, insensibly, indeterminately, involuntarily, impassively, [and] unactuated by desire, willed to create a world.³²

Logically, if the creator of this Gnostic system is to go on to explain the origin of man, angel, God, sense and mind, what precedes all of these must be “nothing”.

The doctrine of negative theology rests on different premises. Plotinus teaches that knowledge of God can scarcely, if at all, be put into words, resulting, according to R.T. Wallis, in “the rise of negative theology, the doctrine—common to mystical systems the world over—that words can tell us only what God is not, never what he is”.³³ According to Plotinus, the One is beyond both speech and knowledge:

On this account [Plato says in the *Parmenides*, speaking of *the one*] that neither language can describe, nor sense, nor science apprehend it, because nothing can be predicated of it as present within it.³⁴

For Kant the noumenon is beyond our rational faculties; for Plotinus, our inability to intuit the One reduces us to negatives. Pseudo-Dionysius contrasts the “affirmative method” of referring to God with the negative. Fran O’Rourke explains:

[...] in proposing the negative way, Dionysius argues [...] that we praise that which transcends Being in a manner proper to the transcendent itself, by removing from it every concept derived from finite being. [...] By the negative path, the soul first withdraws from the things that are akin to itself, and ascending gradually from these most distant attributes, continually denies ever more and more noble qualities; finally we remove even the most sublime as, strictly considered, being unworthy of God. We purify thus our knowledge of God as transcendent, and submit to him in an ‘unknowing’ (*ἀγνώσιω*) which is freed of all concepts drawn from creatures.³⁵

The way of “agnosia” described here is compatible with Brennan’s interpretation of the agnosticism of Spencer. The unknowable is by no means the non-existent, but its essence is beyond human cognition.

³² Hippolytus, p. 274.

³³ Wallis, p. 11.

³⁴ Plotinus, *On Suicide*, p. 111.

³⁵ Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, ed. Albert Zimmerman, *Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters* 32, Leiden: Brill, 1992, p. 15.

In his discussion of the concept of the *néant* in French Romanticism, Gusdorf argues that an “ontologie du néant” is by no means “un néant d’ontologie”, asserting that the “moment négatif caractérise la conscience fascinée par l’absolu ; elle refuse de le reconnaître dans des formes qui le trahissent plutôt qu’elles ne l’expriment”.³⁶ Negativism is a refusal to be limited by knowledge:

C’est le *oui*, l’affirmation positive, qui impose des restrictions à la pensée ou à l’œuvre ; toute détermination est négation. Le Néant romantique évoque la présence totale de l’Être sans restriction, dans son identité incarcérisable, avant que lui soient appliquées les formes restrictives de notre langage et de notre intellect. [...] L’Être Absolu transcende le connaître, et cette transcendance se révèle à la conscience des hommes sous la forme obscure d’une permanente dénégation.³⁷

The Absolute is not accessible to the logical processes of reason and discourse: the “dessaisissement du discours, marquant la limite de l’approche rationnelle, fait entrer la spéculation dans l’ordre de la mystique”.³⁸ We observe how the Kantian view that access to the noumenon cannot be obtained through reason has inspired the Romantic movement to seek out other ways of intuiting that which is beyond knowledge.

In these terms, we can understand the interchange in “They said, because their parcel-thought” between the stars and the easily-discouraged seekers after the “mother”. Whereas the “parcel-thought” of the seekers is looking everywhere for her, the stars apostrophise them: “O fools and blind, not to have found! / is her desire not as your own? / stirs she not in the arms that round / a hopeless clasp, lone with the lone!” (lines 9–12). The “nought / which is the hid heart of all place” may be encountered in the inner faculty of imagination, which alone is able to intuit the nothingness which is the Absolute.

³⁶ Gusdorf, pp. 115–116: “ontology of Nothingness”; “no ontology at all”; “the negative moment characterises the consciousness fascinated by the Absolute; [consciousness] refuses to recognise it in forms that betray it rather than express it”.

³⁷ Gusdorf, p. 116: “It is the *yes*, the positive affirmation, which imposes restrictions on the thought or the work; any determination at all is the equivalent of negation. The Romantic Nothingness evokes the total presence of Being without restriction, in its indescribable identity, before the restrictive forms of our language and intellect are applied to it. Absolute Being transcends knowledge, and this transcendence reveals itself to human consciousness in the obscure form of a constant denial”.

³⁸ Gusdorf, p. 116: “The disempowerment of discourse, marking the limit of the rational approach, introduces speculation into the order of mysticism”. For Brennan’s response to the notion of the *néant* as it appears in Mallarmé’s “Toast funèbre”, see page 180 below.

As the Lilith sequence proceeds, Brennan draws on his knowledge of Gnosticism to add 'silence' to 'nothingness' as attributes of Lilith and to continue the exploration of the quest for the Absolute. The last of the short pieces, "*The anguished doubt broods over Eden*", shows the watcher turning towards "*some olden word*" to shed some light on his inner malaise. As the succeeding poem plunges us immediately into a cosmology that has recognisably Gnostic dimensions, it seems sensible to take the "*olden word*" to refer to Gnosticism itself. Printed in italics, placed high on the page and ending with a colon, this poem suggests the loss of former significance, the inability to formulate a meaning. The night has only "rent banners" to display, old "trophies and glories whence a trouble streams", relating to "old dreams". The watcher's soul is challenged "out of its blank" (line 5), symbolised by the empty space on the page. In the second line Brennan employs Keats's adjective from "Ode to a Nightingale", "viewless". Brennan's night landscape, unlike Keats's, affirms very little, but the allusion to Keats hints that the creative power of the artistic imagination might have a part to play in resolving the dilemma.

"O thou that achest, pulse o' the unwed vast"

A number of much longer pieces follow. In the first of these, "O thou that achest, pulse o' the unwed vast", the speaker seems to be standing on the earth looking up at the sky. Presumably this is the watcher, who is now caught up in a debate about whether he truly belongs to Lilith's night sky or Eve's daylight earth. This is a particularly difficult poem to interpret, as Brennan's imagery is not always clear. Roman type indicates that the watcher speaks in the first person, for the first time contributing his own thoughts to the interplay of voices.

It is apparent at the outset that we are oscillating between the outer world and the inner world of the speaker: "now in the distant centre of my brain / dizzily narrow'd, now beyond the last / calm circle widening of the starry plain" (lines 2-4). The oxymoron implied in the phrase "the distant centre of my brain" suggests fluctuation involving an expansive and contractive movement, which is the "pulse o' the unwed vast" mentioned in the first line. This pulse is apparent in the movement of the "gulfs" of night that "break away to the dark" and then return to the centre (lines 5-10). This pulse, the inner drive or ache introduced in the first line, surpasses sexual

desire, “the hard throb of sun-smitten blood / when the noon-world is fused in fire” (line 10).³⁹ In lines 19–23, the “pulse” is imagined as a tide, pulling the speaker’s “deep”, “a tide that draws / with lunatic desire, distraught and fond, / to some dark moon of vastness, hung beyond / our little limits of familiar cause”. It would seem that we are dealing with metaphysical speculation, whose object, like that of imagination in Kantian and Romantic thought, is inaccessible to the “familiar cause” of discursive reasoning. We are “on the scatter’d edge of [. . .] surmise” (line 5), where everything is “vanishing utterly out of mortal trace” (line 16).

Gnostic myth seems to have influenced several important features of this piece. Clark argues that the following passage is indebted to the cosmogony of the Manichaean system:⁴⁰

where, on the scatter’d edge of my surmise,
the twilit dreams fail off and rule is spent
vainly on vagrant bands the gulfs invite
to break away to the dark: they, backward sent,
tho’ dumb, with dire infection in their eyes,
startle the central seat. (lines 5–10)

While the connection to Gnostic myth seems clear, the specific link to the extreme dualism of the Manichaean system is only partially supported by the imagery. Although the bands being pressured to break away to the dark are characterised by “dire infection”, a pejorative term, there is no corresponding “good” to provide the other half of the dualist system of Manichaean thought. Other systems of Gnostic cosmogonic speculation may be more relevant. The Docetae, for instance, attribute to darkness an oppositional role, while in the system of the Sethians, darkness is imagined as water in which the power of generation acts as a wind, stirring up waves from which new beings are created.⁴¹

The evocation of the “dark wings of silence” at the end of the first paragraph of “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast” also

³⁹ For a discussion of imagery of the sun at the height of noon and its association with sexual consummation in other pieces from *Poems*, see pages 203–04 and 215–16 below.

⁴⁰ CB, p. 131.

⁴¹ Hippolytus, p. 312. Hippolytus explains that the third Æon, “beholding his own distinctive attributes laid hold on collectively by the underlying darkness [which was] beneath, and not being ignorant of the power of darkness, and at the same time of the security and profusion of light, did not allow his brilliant attributes

has Gnostic overtones. In the Gnostic system of Simon Magus (who makes an appearance in the Acts of the Apostles), Silence is the origin of all the Æons, according to Hippolytus' quotation of the "revelation" of Simon himself:

[T]here are two offshoots from all the Æons, having neither beginning nor end, from one root. And this is a power, viz. Sige, [who is] invisible [and] incomprehensible. And one of these [offshoots] appears from above, which constitutes a great power, [the creative] Mind of the universe, which manages all things, [and is] a male. The other [offshoot], however, is from below, [and constitutes] a great Intelligence, and is a female which produces all things.⁴²

In the Valentinian Gnosis, Silence is the female partner of the original Abyss. Brennan is likely to have been familiar with this before the writing of the Lilith sequence, given his detailed notes on the different Gnostic systems represented in Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*,⁴³ and the ready availability of the primary sources for Gnosticism in the works of the Church Fathers, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Epiphanius, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen (the main source of information on Gnosticism before the finding of the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945). The system of the Ophites, followers of the serpent, also has an important figure of Silence. According to the description of Irenaeus, as quoted by C.W. King, the original One, "long utterly unknown to mankind", is "named Bythos, 'Profundity', to express his unfathomable, inscrutable nature". From Bythos emanates his Thought (Ennoia) or Silence (Sige), his consort, who in turn produces the Spirit (Pneuma) and the Wisdom from on high (Sophia).⁴⁴

The 'silence' of Brennan's poem is certainly also informed by his reading of the literature of Romanticism, in which silence is another aspect of the approach to the Absolute via negativity. That which transcends reason is inexpressible as well as unknowable, except by

[which he derived] from above for any length of time to be snatched away by the darkness beneath" (p. 312). The "spirit" that mediates between light and darkness emits a certain fragrance, while the darkness longs for both this fragrance and for the light. Certain aspects of Brennan's poem resemble these features of Sethian Gnosis. The tidal imagery of Brennan's poem implies that the dark of night is being thought of as water, as in the Sethian system.

⁴² Hippolytus, p. 209.

⁴³ See page 20 above.

⁴⁴ King, pp. 95-96.

means of the non-discursive powers of intuition and imagination expressed in symbol and myth. Gusdorf explains the “loi romantique du silence” by quoting the *Vers dorés de Pythagore* (1813) of Fabre d’Olivet:

L’homme qui aspire par le mouvement intérieur de sa volonté à parvenir au dernier degré de la perfection humaine ; et qui [. . .] s’est mis en état de recevoir la vérité, doit remarquer que plus il s’élèvera dans la sphère intelligible, plus il s’approchera de l’être insondable dont la contemplation doit faire son bonheur, moins il pourra en communiquer aux autres la connaissance ; car la vérité, lui parvenant sous des formes intelligibles de plus en plus universalisées, ne pourra nullement se renfermer dans les formes rationnelles ou sensibles qu’il voudra lui donner.⁴⁵

If rational forms of thought and speech are inadequate, Romantic poets are called to a prophetic role, mediating between the phenomenal and the noumenal worlds by means of symbolism rather than rational discourse. The speaker of “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast” finds “beyond / our little limits of familiar cause” (lines 22–3) the “dark wings of silence” (line 31); the experience is one which “no lip” (line 33) can share, no rational discourse put into words. Silence is represented as central in several other pieces in *Poems*: “*I saw my life as whitest flame*”, where the visionary experience of the speaker focuses on “*the carven silences / Memnonian in the hidden heart*” (lines 10–11), and “*Sweet silence after bells*”. The “silence” is explicitly associated with Mallarmé in the second-last poem of the Lilith sequence.

The “pulse” associated with Lilith directs the speaker’s attention to the “gulfs” which are “on the scatter’d edge of my surmise” (line 5), that is, beyond the reach of the senses, beyond conscious awareness. These “gulfs” (or “voids”, line 24) are an important focus of this first verse-paragraph. In lines 6–10, the gulfs incite what is on the edge of consciousness, where even the “twilit dreams fail off”,

⁴⁵ Gusdorf, p. 423: “The person who aspires to attain the final degree of human perfection through the inner movement of his will, and who has put himself in a state to receive the truth, must observe that the more he ascends into the intelligible sphere, the more he approaches the unfathomable Being (the contemplation of whom must constitute his happiness), the less he will be able to communicate the knowledge of it to others; since truth, reaching him in more and more universalised intelligible forms, could in no way be contained in those rational or sensual forms that he would want to give it”.

to lapse into unconsciousness. At the beginning of the next long sentence, which runs for the remaining length of the paragraph, we find what appears to be a question regarding the gulfs: “what will with me the imperious instinct / that hounds the gulfs together on that place / vanishing utterly out of mortal trace” (lines 14–16). Where we might have expected a question mark, there is a long, quasi-parenthetical explanation of “that place”, which is both “the citadel where I would seem distinct” (line 17) and “my deep / unlighted still” (line 19). It seems clear that this place is within the speaker, implying that the “gulfs” are inner gulfs; this supports my interpretation of the earlier “gulfs” as incursions of the unconscious into the conscious mind. If “still” is functioning as a noun, it could refer to an apparatus for distillation (possibly alchemical); it could also function as an adverb modifying “unlighted”. Because the line is not end-stopped, both readings are possible. The “still” (or the “deep”) is “unlighted”, again implying that it is beyond cognisance by the senses, particularly the sense of sight. This place, seat of the unconscious mind, is troubled by the “refluent sweep” of night, the “tide that draws”, the “pulse” of Lilith again. The tide operates powerfully on the mind, drawing it “with lunatic desire”. The vision with which the paragraph ends is introduced by “as though”. This is no achieved resolution, no final union with the Absolute. Instead, such an event is imagined, “as tho’ the tense and tortured voids should dash / ruining amorously together” (lines 24–5). The gulfs that at the outset have seemed to have a negative effect, and which the speaker has imagined himself “hounding together” in the middle of the piece, now become the site of generation, marked by the use of sexual imagery. When they “dash / ruining amorously together”, their destruction is “portentous” of the secret rose, the wings of silence. The speaker has been encouraged by the pulse, the inner drive, of night, to engender a creative act within the depths of his own unconscious mind.

This poem shares imagery of the inner deep and its gulfs with two poems from “The Forest of Night”: “The mother-deep, wise, yearning, bound” and “What do I know? Myself alone”.⁴⁶ The first of these uses the word “mother”, a place of origin of the self, to refer to the inner depths. The “mother-deep” (line 1) “haunts” the

⁴⁶ See page 50 above.

speaker (line 5), just as the “pulse” of Lilith exerts an unavoidable force on the human mind. It appears as a “grey unlit abysm” (line 5), like the inner abyss of “The plumes of night, unfurl’d”. In the second of these poems, the self is represented as “a gulf of uncreated night” (line 2), a place of chaos. Only the self has the power to create stars in the darkness of this inner chaos: “I seek the word / that shall become the deed of might / whereby the sullen gulfs are stirr’d / and stars begotten on their night” (lines 9–12). The “word” is fulfilled, to the extent that this is possible, in the creation of the poetic myth of Lilith, who seems to function as a meta-symbol, standing for the power of symbol itself—appropriately for a work of late Romanticism taking the form of a Symbolist *livre*.

Some of the references in the second verse-paragraph of “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast” are probably alchemical and Boehmian. Here we are taken back in time (“of old”, line 37) to an earlier manifestation of the “pulse”: the labour pains of Lilith as she gave birth to Adam. Adam addresses Lilith in the first line of this paragraph as “O mother thou or sister or my bride”. Metaphorical expression of this kind is used in alchemy, as Ronald Gray explains, to describe the relationship between the human being and the Philosopher’s Stone, Tincture or Elixir: “As the feminine counterpart of man, the Stone, which can be equated in many respects with the Sophia of Boehme and the Pietists, was also said to be related to humankind by bonds of blood and marriage”.⁴⁷ Gray explains that the Stone is “mother” in that the human being originates from it, “sister” in being present throughout his life, and “wife” in that the two must reunite in order to achieve perfection; and that “the sister may be compared to the divine spark believed by the alchemists to exist in all men [. . .]. The sister was thus in one sense a representation of the unconscious, allegedly divine counterpart within a man. To ‘marry the sister’ was to overcome duality”.⁴⁸ While there is no conclusive evidence that Brennan had alchemy in mind in his reference to Lilith as mother, sister and bride, the possibility that the Boehmian Sophia—which, we should remember, is also the alchemical Tincture or Philosopher’s Stone—has contributed something is strengthened by the occurrence of the phrase “dark fire” (“the

⁴⁷ Ronald Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist: A Study of Alchemical Symbolism in Goethe’s Literary and Scientific Works*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952, p. 222.

⁴⁸ Gray, p. 223.

dark fire thy foresight did enmesh / within this hither and thither harried flesh”, lines 49–50). In Boehme’s *De signatura rerum*, the polarities within the godhead itself, from which everything developed, are the “dark fire” and the “light world” (ch. iii, 4). The dark fire, therefore, is evidence of the godhead within, whose destiny is to be reunited with its origin in the “divine incest” with Lilith (line 44) for which Adam was created. Brennan’s imagery supports the identification of Lilith with the Boehmian Sophia, which was suggested earlier.⁴⁹

The “divine incest”, marriage with the “mother” and the “sister”, has the potential to be genuinely creative, to “wither up in splendour the stark night / and haggard shame that ceremented thy dearth, / with purest diamond-blaze” (lines 46–8). The “diamond-blaze” refers to the stars, symbol of creation out of the gulfs of darkness. We find stars figured as diamonds in the *Musicopoematographoscope*, where dead stars appear as “black diamonds”, their light cancelled.⁵⁰ It is clear that the lines beginning “wither up in splendour” refer to a future union rather than the original one, the latter having produced only abortions, the “worm-brood” of the Argument. The shame to which Lilith was subjected after the failure of the original union, her “dearth”, is to be “ceremented” or shrouded, that is, put to death, by this new union (line 47).

One of the results of the original union was the birth of Adam himself into material existence, alluded to in the following lines:

were thine of old such rhythmic pangs that bore
my shivering soul, wind-waif upon the shore
that is a wavering twilight, thence astray
beneath the empty plainness of the day? (lines 37–40)

In “The mother-deep, wise, yearning, bound”, “day” is, metaphorically, the restriction of perception to the evidence of the five senses.⁵¹ The inner “abysm” is barely perceptible to the senses, which impose a “mean inflicted schism / where day deludes my purblind wits”. The “empty plainness of the day” is, similarly, a life restricted to what we can see with our eyes.

⁴⁹ Brennan could also have encountered the “dark fire” in the Ellis and Yeats edition of Blake, where the Blakean “fierce impersonal energy—or wrath of God” is associated with “dark fire” (vol. 1, p. 254). This is itself consistent with Boehmian doctrine, which of course Yeats discusses with reference to Blake, although not at this point.

⁵⁰ Brennan, *Musicopoematographoscopes* [15].

⁵¹ See page 50 above.

Much of the remainder of the Lilith sequence refines the symbolic implications of “night” by setting it off against “day”. This is one important focus of the verse-paragraph which begins “Nightly thy tempting comes”, in which the night of Lilith, and the daylight earth associated with Eve, impose competing claims on Adam. Lilith’s tempting of Adam to renew the union with her appears as the disquiet aroused in Adam by the winds of twilight and autumn, “when the dark breeze / scatters my thought among the unquiet trees / and sweeps it, with dead leaves, o’er widowed lands” (lines 72–4). Adam is now committed elsewhere, “into dividual life” (line 80). He belongs to a physical world whose beauty, symbolised by Eve, draws him away from Lilith:

..... I am born into dividual life
 and I have ta’en the woman for my wife,
 a flowery pasture fenced and soft with streams,
 fill’d with slow ease and fresh with eastern beams
 of coolest silver on the sliding wave:
 such refuge the derisive morning gave,
 shaped featly in thy similitude, to attract
 earthward the gusty soul thy temptings rack’d. (lines 80–87)

The term “dividual” may be considered in the light of the monism of Hartmann,⁵² which suggests that the individual ego is merely phenomenal, and in the context of the theory of Arthur Schopenhauer on the principle of individuation, one of the most important sources of Hartmann’s thinking in this area.

Schopenhauer (1788–1860) suggests in *The World as Will and Representation* that the division of the phenomenal world into individual things is dependent on location in space and time, aspects imposed on the world by the perceiving subject. Christopher Janaway explains:

[...] what is the principle on which this division of the world into individual things works? Schopenhauer has a very clear and plausible answer: location in space and time. [...] Now if you take this view, and also think, with Kant, that the organizing of things under the structure of space and time stems from the subject, and applies only to the world of phenomena, not to the world as it is in itself, then you will conclude that individuals do not exist in the world as it is in itself. The world would not be broken up into individual things, if it were not for the space and time which we, as subjects, impose. [...]

⁵² See pages 25–35 above for Hartmann’s monism.

Space and time are the principle of individuation, or in his favoured Latin version, the *principium individuationis*; and there can be no individuals on the ‘in itself’ side of the line.⁵³

As far as it applies to the status of individual human beings, this principle implies that individuation is restricted to the phenomenological world:

[...] beneath [the world of appearance] lies the world as thing in itself, which is not split up into individuals, but just is *the world*—whatever there ultimately is. So the supposedly more profound view is the one which considers individuation to be ‘mere phenomenon’ rather than ultimately part of reality.⁵⁴

We can, that is, go beyond individuation to a deeper reality.

Brennan’s use of the word “dividual”, while almost certainly referring to the Schopenhauerian principle of individuation, should not be assumed to be anti-phenomenal as such. The next line in the poem associates Eve with the natural beauty of the earth, suggesting that the phenomenal draws Adam away from his true destiny in Lilith, but this point of view is itself qualified as the sequence proceeds. The Lilith sequence as a whole does not propose the abandonment of the sensuous in favour of a higher, imaginative, visionary self but the achievement of a higher self by the union of the sensuous and the imaginative.

Gnostic myth helps explain how Eve can be thought of as attracting “earthward the gusty soul thy temptings rack’d” (line 87). Some systems of Gnostic myth, resembling Boehmian cosmogony, employ a Sophia figure to explain how the material world came to be created from the divine. An important example is the treatise entitled *Pistis Sophia* (Faith Wisdom), part of the *Codex Askewianus*, translated into Latin in 1851 and into English, by Mead, in 1896.⁵⁵ This is how King summarises the adventures of Pistis Sophia in this work:

She, having once caught a glimpse of the Supreme Light, was seized with a desire to fly upwards into it; but Adamas, the ruler of her proper place, being enraged at this act of rebellion against himself, caused a false light, a veritable *ignis fatuus*, to shine upon the waters of the subjacent chaos which lured down the hapless aspirant, and she

⁵³ Christopher Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, Past Masters, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 24.

⁵⁴ Janaway, p. 83.

⁵⁵ Mead’s translation was not acquired by the PLNSW until 1902. We know, however, that Brennan knew of this work by 1898–99, because he thought of

was inextricably immersed in the abyss, and beset by the spirits thereof, all eager to deprive her of her native light. This doctrine of the admixture of light, derived from the Treasure of Light, with *matter*, its imprisonment therein, and its extraction and recovery by the appointed “Receivers of the Light” is the pervading idea of this revelation, to a greater extent even than in the Ophite scheme.⁵⁶

This luring down of the spiritual principle into the material is what Brennan is referring to when he says that Eve is meant “to attract / earthward the gusty soul thy temptings rack’d”.

Eve, then, is associated with the physical beauty not only of woman but of the earth itself. As we learnt in the Argument, she appears in the form which first belonged to Lilith, in order to entice Adam away from his first wife. Patterns of imagery connect her with the landscape as it appears in the morning. There is a strong implied contrast between the beauty of day (particularly morning) and of night. As the poem proceeds, we learn that morning is “derisive” because the optimism it arouses is never justified: “no dawn is shown that keeps its grace nor soon / degraded not to brutal fires of noon” (lines 90–91). Whereas physical beauty claims to be able to provide complete satisfaction, we have already learnt from “*The trees that thro’ the tuneful morn had made*” that the claims of the daytime garden of Eden to be “*self-sufficing*” are not to be trusted. The speaker’s disillusionment causes a reversal of feeling: rejecting the appeal of “scanty shapes that fly / in dreams” whom “I know not”, he decides to manufacture objects of worship himself, “to rule and mould / in mine own shape the gods that shall be old” (lines 105–109).

In the final verse-paragraph of this poem, the speaker counsels himself to “turn thee to earth” (line 133) and explain away as mere “cynic play” the call of the winds which “pass and repass” through his heart. Establishing his own security will, he hopes, make him impervious to the disquiet the winds arouse, and the ultimate expression of that security will be complacent and self-satisfied sleep:

Thou sleep, at least, receive and wrap me sure
in midmost of thy softness, that no flare,
disastrous, from some rending of the veil,
nor dawn from springs beyond thy precincts, rare
with revelation, risen, or dewy-pale

including a piece with this title in an early version of the Lilith sequence (see Wilkes, *New Perspectives*, pp. 17–18).

⁵⁶ King, p. 15.

exhaled from fields of death, disturb that full
 absorption of robustness, and I wake
 in placid large content, replete and dull,
 fast-grown to earth, whom winds no longer shake. (lines 139–147)

Sleep, he thinks, will be a certain defence against the disturbing influence of vision associated with Lilith herself. The pursuit of the “round of nothingness” (line 102) can safely be left to “the viewless dead” (line 101). Imagery of winds which challenge complacency and self-satisfaction is developed more fully elsewhere, above all in the Wanderer sequence.

“Thick sleep, with error of the tangled wood”

In attempting to escape in sleep from the inner drive that is Lilith herself, Adam has forgotten dream. The next poem, “*Thick sleep, with error of the tangled wood,*” returns to the italics signifying the choric voice. As we have seen, dream is associated with vision and the release of a higher self in Romantic psychology of the unconscious. Adam’s hope that a deathlike sleep will put an end to the promptings of Lilith and allow him to “*inaugurate his dullard innocence*”, to become “*cool’d of his calenture*” (a delusion-producing disease), an “*elaborate brute*” (lines 4–5), is falsely grounded. Instead, dream will open up “*the shuddering scope / and the chill touch of endless distances / still thronging on the wingless soul that flees / along the self-pursuing path, to find / the naked night before it and behind*” (lines 10–14). Here, perhaps, is an echo of Martensen’s version of the Bohemian Sophia, who “sought [Adam] at lonely hours, and met him in solitary paths”.⁵⁷

Adam’s soul is “*wingless*” in Brennan’s poem because he is immured in the forgetfulness of physical existence. In the myth of the charioteer recounted in Socrates’ second speech in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the soul is said to be originally winged (246 C). Beauty and other divine attributes nourish the wings, but “foulness and ugliness make the wings shrink and disappear” (246 E). Souls dragged down by ugliness lose their wings, taking on “a burden of forgetfulness and wrongdoing” (248 C), and it takes ten thousand years of metempsychosis to grow their wings again (249 A). The only exception is philosophers, whose superior status speeds up the process.

⁵⁷ Martensen, p. 236.

The doctrine of the ‘sleep’ of the soul after the Fall into material existence is common to Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and the teachings of Boehme. The Platonic ‘forgetfulness’ (*anamnesis*) of the soul after its birth into the world became part of Neoplatonic doctrine.⁵⁸ Taylor’s translation of Porphyry’s commentary on the Homeric Cave of the Nymphs includes a long note from the commentary of Macrobius (fourth to fifth century AD) on the *Dream of Scipio*, discussing the intoxicating drink imbibed by souls descending into generation:

For if souls retained in their descent to bodies the memory of divine concerns, of which they were conscious in the heavens, there would be no dissension among men about divinity. But all, indeed, in descending, drink of oblivion; though some more, and others less.⁵⁹

This is the drink of forgetfulness. One of the central teachings of Gnosis, according to Werner Foerster, is the doctrine that the soul “has fallen into this world, has been imprisoned and anaesthetized by it, and cannot free itself from it”.⁶⁰ The descent into generation is, however, regarded more unfavourably by Gnostics than by Neoplatonists (Porphyry suggests that divine beings enjoy their descent).⁶¹ As we have seen, the Fall into generation is also regarded unfavourably by Boehme. Sleep signifies Adam’s death as far as the heavenly kingdom is concerned, and his submission to the kingdom of the stars, that is, to fate. Eve is created in place of the lost Sophia, in union with whom Adam was able to procreate through the faculty of imagination rather than sexually.

In Brennan’s version, the sleep of forgetfulness or oblivion represents a deliberate choice by Adam, who wants to escape from Lilith’s relentless pursuit, after the Fall from union with Lilith has taken place and after he has been joined to Eve. In dream, however, Lilith settles on him even more heavily, her presence signifying death, turning him, in the manner of the Medusa, to stone:

⁵⁸ For a more detailed discussion of *anamnesis* see pages 237–39 below.

⁵⁹ *Select Works of Porphyry*, transl. Thomas Taylor, London: Rodd, 1823, p. 187. The PLNSW acquired this work in 1879. Porphyry’s interpretation of the Cave of the Nymphs was discussed on pages 53–84 above.

⁶⁰ Werner Foerster, *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*, trans. R.McL. Wilson, Oxford: Clarendon, 1972, vol. 1, p. 9.

⁶¹ Porphyry appeals to the authority of Heraclitus: “Hence, also, Heraclitus says, ‘that moisture appears delightful and not deadly to souls;’ but the lapse into generation is delightful to them” (Porphyry, p. 178).

*as tho' a settling of tremendous pens,
 above the desolate dream, had shed immense
 addition to the incumbence of despair
 downward, across this crypt of stirless air,
 from some henceforth infrangible attitude,
 upon his breast, that knows no dawn renew'd,
 builded enormously, each brazen stage,
 with rigor of his hope in hopeless age
 mummied, and look that turns his thew to stone.* (lines 21–29)

Death and nightmare (which anticipates death) take away all the optimism and defiance of Adam's earlier choice of earth and day over Lilith and night.

"Terrible, if he will not have me else"

We hear the voice of Lilith herself for the first time in "Terrible, if he will not have me else". In the first verse-paragraph, she claims that she can subvert Adam's attempt to find a "refuge in his inner deep / of love, and soften'd fire, and quicken'd sleep" (lines 19–20). The beauty of Adam's bride is figured as an "incarnate bright / and natural rose" (lines 4–5), whose perfume overflows the limits normally imposed by the physical senses and "saturates the dusk with secret gold" (line 9): one focus of Adam's quest is human love. Religious faith, the other focus, is symbolised by another rose, the paradisaical rose of Dante, emblem of a kind of eternity not dependent on Lilith. The imagery by no means suggests that the human bride, or Adam's love for her, is unworthy. This love, however, is not immune from the inner dissatisfaction that "can bring that icy want even to the heart / of his most secret bliss" (lines 23–4).

Critics have drawn a number of inferences regarding the sexual aspect of Brennan's marriage from the next verse-paragraph, beginning "Lo now, beneath the watch of knitted boughs". The crucial passage is this one:

he shall not know her nor her gentle ways
 nor rest, content, by her sufficing source,
 but, under stress of the veil'd stars, shall force
 her simple bloom to perilous delight
 adulterate with pain, some nameless night
 stain'd with miasm of flesh become a tomb:
 then baffled hope, some torch o' the blood to illumine
 and flush the jewel hid beyond all height,

and sombre rage that burst the holy bourne
of garden-joy, murdering innocence,
and the distraught desire to bring a kiss
unto the fleeting centre of the abyss,
discovering the eternal lack, shall spurn
even that sun-god's garden of pure sense,
not wisely wasted with insensate will. (lines 44–58)

McAuley takes these lines to be “Brennan’s near-avowal of what really went wrong” with his marriage, “at the level of erotic experience”. The following is his “considered paraphrase of this dense, convoluted, and abominable passage”:

I think Brennan is saying: ‘My wife was virginal and unready. The marriage was a disaster of Miltonic proportions. The act of love became a bloody obscenity of force and pain, her flesh becoming a tomb of love. The total disappointment of my superheated ardour of sensual expectation, when no answering ardour was generated, became a sombre rage to violate her baulking purity and innocence; but all it could achieve was the realization of an irremediable lack; so that the marital paradise I had hoped for became a ravaged wasteland’.⁶²

Clark’s reaction is more restrained, but along the same lines:

The general outline of ‘See now the time’, and the underlying situation in ‘Lilith’, indicate that Brennan rapidly came to feel his marriage was in some basic sense a failure; a particular passage in ‘Lilith’ may represent a disguised account of what precisely happened to give him this feeling.⁶³

Both McAuley and Clark, then, take the passage to refer to, or at least to betray evidence of, the sexual relationship of the poet and his wife.

Several considerations contest the plausibility of these readings of Brennan’s text. As we will see, the symbolism of the verse-paragraph associates Eve with morning, innocence and water. This pattern of imagery is consistent with what is established before, and continued after, this passage. It implies that the aspect of Eden represented by Eve is not one which can be maintained; morning must of necessity give way to noon and later to night, as the fourth poem of the sequence has already demonstrated. The symbolic patterns of the Lilith sequence show that the violent disruption of the innocence of

⁶² McAuley, “The Erotic Theme in Brennan”, *Quadrant* 12, no. 6 (1968), p. 14.

⁶³ CB, p. 119.

Eden by human sexual drives is inevitable (Lilith has preceded Eve). This pattern is characteristic not only of the Lilith sequence but of *Poems* as a whole. Whereas the Lilith sequence was written after Brennan's marriage in December 1897, "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude", which portrays the fresh innocence of spring being rudely raped by the sexual heat of summer, was written several months before the marriage and therefore cannot be taken as evidence of the failure of the sexual aspect of that marriage in its early period.⁶⁴

We have already met Eve as the "woman" of "O thou that achest, pulse o' the unwed vast". She appears there in a somewhat negative light, having been assigned to Adam as a "refuge" by the "derisive morning", which does not fulfil the expectations it arouses. She is associated with morning again in the following lines from "Terrible, if he will not":

Lo now, beneath the watch of knitted boughs
 he lies, close-folded to his newer spouse,
 creature of morn, that hath ordain'd its fresh
 dew and cool glimmer in her crystal flesh
 sweetly be mix'd, with quicken'd breath of leaves
 and the still charm the spotless dawning weaves. (lines 27–32)

Here Eve is associated with the coolness, dew and stillness of dawn. Lilith opposes to this coolness the memory of "the forces of tremendous passion" (line 37) that Adam has experienced with her. We must remember that Eve is being described by the voice of Lilith, her adversary. In spite of this, the representation of Eve is positive. We find "the soft face of her" (line 39), "the quiet waters of her gaze" (line 41), "her gentle ways" (line 44) and "her sufficing source" (line 45). In addition to this, "her simple bloom" (line 47) suggests the innocence which is spelt out in line 53, where we find that the feelings aroused in Adam by Lilith's interference will "burst the holy bourne / of garden-joy, murdering innocence", the innocence characteristic of the union Adam and Eve share. Thus, a consistent pattern of imagery associates Eve with the morning, the dawn, as a time of innocent and simple beauty. Eve is just as much the symbol of a time of day as Lilith, "Lady of Night".⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Elisabeth Werth arrived in Australia only six days before she and Brennan were married.

⁶⁵ In *Les Dieux antiques*, Mallarmé suggests that the innocent maidens of myth, left behind or seduced by their heroes, are symbols of dawn or springtime. See discussion beginning on page 148 below.

In addition to the trope of morning innocence, there is also a consistent pattern of water imagery associated with Eve. In her first appearance in “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast”, she appears as “a flowery pasture fenced and soft with streams, / fill’d with slow ease and fresh with eastern beams / of coolest silver on the sliding wave” (lines 82–84). As we have seen, the dew of dawn and the “cool glimmer” of early morning light on water are mirrored in Eve’s “crystal flesh” in “Terrible, if he will not”. The “sufficing source” of Eve could be a water-source or spring. The “quiet waters of her gaze” are undercut by the “siren-lure” which they reflect, that is, Lilith herself in the guise of a water-sprite like Melusine, mentioned in the Argument.

Among the water-spirits Brennan had in mind in writing the Lilith sequence, according to his notes, is Undine, the heroine of Fouqué’s story of the same name (1811). Like all elemental spirits, Undine lacks a soul, which she can only gain by giving up her virginity for the sake of marriage with a human being. As an elemental spirit of water, Undine is also, in Fouqué’s story, a symbol of Nature itself, lacking a soul and needing to acquire one by being united with humanity. Her character is transformed when she acquires a soul, making her stand out from the other (purely human) characters, especially Bertalda, her rival for her husband’s love, as she becomes more humane than they are. The story could be interpreted in terms of the “I-You” relationship between human beings and Nature proposed by Schlegel and Novalis.

Brennan brings his interpretation of the story of Undine to Mallarmé’s “sonnet en -yx”, illuminating in the process his own use of Undine as a symbol. Speaking of the nixie, depicted on the mirror-frame in Mallarmé’s poem being attacked by unicorns and appearing dead in the mirror, he says, “[t]he couchant unicorn is, in art, the symbol of virginity: a water-sprite, having no soul, must, to obtain one, give up her maidenhead to a mortal (Fouqué, Undine)”.⁶⁶ It is clear that the bestowal of a soul on the elemental spirit is an essential aspect of the story for Brennan. He reads Undine as a symbol of “[t]he instinctive innocent soul” that “knows nought of the ills of life” until “‘stung with the splendour’ of a higher sphere”.⁶⁷ He goes on:

⁶⁶ P, p. 362.

⁶⁷ P, p. 362.

Once that virginity is lost [such souls] rise up like unicorns, snorting fire. Undine has learnt sorrow: her classic prototype was Kallisto—fairest of the fair—the Arkadian nymph whom Artemis cast out [. . .]: but he raised her to glory in the skies as the great constellation of the north, the Bear.⁶⁸

Thus, to Brennan, Undine symbolises innocence, which requires a soul and which acquires that soul by suffering the loss of virginity in experiencing “the ills of life”, that is, in moving from innocence to experience.

The association of Brennan’s Eve with water and water-brides, as well as with the innocence of early morning, makes it logical to consider her in relation to such readings of Undine, even though it is Lilith, and not Eve, who is associated with the water-brides in the Argument. Such an association is supported by the suggestion that the lure of Lilith is inherent in “the quiet waters of [Eve’s] gaze” (line 42), a suggestion further developed in the following paragraph where Lilith speaks of “water-brides, swift blight to them that see, because the waters are to mirror me” (lines 74–5). It is clear that Lilith and Eve cannot be entirely separated. Because of this, Adam’s attempt to find sufficient the purely physical life represented by his choice of “earth” at the end of “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast” is not going to save him from the overtures of Lilith, who lurks within the gaze of Eve.

Thus the innocence of Eve will never be able to satisfy Adam. He will be driven to violate that innocence as he succumbs to his inner sexual drive, and this is the process described in the lines McAuley found so distasteful. The voice is Lilith’s. She does not, as we might expect, express glee over the violation of Eve’s innocence, but disapproval. This is particularly clear in the last few lines, where it is suggested that the “sun-god’s garden of pure sense” is “not wisely wasted with insensate will”. Adam will drive the relationship with Eve beyond what can reasonably be expected of it, hoping that sexual ecstasy will be the pathway to spiritual ecstasy. Eve, however, who has been associated with the physical beauty of the earth, offers a “garden of pure sense” that is only destroyed (“wasted” in the sense of ‘laid waste’ as well as the more usual sense) by such an

⁶⁸ P, pp. 362–63.

expectation. This “garden of pure sense”, it is intimated in these lines, has its own value which should not be “spurned”.

Further light is thrown on the “garden of pure sense” by “Ah, who will give us back our long-lost innocence”, part of a sequence with an apocalyptic aspect from “Towards the Source”. In the third stanza of this poem, we read: “[. . .] seeking have we wandered, south and west and north, / some darker fire to fuse the full-grown sense with soul”. Although the imagery of the “darker fire” is not as violent as that in “Terrible, if he will not”, these lines seem to refer to a similar idea, implying that some experience “darker” than the innocent, childlike garden of Eden evoked in the first stanza is required to deepen the sensuous by uniting it with “soul”.

Both Lilith and Eve have a claim on Adam. It is his task to “fuse the full-grown sense with soul”, to recover the lost, androgynous, complete self by bringing about a marriage of the mind and Nature, the spiritual and the material, the noumenal and the phenomenal. Such a marriage has to take place within the mind itself, as the faculty of imagination draws in what is external to it. These lines occupy a central place in the development of Brennan’s myth and the symbols which underpin it.

The remainder of “Terrible, if he will not” surveys some of the other ways in which Adam will try to assuage his yearning for Lilith. He will create idols for himself, to which he will sacrifice human lives; he will build edifices such as “heaven-threatening Babels, iron Ninevehs” (line 106) and immense monuments for himself such as the Pyramids, but will not be able to escape Lilith even in death. He will attempt, as “warrior and prince and poet”, to create something “authentic” (line 137) but will find only himself in all his creations. This theme is further developed in “*Thus in her hour of wrath, o’er Adam’s head*”, in which instances of the effects of the “*lingering unnamed distress*” (line 11) aroused by Lilith are seen in Babylon, Persepolis, Ekbatan, and in the creation of the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages.

The final lines of “*Thus, in her hour of wrath*” prefigure a “*secular flowering / of the far-bleeding rose of Paradise*”, a new religious rite which is to find its expression in the work of art, as Mallarmé foreshadows in “*Crise de vers*”. It is in this section of the poem that the exploration of ‘silence’ is overtly linked with the French poet:

*Lilith, a name of dread: yet was her pain
and loving to her chosen ones not vain*

*hinted, who know what weight of gelid tears
 afflicts the widow'd uplands of the spheres,
 and whence the enrapturing breaths are sent that bring
 a perfume of the secular flowering
 of the far-bleeding rose of Paradise,
 that mortal hearts in censer-fume arise
 unto the heart that were an ardent peace,
 and whence the sibyl-hints of song, that cease
 in pale and thrilling silence, lest they wrong
 her beauty, whose love bade live their fleeting throng,
 even hers, who is the silence of our thought,
 as he that sleeps in hush'd Valvins hath taught. (lines 42–56)*

It is clear that Brennan was struck by the central role Mallarmé accords to silence, both in theory and in practice. Mallarmé's "Crise de vers" speaks of the silence that accompanies discourse: "*Qu'une moyenne étendue de mots ; sous LA COMPRÉHENSION DU REGARD, se range en traits définitifs, AVEC QUOI LE SILENCE*".⁶⁹ There is the silence of the poem itself, "LE POÈME TU, AUX BLANCS".⁷⁰ "Crise de vers" makes use of blank spaces to symbolise the source of its own discourse in surrounding silence. According to Cohn, when Mallarmé mentions "le silence" in "Crise de vers", he is referring to "the pure source Mallarmé never leaves out of such considerations".⁷¹

At this crucial point in Brennan's representation of Lilith, the poet links the creative silence that precedes creation in Gnostic myth with the Mallarméan silence preceding and accompanying discourse to give the most strongly positive impression of Lilith in the entire sequence. Lilith is "widow'd" in two ways: she has lost Adam, her former partner in androgynous union, and together with Adam she has lost the power they had in that union to engender offspring through imagination. But the "sibyl-hints of song" (both poetry and music) offered to her suggest the possibility of a potent reunion. It is Lilith who supports and encourages the uncertain endeavour to produce art, the "censer-fume" offered to the new secular cult. Unlike

⁶⁹ OCM, vol. 2, p. 208: "*Let an intermediate expanse of words, beneath THE COMPREHENSION OF ONE'S GAZE, order itself in definitive traits, ADDED TO WHICH: SILENCE.*" italics correspond with Brennan's underlining in his copy of *Divagations* (Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations*, Paris: Charpentier, 1897); small capitals indicate where Brennan has placed a double line under the text.

⁷⁰ See OCM, vol. 2, p. 211: "THE SILENT POEM, WITH BLANK SPACES".

⁷¹ Robert Greer Cohn, *Mallarmé's Divagations: A Guide and Commentary*, New York: Lang, 1990, p. 241.

thought, art can penetrate, can attempt to express, the silence from which everything else arises. Brennan wrestles Gnostic myth into new forms expressing Romantic and Symbolist aspirations.

“She is the night: all horror is of her”

The final poem in the Lilith sequence draws together some of the themes established earlier. Repetitive patterns in the first four stanzas emphasise this. “She is the night: all horror is of her” at the beginning of the first stanza is mirrored in “She is the night: all terror is of her” at the beginning of the second. The third stanza begins “Or majesty is hers”, and the fourth varies this only slightly with “Or she can be all pale”. The “horror” of the first stanza is that of chaos, lack of form, unproductiveness, conveyed by “the unclaim’d chaotic marsh” where Lilith is without form, “heap’d, shapeless”, accompanied by an emblematic “incult [uncultivated] and scanty herb”. This is the “horror” of the chthonic side of Greek myth and the mystery religions. The “terror” Lilith inspires (the “faces of fear, beheld along the past” of the Argument) is the theme of the second stanza, where Lilith appears as a serpent, evoking the Python slain by Apollo.⁷² The word ‘larve’ (“with wavering face of larve and oily blur / of pallor on her suffocating coil”, lines 3–4) could well reflect the German word *Larve* as it appears in Novalis’ *Hymnen an die Nacht*. In Part V of Novalis’ poem, the human response to personified Death, whose arrival puts an end to the Golden Age, is described like this: “Mit kühnem Geist und hoher Sinnenglut / Verschönte sich der Mensch die grause Larve”.⁷³ Like the English ‘larva’, the German word *Larve* can mean mask or grub but also spectre or ghoul.⁷⁴ With its connotation of larva or grub, “larve” is appropriate for Lilith’s appearance as a serpent, while the implication of death links this stanza to the following one, in which Lilith’s “majesty” is apparent in “marble gloom”. In the fourth stanza she appears overtly as death, “all pale”, and “bride-robed in clinging shroud”.

⁷² See page 81 above.

⁷³ NS, vol. 1, p. 143: “With bold spirit and higher sensuality / Humanity glorified the fearsome ghoul”.

⁷⁴ An article on the Roman *Lares* in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1882 states: “the dead were powerful also to do harm, unless they were duly propitiated with all the proper rites; they were spirits of terror [...] in this fearful sense the names *Lemures* and still more *Larvae* were appropriated to them” (“Lares” in *Encycl. Brit.*, 9th edn, Edinburgh: Black, 1882, vol. XIV, p. 313/2).

In the fifth stanza, we learn that Lilith “knows each wooing mood”, having appeared in a number of different guises. The appeal of night is particularly apparent in the “charm’d air / of summer eve”. This association of human emotion with times of the day is characteristic of Brennan’s notion of ‘moods’, as we will see in the next chapter. Another aspect of the vulnerability of innocence is seen in Lilith’s appearance in stanzas 6–8 as the longing of “maiden blood” for sexual experience, figured in the trope of “creeks which slept unvisited” during the day but whose longing is eventually assuaged, this time in languid pleasure rather than forced submission.

All that the sequence offers by way of a resolution of the ambivalence associated with Lilith as symbol occurs in the final stanza:

All mystery, and all love, beyond our ken,
she woos us, mournful till we find her fair:
and gods and stars and songs and souls of men
are the sparse jewels in her scatter’d hair.

“[B]eyond our ken” suggests that Lilith is associated with the Absolute beyond both knowledge and speech. We recall that, according to Basilidean Gnosis, there was, before the beginning of everything, “nor man, nor angel, nor a god”. Now, gods and souls of men have been created out of nothing; stars and songs have been begotten on the chaos. The image of the jewels in Lilith’s hair recalls Baudelaire’s “La Chevelure”: “Longtemps ! toujours ! ma main dans ta crinière lourde / Sèmera le rubis, la perle et le saphir” (final stanza).⁷⁵ “She woos us” again raises the question of a union between the human mind and Nature. Lilith’s appeal, now, is not to Adam, the representative human being of the mythic narrative, but to us, the audience of the narrative. The “terrible” side of Lilith, her remorseless pursuit of the human mind, her “mournful” state when separated from the human mind, will persist “till we find her fair”.

* * *

The central role of the Lilith sequence in *Poems* reflects Brennan’s interest in the connection between myth and the natural world. Emerging out of Kantian and Romantic understandings of symbol

⁷⁵ OCB, vol. 1, pp. 26–27: “Ages! Always! My hand in your heavy mane / will sow rubies, pearls and sapphires”.

and myth, the academic study of mythology in the nineteenth century took interpretations of the function of myths in a direction which related it inextricably to events in the natural world and to language itself. Brennan wove together relevant insights from German Romanticism, from early Yeats and from Mallarmé's translation and adaptation of an English study of mythology, developing a complex theory of what he called 'moods', which reflected his understanding of the relationship between the human mind and the natural world and inspired the structure of *Poems* as a single, unified work. This theory is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

BRENNAN'S THEORY OF 'MOODS'

Stimmung and Gemüth in German pre-Romanticism and Romanticism

The German word *Stimmung* means mood, frame of mind or humour. It can also refer to atmosphere, and has a fundamental sense of musical tuning or pitch. According to Leo Spitzer, the word may be traced to the eighteenth century, the era of Pietism. A loan-translation from such Latin words as *temperamentum* and *consonantia* or *concordia*, which refer to a harmonious state of mind, it expresses the Pythagorean notion of world harmony.¹ In Spitzer's view, the fundamental connotation of *Stimmung* is "the unity of feelings experienced by man face to face with his environment (a landscape, nature, one's fellow man)", which "would comprehend and weld together the objective (factual) and the subjective (psychological) into one harmonious unity". This sense is missing in the English and French equivalents.² As he explains, "for a German, *Stimmung* is fused with the landscape, which in turn is animated by the feeling of man—it is an indissoluble unit into which man and nature are integrated".³ The word can apply equally to landscape or to feeling. It is related to *gestimmt sein*, to be tuned, so that there is "a constant musical connotation with the word".⁴ Further, originally it "did not suggest a changing, temporary condition, but rather a stable 'tunedness' of the soul".⁵

The word *Stimmung* is particularly relevant to the gulf between subject and object perceived by Romantics and pre-Romantics and the possibility of their reunification. According to Schiller, aesthetic experience, whether of music, poetry or architecture, brings about a particular mood. The higher the work of art, the more general the mood:

¹ Leo Spitzer, *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prologomena to an Interpretation of the Word "Stimmung"*, ed. Anna Granville Hatcher, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963, pp. 33, 3, 7.

² Spitzer, p. 5.

³ Spitzer, p. 5.

⁴ Spitzer, p. 6.

⁵ Spitzer, p. 7.

Da in der Wirklichkeit keine rein ästhetische Wirkung anzutreffen ist [. . .], so kann die Vortrefflichkeit eines Kunstwerks bloß in seiner größern Annäherung zu jenem Ideale ästhetischer Reinigkeit bestehen, und bei aller Freiheit, zu der man es steigern mag, werden wir es doch immer in einer besondern Stimmung, und mit einer eigentümlichen Richtung verlassen. Je allgemeiner nun die Stimmung und je weniger eingeschränkt die Richtung ist, welche unserm Gemüt durch eine bestimmte Gattung der Künste und durch ein bestimmtes Produkt aus derselben gegeben wird, desto edler ist jene Gattung und desto vortrefflicher ein solches Produkt.⁶

The kind of mood produced by a work of art is, it seems, a measure of how successful it has been in approximating the ideal.

We have already seen that Novalis uses *übereinstimmen* in *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* to refer to the desirable reunification of subject and object, which can and should be in tune with one another.⁷ In another passage from the same work, a second musical metaphor is employed to express the possibility of an accord between a human being and the external world:

[Der Lehrling] merkte bald auf die Verbindungen in allem, auf Begegnungen, Zusammentreffungen. Nun sah er bald nichts mehr allein.—In große bunte Bilder drängten sich die Wahrnehmungen seiner Sinne: er hörte, sah, tastete und dachte zugleich. Er freute sich, Fremdlinge zusammenzubringen. Bald waren ihm die Sterne Menschen, bald die Menschen Sterne, die Steine Tiere, die Wolken Pflanzen, er spielte mit den Kräften und Erscheinungen, er wußte, wo und wie er dies und jenes finden, und erscheinen lassen konnte, und griff so selbst in den Saiten nach Tönen und Gängen umher.⁸

⁶ Friedrich Schiller, *Theoretische Schriften*, ed. Rolf-Peter Janz, vol. 8 of *Friedrich Schiller Werke und Briefe*, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker, 1992, pp. 639–40: “Since in reality no purely aesthetic effect is to be met with [. . .], the excellence of a work of art can consist in nothing other than its greater approximation to that ideal of aesthetic purity, and in spite of elevating it to great freedom, we will still come away from it in a certain mood and with a particular persuasion. Now the more unpreoccupied the mood and the less constricted the persuasion produced in us by a certain kind of art and a particular product brought forth by it, the more noble is that kind of art and the more excellent such a product.”

⁷ See page 68 above.

⁸ NS, vol. 1, p. 80: “He [the disciple] began to pay attention to the links between everything, meetings, encounters. Soon he saw nothing by itself any more. The perceptions of his senses pressed themselves into large, many-coloured images: he heard, saw, touched, and thought all at once. He enjoyed bringing strangers together. Sometimes the stars seemed like people to him, sometimes people stars, the stones animals, the clouds plants. He played with forces and phenomena; he knew where and how to find this and that and to let it appear, and so struck the strings himself for notes and arpeggios”.

Becoming aware of the interrelatedness of all things, the disciple of the book's title begins to fulfill the injunction to strike "ein Akkord aus des Weltalls Symphonie".⁹ The sense of tunedness which belongs to *Stimmung* is conveyed by the imagery, in the absence of the word itself.

We have already encountered the specialised use of the word *Gemüth*, in *Naturphilosophie* and mysticism, to refer to the inner faculty of imagination which intuits the divine.¹⁰ In his article on German Romanticism, Brennan himself employs the term in that sense. He is discussing one of Novalis' *Teplitzer Fragmente* that we have already met, and finds of some interest Novalis' combination of *Stimmung*, mood, with the sense of the word *Gemüth* that appears in the aphorism. He glosses the aphorism ("*Gemüth—Harmonie* aller Geisteskräfte—*Gleiche Stimmung* und harmonisches Spiel der ganzen Seele") as "highest mood and harmonious equilibrium of all the powers of the soul".¹¹ "Harmonious equilibrium of all the powers of the soul" must encompass both "Harmonie aller Geisteskräfte" and "harmonisches Spiel der ganzen Seele", with some of the connotations of "gleiche Stimmung" (equal tuning) contributing to the word *Spiel* (play) to give "harmonious equilibrium". "Highest mood", then, must express Brennan's sense of *Gemüth*. He comments, "The region or state of consciousness in which imagination identifies itself with, and thereby momentarily attains the absolute [. . .] is called *Gemüth*". Here Brennan links *Gemüth* with the inner faculty of imagination, which connects the human being with the divine; he may or may not have known that Boehme and Paracelsus did the same thing earlier.¹²

Thus Brennan's word 'mood', at least by the time the article on German Romanticism was written but probably from his first exposure to that particular fragment by Novalis, seems to have been linked not to one but to two German words, *Gemüth* and *Stimmung*. *Gemüth* refers to an inner human faculty for union with the Absolute or the divine. *Stimmung* refers to human connectedness with the external world; it suggests both inner feeling and atmosphere and has the connotation of 'being in tune with'. According to Brennan's

⁹ NS, vol. 1, p. 79: "a chord from the symphony of the universe".

¹⁰ See pages 90–92 above.

¹¹ NS, vol. 2, p. 613: "*Gemüth—harmony* of all spiritual powers—equal tuning and harmonious play of the entire soul". P, p. 388.

¹² See page 90 above.

understanding, ‘moods’ connect human beings with the surrounding world of Nature and with the divine, which is located, however, within.

In addition, moods and poetry are connected. Brennan continues the Romanticism article with excerpts from several other relevant aphorisms of Novalis. From the following well-known fragment on the ideally poetic nature of the novel, he quotes the description of poetry as a “harmonische Stimmung unsers Gemüths”:

Ein Roman muß durch und durch Poesie sein. Die Poesie ist nämlich, wie die Philosophie, eine harmonische Stimmung unsers Gemüths, wo sich alles verschönert, wo jedes Ding seine gehörige Ansicht, alles seine passende Begleitung und Umgebung findet. [. . .] Man glaubt, es könne nichts anders sein, und als habe man nur bisher in der Welt geschlummert—und gehe einem nun erst der rechte Sinn für die Welt auf.¹³

Here poetry, like philosophy, is a revelatory state of mind that makes it seem as though, before poetry made its revelation, no one had been truly awake. Poetry, we infer, reverses the ‘sleep’ in which human beings have been languishing since the Golden Age disappeared. The musical connotation is implied in the word “harmonische”. From another aphorism, “Poesie ist *Darstellung* des *Gemüths*, der *innern Welt in ihrer Gesammtheit*”, Brennan excerpts “*Darstellung des Gemüths*” as another definition connecting poetry with the inner faculty of *Gemüth*.¹⁴

Gemüth is cognate with the English word ‘mood’, while *Stimmung*, as we have seen, is linked to the English ‘mood’ by meaning. Apparently Brennan’s notion of moods is inflected by both words, *Stimmung* and *Gemüth*, which relate the human being horizontally to Nature and vertically (in a sense) to the inner faculty where the Absolute or divine makes its appearance. Following Novalis, he thinks that it is the job of poetry to bring about such a “musical” relation.

¹³ NS, vol. 3, p. 558: “A novel must be poetry through and through. For poetry is, like philosophy, a harmonious mood of our mind, in which everything is made beautiful, everything finds its true appearance, its proper company and surroundings. [. . .] We believe it could not be any other way, and that it is as if up until now people have only slumbered in the world—and only now a true sense for the world is dawning in people.” This aphorism was first published in the Heilborn edition of Novalis (1901).

¹⁴ NS, vol. 3, p. 650: “Poetry is the representation of *Gemüth*, of the inner world in its entirety”. P, p. 388.

Brennan's reading of Maeterlinck's edition of Novalis would have drawn his attention to this sense of the word *Gemüth*.¹⁵ In *Les Affinités allemandes dans l'œuvre de Maurice Maeterlinck*, Paul Gorceix comments on Maeterlinck's consistent translation of *Gemüt*[h] by *âme* (soul):

Gardons-nous de prendre le terme *Gemüt* au sens moderne d'affectif, de sentimental, ce qui serait un faux sens par rapport à l'usage du XVII^e et XVIII^e siècle ! Chez le romantique allemand *Gemüt* équivalait au latin *animus* et *mens* à la fois. Il désigne l'ensemble des facultés intellectuelles et spirituelles, l'*animus* et l'*anima* de Claudel en somme ; selon les cas, l'âme, le cœur, dans leur ampleur et leur totalité. Le mot *âme* (*anima*) suggère bien au même titre le principe spirituel englobant « sensibilité et pensée ».

Il ne fait point de doute que Maeterlinck utilise comme pivot de sa réflexion le même concept d'âme, fondamental pour le romantique allemand. Il attribue au *Gemüt*, à l'âme, un sens et un rôle analogues à ceux que les piétistes lui avaient donnés. Zinzendorf, que cite le Belge, fait du *Gemüt* le porteur de la sensibilité, de la vie intérieure, opposé à l'intellect. Schleiermacher voit dans le *Gemüt* l'organe religieux par excellence. Pour Troxler, le philosophe romantique lucernois, l'âme, le cœur, c'est le centre de gravité de l'être humain, le point de rencontre de l'infini et du fini. Fr. Schlegel attribue à Lessing cette âme, « cette mobilité vivante et cette force la plus profonde et la plus intérieure de Dieu dans l'homme ». Quant à Novalis, il fait du *Gemüt* un véritable « mythe » du romantisme. A sa suite directe, l'âme deviendra pour Maeterlinck une notion majeure. Sa pensée et son esthétique cristalliseront autour d'elle. Par delà les piétistes, par delà Novalis, le Belge rejoint sur le plan de l'introversión une disposition spéculative qui appartient en propre à la mystique germanique.¹⁶

We see that Maeterlinck cites Zinzendorf, the founder of the Pietist Moravian Brethren. Gorceix links Maeterlinck's understanding of *Gemüth* to a number of other figures or movements we have already encountered in this context, suggesting that Maeterlinck was very much aware of the specialised use of the term in German mystical thought and reflected that awareness in his translation.

¹⁵ *Les Disciples à Saïs et les Fragments de Novalis*, transl. and intro. Maurice Maeterlinck, Brussels: Lacomblez, 1895. Brennan recommended this edition of Novalis in the *Syllabus of a Course of Six Lectures on "Symbolism in Nineteenth Century Literature"* (Sydney: Beatty, Richardson, [1904]), but it has not yet been possible to establish when he first read it. His library included many titles by Maeterlinck.

¹⁶ Paul Gorceix, *Les Affinités allemandes dans l'œuvre de Maurice Maeterlinck*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975, pp. 119–20: "Let us take care not to take the term *Gemüt* in the modern sense of the affective, the sentimental, which would be a mistaken sense with regard to seventeenth and eighteenth century usage! For the German Romantic, *Gemüt* corresponds to two Latin words, *animus* and *mens*."

Concepts of moods in early Yeats

The single most important source for Brennan's concept of moods is W.B. Yeats. In the Symbolism lectures, Brennan says that the word was "definitely brought into circulation by the editors of Blake".¹⁷ The doctrine is discussed in the chapters of the Ellis and Yeats edition of Blake from which Brennan made notes linking the Bohemian looking-glass with Lilith.¹⁸ Yeats uses 'moods' in several related ways, firstly to refer to the symbolic relationship between the universe and the divine, and secondly to refer to manifestations of the divine in human life and in works of art. The first sense is founded on the Swedenborgian and Bohemian notion that the universe is a "correspondence" (Swedenborg) or "signature" (Boehme) of the divine.

Although Yeats's exposition of moods is couched in the terminology of the esoteric doctrines of Boehme, Swedenborg, Kabbalah, Theosophy and the vaguely occult, the idea that the divine may be embodied in works of art has obvious similarities with the Kantian and Romantic doctrine of aesthetics. Yeats's idea of moods may be seen as the heritage, not only of Pater and Shelley as Harold Bloom and R.F. Foster suggest,¹⁹ but more widely of that interaction of

It designates the totality of intellectual and spiritual faculties, in a word, Claudel's *animus* and *anima*: soul, heart, whichever the case may be, in their fullness and totality. The word 'soul' (*anima*) suggests in the same way the spiritual principles encompassing 'feeling' and 'thought'. There is no doubt that Maeterlinck's thought pivots on the same concept of the soul [that was] fundamental for the German Romantic. He attributes to *Gemüt*, to the soul, a sense and a role analogous to those which the Pietists had given it. Zinzendorf, quoted by the Belgian, makes *Gemüt* the bearer of feeling, of the inner life, as against the intellect. Schleiermacher sees in *Gemüt* the supreme organ of religion. For Troxler, the Romantic philosopher from Lucerne, the soul, the heart, is the centre of gravity of the human being, the point where the infinite and the finite meet. Fr. Schlegel attributes this soul to Lessing, 'this lively mobility, the most deeply interior power of God within humankind'. As for Novalis, he makes *Gemüt* a veritable 'myth' of Romanticism. The soul becomes for Maeterlinck, in direct succession to him, a notion of major significance. His thought and aesthetic crystallise around it. Going beyond the Pietists and Novalis, the Belgian restores to the level of introversion a speculative disposition which is of the essence of German mysticism".

¹⁷ P, p. 84.

¹⁸ See page 53 above.

¹⁹ See Harold Bloom, *Yeats*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 71 and R.F. Foster, *The Apprentice Mage, 1865-1914*, Vol. 1 of *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 99.

English and German Romanticism during the nineteenth century to which Coleridge and Carlyle made an especially important contribution. Encountering the meeting of the esoteric with the Romantic in the edition of Blake, Brennan had a sufficiently wide familiarity with both streams to consider Yeats's ideas in the context of a Romanticism interfused with esotericism. While Gould points to Yeats's indebtedness for the notion of moods to the fixed symbols called "Tatwas" in Ráma Prasád's *Nature's Finer Forces*, there is no reference to these in the works of Yeats that Brennan was reading during the latter part of the 1890s and no evidence that Brennan's responses to the text encompassed Eastern doctrines.²⁰ Yeats's connection of moods with the Swedenborgian and Boehmian notions of correspondences or signatures, and the parallels between his thought and the suggestion of Kant and his successors that the work of art embodies the noumenon, are likely to have been the aspects of Yeats's work in which Brennan was most interested. His notes include cross-references to Novalis, Coventry Patmore and Mallarmé.

Yeats begins "The Symbolic System" with a discussion of the doctrine of correspondences as formulated by Swedenborg. In order to explain the doctrine in his Symbolism lectures, Brennan quotes from Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*: "The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world, not only the natural world in general, but also in particular. Whatever, therefore, in the natural world exists from the spiritual, is said to be its correspondent".²¹ Yeats summarises the principle as "the symbolic relation of outer to inner", pointing out that it appears in the works of Boehme as the doctrine of "signatures".²² This establishes the context for Yeats's explanation of moods, the immanence of the transcendent in the material universe, under three forms: the physical universe as symbol of the spiritual, the manifestation of the divine in large-scale affective states of humanity, and the embodiment of intellectual Ideas in art.

²⁰ See Warwick Gould, "Clairvoyance: A Lecture by V.H. Soror Deo Date", in *Yeats and the Nineties*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 275–76, notes 8 and 9. For further comments by Gould on Yeats's notion of moods, see Warwick Gould, John Kelly, and Deirdre Toomey, eds., *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2, Oxford: Clarendon, 1997, p. 71 n. 5.

²¹ P, p. 53.

²² WWB, vol. 1, pp. 235, 237.

It is somewhat startling to find that Yeats takes God to be a “universal mood”:

Sometimes the mystical student, bewildered by the different systems, forgets for a moment that the history of moods is the history of the universe, and asks where is the final statement—the complete doctrine. The universe is itself that doctrine and statement. All others are partial, for it alone is the symbol of the infinite thought which is in turn symbolic of the universal mood we name God.²³

The universe is a statement, an expression of divinity, which must be read as symbol. There is a “poetic genius or central mood in all things”: a divine source which “creates all by affinity—worlds no less than religions and philosophies”. This source or “bodiless mood” becomes expressed as a thought and subsequently becomes material: “First, a bodiless mood, and then a surging thought, and last a thing”.²⁴ Yeats equates this threefold process of emanation by which the divine first conceives and then produces the material world with the threefold expressions he finds in a number of esoteric and religious systems such as those of Swedenborg, the Kabbalah and Theosophy, as well as the Christian Trinity. The process is also the foundation of a hierarchy: emotion—intellect—Nature. Yeats explains:

As natural things and intellectual differ by discrete degrees, so do intellectual things differ by discrete degrees from emotional. We have thus three great degrees the first of which is external: the first two possessing form, physical and mental respectively, and the third having neither form nor substance—dwelling not in space but in time only. [. . .] The emotional Degree is associated with will by Swedenborg.²⁵

In his notes, Brennan summarises this distinction between the three “degrees”, two of which have form and one (the emotional) that does not. Then he writes the word “Mood”, and next to it “The indwelling mystery we cannot elude—that which transcends even the highest form”.²⁶ His notes acknowledge the important role Yeats accords to emotion by commenting “cf Novalis ‘Thought is a pale desiccated emotion’”.²⁷

²³ WWB, vol. 1, p. 239.

²⁴ WWB, vol. 1, p. 241.

²⁵ WWB, vol. 1, pp. 239–40.

²⁶ Brennan, Notebook FL RB509.1/26, folio [3], recto.

²⁷ Brennan, Notebook FL RB509.1/26, folio [2], recto.

As Bloom points out, Yeats's version of "The Symbolic System" differs from Blake's in making emotion the distinguishing feature of the divine. Bloom attributes this primacy of the emotional to the influence of Pater:

Yeats's notion of Blake's third order, of "emotional" things, is a Yeatsian invention, and initially a puzzling one. The first question must be, why did Yeats use the word "emotional" in this context? There is not a single occurrence of the word anywhere in Blake's verse or prose. Blake speaks of "feelings" or "passions", never of "emotions"; Yeats himself uses "emotion" only twice in all his poetry. The clue is in the Paterian word, almost a concept, "moods", for "The Necessity of Symbolism" [the first chapter of "The Symbolic System"] employs "moods" not only as a near-synonym for "emotions", but centers its entire argument upon "moods".²⁸

Pater's use of "moods" has something important in common with Yeats's. Like his, it conveys considerably more than "emotions". In *The Renaissance*, Pater discusses moods with reference to Botticelli, the nature of whose (visual) art is contrasted with that of Dante:

[T]he genius of which Botticelli is the type usurps the data before it as the exponent of ideas, moods, visions of its own; in this interest it plays fast and loose with those data, rejecting some and isolating others, and always combining them anew. To him, as to Dante, the scene, the colour, the outward image or gesture, comes with all its incisive and importunate reality; but awakes in him, moreover, by some subtle law of his own structure, a mood which it awakes in no one else, of which it is the double or repetition, and which it clothes, that all may share it, with visible circumstance.²⁹

According to Pater, the "mood" created by Botticelli is an inner correspondence of the outer world, produced by the force of his own unique gifts, and it is the achievement of his art to mediate this vision to others. It is something awoken in him by the outer world and transformed by his art. Yeats's 'moods', however, go far beyond Pater's.

Yeats explains that "[t]he mood or genius, which is the centre of human life, is the impression upon man of the divine quaternary, and is variously identified with both Father, Son, and Spirit and imagination".³⁰ This is not particularly illuminating, although we may

²⁸ Bloom, pp. 70–71.

²⁹ Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 42.

³⁰ WWB, vol. 1, p. 250. The idea of a divine "Quaternary" appears in Martensen: "Böhme teaches that there is in God not simply a Ternary, but also a Quaternary. By "Ternary" we are now thinking of the Trinity [. . .]. But a fourth element belongs

draw the inference that the human mood corresponds to the inner action of the divine, by analogy with the German esoteric and Romantic use of *Gemüth* to refer to the inner faculty where the imagination acts as the inner representative of the divine. Yeats identifies Blake's "poetic genius" with his own phrase "the emotional life":

In the second of the two tractates on "Natural Religion" Blake goes further and asserts that "the poetic genius", as he calls the emotional life, "is the true man, and that the body or outward form of man is derived from the poetic genius".³¹

In the notes he makes from Yeats's third chapter, Brennan records that archetypes of the divine (the "intellectual" degree of Yeats's three-stage process of emanation) may be embodied in human beings as "mental states": "God only acts or is in created beings (mental states) or men".³² Such mental states dominate not only individuals but ages of human history. In *Poems*, where we find a poetic enterprise structured around the notion of moods, Brennan develops Yeats's suggestion that large-scale human emotion or passion reflects the immanence of the divine in the human.

Brennan knew Yeats's essay "The Autumn of the Body", in which the speaker envisages the work of art becoming "the signature or symbol of a mood of the divine imagination".³³ In a short story that Brennan also knew, "Rosa Alchemica", published in *The Savoy* (edited by Arthur Symons) in 1896, Yeats describes how the imagination is able to embody the intellectual archetypes in art.³⁴ In this story,

to the Trinity, not a fourth Person, but an impersonal thing, which is different from God and is yet inseparable from Him, viz., the eternal product which is developed through the process, and which we have already spoken of as the seventh Natural Property, the Glory of God, the Uncreated Heaven, which Böhme sometimes also designates as the essential, *i.e.*, as Wisdom evolved into actuality, the Maiden that generates nothing, but merely reflects, or beams back the Triune God" (p. 95).

³¹ WWB, vol. 1, p. 239.

³² Brennan, Notebook FL RB509.1/26, folio [7], recto.

³³ This article was first published under the title "The Autumn of the Flesh" in the *Dublin Daily Express*, December 1898. It is not clear whether Brennan knew this version. It was later published as "The Autumn of the Body" in *Ideas of Good and Evil*, London: Bullen, 1903, which Brennan owned.

³⁴ Brennan's copy of the volume containing the second and third of these stories, *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi* (1897) is in the ML. Although Merewether states that "both stories are heavily marked by Brennan", the markings are limited to lines at the side of a few passages. Compared with other annotated texts, these cannot really be described as "heavily marked".

Michael Robartes, adept of the Order of the Alchemical Rose, explains to the narrator that literary works embody divinities:

'And yet there is no one who communes with only one god,' he was saying, 'and the more a man lives in imagination and in a refined understanding, the more gods does he meet with and talk with, and the more does he come under the power of Roland, who sounded in the Valley of Roncesvalles the last trumpet of the body's will and pleasure; and of Hamlet, who saw them perishing away, and sighed; and of Faust, who looked for them up and down the world and could not find them; and of all those countless divinities who took upon themselves spiritual bodies in the minds of the modern poets and romance writers, and under the power of the old divinities, who since the Renaissance have won everything of their ancient worship except the sacrifice of birds and fishes, the fragrance of garlands and the smoke of incense. [. . .]³⁵

Hamlet and Faust are literary figures, and Roland too should probably be thought of in this context as a hero of romance rather than a historical figure. Here, the idea that art embodies the noumenon is cast into a form compatible with polytheism. Later in "Rosa Alchemica", the narrator is conducted to the headquarters of the Order to undergo initiation. The material he is given to read in preparation for the rite tells him that the artistic imagination has the power to embody supernatural beings: "If you imagine, it said, the semblance of a living being, it is at once possessed by a wandering soul".³⁶ It continues:

The bodiless souls who descended into these forms, were what men called the moods; and worked all great changes in the world; for just as the magician or the artist could call them when he would, so they could call out of the mind of the magician or the artist, or if they were demons, out of the mind of the mad or the ignoble, what shape they would, and through its voice and its gestures pour themselves out upon the world. In this way all great events were accomplished; a mood, a divinity or a demon, first descending like a faint sigh into men's minds and then changing their thoughts and their actions [. . .].³⁷

³⁵ W.B. Yeats, *The Secret Rose*, London: Lawrence, Bullen, 1903, pp. 233–34.

³⁶ Yeats, *The Secret Rose*, pp. 250–51.

³⁷ Yeats, *The Secret Rose*, pp. 252–53.

This is the magical power of the imagination, creating forms for the incarnation of the formless divinities called “moods”. Yeats seems to be supporting the Romantic contention that artists, as possessors of the faculty of communication with the divine, have a prophetic role in embodying the divine in their art and thereby conveying it to others. The 1895 essay entitled “The Moods” confirms that literature is “wrought about a mood, or a community of moods, as the body is wrought about an invisible soul”, and that “these moods are the labourers and messengers of the Ruler of All, the gods of ancient days still dwelling on their secret Olympus, the angels of more modern days ascending and descending upon their shining ladder”.³⁸ Here, the moods are mediators between the divine and the human.

While Brennan does not seem to have adopted Yeats’s notion of moods as supernatural beings mediating between the divine and the natural, he does take from Yeats the notion that moods represent a correspondence between the natural world and large-scale human emotions or affective states and that it is the role of art to give expression to the divine. At two points in his notes on the Ellis and Yeats edition of Blake, Brennan refers to Mallarmé. In the second instance, he connects “the hierarchy of moods and correspondences” with “Mallarmé’s ideal drama”. In parentheses, Brennan adds “feebly hinted in ‘Fact & Idea’”.³⁹ A passage in his 1898 talk “Fact and Idea” refers to “all those countless *rappports* between ourselves and Nature”, in which Brennan sees the possibility of achieving “the last Unity of World and Human”.⁴⁰ This gives an important indication of the direction in which Brennan took Yeats’s notion of moods.

Les Dieux antiques

Comments Brennan made on Mallarmé’s *Les Dieux antiques* suggest that he found in it a way of thinking about Nature as myth that was a significant influence on the development of his own concept of moods. There is evidence that he read it in terms of the notion of correspondences, which, as we have seen, contributed to Yeats’s

³⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil*, London: Bullen, 1903, p. 306.

³⁹ Brennan, Notebook FL RB509.1/26, folio [4], recto.

⁴⁰ P, p. 11.

idea of moods. A reference to the work occurs in the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé:

Two other influences affected [Mallarmé] and will be found running through his work: mythological and philological research; he has devoted to them the only two scholastic treatises he ever wrote, one a translation and adaptation of Cox's mythology, the other a manual on the formation of English words. The myths, however much they may be overlaid with alien matter, all possess a symbolic element, a reading of the drama of nature in terms of man. And language is governed by the law of correspondences, though again imperfectly [. . .].⁴¹

Brennan takes *Les Dieux antiques* to be "a reading of the drama of nature in terms of man", that is, founded on the "rapports" he mentions in his notes on the Ellis-Yeats Blake. The phrase "philological research" applies to both the works to which he refers, as both works are fundamentally concerned with language.

As Brennan notes, Mallarmé's text is a translation and adaptation of George Cox's *A Manual of Mythology in the Form of Question and Answer* (1867). Mallarmé himself describes *Les Dieux antiques*, with *Les Mots anglais*, as "des besognes [. . .] dont il sied de ne pas parler", but this self-deprecatory assessment is contested by Bertrand Marchal and Peter Brown, and also (implicitly) by Brennan's own enthusiastic response.⁴² In the process of translation, Mallarmé reordered the text, commenting:

Impossible, même dans un travail de traduction, que la présence de l'esprit français ne se fasse remarquer. L'ordonnance toute différente des matières, avec des raccords nombreux et nécessaires, jette une véritable clarté sur l'ouvrage presque métamorphosé.⁴³

As Marchal points out, Mallarmé's alterations to Cox's references to God are of considerable interest. Where Cox uses a capital letter for "God", Mallarmé systematically evades translating it directly.

⁴¹ P, p. 144.

⁴² OCM, vol. 1, p. 789: "pot-boilers which shouldn't be mentioned". See Marchal, *La Religion de Mallarmé*, pp. 103–104 and Peter Brown, "Les contradictions de l'évolution esthétique : *Les Dieux antiques* et *Les Mots anglais*", in *Mallarmé et l'écriture en mode mineur*, Paris: Minard, 1998, p. 58.

⁴³ OCM, vol. 2, p. 1448: "Impossible, even in a work of translation, that the presence of the French mind wouldn't make itself apparent. The completely different arrangement of the material, and the numerous and necessary links, cast a genuine illumination on the almost transformed work".

Where Cox writes “and all, whose hearts and minds are open to see the works of God, will feel both their truth and their beauty”, Mallarmé translates “et tous les hommes d’à présent dont le cœur ou l’esprit sont ouverts à la beauté du ciel et de la terre, sentiront la séduction [. . .] que comporte la Fable”.⁴⁴ In the same chapter, where the word “God” occurs several times in succession, Mallarmé substitutes “divinité”. Where Cox writes “Zeus was a mere name by which they might speak of Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being”, Mallarmé translates “Zeus était un pur nom, à la faveur de quoi il leur fût possible de parler de la divinité, inscrite au fond de notre être”, a reference to some kind of inner divinity, as opposed to the objectified and fully externalised God of Cox.⁴⁵

Brennan’s annotations indicate his interest in this idea. Where the introductory chapter discusses the relationship of myth to religion, Brennan has underlined as shown by italics:

Ne point croire que, dans les temps antiques, un homme qui prononçait fréquemment le nom de Zeus, fit une allusion continuelle à un personnage unique ; non : il parlait comme deux langues très-distinctes. *Zeus existait double au fond de son âme* : le Zeus embrassant les noms et les actes des phénomènes par ce dieu personnifiés, et le Zeus père universel, imploré dans le malheur et remercié dans la joie, qui voit tout et que personne ne vit jamais. Le Paganisme empruntait, inconsciemment, *à la religion unique, latente*, certaines de ses inspirations les plus pures, comme cette dernière, dans sa phase moderne, qui est le Christianisme, a emprunté aux vieux rites plusieurs manifestations extérieures de son culte.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Mallarmé, *Les Dieux antiques*, Paris: Rothschild, 1880, hereafter abbreviated to DA, p. 10; OCM vol. 2, p. 1460: “and everyone from modern times whose heart and spirit are open to the beauty of sky and earth will feel the seduction of the Fable”.

⁴⁵ OCM, vol. 2, p. 1476: “Zeus was purely a name, which allowed them to speak of the divinity inscribed in the depths of our being”. See Marchal, *La Religion de Mallarmé*, pp. 154–57.

⁴⁶ DA, p 11; OCM, vol. 2, pp. 1460–61: “By no means [should one] believe that in ancient times a person who frequently uttered the name of Zeus was always alluding to one and the same character; no: he was speaking as though in two quite distinct languages. *Zeus lived in the depths of his soul in two guises*: the Zeus who encompassed the names and actions of the phenomena this god personified, and Zeus the universal father, supplicated in misfortune and thanked in [times of] joy, who saw everything and whom no one ever saw. Paganism borrowed, unconsciously, from *the single, latent religion*, some of its purest inspirations, just as the latter, in its modern phase, which is Christianity, has borrowed several of the external manifestations of its worship from the old rites”.

Brennan has responded to the implication that Zeus, as god of the Greeks, was to be found in the depths of the soul of the worshipper; that a single religion forms the basis of both paganism and Christianity; and that it is latent or concealed, presumably within the soul.

Cox's interpretation of mythology was derived from the theories of Max Müller.⁴⁷ Müller's chair in comparative mythology was among those proliferating in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century,⁴⁸ Romantic enthusiasm for myth having been transmitted to that century when K.O. Müller edited the notes on mythology written by Karl Solger, an associate of the Jena Romantics. Eighteenth-century reductive readings of myth, such as those of Dupuis (*L'Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle*, 1795) and Volney (*Les Ruines des empires*, 1791), reappeared in the nineteenth century, particularly in the work of Max Müller (whose *Comparative Mythology* was translated into French by Renan in 1859) and Adelbert Kühn. Max Müller believed that mythology and language were closely related, myths having originated from words for natural phenomena such as sun, clouds and storm, which lost their original meaning when tribes moved to new locations. Müller and Kühn parted company over which natural phenomena had been instrumental, Kühn arguing for meteorological phenomena such as storms, lightning and thunder, and Müller for solar phenomena such as sunrise and sunset: the battle between light and darkness which continued day by day and year by year.⁴⁹ The reductionist position of Müller (according to Detienne a prudish nineteenth-century response to the apparently scandalous behaviour of the Greek deities) disqualified mythology as religious revelation. For Müller, says Detienne, "mythology is a disease whose extent and ravages can be precisely measured by comparative grammar".⁵⁰ Gods who are only words can no longer be scandalous.

Reductive readings of myth were challenged by representatives of the traditionalist position.⁵¹ Creuzer,⁵² whose work was made known

⁴⁷ Müller's *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* is discussed on page 000 above.

⁴⁸ Marcel Detienne, "Rethinking Mythology", in *Between Belief and Transgression: Structuralist Essays in Religion, History, and Myth*, ed. Michel Izard and Pierre Smith, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 44; Jamme, *Epoque moderne*, p. 93.

⁴⁹ Marchal, *La Religion de Mallarmé*, pp. 113–14.

⁵⁰ Detienne, p. 45.

⁵¹ See page 30 above.

⁵² See pages 84–85 above.

in France through Guigniaut's translation (1825–51) and popularised in Benjamin Constant's *De la religion* (1824–31), is an important representative of this point of view. The mage and cabbalist Eliphas Lévi (Alphonse Constant, 1810–1875), probably the single most powerful influence on the century in terms of illuminism and esotericism, strongly disputed the “négation de toutes les religions” of Dupuis and Volney and argued for the presence of divine revelation in all the religions of the civilised world.⁵³ Neopaganists, too, disputed reductive readings of myth. Louis Ménard, whose *Rêveries d'un païen mystique* was in Brennan's library,⁵⁴ extended the position of Creuzer, defending mythology in *Du polythéisme hellénique* (1863) against Max Müller's interpretation by emphasising its symbolic function:⁵⁵ “les religions sont des ensembles de symboles, c'est-à-dire des idées exprimées sous des formes concrètes.”⁵⁶

Mallarmé's primary thesis in *Les Dieux antiques*, following Cox, is that words originally signifying natural phenomena become the names of gods when groups of people with a common language are physically dispersed. In the introductory chapter the following passage, according to the editorial note, is taken directly from Cox:

[T]ant que ces antiques peuplades demeurèrent au même lieu, il n'y eut pas à craindre que les termes qu'elles employaient pour parler entre elles, fussent mal compris ; mais le temps alla, les tribus se dispersèrent. Quelques-unes errèrent au sud, d'autres au nord et à l'ouest ; et il arriva que toutes gardèrent les noms donnés jadis au soleil et aux nuages et à toute chose, alors que la signification de ces noms était presque perdue.⁵⁷

Brennan marked a later passage which further explicates this principle:

[Les tribus] emportaient au moins une langue commune, à laquelle étaient confiés des mythes communs. L'éloignement où vécurent l'une de

⁵³ See Marchal, *La Religion de Mallarmé*, p. 119.

⁵⁴ “Musings of a Mystical Pagan”.

⁵⁵ “On Hellenic Polytheism”.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Marchal, *La Religion de Mallarmé*, p. 121: “religions are collections of symbols, that is, ideas expressed in concrete forms”.

⁵⁷ DA, p. 3; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1456: “As long as these ancient peoples lived in the same place, there was no fear that the terms they used among themselves could be poorly understood; but the time came when the tribes dispersed. Some wandered to the south, others to the north and west, and it happened that all of them retained the names once given to the sun and the clouds and everything else, although the meaning of these names was virtually lost”.

l'autre les peuplades errantes où fixées, fit que leur langue se différençia et se refondit en idiomes nouveaux ; et de la même façon les mythes, mêlés intimement à la parole, acquièrent une existence nouvelle et isolée. Mais langues et mythes ne sont jamais si complètement transformés, que deux sciences, celle du Langage et la Mythologie, ne puissent, par leur effort récent, retrouver la parenté originelle des mots et des dieux.⁵⁸

Words, corresponding with Nature, become gods.

Brennan's underlinings and annotations throughout the text indicate that he took the final paragraphs of the introductory chapter to be crucial to the entire argument. The paragraph below, footnoted as "Note particulière à la Traduction",⁵⁹ describes the drama of the daily and yearly natural cycles as the "Tragedy of Nature". Brennan has underlined the footnote and written at the side of the second last paragraph, "Mallarmé incipit".⁶⁰ Throughout the entire text, Brennan's underlinings indicate his deep interest in the events of the "Tragedy of Nature" described in the introduction and employed as an interpretative principle in the work, a theme with which he was familiar from other works of Mallarmé. This is the passage where this theme is first explicated:

Tel est, avec le changement des Saisons, la naissance de la Nature au printemps, sa plénitude estivale de vie et sa mort en automne, enfin sa disparition totale pendant l'hiver (phases qui correspondent au lever, à midi, au coucher, à la nuit), le grand et perpétuel sujet de la Mythologie : *la double évolution solaire*, quotidienne et annuelle. Rapprochés par leur ressemblance et souvent confondus pour la plupart dans un seul des traits principaux qui retracent la lutte de la lumière et de l'ombre ; les dieux et les héros deviennent tous, pour la science, les acteurs

⁵⁸ DA, p. 16; OCM, vol. 2, pp. 1462–2–63: "At least [the tribes] took with them a common language, to which the common myths were entrusted. The distance at which the peoples (whether nomadic or settled) lived from one another caused their language to become differentiated and recast into new idioms; and in the same way myths, closely connected to words, acquired a new and separate existence. But languages and myths are never so completely transformed that two disciplines, Philology and Mythology, cannot (as shown by their recent efforts) recover the original kinship of words and gods".

⁵⁹ "Translator's note".

⁶⁰ DA, p. 12; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1461. Brennan pays careful attention to Mallarmé's alterations to the text, as noted in the footnotes, although they sometimes lead him astray. Marchal points out, for instance, that these paragraphs actually follow Cox closely, in spite of the footnote, except that Mallarmé represents the quotidian and annual cycles as equally important, whereas Cox emphasises the former (*La Religion de Mallarmé*, pp. 153–54).

de ce grand et pur spectacle, dans la grandeur et la pureté duquel ils s'évanouissent bientôt à nos yeux, lequel est : *LA TRAGÉDIE DE LA NATURE*.⁶¹

The daily and yearly events of Nature are seen as a drama, providing universal material for myth.

The methods of comparative mythology outlined in the *avant-propos* use philological studies of other languages, especially the language of the Vedas, to explain myth. Thus, a number of personages in Greek myth are associated with dawn or morning. The story of Procris, for example, may be reduced to three simple propositions: “*le soleil aime la rosée*”, “*le matin aime le soleil*” and “*le soleil est la mort de la rosée*”.⁶² The text offers to “translate” the myth of Procris into its natural analogues.⁶³ The love of Adonis for Aphrodite is traced to a similar origin: “Voici l’histoire d’Adonis. Sa grande beauté charma Aphrodite, mais il ne paya pas cette passion de retour”.⁶⁴ Brennan’s marginal note reads “day flying the dawn”.⁶⁵ Dawn is associated with the tenderness of first love: “le charme du matin suggéra l’idée de tendresse et d’amour, qui passa par mille formes, selon l’âme des nations auxquelles arrivèrent ces traditions”.⁶⁶ Brennan has marked this passage in the margin. Another marked passage has a similar theme:

[L]e soleil, qui ne peut s’attarder dans son voyage, paraît oublier *l’aurore aimable* et belle pour le brillant et fastueux midi, et tous les dieux et les héros, dont les noms furent d’abord simplement les noms du

⁶¹DA, p. 12; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1461: “Such, with the changing of the Seasons, the birth of Nature in spring, her summer plenitude of life and her death in autumn, then her complete disappearance during winter (phases which correspond to dawn, midday, sunset and night), is the great and never-ending subject of Mythology: *the double cycle of the sun*, daily and annual. Connected by their resemblance and often merged into one of the principal features which recount the battle of light and darkness, gods and heroes all became, for scholars, actors in this great and simple spectacle, in whose grandeur and simplicity they soon vanish from our eyes: *THE TRAGEDY OF NATURE*”.

⁶²DA, p. 189; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1525: “*the sun loves the dew*”; “*morning loves the sun*”; “*the sun is the death of the dew*”.

⁶³DA, p. 189; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1525.

⁶⁴“Here is the story of Adonis. His great beauty enchanted Aphrodite, but he did not return her love.”

⁶⁵DA, p. 93; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1490.

⁶⁶DA, p. 91; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1489: “The charm of the morning suggested the idea of tenderness and love; it took on a thousand forms, according to the spirit of the nations into which these traditions came”.

soleil, se présentent à nous comme délaissant celle à qui ils avaient donné leur foi première.⁶⁷

Beside the underlined phrase, Brennan has written "tenderness connected with the dawn". The name of Iole, abandoned beloved of another sun-hero, Hercules, signifies the colour violet, referring to the violet-coloured clouds which appear only at sunrise and sunset. Iole reappears, weeping, at the death of Hercules, signifying the reappearance of the violet clouds of dawn at sunset. Brennan has marked this passage too.⁶⁸

Brennan's response to the association of human feelings with the events of Nature indicates that he does not read the work as merely reductive. His annotations reflect or amplify the poetic treatment accorded to myth, even though reduced to natural event, by Mallarmé. Brown points to "une tension étrange dans *Les Dieux antiques* entre le travail de Mallarmé comme traducteur et son identité de poète".⁶⁹ The poetic aspect of the language is apparent, for example, in the section entitled "Origine et développement de la mythologie", where Mallarmé writes:

Qu'est le soleil ? Un fiancé qui sort de sa chambre ou un héros qui se réjouit de parcourir sa route. Telle est l'idée qui fait le fond des légendes d'Héraclès, de Persée, de Thésée, d'Achille et de Bellérophon, et de beaucoup d'autres ; et tous les hommes d'à présent dont le cœur ou l'esprit sont ouverts à la beauté du ciel et de la terre sentiront la séduction, spéciale et permanente à la fois, que comporte la Fable.⁷⁰

Not only does Mallarmé suggest that mythology makes its appeal especially to those who have an eye for the beauty of Nature, but his use of personification also effects the conversion of Nature itself

⁶⁷ DA, p. 104; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1494: "The sun, which cannot delay its journey, seems to forget the beautiful, amiable dawn in favour of the radiant and sumptuous midday, and all the gods and heroes, whose names were originally simply names of the sun, appear to us as leaving behind that [the dawn] to which they had first pledged their faith".

⁶⁸ DA, p. 135; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1504.

⁶⁹ Peter Brown, p. 54: "A strange tension in *Les Dieux antiques* between the work of Mallarmé as translator and his identity as poet".

⁷⁰ DA, p. 10; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1460: "What is the sun? A fiancé leaving his bedroom or a hero who delights in pursuing his course. This idea forms the basis of the legends of Hercules, Perseus, Theseus, Achilles and Bellerephon, as well as many others; and everyone of our own time whose heart and mind are open to the beauty of the sky and the earth will sense what makes up the attraction, at once special and permanent, of the Fable".

into the personages of myth. The tone is positive, elevating Nature, rather than dismissive. When Brennan writes “day flying the dawn” or “tenderness connected with the dawn”, he is responding to the attribution of human qualities to Nature in Mallarmé’s use of personification.

In making Nature into myth, in identifying natural cycles with large-scale human passions, *Les Dieux antiques* makes an essential contribution to Brennan’s notion of moods. As we have seen, Brennan’s notes to the Ellis-Yeats Blake make a connection between “the hierarchy of moods and correspondences” and “Mallarmé’s ideal drama” and refer to Brennan’s 1898 talk, “Fact and Idea”, in which he claims that “[m]an’s task is to spiritualize, idealize, humanize [. . .] the world”.⁷¹ *Les Dieux antiques*, read eighteen months earlier, may well have struck Brennan as doing just that. It humanises the world of Nature by attributing human passions to it, by making the events of the diurnal and seasonal cycles correspond to human experience, becoming stages in a mythic narrative.

We have seen that Brennan took *Les Dieux antiques* as an instance of ‘correspondences’. This doctrine was famously given expression by Baudelaire, in his article on Victor Hugo and in the poem “Correspondances”, and before him by Lévi.⁷² As Lynn R. Wilkinson comments,

Constant’s characterization of “correspondances” as a language of nature, the significance of which was lost when humankind fell from grace, repeats a widespread Romantic commonplace. Allusions to such a lost language, often called a “hieroglyphic” language, occur in the work of many European writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In French literature, such references are often tied to a vision of the ideal organization of society. [. . .]

References in nineteenth-century French writings to a language of nature are so widespread and so tied to the political beliefs of writers that it is absurd to pretend that they originate in the work of any one individual. In the first half of the nineteenth century, however, many writers do credit eighteenth-century esotericism for refocusing attention on the social significance of a language of nature. Within this context, an allusion to “correspondences” would almost certainly refer

⁷¹ P, p. 10. See page 142 above.

⁷² See Lynn R. Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996, pp. 24–26.

back to Swedenborg as one of many eighteenth-century visionaries whose work called attention to a kind of hieroglyphic language of nature whose meaning had been lost, but might be restored again through a program of individual and general reform. For [...] this was the one doctrine that was consistently emphasized in popularisations of Swedenborg's work, both by Swedenborg himself and by others.⁷³

Wilkinson's emphasis on the link between the idea of a language of Nature and schemes for social and political reform, of whatever persuasion, is important in the light of Brennan's interest in Mallarmé's proposal of a "vrai culte moderne" and Brennan's own attempt to produce a body of poetry appropriate to such a project.

In the first Symbolism lecture, which argues that Symbolism is founded on the doctrine of correspondences, Brennan quotes from Baudelaire's article on Hugo and the poem "Correspondances":

It was Baudelaire, perhaps the most profoundly original poet, certainly one of the most profound and subtle influence, and one of the acutest thinkers on art that his century has produced, who went directly to Swedenborg [...]. "Swedenborg," he says, "has taught us that heaven is a great man; that everything, form, movement, number, colour, perfume, in its spiritual as well as in its natural aspect, is significant, reciprocal, converse, correspondent. [...] And what is a poet [...] if not an interpreter, a decipherer?"⁷⁴

As Anna Balakian points out, however, the detailed correspondences established by Swedenborg were not adopted by either Baudelaire or the Symbolist movement:

The one meaning in Swedenborgism that no one accepted was the definition of symbol. When Swedenborg says that "garden" means wisdom, "trees" are the knowledge of good, "bread" is affection, this is old-fashioned allegory and not *symbol*, as the word evolved in the century following Swedenborg.⁷⁵

Symbolism relies on a modified version of the doctrine.⁷⁶

⁷³ Wilkinson, p. 26.

⁷⁴ P, pp. 54–55.

⁷⁵ Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal*, Studies in Language and Literature, New York: Random House, 1967, p. 14.

⁷⁶ As we have seen already, the doctrine of correspondences was a commonplace in the nineteenth century, rather than being unique to Swedenborg. See Brian Juden, "Que la théorie des correspondances ne dérive pas de Swedenborg"; *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature* XI, 2 (1973), p. 34.

Brennan's positive response to the idea that Nature is a symbolic language which needs to be deciphered is hardly surprising. He continues the lecture with a prose translation of the first part of Baudelaire's poem: "Nature is a temple wherein the pillars are alive and, from time to time utter confused words; man walks amid wild-woods of symbols which look upon [him] with looks that he recognizes as kin."⁷⁷ An example of correspondences in Mallarmé's work follows. Brennan offers his own (albeit questionable) translation of a passage from "La Musique et les lettres" that includes the following statement: "The only line of action left free to us is to seize the relations, few or many, existing between different seasons; to simplify the world in accordance with some inner mood, which we are driven to extend beyond ourselves".⁷⁸ Here Brennan uses "mood" to translate "quelque état intérieur". His translation makes it absolutely clear that the correspondences he finds in Mallarmé are those between "different seasons" and "some inner mood", a very different application of the principle of correspondences from that offered by Swedenborg, although equally universal. A little earlier in "La Musique et les lettres", Mallarmé predicts the advent of someone who will be able to establish in his writing the analogical connection between "the symphonic equation proper to the seasons" and the human passions:

Un homme peut advenir, en tout oublié—jamais ne sied d'ignorer qu'exprès—de l'encombrement intellectuel chez les contemporains ; afin de savoir, selon quelque recours très simple et primitif, par exemple la symphonique équation propre aux saisons, habitude de rayon et de nuée ; deux remarques ou trois d'ordre analogue à ces ardeurs, à ses intempéries par où notre passion relève des divers ciels [. . .] jusqu'à une transfiguration en le terme surnaturel, qu'est le vers.⁷⁹

Here Mallarmé uses "équation" for the relationship between seasons and human passions, a relationship, as the word "symphonic" implies, that is also a musical one. The understanding of moods Brennan gained from early German Romanticism would have been in accord with Mallarmé's "symphonic equation".

⁷⁷ P, p. 55.

⁷⁸ P, p. 56. The original is as follows: "Tout l'acte disponible ; à jamais et seulement, reste de saisir les rapports, entre temps, rares ou multipliés ; d'après quelque état intérieur et que l'on veuille à son gré étendre, simplifier le monde" (OCM, vol. 2, p. 68).

⁷⁹ OCM, vol. 2, p. 66. "A man could come along, completely oblivious—ignorance is only ever becoming if deliberate—to the intellectual clutter of his contemporaries;

Elsewhere, in "Ballets", Mallarmé uses the phrase "équations sommaires".⁸⁰ As we have seen, Brennan quotes this phrase in a note that makes an equation of its own between Mallarmé's "équations sommaires" and the "moods" of Yeats. He also underlines it twice in his copy of *Divagations*. In a notebook used for writing drafts of his poems, we find the following:

Yeats = Symbolism
Moods: the *équations sommaires* of Mallarmé.⁸¹

Mallarmé uses "équations" again in an important passage from the "Autobiographie" in which he discusses the possibility of an "explication orphique de la Terre, qui est le seul devoir du poète et le jeu littéraire par excellence : car le rythme même du livre, alors impersonnel et vivant, jusque dans sa pagination, se juxtapose aux équations de ce rêve, ou Ode".⁸² Here the equation seems to be drawn between the foreshadowed book and the dream of an "orphyic explanation of the earth", conceived in a musical metaphor as rhythmic. "Orphyic" implies the recovery of the language bestowed on Nature itself by the music of Orpheus; here, however, a rhythmic book rather than actual music. In Brennan's article "Was Mallarmé a Great Poet?" we find substantial evidence connecting Mallarmé's work on mythology with correspondences. Brennan says:

Glory—we seem to have lost the notion of it—the corroboration of man's ardours by all those "correspondences" in nature's spectacle, which are the roots of all the myths, the secret of their perpetual newness.⁸³

Myth is derived from the correspondences between human "ardours" and "nature's spectacle", making it of lasting relevance.

in order to know, according to some very simple, primitive appeal, for example the symphonic equation belonging to the seasons, custom of light-beam and cloud; two or three remarks similar to these ardours, its bad weather by means of which our own passion responds to various skies [. . .] as far as a transfiguration into the supernatural term, which is the line of verse".

⁸⁰ OCM, vol. 2, p. 172: "Summary equations".

⁸¹ C.J. Brennan, Notebook, NLA MS 3246, opp. p. 56. The book Brennan has used for this notebook is the Catalogue of Class E of the Free Public Library, Sydney. There is no connection between the published work and his notes.

⁸² OCM, vol. 1, p. 788: "Orphyic explanation of the Earth, which is the sole duty of the poet and the literary play *par excellence*; since the very rhythm of the book, impersonal and lively, even in its pagination, juxtaposes itself to the equations of this dream, or Ode". Brennan quotes this passage in "Quelq'és Vers", p. [134].

⁸³ P, p. 282.

A number of the poems make use of imagery associating dawn or morning with the innocent tenderness of first love, following the symbolism suggested in *Les Dieux antiques*. In “*Where the poppy-banners flow*”, the growth towards sexual maturity of the couple in the poem—the transition from “*girl and boy*” (line 5) to “*youth and maid*” (line 6)—is paralleled by the appearance of poppies in the fields indicating the arrival of summer. The original innocence of the couple is paralleled by the “*spotless morn*” (line 3). “And does she still perceive, her curtain drawn” builds on the imagery of “*Where the poppy-banners flow*” as it moves from the pale colours of “*maiden Dawn*” (line 2) to the red of passion (“warmer flush / our poppies with her blush / as the long day of love grows bold for the red kiss / and dreams of bliss / dizzy the brain and awe the youthful blood”, lines 9–13). The pale hues of “*maiden Dawn*” are picked up in the “*delicate feather-pinks*” and the “*pale sweet grass*”, signifying sexual innocence, while the stronger colour suggested by the blushing of the woman corresponds to the colour of the summer poppies, as in “*Where the poppy-banners flow*”. Blue and purple colours in the flowers (“*blue-eyed flower-births*”, “*forget-me-nots and violets*”, lines 15–16) are also associated with spring and innocence (“*bashful*”, line 15; “*maids*”, line 17), just as Mallarmé associates the colour violet with the innocent dawn, first beloved of the sun-hero. We have already seen that Brennan makes Eve a symbol of innocence in the Lilith sequence by associating her with the freshness of early morning.

The climax of Mallarmé’s drama of Nature comes at sunset. In the story of Hercules, who epitomises the solar hero, this corresponds to the moment of his self-immolation in a funeral pyre on the summit of Mount Oeta in order to put an end to his agony after he has unwittingly put on the poisoned robe of Nessus. Mallarmé explains the allegory in a passage marked in the margin by Brennan:

Cette scène magnifique a un sens profond : reconnaissez le dernier incident de ce qui a été plus haut appelé la Tragédie de la Nature,— la bataille du Soleil avec les nuages qui se rassemblent autour de lui comme de mortels ennemis, à son coucher. Comme il s’enfonce, les brumes ardentes l’étreignent et les vapeurs de pourpre se jettent par le ciel, ainsi que des ruisseaux de sang qui jaillissent du corps du mythe ; tandis que les nuages violets couleur du soir semblent le consoler dans l’agonie de sa disparition.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ DA, pp. 135–36; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1504: “This magnificent scene has a profound meaning: you note the final incident of what, above, has been called the

Here the sun (equated with Hercules) appears as a hero in his final battle against his mortal enemies, the clouds. The sinking of the sun into the sea becomes for Hercules the "agonie de sa disparition". The purple clouds of evening (equated with Iole who weeps at Hercules' side) console him in his death-throes. Brennan was well aware that Mallarmé's use of the sunset as a symbol of the self-sacrifice of the hero is fundamental to his work.

Mallarmé's text makes the Medusa a significant symbol of night. Brennan's notes for the writing of the Lilith poems quote from *Les Dieux antiques*, pages 167 and 171. In his copy of the text, he has written "Lilith" opposite both these passages; if these were written on his first reading, he must have already been thinking in terms of Lilith in 1896. The first passage is as follows:

La légende est belle : on dit que Méduse vivait , avec ses sœurs, dans l'Ouest lointain, bien au-delà des jardins des Hespérides, où le soleil ne brillait jamais : rien de vivant ne s'y faisait voir. *Altérée d'amour humain et de sympathie*, elle visita ses parentes les Grecs, qui ne vouaient l'aider. Aussi quand Athéné vint du pays libyen, implora-t-elle son aide ; mais la déesse la lui refusa, alléguant que les hommes reculeraient devant la sombre mine de la Gorgone. *Méduse avait dit qu'à la lumière du soleil sa face pouvait être aussi belle que celle d'Athéné* ; et la déesse, dans sa colère, répliqua que tout mortel qui regarderait ce visage serait changé en pierre. C'est ainsi que l'aspect de la malheureuse devint autre, et que ses cheveux furent des serpents qui s'enroulèrent et s'enlacèrent autour de ses tempes.⁸⁵

The entire passage is marked in the margin with a vertical line, in addition to the underlinings indicated. The ambivalence of Medusa

Tragedy of Nature—the battle of the Sun against the clouds which gather around him like mortal enemies at his descent. As he sinks, a golden haze takes hold of him and purple vapours hurl themselves through the sky, while streams of blood spurt from his mythical body and violet clouds, the colour of evening, seem to console him in the agony of his downfall".

⁸⁵ DA, pp. 166–67; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1516: "The legend is a beautiful one: it is said that Medusa lived with her sisters in the distant West, well beyond the Gardens of the Hesperides, where the sun never shone: nothing living ever made an appearance there. *Starved of human love and sympathy*, she visited her relatives the Greeks, who would not pledge themselves to help her. So when Athene came from Libya, she beseeched her help, but the goddess refused, claiming that people would recoil from the gloomy appearance of the Gorgon. *Medusa had said that in the light of the sun, her face could be as beautiful as Athene's*; the goddess, in her anger, retorted that every mortal who beheld that face would be changed into stone. This was how the look of the miserable [Medusa] was altered, and her hair became snakes coiling and intertwining around her temples".

as a symbol in Mallarmé's text is apparent here, an ambivalence which Brennan transfers to his own Lilith. Medusa is capable of being both as fair as Athene and so terrifying that her face turns those who see it to stone. We recall that Lilith becomes beautiful only when "we find her fair" ("She is the night: all horror is of her"). This is the second passage: "*Méduse est la nuit étoilée, solennelle dans sa beauté, et condamnée à mourir quand vient le soleil ; ses sœurs représentent les ténèbres absolues que l'on supposait impénétrables au soleil*".⁸⁶ The association with Brennan's Lilith and her "flung hair that is the starry night" is obvious.

Mallarmé's text also explores the drama of Nature in terms of the yearly cycle and sometimes conflates this with the daily cycle. Autumn is the season corresponding to sunset in the daily cycle, in which the tragedy of the death of the sun-hero takes place. Dionysus is associated with the fall of autumn leaves; when he is tied up, the bonds are "tombant autour de lui comme les feuilles d'un arbre en automne".⁸⁷ The sleep of Brunhilde after she has been pricked by the thorn, and the serpent-bite which sends Eurydice to the Underworld, are characterised as "*cette épine de la nuit ou de l'hiver*".⁸⁸ the 'death' of the sun either at night or in the winter. Twice Brennan adds in the margin next to references to the sleep of Brunhilde a cross-reference to *Dornröschen*, the Sleeping Beauty.⁸⁹ Obviously he felt that the story of the Sleeping Beauty was another instance to which the Mallarméan interpretation of the thorn—the bite of night or winter, which sends the earth into a death-like sleep—could be applied. The German name *Dornröschen* (little rose thorn) makes the connection clear.

This marginal annotation sheds some light on the first piece in Brennan's *Poems*, "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude". Stanzas four to six of this poem contain an obvious reference to the stories of Sleeping Beauty and Snow White. The succession of winter by spring is

⁸⁶ DA, p. 171; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1518: "*Medusa is the starry night, solemn in its beauty, and condemned to die when the sun appears; her sisters represent absolute darkness that people imagined the sun could not penetrate*".

⁸⁷ DA, p. 127; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1501: "falling around him like the leaves of a tree in autumn".

⁸⁸ DA, p. 33; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1469: "*that thorn of night or winter*".

⁸⁹ The first reads "Dornröschen, the earth" (DA, p. 31; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1468) and the second, "cf. again Dornröschen" (DA, p. 33; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1469).

figuratively represented as the awakening of one of these figures (“*the tranced maiden*”, stanza 5) from her sleep. In his discussion of the myths of Dionysus, Demeter and Persephone in *Greek Studies*, Pater expresses the opinion that the story of the Sleeping Beauty is an English equivalent for the Demeter-Persephone cycle. It is not in the least surprising, therefore, that Brennan has written “See W. Pater’s study of Dionysus and Bacchanals of Euripides (*Greek Studies*)” beside Mallarmé’s discussion of the myth of Dionysus, and “See Pater’s *Greek Studies*” beside the chapter on Demeter, in his copy of *Les Dieux antiques*. The Sleeping Beauty symbolism in “MDCCLXXIII: A Prelude”, figuring winter giving way to spring, also evokes the Demeter and Persephone myth, interpreted as the imprisonment of spring under the ground in winter. Mallarmé’s account of the myth in *Les Dieux antiques* is at once reductive and poetic:

Les hommes avaient dit autrefois, quand venait l’heure du printemps, que « voici revenir la fille de la Terre dans toute sa beauté » ; et quand se flétrit l’été devant l’hiver, que « la belle enfant avait été dérobée à sa mère par de sombres êtres qui la tenaient prisonnière sous le sol ». [. . .] Perséphone [. . .] est une belle vierge qui, pendant que la terre est morte et froide au dehors, gît enveloppée et cachée à tous les yeux mortels.⁹⁰

Pater suggests that the seasonal aspect of the cycles of Demeter and Persephone on the one hand, and Dionysus on the other, may be read as allegories of the destiny of the human soul, offering it a comparable hope of resurrection:

If Dionysus, like Persephone, has his gloomy side, like her he has also a peculiar message for a certain number of refined minds, seeking, in the later days of Greek religion, such modifications of the old legend as may minister to ethical culture, to the perfecting of the moral nature. A type of second birth, from first to last, he opens, in his series of annual changes, for minds on the look-out for it, the hope of a possible analogy, between the resurrection of nature, and something else, as yet unrealised, reserved for human souls [. . .]. It is the finer, mystical

⁹⁰ DA, p. 77; OCM, vol. 2, p. 1485: “Once people said when the springtime came, ‘here is the daughter of Earth returning in all her beauty’, and when the summer faded before the onset of winter, ‘the beautiful child has been stolen away from her mother by dark beings who have her imprisoned under the ground’. [. . .] Persephone [. . .] is a beautiful virgin who lies shrouded and hidden from all mortal eyes while the earth is dead and cold outside.”

sentiment of the few, detached from the coarser and more material religion of the many, and accompanying it, through the course of its history, as its ethereal, less palpable, life-giving soul [. . .].⁹¹

This reading of myth is neither sceptical nor reductive (if somewhat arrogant). It is an expression of religious hope, addressing the possibility of a “second birth” outside the terms of “the coarser and more material religion of the many” and depending for its argument on an analogy between the “series of annual changes” and human destiny, an analogy that is the “ethereal, less palpable, life-giving soul” of myth. Whereas the religious aspect of Mallarmé’s text is concealed in the replacement of Cox’s reference to God by phrases such as “la religion unique, latente” and “la divinité, inscrite au fond de notre être”,⁹² Pater’s text is more overtly religious.

Brennan’s annotations indicate that he found important common ground between the treatment of myth by Mallarmé in *Les Dieux antiques* and the work of Pater. In addition to those cross-references noted above, there is an implicit reference to Pater’s *Greek Studies* in an annotation opposite Mallarmé’s discussion of Indra as the god of fire and rain, in which Brennan wrote “spiritual form of fire and dew”. This is the subtitle of Pater’s “Study of Dionysus”, the first of the *Greek Studies*. An annotation to page nine of *Les Dieux antiques*, where the text discusses the metamorphosis of what were originally accounts of Nature into myth, states: “See account of the three stages of a myth in Pater’s *Greek Studies*”. These three phases—the first “half-conscious, instinctive, or mystical”, the second “conscious, poetical or literary”, and the third “ethical”—are discussed in Pater’s chapter on Demeter and Persephone.⁹³ The tone Pater uses in discussing the significance of important Greek myths is comparable with Mallarmé’s, and Brennan’s numerous cross-references make it clear that he is acutely aware of the resemblance. As Pater describes it, the Greek religious imagination is precisely “a unifying or identifying power, bringing together things naturally asunder, making, as it were, for the human body a soul of waters, for the human soul a body of flowers”.⁹⁴ Here we are back to Kantian and Romantic

⁹¹ Walter Pater, *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays*, 1895; London: Macmillan, 1901, pp. 49–50.

⁹² “divinity, inscribed in our deepest being”

⁹³ Pater, *Greek Studies*, p. 91.

⁹⁴ Pater, *Greek Studies*, p. 29.

notions of the power of imagination to unify outer and inner worlds. Pater's theoretical description of "the office of the imagination [. . .] in Greek sculpture" is "to condense the impressions of natural things into human form",⁹⁵ a description which could be applied to Mallarmé's actual practice in the poetic prose of *Les Dieux antiques*.⁹⁶

In the second of his "Minuits chez Mallarmé" articles, written in May 1921, Brennan says of *Les Dieux antiques* that it "contains [Mallarmé's] own reading of the myths".⁹⁷ This comment was made seven years after *Poems* was finally published, indicating that it reflects an enduring opinion. In the article, Brennan refers to Mallarmé's refusal to acknowledge *Les Dieux antiques* and *Les Mots anglais*, declaring that "only the purified results pass into his work".⁹⁸

'Moods' in Brennan's early prose

Brennan's interest in the notion of moods predates the Symbolism lectures, where it is discussed in detail, by some years. In 1896, in the context of a debate with Dowell O'Reilly about poetry and aesthetics, Brennan sent his friend a series of statements about his poetry which he called "Chevaux de Frise", after the defensive spikes used by the Frisians to drive back cavalry attacks.⁹⁹ These statements read as follows:

The I of my verses is not necessarily ME
A poem is the expression of a mood
A mood need not be a confession of faith
. . . nor yet a record of real events
All the sincerity required in art is that you should have
thoroughly felt your mood.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Pater, *Greek Studies*, p. 32.

⁹⁶ It is interesting to compare the dates of relevant works of Pater and Mallarmé in the light of the first appearance of the ideas of Müller and Cox on comparative mythology. Müller's *Comparative Mythology* appears in 1856, Cox's *Manual of Mythology* in 1867. Pater's "Study of Dionysus" appears in 1876, his essay on Demeter and Persephone in 1875. Mallarmé's work does not appear until 1880 but was ready for publication much earlier, in 1871 (Marchal, *La Religion de Mallarmé*, p. 134), before Pater's articles on Dionysus, Demeter and Persephone.

⁹⁷ P, p. 363.

⁹⁸ P, p. 363.

⁹⁹ See G.A. Wilkes, "Interpreting Brennan's Poetry; or 'The I of My Verses is not Necessarily ME'", *Southerly* 37 (1977), pp. 421–22 and CB, p. 88.

¹⁰⁰ CB, p. 88.

Clark takes this to be, at least partially, “a defensive tactic”, as well as expressing an intention to use personal spiritual states as the foundation of “a kind of autobiography”.¹⁰¹ Brennan’s terms, however, should be understood in a wider application than the succession of the states of mind of an individual. He was seeking to express universal moods, aspects of the human condition.

The notion of moods is prominent in Brennan’s introduction to *From Blake to Arnold* in the context of a discussion of beauty and the role of the imagination in poetry (specifically, English poetry of the Romantic and Victorian eras).¹⁰² We read that “imagination [. . .] deals directly with the living spiritual unity or ‘mood’” and find that the unity in question is one of “sense and spirit”.¹⁰³ The influence of the German Romantic concept of *Stimmung*, implying the harmonious accord of the perceiving mind with the natural object of perception, is apparent in the reference to “a universal kinship of all beauty, of all beautiful natural and material objects with the pure impulses of the spirit”.¹⁰⁴ The word “kinship” suggests correspondences. This is corroborated by a later comment that the beauty of the “mood” is “constituted by all those correspondences between nature and spiritual life, out of which the myths arise”.¹⁰⁵

Brennan’s opinion that the creation of poetry involves an exchange between “spiritual and material fact”, a version of which he repeats three times in publications between 1898 and 1904, strongly recalls Pater’s assertion that the Greek imagination was able to make “for the human body a soul of waters, for the human soul a body of flowers”. As we have already seen,¹⁰⁶ he speaks about the exchange between “spiritual and material fact” in the introduction to *From Blake to Arnold*.¹⁰⁷ In his review of Victor Daley’s *At Dawn and Dusk* (1898), Brennan uses a trope of marriage:

[T]hat Beauty which poetry would achieve, is a new creation out of the old and lasting matter—Man and Nature: both being fused together in unity, that the soul may confer on outer beauty significance and in

¹⁰¹ CB, p. 88.

¹⁰² According to Clark, “Brennan wrote the introduction and most of the notes for this book” (CB, p. 154).

¹⁰³ BA, p. xv, n. 1; p. xvii.

¹⁰⁴ BA, p. xviii.

¹⁰⁵ BA, p. xxv.

¹⁰⁶ See page 72 above.

¹⁰⁷ BA, p. xviii.

return receive, what belongs to it by right of birth, all splendour and glory—a nuptial exchange.¹⁰⁸

The trope occurs again in the Symbolism lectures. As we have seen, just such a metaphor is used by Novalis for the reunification of human with Nature considered as a 'thou', an intimate 'you'.

The idea that moods represent an exchange between the mind and Nature is also found in the notebook entry relating the symbolism of Yeats to the "équations sommaires" of Mallarmé. After some notes contrasting the manifestation of the mood in classic and Romantic thought, we find the comment "*Symbolism* [:] The connection of these moods with *outer* aspects of beauty".¹⁰⁹ It is clear from this comment both that Brennan understood moods as the connection of inner and outer worlds and that he understood this to be an essential aspect of Symbolism.

We learn from the introduction to *From Blake to Arnold* that moods in poetry also represent a union of the emotional and the intellectual. This is another aspect of the union of "sense and spirit". Rejecting as inadequate the common Victorian definition of poetry as the expression of emotion, Brennan suggests that "ideas are interesting, perhaps, only as parts of man's passional life, as beliefs".¹¹⁰ Ideas exist in combination with emotions:

All ideas, and more particularly clear ideas, are a creation of the intellect. What we possess in reality is not such concepts, ideas, or thoughts, but moods or states of mind [. . .]. The intellect is an instrument for analysing and decomposing them. Thus we disintegrate them into idea, emotion, and sensation. But the imagination should rather deal with the unity, the living reality.¹¹¹

A footnote describes moods as "intellectual raptures",¹¹² a phrase which reappears in the Symbolism lectures, again with reference to the union of abstract ideas and emotion.¹¹³

The introduction presents moods as "large, rhythmical states" of the soul, "the abiding figures whose union is the type, the ideal or

¹⁰⁸ P, p. 190.

¹⁰⁹ NLA MS 3246, opp. p. 56.

¹¹⁰ BA, p. xiii.

¹¹¹ BA, p. xxiii.

¹¹² BA, p. xxvi, n. 1.

¹¹³ P, p. 86.

perfect human figure, which it is not given to any one man to be".¹¹⁴ We recognise the influence of Yeats's idea of the moods as large affective states not restricted to the merely individual, itself significantly influenced by Blake's notion of the "Universal Man", described in the following passage from *Vala*:

Four Mighty Ones are in every Man; a Perfect Unity
 Cannot Exist but from the Universal Brotherhood of Eden,
 The Universal Man, to Whom be Glory Evermore. Amen.
 What are the Natures of those Living Creatures the Heav'nly father only
 Knoweth. No Individual knoweth, nor can know in all Eternity. (Night
 the First, lines 9–13)

Blake's "Universal Man" is not individual but type. We also recognise the contribution of Mallarmé's version of the type, "la figure que nul n'est".

The idea that moods are "rhythmical" is indebted not only to the musical connotations of the German word *Stimmung* but to Mallarmé's "La Musique et les lettres", in which, as we have seen, Mallarmé proposed that we should "seize the relations [. . .] existing between different seasons" and "simplify the world in accordance with some inner mood". Here is part of Brennan's translation:

Hitherto [. . .] we have been contented with a semblance of this, comparing the aspects as we carelessly brushed against them, without unifying them; evoking amid them certain fair figures ambiguous, confused, and intersecting each other. The totality of the arabesque, which united them, now and then came near to being known; but its harmonies remained uncertain. Yet, wherever it might seem to stray, there was rather a warning than ground for fear: it remained like and identical, returning always into itself, a silent melodic notation of themes which form a logic out of our own living fibres. No matter how great may be the agony of the fallen Chimera, there is not a wound of hers which does not bear testimony to the kinship of all being, not a writhing which breaks the omnipresent line drawn from every point to every other in order to establish the Idea, mysterious, harmonious, and pure, let the human face reveal it or not.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ BA, p. xviii.

¹¹⁵ A "rough translation" by Brennan given in the first of the Symbolism lectures, where it is used to explain Mallarmé's contribution to Brennan's notion of moods (P, pp. 56–57). The original reads as follows: "Semblable occupation suffit, comparer les aspects et leur nombre tel qu'il frôle notre négligence : y éveillant, pour décor, l'ambiguïté de quelques figures belles, aux intersections. La totale arabesque, qui les relie, a de vertigineuses sautes en un effroi que reconnue ; et

The "kinship of all being", the "silent melodic notation of themes which form a logic out of our own living fibres" are, according to this translation, the foundation of the analogy between the "different seasons" and "some inner mood".

It is not surprising that the introduction to *From Blake to Arnold* associates the moods with myth, both in the reference to "all those correspondences between nature and spiritual life, out of which myths arise" and in the following:

An instinctive feeling of this mysterious correspondence of things guided those anonymous poets, the creators of the ancient myths. Their personages, fragmentary expressions of the perfect human type implied in all poetic creation, are always human interpretations of natural fact, embodiments in outer beauty of human life, of those ideal "moods" which alone are vast, clear, and simple enough to be adequate to natural aspects.¹¹⁶

Brennan gives examples of the emotions typically evoked in human viewers by the sunset or the dawn to illustrate moods that correspond with Nature, in a comment whose similarity of expression to Mallarmé's *Les Dieux antiques* definitively establishes its contribution to Brennan's notion of moods:

Not merely because the sun sets, but because the splendours of the sunset evoke vast feelings of dying magnificence, fading glory, and passion come to its term, did the setting sun become the hero going to his great doom after a life of kindly might. Not merely because the dawn fades in the brilliancy of morn, but because the dawn-light suggests shy tenderness, did the dawn become the trusting maiden abandoned by the hero called to glorious life.¹¹⁷

The connection between human passion and the events of natural cycles that Brennan asserts here may not convince us, but it is of the essence of his theory of moods. Human emotions, "feelings of dying magnificence", "shy tenderness", are seen to correspond with

d'anxieux accords. Avertissant par tel écart, au lieu de déconcerter, ou que sa similitude avec elle-même, la soustraie en la confondant. Chiffuration mélodique tue, de ces motifs qui composent une logique, avec nos fibres. Quelle agonie, aussi, qu'agite la Chimère versant par ses blessures d'or l'évidence de tout l'être pareil, nulle torsion vaincue ne fausse ni ne transgresse l'omniprésente Ligne espacée de tout point à tout autre pour instituer l'Idée ; sinon sous le visage humain, mystérieuse, en tant qu'une Harmonie est pure" (OCM, vol. 2, p. 68).

¹¹⁶ BA, p. xix.

¹¹⁷ BA, p. xix.

sunset and dawn. In his view, myths are created out of such correspondences. It is the task of the poetic imagination to reunite mind and Nature by means of the mood:

The true art, embracing man and nature, is the symbolic, which both classic and romantic art become, at their best. By it the mood, in its essence, is always presented (or suggested) completely, as a unity, and its beauty is constituted by all those correspondences between nature and spiritual life, out of which the myths arise.¹¹⁸

“True art” establishes the correspondence between the human being and Nature that constitutes the mood, and this is the foundation of myth.

The gods formerly embodied in the cycles of myth have, for Brennan, been superseded. Romantic theory called on poetry to renew mythology through the use of the natural object as symbol; the interpretation of myth presented in *Les Dieux antiques* showed Brennan (not to mention Mallarmé himself) a way to reanimate landscape with human emotion and experience. In his elegy to the Symbolist poet he most admired, “Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed”, Brennan turned Mallarmé’s own practice into a tribute to his art and placed the poem as a dedication, as well as an introduction, to “The Forest of Night”.

¹¹⁸ BA, p. xxv.

CHAPTER FIVE

“RED AUTUMN IN VALVINS”

Introduction

In 1918, Alfred Poizat wrote in the *Revue de Paris* that Mallarmé's sonnet “Victorieusement fui le suicide beau” is about Antony and Cleopatra. Brennan disagreed. In one of his “Minuits chez Mallarmé” articles, published in the *Modern Language Review of New South Wales* in December 1920, he demonstrates, drawing on evidence from an earlier version of the poem, that the suicide in question has nothing to do with Antony and Cleopatra but refers to the sun at sunset:¹

The equations *suicide-désastre = éclat-coucher, ciel évanoui = soirs évanouis* are clear [. . .]. It is a sunset, magnificently rendered in the second line of the final version; a sullen smouldering along the horizon, above that the clouds all freaked with red, higher yet the pure gold that is the last to fade—and all the tumultuous disarray of that sky, its form in formlessness, given in one word, *tempête*.²

Brennan construes the symbol of the suicide by drawing inferences from differences in vocabulary between the two versions. Although he does not mention *Les Dieux antiques*, his understanding of its themes—notably, the association of sunset with the suicide of legendary sun-heroes such as Heracles—gives him a far superior interpretative apparatus to that of Poizat.

Brennan continues the article on “Victorieusement fui le suicide beau” with a reference to “the rapture with which [Mallarmé] contemplated in nature ‘*le mystère ou idée*’, and with most intensity in her time of smouldering glory—sunset and autumn”.³ The question of the relationship of ‘idea’ and Nature in Mallarmé is a vexed one.

¹ In *Mallarmé et le drame solaire*, Gardner Davies (another Australian) explores in detail the thesis that the mythical drama of the sun, in its daily and yearly cycles, is a major source of imagery in the poetry of Mallarmé. His argument supports Brennan's own interpretation. Davies was a student of Chisholm at the University of Melbourne; Chisholm himself was a student of Brennan at Sydney University.

² P, p. 357. Brennan gives the source of the Poizat article as *Revue de Paris*, July 1918, 187 f. “Suicide” in the final form of the poem replaces “désastre” in the earlier version, and “ciel évanoui” replaces “soirs évanouis”.

³ P, p. 357.

According to Jacques Derrida, Mallarmé's work does not signify any 'idea' at all beyond the work itself. In his article "La double séance" (1970) Derrida compares a passage from Mallarmé's "La Mimique" with one from Plato's *Philebus*, in order to argue that whereas Plato points to a reality beyond the human mind that reproduces it, so that "l'imité est plus réel, plus essentiel, plus vrai, etc., que l'imitant", Mallarmé's piece "se lit tout autrement que comme un néo-idéalisme".⁴ Further, "[i]l n'y a pas d'imitation. Le Mime n'imité rien. [. . .] Il n'y a rien avant l'écriture de ses gestes. [. . .] Ses mouvements forment une figure que ne prévient ni n'accompagne aucune parole. Ils ne sont liés au *logos* par aucun ordre de conséquence".⁵ In Derrida's view, there is nothing to imitate, nothing prior to the text itself, in Mallarmé's "Mimique". Julia Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) has furthered a reading of Mallarmé as a series of texts which do not signify anything beyond themselves.⁶ The "systematic displacement" of the "logocentric" approach to literary criticism, says Peter Dayan, "historically begins with Mallarmé's own 'poèmes critiques'".⁷ Mallarmé is widely read as the beginning of a radically new era.

Brennan, on the other hand, reads Mallarmé in the light of the preceding movement of Romanticism (although not in the least as derivative). In this he was not alone at the time. Macainsh points out that French Symbolism was first received in Berlin, at the very time when Brennan was studying there and making his first acquaintance with Mallarmé and the French Symbolists, as a renewal of Romanticism, especially German Romanticism:

[. . .] among young writers in Berlin, Brennan was far from being the first and only one to enthuse over the newer French literature. The

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972, pp. 218, 221: "that which is imitated is more real, more essential, more true, etc., than that which imitates it"; "reads as something completely different from neo-idealism".

⁵ *La Dissémination*, p. 221: "There is no imitation. The Mime imitates nothing. There is nothing previous to the inscription of his gestures. His movements form a figure which is neither foretold nor accompanied by any word. They are not connected to the *logos* by any order of consequence".

⁶ According to Kristeva, "Mallarmé's practice emerges, precisely, out of a compromise with Parnassian and Symbolist poetry whose stases he accepts in order to reject, bypass, and go beyond them. But having rejected the old poetry as a fetishistic guardian of meaning and the subject, one also had to shun the lie of unspeakable delirium" (*Revolution in Poetic Language*, transl. Margaret Waller, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, pp. 83–84).

⁷ Peter Dayan, *Mallarmé's Divine Transposition: Real and Apparent Sources of Literary Value*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1986, p. 3.

time when he was reading these works and "some articles dealing with the symbolists" was also a time when the tide of *Neuromantik* was rising in Germany. There is a wealth of material to demonstrate that the reception of French Symbolism in Berlin was seen as a neo-romanticism derived from the German Romantics earlier in the century. [. . .] Already, in 1891, before Brennan's arrival, it was proclaimed that the two literatures were related in principle [. . .].⁸

In fact, "in Berlin, Brennan had the opportunity to hear lectures on the new French literature, to read the first articles on the topic, fresh from the publishers, to read the French originals as they appeared in the bookshops, and to make contact with writers and aspirants to literary renewal".⁹ The German poet Stefan George (1868–1933), who previously spent time in Paris with Mallarmé and Verlaine, studied the new French literature at Berlin University from 1889–91.¹⁰ George's manifesto on art was published in the first issue of *Blätter für die Kunst*¹¹ in October 1892, "with a programmatic statement on the renewal of poetry from the spirit of French Symbolism", while the next issue contained translations of works by Mallarmé, Verlaine and Régnier, among others.¹² Macainsh points out that although "the circulation of the earlier issues of these thirty-two page magazines purported to be restricted to members of the George circle and those invited by them, they in fact lay in selected bookshops in Berlin, Vienna and Paris".¹³ Brennan is very likely to have known them.

The 'passion' of the poet

In his elegy to Mallarmé, "Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed", Brennan draws on equivalences between natural cycles and the

⁸ Noel Macainsh, "Christopher Brennan's Poetic," *Southerly* 44 (1984), p. 311.

⁹ Noel Macainsh, "Brennan and Berlin—Some Circumstances", *Southerly* 49 (1989), p. 89.

¹⁰ Macainsh, "Brennan and Berlin", p. 86. Macainsh quotes a letter from George's lifelong friend Karl Wolfskehl (1869–1948), who "discovered" Brennan's poetry in Sydney after his death, claiming that Brennan "loved" George's poetry. This is rather at odds with a comment Brennan made in a letter from Brennan to Delmer of Dec. 14th 1900, "Mind you, I know of Symbolists who are affected and unintelligible: there are many in France and in Germany the would-be Teutonic Mallarmé-Verlaine, Stefan George". Perhaps Brennan changed his mind later in life, or perhaps he was jealous of someone with similar aspirations to his own, and more success.

¹¹ "Pages for Art".

¹² Macainsh, "Brennan and Berlin", p. 89. See *Blätter für die Kunst*, vol. 1, Düsseldorf: Küpper, 1968, pp. 1–2.

¹³ Macainsh, "Brennan and Berlin", p. 89.

universal events of human life to express his own perception of Mallarmé's art. The words "watchful flame" and the colours of red and gold evoked in the first stanza establish the symbolism of autumn as a flame, probably, as Rosemary Lloyd suggests, a "funeral torch-flame".¹⁴ Later in the poem the flame is transformed into a funeral pyre, in keeping with the association of autumn and sunset with the self-immolation of the sun-hero in *Les Dieux antiques*. The elegy, a sonnet, begins:

*Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed
was watchful flame or yet thy spirit induced
might vanish away in magic gold diffused
and kingdom o'er the dreaming forest shed.*

The setting is a specific autumn forest, the forest of Fontainebleau described by Mallarmé in pieces such as "La Gloire" (from *Poèmes en prose*) and "Bucolique" (from *Divagations*), where the poet spent his holidays and then increasingly more time after his "retirement" in 1880.¹⁵ Autumn is represented as "un holocauste d'année" in "Hamlet", one of the pieces in Mallarmé's *Divagations*,¹⁶ as well as in "La Gloire" and "Bucolique". As in English, the French *holocauste* refers to a burnt offering, as in the Temple religion of the Old Testament, or, by transference, to a religious or non-religious sacrifice (possibly, but not necessarily, a blood-sacrifice). As we will see, Brennan's poem echoes a number of pieces in *Divagations*, a volume he was familiar with by the time he composed the elegy.¹⁷

At the beginning of "Hamlet", Nature in autumn appears as a theatre in which a drama takes place:

Loin de tout, *la Nature, en automne, prépare son Théâtre, sublime et pur*, attendant pour éclairer, dans la solitude, de significatifs prestiges, que l'unique œil lucide qui en puisse pénétrer le sens (notoire, le destin de l'homme), un Poète, soit rappelé à des plaisirs et à des soucis médiocres.¹⁸

¹⁴ Lloyd, "Mallarmé Reading Brennan", p. 27.

¹⁵ In his 1899 article on Mallarmé, Brennan describes how Mallarmé's "one delight was to escape to his beloved Valvins, where the Seine spreads broad as a lake in the forest-amphitheatre of Fontainebleau" (P, p. 317).

¹⁶ OCM, vol. 2, p. 167.

¹⁷ Brennan lists the 1897 edition of *Divagations* in "Quelq'ès Vers", p. 143, indicating that he was familiar with it in 1898, the year he made the handwritten collection. This was the year of Mallarmé's death, recorded in the *Chronologie* (p. 143). The interleaved 1897 edition of *Divagations* in the ML is dated by Brennan "April 6th 1900".

¹⁸ *Divagations*, p. 164; OCM, vol. 2, p. 166: "Far from everything, *Nature, in autumn,*

Brennan adopts a similar setting for his poem, in which Mallarmé himself takes the role of Poet. In the next stanza, further connections with the Poet described by Mallarmé are apparent, the words "lucid gaze" recalling the "unique œil lucide":

*what god now claims thee priest, O chosen head,
most humble here that wast, for that thou knew'st
thro' what waste nights thy lucid gaze was used
to spell our glory in blazon'd ether spread?*

The eye of Mallarmé's poet can interpret Nature ("en puisse pénétrer le sens"). The poet in Brennan's elegy can "spell our glory in blazon'd ether spread", that is, understand and use as the basis of his artistic technique the equation of Nature and human experience. As Lloyd points out, [t]he word "spell" has the ambiguous complexity of Mallarmé's term *grimoire* in "Prose (pour des Esseintes)".¹⁹ It refers both to the act of writing and to magical transformation.

In "Hamlet", Mallarmé develops the trope of Nature as a theatre:

Je sais gré aux hasards qui, *contemplateur* dérangé de la vision imaginative du théâtre de nuées et de la VÉRITÉ pour en revenir à quelque scène humaine, me présentent, comme thème initial de causerie, *la pièce que je crois celle par excellence*; tandis qu'il avait lieu d'offusquer aisément des regards trop vite déshabitués de l'horizon pourpre, violet, rose et toujours or. Le commerce *de cieux où je m'identifiai* cesse, sans qu'une incarnation brutale contemporaine occupe, sur leur paravent de gloire, ma place tôt renoncée [. . .].²⁰

The speaker presents himself as a "contemplateur dérangé de la vision imaginative du théâtre de nuées et de la vérité" (Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, he implies, compares more favourably with this spectacle of

prepares her Theatre, sublime and pure, waiting to illuminate, in solitude, prestiges that are [genuinely] significant, until the sole lucid eye able to penetrate its meaning (the celebrated destiny of mankind), a Poet, be called back to pleasure and the cares of the mediocre".

¹⁹ Lloyd, "Mallarmé Reading Brennan", p. 27.

²⁰ *Divagations*, p. 165; OCM, vol. 2, p. 167: "I am grateful to chance events which offer me, a *contemplator* of the imaginative vision of the theatre of clouds and TRUTH, dragged away from it in order to return to some human scene, as the initial theme of my chat, *what I believe to be the play par excellence*; while there were grounds for easily mistaking looks all too readily becoming unaccustomed to the purple, violent, pink and gold (always) of the horizon. The commerce of the skies with which I identify ceases, but not without a brutal contemporary incarnation occupying, on their glorious screen, my soon renounced place".

clouds and truth than do most other plays), unlike others who are “trop vite déshabitués de l’horizon pourpre, violet, rose et toujours or”. He identifies himself with the “commerce of the skies”—the drama of Nature in which human beings, it seems, are implicated.

Mallarmé’s “Crayonné au théâtre” clarifies this connection:

[La Critique] cède-t-elle à l’attirance du théâtre qui montre seulement une représentation, *pour ceux n’ayant point à voir les choses à même!* DE LA PIÈCE ÉCRITE AU FOLIO DU CIEL ET MIMÉE AVEC LE GESTE DE SES PASSIONS PAR L’HOMME.²¹

In these lines, the drama presented in an actual theatre is itself seen as “une représentation” (a performance) of a more fundamental drama, in which humanity itself is the actor (implied by “mimée”) and human passions are the foundation of the plot. Brennan’s elegy to Mallarmé situates the poet in such a drama.

Brennan associates the dead poet with the words “kingdom” (line 4) and “priest” (line 5). In Mallarmé’s prose poem “La Gloire”, the autumn forest of Fontainebleau becomes the setting for a rite in which the poet is to participate:

Personne et, les bras de doute envolés comme qui porte aussi un lot d’une splendeur secrète, trop inappréciable trophée pour paraître ! mais sans du coup m’élancer dans *cette diurne veillée d’immortels troncs au déversement sur un d’orgeuils surhumains* (or ne faut-il pas qu’on en constate l’authenticité ?) ni passer *le seuil où des torches consomment, dans une haute garde, tous rêves antérieurs à leur éclat répercutant en pourpre dans la nue l’universel sacre de l’intrus royal qui n’aura eu qu’à venir: j’attendis, pour l’être [. . .].*²²

“Sacre” means either coronation or consecration. The speaker, the poet himself, the solitary inhabitant of the forest (implied by “personne”) participates in a rite which is equally, or both, the coronation of a king and the consecration of a priest. Cohn comments:

²¹ *Divagations*, pp. 155–56; OCM, vol. 2, pp. 161–62: “[Criticism] yields to the attraction of theatre which shows a mere representation, *for those not having the opportunity to see the real thing!* OF THE PLAY WRITTEN IN THE FOLIO OF THE SKY AND IMITATED BY MAN WITH THE GESTURE OF HIS PASSIONS”.

²² *Divagations*, p. 46; OCM, vol. 2, p. 104: “No one—and, the arms of doubt flown away like someone who also carries a share of secret splendour, a trophy too invaluable to appear! But without throwing myself *into that diurnal watch of immortal trunks to the pouring out upon one of superhuman pride* (but must one not certify its authenticity?) nor cross *the threshold where torches consume, their guard up, all dreams anterior to their splendour, reflecting in purple in the skies the universal consecration of the royal intruder who will have had only to come: I waited, in order to be [that person]*”.

"This sacrificial moment is pagan-holy, royal as the purple in the declining autumn skies. And by extension the solitary poet and intruder is consecrated, anointed, in his own royalty".²³ The moment is "sacrificial" because the "torches" of the autumn conflagration consume "tous rêves antérieurs".

Brennan's poem contains a number of echoes of "La Gloire" (in addition to the autumnal forest setting common to several Mallarmé pieces), suggesting that his poem is a deliberate reworking of some important themes of that piece.²⁴ The word "glory", in "our glory in blazon'd ether spread", recalls the title. The word "suspended", prolonging the moment in the forest, produces a similar effect to that of the following sentence, earlier in "La Gloire": "*Une quiétude menteuse de riches bois suspend alentour quelque extraordinaire état d'illusion*".²⁵ Here "suspends" is used in reference to the prolongation of illusion. Brennan's forest in suspense also echoes "*l'extatique torpeur de ces feuillages là-bas trop immobilisés pour qu'une crise ne les éparpille bientôt dans l'air*".²⁶ Mallarmé's forest is "*en son temps d'apothéose*",²⁷ at the crucial point of the cycle of the seasons, celebrating the consecration of the poet as priest or king while the train that has deposited him there, connecting the forest with the city, departs. Brennan's forest witnesses the apotheosis of the poet at the moment of his death: "what god now claims thee priest, O chosen head" (line 5).

The rite which takes place in the autumn forest, the consecration of the poet, involves a sacrifice, like the self-immolation of the various sun-heroes described in *Les Dieux antiques*. There is no direct evidence that Brennan was aware of the "crisis" experienced by Mallarmé in the years 1866–8, documented in the correspondence, whose outcome was expressed in a letter of 1867 to his friend Cazalis in terms of his own "death" as an individual. In this well-known letter Mallarmé

²³ Robert Greer Cohn, *Mallarmé's Prose Poems: A Critical Study*, Cambridge Studies in French, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 110.

²⁴ "La Gloire" was a favourite with Brennan from very early on. When he passed on to his friend Peden the pamphlet in which he had read Mallarmé first, he wrote on the cover, "The sonnets, La Gloire and Le Nénuphar Blanc will knock you out; better read Aeschylus before you start them" (Mallarmé, *Album de Vers et de Prose*, Paris: Vannier, Peden Family Collection, ML MSS 1663/20/6).

²⁵ *Divagations*, p. 45; OCM, vol. 2, p. 103: "A mendacious tranquillity of rich woods suspends some extraordinary state of illusion round about".

²⁶ *Divagations*, p. 45; OCM, vol. 2, p. 103: "the ecstatic torpor of the foliage over yonder, too still for a crisis to scatter (soon) in the air".

²⁷ *Divagations*, p. 44; OCM, vol. 2, p. 103: "in its time of apotheosis".

states: “je suis parfaitement mort, et la région la plus impure où mon Esprit puisse s’aventurer est l’Éternité”; and further: “je suis maintenant impersonnel et non plus Stéphane que tu as connu,—mais une aptitude qu’a l’Univers spirituel à se voir et à se développer, à travers ce qui fut moi”.²⁸ Brennan did know, however, the following passage from “Crise de vers”, whose theme is the metaphorical death of the poet:

L’œuvre pure implique *la disparition élocutoire du poète*, qui cède l’initiative *aux mots* [. . .].

Une ordonnance du livre de vers point innée ou partout, élimine le hasard; encore la faut-il, pour omettre l’auteur: or, un sujet, fatal, implique, parmi les morceaux ensemble, tel accord quant à la place, dans le volume, qui correspond [. . .]. Instinct, je veux, entrevu à des publications et, si le type supposé, ne reste pas exclusif de complémentaires, la jeunesse, pour cette fois, en poésie où s’impose une foudroyante et harmonieuse plénitude, bégaya le magique concept de l’Œuvre. Quelque symétrie, parallèlement, qui, de la situation des vers en la pièce se lie à l’authenticité de la pièce dans le volume, vole, outre le volume, à plusieurs inscrivant, eux, sur *l’espace spirituel*, le paronyme amplifié du génie, *anonyme et parfait comme une existence d’art*.²⁹

“Crise de vers” is a work in which Mallarmé set out some of the specifications of his ideal work of literature, which he referred to as “l’Œuvre” after the Great Work of the alchemists. Here we see that the “magique concept de l’Œuvre” involves the disappearance of the author, the subject, in favour of words themselves, in order to achieve the anonymous and perfect existence of art. Davies explains this as

²⁸ OCM, vol. 1, pp. 713–14: “I am completely dead, and the most impure region where my Spirit can venture is Eternity”; “I am now impersonal and no longer the Stéphane you knew—but an aptitude of the spiritual Universe to see and develop itself through what was me”.

²⁹ *Divagations*, pp. 246–47; OCM, vol. 2, p. 211: “The pure work implies *the elocutory disappearance of the poet*, who cedes the initiative *to words*. A [certain] organisation of the book of poetry stirs, innately or everywhere, eliminates chance; that is still necessary, in order to omit the author: now, a certain subject, inevitable, implies, among the scraps gathered together, a certain agreement as to the place, in the volume, which corresponds [to it]. Instinct, I want, glimpsed in publications, and, if the presumed kind, [it] doesn’t remain exclusive of complements, the young, for now, in poetry where a flashing and harmonious plenitude imposes itself, faltered out the magic concept of the Work. Some symmetry, equally, which, from the position of the lines in the piece allies itself to the authenticity of the piece in the volume, soars, beyond the volume, to those several [who are] writing, on *the spiritual space*, the amplified signature of genius, *anonymous and perfect like an existence of art*”.

a sacrifice: "le poète doit faire le sacrifice de sa conscience individuelle et renaître".³⁰ He discusses the self-sacrifice Mallarmé requires of himself as poet in some detail, commenting: "il ne s'agit pas simplement de l'omission d'un nom d'auteur, mais bien d'un dépouillement total dans le sens d'abstraction".³¹ In "L'Action restreinte", in the context of a stage play, Mallarmé says, with reference to the self:

[. . .] là, en raison des intermédiaires de la lumière, de la chair et des rires le sacrifice qu'y fait, relativement à sa personnalité, l'inspirateur, aboutit complet ou c'est, dans une résurrection étrangère, fini de celui-ci: de qui le verbe répercuté et vain désormais s'exhale par la chimère orchestrale.³²

The word, the Work, stands on its own, leaving its author out of consideration.

Cohn has demonstrated in his article "Keats and Mallarmé" that Mallarmé, teacher of English, knew the poetry of Keats.³³ There is an obvious affinity between Mallarmé's notion of the sacrifice of the individual personality of the poet and the following statement of Keats:

A Poet [. . .] has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. If then he has no self, and if I am a Poet, where is the wonder that I should say I would [. . .] write no more?³⁴

In this respect, there is a significant continuity between the Romantic conception (in this case, English Romanticism) of the poetical self and that of Mallarmé. This, then, is one aspect under which the theme of sacrifice appears in the work of Mallarmé: the sacrifice of

³⁰ "The poet must sacrifice his individual consciousness and be reborn."

³¹ Davies, *Drame solaire*, p. 22: "It is not simply a question of the omission of an author's name, but rather of a total divestment in the direction of abstraction".

³² OCM, vol. 2, pp. 215–16: "There, due to the mediation of light, flesh and laughter, the sacrifice the inspirer makes there, relative to his personality, ends up complete or finished with him, in a foreign resurrection: his word in future, reverberated and hollow, is exhaled by the orchestral chimera".

³³ Robert Greer Cohn, "Keats and Mallarmé", *Comparative Literature Studies* 7 (1970), pp. 196–97.

³⁴ "To Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818", in John Keats, *Letters of John Keats*, ed. Robert Gittings, London: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 157.

the individual personality of the poet in favour of the work. This notion helps to explain the significance of the “assumption-pyre” in Brennan’s elegy. It is not merely a funerary pyre; it is the fire in which the poet enacts the sacrifice of his individual personality, according to the equivalences established in *Les Dieux antiques* between sunset or autumn and the death of the sun-hero.

The “assumption-pyre” also points to a more universal role of the poet as the type or hero of a possible future religion who undergoes, on behalf of humanity, a passion comparable to that of Christ. The end of Mallarmé’s “La Musique et les lettres” points towards such a future religion:

Si, dans l’avenir, en France, ressurgit une religion, se sera l’amplification à mille joies de l’instinct de ciel en chacun; plutôt qu’une autre menace, réduire ce jet au niveau élémentaire de la politique. Voter, même pour soi, ne contente pas, en tant qu’expansion d’hymne avec trompettes intimant l’allégresse de n’émettre aucun nom; ni l’émeute, suffisamment, n’enveloppe de la tourmente nécessaire à ruisseler, se confondre, et renaître, héros.³⁵

This new religion would be founded on the inner “instinct for heaven”. Brennan quotes the phrase “l’instinct de ciel en chacun” in his interleaved copy of the 1899 *Poésies* of Mallarmé, opposite “Le Guignon”. Here he says of the early poems:

Commence le ‘prélude’ de Mallarmé, sur le destin du poète, en tant que symbole de ‘l’instinct de ciel’ et de ses destinées, soit de ‘l’antagonisme de rêve chez l’homme avec les fatalités à son existence départies par le malheur’.³⁶

Apparently the “instinct de ciel” is involved in the clash between dream and suffering in human life: indeed, Brennan takes Mallarmé’s

³⁵ OCM, vol. 2, p. 74: “If a religion resurfaces in France in the future, it will be the joyous amplification to a thousandfold of the instinct of heaven in each one of us; it is a greater threat than any other to reduce this flow to the elementary level of the political. To vote, even for oneself, does not satisfy, as much as the spreading of the hymn with trumpets intimating the elation [that comes from] emitting no name at all; neither does the riot, sufficiently, shroud it in the torment necessary to flow, merge, and be reborn as hero”.

³⁶ Annotations to Mallarmé, *Poésies* (1899), folio opp. p. 9, verso: “Here begins the ‘prelude’ of Mallarmé, on the destiny of the poet, as symbol of ‘the instinct of heaven’ and of his destinies, that is to say of the ‘antagonism of dream in us to the fatalities associated with our existence dealt to us by misfortune’.”

phrases "l'instinct de ciel en chacun" and "l'antagonisme de rêve chez l'homme" to be parallel. The latter phrase comes from "Hamlet".³⁷ We observe that, according to Brennan, the destiny of the poet is bound up with this clash, implying that he understands the poet to play an important role in the new universal religion adumbrated by Mallarmé. Mallarmé suggests further that the "torment" of the clash is necessary for a transformation to occur, the rebirth of the human being as "hero".

Brennan was familiar with the 1886 letter from Mallarmé to Vittorio Pica quoted in *La Revue indépendante* in March 1891, in which the question of the role of literature in the "vrai culte moderne" is addressed:

Je crois que la littérature, reprise à sa source, qui est l'art et la science, nous fournira un théâtre, dont les représentations seront le vrai culte moderne; un livre, explication de l'homme, suffisante à nos plus beaux rêves. Je crois tout cela écrit dans la nature de façon à ne laisser fermer les yeux qu'aux intéressés à ne rien voir. Cette œuvre existe, tout le monde l'a tentée sans le savoir [. . .]. Montrer cela et soulever un coin du voile de ce que peut être pareil poème, est dans un isolement mon plaisir et ma torture.³⁸

This is a crucial passage for understanding Brennan's enterprise in *Poems*. According to Mallarmé, literature itself, in the form of "un livre", can provide the "explication de l'homme" that would be adequate to our dreams and that would itself constitute the desired new form of religious expression. This explanation is already unmistakably expressed in *Nature* for anyone who has eyes to see, and Mallarmé's ambition (both "pleasure" and "torture") is to contribute to the revelation of this same poem or, to use the words of Brennan's elegy, to "spell our glory in blazon'd ether spread". This is the foundation for the unique, passional role of the poet.

³⁷ OCM, vol. 2, p. 167.

³⁸ Quoted by Brennan from Vittorio Pica, "Les modernes Byzantins", *La Revue indépendante* 18 (1891), pp. 357-58, in "Quelques Vers", pp. [136]-137: "I believe that literature, taken back to its sources in art and science, will furnish us a theatre, whose performances will be the true form of worship of our time; a book, explanation of mankind, adequate to our most beautiful dreams. I believe all this [to be] written in nature [so clearly that] only those who are interested in seeing nothing can close their eyes to it. This work exists, everyone has attempted it without realising [it] [. . .]. To show this and to lift a corner of the veil over what could be such a poem, is, in my isolation, my pleasure and my torture".

Cohn takes the principle expressed in the passage we have already encountered from Mallarmé's "La Musique et les lettres"³⁹ concerning the equivalence between the seasons and human passion to be absolutely fundamental to Mallarmé's thought:

In *La Musique et les Lettres* [. . .] Mallarmé evokes a "symphonic equation proper to the seasons"—a tetrapolar dialectic vibrant between the four seasonal poles and, further, suspended, as in the nature-art pair above, between seasons proper and the equivalent in man's moods—and he presents it as the core of a Future Work which he mysteriously announced to his Oxford and Cambridge brethren in 1894.⁴⁰

Brennan's notion of moods and Cohn's interpretation of Mallarmé's "symphonic equation" are very close. The relationship Mallarmé suggests between "notre passion" and "divers ciels" is also found in the passage from "Crayonné au théâtre" quoted above,⁴¹ in which we find that human beings mime or mimic the drama of the skies with their passions. In "Catholicisme" (partly inspired by Joris-Karl Huysmans' novel of conversion, *La Cathédrale*, 1898) the drama that, in performance, could form the basis of the "vrai culte moderne" is allied with the Passion of Christ celebrated in the Catholic rite:

*Mystère, autre que représentatif et que, je dirai, grec. Pièce, OFFICE. [. . .] Ici, reconnaissez, désormais, dans le drame, LA PASSION, pour élargir l'acceptation canoniale ou, comme ce fut l'esthétique fastueuse de l'Église, avec LE FEU TOURNANT D'HYMNES, UNE ASSIMILATION HUMAINE À LA TÉTRALOGIE DE L'AN.*⁴²

The Passion of Christ is thought of as a drama, although unlike the Greek tetralogy (the cycle of four plays, three tragic and one satyric) that was performed at the festival of Dionysus. The drama is connected with the fourfold festival of the seasons, another tetralogy. Wagner's Ring cycle is another relevant tetralogy, as Cohn points out, the metaphorical association of the downfall of the old gods with the end of the day (*Götterdämmerung*, the Twilight of the Gods)

³⁹ See page 152 above.

⁴⁰ Robert Greer Cohn, *Mallarmé's Divagations*, p. 3.

⁴¹ See page 170 above.

⁴² *Divagations*, p. 305; OCM, vol. 2, p. 241: "Mystery, something other than representational, and, I would say, than Greek. Play, [divine] SERVICE. [. . .] Here recognise, for the future, in the drama, THE PASSION, to broaden the way it is understood canonically, or, as was the sumptuous aesthetic of the church, with THE REVOLVING FIRE OF HYMNS, AN ASSIMILATION OF THE HUMAN TO THE TETRALOGY OF THE YEAR".

being particularly relevant to a new form of religious expression that would unite human, rather than divine, passion with natural cycles.⁴³

This passage, and the one from "La Musique et les lettres" we have just looked at, are crucial both to Brennan's reading of Mallarmé and to his own work. To Mallarmé, the old rite of Catholicism contributes to a new form of religious expression that grafts in the cycles of the natural world, thus addressing the gulf between the human mind and Nature that Romanticism sought to bridge. Obviously this aspect of Mallarmé's thought was very much in the forefront of Brennan's mind in comments he made in the Symbolism lectures. We have already met these comments in the Introduction,⁴⁴ but they are usefully repeated here:

Poetry then was for Mallarmé a religion, and a national matter. [. . .] What now is the form of that art-work which is to satisfy all our spiritual needs?

1. It is a myth. Not a particular legend, but a myth resuming all the others, without date or place, a figuration of our multiple personality: the myth written on the page of heaven and earth and imitated by man with the gesture of his passions.

2. It is a drama: for nature is a drama and as Novalis had said, "The true thinker perceives in the world a continued drama"; "In the people all is drama." It is the assimilation of our inmost passion to the tetralogy of the year. But a drama again, as it was a myth. There is no limited fable, no individual hero. We, who assist at it, are, each of us in turn and all of us together, the hero.⁴⁵

A myth takes on a religious function, the person who creates or expresses that myth assuming the impersonal role of hero. The work of art enacts the drama of the cycles of Nature, as they are correlated with human experience. Cohn agrees with Brennan on the central place of this idea in the *œuvre* of Mallarmé:

Mallarmé's Passion is of man, a modification of the Church's Passion Plays but a subtle one, not secular but more *deeply* and *universally* sacred: (a new more comprehensive *cross* of life's and Church's main dimensions). The tetralogy refers to the "symphonic equation proper to the seasons" (*La Musique et les Lettres*) which Mallarmé announced as the skeleton of his Great Work and built into the four phases of the *Coup*

⁴³ Cohn, *Mallarmé's Divagations*, p. 322.

⁴⁴ See page 12 above.

⁴⁵ P, p. 145.

de dés (after seeing it in the four times of day and year in *Les Dieux antiques*); also there is no doubt a nod at Wagner's *Tetralogy*, as well as the Church's seasonal rites, each with its appropriate hymns.⁴⁶

For Mallarmé, as for Brennan, human passion can take on a comparable significance to that of the Passion of Christ.

Romantic humanism emphasised the human, rather than the divine, aspect of Christ, who was seen as the type or symbol of humanity rather than as the Son of God. The German writer Johann Paul Friedrich Richter, known as Jean Paul (1763–1825) wrote his “Dream” of the death of God well before Nietzsche took on the subject; it had been conveyed to France in a rather more pessimistic version by Madame de Staël, whose *De l'Allemagne* (1813) was one of the most important conduits for German Romantic thinking into nineteenth-century France. This is her version of the return of Jean Paul's Christ from a fruitless search for his Father:

Alors descendit des hauts lieux sur l'autel une figure rayonnante, noble, élevée, et qui portait l'empreinte d'une impérissable douleur; les morts s'écrièrent:—O Christ ! n'est-il point de Dieu ? Il répondit:—Il n'en est point. [. . .] [L]e Christ continua ainsi:—J'ai parcouru les mondes, je me suis élevé au-dessus des soleils, et là aussi il n'est point de Dieu; je suis descendu jusqu'aux dernières limites de l'univers, j'ai regardé dans l'abîme, et je me suis écrié:—Père, où est-tu ? [. . .] Relevant ensuite mes regards vers la voûte des cieus, je n'y ai trouvé qu'une orbite vide, noire et sans fond.⁴⁷

Bowman comments that, although de Staël's alterations changed the impact of Richter's text, “it was her version of the dream, the image of the eye of God as an infinite, empty pit, of the sun as black, which was to dominate, horrify and delight the next generation, inspire works by Balzac, Gautier, Nerval, above all Victor Hugo”.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Cohn, *Mallarmé's Divagations*, p. 322.

⁴⁷ Madame De Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, ed. Henry Weston Eve, Oxford: Clarendon, 1906, pp. 161–62: “Then a radiant, noble and lofty figure came down from on high to the altar, one who bore the imprint of a lasting sorrow; the dead cried out: ‘O Christ, is there no God?’ He replied, ‘None at all’. [. . .] Christ continued thus: I have travelled the length and breadth of the worlds, I have ascended above the suns, and there too there is no God; I have descended to the furthest limits of the universe, I have looked into the abyss, and have called out, Father, where are you? [. . .] Then lifting my gaze again towards the vault of the heavens, I found nothing but an empty eye-socket, black and bottomless”.

⁴⁸ Bowman, “Illuminism, Utopia, Mythology”, p. 81.

This human Christ, lacking the validation of a Father or Absolute beyond himself, is a type of the passion not of the Son of God, but of humanity itself.

Brennan’s delineation of Mallarmé’s ideal drama emphasises that there is no individual hero but only a universalised one. In “De même”, which follows “Catholicisme” in *Divagations*, Mallarmé suggests that Christ is a type for the hero of the drama of the “religion d’état”:

Telle, en l’authenticité de fragments distincts, la mise en scène de la religion d’état, par nul cadre encore dépassée et qui, selon une œuvre triple, INVITATION DIRECTE À L’ESSENCE DU TYPE (ici le Christ), puis INVISIBILITÉ DE CELUI-LÀ, ENFIN ÉLARGISSEMENT DU LIEU PAR VIBRATIONS JUSQU’À L’INFINI, satisfait étrangement un souhait moderne philosophique et d’art.⁴⁹

In his interleaved copy of the 1899 *Poésies*, Brennan writes “héros puisqu’ élevé à un moment d’éternité: tout homme qui meurt devient héros” opposite line 25 of “Toast funèbre”, which refers to “le vierge héros de l’attente posthume”.⁵⁰ As this poem deals with the death of a poet, Théophile Gautier (associated with pure aestheticism), Brennan seems to have taken Mallarmé to imply that it is the dead poet who, having suffered death, is resurrected as hero and that he is the representative or “type” of “tout homme qui meurt”. As we have seen, “La Musique et les lettres” mentions the rebirth of the “hero” out of “torment”. Thus we have, in Mallarmé’s works, an association of poet, hero, type, and Christ. The passion of the poet takes the role, in the drama of the new cult, of the Passion of Christ.

Opposite the beginning of “Toast funèbre”, Brennan notes “On n’invoqua pas le spectre: le poète s’évanouit tout dans la gloire vespérale; ne laissant derrière lui que le corps vain que couvrira la tombe”.⁵¹ When he writes in the first stanza of his elegy, “thy spirit

⁴⁹ *Divagations*, p. 310; OCM, vol. 2, p. 244: “Such, in the authenticity of distinct fragments, the mise en scène of the state religion, still not surpassed by any setting and which, according to a triple work, DIRECT INVITATION TO THE ESSENCE OF THE TYPE (here, Christ), and then THE FACT THAT HE IS INVISIBLE, FINALLY THE EXTENSION OF THE PLACE THROUGH VIBRATIONS AS FAR AS THE INFINITE, strangely satisfies a modern wish of philosophy and art”.

⁵⁰ Mallarmé, 1899, folio opp. p. 76, recto: “hero because elevated to a moment of eternity: everyone who dies becomes a hero”; “the pure hero of posthumous expectation”.

⁵¹ Mallarmé, 1899, folio opp. P. [74], verso: “No one evoked the apparition: the

induced/might vanish away in magic gold diffused”, he suggests that the poet might “vanish in the glory” before the suspended moment of the “assumption-pyre” has been concluded. What the poet does for the rest of humanity, in his role as representative, appears in Brennan’s gloss to lines 25–34 of “Toast Funèbre”. These lines read:

Vaste gouffre apporté dans l’amas de la brume
 Par l’irascible vent des mots qu’il n’a pas dits,
 Le néant à cet Homme aboli de jadis:
 « Souvenir d’horizons, qu’est-ce, ô toi, que la Terre ? »
 Hurlé ce songe; et, voix dont la clarté s’altère,
 L’espace a pour jouet le cri: « Je ne sais pas ! »

 Le Maître, par un œil profond, a, sur ses pas,
 Apaisé de l’éden l’inquiète merveille
 Dont le frisson final, dans sa voix seule, éveille
 Pour la Rose et le Lys le mystère d’un nom.⁵²

For Brennan, the poet has an answer for the gulf of the *néant*, the universe deprived of a personal God in the aftermath of Jean Paul and de Staël. Opposite “la Terre” he has written “[d]onner un sens à la Terre, devoir de l’Homme”. Opposite “Le Maître, par un œil profond” we find “[v]oir clairement et parler, devoir du Poète”. As a gloss on “éden” we find “simple beauté terrestre inquiète jusqu’à ce que l’Homme lui confère l’authenticité”. Next to “le mystère d’un nom” he writes “la Parole par qui les choses vraiment sont (Adam donnant aux choses leur nom)”.⁵³ Faced with the *néant*, he implies, the poet has the power to authenticate the earth.

In Mallarmé’s “Le livre, instrument spirituel”, the writer appears as “l’homme chargé de voir divinement”:

[L]’HYMNE, HARMONIE ET JOIE, COMME PUR ENSEMBLE GROUPE DANS QUELQUE CIRCONSTANCE FULGURANTE, DES RELATIONS ENTRE TOUT. L’homme chargé de voir divinement, en raison que *le lien, à volonté, limpide, n’a d’expression qu’au parallélisme, devant son regard, de feuilletts.*⁵⁴

poet vanishes completely in the evening glory, leaving behind only the hollow body which the tomb will cover”.

⁵² OCM, vol. 1, pp. 27–28.

⁵³ Mallarmé, 1899, folio opp. P. 76, verso: “the duty of human beings, to bestow a sense on the earth”; “to see clearly and speak, the duty of the Poet”; “simple earthly beauty, anxious until mankind confers authenticity upon it”; “the Word by means of which things really are (Adam giving objects their names)”.

⁵⁴ *Divagations*, p. 273; OCM, vol. 2, p. 224: “THE HYMN, THE HARMONY AND JOY

To “see divinely” is connected with the “interdependence of everything” that comprises the harmony of the “hymn”. Speaking follows seeing, as Brennan too emphasises when he says “voir clairement et parler, devoir du poète”. The artistic act, “parler”, puts into effect the “Parole par qui les choses vraiment sont”, allowing the poet, on behalf of humanity, to resume the role of the unfallen Adam of naming things in their true significance. Brennan knew Mallarmé’s comment in a letter to Léo d’Orfer of 1884 that “La Poésie est l’expression, par le langage humain ramené à son rythme essentiel, du sens mystérieux des aspects de l’existence: elle doue ainsi d’authenticité notre séjour et constitue la seule tâche spirituelle”.⁵⁵ Obviously Brennan had this statement in mind in his gloss on Eden as the simple beauty of the earth upon which humankind has to confer authenticity. To authenticate the earth in art, in poetry, in the face of the *néant* that has taken the place of an external divinity or Absolute is, Brennan implies, sufficient.

Transposition

In the second part of Brennan’s elegy, the smoke of the pyre, imagined into being from the flamelike colours of the autumn leaves and the haze in the air, symbolises the transformation of the poet. Brennan’s translation of part of Mallarmé’s “Bucolique” in the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé throws further light on the “suspended fulgent haze”:

Nature—

Music—

Terms in their current acceptation of foliage and sounds.

I have only to draw upon my experience.

The first in date, Nature, the Idea made tangible in order to hint at some reality for our imperfect senses and, by way of compensation,

OF THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF EVERYTHING, LIKE A PURE ENSEMBLE GROUPED TOGETHER ON SOME RADIANT OCCASION. The person called to see divinely, by dint of the fact that *the [connecting] line made at will, limpid, HAS NO EXPRESSION EXCEPT [WHAT INHERES] IN THE ALIGNMENT of pages before his gaze*”.

⁵⁵ Mallarmé’s letter was published in *La Vogue*, no. 2, 18th April 1886, and then quoted by Brennan in “Quelq’ es Vers”, p. 131: “Poetry is the expression, by human language reduced to its essential rhythm, of the mysterious meaning of aspects of existence: thus it confers authenticity on our sojourn and constitutes the sole spiritual task”.

direct, communicated to my youthful mind a fervour which I can only call passion and compare to the fire which, when day evaporated in majestic suspense, she sets to her funeral pyre in the virginal hope of withholding its interpretation from him who reads the horizon. To see clearly that, in this suicide of hers, the secret cannot remain incompatible with man, is enough to disperse the vapours of desuetude, daily existence, and the street. So, when led by an instinct I recognize, some evening of later life, to music, I could not but recognize, in its subtle furnace, the fallen but renascent flame, wherein words and skies offered themselves a holocaust: now fanned, in public, by the hunger for ecstasy which it consumes, spreading the darkness thereof overhead like a temple roof.

In such a way and in such succession did the two sacred states of being appeal to me—the one primitive and still choked with its own richness of material [. . .]: the other, its fiery volatilization into corresponding rhythms, that lie close to thought, not merely the text being abolished but the image, too, left latent. What seems to me wonderful in the case is that the concordance followed just this order: that one could pursue one's true self through the forests from scattered symbol to symbol towards a source, and then find that an instrumental concert did not forbid the same notion; in its illuminating clangour the phantom was recognized as the same, throughout the transformation of nature into music.⁵⁶

Here is the day evaporating “in majestic suspense”. Reciprocally, Nature is seen as “the Idea made tangible” and music as “the transformation of nature”, a complex development of the relatively sim-

⁵⁶ P, pp. 151–52. The original reads as follows: “La Nature—La Musique—Termes en leur acception courante de feuillage et de sons. Repuiser, simplement, au destin. La première en date, la nature, Idée tangible pour intimer quelque réalité aux sens frustes et, par compensation, directe, communiquait à ma jeunesse une ferveur que je dis passion comme, son bûcher, les jours évaporés en majestueux suspens, elle l’allume avec le virginal espoir d’en défendre l’interprétation au lecteur d’horizons. Toute clairvoyance, que, dans ce suicide, le secret ne reste pas incompatible avec l’homme, éloigne les vapeurs de la désuétude, l’existence, la rue. Aussi, quand mené par je comprends quel instinct, un soir d’âge, à la musique, irrésistiblement au foyer subtil, je reconnus, sans douter, l’arrière mais renaissante flamme, où se sacrifèrent les bosquets et les cieux; là, en public, éventée par le manque du rêve qu’elle consume, pour en épandre les ténèbres comme plafond de temple. Esthétiquement la succession de deux états sacrés, ainsi m’invitèrent-ils—primitif, l’un ou foncier, dense des matériaux encore [. . .]: l’autre, ardent, volatil dépouillement en traits qui se correspondent, maintenant proches la pensée, en plus que l’abolition de texte, lui soustrayant l’image. La merveille, selon une chronologie, d’avoir étagé la concordance; et que, si c’est soi, un tel, poursuivi aux forêts, épars, jusqu’à une source, un concert aussi d’instrument n’exclue la notion: ce fantôme, tout de suite, avec répercussion de clartés, le même, au cours de la transformation naturelle en musicale identifié” (OCM, vol. 2, pp. 253–54).

ple "equation" of sunset and sacrifice in *Les Dieux antiques*. Brennan translates "c'est soi, un tel" as "one's true self", hinted at by both Nature and music. "Skies" and "words" equally are offered as a sacrifice. The process of volatilisation described here (given prominence by Brennan's translation of the adjective *volatil* with a noun, volatilisation) produces something non-physical; physical substance (Nature) is transformed, by burning in a "funeral pyre" or "furnace", into non-physical music.

In "Crise de vers" we read of the abolition of the physical aspect, the "thingness" of the image, in poetry:

Abolie, la prétention, esthétiquement une erreur, quoiqu'elle régit les chefs-d'œuvre, d'inclure au papier subtil du volume autre chose que par exemple *l'horreur de la forêt, ou le tonnerre muet épars au feuillage; non le bois intrinsèque et dense des arbres. Quelques jets de l'intime orgueil véridiquement trompetés éveillent l'architecture du palais, le seul habitable; hors de tout pierre, sur quoi les pages se refermeraient mal.*⁵⁷

The "bois intrinsèque et dense des arbres", on which the pages would close with difficulty, must yield to the exigencies of writing. This allows a kind of magic spell ("sortilège") to operate in which the spirit is released, again with the use of the word "volatil":

Les monuments, la mer, la face humaine, dans leur plénitude, natifs, conservant une vertu autrement attrayante *que ne les VOILERA* une description, évocation dites, *allusion* je sais, *suggestion*: cette terminologie quelque peu de hasard atteste la tendance, une très décisive, peut-être, qu'ait subie l'art littéraire, elle le borne et l'exempte. Son sortilège, à lui, *si ce n'est libérer*, hors d'une poignée de poussière ou réalité sans l'enclore, au livre, même comme texte, la dispersion volatile soit l'esprit, qui n'a que faire de rien outre LA MUSICALITÉ DE TOUT.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Divagations*, p. 245; OCM, vol. 2, p. 210: "Abolished, the pretension, aesthetically an error, although the masterpieces were subject to it, to include on the subtle paper of the volume anything other than, for example, *the horror of the forest, or the scattered mute thunder in the foliage; not the intrinsic and dense wood of the trees. Some sketches of intimate pride, authentically trumpeted, bring to life the architecture of the palace, the only one habitable*; leaving aside every [actual] stone, upon which the pages would close with difficulty".

⁵⁸ *Divagations*, pp. 245–46; OCM, vol. 2, p. 210: "Monuments, the sea, the human face, in their fullness, native, conserving a virtue much more attractive *in that a* [mere] description *would CONCEAL them*, evocation, say, *allusion*, I know, *suggestion*: such somewhat fortuitous terminology attests to the tendency, perhaps a very decisive one, from which the literary art has suffered, simultaneously bounds and exempts it. [What is] its magic spell, *if not to release in the book (even considered as a text) outside of a handful of dust or reality not enclosed in it, the volatile dispersal or*

Again, “la dispersion volatile soit l’esprit” has to do with “la musicalité de tout”. Evocation, allusion, suggestion will allow such a dispersal of spirit. The term finally settled upon is “transposition”, itself, of course, a musical term.

Parler n’a trait à la réalité des choses que commercialement: en littérature, cela se contente d’y faire une allusion ou de distraire LEUR QUALITÉ QU’INCORPORERA QUELQUE IDÉE. [. . .]

Cette visée, je la dis Transposition—Structure, une autre.⁵⁹

Davies argues that the principle of transposition is fundamental to Mallarmé’s aesthetic, describing it as “ce procédé ou artifice qui lui permet, en partant d’une inspiration directe, de l’effacer totalement, puis de la recréer en tant qu’abstraction pure”.⁶⁰ In discussing the production of the symbol by the manipulation of correspondences, Brennan quotes (in translation) two passages from Mallarmé dealing with transposition:

“The principle of transposition leads us to take from anything nothing more than the image, just at the point where it is about to melt into a thousand others, a kind of Loie Fuller tissue of alliances and deductions; by such evaporation this, which is the substance of literature, gains in purity. Language should not seek to intercept anything of the brute reality of its materials, which cease to be when once uttered: we are left with the essential, with that which, until then, did not exist and which it was our business to create.” That is to say, we leave behind us the unformed everyday fact, whether mental or material; we have to deal with the fusion of the two kinds in correspondence. Elsewhere he gives the rule, briefly and more abstractly: “Institute a relation, with exactness, between the images; a third aspect will be the result, fusible and clear, offered to the divination”.⁶¹

This is not only a description of Symbolist technique but also deals with the relationship between the “brute reality” and the “essential”,

spirit, which has nothing to do with anything except [what relates to] THE MUSICALITY OF EVERYTHING”.

⁵⁹ *Divagations*, p. 246; OCM, vol. 2, pp. 210–11: “*Speaking is only connected with the reality of things commercially: in literature, one is content with making an allusion to it or abstracting THEIR QUALITY WHICH SOME IDEA INCORPORATES. [. . .]* I call this aim Transposition—in other words, Structure”.

⁶⁰ Davies, *Drame solaire*, p. 26: “this procedure or artifice which permits him, starting from a direct inspiration, to completely efface it, and then to recreate it as pure abstraction”.

⁶¹ P, pp. 61–2.

to use the terms of Brennan's own translation. A further explanation of transposition occurs later in "Crise de vers":

A quoi bon la merveille de TRANSPOSER un fait de nature en sa presque disparition vibratoire selon le jeu de la parole, cependant; si ce n'est pour qu'en émane, sans la gêne d'un proche ou concret rappel, la notion pure.

Je dis: une fleur ! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, *idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets*.⁶²

A natural object almost disappears in being transposed by the play of words into "the pure notion"; to utter the word 'flower' is to call up, distinct from any particular, known flower, "that which is missing from every bouquet". In the light of the emphasis on sacrifice discussed above, we may think in terms of the virtual death of the object in its transposition into verse. In "Théodore de Banville" we find the process of transposition given the epithet "divine": "*La divine transposition, POUR L'ACCOMPLISSEMENT DE QUOI EXISTE L'HOMME, va du fait à l'idéal*".⁶³ Here it is apparent that transposition is not merely an aesthetic principle; it is something the poet is called to accomplish for the sake of humanity.

When Brennan calls Mallarméan thought "Hegelian" in the article "German Romanticism: A Progressive Definition", he is almost certainly thinking of the "third aspect" referred to in his translation above.⁶⁴ Cohn, too, thinks of Hegel: "The extraction of artistic essences from ordinary materials and diversion to metaphoricity involves a dialectical process of raising or *Aufhebung*".⁶⁵ *Aufhebung* is the name Hegel applies to his dialectical method. It relates fundamentally to logic, but Hegel extends its use from that field to his philosophies

⁶² *Divagations*, pp. 250–51; OCM, vol. 2, p. 213: "To what purpose, however, is the marvel of TRANSPOSING a fact of nature in its vibratory near-disappearance according to the interplay of words; if not in order that the pure notion should issue forth from it, without the constraint of a close or concrete evocation. I say, A flower! And, out of the forgetfulness to which my voice relegates any contour, as something other than the known calices, the very same, suave idea, that which is missing from every bouquet, ascends musically".

⁶³ *Divagations*, p. 121; OCM, vol. 2, p. 144: "*The divine transposition, WHICH HUMAN BEINGS EXIST TO ACCOMPLISH, goes from the fact to the ideal*".

⁶⁴ P, p. 388.

⁶⁵ Cohn, *Mallarmé's Divagations*, p. 246.

of Nature and Spirit and to the phenomenology of Spirit.⁶⁶ Michael Forster explains the “third thing” in this way:

This new category unites [. . .] the preceding categories [. . .]. But it unites them in such a way that they are not only preserved but also abolished (to use Hegel’s term of art for this paradoxical-sounding process, they are *aufgehoben*).⁶⁷

The German verb *aufheben* has a triple meaning: to preserve, abolish and raise. In the logic of Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia*, we find that in the dialectical stage “these finite characterisations or formulae supersede themselves, and pass into their opposites”.⁶⁸ The speculative stage “apprehends the unity of terms (propositions) in their opposition—the affirmative, which is involved in their disintegration and in their transition”.⁶⁹ The self-contradiction of the two poles, thesis and antithesis, has “a positive outcome, a new category” that “unites [. . .] the preceding categories”.⁷⁰

An essential aspect of Hegelian *Aufhebung* is contradiction. Mallarmé’s transposition, however, has no genuine opposites or antitheses. It is actually closer to another form of the Romantic synthesis. In his article on German Romanticism, Brennan presents and compares various versions of the Romantic synthesis, especially those of Schlegel and Novalis. According to Brennan, the “triad is the fundamental form of romantic thought, for the romantic ideal is a synthesis, and synthesis presupposes thesis and antithesis, a pair of contraries or contradictions of which it is the solution, union and harmony”.⁷¹ However, Brennan’s interpretation of “contraries” is quite wide, extending to “elements which have become negative opposites by misuse”.⁷² The union of these contraries, which forms the third part of the triad, “will be a *transcendental* unity, a unity which transcends each individual element constituting it, a unity in which each indi-

⁶⁶ Michael Forster, “Hegel’s Dialectical Method”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser, Cambridge Companions, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 131.

⁶⁷ Forster, p. 132.

⁶⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel*, edn. William Wallace, 2nd edn., London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 147.

⁶⁹ Hegel, p. 152.

⁷⁰ Forster, “Dialectical Method”, p. 132.

⁷¹ P, p. 384.

⁷² P, p. 382.

vidual element is sublimated".⁷³ Under this definition, Nature and the human mind could be considered as "opposites by misuse"; his description of Mallarmé's transposition as "fundamentally Hegelian", therefore, may not necessarily imply a strictly logical contradiction between the first two elements.

The version of the Romantic synthesis proposed by Novalis, discussed at the end of Brennan's article, actually fits Mallarmé's transposition better than Hegel's synthesis does. Novalis' version does not rely on antitheses at all. Brennan describes it in this way:

[. . .] any single point of experience, romanticized, in the sense [Novalis] gives to the term, leads him to the final synthesis. Consequently the duad of his triad does not consist of two contraries or contradictions, but of one and the same thing taken once in its ordinary power, a second time in its higher power. This use of the triad is based on his conception of individual *Bildung*: "*höchste Aufgabe der Bildung ist es sich seines transcendentalen Ichs zu bemächtigen, das Ich seines Ichs zu sein*" ([. . .] and elsewhere, "*Der Mensch soll sich selbst selbzweien und nicht allein das, sondern auch selbdreien*"; *selbzweien* to enter into relations with his transcendental ego, change the mere circle of consciousness into an ellipse with two foci, carry on a *Zwiegespräch* [sic] with himself—*selbdreien* to bring about a synthesis of the two selves).⁷⁴

The mathematical metaphor of "raising to a higher power" was popular among the early German Romantics. We have already encountered Schlegel's description of Fichte as "Kant raised to a higher power". Although Brennan does not draw any parallels in this article between Novalis' triad and Mallarmé's transposition, its "third aspect" certainly resembles Novalis' version.

Brennan is not enthusiastic about excessively abstract readings of Mallarmé. In an important passage in the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé, he discusses in what ways the poet's thought might be considered mystical or Platonic, rejecting one and modifying the other as it might apply to Mallarmé:

Mallarmé was never a mystic, as the word is generally understood. But one might call him an intellectual mystic. His thought is Platonic. The symbol of *l'après-midi*, the faun endeavouring to recall a vision of beauty, is the Platonic doctrine of *ἀνάμνησις* applied to poetry. Not

⁷³ P, p. 382.

⁷⁴ P, p. 393: "The highest task of education is to gain control over one's transcendental self, to be the I of its I"; "Humanity must split itself into two parts, or even into three".

that Mallarmé ever goes so far as to maintain that there is *ἀνάμνησις* in all the implications of the word: he does, it is true, speak of the “*ciel antérieur où fleurit la beauté*” but that is in verse [. . .]. His use of that word “anterior” in prose is somewhat like the philosophical use of the words *a priori*. There exists [sic] in the soul, native to it and ungenerated by experience, prides, ardours, magnificences, and splendours, “the divinity present to each”, the “instinct of heaven”, our true self. But that these may be manifested, we must become one with the universe. [. . .] The whole world is thus “a single phenomenon, the Idea”, and that is divine.⁷⁵

While Brennan calls Mallarmé’s thought “Platonic”, he makes it clear that he is referring to an inner, rather than an external, noumenon, a “true self” that is not an abstraction but is constituted by an imaginative union with the outer world.

As the lecture continues, Brennan discusses Mallarmé’s own references to Plato and Hegel:

The name of Plato is only mentioned once by Mallarmé and then in a note where he says that he hesitates to drag in “the august name of Plato”. Similarly, though we are told that he was a Hegelian, the name of Hegel only occurs once and then only as one of the names revered by Villiers de l’Isle Adam [sic]. Mallarmé was wise: he knew that poetry is independent of this or that philosophy, that philosophy is at best a commentary on it.⁷⁶

The attitude expressed here is echoed in the annotations to Camille Mauclair’s 1898 article “L’Esthétique de Stéphane Mallarmé”. According to Mauclair,

La conception fondamentale de Stéphane Mallarmé procède directement de l’esthétique métaphysique de Hegel, et l’on peut dire, si l’on veut résumer d’un mot sa personnalité, qu’il fut l’applicateur systématique de l’hegelianisme aux lettres françaises. L’idéalisme absolu de Hegel, de Fichte et de Schelling avait déjà tenté Villiers de l’Isle-Adam [. . .] Mallarmé en fit la base même de ses travaux: Pour lui, *les idées pures* étaient les seuls êtres virtuels et réels de l’univers, alors que les objets et toutes les formes de la matière n’en étaient que les signes.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ P, p. 143: “the anterior heaven where beauty flourishes”.

⁷⁶ P, pp. 143–44.

⁷⁷ Annotations to Camille Mauclair, “L’Esthétique de Stéphane Mallarmé”, *La Grande revue* 11 (November 1st, 1898), p. 196, in “Hugo et Mallarmé”, a collection bound and named by Brennan, MZ PQ2344.Z5B7: “Stéphane Mallarmé’s fundamental notion arises directly from the metaphysical aesthetic of Hegel, and one could say, if one wanted a single word to sum up his personality, that he was the

Brennan adds, "say, the Moods: & expect light from the coming philosophic revival. The purely intellectual absolutism has done its work: enough will always remain". This comment suggests dissatisfaction with "the purely intellectual absolutism" which Mauclair finds in Mallarmé. As we have seen, moods are not purely abstract but represent the union of inner and outer worlds, of intellect and emotion. Hegel's philosophy of the self-actualisation of Spirit, in contrast, privileges the abstract over the material. Robert Wicks points to Hegel's "pervasive philosophical impulse to elevate purely conceptual modes of expression above sensory ones".⁷⁸ Brennan's annotations to Remy de Gourmont's *Le Livre des masques: portraits symbolistes* (1896) suggest he believes that there is no "beyond" that is not within. When Gourmont refers to the notion that the appearance of the world is totally subjective, existing only according to what the observer makes of it, Brennan adds a marginal note: "ce qui demeure [sic] vrai, même donné un monde existant par soi et à lui seul".⁷⁹

Brennan's elegy enacts a Mallarméan transposition,⁸⁰ symbolised by the leaves of autumn which are imagined smouldering, producing a haze which remains undispersed throughout the course of the poem. The union of mind and Nature that the poet has achieved in his art, which "was used/to spell our glory in blazon'd ether spread", itself constitutes the transcendental or true self. The poem demonstrates the Symbolist principles it celebrates, drawing on the correspondence between Nature and human passion, the forest in autumn and the death of the poet, in order to suggest or evoke, without description, the achievement of Mallarmé in the light of his own stated aspirations.

one who applied Hegelianism systematically in French literature. The absolute idealism of Hegel, Fichte and Schelling had already tempted Villiers de l'Isle-Adam [. . .]; Mallarmé made it the very foundation of his work. For him, *pure ideas* were the only effective and real existences in the universe, while objects and every form of matter were only signs of it".

⁷⁸ Robert Wicks, "Hegel's Aesthetics: An Overview", in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, p. 350.

⁷⁹ Annotation to Remy de Gourmont, *Le Livre des masques*, p. 11: "which remains true, even given a world existing for itself and in itself alone".

⁸⁰ Lloyd suggests that Brennan's poem accomplishes a somewhat different kind of transposition: "transposition of the work concerned into a domain deeply loved by the dedicatee" ("Mallarmé Reading Brennan", pp. 22-3). This is also true.

'Musicality' in the elegy

To answer the question posed by the octet in "Red autumn in Valvins"—"what god now claims thee priest"—Brennan places three answers in parallel, without grammatical links, in the sestet: "silence alone, that o'er the lonely song/impends", "old night" and "long autumn afternoon o'er stirless leaves/suspended fulgent haze". There is a sense of time standing still in the "long autumn afternoon", the "stirless" leaves of the forest, and the "suspended fulgent haze": a moment extracted from the progress of time and extended beyond the end of the poem. "Fulgent" echoes *Paradise Lost* (Book X, line 449), where Milton applies the word to Satan; perhaps it also echoes the cognate "fulgurante", the Latinate term used by Mallarmé with reference to the circumstances in which the poet can perceive the "interdependence of everything", and also employed suggestively in the final line of his sonnet "Tout orgueil fume-t-il du soir" ("la fulgurante console", line 14).⁸¹ Brennan echoes "fulgurante" in "I saw my life as whitest flame", with its reference to "blithe, effulgorant majesties" (line 14).

"[O]ld night" is a direct echo of Mallarmé's "nuit ancienne", as well as of Milton's "Chaos and old Night".⁸² In the context of *Poems* as a whole, "night" is also the mysterious night of the Lilith sequence and (particularly relevant in the context of this sonnet) the Mallarméan midnights about which Brennan wrote his two 1920s articles, "Minuits chez Mallarmé". In the first of these, the "minuit" in "Victorieusement fui le suicide beau" is seen as "the dead point of the poem, between a splendour that has waned and died, and that other radiance that presumes and yet is caressed".⁸³ The "silence" which "impends" over the words of the poet in "Red autumn in Valvins" (the "lonely song") is the inexpressible. Words can only point to it.

According to Brennan's translation of Mallarmé's "Nature", music is the product of the "volatilization" of the concretely physical. In

⁸¹ OCM, vol. 1, p. 41.

⁸² *Paradise Lost*, Bk. I, line 543. Lloyd points out the connection with Milton and "L'Après-midi d'un faune" in "Écrire Mallarmé: la parodie et le pastiche en tant que miroir linguistique" in *Mallarmé ou l'obscurité lumineuse*, Paris: Hermann, 1999, p. 365; "Mallarmé Reading Brennan", p. 27. She also argues for an echo of "la massive nuit" in the last line of Mallarmé's "Toast funèbre" ("Mallarmé Reading Brennan", p. 27).

⁸³ P, pp. 359–60.

Brennan’s elegy, the “fulgent haze” of the “assumption-pyre” lingers to “hear/what strain the faun’s enamour’d leisure weaves”, an obvious reference to Mallarmé’s “L’Après-midi d’un faune”. Brennan’s ultimate metaphor for the Mallarméan transposition enacted in this elegy is music itself. By summoning up the music of Mallarmé’s faun, Brennan epitomises the French poet’s continuing legacy.

Looking at the poem in the light of its final line, we can see that the suspended dissolution of the dead poet’s spirit has something in common with the faun’s desire to “perpetuate” the nymphs of his drowsy midday experience. The status of the faun’s nymphs is questionable, lying somewhere between reality and dream; the colour of their skin (*incarnat*) “voltige dans l’air/Assoupi de sommeils touffus”.⁸⁴ These are the nymphs of whom the faun asks the question “Aimai-je un rêve?” (lines 3–4).⁸⁵ Brennan has transposed the faun—or rather, the faun’s music—from the Sicilian marsh of Mallarmé’s poem to the forest associated so strongly with the French poet himself. Mallarmé uses bright embers, gold and a festival to evoke evening (another version of the imagery of an autumn conflagration in “La Gloire” and “Bucolique”) when “à l’heure où ce bois d’or et de cendres se teinte/Une fête s’exalte en la feuillée éteinte” (lines 99–100);⁸⁶ Brennan’s imagery of the “smouldering throng/Staying its rapt assumption-pyre” extends this effect in keeping with the equation of sunset and evening with the death of the hero.

Whereas Schopenhauer gave music a privileged place within the arts as the one form of aesthetic expression that requires no meditation, Mallarmé’s response to the ascendancy of Wagner’s music was circumscribed by his desire to achieve a poetic version of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. As Cohn explains, the real “crisis” of the “Crise de vers” concerns Wagner and the relationship of poetry to music. Commenting on Mallarmé’s call to hear “l’indiscutable rayon [. . .] ou la Musique rejoint le Vers pour former, depuis Wagner, la Poésie”,⁸⁷ Cohn writes:

⁸⁴ OCM, vol. 1, p. 22: “flesh-colour”; “flutters in the air/drowsy with tufted slumbers”.

⁸⁵ “Did I love a dream?”

⁸⁶ “at the hour when this wood takes on tints of gold and ashes, a festival is kindled in the dying leaves”.

⁸⁷ OCM, vol. 2, p. 209: “the indisputable ray [. . .] where music rejoins verse to form, since Wagner, poetry”.

This is the deep revolution, the real crisis: going back to the genetic source, with Wagner, when music and letters were one [. . .]: as noted in the 1893 letter to Gosse, the common source was in the Greek word for music, meaning “harmony”. Mallarmé sees it also in the generic term “Poetry”. So there is a root Music or Poetry which has branches of music and poetry (verse): with Wagner, the musical branch is orchestral-vocal; Mallarmé will try to “reprendre à la musique notre bien” and make his own totalizing version of art within language [. . .].⁸⁸

Verse, then, is itself to aim for ‘musicality’. Brennan’s poem suggests that “L’Après-midi d’un faune” achieves the desired transformation of the physical into musicality.

“Red autumn in Valvins” employs both visual and ‘musical’ effects. The entire text is printed in italics, indicating the dedicatory function of this introductory piece to “The Forest of Night” but also recalling Mallarmé’s use of italics in “L’Après-midi d’un faune” to distinguish reverie from event. The poem is separated from what precedes and follows it by blank pages. In a departure from English tradition and following patterns established by Mallarmé, the quatrains and tercets of the sonnet are separated by spaces (like the “silence alentour” described by Mallarmé in the preface to “Un coup de dés”)⁸⁹ supporting the “silence” appearing in verbal form at the beginning of the third stanza of the elegy. Brennan’s full awareness of the function of blank space in Symbolist poetry is indicated in the long *Musicopoematographoscope*, his response to “Un coup de dés”, where he writes of

the fair white page
whose candour
illumes
the mystic signs [.]⁹⁰

The title of this piece, half spoof, half serious, indicates clearly his awareness of both musical and graphic aspects of text.

In *Pictorialist Poetics*, David Scott discusses the aspiration of poets such as Baudelaire to reproduce the effects of painting in poetry, speaking of “the way in which certain kinds of literature manage to maximize the pictorialist potential of language while still retaining a

⁸⁸ Cohn, *Mallarmé’s Divagations*, p. 242. Brennan knew the letter to Gosse, to which he refers in the first Symbolism lecture (P, p. 57).

⁸⁹ See page 15 above.

⁹⁰ Brennan, *Musicopoematographoscope*, p. [17].

fully textual dimension".⁹¹ Apart from the use of spaces and expressive typography, Brennan creates colour effects in *Poems*, often to assist in the patterning of the work as a whole. Two colours are important in the elegy, in keeping with the autumn and late afternoon setting: red and gold. "Red" attracts capital letters as the first word in a sentence, even though part of Brennan's strategy in *Poems* is to abandon the traditional pattern of capitalising the first word of each line of verse. Its important place as the first word in the poem is enhanced by the symmetrical internal rhyme with the last word of the line ("bed"), which itself establishes the *a* rhyme for the two quatrains. The two strong stresses in "red autumn" further support the effect.

The techniques Brennan uses to emphasise the colour gold are more complex. The word itself is mentioned only once. However, as Lloyd points out, the word "or" in the second line is a "bilingual pun", echoing Mallarmé's punning employment of the word in "Or", one of the *Divagations*.⁹² Part of Brennan's tribute to the French poet seems to have been to employ similar effects in the elegy, creating a pattern of repeated sound that resembles a musical ostinato. Although the English word "gold" occurs only once, the word "or" and its homophones occur frequently. With the grammatical function of conjunction, "or" occurs in "or yet thy spirit induced" (line 2) and "old night, or, known to thee and near" (line 10). It is echoed in "for" (line 6) and "glory" (line 8) and almost rhymes with the last syllable of "enamour'd" (line 12). Keats uses similar effects. In addition, the contraction "o'er" occurs in lines four, nine and eleven. It is particularly noticeable that these repeated sounds tend to occur in the middle of lines. This means that something with a sound like 'or' appears in eight out of the fourteen lines of the sonnet. Perhaps it is not too fanciful to suggest that a vein of gold has been buried, punningly, in the middle of the elegy, supporting the suggestion of an alchemical transformation of the poet into "magic gold". This becomes apparent if we look at the entire poem:

⁹¹ David Scott, *Pictorialist Poetics: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge Studies in French, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 2.

⁹² Lloyd, "Mallarmé reading Brennan", p. 27.

*Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed
was watchful flame or yet thy spirit induced
might vanish away in magic gold diffused
and kingdom o'er the dreaming forest shed.*

*What god now claims thee priest, O chosen head,
most humble here that wast, for that thou knew'st
thro' what waste nights thy lucid gaze was used
to spell our glory in blazon'd ether spread?*

*Silence alone, that o'er the lonely song
impends, old night, or, known to thee and near,
long autumn afternoon o'er stirless leaves*

*suspended fulgent haze, the smouldering throng
staying its rapt assumption-pyre to hear
what strain the faun's enamour'd leisure weaves.*

Brennan employs continental enclosed rhymes for the quatrains, like Mallarmé but also like Keats. His *b* rhymes are complex: “induced”, “diffused”, “knew’st” and “used”, perhaps in an attempt to reproduce the “rimes riches” of the French Symbolist sonnet. “Lucid”, in the phrase “lucid gaze”, is intensified by the *b* rhymes while “gaze” is supported in the line that follows by its echo in “blazon’d”, itself a possible echo of “le blason de deuils épars” in Mallarmé’s “Toast funèbre” (line 20).⁹³ The first line of the first tercet has “alone” and “lonely”, supported by assonance in the second line (“old” and “known”), while the first line of the second tercet has “smouldering”. Another Symbolist practice, nominalisation, occurs in the condensed phrase “kingdom o’er the dreaming forest shed”, where we might have expected something like “he rules over the dreaming forest” instead.

“Was Mallarmé a Great Poet?”

Brennan’s article “Was Mallarmé a Great Poet?” corroborates the reading of his elegy offered in this chapter. The article begins:

The autumnal glory of Valvins is lit once more, again has Nature prepared her sublime and splendid theatre, but this time the lucid eye that could penetrate its signification is curtailed in death. [. . .] no more can one think that somewhere this man walks on earth and reads with certainty the signs of our greatness.⁹⁴

⁹³ “the heraldry of scattered mourning”.

⁹⁴ P, p. 281.

Here are the "theatre" of Nature and the "lucid eye" of the poet, able to read and interpret the spiritual correspondences of Nature on behalf of humanity. Further on, Brennan compares Mallarmé with Keats:

This man came into the world to bear witness to an idea; having waited for his hour and having borne witness, he departs. The idea that elected him was simply that of poetry; in him the art seemed to become self-conscious, to develop a living conscience. He was that rare poet—Keats, our most splendid possibility, was on the way to become such—who possesses a poetic philosophy, a poetry that is philosophy, a philosophy that is entirely poetry; a systematic body of imaginative thought wherein reality is transposed, dissolved into pure light [. . .] transmuted into a unity of beauty, truth, and justice. He believed in the supremacy of poetry—the gold by means of which man lives the spiritual life, just as by means of that other (only a figure of this) he maintains his material being—that in a rightly constituted state, [. . .] this art was meant to be *fasti*, the communion of man with his glory. [. . .] Is not the drama of all passion and dream written day by day upon the heavens? Do not all things concert to proclaim the type, *la figure que nul n'est*, with which all may feel themselves akin?⁹⁵

Brennan makes an overt reference to Mallarmé's pun on "or" as both gold and money in "Or".⁹⁶ He speaks of Mallarmé's transposition of reality, its transmutation. The language is strikingly religious; in fact it is plain that Brennan has cast Mallarmé in the role of John the Baptist, in that he "came into the world to bear witness to an idea", an idea which "elected him" rather than vice-versa (the "idea" itself must then, by implication, correspond to Christ). He echoes Mallarmé's aspiration towards expressing the drama "written [. . .] upon the heavens", whose hero is not the individual but the "type", "*la figure que nul n'est*". Further on again, we find a discussion of Mallarmé's transposition:

He desired to extract from things just merely that essence of poetry, that *musicalité de tout*; not things, but the harmonies, the parallelisms, the correspondences between them, what in our poetry is yet scattered comparisons, hints: to free the spirit from the reality, *élever une voix en*

⁹⁵ P, pp. 281–82. Brennan's alchemical imagery, implied by his references to transmutation and to "poetry—the gold by means of which man lives the spiritual life", reflects his familiarity with Mallarmé's use of alchemical imagery for poetry and its value in pieces such as "Magie" and "Or".

⁹⁶ OCM, vol. 2, pp. 245–46.

pureté, as he defines it, with subtle and decisive simplicity—this was his aim.⁹⁷

Here we encounter the “harmonies” or “correspondences” between things, the spirit freed from reality, “*musicalité*”.

* * *

Having established the Symbolist (especially Mallarméan) preoccupations of his Forest of Night sequence with the dedicatory elegy “Red autumn in Valvins around they bed”, Brennan continues with a Liminary which, I believe, employs the notion of raising the self to a higher power as a fundamental metaphor. Together with two other poems with important introductory functions, this poem establishes connections and correspondences between the cycle of the seasons and human experience and reveals a structure within which the symbolism of individual pieces in the sections and sequences of *Poems* may be understood.

⁹⁷ P, p. 282.

CHAPTER SIX

TWO PRELUDES AND A LIMINARY

Introduction

Brennan bought his copy of Huysmans' *A Rebours* in December 1893. Either then or later, he wrote in the front of the book his Berlin address and added: "hiver apaisé et doux, Décembre aux lampes".¹ The comment evokes both a season and a mood.

The European seasons seem to have impressed themselves deeply on Brennan's mind during the two years of his stay in Germany. He turned to them, rather than the less clearly distinguished seasonal variations of Sydney,² when writing three cyclic poems in contrasting styles that are strategically placed in *Poems*, two as preludes and one as a threshold poem, or Liminary, between the dedicatory poem to Mallarmé and the rest of "The Forest of Night". Brennan put his concept of moods to work as a thematic and structural principle in *Poems*. The three cyclical poems ("MCCCCXCIII: A Prelude", "Oh you, when Holda leaves her hill" and "The hollow crystal of my winter dream") establish a pattern in which certain times of day or year are associated with human experience. Spring and morning correspond to innocent hopefulness, summer and noon to transient

¹ This is written on the half-title (recto) of his copy of *A Rebours* (Paris: Charpentier, 1892): "mild, calm winter, December with lamps".

² The breadth and depth of his interest in European literature were almost certainly another important reason for this choice. In spite of this, Brennan envisaged a time when the Australian landscape would be far more closely reflected in Australian poetry. By 1927, when he wrote the article "Some Makers of Australia", he was able to comment: "as [the poet's] own physical nature is adapted to this latest of all the homes his race is making for itself, so, too, through his long and deep intimacy with his home, will his art take on a 'national' tinge and come to be expressive of what is most true and real in the world that his imagination prefers. Here there is no vehemently deliberate act required. [. . .] No, art may be acquired, and technique may be learnt: but this other quality will be the slow deposit of life and time: it will be instinctive and unconscious. And it will show itself, not in the deliberate choice of supposedly Australian subjects, but in the individual element of style: in how far the very primal movement of the writer's imagination has been influenced previously from childhood by the shapes of our promontories and beaches, our hills and forests, by the flow of our rivers and our tidal streams" (ST, p. 375).

ecstasy, autumn and evening to the conversion of that ecstasy into a more lasting form in art. Winter and night are associated with reflection. These are the only poems which represent the entire cycle of day or year, and in important ways they hold *Poems* together as a complete work. The two preludes are printed in italics; the Liminary in Roman type.

“MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude”

Poems begins with “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude”, written in 1897, but referring to 1893. This poem functions as a prelude not only to “Towards the Source” but to the entire work. As his note in *A Rebours* suggests, 1893 was a significant year for Brennan: the year he became engaged to Elisabeth Werth and the year he first became acquainted with the poetry of Mallarmé and other French Symbolist writers.³

The first three and the final four stanzas of “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude”, which are set off by long dashes, frame the rest of the poem. The early stanzas of the framing section establish a contrast between the “*breaking light*” of the poet’s experiences in 1893 and the “*shadowy might / and blaze of starry strife*” (a suggestive phrase that takes on substance in the extensive imagery of night we encounter later in *Poems*, especially in the Lilith sequence) which now dominate his life (lines 1–4). The second stanza of the prelude anticipates Lilith in its reference to the “*compulsive force / that since my course / across the years obeys*” (although here, the “*compulsive force*” is identified as “*Beauty*”).

At the end of the prelude, three aspects of the speaker’s experiences in 1893 are mentioned—“love, song and sun”:

*O poets I have loved
when in my soul first moved
desire to breathe in one
love, song and sun,

your pages that I turn,
your jewelled phrases burn
richly behind a haze
of golden days. (stanzas 29–30)*

“*Love*” clearly refers to Brennan’s courtship of Elisabeth. “*Song*” refers to the works of writers Brennan was reading in Berlin in 1893 (“*O*

³ See CB, pp. 67–71.

poets I have loved"). According to Clark's biography, these writers included Mallarmé, Flaubert, Gautier, Huysmans, Villiers, Maeterlinck, Corbière and Verlaine, and probably Baudelaire, Novalis and Rimbaud.⁴ "*Sun*" refers, at one level, to the warmth of spring, which provided the backdrop for the courtship in Berlin.

The framing stanzas of the prelude, therefore, portray the education of the young poet through his experience of falling in love, his reading and his natural surroundings. In a similar way, the poem with which Novalis introduces *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* praises "Gesang", song or poetry itself (in Novalis' novel, music and *Poesie* are inseparably linked), for educating the imagination of the child:

Du hast in mir den edeln Trieb erregt
Tief ins Gemüt der weiten Welt zu schauen;
Mit deiner Hand ergriff mich ein Vertrauen,
Das sicher mich durch alle Stürme trägt.

Mit Ahndungen hast du das Kind gepflegt
Und zogst mit ihm durch fabelhafte Auen;
Hast, als das Urbild zartgesinnter Frauen,
Des Jünglings Herz zum höchsten Schwung bewegt.⁵

"Song", according to Novalis, has directed the child's vision to the deepest meaning ("Gemüt") of the world of Nature, on which it has conveyed a fairytale atmosphere ("fabelhafte Auen"), and has also operated through the influence of "gentle-tempered women" ("zartgesinnter Frauen"). Brennan's identification of the influences of "*love, song and sun*" is comparable.

Brennan begins *Poems*, a work in which moods play an important thematic and structural role, with a survey of his own education by beauty. This is in keeping with Schiller's notion of "Ästhetische Erziehung", education by means of the beautiful, and with the general emphasis of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century German thought on what was frequently called *Bildung*, described by Abrams as "a process of the self-formation, or self-education, of the mind

⁴ CB, pp. 68–71.

⁵ NS, vol. 1, p. 193: "You have awoken in me the noble urge / To look deep into the soul of the wide world; / Confidence seized me with the grasp of your hand / That carries me surely through every storm. / You nourished the child with intimations / And moved with him through fabulous meadows; / As the model of gentle-tempered women, / You have moved the heart of the youth to take its highest flight".

and moral being of man from the dawn of consciousness to the stage of full maturity".⁶ Fichte, according to La Vopa, "found the structuring principle of spiritual biography" in *Bildung*.⁷ Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is one of the most famous of the *Bildungsgeschichten* (stories of *Bildung*), and Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is overtly about the education of a poet.⁸

The central section of Brennan's prelude begins in stanza four with spring imagery. As we have already seen, the fairytale figures of the Sleeping Beauty or Snow White appear in these stanzas as tropes of the awakening of spring:

*The northern kingdom's dream,
prison'd in crystal gleam,
heard the pale flutes of spring,
her thin bells ring;

the tranced maiden's eyes
open'd, a far surmise
and heaven and meadows grew
a tender blue

of petal-hearts that keep
thro' their dark winter-sleep
true memory of delight,
a hidden light.*

The figure of Beauty, introduced in the second stanza ("*sweet dawn of Beauty's day*"), reappears implicitly in the Sleeping Beauty imagery. The flowers with which this maiden of the spring is associated ("*petal-hearts*" of "*a tender blue*") have undergone a "*dark winter-sleep*" beneath the ground, like Persephone in the Underworld.

Stanzas seven to nine portray late spring, when all the trees are in leaf:

*Then by her well Romance
waiting the fabled chance
dream'd all the forest-scene
in shifting green [. . .].*

⁶ Abrams, pp. 187–88. Brennan mentions Schiller's "aesthetic education" in the lecture on German Romanticism, (P, p. 382), where he suggests it derives from Shaftesbury.

⁷ La Vopa, p. 68.

⁸ Brennan compares Goethe's novel with that of Novalis in the fourth Symbolism lecture (P, pp. 106–7).

“*Romance*”, in the context, evokes Romance literature, the tales which inspired writers of the Romantic era, as well as the romance between lovers of which such stories often told. Defining the Romantic, Schlegel speaks of the “*Zeitalter der Ritter, der Liebe und der Märchen, aus welchem die Sache und das Wort selbst her stammt*”.⁹ Again, the Sleeping Beauty is suggested by Brennan’s figure of Romance, awaiting “the fabled chance” in a forest all grown over with green.

In this forest are hidden other figures of legend and story, Melusine and Undine:

*and Melusine’s gaze
lurk’d in the shadow’d glaze
of waters gliding still,
a witching ill;*

*or lost Undine wept
where the hid streamlet crept,
to the dusk murmuring low
her silvery woe.*

Fouqué’s *Undine* is a prime example of a legendary tale retold by a writer of the Romantic era. Goethe and Tieck both wrote stories based on the legend of Melusine.¹⁰ Brennan’s poem was written in late 1897, when he was already planning the Lilith sequence. It clearly anticipates Lilith in its reference to Melusine and Undine, with whom Lilith is associated in the Argument, as we have seen.¹¹ Undine and Melusine traditionally appear at water-sources in forests, such as the forest well in Brennan’s poem. Macainsh compares Brennan’s well with the fountain appearing in the compelling dream of the young poet in Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and notes the association of the word with the German *Quelle*, meaning both fountain or well and source.¹² We have an intimation of the “source” referred to in the title of the section.

In stanzas eleven to fourteen, imagery of Demeter and Persephone becomes more overt:

⁹ KFSA, vol. 2, p. 335: “age of knights, love and fairytales from which the thing [the Romantic] and the word itself originated”.

¹⁰ See Goethe’s “Die neue Melusine” (1807–08) and Ludwig Tieck’s “Sehr wunderbare Historie von der Melusina” (1829).

¹¹ See page 61 above.

¹² Macainsh, “Christopher Brennan’s Poetic”, p. 318.

*. . . Beauty came to save
the prison'd life and wave
above the famish'd lands
her healing hands*

*(Beauty, in hidden ways
walking, a leafy maze
with magic odour dim,
far on life's rim;*

*Beauty, sweet pain to kiss,
Beauty, sharp pain to miss,
in sorrow or in joy
a dear annoy;*

*Beauty, with waiting years
that bind the fount of tears
well-won if once her light
shine, before night).*

Here Beauty appears as Demeter, who, by saving “*the prison'd life*” (Persephone), brings healing to the “*famish'd lands*”. According to the myth, the infertility of the land resulted from Demeter’s search for her daughter, snatched away to the Underworld by Hades. Like Lilith, Beauty arouses conflicting emotions, being “*a dear annoy*” who is “*sweet pain to kiss*” and “*sharp pain to miss*”. She is elusive, but even a single encounter is “*well-won*”. Like the Sleeping Beauty, Beauty is hidden or occulted (“*in hidden ways walking*”), concealed behind “*a leafy maze / with magic odour dim / far on life's rim*” (like the magic forest that grew up to conceal the fairytale heroine as she slept). It seems that Beauty is both the Demeter figure, the one who rescues the prisoner, and the Persephone figure, the one who is rescued.

These resonances strengthen the suggested connection between fairytale and myth, both of which apparently conceal a similar deeper signification of “Beauty”. This implication is heightened in the final stanzas of the poem, with their reference to “*unseen Beauty*” and “*occult law*” and in their anticipation of Lilith:

*And, O, ye golden days,
tho' since on stranger ways
to some undying war
the fatal star*

*of unseen Beauty draw
this soul, to occult law
obedient ever, not
are ye forgot.*

The “*fatal star of unseen Beauty*” that invites the speaker to engage in “*some undying war*” reminds us of the ambiguities and frustrations of Lilith’s demands.

As we have seen, Brennan was aware of the strong tradition interpreting the Demeter and Persephone cycle as a seasonal allegory of the spiritual ‘sleep’ or ‘death’ and regeneration of the human soul. His account of the salvation of the “*prison’d life*” by Beauty signifies more than his relationship with the beautiful Elisabeth. The strong pattern of imagery relating to the Demeter and Persephone cycle, both directly and implicitly in the stanzas invoking the Sleeping Beauty, suggests that the “*prison’d life*” in question is also the latent potential for an inner divinity within the human being.

By placing the seasonal cycle, which he associates symbolically with the awakening of the “true self”, in the context of an account of his own formation as a poet, Brennan makes this poem a genuine prelude to the themes, techniques and structures of *Poems*. He revives and recreates mythic associations between Nature and human experience. The events of a particular year—falling in love, encountering the Symbolist writers for the first time, enjoying the warmth of summer—are extended, as we will see, into an account of more universal human experience, in which the cycle of the seasons corresponds with stages in human life.

Having dealt with spring, the poem introduces in stanzas fifteen to twenty-five the dominant figure of summer and autumn: the sun, represented as a god. The innocence of the “*girlish*” spring, whose “*liquid laugh*” associates her with the water-sprites of earlier stanzas, attracts the attention of the sun-god himself. The association of mythical gods and heroes with the sun in *Les Dieux antiques* helps us to understand the nature of the drama Brennan is depicting.

The girl who represents the spring achieves a state of ecstasy in the divine embrace of the sun. From this union, “*the exulting strain / sped onward as a rain / of gold-linked throats*” (stanza 24), conveying the moment of ecstasy by means of musical imagery and also recalling Zeus’s union with Danae in the form of a golden shower. Although revealing “*life beyond all dream / burning, supreme*” (stanza 22), the union robs the spring of its innocence and beauty: “*the mad heart, adust, / of August’s aching lust / to do her beauty wrong / broke, and the song*” (stanza 25). The archaism “adust” (parched, seared or scorched by the sun) is carefully chosen. We have seen that *Les Dieux antiques* equates summer with the desiccation of the earth, the burning

of its own fruits by the sun; in Brennan's poem, the innocent maiden spring dies, the red poppies of high summer indicating her fate.

It is in the nature of the ecstatic moment of union with the divine that it cannot last. This poem suggests, however, that something survives the transience of ecstasy. We read in stanzas twenty-seven and twenty-eight that

. . . these deep fibres hold
the season's mortal gold,
by silent alchemy
of soul set free,

and woven in vision'd shower
as each most secret hour
sheds the continuing bliss
in song or kiss.

The reference is to spiritual alchemy.¹³ The "*mortal gold*" is the golden beauty of summer and autumn. There are two means by which this "*mortal gold*" is preserved or "*woven in vision'd shower*": one is love ("*kiss*") and the other is poetry ("*song*"). Both rely on memory, which is able to preserve and release "*the continuing bliss*", that is, to allow the moment to live beyond the moment. The overt alchemical reference extends and makes explicit the suggestions of earlier imagery: the "*gold-linked notes*" (stanza 24), the summer's banner of "*blazon'd gold*" and the golden colour suggested by "*the honey'd time*" (both in stanza 16). Stanza nineteen mentions "*the yellow meads of May*". The word "*fulgent*" (stanza 20) could also suggest gold. In the Liminary to "The Forest of Night", the imagery of gold is transferred to the "summer bride", who takes the role of the male sun-god in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude".

In the Symbolism lectures, Brennan uses an image from the Gnostic Simon Magus, quoted by Hippolytus, for the lasting perfection achieved by art: "The fruit of the tree, if its imaging has been perfected, is placed in the treasure-house and not cast into the fire".¹⁴ The drama of spring, summer and autumn in this poem symbolises the drama of the human soul, the higher self which escapes from the restrictions of material existence in ecstatic union with the divine.

¹³ See pages 85–87 above for a discussion of spiritual alchemy.

¹⁴ P, p. 170.

Although such an experience is transient, its “gold” may be rescued from extinction by transmutation into art. To achieve this is the calling of the poet, whose own artistic education is depicted in the frame at the beginning and end of the poem.

The Liminary

“The hollow crystal of my winter dream” is a hugely ambitious poem that has proved resistant to credible interpretation as a complete work. It began as two separate poems, the first written in September 1897, only months before Brennan’s marriage in December, the second begun in the early months of 1898.¹⁵ The original title of the first part was “The Year of the Soul”. The placement of the poem as the liminary or threshold piece to “The Forest of Night” indicates that it provides an introduction to the themes and structure of the entire sequence. It follows the elegy to Mallarmé and takes up a number of significant metaphors in that poem.

It is possible to find in the imagery of snow, ice and crystal with which the poem begins a considerable number of literary resonances with works Brennan either definitely or probably knew at the time he wrote this piece, which might assist us in interpreting the winter symbolism of the first three stanzas.¹⁶ But one author is paramount, and that author is Mallarmé. There are echoes of Mallarmé’s “Scène” for “Hérodiade” all the way through the poem, especially at the beginning and end. It is particularly easy to recognise these echoes because we have Brennan’s own translation of the “Scène” in the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé, preceded by a discussion of its meaning. Brennan’s poem takes the “Scène” as its point of departure and builds its action according to metaphors derived from the *Frühromantik*.

Here are the first three stanzas of the poem:

¹⁵ Before the death of Mallarmé on September 9th.

¹⁶ Examples are the entrapment of the hero Anselmus in a crystal phial in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der goldne Topf*; the city frozen in ice in the interpolated “Klingsohr’s Tale” in Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*; and the crystal breasts of the wizards in Beckford’s *Vathek*.

The hollow crystal of my winter dream
 and silences, where thought for worship, white,
 shimmer'd within the icy mirror-gleam,
 vanishes down the flood of broader light.

The royal weft of arduous device
 and starr'd with strangest gems, my shadowy pride
 and ritual of illusive artifice
 is shed away, leaving the naked side.

No more is set within the secret shrine
 a wonder wherein day nor night has part;
 my passing makes the ways of earth divine
 with the wild splendours of a mortal heart.

In each stanza, a stasis is broken up. In the first, the closed system formed by the speaker and his or her reflection in the mirror “vanishes”. In the second, something that has been created by artifice (“[t]he royal weft of arduous device [. . .], my shadowy pride / and ritual of illusive artifice”) is “shed away”. The third begins with “No more”; the disappearance marked at the end of each of the first two stanzas has become established. In this stanza, the “secret shrine [. . .] wherein day nor night has part” yields to “my passing”. At one level the meaning is plain. These stanzas describe winter yielding to spring. The ice of winter (“the hollow crystal of my winter dream”) yields to “the flood of broader light”. This imagery recalls the beginning of “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude”. Phrases such as “thought for worship, white” and “the secret shrine” indicate, however, that this is a figurative as well as a literal winter.

McAuley and Wilkes both find Mallarméan echoes here. McAuley comments, “Mallarmé is visibly present in the symbols of the icy mirror and the silence, and some other details”.¹⁷ According to Wilkes, the “deliberate withdrawal from the world of which Axël’s castle has become one symbol, and the mirror of Hérodiade another, is the conception employed in Brennan’s ‘Liminary’”.¹⁸ We have seen already that Brennan associates silence with Mallarmé in one of the poems of the Lilith sequence, “O thou that achest”. The “shadowy pride” of Brennan’s speaker recalls the opening line of the “Scène”: “Tu vis ! ou vois-je ici l’ombre d’une princesse?”¹⁹ In the following

¹⁷ McAuley, “The Erotic Theme in Brennan”, p. 11.

¹⁸ G.A. Wilkes, “Brennan and his Literary Affinities”, *The Australian Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1959), p. 79.

¹⁹ As Chisholm points out, “during the period when Brennan was writing the

lines, addressed by Hérodiade to her nurse, the mirror of Hérodiade appears as water in a frozen frame, like Brennan's "icy mirror-gleam":

Assez! Tiens devant moi ce miroir.
 Ô miroir!
 Eau froide par l'ennui dans ton cadre gelée
 Que de fois et pendant des heures, désolée
 Des songes et cherchant mes souvenirs qui sont
 Comme des feuilles sous ta glace au trou profond,
 Je m'apparus en toi comme une ombre lointaine,
 Mais, horreur ! des soirs, dans ta sévère fontaine,
 J'ai de mon rêve épars connu la nudité !
 Nourrice, suis-je belle?²⁰

Hérodiade seeks the memory of her past self in her mirror, like dead leaves under the surface of a pond.²¹ This is the "dream" with which she is "distracted" (Brennan's translation of "désolée"), the dream which appears "scattered" in the mirror.

The "royal weft of arduous device" that is "shed away, leaving the naked side" in Brennan's second stanza may represent a deliberate contrast with Mallarmé's "perverse princess" who, as Brennan says in his lecture, "delights in her own beauty, living in a shadowy and gleaming silence of mirrors, jewels, and metals, abhorring the roses and the sky, shunning the touch of a human hand". Hers is a world characterised by "illusive artifice" of such a kind as is "shed away" in Brennan's poem.²² Addressing her nurse, Hérodiade vehemently rejects even the thought of adult sexuality:

pieces later included in *Poems 1913*, the only sections of *Hérodiade* that were available were the *Scène* and the *Cantique de saint Jean*: the rest was buried in private collections. The [...] *Ouverture ancienne* was first published by Dr Donniot in 1926" (A.R. Chisholm, "Brennan and Mallarmé Part One", *Southerly* 21, no. 4 (1961), p. 5).

²⁰ OCM, vol. 1, p. 19: "Enough! and hold this glass before my face. / O mirror, thou cold wave in narrow frame / congeal'd by days whose dull glance is the same, / how often, through what long hours, all distraught / with dream, in thy deep hollow I have sought / dead leaves of memory the dim ice betrays / and my imagin'd self of other days. / but [sic] oh the dread eyes when thy cruel gleam / show'd me, all sudden and bare, my scatter'd dream! / Nurse, am I fair?" (Brennan's translation, P, p. 139).

²¹ In the Symbolism lectures, Brennan discusses "Hérodiade" as a representation of the tendency of "the young imagination" to "brood over its own ideal beauty" (P, p. 137). In his view, it is this which appears to Hérodiade in her mirror as the "rêve épars".

²² P, p. 137.

Quant à toi, femme née en des siècles malins
 Pour la méchanceté des antres sibyllins,
 Qui parles d'un mortel ! selon qui, des calices
 De mes robes, arôme aux farouches délices,
 Sortirait le frisson blanc de ma nudité,
 Prophétise que si le tiède azur d'été,
 Vers lui nativement la femme se dévoile,
 Me voit dans ma pudeur grelottante d'étoile,
 Je meurs ! (lines 95–103)²³

The shedding of the robe “starr'd with strangest gems” in Brennan’s poem contrasts with Hérodiade’s refusal to abandon the artifice of her robes (and her virginity). The *Liminary* can be read as a response to the obsession of Mallarmé’s heroine with the beauty of the Ideal, as opposed to the real.

Brennan’s translation of the “Scène” alerts us to the extent of the allusions to it at the beginning of the *Liminary*.²⁴ Winter imagery is apparent in Mallarmé’s “nourrice d’hiver” (line 11); Brennan writes “winter crone”. In dealing with Hérodiade’s description of the cold night of her chastity, Brennan’s translation intensifies sensation by translating “reptile / Inviolé” by “reptile-cold”:

The horror of a heart untaught
 woos me, the touch of mine own tresses, fraught
 with fear, to feel at night in couched fold
 thro’ vain flesh, inviolate, reptile-cold,
 thrill the chill sparkle of thy pallid light,

²³ “Thou, woman, whom the baleful long-ago / whose doom would bid me for a mortal mate / from the slipt calyx of my rubes exude, / savour distill’d in savage solitude, / and the white shudder of my birth renew / rather foretell, if only the warm blue / whose summer best glad limbs of nymphs proclaim, / behold me in my shivering starry shame, / I die! (Brennan’s translation, P, p. 140).

²⁴ These seem to be conscious allusions, rather than unconscious echoes, even though Brennan could have felt no confidence that they would be recognised by many contemporary readers in Australia. The distinction between allusion and echo is well drawn in the fourth chapter of John Hollander’s *The Figure of Echo*: “In the case of outright allusion, [. . .] the text alluded to is not totally absent, but is part of the portable library shared by the author and his ideal audience. Intention to allude recognizably is essential to the concept, I think [. . .] [O]ne cannot in this sense allude unintentionally—an inadvertent allusion is a kind of solecism. [. . .] In contrast with literary allusion, echo is a metaphor of, and for, alluding, and does not depend on conscious intention. The referential nature of poetic echo [. . .] may be unconscious or inadvertent, but is no less qualified thereby” (Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, p. 64).

thou perishing with chastity, sharp night
burnt froze with ice and white with cruel snow.²⁵

The coldness of *Hérodiade's* withdrawal from the world is associated with stars. *Hérodiade* appeals to the "Etoiles pures" (line 69) where Brennan gives "chaste stars"; she speaks of "ma pudeur grelot-tante d'étoile" (line 102), rendered as "my shivering starry shame". The "froides pierreries" of the last line of the poem become in translation "each icy gem". In the Liminary, the "royal weft", which is "starr'd with strangest gems", unites the metaphorical association of stars with cold and gems.

Brennan's 1899 article "Stéphane Mallarmé" refers to "the *Hérodiade* of the second *Parnasse*, a variant of the Narcissus myth, a mysterious expression of the solitary anguish of the soul that has retired from life to dwell in the house of its contemplation, too often a crypt chill with despair".²⁶ He takes Mallarmé's poem to be a critique of this position, its central character a symbol of "the soul". The Symbolism lecture further develops this interpretation, and it too employs the term "house of contemplation". In the second part of the Liminary (stanza 26), we visit the "House of Contemplation" as the poem cycles back to the wintry mood of the beginning. Brennan's poem is a response to the error of *Hérodiade*. For the stasis of *Hérodiade's* attitude, it substitutes a process, beginning when movement interrupts stasis and continuing in the fourth stanza with the emergence of a second figure upon the "passing" (stanza 3) of the speaker. Stanzas eight and nine describe the union of this figure and the speaker, stanzas ten to twelve their soaring flight. Stanzas fourteen and fifteen describe their sacrificial love-death, bringing the first part of the poem to an end.

The "mirror-gleam" of the first stanza implies self-reflection. Whereas *Hérodiade* (in Brennan's view) ponders the beauty of an Ideal not directly attainable, the speaker of the Liminary seems to engage in

²⁵ P, p. 140: "J'aime l'horreur d'être vierge et je veux / Vivre parmi l'effroi que me font mes cheveux, / Pour, le soir, retirée en ma couche, reptile / Inviolé, sentir en la chair inutile / Le froid scintillement de ta pâle clarté, / Toi qui te meurs, toi qui brûles de chasteté, / Nuit blanche de glaçons et de neige cruelle !" (lines 103–109).

²⁶ P, p. 313. In the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé, Brennan uses a similar phrase with reference to *Hérodiade*, speaking of the temptation of the "young imagination" "to withdraw from life, to shut itself up in the house of its contemplation and there brood over its own ideal beauty" (P, p. 137).

the kind of self-reflection proposed by Novalis and Friedrich Schleiermacher, which looks within in order to discover there the image of the outer world. Schleiermacher, the most prominent theologian of the Romantic era in Germany, addressed to his colleagues at Jena (among them Novalis and the Schlegel brothers) a work entitled *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799), in which he suggests that to look within is really to look outward, to find the outer world as an inner other:

Eingerißen ist die ängstliche Scheidewand, alles außer ihm ist nur ein andres in ihm, alles ist der Widerschein seines Geistes, so wie sein Geist der Abdruck von Allem ist; er darf sich suchen in diesem Widerschein ohne sich zu verlieren oder aus sich heraus zu gehn, er kann sich nie erschöpfen im Anschauen seiner selbst, denn Alles liegt in ihm.²⁷

This is represented by Schleiermacher as a process of reflection (*Widerschein*) in which the gap between inner and outer worlds would be bridged as imagination reproduces the outer world within the mind. According to *On Religion*, imagination (*Fantasie*) is a central faculty, both for religion and for perception:

Ihr, hofft ich, werdet es für keine Lästerung halten, daß Glaube an Gott abhängt von der Richtung der Fantasie; ihr werdet wissen daß Fantasie das höchste und ursprünglichste ist im Menschen, und außer ihr alles nur Reflexion über sie; Ihr werdet es wissen daß Eure Fantasie es ist, welche für Euch die Welt erschafft, und daß Ihr keinen Gott haben könnt ohne Welt.²⁸

By uniting the mind with the world, Schleiermacher implies, the imagination also unites the mind with God. Novalis wants us to follow up the “mysterious inner way” with an outward look:

²⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schriften aus der Berliner Zeit 1796–1799*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984, p. 264: “The fearful dividing wall has been rent, everything outside of him is only another within him, everything is the reflection of his spirit, just as his spirit is the mark of everything; he may seek himself in this reflection without losing himself or going outside of himself; he can never be exhausted in the contemplation of himself, since everything lies within him”.

²⁸ Schleiermacher, p. 245: “I hope you will not take it as blasphemy that belief in God depends on how we direct our imagination; you will know that imagination is the highest and most original faculty of humankind, and without it everything is only reflection upon it; you will know that it is your imagination that shapes the world for you, and that without the world you could have no God at all”.

Der erste Schritt wird Blick nach Innen, absondernde Beschauung unsers Selbst. Wer hier stehn bleibt, geräth nur halb. Der zweyte Schritt muß wirksamer Blick nach Außen, selbstthätige, gehaltne Beobachtung der Außenwelt seyn.²⁹

I believe the speaker of Brennan's poem is engaging in just such a process of reflection, in which the static inner gaze, conveyed by the mirror imagery of the first stanza, gives way to the "flood of broader light", comparable to the "active outward gaze" recommended by Novalis.

We may consider this self-reflection in the light of the notion of raising the self to a higher power. Very few poets would be likely to set out to write a poem whose dynamic arises out of the theoretical concepts of self-reflection and "raising". But Brennan's familiarity with writers of the *Frühromantik* may (quite rightly) have made him feel he was particularly well-equipped to undertake such a task, as well as supplying the idea in the first place.

According to Novalis, "Die höchste Aufgabe der Bildung ist—sich seines transcendentalen Selbst zu bemächtigen—das Ich ihres Ichs zugleich zu seyn".³⁰ Novalis' notion of the transcendental self differs from Kant's in not necessarily being conceived as a bridge between the noumenon and the phenomenal world. For Novalis, raising the self to a higher power is involved in "Romanticising" the world:

Die Welt muß romantisirt werden. So findet man den urspr[ünglichen] Sinn wieder. Romantisiren ist nichts, als eine qualit[ative] Potenzirung. Das niedre Selbst wird mit einem bessern Selbst in dieser Operation identificirt. So wie wir selbst eine solche qualit[ative] Potenzenreihe sind. Diese Operation ist noch ganz unbekannt. Indem ich dem Gemeinen einen hohen Sinn, dem Gewöhnlichen ein geheimnißvolles Ansehn, dem Bekannten die Würde des Unbekannten, dem Endlichen einen unendlichen Schein gebe so romantisire ich es—Umgekehrt ist die Operation für das Höhere, Unbekannte, Mystische, Unendliche—dies wird durch diese Verknüpfung logarythmisirt.³¹

²⁹ NS, vol. 2, p. 423: "The first step is a look within, an isolating contemplation of our self. Whoever remains at this point is only partially thriving. The second step must be an energetic gaze outside oneself, an independent and sustained observation of the outside world".

³⁰ NS, vol. 2, p. 424: "The highest task of education is—to take possession of one's transcendental self—to be at once the I of its I".

³¹ NS, vol. 2, p. 545: "The world must be Romanticised. That is how one finds the original meaning again. To make Romantic is nothing other than a qualitative exponentiation. The lower self will be identified with a better self in this operation.

According to Novalis, to apply an exponential process to the world necessarily involves uniting the “lower self” with a “better” or “transcendental” self; moreover, these processes are interconnected.

Margaret Stoljar believes that this concept of ‘potentiation’ is extremely important in Romantic thought, and that Novalis’ version is the most profound of the various Romantic reflection formulae:

As part of his intensive study of Fichte during 1796, Novalis had set out to redefine the relation between the intuitive and cognitive functions of the self, between feeling and reflection, content and form. Through an interactive process that Novalis calls *ordo inversus*, as the self reaches consciousness of itself these two functions come together, subject and object becoming one. [. . .]

As a creative dynamic, the concept of potentiation or reflection, exemplified in the phrase “the I of its I”, is at the heart of Romantic aesthetics. It is defined by Friedrich Schlegel in terms such as poetry of poetry and philosophy of philosophy, signifying a continuous progression of ever greater intensity and power. But for Novalis the reflection formula has more than purely intellectual force; the *ordo inversus* is infused with a characteristic sense of mystical understanding. [. . .] Raising the self to the power of itself is perhaps the most consequential of all the Romantic reflection formulas, since it describes a progressive mental act whereby, in perfect self-knowledge, one’s gaze is simultaneously extricated from the bounds of individuality. Not forgetful absorption in the self but the converse, critical contemplation, is the goal: “As we behold ourselves—we give ourselves life” [. . .]. Through the *feeling* of the self *reflecting* on itself, transcendent or magical truth may be revealed.³²

Stoljar argues, however, that to understand Novalis’ concept precisely is to distinguish it entirely from narcissism, as it is a kind of distancing from the self. Self-consciousness is the means by which subject and object become unified. She emphasises, too, the mystical aspect, the potential for revelation, in this process of self-reflection, contrasting this with Schlegel’s version of the reflection formula which is expressed in the famous *Athenaeum* fragment on Romantic poetry:

In the same way, we ourselves are such a qualitative exponential series. This operation is still completely unknown. Inasmuch as I bestow a higher sense on the ordinary, a mysterious aspect on the familiar, the dignity of the unknown on the known, an immortal glory on the mortal, so I make it Romantic. This is reversed for the high, mysterious, infinite—this is logarithmatised through this operation”.

³² Margaret Mahony Stoljar, trans. and ed., Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, p. 6.

Nur sie [die romantische Poesie] kann gleich dem Epos ein Spiegel der ganzen umgebenden Welt, ein Bild des Zeitalters werden. Und doch kann auch sie am meisten zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden, frei von allem realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen.³³

Schlegel's version does not share Novalis' emphasis on the transcendent potential of self-reflection. However, Schlegel employs the verb *schweben*, used by Fichte to describe the action of the imagination suspended between subject and object, the self and the outer world, and by Schlegel himself to convey a similar kind of hovering. According to another of Schlegel's *Athenaeum* fragments, the essence of what should be called "Transzendentalpoesie" (transcendental poetry) lies in "das Verhältnis des Idealen und des Realen" (the relation between Ideal and real).³⁴ Hegel, too, uses reflection imagery in discussing the process by which the Spirit becomes fully itself. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* he says: "But this substance which is Spirit is the process in which Spirit *becomes* what it is in *itself*; and it is only as this process of reflecting itself into itself that it is in itself truly *Spirit*".³⁵

We have already met the notion of transposition, and discussed its possible relationship to Romantic exponentiation, in Brennan's representation of the suspended smoke from the funeral pyre, hovering over the forest around Valvins, in the elegy which precedes the Liminary.³⁶ The "retreat" of the speaker in the Liminary coincides with the appearance of the "summer bride, new life from nuptial lands" (stanza 4). The speaker may be involved in a "passing", but persists. The single figure with which the poem begins becomes doubled into a self and a bride who reunite, hovering above the

³³ KFSa, vol. 2, pp. 182-3: "Only [Romantic poetry] can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole surrounding world, an image of the age. And yet it can also hover best at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, raise this reflection again and again to a higher power and multiply it as if in an endless sequence of mirrors".

³⁴ KFSa, vol. 2, p. 204.

³⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, pp. 487-88.

³⁶ See discussion beginning on page 183 above.

landscape of Nature. The “secret shrine [. . .] wherein day nor night has part” gives way to an act that “makes the ways of earth divine / with the wild splendours of a mortal heart” (stanza 3).

Fichte’s notion of the origin of the non-ego in the self-consciousness of the ego was considered by Schlegel, Schelling and Hegel in the light of Boehme’s derivation of the world from the self-consciousness of God. The split of the subject into two that the *Liminary* portrays suggests either the cosmogony of Boehme or some other emanationary system such as Neoplatonism. We know that Brennan was discovering Boehme via Yeats around 1897 and that he was thinking of the Bohemian mirror when he was planning *Lilith*; so it is certainly possible that the mirror of self-reflection in the first stanza of this poem may itself reflect not only the mirror of Hérodiade and the reflection formulae of the *Frühromantik* but also the mirror of Boehme.

Among German writers of the early nineteenth century, the figure of an ellipse with two centres was employed to figure the positing of the outer world by the self-conscious ego. According to Marshall Brown, Goethe’s essay “Problem und Erwiderng” (1823) “proposes the ellipse in quite specific terms as the answer to the problems raised by Fichte’s analysis of the opposing central forces of experience”.³⁷ Görres used the symbol of the ellipse with two foci, as did the philosopher Franz von Baader (1765–1841), who had a strong interest in the writings of Boehme.³⁸ We cannot be certain that Brennan was sufficiently familiar with the figure of the ellipse before 1897 to have used it in this poem, although it is possible, but his familiarity with the Bohemian mirror would have encouraged him to interpret the notion of exponentiation in terms of the divine self-consciousness that posited the world of Nature. In the “passing” of the speaker of the first stanzas of the *Liminary*, a unity becomes a duality. Nature appears as the complementary other self.

In Brennan’s poem, the “summer bride” appears simultaneously with the world of Nature in stanza four. The imagery of stanzas five and six actually connects her with Nature:

³⁷ Marshall Brown, p. 158. Mayer objects to Brown’s insistence that the figure of the ellipse represents the single borrowing from Boehme by writers of the *Frühromantik* (Mayer, p. 178 n. 74).

³⁸ Marshall Brown, pp. 178–79.

The hidden places of her beauty hold
 the savours shed o'er wastes of island air,
 and her crown'd body's wealth of torrid gold
 burns dusky in her summer-storm of hair.

Her breasts in baffling curves, an upward hope,
 strain towards the lips pain'd with too eager life,
 and the rich noons faint on each lustrous slope
 where thunder-hush in the ardent brake is rife.

If applied to Elisabeth Werth, the imagery of stanza six (her breasts are like hillsides covered with bracken) is inappropriate. McAuley, taking it in such a way, comments, "I am not sure of the anatomical meaning here, any ideas that occur to me being rather grotesque".³⁹ It is far more likely that Nature is being represented as a woman. The scents of "island air" are like "the hidden places" of a woman's beauty. Nature has appeared as a bride in the morning or in spring-time ("the living fringe of green"; "the breathless morn"), and at summer or noon an imminent thunder-storm presages the electric encounter to come between the soul and its bride ("burns dusky in her summer-storm of hair"; "thunder-hush in the ardent brake is rife"). A similar cluster of significations applies to the golden hair ("her crown'd body's wealth of torrid gold") as in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude", the word "ardent" ("the ardent brake") connoting burning or flaming as well as eagerness. The association of gold with a storm or tempest is made in the second line of Mallarmé's "Victorieusement fui le suicide beau", where the words "or, tempête" are applied to a sunset.

Stanzas seven to nine of Brennan's poem describe the consummation of the 'marriage'. These stanzas, which present a puzzling picture to those who take the poem to relate to Brennan's marriage to Elisabeth, call on the "summer bride" to "consume all me that wears an uncrown'd name" and "burn this my flesh to a clear web of light" (stanzas 8 and 9). We recall the fiery sun-god of "MDC-CCXCIII: A Prelude" and his effect on the spring, while noting that the equivalent figure in the Liminary is feminine ("I cannot tell what god is in her gaze"). "Uncrown'd" refers back to the epithet "crown'd" that was applied to the "summer bride" in stanza five and suggests that the speaker seeks to share the "crown'd" status of his bride.

³⁹ McAuley, "The Erotic Theme in Brennan", p. 11.

Such an aspiration is in keeping with the system of the Kabbalah, in which “Keter” (crown) appears at the head of the system of ten Sefirot, or emanations of the divine. When Brennan wanted to describe the state he called “direct intuition” in the 1898 lecture “Fact and Idea”, he said that “thought would be like a quivering flame, inseparable from sense, emotion, and imagination”. The “flame” of the Liminary should be taken to refer to ecstatic experience of the divine. Such a flame appears in another poem written in 1897, number thirteen of “Towards the Source”, which envisages the achievement of a particular spiritual state in which the life of the speaker becomes “*whitest flame / light-leaping in a crystal sky*” (stanza 1).

The consummation represented in stanzas seven to nine of the Liminary is a marriage of opposites, antitheses or contraries. At the most basic level of meaning, it is a marriage of seasonal opposites, winter and summer. Novalis’ poem “Die Vermählung der Jahreszeiten”, “The Marriage of the Seasons”, intended for the second part of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, calls for such a marriage, not only of spring and autumn, summer and winter, but of future with past and present, youth with age.⁴⁰ It suggests that the seasons of the year (“die Zeiten des Jahres”) should be united with those of the human race (“des Menschengeschlechts”). As we have seen, such a union is the foundation of Brennan’s notion of moods. Another literary example of the marriage of opposites, with which we know Brennan was familiar, is Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which claims that “without Contraries is no progression”. In addition, William Morris’s *The Earthly Paradise* is a cycle of stories linked to the months of the year.

Stanza ten suggests that the pair have achieved transcendence through their union, as they survey the countryside from an elevated vantage-point (“mingled in radiance over cloud and lea”). This, I believe, represents the achievement of the “third thing” from a union of antitheses or opposites, according to the model of the Romantic triads which raised the duad (or in Novalis’ version, the self and its complementary other) to a higher level. This section and the elegy to Mallarmé share some similar imagery. At the end of the first part of Brennan’s poem, sunset and autumn are equated:

⁴⁰ Brennan refers to this poem in the article on German Romanticism (P, p. 393).

And gloriously our summer's reign shall end:
 in some dark pass that leads into the west,
 burnt incense-wise, each blood shall sweetly blend,
 exhaled in music from the love-slain breast [. . .].

The ending of "our summer's reign" is obviously autumn; it occurs in "some dark pass that leads into the west", the latter word implying sunset. Here a *Liebestod* is depicted using the sacrificial sunsets and autumns of Mallarmé's *Les Dieux antiques*. Like the death of Hercules discussed in the latter work, this death is an immolation: the pair are "burnt incense-wise". The participial phrase "exhaled in music" suggests that the love-death of the protagonists releases a spiritual essence that constitutes its Mallarméan 'musicalité'.

* * *

At the beginning of the second section of the Liminary, the mood changes dramatically. The first part was fundamentally triumphant in tone, even when dealing with the *Liebestod*. The speaker's claim that "my passing makes the ways of earth divine / with the wild splendours of a mortal heart" is developed differently in the two parts of the poem; while the first section focuses on the "wild splendours" and on making "the ways of earth divine", the second develops the implications of "a mortal heart". The change of tone is apparent in the first three stanzas of the second section:

See now the time (O eve of smoky brown!)
 the morbid season of my close content,
 drown'd flame, broad swathes of vapour closing down
 round the clear gaze that pierces, vainly pent,

 and knows how vain the hero-death that flung
 far flame against the craven face of dark
 (poor hero-heart the minstrel summer sung,
 O brooding hidden over a bitter cark!),

 how vain! did not the hot strength of the earth
 exude in drifts of colour, dwindling
 to dimmer odour-wafts, a hearted worth
 the long-defeated tribes to altar bring.

The "season of my close content" becomes "morbid". The flame of stanzas eight and nine is "drown'd" by the "broad swathes of vapour closing down". The "clear gaze" of the achieved visionary ecstasy is "vainly pent" by mist. The heroic sacrificial death that ends the first

section now appears as “vain”, an ephemeral song of the “minstrel summer”. Again, autumn and evening are equated: the “eve of smoky brown” corresponds to the descending mists of autumn. These stanzas are a very good example of the correspondence between the seasonal changes of Nature and the universal experiences of human beings that forms the foundation of moods as Brennan conceives them.

The sense of frustration and ineffectuality is meliorated, however, in the third stanza, with the words “how vain! did not [...]”. The strength of summer, now past, is not lost completely but is vapourised by the “hot earth”, “in drifts of colour” and then “dimmer odour-wafts”. As with the “suspended fulgent haze” of Brennan’s elegy to Mallarmé, autumn symbolises a sacred event: at once a volatilisation of the physical, a ‘raising to a higher power’, and the ‘transposition’ accomplished by art. In stanzas nineteen to twenty-one, the heroic acts undertaken in religious wars (“the red crusades of ire / following some dusky king of mighty woes”), in order to slake the “caravans” of “vast desire”, result in a death whose meaning is transformed into art by becoming narrative (“the last word of their red tale”).

The “rapt assumption-pyre” of “Red autumn in Valvins” appears in stanza twenty-two of the Liminary. Brennan speaks of “the ghost of flame”, which “hung on horizon-wings” “o’er their darkening blood”. The hinted alchemical reference in the elegy is quite explicit here: the “ghost of flame” is “the spirit’s gold, / [...] in the vast crucible / transmuted of some viewless Trismegist” (stanzas 22–23). This reference invokes the tutelary deity of Hermeticism, alchemy and magic: Hermes Trismegistus, the ‘thrice-great’. It is he who completely overshadows the God of the Old Testament (appearing as “the crafty lord of wrong and right”—that is, a Gnostic demiurge—in stanza twenty). The appearance of Trismegistus signals the release of the spiritual from the material (the goal of spiritual alchemy). This release, an act taking place at a spiritual level, corresponds to the seasonal dissolution of autumn leaves, apparently into the mist itself.

The next part of the Liminary (stanzas 24–27) returns to dream, the handling of the imagery recalling the rapports between dream and death put forward in Nerval’s *Aurélia*. At the beginning of this work, Nerval refers to the gates of ivory and horn separating dream from waking consciousness, deliberately invoking the journey of Aeneas to the Underworld as a precursor of his own study of dream:

Le rêve est une seconde vie. Je n'ai pu percer sans frémir ces portes d'ivoire ou de corne qui nous séparent du monde invisible. Les premiers instants du sommeil sont l'image de la mort; un engourdissement nébuleux saisit notre pensée, et nous ne pouvons déterminer l'instant précis où le *moi*, sous une autre forme, continue l'œuvre de l'existence. C'est un souterrain vague qui s'éclaire peu à peu, et où se dégagent de l'ombre et de la nuit les pâles figures gravement immobiles qui habitent le séjour des limbes. Puis le tableau se forme, une clarté nouvelle illumine et se fait jouer ces apparitions bizarres:—le monde des Esprits s'ouvre pour nous.⁴¹

Brennan uses a similar identification of dream and death in the Liminary. It is implicit in phrases such as “the cortèges of dream”. By the end of stanza twenty-seven (“the fixed light that charms the fields of death”) it is explicit. The repeated word “pale”, occurring in stanzas 24 and 26, and twice in stanza 27, recalls Nerval's description of dream-figures in the dream-landscape: “un souterrain vague qui s'éclaire peu à peu, et où se dégagent de l'ombre et de la nuit les *pâles* figures gravement immobiles qui habitent le séjour des limbes” (italics mine). In view of the sacrificial death in which the speakers have participated at the end of the first part of the poem, the “pale” day that succeeds evening must owe its pallor to shed blood. A manuscript version of these lines reads “pale day that dies even since morning drain'd / by lurking mystery of its blood”.⁴² The connection of pallor in the sky with the blood shed in the “sacrifice” of sunset also occurs elsewhere in *Poems*.

The return to dream is not, however, a simple resumption of the earlier “winter dream”. The state of mortality embraced in the first part of the poem has been enriched by the transient achievement of ecstasy and by the transformation of the treasures of mortality

⁴¹ OCN, vol. 3, p. 695: “Dream is another life. I haven't been able to penetrate these gates of ivory or horn, which separate us from the invisible world, without trembling. The first instants of sleep are the image of death; a vague numbness seizes hold of our thought, and we are unable to determine the precise instant when the self takes up the work of existence in a different form. It's an obscure subterranean cavern, which brightens little by little, where the pale, solemnly immobile figures that inhabit the resting-place of Limbo emerge from shadow and night. Then the picture composes itself, a new brightness illuminates these bizarre apparitions and sets them in motion: the world of spirits opens before us”. The epigraph of the second part of Nerval's *Aurélia*—“Euridyce ! Euridyce !”—relates his work to Orpheus' visit to the Underworld as well as to that of Aeneas.

⁴² This version appears on the recto of the second leaf of Notebook NLA MS 3246.

into art. The mention of “Thulean spring”, which seems to return us puzzlingly to the beginning of the seasonal cycle in a section whose tone clearly belongs to the end, actually indicates something collected during spring and stored against the winter. It refers most obviously to memories but also to art. In the first part of the poem the flower-cups had become “hard stalks and cruel cups” as summer supplanted the innocence of spring, but memory (and art) can recover their former state.

The reference in stanza twenty-five to “opals that engeal the Boreal gleam / and diamond-drip of ether’s crystal thrill” recalls the “hard, gem-like flame” of Pater.⁴³ Whereas the “ruby of harden’d flame” occurs in Brennan’s *Wisdom* sequence in the context of esoteric wisdom, suggesting that such wisdom has a latent value that will be preserved into the future, the opals and diamonds of the *Liminary* represent solidified fire and light, the beauty of the summer caught and kept by memory, but also—and more importantly in this context—by art. The influence of Pater’s “hard, gem-like flame” is immediately apparent, even though Brennan has entirely reworked the image.

The image of precious stones also suggests an allusion to the end of Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade*, summoning up the mood in which that poem ends; in Brennan’s translation, “each icy gem / slips dream-like from its dream-wrought diadem” (“une enfance sentant parmi ses reveries se séparer enfin ses froides pierreries”, lines 133–34). The reference to the “House of Contemplation” returns us to the detachment of the beginning of the *Liminary*.⁴⁴ To this “House of Contemplation” gather the “cortèges of dream / over the hills of legend”, bringing with them the treasures of spring and summer, the “lucid flower-cups” as well as the opals and diamonds; but the implacable return of the procession is halted as the speaker prolongs the suspense of autumn, in a command that parallels the “suspended fulgent haze” of the elegy:

A little yet, a little—wait, O files
obedient to my dumb command—the brow
may waive its frigid lordliness, the wiles
of the spent heart becloud it—wait; and thou,

⁴³ See pages 45–46 above.

⁴⁴ See page 209 above.

dark presence, large above the passing world,
 bidding the full hour of the fated stroke,
 ere in the sudden gust of truth be whirl'd
 the veils of kindly Maya, leaf or smoke,

let their suspense of smouldering glory be
 yet mirror'd in this mind's unruffled pool [. . .] (stanzas 28–30)

The mind of the speaker, now clearly that of a poet, reflects the “glory” of the autumn leaves. We recall Mallarmé’s “La Gloire”, where the autumn forest witnesses the consecration of the poet, as well as the memories of *Hérodiade*, which appear as autumn leaves beneath the “glace” (both ice and glass) of her mirror. There are further echoes of Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade*: “engeal” recalls “congeal” but also the French word *geler*, to freeze. (The mirror of *Hérodiade*, and by transference *Hérodiade* herself, are both, metaphorically, “eau froide [. . .] dans ton cadre gelée”.) Mallarmé’s “pâle clarté” (in Brennan’s translation “pallid light”) probably helps to illuminate the “pale fields” and “pale day”.

The “dark presence, large above the passing world” may be Isis, who appears by name in the final stanza of the poem. A piece called “Isis” is included in Nerval’s *Les Filles du feu*. In it Nerval draws on the syncretic association of Isis with various other Nature-goddesses made by Apuleius, whose *Golden Ass* (second century AD) was the single most important ancient source of information on the ancient cult of Isis:

Cette éternelle Nature, que Lucrèce, le matérialiste, invoquait lui-même sous le nom de Vénus céleste, a été préférablement nommée Cybèle par Julien, Uranie ou Cérès par Plotin, Proclus et Porphyre;—Apulée, lui donnant tous ces noms, l’appelle plus volontiers Isis / c’est le nom qui, pour lui, résume tous les autres / c’est l’identité primitive de cette reine du ciel, aux attributs divers, au masque changeant !⁴⁵

If, as has been suggested, the conflation of dream and death in stanzas twenty-four to twenty-seven of Brennan’s *Liminary* is a conscious allusion to Nerval’s *Aurélia*, the appearance of Isis in the poem is

⁴⁵ OCN, vol. 3, pp. 619–20: “Julian preferred the name of Cybele for this eternal Nature which Lucretius, the materialist, invoked under the name of the celestial Venus, while Plotinus, Proclus and Porphyry favoured Urania or Ceres; Apuleius, while bestowing on her all these names, rather called her Isis, the name which, for him, summed up all the others, [reflecting] the primitive identity of this queen of the sky, whose attributes are diverse, whose appearance is [constantly] changing!”

unsurprising. In the eighth chapter of the first part of *Aurélia*, “une déesse rayonnante” appears who “guidait, dans ses nouveaux *avatars*, l’évolution rapide des humains”.⁴⁶ Later she is revealed as Isis. Like Brennan’s Lilith, she has the traditional lunar aspect. In “Isis” she appears with a moon on her forehead, in a deep black cloak sewn with stars, and her hair is a striking feature.⁴⁷ In the *Voyage en Orient*, Isis appears before an initiate into her mystery cult as “la ressemblance de la femme qu’il aimait le plus ou de l’idéal qu’il s’était formé de la beauté la plus parfaite”.⁴⁸ Thus she is associated for Nerval not only with ‘eternal Nature’ but with the reconciliation of real and Ideal. Her presence at the end of the Liminal foreshadows the appearance of Lilith, “Lady of Night”, later in “The Forest of Night”.

Isis was also a popular literary subject at the time of Schiller and the writers of the *Frihromantik*. Schiller’s famous poem of 1795, “Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais”,⁴⁹ warns those who attempt to lift the veil of truth that they will never be happy again. The plot of Novalis’ *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* concerns the lifting of the veil of Isis; Nerval’s reading of Isis as ‘eternal Nature’ resembles Novalis’ interpretation. Isis has also had a perennial interest for adherents of Masonic and esoteric groups drawing on Egyptian mystery traditions. Madame Blavatsky’s choice of the title *Isis Unveiled* for her 1877 book indicates the extent of the revelation the author was claiming, not only for her book but for the Theosophical Movement as a whole. Brennan would have been familiar with all of these associations of Isis, but those that are most relevant to the concerns of this poem are the literary ones of the Romantic movement, both French and German, and the connection with the mystery religions, which interpreted seasonal myths in terms of the regeneration of the human being and the release of the transcendent self.

Brennan’s reference to “Maya” need not imply any more familiarity with Indian thought than could have been obtained from Schopenhauer, who borrowed the idea of a veil of appearances (*Maya*) from Hinduism. According to Janaway,

⁴⁶ OCN, vol. 3, p. 712: “a radiant goddess”; “guided, through her new avatars, the rapid evolution of human beings”.

⁴⁷ OCN, vol. 3, p. 620.

⁴⁸ OCN, vol. 2, p. 392: “the likeness of the woman he loved most or of the ideal he had created for himself of the most perfect beauty”.

⁴⁹ “The veiled image at Sais”.

Schopenhauer often refers to our ordinary experience as not penetrating the 'veil of Mâyâ'. This is not the common sceptical thought that we cannot trust our senses to tell us about the material world, but rather the idea that the material world of our experience is not something eternal, and not something we should ultimately put our trust in.⁵⁰

Brennan's Liminary strongly suggests the workings of an unyielding force associated with the "dark presence, large above the passing world, / bidding the full hour of the fated stroke" (stanza 29). The poem refers to "implacable certainty" (stanza 30) and the "proud predestin'd circle" (stanza 32). To return to the "hollow crystal", as the poem does at the end, is to return to the beginning of the cycle, with its potential for further emanation of one into two.

"O yon, when Holda leaves her hill"

The prelude to the section of "The Forest of Night" entitled "Secreta silvarum" is "Oh yon, when Holda leaves her hill". "Secreta silvarum" is itself an introduction to "The Quest of Silence". The Holda poem exploits the association between legend and the daily and yearly cycles of Nature, following up the implication of Mallarmé's *Les Dieux antiques* that if myth is reducible to natural cycles, then natural cycles can be read as myth. It populates the Romantic forest of its setting (which, as we saw earlier, also appears in "MDCCXCIII: A Prelude") with figures of legend, such as fairies, knights, and nymphs of wood and water, who animate the various seasons and their equivalent times of day. By associating times or seasons with certain myths, legends or fairytales, this poem connects these times with particular moods, a practice which has already been established in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude" and the Liminary. The balladic style, very different from the short stanzas of "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude" and the pentameters of the Liminary, is in keeping with the legendary material which it presents.

The central figure of "Oh yon, when Holda leaves her hill" is the Germanic Venus, Holda. The seasonal cycle is framed by Holda's exit from, and return to, the hill beneath which she sleeps during

⁵⁰ Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, p. 15.

winter.⁵¹ This is a Germanic version of the seasonal myth that appeared in its Greek version in “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude” as the story of Demeter and Persephone. The Venus of Wagner’s opera *Tannhäuser* is referred to as Holda in the “Shepherd’s Song”, as Jessie Dyce points out.⁵² Like Wagner’s Venus, Brennan’s Holda is not the sanitised goddess of classical legend but the mother-goddess who is identified by Nerval, following Apuleius, with Cybele, Ceres and Isis, and by Apuleius himself also with Minerva, Diana and Proserpine, among others. Proserpine and Ceres, of course, are the Roman names for Persephone and Demeter.

In the prelude to “*Secreta silvarum*”, the legends with which the seasons and times of day are associated have their own secrets. In his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Pater uses the Germanic legends of Venus as evidence of the survival of paganism during the Middle Ages and its return in a “*mediæval Renaissance*”:

One of the strongest characteristics of that outbreak of the reason and the imagination, of that assertion of the liberty of the heart, in the middle age, which I have termed a medieval Renaissance, was its antinomianism, its spirit of rebellion and revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the time. In their search after the pleasures of the senses and the imagination, in their care for beauty, in their worship of the body, people were impelled beyond the bounds of the Christian ideal; and their love became sometimes a strange idolatry, a strange rival religion. It was the return of that ancient Venus, not dead, but only hidden for a time in the caves of the Venusberg, of those old

⁵¹ There is a section on Holda in Charles Sainte-Foi’s French translation of Görres’ *La Mystique divine, naturelle et diabolique* (Paris: Poussielgue-Rusand, 1854), which was acquired by PLNSW in 1885. It reads in part: “Sur le mont Hoersil, en Thuringe, une procession d’un autre genre précède et termine l’apparition de cette armée bruyante. C’est la fée Holda, la déesse bonne et bienveillante, qui conduit la marche, montée sur un char. Quelquefois cependant le fidèle Warner marche à la tête du convoi. Des fantômes singuliers se pressent autour d’Holda, mais ce sont des femmes qui l’accompagnent. Elles traversent les airs et les grandes routes, semant d’abondance sur leur passage ; aussi célèbre-t-on leur apparition par des repas et des fêtes”: “On Mount Hörsil, in Thuringia, the appearance of this boisterous army is preceded and terminated by a procession of another kind. The fairy Holda, the good and benevolent goddess, leads the march, raised on a cart, although sometimes it is the faithful Warner who marches at the head of the convoy. Strange phantoms crowd around Holda, but these are women who accompany her. They flutter through the air and along the highways of the land, sowing abundance as they pass; and people celebrate their appearance with feasts and fêtes”.

⁵² J.R. Dyce, “An Assessment of the Poetry of Christopher Brennan in *Poems [1913]* and *The Burden of Tyre*”, PhD, University of Newcastle, 1983, p. 143.

pagan gods still going to and fro on the earth, under all sorts of disguises. And this element in the middle age, for the most part ignored by those writers who have treated it preeminently as the 'Age of Faith'—this rebellious and antinomian element, the recognition of which has made the delineation of the middle age by the writers of the Romantic school in France [. . .] so suggestive and exciting—is found alike in the history of Abelard and the legend of Tannhäuser.⁵³

The "secret" of "Secreta silvarum" turns out to be a survival of the kind Pater discusses, which Brennan figures appropriately as the god Pan. Pater's association of the Germanic legend of Venus with the survival of paganism is particularly relevant to Brennan's poem in that Pater uses the Germanic Venus, and her hill the Venusberg, as a symbol of the continuation of pagan ideas in medieval European legend. He recasts the 'Age of Faith' as an age of religious rebellion, even of "a strange rival religion". Moreover, he uses the cyclic return of this Venus as a metaphor for the cyclic recurrence of ideas in human history. Paganism, it is suggested, recurred at the time of the "mediæval Renaissance", and the tone of excitement ("this rebellious and antinomian element, the recognition of which has made the delineation of the middle age by the writers of the Romantic school in France [. . .] so suggestive and exciting") intimates that a further return would be neither surprising nor unwelcome. "The Christian ideal" has "bounds" that may be exceeded by those who exercise a "care for beauty" as well as "the pleasures of the senses and the imagination". All of these emphases are relevant to Brennan's own interests. Neopaganism is clearly implied in the "Secreta silvarum" sequence.⁵⁴ Pater also refers to "Beauty", which, we recall, is one of the allegorical figures in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude".

The first stanza suggests night as well as winter, but night that is already ending: the "black oaks" are lightened by the "emerald lamplights" of new growth which already "flicker forth". The fourth stanza looks back to night, as a time when fairy revels "gleam o'er the pale grass", their lights contrasting with the "goblin fear" conveyed by the "black woods in mass". The dawn forest, in stanzas two and three, is a place of sound ("the soft-swaying branches make / along its edge a woven sound") and of silence ("the forest shivers whist"). As usual, Brennan chooses his archaic terms with full awareness of

⁵³ Pater, *The Renaissance*, pp. 18–19.

⁵⁴ See page 146 above.

their meaning (“whist”, for instance, means silently or quietly). The physical sound of the forest is woven into story or legend (“a woven sound / of legends that allure and flit”). Legend populates the forest with creatures of the imagination.

In stanzas five, six and seven, spring is associated with the legend of Undine.⁵⁵ The story of the water-nymph is interpreted according to the principle that myths originate in the events of the cycles of Nature. The wooing of Undine by Huldbrand (whose name suggests fire) is linked to the evaporation of mist into cloud in the heat of the sun (“from that sad dream / to woo her, laughing, to the sun / and that glad blue that seems to flow / far up, where dipping branches lift [/. . .] and slow the thin cloud-fleecelets drift”). Thus, one reading of the Undine story suggested by this poem is a Nature myth. The sadness of Undine (“lost Undine”, “her plaint”, “that sad dream”) because Huldbrand has abandoned her for a fully human lover, Bertalda, is like that of the former fiancées of the sun-hero in *Les Dieux antiques*, left behind by the sun on its journey through the day or the year or destroyed by the heat of noon or summer. The word “laughing” is important. Before Fouqué’s Undine gains her soul by marrying Huldbrand, she is constantly laughing, smiling or joking, often inappropriately. This is how she first appears in the story: “Da flog die Tür auf, und ein wunderschönes Blondchen schlüpfte *lachend* herein” (my italics).⁵⁶ Her inability to take anything seriously is, it is implied, a consequence of not having a soul; after she has acquired one, her behaviour is no longer characterised by levity. We have seen that Brennan took her as a symbol of the “instinctive innocent soul” who must “learn sorrow”; so the word “laughing” suggests an innocence that further experience of life will remove.

The Nature myth in this prelude takes on a further level of meaning in the light of Brennan’s allegorical reading of Undine as the soul destined to lose innocence when the divine or the Absolute breaks in upon it. The lines “perchance from that sad dream / to woo her, laughing, to the sun / and that glad blue that seems to flow / far up” (stanzas 6–7) should be taken to refer not merely to the

⁵⁵ See discussion beginning on page 124 above.

⁵⁶ Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué, *Undine*, Chapter One, Projekt Gutenberg-DE, <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/fouque/undine/undine01.htm>, 4/11/2005: “Then the door flew open, and a beautiful blonde girl slipped in, laughing”.

evaporation of water into cloud but to the regeneration of the soul injured by the pain of life itself. Such a soul, whose predicament is like Undine's, may aspire to an experience of the Absolute in which it is released from the limitations of physical existence. "[T]hat glad blue" is both sky and heaven, like the "azur" of Mallarmé's "L'Azur". This further level of signification in the imagery of water evaporating into cloud is similar to the volatilisation of spirit we saw in Brennan's elegy to Mallarmé.

The Holda poem unites in one figure, under the name of Undine, both figures of spring in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude", as well as the "water-maid" of the Liminary; in the latter poem, she appears to be an abandoned fiancée whose innocence is troubled by the consummated union of the bridal pair, of whom one (in this case the bride) is associated with the sun. In "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude", "*lost Undine wept / where the hid streamlet crept, / to the dusk murmuring low / her silvery woe*" (stanza 9). Later in this poem, the laughing spring, who is united with the sun-god but subsequently scorched, appears in the phrase "*the liquid laugh / of girlish spring*" (stanza 17).

In addition to its association with the innocence of spring, laughter is a metaphor for the sounds of spring, especially the sound of running water. Undine is the voice of spring, and her legend gives a voice to the spring waters, at the same time expressing a particular mood, not only in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude" and the Holda poem but also in a number of other poems of "Towards the Source" in which the figure of the laughing spring appears.⁵⁷

In stanzas eight and nine, the Holda prelude moves to summer in the forest. The "sylvan witches", in whose hair one is able to "drowse the summer thro'", recall the real or imagined nymphs of Mallarmé's "L'Après-midi d'un Faune" and their "splendide bain de cheveux" (line 66).⁵⁸ There is an oblique intimation of noon, the "heure fauve" (line 32) of Mallarmé's poem,⁵⁹ as well as summer. Stanza ten, moving to "royal autumn", recalls sunset as well: "smouldering magnificence" evokes skies as well as leaves. Thus it reiterates the imagery of the elegy to Mallarmé and the Liminary. The next stanza, describing the "mad desire and pain that fill'd / red

⁵⁷ See discussion beginning on page 240 below.

⁵⁸ "splendid bath of hair".

⁵⁹ "tawny hour".

August's heart of throbbing bloom", recalls the rape of spring by August in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude". The "wisdoms of forgotten sense" at the end of stanza ten, and the "knowledge still'd / where glory ponders o'er its doom" of stanza eleven, remind us of the return of reflection at the end of the Liminary. Stanza twelve returns to silence and the reverie over "the vanish'd forest prime", which takes place beside the hearth in winter. The hearth as symbol is developed in the various interludes of hearth and window that separate sections of *Poems*.⁶⁰ Silence "chisels silver rime" in the winter forest, "now that hard winds chill / the dews that made their mornings bright". These lines recall not only the congealing of the fruits of spring into gems in the second part of the Liminary, but also the crystal imagery associated with winter in both the Liminary and "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude".

Although the primary associations of the Holda poem are Germanic, there are also echoes of the Romantic forests of Keats's *Endymion*, which employs the legend of Venus and Adonis to figure the death of the earth in winter and its resurrection in spring. In *Endymion*, too, the sacred revels of the human inhabitants of the forest are dedicated to the god Pan, the central figure of the later poems of Brennan's "Secreta silvarum".⁶¹ Brennan's poem evokes Romanticism, both German and English, by referring to the Romance stories of knight-errantry from which Romanticism drew its name.

* * *

The three cyclical poems we have been considering establish a clear pattern of correspondences between the cycles of days and seasons and the emotions associated with the events of human life. This provides a key to the rest of *Poems*. Many of the other poems, in which Brennan attempts to convey a single mood, obliquely, by a technique of suggestion, depend on the symbolism he establishes in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude", the Liminary and "O yon, when Holda leaves her hill". Having grasped the fundamental pattern of the symbolism, we are in a strong position to consider the correspondences between human experience and the seasonal cycle in a number of other poems.

⁶⁰ See page 245 below.

⁶¹ *Endymion*, Bk II, ll. 428–533; Bk I, ll. 185–306.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ASSIMILATION OF OUR INMOST PASSION TO THE TETRALOGY OF THE YEAR

A secular liturgy

As the child of an Irish Catholic family, growing up in Sydney in the 1870s and 1880s, Brennan developed a deep love for the rituals and ceremonies associated with the Church calendar. At the age of seven, he became an altar-boy in the parish of St Francis of Sales in central Sydney. Clark speaks of “the kind of attraction that Catholicism had for Brennan from an early age” and explains:

Throughout his life, the religion of his childhood exerted a strong influence on his private imagination as well as his social instincts, and one reason for this lay in the peculiar fascination which the music, the ceremony and the symbols of the Church had for him. His ambition to become an altar-boy was largely inspired by his love of the ritual, the richness of the vestments, and the interior of his parish church.¹

The enduring influence on Brennan’s imagination of his exposure to the rituals of the Catholic Church, as Clark describes it, is apparent in his endeavour to give his *livre composé* a liturgical aspect that would be in keeping with the Mallarméan notion of a “vrai culte moderne”.

Several of the individual pieces or sequences in *Poems* formerly had names referring to the Catholic office or mass. “Dies Dominica” was originally “Sicut incensum”, a reference, as Wilkes explains, to the ordinary of the mass (“Dirigatur, Domine, oratio mea sicut incensum in conspectu tuo”).² “Sweet silence after bells” replaced another poem about bells from the earlier *XXI Poems* entitled “Compline”.³ “The Forest of Night” was formerly “The Office of Night”.⁴ Although

¹ CB, pp. 6–7.

² Wilkes, *New Perspectives*, p. 36.

³ Wilkes, “The Art of Brennan’s *Towards the Source*”, p. 29.

⁴ Wilkes, *New Perspectives*, p. 23.

these names were excised from *Poems*, a liturgical aspect is still apparent in three of the poems: “Sweet silence after bells” and “Dies Dominica” from “Towards the Source”, and “The banners of the king unfold” from “The Twilight of Disquietude”. This takes on a special significance in the light of Mallarmé’s discussion in “Catholicism” of the “assimilation humaine à la tétralogie de l’An” as an extension of the festivals of the Church year (the series of pieces in Mallarmé’s *Divagations* that includes “Catholicism” is called “Offices”). Brennan’s *Poems*, too, undertakes “to enlarge the canonical meaning” (“élargir l’acceptation canoniale”) of the drama of the Passion by expressing the correspondence between human experience and the fourfold aspect of the year.

In his article “Was Mallarmé a Great Poet?”, Brennan compares Mallarmé’s poetic art with the *fasti* of the Romans, the calendar of festivals, games and anniversaries connected with particular days of the year, to which the title of Ovid’s *Fasti* refers. Brennan says of Mallarmé, “in a rightly constituted state, one that should mirror the constitution of the universe, his art [poetry] was meant to be *fasti*, the communion of man with his glory”.⁵ In “Catholicism” Mallarmé speaks of “l’esthétique fastueuse de l’Église”;⁶ the word *fastueuse* is derived from *faste*, which in addition to referring to the sacred festivals of the Church is also the French title of Ovid’s work. Brennan’s use of the word *fasti* in relation to “the corroboration of man’s ardours by all those ‘correspondences’ in nature’s spectacle”,⁷ connects his comments with Mallarmé’s “esthétique fastueuse de l’Église”. Brennan’s art, too, is “meant to be *fasti*”, to reflect the correspondences between human emotions and the natural world, which it should be the responsibility of a secular state religion to celebrate.

One of the poems with a liturgical aspect is “Dies Dominica”. The title means “the Lord’s day”, Sunday, and this meaning is crucial to the sense and function of the poem. The sun itself becomes the “celebrant” of a morning rite (stanza 2), drawing out the “strong incense” from the “breathing fields of morn” (stanza 1). The representation of the sun in this poem is enhanced by resonances with the sun-god in “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude” and the flame of the

⁵ P, p. 282. See page 195 above for the full context of this quotation.

⁶ OCM, vol. 2, p. 241.

⁷ P, p. 282.

“summer bride” in the Liminary. Nature itself, including the poem’s speaker as part of it, is figured as a chalice, a single flower burning incense towards the “blue” that is both sky and heaven, like the incense-breathing flower in the reiterated line of Baudelaire’s “Harmonie du Soir” (“chaque fleur s’évapore ainsi qu’un encensoir”), although Brennan’s flower celebrates morning rather than evening.⁸ Obviously he was well aware of etymological connections between the “chalice” mentioned in the third stanza and the calyx of a flower. The “pointed flame” with which the sun fills “all things aware” (stanza 2) recalls the Whitsunday descent of the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire. Visible beauty lifts the soul to an ecstatic experience (stanza 4). Nature itself initiates a service of worship, drawing the observer into the rite.

The word “claustral” (pertaining to a cloister) in the second stanza links this poem to “Sweet silence after bells” (1913), placed earlier in *Poems*, in which the sound of church bells floats over “gold-lit cells” (stanza 5). Both “cells” and “claustral” give the impression of monastic life, either implying that the poem has a monastic setting, or simply suggesting that the bells confer a monastic or contemplative aspect on the “gather’d cotes” over which the sound is dispersed. In celebrating the silence succeeding the bells, rather than the sound itself, this poem undercuts the traditional Christian *Weltanschauung* it invokes, anticipating the invocation of the Mallarméan silence later in *Poems*, especially in the Lilith sequence (“even hers [Lilith’s], who is the silence of our thought, / as he that sleeps in hush’d Valvins hath taught”, lines 55–56 of “Thus in her hour of wrath”). As “Dies Dominica” celebrates a festival of morning, this poem celebrates evening.⁹

⁸ OCB, vol. 1, p. 47: “every flower exhales like a censer”.

⁹ Two other possible influences on this poem should be noted. One is Keats’s *Hyperion*, Book II, l.128, which reads “Leave the dinn’d air vibrating silverly”. Brennan underlined these words in 1894 when he was deeply impressed by his first extensive reading of Keats. The other is the theories of Theosophists Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, whose *Thought Forms* (London, 1905) suggests that music impresses sound on the ether. ‘Ether’ was the substance thought to interpenetrate space and provide the medium through which light and other electromagnetic waves were propagated. The concept was current up to the 1920s, when the Special Theory of Relativity made it obsolete. *Thought Forms* describes the impact of musical sound on ether in the following way: “sound produces form as well as color, and [. . .] every piece of music leaves behind it an impression of this nature, which persists for some considerable time, and is clearly visible and intelligible for those who have eyes to see” (Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, *Thought Forms*, 1905;

“The banners of the king unfold” is based on the conceit of a correspondence between human experience and the sky at sunset, which we have met in the elegy to Mallarmé.¹⁰ The human viewer and the sunset are so much a unity that the glory of the sunset is appropriated by the speaker: “my trumpets flood the air with gold; / my pride uplifts the vanquish’d day” (stanza 1). The poem demonstrates by means of this conceit that a marriage of mind and Nature may be achieved by the act of perception itself. Clark notes that “the opening line of the poem is a translation of the opening line of the hymn ‘Vexilla regis prodeunt’, by Venantius Fortunatus; in the Catholic *Liber Usualis*, this hymn is ascribed to Vespers of Passion Sunday”.¹¹ This, then, is another poem with traditional liturgical associations that take on a non-traditional but still religious function. The passion of the human being is substituted for the Passion of Christ, commemorated at the start of Easter. The speaker is identified with the Mallarméan sun-hero of *Les Dieux antiques*, whose shed blood of sacrifice, in the reciprocal process that makes natural events into myth as well as myth into natural events, is equated with the red sky of sunset (“The riches of my heart are bled / to feed the passion of the west”, stanza 2). If the sun-hero bleeds to death at sunset, then night is death (“the limpid springs of life are shed”, stanza 2) as well as fulfilment. The third stanza makes explicit this association of night, death and mystical fulfilment, characteristic also of Novalis’ *Hymnen an die Nacht*.

Brennan uses the Symbolist technique of suggestion (characterised by Mallarmé as “[p]eindre, non la chose, mais l’effet qu’elle produit”)¹² in

Quest Book edn, Wheaton, Ill.: Quest—Theosophical Publishing House, 1975, p. 67). The work continues: “Such forms remain as coherent erections for some considerable time—an hour or two at least, and during all that time they are radiating forth their characteristic vibrations in every direction, just as our thought-forms do; and if the music be good, the effect of those vibrations cannot but be uplifting to every man” (p. 69). Later in life, Brennan sometimes attended Leadbeater’s Liberal Catholic Church in Sydney (Roe, p. 251). Leadbeater did not arrive in Sydney until 1914, after this poem was written, but *Thought Forms* had a wide circulation, and Brennan could easily have had access to it via friends who were involved with the Theosophical Society.

¹⁰ I use “conceit” in the sense in which it is applied to Metaphysical poetry (for which Brennan had a decided taste well before it became fashionable), to refer to an ingenious, witty or far-fetched figure.

¹¹ CB, p. 103.

¹² Letter to Henri Cazalis, 30th October 1864; OCM, vol. 1, p. 663. I have not found any evidence that Brennan knew of this letter.

Poems as a whole, as well as in smaller subdivisions and individual pieces. He discusses the technique in his first “Minuits chez Mallarmé” article. Speaking of Mallarmé’s “Petit air I”, he comments: “[t]hat stretch of dusky water is not called *onde* until the second-last line, but *cygne* and *quai* by their absence define it. It has nothing to distinguish it—*quelconque*—from any other mere, neither floating bird nor edging marble; here again *cygne* colours *quai* though that whiteness is not explicit until line 10”.¹³ In his notes to Mallarmé’s 1899 *Poésies*, he considers in what sense the three sonnets “Tout orgueil fume-t-il du soir”, “Surgi de la croupe et du bond” and “Une dentelle s’abolit” form a group, as “études [sic] d’aspects d’abandon, de désuétude, de manque, ou l’absence”.¹⁴ Then he points out the technique: “Remarquez comment l’aspect matériel des choses se définit par leur signification : la description évanouit [sic] jusqu’à la simple mention de leur qualité”.¹⁵ The material aspect of things appears only indirectly. Considered as a poetic technique, Brennan’s own treatment of moods in *Poems* could be described as “studies of aspects” of differing states of mind. Since many of the pieces in *Poems* reveal aspects of their meaning only in relation to others employing similar symbolism, it is ultimately unsatisfactory to consider the individual pieces purely as discrete units.

“Towards the Source”

In “Towards the Source”, the words “blue” and “azure” refer both to Brennan’s courtship of Elisabeth in the Berlin spring and to the soul’s memories of a former paradise, forging an association between the physical manifestations of spring (sky, flowers) and heaven.¹⁶ In “Dies Dominica”, as we have seen, the incense of the flowers is directed “toward the blue”, both sky and heaven, or even sky as

¹³ P, p. 358. “wave”; “swan”; “wharf”.

¹⁴ Mallarmé, 1899, first folio opp. p. [122], verso: “Does all pride [turn into] smoke at evening?” “Sprung from the coup and the leap”; “A lace [curtain] abolishes itself”; “studies of aspects of abandon, of disuse, of loss, or absence”.

¹⁵ Mallarmé, 1899, first folio opp. p. [124], recto: “Notice how the material aspect of things is given definition by their signification: the description disappears into the mere mention of the quality relating to them”.

¹⁶ Brennan follows Mallarmé in using “azure” with multiple significations, referring both to the sky and to the heaven that, in the early poems of Mallarmé, is longed for but not believed in.

heaven. In “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude”, spring is associated with the blue colour of the flowers and sky (“*and heaven and meadows grew / a tender blue / of petal-hearts*”, stanza 6). In “*Under a sky of uncreated mud*”, “azure” functions as a kind of shorthand in the line “*My days of azure have forgotten me*” (line 6). The “*days of azure*” are the courtship days, but also the soul’s memories of archetypal beauty. These memories are contrasted with the speaker’s present physical and spiritual context, which appears as “*walls of ugliness*” (line 4).

“*Under a sky of uncreated mud*” is one of two poems introducing a sequence with an apocalyptic tone that follows “The grand cortège of glory and youth is gone”. The other is an epigraph, set low on the page. Both poems are in italics. In a symmetrical arrangement, the sequence is preceded and followed by a blank page, and there is a final poem in italics, “*I saw my life as whitest flame*”, to match “*Under a sky of uncreated mud*”. The sequence itself consists of three poems numbered with Roman numerals and printed in Roman type.

The theme of the loss of a former heaven becomes explicit in the first of the three numbered poems in this sequence, “The yellow gas is fired from street to street”. Paradise is associated with dawn, which dissolves in “virgin tears” (stanza 7) like the mythical figures of dawn abandoned by the sun-hero in *Les Dieux antiques*. The “paradise instinct” (“where’er our paradisaic instinct starves”, stanza 2), must be an allusion to Mallarmé’s expression “l’instinct du ciel en chacun”.¹⁷ “Our old joy” in stanza six (“to whom no part in our old joy remains”) presumably refers to the same thing. What has been lost, however, is not a place but a faculty, the capacity to incorporate Nature in the inner self (“had felt those bright winds sweeping thro’ our soul / and all the keen sea tumbling in our veins”, stanza 6). Brennan is indebted to Traherne for the expression of these lines, but the idea is also close to Wordsworth’s in Book I of *The Prelude*, where mountains impress their dramatic forms on the mind of the growing child.¹⁸ Brennan’s poem contrasts the “delusive dream” (stanza 2) of city-dwellers—an earlier title of the piece was “Cities”—

¹⁷ See page 174 above.

¹⁸ In the Symbolism lectures, Brennan refers to “a prose fragment” of “the recently discovered Traherne”, to the effect that “we are not men till we are crowned with the sun and stars, clothed with the sky, and have the whole sea flowing in our veins” (P, p. 53). The Wordsworth reference is to lines 357–400 of Book I of *The Prelude*.

with the heightened sense that could have “thrill’d to harps of sunrise” or “caught, across the hush’d ambrosial night, / the choral music of the swinging spheres” (stanza 7).¹⁹ According to Spitzer, to be able to sense the music of the spheres is to experience *Stimmung*.²⁰ In Brennan’s poem, Nature itself affords an experience comparable with the Christian heaven (“harps”) or the Elysian fields (“ambrosial”).

In “Ah, who will give us back our long-lost innocence”, the next poem of the sequence, morning is overtly associated with memories of Eden, whose loss, however, may not ultimately be to our disadvantage. The innocence associated with dawn in “The yellow gas is fired from street to street” now becomes linked with human beings:

Ah, who will give us back our long-lost innocence
and tremulous blue within the garden, else untrod
save by the angels’ feet, where joys of childish sense
and twin-born hearts went up like morning-praise to God! (stanza 1)

The heavily apocalyptic tone of “The yellow gas is fired from street to street” is continued. This poem depicts the relinquishment of Eden, the subsequent wandering and suffering, and the awakening of desire that inspires a further search which may be unsuccessful (“if we ne’er behold with longing human eyes / our paradise of yore, sister, we shall have sought”, stanza 11).

The word “sororal” could be an oblique reference to the speaker’s perceptive sister in Mallarmé’s “Prose (pour des Esseintes)” (“Nous fûmes deux, je le maintiens”; “cette sœur sensée et tendre”, stanzas 3 and 9).²¹ There is also a possible allusion to the “dear, dear Sister” to whom Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” is addressed. Both these sisters share with the speakers of the poems in which they appear a profound experience in which life takes on a different aspect. Henry Weinfield draws a connection with “Tintern Abbey” in his discussion of the Mallarmé poem.²² As he points out, the “enfant” in the second-last stanza of “Prose (pour des Esseintes)”, whom he identifies with the sister, definitively “abdicates her ecstasy” in favour of

¹⁹ Ambrosia being the nectar of the gods, Brennan implies that to sense the music of the spheres is to experience heaven.

²⁰ See Spitzer, especially Chapter One.

²¹ “Prose (for des Esseintes)”; “We were two, I maintain”; “this sensible, tender sister”. Des Esseintes is the ennui-ridden hero of Huysmans’ *A rebours*.

²² Weinfield, p. 195.

“Anastasius”, or resurrection. According to his annotations to the 1899 *Poésies*, Brennan took the “sister” and “child” to refer to the Muse Hyperbole, addressed in the first line, under whose aegis “la transformation spirituelle de la Nature” (the essential task of the poet, according to Brennan) was to take place.²³

The Fall portrayed in “Ah, who will give us back” appears to be a “felix culpa”, a “fortunate fault”, as Milton’s Adam suggests that his own may have been, claiming that it both occasioned the divine grace manifested in the Incarnation and produced a paradise superior to that which had been lost.²⁴ Human beings, driven out of the garden in Brennan’s poem by their own “dark lust to learn and suffer” rather than by the angel of God, should be able to deepen the “joys of childish sense” (stanza 1) that they originally experienced by fusing “the full-grown sense with soul” (stanza 3), that is, achieving a version of the marriage of mind and Nature. The “dark lust” and the “darker fire” (stanza 3) probably allude to Boehme’s godhead, constituted by polar opposites of dark fire (wrath) and love, as in the “dark fire” of “O thou that achest” in the Lilith sequence.²⁵ “The blue” (stanza 8) is explicitly associated with the lost paradise. The ugliness of cities is linked to the suppression of the paradisaical instinct, with “our long disease” (stanza 4). The sequence establishes a strong association between dawn or morning and the paradise once experienced by the soul.

The pieces in the third section of “Towards the Source”, from the second Epigraph to “The winter eve is clear and chill”, play with contrasting pairs: Australia and Berlin, innocence and experience, lived experience and the experience of the soul, spring and autumn, dawn and dusk. There is also another grouping whose terms are almost equated, memory and dream. Except for two poems of passion and consummation, these are poems of memory and longing, not dealing directly with the Berlin courtship but with memories of that courtship recalled in Australia. In the case of the last three poems, written between 1898 and 1906, it is a question of memories of memories. The emphasis on memory and dream is established in the epigraph:

²³ Mallarmé, 1899, first of four folios tipped in between pp. [78] and 79, verso.

²⁴ *Paradise Lost*, Bk. XII, lines 458–78.

²⁵ See pages 114–15 above.

*A memory droops among the trees
and grasses ponder a vanished trace;
the dream that wanders on the breeze
wafts incense towards a hidden face.*

There is a play between memories of the courtship (associated with the blue skies and flowers of the Northern spring) and the “paradisaical instinct” of the soul. The “*dream that wanders on the breeze*” of the epigraph harks back to the breeze that “has blown upon our eyes with tidings of the blue / still somewhere” in “Ah, who will give us back our long-lost innocence” (stanza 8). As well, it introduces the breeze imagery we find in a number of poems of this third section, for example in “methinks thy laughter seeks me on every breeze that goes” (“When summer comes in her glory”, stanza 1) and “spring breezes over the blue, / [. . .] / go forth to meet her way, / for here the spell hath won and dream is true” (“Spring breezes over the blue”, stanza 1).

One poem of the third section, “And shall the living waters heed”, is overtly religious, recalling the paradisaical imagery and prophetic tone of the apocalyptic sequence and expressing a similar condemnation of cities, “where our tears are slime” (stanza 2). Life in cities is represented as a “sleep” of “unquickened bodies”, contrasted with the soul’s memories of paradise. The third stanza of this poem shows that such memories are aroused at twilight, presumably because it is a contemplative time, as with the reference in the previous poem to “the dreamy eve, [. . .] / when Life for an hour is hush’d, and the gaze is wide to behold / what day may not show nor night” (“When Summer comes in her glory”, stanza 2). In “And shall the living waters heed”, it becomes clear that the memories in question are those of the life of the soul before birth:

—But thou, O soul, hast stood for sure
in the far paradisaical bower,
there where our passion sparkles pure
beneath the eternal morning hour. (stanza 3)

The soul, that is, has pre-existed this life.

The doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul (as opposed to the traditional Christian teaching that the soul begins with the creation of the individual human being by God) is found in Plato, and in the Neoplatonic, Gnostic and Hermetic traditions. The Greek word *anamnesis* refers to the memory of pre-existence, described in Plato’s

Phaedrus as “the recollection of things our soul saw when it was travelling with god, when it disregarded the things we now call real and lifted up its head to what is truly real instead” (249C).²⁶ The doctrine is found in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* as well as in the *Phaedrus*, where it occurs in the context of a discussion of metempsychosis, the cycle of alternating periods of unembodied and embodied life experienced by the soul. As we have seen, Neoplatonism and Gnosticism had their own versions of the doctrine, emphasising that the soul has been drugged into forgetfulness of the former life, while for Boehme the “sleep” of Adam fulfils a similar function. Hermeticism, too, embraces the doctrine that the soul is divine in origin and may return to its divine source.²⁷

The best-known literary example of the doctrine is Wordsworth’s “Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”, which speaks of the former existence as a “visionary gleam [. . .] / the glory and the dream” and goes on to say:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
 The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,
 And cometh from afar:
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home:
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy

 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day. (lines 58–76)

Wordsworth’s references to “sleep”, “forgetting” and “forgetfulness”, and the “prison-house” are in accord with traditional expressions of this doctrine.

Brennan’s notes to Wordsworth’s poem in *From Blake to Arnold* trace the notion of metempsychosis back as far as Pythagoras and link

²⁶ See quotation from Brennan on pages 187–88 above discussing *anamnesis* with regard to Mallarmé’s “L’après-midi d’un faune”.

²⁷ See Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: An Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 89.

Plato with “what later philosophers have called innate ideas, or *a priori* conditions of knowledge”. Brennan goes on to suggest:

Wordsworth, perceiving in childhood an innocence—as Blake did—a sense as of a Paradise, as of a heaven or earth, a living close to the true life, which every new experience of this world makes fainter—remember Blake’s distinction between innocence and experience—explains it as the reminiscence of a pre-natal existence in the presence of God.²⁸

Although Brennan’s assertion of common ground between Wordsworth and Blake in the matter of a “true life” that belongs to “a Paradise” rather than to this world does not extend the connection to Mallarmé, we have seen how seriously he took Mallarmé’s “instinct du ciel en chacun” and the notion of pursuing one’s “true self” through a forest of symbols “towards the source”. This knitting together of Blake and Wordsworth could certainly have been extended to include Mallarmé as well.

Most of the other poems in this third section of “Towards the Source” deal with memories of Berlin. Such memories are strongly associated with dreams, especially the dreams from which one awakes in the morning, hoping to find them true. Ten out of seventeen of the poems of this section, including the epigraph, mention the word “dream” or a variant. “Deep mists of longing blur the land” compares the longing of the poet in Australia with the mists of “your late October eve” and expresses a hope that, in the morning, “these eyes should wake on tenderer light / to greet the spring and thee once more” (stanza 3). Dream has “touch’d that far reality / of memory’s heaven” (stanza 2), suggesting a symbolic link between the memories of Berlin and the soul’s memories of heaven. The dream with which one awakes is also found in “Was it the sun that broke my dream”, where the imagery associates the sunlight streaming in through the window with the dazzle of fair hair, and by this means uses a typical Symbolist technique to suggest the absence of the beloved. A similar theme is given a more extended treatment in “I am shut out of mine own heart”.

Several poems associate dawn, morning or spring with childlikeness. We have already seen that “And does she still perceive, her curtain drawn” and “Where the poppy-banners flow” associate dawn

²⁸ BA, p. 158.

or spring with virginal innocence. The third stanza of “An hour’s respite: once more” refers to a “low-laughing child haunting my old spring ways”. The association of the early days of love with childlikeness is explicable in terms of the interaction of several themes or approaches Brennan is supporting in this group of poems. In addition to the courtship itself, we have the idea of the pre-existence of the soul, according to which childlikeness is the state of mind closest to heaven. As well, we have the trajectory of the drama of Nature presented in *Les Dieux antiques*, in which the virginal innocence of dawn and spring, overwhelmed or abandoned by the sun-hero in favour of the noonday or summer heat of passion, correlates with the early innocence of the human spirit. Blake’s contrast of innocence with experience is also relevant, as we have seen from Brennan’s discussion of Wordsworth’s Immortality ode. The poems discussed in the previous chapter introduce the pattern explored in *Poems* as a whole: that childlike innocence must in the nature of things be overtaken by experience, first by passion and its consummation, then by the discovery of the transience of ecstasy and the persistence of an anguished sense of the discontinuity between such experience and the quality of daily life, and finally by the search (no means certain of fulfilment) for a new kind of innocence beyond experience.

The figure of the laughing innocent is an important one in the third section of “Towards the Source”, appearing in “When Summer comes in her glory”, “When the spring mornings grew more long”, “An hour’s respite; once more”, “I am shut out of mine own heart” and “Four springtimes lost”. In “An hour’s respite; once more”, the “low-laughing child haunting my old spring ways” is invited to reappear, “sororal in this hour of tenderness” (lines 12 and 14), like the “sister” addressed in “O, who will give us back”. If Brennan was thinking here as well of the Mallarméan “sister” from “Prose (pour des Esseintes)”, who gave up ecstasy for resurrection, then we should think also of the laughing figure of Undine. In fact, as a figure of the innocence of spring and thus of youth, whose destiny is to gain a soul and lose innocence in favour of experience, the “laughing child” must be an important figure in poems that play with memories of courtship, memories of youth, memories of heaven, suggesting that these states are bound to be superseded and that the former paradise must be abandoned.

The two poems of passion and consummation in this section both have a symbolic aspect, expressing the relationship of the soul to the

divine, as well as an experiential one. The original title of “And does she still perceive, her curtain drawn”, a poem anticipating the sexual consummation of marriage, was “Blue-flower”, and although the title has gone, the blue flowers are still present in lines fifteen to seventeen, “the bashful blue-eyed flower-births of the North, / forget-me-nots and violets of the wood, / those maids that slept beneath the snow”. Macainsh points out that the reference in “MDCC-CXCIII: A Prelude” to “*the tender blue / of petal-hearts*” (stanza 5) is an overt reference to the “blue flower” of Novalis’ novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.²⁹ “And does she still perceive” deliberately recalls both “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude” and Novalis’ image of the blue flower (which was at once an image of his beloved Mathilde and of the goal of his spiritual journey), suggesting the entire cycle of spiritual death and regeneration of the soul depicted in the prelude, as well as mystical union with the divine. The influence of Brennan’s reading of *Les Dieux antiques* on the representation of virginal innocence is apparent not only in the colours associated with dawn but in the association of “shy evening” with lilac hues (lines 28–9). In the passion of humanity, love bestows the blessing of “grace” (line 27).

The original title of “White dawn, that tak’st the heaven” was “The Loneliest Hour”. Again, the sense of the title remains in its absence. The poem anticipates ecstasy, “my perfect hour”, an experience of paradise both human and divine, but the predominance of the divine is indicated by the reference in the final line to “the archangel-sword of loneliest delight”. The archangel-wielded sword guarding the gates of Paradise appears again in one of the “Twilight of Disquietude” poems, “The pangs that guard the gates of joy”, whose second line reads “the naked sword that will be kist”. Brennan described this as a “Patmorian Ode”. What he meant may be inferred from his comment in a later article on Patmore’s *The Unknown Eros*:

It treats of wedded life and human love considered both as a sacrament and as a symbol—not merely of St Paul’s great mystery of Christ and the Church, but it is a mystical interpretation of Solomon’s Canticle of Canticles, the hidden intercourse of God and the soul.³⁰

An unfortunate consequence of the melding of embodied and spiritual experience in “White dawn, that tak’st” is the sense, which is

²⁹ Noel Macainsh, “Christopher Brennan and ‘Die Romantik’”, *Southerly* 23 (1963), pp. 153–54.

³⁰ P, pp. 272–73.

hard to avoid, that the beloved is excluded from the deepest meaning of the experience.

In the final three poems of the group, a more distanced stance towards the spring and morning memories is taken. These poems were written later than the others, in 1898, 1900 and 1906 respectively. Each expresses a sense of the remoteness of the memories in question, but each also finds a renewed meaning in them. In “Four springtimes lost: and in the fifth”, the memories are described “receding ever now / farther and farther down the past” (lines 24–25), but the poem suggests that they are still worth recalling, as the seasonal cycle continues to bring spring back again: “each season claims the homage due, long after / its glory has faded to an outcast thing” (lines 32–33). In “Old wonder flush’d the east”, the memories are seen to have been productive rather than the opposite (“blossom’d, not inhears’d”, stanza 5) and to have provided a kind of mental antidote to “the long days’ subtle dusty mesh” (stanza 6). In “The winter eve is clear and chill”, although the speaker attempts to detach himself from the “prompting” of the morning dream (line 7) to return to his home “behind the panes that come and go / with dusk and firelight wavering low” (lines 5–6), the poem perversely finishes with the dream in the ascendant. But the search for the dream must first encounter the night. This poem therefore provides an appropriate transition to the next section, “The Forest of Night”.

“*Secreta silvarum*”

The ambivalence with which morning innocence is regarded in “Towards the Source” becomes more apparent in “The Forest of Night”. This section is broken into four subsections, “The Twilight of Disquietude”, “The Quest of Silence”, “The Shadow of Lilith” (including the Lilith sequence itself) and “The Labour of Night”, with the elegy to Mallarmé and “The hollow crystal of my winter dream” together forming an introduction to the whole section. Part of “The Quest of Silence” is the “*Secreta silvarum*” sequence, introduced by “Oh yon, when Holda leaves her hill”. In the first of the “*Secreta silvarum*” poems, the forest is shown to preserve morning innocence after it has already passed in the world outside the forest: “What tho’ the outer day be brazen rude / not here the innocence of morn is fled” (lines 1–2). The vehemence of “brazen rude”

implies that the forest provides a refuge from the day, which imposes itself like the overwhelming sun-god of “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude” or the “mad desire and pain” associated with summer in the Holda piece (stanza 11). The fresh coolness of the forest is personified as a female figure, only hinted at: “hers guess’d, whose looks, felt dewy-cool, elude” (line 5). The “silence” of the section title reappears as “Quietude” (line 8), contrasting with the “Disquietude” of the preceding section of “The Forest of Night”. In lines three to four of the sestet, “her beasts”, “with ivory single horn”, identify the figure as the legendary virgin who alone is able to make unicorns lie down (“couchant”). This hinted personage, a creature of fable inhabiting the forest, is evoked only to be dismissed in the sinister-toned fifth poem of this sequence, “No emerald spring, no royal autumn-red”, where “no turf retains a print” (line 11) of the unicorns of the “Lady of the Forest”, and where no colours signal the changes of the seasons.

The “*Secreta silvarum*” sequence marks the transition from innocence to experience. As in other poems, morning is used as a symbol of innocence. The virgin of the forest is another variant of the Undine symbol.³¹ Brennan makes the connection between the two in the article on Mallarmé’s “sonnet en -yx”. He says “the couchant unicorn is, in art, the symbol of virginity: a water-sprite, having no soul, must, to obtain one, give up her maidenhead to a mortal (Fouqué, *Undine*)”, and adds a footnote to medieval translations of Psalm XXI, “*Salva me ex ore leonis: et a cornibus unicornium humilitatem meam*”.³² The unicorns of the first and fifth poems of “*Secreta silvarum*” evoke a cluster of associations.

According to Brennan’s friend and editor J.J. Quinn, the second of the “*Secreta silvarum*” poems, “O friendly shades, where anciently I grew”, belongs to a particular Australian setting. Chisholm reports that Quinn “confidently affirmed that it refers to the trees around St Ignatius’ College at Riverview, on the Lane Cove River—hence ‘anciently I grew’”.³³ The poem is also linked to Brennan’s own imaginative history. In an 1899 letter to his friend Brereton, Brennan says: “I only know that I allow something in me to speak that gazes

³¹ See pages 124–25 and 226–27 above.

³² P, p. 362.

³³ Chisholm, *Forest of Night*, p. 68.

for ever on two heavens far back in me: one a tragic night with a few expiring stars; the other an illimitable rapture of golden morn over innocent waters & tuneful boughs".³⁴ "O friendly shades, where anciently" uses the phrase "tuneful boughs" (line 8) from Brennan's letter. This poem suggests that the forest possesses a certain potential for revelation. The Romantic connotations of *Ahn(d)ung*, which for Brennan, as we have seen, implied prophetic intuition,³⁵ may illuminate the words "divined" (line 11) and "foreboding" (line 15). What is divined is the revelation of noon, "the impending threat of silence". Such revelation is hinted at rather than achieved; the revelation itself is left to the next poem, where, however, it remains ambiguous.

That poem, "The point of noon is past, outside", is a poem of the climax of the day, the "perfect hour" of the light, which in the forest occurs after "the point of noon" (lines 1–2). Teasing presences of light promise much, but in fact there will be no revelation to ordinary sight. The reader is adjured to "seek not, and think not; dream, and know not; this is best": that is, to seek an intuitive or visionary understanding. The "whispering" woods are very likely an allusion to the "confused words" spoken by the living pillars of Nature's temple in Brennan's translation of Baudelaire's poem "Correspondances".³⁶

The foremost figure of the mythical inhabitants of the forest is Pan, who symbolises the mystery at the heart of the "Forest of Night".³⁷ He shares the ambiguity of the Lilith figure, also associated with the Forest via her avatar, Holda. The satyrs of "What tho' the outer day" foreshadow Pan, and he appears in a friendly guise in "O friendly shades, where anciently", although his more sinister association with 'panic' is alluded to in the third line:

This is the house of Pan, not whom blind craze
and babbling wood-wits tell, where bare flints blaze,
noon-tide terrific with the single shout,
but whom behind each bole sly-peering out
the traveller knows, but turning, disappear'd
with chuckle of laughter in his thicket-beard. (lines 27–32)

³⁴ ST, p. 416.

³⁵ See page 94 above.

³⁶ See P, p. 55.

³⁷ See Wilkes, *New Perspectives*, p. 49.

These lines associate Pan with noon, so that his presence may be hinted at in the next poem, “The point of noon is past, outside”, even though he does not appear in it. (The “unseen presences of light” in that poem could be an oblique reference to the nymphs of Mallarmé’s “L’Après-midi d’un faune”, effecting another gesture towards Pan). In number four of the sequence, “The forest has its horrors, as the sea”, the Mallarméan “horreur de la forêt”³⁸ appears, as night and mystery take over the innocent morning and the revelatory noon in the forest. “The point of noon is past” leads up to the appearance of the sinister Pan, revealed at the end of the fifth poem, “No emerald spring, no royal autumn-red”. Pan is a faun, like the protagonist of Mallarmé’s “L’Après-midi d’un faune”. As we have seen, Pan is associated with the resurgence of paganism. Leconte de Lisle’s poem to Pan, one of the poems appended by Mallarmé to *Les Dieux antiques*, shows Pan at night, pursuing and capturing as “prey” the virgin who wanders into the forest.³⁹

Interludes

The overtaking of morning innocence by mystery in the “*Secreta silvarum*” sequence foreshadows the undercutting of spring and morning optimism in several of the interlude poems, later in “The Forest of Night”. Between “The Quest of Silence” and “The Shadow of Lilith” Brennan places an interlude of two poems subtitled “The window and the hearth”, thus drawing attention to several important structural symbols in *Poems*: the hearth, one of the most important symbols in “The Wanderer”, and the window (as in Mallarmé’s “sonnet en -yx” and “Les Fenêtres”). In the second interlude both poems employ the device of the window, as the title, “The Casement”, suggests. Both poems of “The window and the hearth” are printed in italics. The two poems are separated from the previous section by two facing pages, blank except for the interlude title on

³⁸ OCM, vol. 2, p. 210: “horror of the forest”. The passage from which this phrase comes is quoted above, page 183.

³⁹ The 1892 edition of Richard Payne Knight’s study of mythology, *On The Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology*, 1818; New York: Bouton, 1892, was acquired by the PLNSW in the year of its publication. Whereas the Müller-Cox tradition reduces myth to natural phenomena, Knight’s book reduces it to sexual symbolism, and this theory is applied to the interpretation of the story of Pan.

the right-hand page, and also separated from the following section in a similar way.

“*Twice now that lucid fiction*” deals with a “*weary mood*” (line 5) in the face of the relentless return of the seasons. The coming of spring is painful, an enticing “*lure*” that stings (lines 6–9). The spelling “*kist*” for ‘kissed’, jarring for a modern reader, sounds an awkward note in some powerful lines expressing the impact upon the speaker of the return of seasons whose promises have proved unreliable:

*Earth stirs in me that stirs with roots below,
and distant nerves shrink with the lilac mist
of perfume blossom'd round the lure that, kist,
is known hard burn o'eflaked and cruel sting.
I would this old illusion of the spring
might perish once with all her airs that fawn
and traitor roses of the wooing dawn:
for none hath known the magic dream of gold
come sooth [. . .].*

“*Earth stirs in me that stirs with roots below*” absolutely identifies human feelings with the seasons. “*Burn*” and “*sting*” in the fourth line function as both nouns and verbs. The procession of adjectives accompanying “*burn*” and “*sting*”, not separated even by commas, foreshadows the dissociation of words from traditional grammatical patterns and their reassembling in new patterns. Such a practice is apparent throughout the *Musicopoematographoscope*, providing further evidence of Brennan’s response to Mallarmé’s radical disturbance of syntax. The return of Eden promised by spring, the “*magic dream of gold*” (line 13), has never eventuated; it yields always to “*lewd summer’s dusty mock*”, as “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude” has shown, and to the cynical return of another virginal spring (lines 20–22). Human experience of disillusion is conveyed indirectly, by means of correspondences earlier established between human and natural seasons.

The interlude poems between the Lilith sequence and “The Labour of Night” give a character of universal, religious despair to the failure of the promised Eden of spring to be fulfilled and to the deferment of “*the appointed word*” (“*Once, when the sun-burst flew*”, stanza 5). They call for an apocalypse which will destroy the Earth if it is unable to achieve the return of “*maiden grace [. . .] / sprung soft and sudden on the fainting night*” (“*The window is wide*”, lines 12–13). So both the “*Secreta silvarum*” and interlude poems discussed here undercut the mood of spring or morning optimism established in “Towards

the Source”, suggesting that these feelings may not be justified by any substantial grounds for hope. The “assimilation of our inmost passion to the tetralogy of the year” takes on a further level of equivocity.

“Autumn: the year breathes dully” and “The grand cortège of glory”

The mood of disillusion that ultimately attacks the hopefulness of spring and morning is more consistently associated with autumn. In the first section of “Towards the Source” are two powerful statements of autumn ‘moods’: “Autumn: the year breathes dully” and “The grand cortège of glory”. The first of these, written in October 1894,⁴⁰ represents a funeral procession of “discrown’d belated dreams”. As we have seen, Brennan used the word “discrown’d” with reference to the passing of the old gods in Keats’s *Hyperion*. This is in keeping with the original title of Brennan’s poem, “Funera regum” (the funerals of the kings). In his comment on *Hyperion*, Brennan speaks of the Muse of memory, Mnemosyne, in such a way as to suggest he thought of the Muses, or at least this one, as a ‘mood’ in Yeats’s sense of a dominating idea.⁴¹ These considerations give “Autumn, the year breathes dully towards its death” a certain importance in “Towards the Source”, which, as we have seen, is preoccupied with themes of memory, dream and heaven. It should not be assumed that the “discrown’d belated dreams”, whose inevitable passing is at the same time lamented and accepted in this poem, are gone forever. This poem uses the same image of the funeral pyre employed in autumn poems discussed earlier (the Liminary and the elegy to Mallarmé) but without the suspension of time we encountered in those poems. Here the fire itself is “dying”, and the coming sleep of winter is a “welcome malison” (lines 2, 5).

This poem and “The grand cortège of glory and youth” demonstrate the complexity and ambiguity Brennan is able to achieve by contrasting the moods of individual pieces, that is, the kinds of human experience they associate with particular times and seasons. There is no pyre at all in “The grand cortège”, no sacrificial death of the day with a meaning pointing beyond itself. There is only absence:

⁴⁰ See ST, p. 405.

⁴¹ See page 102 above.

..... the way
 lies stretch'd beneath a slanting afternoon,
 the which no piled pyres of the slaughter'd sun,
 no silver sheen of eve shall follow: Day,
 ta'en at the throat and choked, in the huge slum
 o'er the common world, shall fall across the coast,
 yellow and bloodless, not a wound to boast. (lines 8-14)

The phrase “flaunt standards” (line 2) is from Keats.⁴² Brennan altered the last line of the *XXI Poems* version, which originally read “since, tho’ joy die, Faith’s song must ever rise”, to reflect a bleaker interpretation of the hope offered by the Church “on our morning’s track” (line 19); the new line accuses the Church of “cozening youth’s despair o’er joy that dies”. There is a tone of finality about this line, and the poem is followed by a blank page.

The symbol of the rose

Brennan’s leading symbol of human experience in correspondence with the drama of Nature is the rose. There are multiple antecedents for this symbolism, ranging from Dante to Yeats and including Australian as well as European sources. Brennan’s vision of the “deathless rose of gold” in the last line of “This rose, the lips that kiss” clearly alludes to Dante’s image of the white rose of Paradise, whose tiers of petals form the seats of the blessed and within which is the “gold of the sempiternal rose”, the light of the glory of God (*Paradiso*, Canto XXX). Brennan was also familiar with Yeats’s rose symbolism in *The Secret Rose*, which included “Rosa Alchemica”, the first story of the Alchemical Rose triptych.⁴³ On the question of influence by Yeats’s rose symbolism, Brennan wrote somewhat defensively:

I have to use the secret rose (no one’s got a mortgage on it) but I do so discreetly: & behind my variation on it lurks an analogy that haunts me, between the desired hour of eternal ecstasy & the fire-mist into which, some scientific mythmongers tell us, the stellar universe will be

⁴² In the margin beside the beginning of Keats’s drama “King Stephen” in Brennan’s copy of Keats (*The Poetical Works of John Keats*, London: Warne, n.d., p. 412), where the phrase “flaunt standard” occurs, someone has written “C.B. cribbed this (1928)” (NLA, Christopher Brennan MS1871, Box 4).

⁴³ See page 140 above.

resolved when the stars have entirely faded & clash together in the womb of night.⁴⁴

In his working copy of Yeats's *Poems* (1895), acquired in 1896, Brennan wrote beside Yeats's comment "[t]he rose is a favourite symbol of Irish poets" the note "likewise a symbol of mediaeval use. Rosicrucian etc."⁴⁵

Rosicrucianism combined many of the esoteric currents that attracted Brennan's interest and attention.⁴⁶ He was familiar with the Neorosicrucian movements of late nineteenth-century France, led by colourful figures such as Stanislas de Guaita (1861–1897), Joséphin (self-styled 'Sar') Péladan (1859–1918) and Gérard Encausse ('Papus', 1865–1916). His library contained no less than seven titles (dated from 1891 to 1915) by Péladan, founder of the Salons de la Rose-Croix. From 1905 he had access to (and probably ordered) Encausse's *Cabbale; tradition secrète de l'Occident* in the Public Library of NSW. A.E. Waite's *The Real History of the Rosicrucians* (1887), to which Brennan also had access in the Public Library, mentions Eliphas Lévi's interpretation of the symbol of the rose in the *Roman de la Rose* and Dante's *Paradiso* as "the symbol of the Rosicrucians publicly and almost categorically revealed", an interpretation flawed, as Waite points out, by an unsupported assumption of the antiquity of the Rosicrucian movement.⁴⁷ Bringing together the rose and the cross, Rosicrucian symbolism is obviously appropriate for Brennan's association of the rose with the human 'passion'.

Brennan's patterns of imagery do not suggest any connections to the symbolism of nettles, roses and lilies associated with the three dispensations of Father, Son and Spirit in the teachings of Joachim

⁴⁴ ST, p. 413.

⁴⁵ Mary Merewether, "Brennan and Yeats: An Historical Survey", *Southerly* 4 (1977), p. 396.

⁴⁶ The first Rosicrucian manifesto, the *Fama Fraternitatis* (1614), describes a fraternity supposedly founded by "C.R.C.", later identified with Christian Rosencreutz, hero of the third manifesto, the *Chymische Hochzeit* (1616). The name 'Rosencreutz' means rosy cross. According to Faivre, the first of these manifestoes contained "traces of the Christian Kabbalah, Pythagorism, and a strong dose of Paracelsism" (Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, p. 64). Christopher McIntosh describes an amalgam of the "old alchemical-kabbalistic-Hermetic outlook" with Pietism in the German Rosicrucian groups of the eighteenth century (Christopher McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, pp. 30, 32–3).

⁴⁷ A.E. Waite, *The Real History of the Rosicrucians*, London: Redway, 1887, pp. 13–17.

of Fiore. However, imagery of lilies and roses together (without nettles) in “Let us go down, the long-dead night is done”, a poem of the apocalyptic series in “Towards the Source”, could be indebted to Boehme, Mallarmé or Yeats, or even to all three.⁴⁸ This visionary and optimistic poem, which, as Kane points out,⁴⁹ claims only the discovery of the “saving word”, not its implementation, imagines

a sea of light foaming with seedless flowers;
 lilies that form on some ethereal wave,
 still generate of the most ancient blue,
 burst roses, rootless, knowing not the grave
 nor yet the charnel thought by which they grew”. (stanzas 4 and 5)

These “rootless” flowers are clearly not subject to the sexual generation that (as we saw in earlier discussion of Boehme’s thought) is a consequence of the Fall.

Lilies and roses appear together in another of Yeats’s *Secret Rose* stories, “The Heart of the Spring”, the tale of a magician who seeks the elixir of youth. The whole of the *Secret Rose* is, of course, permeated with rose symbolism. Mallarmé uses lilies and roses in “Toast funèbre”, in the line “pour la Rose et le Lys le mystère d’un nom”.⁵⁰ Boehme’s prophecies of the regenerated human being deploy imagery of lilies and roses. In the *Book of the Three Principles* Boehme declares: “I will plant my Lily-Branch in my Garden of Roses, which brings me forth Fruit, after which my Soul lusts, of which my sick *Adam* shall eat, that he may be strong, and may go into Paradise” (ch. 20, 38).⁵¹ Although Brennan may not have been aware of this particular prophecy before acquiring the four-volume 1764–81 Law edition of Boehme in 1903, Boehme’s prediction of a coming *Lilienzeit* (time of the lilies) is a relatively well-known aspect of his teachings.

Another poem of the apocalyptic sequence in “Towards the Source”, “I saw my life as whitest flame”, speaks of a colour in the sky which dies sacrificially. This “colour” could represent an allusion to Boehme’s identification of Sophia with the alchemical ‘Tincture’, or

⁴⁸ See Gould and Reeves, pp. 24–25.

⁴⁹ Paul Kane, “Christopher Brennan and the Allegory of Poetic Power”, in *Australian Poetry: Romanticism and Negativity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 87.

⁵⁰ This poem is quoted on page 000 above.

⁵¹ Boehme, *Works*, vol. 1, Bk. II, chs. 20, 38.

the Philosopher's Stone, which is able to accomplish the transmutation of base matter into gold or the release of spiritual gold from its material form. The root meaning of tincture is colour or dye. This is the first stanza of Brennan's poem:

*I saw my life as whitest flame
light-leaping in a crystal sky,
and virgin colour where it came
pass'd to its heart, in love to die.*

The association of the "virgin colour" with the rose is made in the next stanza, where either "virgin colour" or "whitest flame" or perhaps both are the antecedents of "it" in the lines "it wrapped the world in tender harm / rose-flower'd with one ecstatic pang". The association of "virgin" with "colour" suggests Boehme's virgin Sophia; it also suggests the virgin dawn of Mallarmé's *Les Dieux antiques*. Both these possibilities are in keeping with Brennan's preoccupations, and probably both should be borne in mind here.

In *Poems* the rose also symbolises the Passional sunset. In addition to *Les Dieux antiques*, Brennan could have encountered the trope of the sun bleeding to death at sunset in the reiterated line from Baudelaire's "Harmonic du Soir", "Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige".⁵² There is another important source for the association of the rose with sunset and passion: the poetry of Brennan's friend Victor Daley, one of the few Australian poets whose work Brennan really respected.⁵³ In a letter to A.G. Stephens of 15th August 1898, Brennan uses Daley's phrase "sunset rose of passion" as an example of the achievement in poetry of "a harmony, a correspondence between soul & world".⁵⁴ Given the value Brennan placed on such an achievement, this must be regarded as a considerable compliment to Daley. The image of the sunset rose is frequent in Daley's collection *At Dawn and Dusk* (1898). Usage ranges from a simple description of sunset colour, such as "flushed the clouds with rose and chrysolite" ("Dreams", stanza 4), to more complex associations of the red and gold of sunset (the rose) and the golden colour of sunset (the lily) with Paradise in "Fragments", part III, stanzas six to eight.⁵⁵

⁵² "The sun has drowned in its congealing blood."

⁵³ See CB, pp. 125–26.

⁵⁴ ST, p. 426.

⁵⁵ Victor J. Daley, *At Dawn and Dusk*, London: Angus and Robertson, 1898.

In addition to Daley's use of the rose, another important instance of rose symbolism in Australia is the journal *The Heart of the Rose*. This postdates most of Brennan's *Poems*, although he published two of them, "The winter eve is clear and chill" and "O white wind, numbing the world", in the third issue, "The Shadow on the Hill". Brennan's friend Brereton also published in this journal, which included prose pieces of a Theosophical or mystical bent by authors such as Bernard O'Dowd, as well as verse. Some of these make heavy-handed use of various symbolic roses, such as the "Rose of Beauty" and the "Mystic Rose". The journal published translations of, and articles about, French Romantic and Symbolist poets such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Verlaine. A comparison of Brennan's rose symbolism with the contents of this journal, and even with the poetry of Daley, demonstrates the complexity of Brennan's conception of the symbol.

Of the poems in "Towards the Source", the rose symbol is most fully developed in "White dawn, that tak'st the heaven". This poem builds on the association of sexual passion with the rose, the colour red and summer established in "Where the poppy-banners flow", especially the correspondence between the poppies and the lovers' passion conveyed in the lines "poppies flush all tremulous; / has our love grown into them, / root and stem, / are the red blooms red with us?" (stanza 6). In "White dawn", the rose symbol is associated with night, the time for sexual consummation and also for mystical vision. It represents an intense concentration of feeling in a single object: "be the sole secret world / one rose unfurl'd [. . .] / its blossom'd peace intense" (lines 15–17). The experience represented has a transcendental aspect, "beyond all dreams of sense / enmeshed in errorous multiplicity", that is, exceeding the boundaries of the five senses perceived by Blake and others as a limitation of the human capacity for divine vision.⁵⁶

This experience, symbolised by the rose, is a "dense incarnate mystery". The word "incarnate" has several important connotations. The Incarnation of Christ, the divine appearing in human flesh, is the central mystery of Christianity, and Brennan's explicit exclusion

⁵⁶ "Errorous multiplicity" refers to the concept, founded in Neoplatonism, that the process of separation into individuals is a limitation of our divine powers, which long to return to their divine source.

of the ceremonies of the mass (“no golden web, no censer-fire”, lines 23–24) both invokes and dispels the idea of the public celebration of the Incarnation in the mass. What remains is an intensely private incarnation, with its own antecedents in the mystical tradition that celebrates the union of the soul with God using sexual symbolism, as in the *Song of Songs* and the poetry of St John of the Cross. We have already seen that Brennan took Patmore’s *The Unknown Eros* as an example of “wedded life and human love considered both as a sacrament and as a symbol” of “the hidden intercourse of God and the soul”.⁵⁷ “Incarnate” also suggests the French *incarnat*, used by Mallarmé for the colour of the nymphs at the beginning of “L’Après-midi d’un faune”. Brennan could not have failed to be struck by resonances between Mallarmé’s “incarnat” and the implications of the English word, especially as the question of the physical reality of the nymphs is central to Mallarmé’s poem. “Incarnate” appears as well in “Terrible, if he will not have me else” (line 4), where it is also associated with rose imagery, as we have seen.

The mood of spring and morning optimism that characterises a number of the poems of “Towards the Source” yields to the “Twilight of Disquietude” in the section of “The Forest of Night” with that name. The two poems in the interlude “The window and the hearth” deepen the symbolism of the rose. These poems immediately follow pieces dealing with the passing of religions. In the first of these interlude poems, “*Twice now that lucid fiction*”, the transformation of the rose symbol through the times and seasons, from the “*traitor roses of the wooing dawn*” to “*roses’ fall*”, appears as the “*sad metempsychose / and futile ages of the suffering rose*” (lines 3–4). The rose symbol itself is seen as undergoing a transmigration, a cycle of different forms associated with a variety of human feelings: from optimism, through disillusion, to cynicism. The “*suffering rose*” is the rose that undergoes passion, literally “suffering”. Yeats, too, associates his rose with suffering. In a 1925 note to “Crossways” and “The Rose”, he writes:

The Rose was part of my second book, *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*, 1892, and I notice upon reading these poems for the first time for several years that the quality symbolized as The Rose differs from the Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and of Spenser in that

⁵⁷ See page 241 above.

I have imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar. It must have been a thought of my generation [. . .].⁵⁸

In “*Twice now that lucid fiction*”, the passion of Nature, in its association with the passion of humanity symbolised by the transmigration of the rose itself, appears futile, ultimately leading nowhere. The mood of the next poem, “*Chimera writhes beside the tragic flame*”, while not mirroring the weary futility of the last, finds agony in the fate of “*the heart’s rose-flusht dream of living gold*”, which is reduced to “*sullen embers*” (lines 14 and 15). The Chimera itself, and the handling of it, are strongly indebted to Mallarmé, particularly his poem “*Toast funèbre*”, in which a golden monster “suffers” on the edge of the cup from which the toast to the departed poet is being drunk.⁵⁹ Brennan acknowledges the debt in an 1899 letter to Brereton, commenting “[t]he subject—I mean the fender—is just what Mallarmé or any symbolist would choose: but I think the verses are pure C.B.”⁶⁰ As we have seen, agony over the clash between dream and lived experience is another theme Brennan perceived in Mallarmé’s work. This is “l’antagonisme de rêve chez l’homme”.⁶¹

One important stage in the metempsychosis of the rose symbol is night. All three poems framing the Lilith sequence, two in “*The Shadow of Lilith*” and one following the interlude just discussed, explore the rose symbol in the context of night. Two are overtly alchemical and Rosicrucian in their symbolism. The third and fourth stanzas of the second poem, “*Cloth’d now with dark alone*”, refer to the alchemical evocation of the ‘spectre of the rose’:

Eve’s wifely guise, her dower that Eden lent,
now limbeck where the enamour’d alchemist
invokes the rarer rose, phantom descent;

thy dewy essence where the suns persist
is alter’d by occult yet natural rite [. . .].

⁵⁸ W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach, New York: Macmillan, 1957, p. 842.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the relationship of this poem to the “*Chimère*” Mallarmé refers to in “*La Musique et les lettres*”, see Cohn, *Toward the Poems of Mallarmé*, p. 98.

⁶⁰ ST, p. 401.

⁶¹ See page 174 above.

Faivre explains this form of palingenesis in the following way:

Dès 1715, l'abbé de Vallemont avait voulu montrer qu'une plante brûlée en cendres pouvait apparaître à nouveau dans un flacon de verre sous la forme d'un spectre lumineux. [. . .] Au siècle précédent, le P. Kircher avait effectué des expériences semblables avec une rose.⁶²

According to Seligmann's *The History of Magic*, the process involved mixing the essence extracted from the rose-seed with dew. This accounts for Brennan's reference to "thy dewy essence".⁶³ McIntosh explains that, in eighteenth-century Rosicrucian doctrine, dew was thought to contain in concentrated form the 'quintessence', or fifth element: "the universal vital fluid, the breath that animated everything and was central to all alchemical operations, for this substance was a *sine qua non* for the making of alchemical medicines and for the preparation of the Philosophers' Stone used in the transmutation of metals".⁶⁴ Brennan's knowledge of alchemy could have been gained from the *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum* of Georg von Welling, a popular work of the period McIntosh is discussing and the text Goethe used as a source of information on alchemy.⁶⁵ The Public Library of NSW held *The Magical Writings of Thomas Vaughan (Eugenius Philalethes)*, translated and with preface and essay by A.E. Waite (1888),⁶⁶ and in 1902 the library acquired the *Collectanea Chemica: Being Certain Select Treatises on Alchemy and Hermetic Medicine*, very likely ordered by Brennan himself.⁶⁷

The conceit of the rose in "Cloth'd now with dark alone" is worthy, at least in ingenuity, of the English Metaphysical poets whose work Brennan admired. The "wifely guise" of Eve (stanza 3) refers

⁶² Antoine Faivre, *L'Esotérisme au XVIII^e siècle en France et en Allemagne*, Paris: Seghers, 1973, p. 46: "From 1715, the Abbé de Vallemont had wanted to show that a plant that had been burnt to ashes could reappear in a flask in the form of a luminous spectre. [. . .] In the previous century, P. Kircher had carried out similar experiments with a rose".

⁶³ Kurt Seligmann, *The History of Magic*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1948, p. 460. There is an illustration on page 461.

⁶⁴ McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, p. 85.

⁶⁵ See Weeks, *German Mysticism*, pp. 217–18. Brennan lists a 1736 edition of this work, described as "Lothar Bucher's copy", in FL Notebook RB 509.1/26, p. 140, verso.

⁶⁶ The library acquired this book in 1889.

⁶⁷ *Collectanea Chemica: Being Certain Select Treatises on Alchemy and Hermetic Medicine by Eiraneus Philalethes, George Starkey, Dr Francis Antony, Sir George Ripley and Anonymous Unknown*, London: Elliot, 1893.

to her embodied existence as part of Nature. This interpretation is supported by the reference in the Lilith sequence to “the bride’s incarnate bright / and natural rose”, which associates embodied existence with the natural rose (“Terrible, if he will not have me”, lines 4–5). This embodied existence, in which sexual consummation may be achieved, is the alchemical apparatus or “limbeck” in which the “rarer rose” of visionary ecstasy is attained. We have seen that this state is consistently associated with night and therefore with Lilith herself. The speaker is the “enamour’d alchemist” who enables the vision of the rose to arise. Eve, as is made clear in the Argument to Lilith, is the natural counterpart of Lilith: “*she [Lilith], in the delicate frame / that was of woman after*” (lines 2, 3).

The rose has both a natural and a transcendental manifestation. The night garden, whose physical manifestation, scents, and heady, entrancing atmosphere are also strongly evoked in the preceding poem, “The tuberose thickens the air”, is, like the rose itself, both real garden and symbol. The verse displays the poet’s consciousness of the doubled signification, of the symbolic apparatus at work. The elaborate conceit used to express the symbolism is prepared for by the reference in “The tuberose thickens the air” to “some rose of rare-reveal’d delight” (stanza 2). In the second stanza of “Cloth’d now with dark alone”, we find that “heaven and earth, seeking their boon, / meet in this troubled blood”. The bleeding rose appears twice in this poem, in the reference in stanza five to “a rose that bleeds unseen” and in the final line, “O bleeding rose, alone! O heart of night”. This is the rose of passion, of blood shed in sacrifice, for which the strongest traditional paradigm is the death of Christ.

In the light of this specific connection of the rose symbol with the shedding of blood in sacrifice, the poem “The banners of the king unfold”, from the “Twilight of Disquietude” sequence, takes on further significance. The conceit employed in this poem, “the riches of my heart are bled / to feed the passion of the west”, foreshadows the symbol of the bleeding rose appearing in later poems, where it unites the passion of Nature with the passion of humanity. “The banners of the king” anticipates the “Shadow of Lilith” poems. The speaker himself suffers the passion, whereas in “Cloth’d now with dark alone” it is the rose, associated with Lilith. As “bleeding rose”, the rose conveys both the “suffering” of Nature at sunset and in autumn, and the passional suffering of humanity. It is a central symbol of Brennan’s enterprise, the “assimilation of our inmost passion

to the tetralogy of the year". As a complete work, *Poems* puts into effect the drama foreshadowed by Mallarmé on the analogy of the Wagnerian tetralogy.

In the last three stanzas of "Cloth'd now with dark alone", the rose (and by implication Lilith herself) is associated with Paradise. We have already noted that this is consistent with Dante's use of the rose symbol. A similar identification of rose and Paradise is made in the Lilith sequence, in "*Thus in her hour of wrath*". As we have seen in Chapter Three, where the passage is quoted, the "*secular flowering*" of the rose (line 48) is very likely an allusion to Mallarmé's "*vrai culte moderne*". This is followed by an invocation of the "*far-bleeding rose of Paradise*" (line 49). The "*secular flowering / of the far-bleeding rose of Paradise*" refers not only to Mallarmé but, self-referentially, to Brennan's own use of the rose throughout *Poems* to unite mind and Nature by identifying human experience with the drama of the natural cycles.⁶⁸ In "Cloth'd now with dark alone", Lilith herself becomes the bearer of the passion, in her loss of Paradise and subsequent suffering:

. remembering how she fared
 in times before our time, when Paradise
 shone once, the dew-gem in her heart, and base
 betrayal gave her to the malefice
 that all thro' time afflicts her lonely face,
 and all the mournful widowhood of night
 closed round her, and the wilderness of space [..]

It is clear that this poem provides a gloss to the action of the Lilith sequence.

The third poem framing the Lilith sequence, "This rose, the lips that kiss", is overtly alchemical in its imagery. Night is urged to accomplish the transmutation of the rose, which at the beginning of the poem is the symbol of young love, transient and mortal. Heat generated by the heart "in decay" has the potential to transform the "corpse of old delight" (stanza 3) into the gold that is the goal of the alchemical quest, here fused with Dante's rose as "the deathless

⁶⁸ "A gray and dusty daylight flows" uses the rose to symbolise the Christian faith, whose certainties have become uncertain. See discussion of this poem beginning on page 35 above.

rose of gold" (stanza 4). This possibility is further explored in the poems that follow.

One of the two important poems in the Casement interlude, "*The window is wide*", represents suffering similar to Lilith's in "Cloth'd now with dark alone", but with "*Beauty*" rather than Lilith as the protagonist ("*cavern tracts, whence the great store of tears / that Beauty all the years / hath wept in wanderings of the eyeless dark*", lines 3–5). This poem poses a central question: is Paradise ever recoverable, or is a cataclysmic end to the entire world the only thing to hope for? Complex syntax, severely taken to task by Hope, puts this question in an immensely condensed fashion.⁶⁹ The poem begins like this:

*The window is wide and lo! beyond its bars
dim fields of fading stars
and cavern tracts, whence the great store of tears
that Beauty all the years
hath wept in wanderings of the eyeless dark,
remembering the long cark
whereunder we, her care, are silent bow'd,
invades with numbing shroud
this dwindling realm of listless avatars.*

The word "*whence*" in line three has a dual function. If a verb such as 'come' is understood to have been omitted, we have 'whence come', referring to the "*cavern tracts*" immediately preceding it and explaining the source of the "*great store of tears*" wept by Beauty. Taken with another verb, "*invades*", five lines further on, "*the great store of tears*" becomes the subject of this verb so that another sense is added: "*whence the great store of tears [that] invades with numbing shroud this dwindling realm of listless avatars*". Brennan's condensed syntax, in which one word can function syntactically in several different ways at the same time, is a response to Mallarmé.⁷⁰

The central image of this poem is the ending of night, the fading of the stars, "*rose passioning to white*" (line 14). This image is profoundly ambiguous. The "*passioning*" rose is bleeding to death, but

⁶⁹ See A.D. Hope, "Christopher Brennan: An Interpretation", in *Native Companions*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974, pp. 141–42.

⁷⁰ In the large *Musicopoematographoscope*, one adjective, "hawklike", modifies two noun phrases that are spaced across the page ([17]), "their claws & dirty" and "their nose scenting a virgin prey" and, by implication, a third noun phrase, "their optic". This is in addition to its adverbial function with regard to the preceding verb phrase, "hither rush".

is it the night or the morning that is dying?⁷¹ The “*fainting night*” (line 13) could be thought of as “*passioning*”, dying sacrificially in the rosy clouds of dawn in order to give birth to morning, but “*rose passioning to white*” could also refer to the dawn itself, the “*maiden grace*” that may in fact never “*return / sprung soft and sudden on the fainting night*” (lines 12–13). The reference to the “*amaranth*”, a flower reputed never to fade (line 11), supports the hope of an unfading rose, the “*deathless rose of gold*” of “*This rose, the lips that kiss*”. But the amaranth, although unfading, is also imagined and poetic, something envisioned but not necessarily achievable, like the Absolute of the *Frühromantik*.⁷² The question posed by this poem receives no definitive answer.

“1908”

Brennan chose to finish *Poems* on a positive note. Unlike almost all of the *Poems*, the second Epilogue, like the first, has a title, “1908”. In this piece, Brennan concludes his *livre composé* with an optimism founded on a particular time, as indicated by the title, and a very specific place. The poem takes a further look at the religious dilemma of Brennan’s earlier years. It suggests that his esoteric interests have been valuable in pointing towards a satisfactory resolution of this dilemma, as long as they are subjected to a rigorous intellectual assessment. It is overtly autobiographical, using an account of a tram-ride along George Street West (now Broadway) in Sydney to connect two poles of Brennan’s life, the church where he was baptised into the Catholic faith he later questioned and the university where he discovered the delights of the intellect.

The tram-journey in the poem is taking the speaker (in this case, Brennan himself) towards “yon four-turreted square tower” (line 5) of Sydney University, where he was a casual lecturer at the time. On the way, the tram passes “the plain obtruncate chancel” of St Benedict’s Church, which provides the occasion for a reflection on

⁷¹ Clark takes the description of the sky as “rose” as an expression of ambiguity and concludes that “rose passioning to white” is “a process of decline” (CB, p. 143).

⁷² Daley uses “Amaranth” as the title of one of the poems in the collection *From Dawn to Dusk*.

his experiences within that congregation. His description of the atmosphere and community of that church, and of Christ himself, is tender and affectionate. Christ appears as “the sweetest god in human form, / love’s prisoner in the Eucharist, / man’s pleading, patient amorist”. The congregation aspire towards Dante’s “candid” rose (“white” but also “sincere”, and in archaic usage “pure” or “clear”) with its golden heart, “the blessed host, / their kin, their comfort, and their boast” (lines 51–52). Completing the long verse-paragraph, these lines reinforce the warmth of its tone.

The next paragraph expresses Brennan’s revulsion against the doctrine of Hell, “that grim maw / and lazar-pit that reek’d beneath” (lines 54–55). The word “beneath” attacks the very foundations of the Dantean imagery of transcendence Brennan used in the previous paragraph: Hell lies “beneath” not only in Christian doctrine in general but literally in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Hell is seen to call Heaven itself into question: “was that bliss / whose counter-hemisphere was this?” (lines 57–58).

The remaining lines of this important verse-paragraph, the fourth of the poem, present more candidly than anywhere else in *Poems*, though still with a certain guardedness and obscurity, Brennan’s resolution of the crisis of faith just described. After leaving the Catholic faith behind (lines 63–64), he finds another faith of sufficient stature to justify applying to it the word “viaticum”, the mass offered to the dying but also, more fundamentally, provisions for the journey (both senses are obviously relevant):

and so, nor long, the guarded ray
broke on my eagerness, who brought
the lucid diamond-probe of thought
and, driving it behind, the extreme
blind vehemence of travailing dream
against the inhibitory shell:
and found, no grim eternal cell
and presence of the shrouded Norn,
but Eden, clad in nuptial morn,
young, fair, and radiant with delight
remorse nor sickness shall requite. (lines 80–90)

What he finds is “that hard atom of the soul, / that final grain of deathless mind” (lines 68–69). The word “atom” implies an inability to be further reduced, but the succeeding lines go on to suggest that something recognisable is actually within it. What we are deal-

ing with is something “deathless”, that is, either not subject to mortality or able to survive death, reminding us of Myers’ search for empirical evidence that something other than the Christian soul might survive bodily death, and Hodgson’s notion of a persisting “independent organism”.⁷³ Brennan’s atom is “stubborn”, presumably resistant (line 73); in line 85 we find it has an “inhibitory shell”. Inside, it is “translucent” and “bright”, more so than anything else in this world, even the diamonds of the Golconda mines, in which all the transient beauty of the earth shines.

The power to probe within the “hard atom of the soul” is supplied by the “guarded ray” (line 80). As Chisholm points out, this phrase is a translation of “*luce abdita*”, which appeared in association with the epigraph to “The Wanderer” when it was first published in *Hermes* (1902).⁷⁴ There Brennan attributed the four lines of Latin verse to “*Frater Basilius de Luce Abdita*”.⁷⁵ It is commonly accepted that Brennan fabricated this author and the book apparently referred to, a view supported by the testimony of J.J. Quinn to this effect as well as the subsequent publication of “The Wanderer” without this ascription.⁷⁶ There is, however, a major alchemical author of the seventeenth century with this name. *Frater Basilius Valentinus*, often referred to simply as ‘Basilius’ or ‘*Frater Basilius*’, is known for his *Twelve Keys of Alchemy* and several other works. Waite published the *Twelve Keys* in the first volume of *The Hermetic Museum Restored and Enlarged* (Redway, 1893). Brennan knew Yeats’s reference to *Basilius Valentinus* and his “keys” in the short story “*Rosa Alchemica*”,⁷⁷ and there are also three pages on Basil Valentine in Waite’s *Lives of Alchemystical Philosophers* (1888).⁷⁸ Perhaps Brennan was deliberately trying to cover his tracks, appearing to fabricate what was actually real, or perhaps he had forgotten the source of the name *Frater Basilius*. Whatever the explanation, the association with

⁷³ See discussion beginning on page 28 above.

⁷⁴ V, p. 263.

⁷⁵ See R.G. Howarth, “The Wanderer of the Ways of All the Worlds”, *Southerly* 10 (1949), p. 238; capitalisation of the Latin is as given there.

⁷⁶ See Chisholm’s note in V, p. 263.

⁷⁷ W.B. Yeats, *The Secret Rose, Stories by W.B. Yeats, A Variorum Edition*, ed. Phillip L. Marcus, Warwick Gould and Michael J. Sidnell, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 129. See discussion of this story beginning on page 140 above.

⁷⁸ The copy of this book in the SLNSW has been rebound, and no accession date is perceptible.

alchemy is plain, and it is reasonable to assume that the “guarded ray” mentioned in “1908” is meant to denote the esoteric or occult (“guarded”) traditions that had illuminated his religious and metaphysical quest.

Thus the “guarded ray” of the traditions of Gnosticism, alchemy, Neoplatonism and Rosicrucianism, studied and presented by Maitland, Kingsford and Yeats as well as Welling and others, alerted Brennan to the doctrine of the hidden inner divinity or “true self”, as he called it. According to “1908”, “the guarded ray / broke on my eagerness”, supplemented by “the lucid diamond-probe” of his own (formidable) intellect (lines 80–82), perhaps considered particularly in the light of his interest in French and German Romantic and Symbolist writers (“lucide” is a favourite word of Mallarmé). These two forms of insight, applied to the quest for the higher self, were supplemented by “the extreme / blind vehemence of travelling dream” (lines 83–84). In the phrase “driving it behind”, “driving” must modify “vehemence”, so we understand that the powerful impetus of dream is driving “the lucid diamond-probe” from behind, the word ‘from’ being understood. The combined force of esoteric insight, intellect and dream is able to prevail against the resistance of the “inhibitory shell” of the self, the “hard atom of the soul”, to reveal what is within. Although the syntax is complicated, the sense is apparent.⁷⁹

“Dream” should be taken to refer to the “paradisal instinct” represented in “Towards the Source”, having important connections to Brennan’s interpretation of Keats and to the Platonic doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul, as well as to Mallarmé’s “l’antagonisme de rêve chez l’homme avec les fatalités à son existence départies par le malheur”.⁸⁰ The dream is “travailing” because it is in labour, as in “The Labour of Night”. Within the “hard atom of the soul”, Brennan suggests, we find not harsh necessity (“the shrouded Norn”) but a source of renewal that is exempt from mortality and mutability (“Eden, clad in nuptial morn, / young, fair, and radiant with delight /

⁷⁹ McAuley’s interpretation supports this. He comments: “By careful disentangling of the syntax of the next lines we find that this ‘guarded ray’ or secret light ‘broke’ (dawned) on his eager sight because he brought the diamond-probe of lucid thought against the ‘inhibitory shell’; the diamond-probe being driven by his desire and imagination (‘the extreme / blind vehemence of travelling dream’)” (James McAuley, *Christopher Brennan*, Australian Writers and Their Work, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 39).

⁸⁰ See pages 102, 234 and 237 above.

remorse nor sickness shall requite", lines 88–90). The second Symbolism lecture suggests that Eden may be interpreted as an archetypal human being (Blake's Eternal Man, Swedenborg's Grand Man or the Adam Kadmon of the Kabbalah; Boehme's androgynous Adam could have been cited as another example) as well as "a state, an age, a country". Interestingly, by the time of writing what became the article on German Romanticism, Brennan was expressing strong misgivings about the kinds of thinking that continually hark back to a past Eden or Golden Age.⁸¹ "1908" describes the discovery of the immortal "Eden" or archetypal human being at the most irreducible level of the self, rather than in a lost paradise.

The Eden within the self, however, may only be glimpsed, not possessed. Like the *Frühromantik* Absolute, it may not be fully attained within our present life, subject as it is to time:

Yes, Eden was my own, my bride;
whatever malices denied,
faithful and found again, nor long
absent from aura of wooing song:
but promis'd only, while the sun
must travel yet thro' times undone [. . .]. (lines 91–96)

In the meantime, the intellect must continue to scrutinise the revelations gleaned from esoteric traditions: "thought must steward into truth / the mines of magian ore divined / in rich Cipangos of the mind" (lines 98–100).⁸² In his article on German Romanticism, Brennan expresses a similar view in relation to Novalis:

It is [. . .] an inexorable demand of the romantic theory and characteristic of Novalis himself, that, the more mystical the ultimate becomes,

⁸¹ In his article on German Romanticism, Brennan definitively rejects the yearning for a former Golden Age or paradise as part of what he calls the "Romantic Fallacy": "instead of a progress towards universality (*Allheit*) there is a backward swing to the pre-reflexion period (we were always happier when we were younger). Plato's *ἀνάμνησις* [*anamnesis*], Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism (both looking upon the world and life as a decline out of a perfect condition and our birth as a sin—Wordsworth's "Ode"), Rousseau's philosophy, glorification of the "sanity" of Greek or the "*fromme Innigkeit*" [pious inwardness] of medieval art, symbolic mythology (Creuzer), belief that wisdom was once in the earth in its fulness (India, Tibet, Egypt or Mexico), theories of a "pure" Aryan race and language in which the idea of God was revealed through the forms of speech—these are some of the innumerable variations of the one theme" (P, pp. 385–86). *Fromme* has a connotation of 'spontaneous' or 'healthy' that is not really conveyed by the English word 'pious'.

⁸² As Dyce points out, the Cipangos is an old name for the islands of Japan (p. 309).

all the harder must be the thinking by which we arrive at it: mysticism may be the goal, but it must not be the road: the mystical synthesis must be completely interpenetrated with self-consciousness, and only hard and continuous reflexion can bring that about: in short, the synthesis must be a real one.⁸³

The process of “hard and continuous reflexion” is the “thought” of line 98. Brennan’s use of the word “magian”, an overt reference to his esoteric sources, supports the contention that the earlier phrase, “the guarded ray”, is a similar reference.

Brennan does not, however, represent his “high attempt” (line 101) as relevant only to his own intellectual world. Unlike the first Epilogue, where the speaker excludes the daylight world from his private mystical experience, this poem deliberately relates his religious dilemma and his solution to it (however intellectual in its formulation) to his own daily life and to his fellow human beings. He rejects the doctrine of Hell because it excludes people (“what outcast howlings these? what teeth / gnashing in vain?”, lines 56–57). In the place of an exclusive Hell, he gives powerful and moving expression to a universal human longing in the lines “the simple meed / to be together in the light / when loneliness and dark incite” (lines 110–12), giving it a religious dimension. The entire poem plays with contrasts of light and darkness. The lighting of the shop windows, a combination of old (“their lampions’ orange blaze”, line 12) and new (“the electric’s’ ghastly blue”, line 14), emphasises the particularity of time and place of the poem’s setting but at the same time demonstrates the universal tendency of human beings to congregate in the light. Although the people are seen to be following a “delusive dream” (line 24), there is no round condemnation of the delusion, as in some earlier poems with a prophetic or apocalyptic tone. Rather, the dream is seen as the expression of “their unwitting need / one with my own, however dark” (lines 26–27), and their destination a common one (“questing towards one mother-ark”, line 28).

A number of aspects of this poem take on further significance in the light of attitudes expressed in Mallarmé’s “Catholicisme”. In this article, the writer speaks of the possibility of transferring to public spaces, outside the Church, some potential for sacredness, for salvation:

⁸³ P, p. 391.

Lequel préfère, en dédain des synthèses, égarer une recherche—VIDE S'IL NE CONVIENT QUE L'AHURIE, LA BANALE ET VASTE PLACE PUBLIQUE CEDE, AUSSI, A DES INJONCTIONS DE SALUT. *Les plus directes peut-être ayant visité l'inconscience, les plus élémentaires* : sommairement il s'agit, la Divinité, qui jamais n'est que SOI, où montèrent avec l'ignorance du secret précieuse pour en mesurer l'arc, des élans abattus de prières—au ras, de la reprendre, en tant que point de départ, *humbles fondations de la cité, foi en chacun*. Ce tracé par assises et *une hauteur comme de trottoir*, y descend la lueur, à portée, quotidienne du réverbère.⁸⁴

The setting of "1908" in a public area in Sydney, a street where the city's "pavement thralls" (line 18) wander past the shopfronts lit by street lamps, represents a subtle and complex response to Mallarmé's exploration of the notion of a secular religious space and a divinity identified with the self. In Brennan's poem, the members of the crowd have been drawn out of "their niggard homes" (line 20). They want "to meet / and mix, unknown, and feel the bright / banality 'twixt them and night" (lines 20–22); the words "unknown" and "banality" echo Mallarmé's *l'ignorance* and *banale*. The people are deluded in directing their longing towards the "poor pleasures of the street" (line 19), perhaps exhibiting what Mallarmé, earlier in his article, describes as "l'inaptitude des gens à percevoir leur néant sinon comme la faim, misère profane".⁸⁵ The tone of respect, however, in which Brennan's speaker reflects upon the crowd's instinctive drive to be together indicates the importance he attaches to the idea that communal areas in a modern city could meet people's need for some form of secular religious expression.

Mallarmé's article helps us to grasp more fully some of the implications of the way Brennan has structured his poem. The French poet contrasts the spire of a church building with the potential for suitable materials to be drawn from the individual ("[J]aillissement le reste, à puiser en l'individu comportant des matériaux subtils pas

⁸⁴ *Divagations*, p. 301; OCM, vol. 2, p. 238; "Which [the spirit] prefers, disdain- ing synthèses, to send astray a search—EMPTY IF IT DOESN'T ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE BEWILDERED, TRITE VASTNESS OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE ALSO YIELDS TO THE INJUNC- TIONS OF SALVATION. *The most direct [injunctions], the most elementary, having perhaps vis- ited the unconscious*: in sum *Divinity, which is never other than THE SELF*, to which mounted up outbursts of prayer, shattered, with the ignorance of the secret, precious so that its arc can be measured—*has to be taken up again*, at ground level, as the point of departure, *the humble foundations of the city, faith within each person*. The quotidian gleam of the street lamp is cast onto this foundational design *at street level, as it were*".

⁸⁵ *Divagations*, p. 300; OCM, vol. 2, p. 238: "people's incapacity to feel their noth- ingness except as hunger, a secular misery".

moins que la flèche, en pierre, de dentelles”);⁸⁶ Brennan builds his poem around the contrast between the university and St Benedict’s church on one hand, and his own resolution of his crisis of faith on the other. The “four-turreted square tower” (line 5) of Sydney University and the “plain obtruncate chancel” (line 34) of St Benedict’s parallel Mallarmé’s spire, perhaps with some ironic contrast in their rather blunter appearance. The experience of the young poet both within the Catholic community and in the warmly welcoming interior of the church itself is accorded a central place in the poem. His reference to Dante’s rose reflects Mallarmé’s comment on the medieval period as “*l’incubation ainsi que commencement de monde, moderne*”,⁸⁷ particularly in the light of the way Brennan takes over the rose as a symbol for secular religious expression, as we have seen earlier in this chapter.

The reassessment of the Eden symbol in this poem subordinates the dreamed or anticipated Eden to lived experience, and values the equivocal promises of the Eden glimpsed in the here and now, in the lives of ordinary people, over the obsession with past or future Edens. The day of the ultimate resolution is a long way off:

long is the way till we are met
 where Eden pays her hoarded debt
 and we are orb’d in her, and she
 hath still’d her hungering to be,
 with plenitude beyond impeach,
 single, distinct, and whole in each [. . .]. (lines 113–18)

The daily experience represented in the poem will be repeated many times, and the “striving” (line 122) will continue.

The last of the Symbolism lectures addresses the question of living in the here and now, rather than being dominated by hopes of future perfection, in the context of a discussion of the English poet and novelist George Meredith:

Meredith bids us hold fast by “our only visible friend”, Earth: she opposes “to the questions [of God and immortality], a figure of clay”; but let us read her without selfish desire, and we shall find her spiritual through and through; she will teach us “from flesh unto spirit

⁸⁶ *Divagations*, p. 302; OCM, vol. 2, p. 239: “Outpouring of the rest, to be drawn from the individual who bears materials no less subtle than the spire of lacy stone”.

⁸⁷ *Divagations*, p. 302; OCM, vol. 2, p. 239: “incubation as well as commencement of [a] world, the modern one”.

man grows / Even here on the sod under sun". I should agree with Meredith in so far that it is a wise thing to mind our business: we are now here in this world and our business is surely with it, to read the sense of it, as Mallarmé also says, with his wise limitation. There is enough here for a man to live on: our daily bread, if we are satisfied with it, will prove richer than we thought. What we have to do is to grow, and the reading of this world in the light of our true self will make ever more plain to us what our true self is. As for the other matters, well, cannot we regard them as adventures reserved for afterwards?⁸⁸

This seems to me to be the sentiment of "1908" too, and therefore the final sentiment of *Poems*. The tram trip through Sydney is of the essence of lived life, whose quality is enhanced by the "true self" glimpsed through the combination of esoteric researches and the intellectual endeavour that led Brennan to investigate German Romanticism, the poetry of Mallarmé and contemporary research into the psychology of the unconscious mind.

At the end of his translation of Mallarmé's "Toast Funèbre", published in the *Bulletin* in 1899, we find the comment "[i]n this poem Mallarmé has reached the secret of the spirit's destiny: to give the earth a sense, creating of it an Eden".⁸⁹ If we consider the here and now quality of "1908" to be connected with the notion of 'giving earth a sense', we can see it as a fitting conclusion to *Poems*, even though the particularity of its setting seems to separate it from the rest of the *livre composé*. To accomplish "the assimilation of our inmost passion to the tetralogy of the year", as *Poems* does, is indeed to "give the earth a sense", to reveal its spiritual aspect in its correspondence with the human experience.

To complete *Poems* with a piece subtly reflecting Mallarmé's "Catholicisme" is to reaffirm that Brennan's entire *livre composé* is an attempt to bring about the modern, secular rite foreshadowed in that article and imagined as a work of art: "le vrai culte moderne". The specific setting in a public street; the crowd with their aspirations; the sense that Eden can only be glimpsed, not finally achieved; the consideration, then ultimate rejection, of the Catholic tradition in favour of a secular expression of religious needs—all enhance the

⁸⁸ P, p. 161.

⁸⁹ C.J. Brennan, Translation of Mallarmé's "Toast funèbre", *Southerly* 10 (1949), pp. 193–94.

connection with “Catholicisme”. The comparison reveals, however, that the execution is all Brennan’s own: structure, form, the tone adopted towards his own Catholic upbringing and towards the crowd in its uncertainty. Inspired by so many influences, from philosophy and psychology, literature and esoteric thought, Brennan’s work, rather than being derivative, demonstrates his capacity to perceive potentially fruitful ideas and to make their execution his own.

CONCLUSION

Judith Wright's criticism of Christopher Brennan is intelligent and perceptive. She is right about his poetry in many ways. But at one crucial point I part company with her, and that is when she refers to the "dead, mental parts" of his poetry and expresses her belief that Brennan's scholarly accomplishments held him back as a poet.¹ I have argued that Brennan used his remarkable grasp of Romantic and Symbolist theory to advantage, structuring his work of art around the notion that the higher or transcendent self might be glimpsed through the reunification of the human mind and Nature in the work of art. To create his unifying symbols he spread his net widely—in esoteric writings and Gnostic mythology, in contemporary psychology and Idealist philosophy, in the literatures of a number of European languages. The result is of immense interest.

The Lilith sequence is at the centre of Brennan's enterprise in *Poems*. Lilith herself has a complex range of symbolic functions. Evidence from Brennan's notes to the Ellis and Yeats edition of Blake associates her with the original, archetypal self-consciousness or 'mirror' of the godhead, the divine imagination, of Boehme. Like Boehme's Sophia, and like the Sophia of some forms of Gnosticism, Lilith, when fallen (or "declined", as Brennan puts it) from her original, transcendent state, becomes the world of Nature and thus inherently ambiguous, since Nature can appeal to the human imagination—the inner evidence of our divine status—in two conflicting ways. It can either entrap the human mind in purely sensuous, physical existence, or it can direct the human imagination towards its own divine origin. Both these functions are evident in Brennan's Lilith and are at the foundation of her ambivalence of function and her ambiguity as symbol. Post-Enlightenment emphases on the split, brought about by rationality, between subject and object, the human mind and the external world, and on the possibility of their reintegration, help us understand the ultimately simple demand Lilith makes of humanity: to "find her fair". To do so is to reunite mind

¹ Wright, "Christopher Brennan" (1970), p. 248.

and Nature and thereby glimpse or momentarily achieve the higher or transcendent self.

Apart from the Lilith sequence, a significant number of other pieces and groups of pieces in Brennan's *Poems* deal with the notion of an inner, higher self. As the nineteenth century progressed, such a self came to be regarded as a possible substitute for the God of Christianity in a 'religion of humanity'. Turning to the inner "abyss", however, is only part of a process that continues with a turn to the outer world. In Brennan's *Liminary*, the German Romantic mathematical metaphor of exponentiation or potentiation, raising to a higher power, is explored as the self of the poem moves from inner reflection to the transitory achievement of ecstasy in union with Nature.

According to Kant and others, the imagination is the only faculty that is able to intuit the noumenon. The imaginative work of art, by its use of objects in the external world as symbols of the Absolute, is uniquely able to give expression to the noumenon. Brennan uses the term 'moods' to refer to the union of inner and outer worlds that art can accomplish. His reading of Yeats and his understanding of the special significance of the words *Gemüth* and *Stimmung* among the German Romantics inflect his use of the term. In Mallarmé's *Les Dieux antiques*, he found a mythical way of interpreting the natural daily and seasonal cycles; he also found what he took to be a correspondence between Nature and human emotion. That is the foundation for the correlation between Nature and human experience in *Poems*.

Regarded as a *livre composé*, *Poems* is structured around the notion of moods, expressed as a correlation or correspondence between times of day and year and the cycle of human experiences and emotions. These emotions and experiences themselves constitute the 'passion' of humanity, analogous in the religion of humanity to the Passion of Christ. Brennan's symbol of this correlation is the rose, whose function derives from the notion that the rose-coloured skies of sunset and the flaming colours of autumn leaves are natural symbols of sacrifice. The symbol of the rose undergoes a metamorphosis during the course of the work, associated as it is with the movement of human emotion from optimism to disillusion and cynicism and with the necessity for a new kind of optimism beyond despair.

Several important poems, such as "Dies Dominica" and "The banners of the king unfold", impart a liturgical cast to the entire work.

Three important pieces that function as preludes associate the complete seasonal cycle with human experience. Many other poems deal with a single season or time of day. Spring and dawn or early morning are associated with innocence, optimism, and memories of Eden; noon and summer with sexual consummation or with the transient achievement of ecstatic fulfilment. Sunset and autumn have a range of associations, from bitter disillusion to the hope that the creations of art can escape the inevitable progress of time. Later in the work, the promises of spring and dawn are shown to be themselves ambiguous or deceptive.

The final epilogue, “1908”, brings the themes and concerns of the entire work into perspective. The poet considers his personal religious choices in the light of the universal need to “be together in the light/when loneliness and dark incite”, confirming the religious aspect of *Poems* and asserting common ground with the social world in which he belongs. His private exploration of the “guarded ray” of esoteric traditions, assisted by rigorous intellectual scrutiny, has brought useful insights into the inner, higher self. But such exploration can, of necessity, provide only transient glimpses of the Absolute. The optimism of “1908” is founded in the here and now, in the circumstances and experiences of ordinary life.

Brennan’s *Poems* is an ambitious attempt to give imaginative expression to the great Romantic quest for the reunification of the mind and Nature. It clearly demonstrates the continuity between the movements of Romanticism and Symbolism. Its structure is grounded in Symbolist principles, and Brennan has marked his work as a Symbolist artefact with graphic techniques such as expressive typography and careful attention to *mise en page*. Romantic in conception, Symbolist in form and strategy, the work is a profound response to the religious dilemma of the age.

While *Poems* is immensely valuable for its historical interest alone, its value goes well beyond that. Brennan’s exploration of human yearnings for the numinous—one of the great themes of poetry, according to the Romantics—remains relevant at a time when those yearnings continue to be felt and those who feel them continue to seek means to express them. Furthermore, the belief that the arts are able to provide access to the numinous has been one of the enduring legacies of Romanticism.

Brennan’s exploration of the higher self as a secular focus for such aspirations was intellectually rigorous, supported by strong foundations

in philosophy and a more than adequate understanding (for his time) of the contribution of mystical and esoteric tradition to Western thought. Moreover, he was uniquely equipped to add to these insights a profound appreciation of the literatures of three modern European languages: the work of those writers who over the course of the century before he took up his pen had wrestled their own aspirations into poetic form.

In an article written in 1974, Australian poet and scholar A.D. Hope looked forward to a time when Brennan's *Poems* could be judged from a properly distanced vantage point, so that his diction would cease to count against a proper evaluation of his work. Speaking of Spenser, Milton and Donne, he commented: "These were true poets and [...] they have emerged into a historical position where their idiosyncracies of language or syntax or metre can no longer blind us to the force of their genius. The same, I believe, may very well be said of Brennan within a century of his death".² It is time for Brennan's work to become known outside Australia, and it is time also for Australians to rediscover, or at least to re-evaluate, *Poems*. The result can only be an enrichment of our culture.

² A.D. Hope, "Christopher Brennan", p. 146.

APPENDIX ONE

TABLE OF CONTENTS FOR *POEMS*

This Table of Contents provides a guide to the structure of *Poems*, showing the five major sections and their subdivisions.

1. MDCCCXCIII: a prelude

I *Towards the Source*

2. We sat entwined an hour or two together
3. Sweet silence after bells
4. Autumn: the year breathes dully towards its death
5. Where star-cold and the dread of space
6. Dies Dominica! The sunshine burns
7. The grand cortège of glory and youth is gone

8. Epigraph
9. Under a sky of uncreated mud
10. The yellow gas is fired from street to street
11. Ah, who will give us back our long-lost innocence
12. Let us go down, the long dead night is done
13. I saw my life as whitest flame

14. Epigraph
15. Where the poppy-banners flow
16. Deep mists of longing blur the land
17. When Summer comes in her glory
18. And shall the living waters heed
19. And does she still perceive, her curtain drawn
20. Of old, on her terrace at evening
21. Was it the sun that broke my dream
22. When the spring mornings grew more long
23. An hour's respite; once more the heart may dream
24. Spring-ripple of green along the way
25. I am shut out of mine own heart

26. Spring-breezes over the blue
27. White dawn, that tak'st the heaven with sweet surprise
28. Four springtimes lost: and in the fifth we stand
29. Old wonder flush'd the east anew
30. The winter eve is clear and chill

II *The Forest of Night*

31. D.M. Stéphane Mallarmé
32. Liminary

I *The Twilight of Disquietude*

33. Epigraph
34. The years that go to make me man
35. I said, And let horizons tempt
36. The pangs that guard the gates of joy
37. My heart was wandering in the sands
38. The banners of the king unfold
39. What of the battles I would win?
40. Disaster drives the shatter'd night
41. The mother-deep, wise, yearning, bound
42. What do I know? myself alone
43. This is the sea where good and evil merge
44. The birds that fly out of the west
45. Peace were in the woods, perchance

Interlude: The hearth and the window

46. Thou cricket, that at dusk in the damp weeds
47. Dusk lowers in this uneasy pause of rain

II *The Quest of Silence*

48. Oh yon, when Holda leaves her hill
49. What tho' the outer day be brazen rude
50. O friendly shades, where anciently I grew
51. The point of noon is past, outside: light is asleep
52. The forest has its horrors, as the sea
53. No emerald spring, no royal autumn-red
54. Fire in the heavens, and fire along the hills

- 55. Peace dwells in blessing o'er a place
- 56. A gray and dusty daylight flows
- 57. Breaking the desert's tawny level ring
- 58. Before she pass'd behind the glacier wall
- 59. Out of no quarter of the charted sky
- 60. This night is not of gentle draperies
- 61. Lightning: and, momentarily, the silhouette
- 62. One! an iron core, shock'd and dispers'd
- 63. There is a far-off thrill that troubles me

Interlude: The window and the hearth

- 64. Twice now that lucid fiction of the pane
- 65. Chimaera writhes beside the tragic flame

III *The Shadow of Lilith*

- 66. The tuberose thickens the air: a swoon
- 67. Cloth'd now with dark alone, O rose and balm
- 68. LILITH This is of Lilith, by her Hebrew name
 Dead stars, beneath the midnight's granite cope
 The plumes of night, unfurl'd
 The trees that thro' the tuneful morn had made
 O mother, only
 But on the zenith, mass'd, a glittering throng
 They said, because their parcel-thought
 The anguish'd doubt broods over Eden; night
 O thou that achest, pulse o' the unwed vast
 Thick sleep, with error of the tangled wood
 Terrible, if he will not have me else
 Thus in her hour of wrath, o'er Adam's head
 She is the night: all horror is of her
- 69. This rose, the lips that kiss, and the young breast

Interlude: The casement

- 70. Once, when the sun-burst flew
- 71. The window is wide and lo! beyond its bars

III *The Labour of Night*

- 72. What gems chill glitter yon, thrice dipt
- 73. Northward, he dream'd, in Judah's vine-clad hills

74. Because he felt against his hundred years
75. Where Soliman-ben-Daoud sleeps, unshown
76. In Eblis' ward now fall'n, where wisdom rose
77. We nameless, that have labour'd in the dumb
78. Are ye indeed gone forth, and is your place
79. In that last fight upon the western hill
80. Night has resumed our hope: the fight is done
81. An iron folk, with iron hand, and hate
82. O sunk in surge of purple, it is told
83. O vanish'd star, fall'n flower, O god deceas'd
84. How long delays the miracle blossoming
85. Because this curse is on the dawn, to yield

III *The Wanderer*

(Epigraph)

86. When window lamps had dwindl'd, then I rose
87. Each day I see the long ships coming into port
88. I am driven everywhere from a clinging home
89. O tame heart, and why are you weary and cannot rest
90. Once I could sit by the fire hourlong when the dripping eves
91. How old is my heart, how old, how old is my heart
92. I sorrow for youth—ah, not for its wildness (would that were dead!)
93. You, at whose table I have sat, some distant eve
94. I cry to you as I pass your windows in the dusk
95. Come out, come out, ye souls that serve, why will ye die?
96. Dawns of the world, how I have known you all
97. What is there with you and me, that I may not forget
98. O desolate eves along the way, how oft
99. The land I came thro' last was dumb with night

III *Pauca Mea*

100. This night first have I learn'd to prize thy boon
101. O white wind, numbing the world
102. Droop'st thou and fail'st? but these have never tired
103. I said, This misery must end

V *Epilogues*

104. 1897

105. 1908

APPENDIX TWO

SOURCES OF BRENNAN'S LILITH: T.K. CHEYNE AND ISAIAH

It has not so far proved possible to establish which Hebrew sources, if any, Brennan used for Lilith. A.D. Hope's article on Sumerian, Talmudic and Kabbalic sources of the Lilith of legend does not claim to be based on knowledge of Brennan's own sources for the material.¹ From workbook notes made to assist in the writing of the sequence, we know that Brennan consulted a scholarly work by T.K. Cheyne on the Old Testament Book of Isaiah.² In these notes, Brennan quotes the translation of Isaiah 34:14 offered in Cheyne's *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, published in 1898. The complete verse, of which Brennan's notes excerpt the third line, reads as follows: "And wild cats join the hyænas, / And satyr there meets with satyr; / Only there does Lilith repose / And a place of rest find for herself". The note to this verse refers to the "Assyrio-Babylonian affinities" of the name Lilith, which is said to be "that of a demon thought to persecute men and women in their sleep".³ There is also a reference to Cheyne in a letter from Brennan to his friend John le Gay Brereton dated by Sturm to September 1899, which says: "The myth of Lilith, I learn from Cheyne (who calls it 'ugly') is Babylonian, not Hebrew: which justifies me in my Ninevehs & Babels & Ecbatans".⁴ The late date of this letter (Brennan began writing Lilith from about August, 1898, and had almost completed the first draft by the end of that year) precludes the possibility that this represents early research in preparation for writing.⁵ Thus we have two references to Cheyne, quite possibly relating to different dates and readings. The manu-

¹ Hope, "Brennan's Lilith", p. 101. The author notes at the beginning of the article the need for a "proper and thorough investigation of Brennan's sources for the Lilith sections of *Poems 1913*", which he himself has not undertaken.

² See V, p. 294.

³ T.K. Cheyne, trans. and ed., *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, London: Clarke, 1898, p. 201.

⁴ ST, p. 414.

⁵ See Wilkes, *New Perspectives*, p. 17 and CB, p. 140.

script notes do seem to have been made to assemble elements Brennan wanted to include in his presentation of Lilith.

To complicate matters further, “Cheyne” could refer to one of three books by this author on the book of Isaiah that contain notes on Lilith and were available by 1898. There is a brief comment on Lilith and the Assyrian-Babylonian “lilit” in *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah* (1895), and there are two relevant longer comments in *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, Volume I (1880; third edition, revised, 1884). Neither these references nor the one from *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, however, calls the myth “ugly”, although that could be inferred. From the notes to Isaiah 34:14 in *The Prophecies of Isaiah* and those to what Cheyne describes as a “parallel passage” in Isaiah 13:21–22, Brennan could have gained much of the information he uses in portraying his ambivalent, demonic but beautiful Lilith: the resemblance between vampires, lamias, “night-hags” and Lilith; the role of succubus (succubi are “demons who were thought to persecute men and women in their sleep”); Lilith’s original role as Adam’s first wife; her wings; the threat she poses to young children; the legendary identification of the Queen of Sheba as Lilith; and comments linking her with serpents and with hybrid legendary figures (here, satyrs).⁶

⁶ See T.K. Cheyne, trans. and ed., *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, New York: Whittaker, 1884, pp. 86–87, 197–98.

APPENDIX THREE

RELEVANT WORKS FROM BRENNAN'S LIBRARY

This list provides details of books owned, and in many cases annotated, by Brennan, together with location details.

- Baudelaire, Charles. *L'art romantique*. Paris: Lévy, 1885. MZ.
- . *Curiosités esthétiques*. Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire. Vol. 2. Paris: Lévy, 1889. MZ.
- . *Les Fleurs du mal*. Def. edn. Paris: Lévy, 1888. MZ.
- Beckford, William. *Vathek*. Pref. by Stéphane Mallarmé. Paris: Perrin, 1893. MZ.
- Blake, William. *The Poems of William Blake*. Ed. W.B. Yeats. London: Lawrence, Bullen, 1893. MZ.
- Boehme, Jacob. *The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher*. 4 vols. London: Richardson, 1764–81. FL.
- Bois, Jules. *Le Satanisme et la magie*. Paris: Chailey, n.d. MZ.
- Ecrits pour l'art*. No. 1 (7 January 1887). MZ.
- Camp, Maxime du. *Théophile Gautier*. Transl. J.E. Gordon. London: Fisher Unwin, 1893. MZ.
- The Dome*. No. 5 (1898); new series, vol. 6, no. 16 (1900; contains annotations to W.B. Yeats's "Magic"); vol. 7, nos 19, 20, 21 (1900). MZ.
- Flaubert, Gustave. *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. 1874. Def. ed. Paris: Charpentier, Fasquelle, 1893. MZ.
- Gautier, Théophile. *Nouvelles*. New edn. Paris: Charpentier, 1871. MZ.
- . *Poésies complètes*. Vol. 1. Paris: Charpentier, 1882. MZ.
- . *Romans et contes*. Paris: Charpentier, 1891. MZ.
- Gourmont, Remy de. *Le Livre des masques: portraits symbolistes*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1896. MZ.
- Hodgson, Shadworth. *Time and Space: A Metaphysical Essay*. London: Longmans, Green, 1865. MZ.
- "Hugo et Mallarmé", a collection of essays from the *Revue de Paris*, *Revue de France* and *Grande revue*, compiled and annotated by C.J. Brennan (contains Henri de Régnier, "Notes sur Hugo" and "Stéphane Mallarmé"; Emmanuel des Essarts, "Souvenirs littéraires: Stéphane Mallarmé"; and Camille Mauclair, "L'Esthétique de Stéphane Mallarmé"). MZ.
- Huret, Jules. *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*. Paris: Charpentier, 1894. MZ.
- Huysmans, Joris-Karl. *A rebours*. Paris: Charpentier, 1892. MZ.
- . *Là-Bas*. New edn. Paris: Tresse, Stock, 1894. MZ.
- . *La Cathédrale*. Paris: Stock, 1898. MZ.
- . *En Route*. 2nd edn. Paris: Tresse, Stock, 1895. MZ.
- . *L'Oblat*. 8th edn. Paris: Stock, 1903. MZ.
- Keats, John. *The Poetical Works of John Keats*. London: Warne, n.d. Christopher Brennan, NLA MS 1871, Box 4.
- Laforge, Jules. *Mélanges posthumes*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1903. MZ.
- Maeterlinck, Maurice. *Aglavaine et Selysette*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1896. MZ.
- . *Alladine et Palomides, Intérieur, et La Mort de Tintagiles*. 2nd ed. Brussels: Deman, 1894.
- . *Les Aveugles*. 4th edn. Brussels: Lacomblez, 1892. Bound with *Les Sept princesses*. Brussels: Lacomblez, 1891. MZ.

- . *Douze chansons*. Paris: Stock, 1896. MZ.
- . *Pelléas et Mélisande*. 2nd edn. Brussels: Lacomblez, 1892. MZ.
- . *La Princesse Maleïne*. 6th edn. Brussels: Lacomblez, 1891. MZ.
- . *La Sagesse et la destinée*. Paris: Charpentier, 1898. MZ.
- . *Sélections*. Brussels: Lacomblez, 1901. MZ.
- . *Le trésor des humbles*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1896.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Album de vers et de prose*. Paris: Vanier. Peden Family Collection, ML MSS 1663/20/6.
- . *Les Dieux antiques*. Paris: Rothschild, 1880. SJCC Mallarmé Box 4.
- . *Vers et prose: morceaux choisis*. Paris: Perrin, 1893. FL Brennan No. 535.
- . *Divagations*. Paris: Charpentier, 1897. ML.
- . *Poésies*. Brussels: Deman, 1899. ML.
- Mauclair, Camille. *Eleusis: causeries sur la cité intérieure*. Paris: Perrin, 1894. MZ.
- . *L'Art en silence*. Paris: Ollendorf, 1901. MZ.
- Mead, G.R.S. *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten*. London: Theosophical Publ. Soc., 1900. MZ.
- Ménard, Louis. *Rêveries d'un païen mystique*. Paris: Lemerre, 1890. MZ.
- Meredith, George. *A Reading of Earth*. London: Macmillan, 1888. MZ.
- Morris, William. *The Earthly Paradise*. London: Reeves, Turner, 1890. MZ.
- Nerval, Gérard de. *Poésies; La Main enchantée; Sylvie; Voyage en Orient* [selections including "Les Epreuves"]. London: Dent, [1912]. MZ.
- . *Gérard de Nerval* [includes "Les Femmes de Caire", *Aurélia*]. Paris: Mercure de France, 1905. MZ.
- Nietzsche, F.W. *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Leipzig: Naumann, 1896. MZ.
- La Parnasse contemporaine*. Paris: Lemerre, 1866. MZ.
- Pater, Walter. *Essays from the "Guardian"*. Portland, Maine: Mosher, 1898. MZ.
- . *Marius the Epicurean*. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1885. MZ.
- Patmore, Coventry. *Poems*. 6th coll. edn. Vol. 1: *The Angel in the House; The Victories of Love*. London: Bell, 1897. MZ.
- . *Poetry of Pathos and Delight*. London: Heinemann, 1896. MZ.
- Péladan, Joséphin. *L'Art idéaliste et mystique*. Paris: Sansot, 1909. MZ.
- . *A cœur perdu*. Paris: Dentu, 1892. MZ.
- . *Finis latinorum*. Paris: Flammarion, 1899. MZ.
- . *La Gynandre*. Paris: Dentu, 1891. MZ.
- . *Pérégrine et Pérégrin*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1904. MZ.
- . *La Science de l'amour*. Paris: Messein, 1911. MZ.
- . *La Vertu suprême*. Paris: Flammarion, n.d. MZ.
- Plowert, Jacques [Paul Adam]. *Petit glossaire pour servir à l'intelligence des auteurs décadents et symbolistes*. Paris: Vanier, Bibliopole, 1888. MZ.
- "Poems, Dramas, Essays". A collection from the *North American Review*, *Monthly Review* and *Nouvelle Revue* (includes W.B. Yeats, "Magic"). Compiled and annotated by C.J. Brennan. MZ.
- Renan, Ary. *Gustave Moreau*. Paris: Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1900. SJCC.
- Retté, Adolphe. *Le Symbolisme: anecdotes et souvenirs*. Paris: Vanier, 1903. MZ.
- La Revue blanche*. Vols. 1, 3-4, 6-11, 13-30. MZ.
- La Revue indépendante*. Vols. 1-18 (1884-1891). MZ.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Poésies complètes*. Paris: Vanier, 1895. MZ.
- Rossetti, D.G. *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. London: Ellis, 1911. MZ.
- Ruysbroeck, Jan van. *Ruysbroeck l'admirable (Œuvres choisies)*. Trans. Ernest Hello. Paris: Poussielgue, 1869. MZ.
- . *L'Ornement des noces spirituelles, de Ruysbroeck l'admirable*. Trans. Maurice Maeterlinck. Brussels: Lacomblez, 1891. MZ.
- Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen*. London: Swedenborg Society, 1899. MZ.

- Symons, Arthur. *Images of Good and Evil*. London: Heinemann, 1899. MZ.
 ——. *Studies in Two Literatures*. London: Smithers, 1897. MZ.
- Tennyson, Alfred Lord. *Poems*. London: Macmillan, 1893. MZ.
 ——. *The Works of Tennyson*. Ed. Hallam, Lord Tennyson. London: Macmillan, 1913. MZ.
- Vanor, Georges. *L'Art symboliste*. Paris: Vanier, 1889. MZ.
- Verlaine, Paul. *Les Poètes maudits*. Paris: Vanier, 1888. MZ.
- La Vogue*, vols. 1-3. MZ.
- La Vogue* series 2 (July-September 1889). MZ.
- Yeats, W.B. *The Celtic Twilight*. London: Lawrence, Bullen, 1893. ML.
 ——. *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*. Cameo Series. London: Fisher Unwin, 1892. MZ.
 ——. *Ideas of Good and Evil*. London: Bullen, 1903. MZ.
 ——. *The Secret Rose*. London: Lawrence, Bullen, 1897. MZ.
 ——. *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi*. [London]: Privately printed, 1897. ML.
 ——. "The Symbolism of Poetry". *The Dome* 6, no. 16 (1900), pp. 249-57. MZ.
 ——. *The Shadowy Waters*. London: Hodder, Stoughton, 1900. MZ.
 ——. *Where There is Nothing*. Plays for an Irish Theatre, vol. 1. London: Bullen, 1903. MZ.

APPENDIX FOUR

RELEVANT WORKS HELD BY THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF NSW 1895–1909

This list provides details of books to which Brennan had access while he was working in the Public Library of NSW, now the State Library of NSW.

- Blavatsky, H.P. *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*. New York: Bouton, 1878.
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