

The conclusion of *Back to Methuselah* by George Bernard Shaw presents a fertile area for investigation inasmuch as the last major speech, that of Lilith, brings a new character on stage, one who has been previously referred to only in the most perfunctory way and who has not appeared before.

Lilith has a mythological function in Judaic legend as Adam's first wife but her function in *Back to Methuselah* seems to be different, to be more symbolic of certain things that are expressed in the play. This symbolism is accomplished by the use of anaphora in her concluding speech which serves to summarize the events of the play and bring a cyclical structure to the play as a whole.

The segment of the play in which Lilith is introduced and which includes her concluding speech is as follows:

A VOICE. There is one that came before the serpent.

THE SERPENT. That is the voice of Lilith, in whom the father and mother were one. Hail, Lilith!

Lilith becomes visible between Cain and Adam.

LILITH. I suffered unspeakably; I tore myself asunder; I lost my life, to make of my one flesh these twain, man woman. And this is what has become of it. What do you make of it, Adam, my son?

ADAM. I made the earth bring forth by my labor, and the woman bring forth by my love. And this is what has come of it. What do you make of it, Eve, my wife?

EVE. I nourished the egg in my body and fed it with my blood. And now they let it fall as the birds did, and suffer not at all. What do you make of it, Cain, my first-born?

CAIN. I invented killing and conquest and mastery and the winnowing out of the weak by the strong. And now the strong have slain one another; and the weak live for ever; and their deeds do nothing for the doer more than for another. What do you make of it, snake?

THE SERPENT. I am justified. For I chose wisdom and the knowledge of good and evil; and now there is no evil; and wisdom and good are one. It is enough. [*She vanishes*].

CAIN. There is no place for me on earth any longer. You cannot deny that mine was a splendid game while it lasted. But now! Out, out, brief candle! [*He vanishes*].

EVE. The clever ones were always my favorites. The diggers and the fighters have dug themselves in with the worms. My clever ones have inherited the earth. All's well [*She fades away*].

ADAM. I can make nothing of it, neither head nor tail. What is it all for? Why? Whither? Whence? We were well enough in the garden. And now the fools have killed all the animals; and they are dissatisfied because they cannot be bothered with their bodies! Foolishness, I call it. [*He disappears*].

LILITH. They have accepted the burden of eternal life. They have taken the agony from birth; and their life does not fail them even in the hour of their destruction. Their breasts are without milk: Their bowels are gone: the very shapes of them are only ornaments for their children to

admire and caress without understanding. Is this enough; or shall I labor again? Shall I bring forth something that will sweep them away and make an end of them as they have swept away the beasts of the garden, and made an end of the crawling things and the flying things and of all them that refuse to live for ever? I had patience with them for many ages: they tried me very sorely. They did terrible things: I stood amazed at the malice and destructiveness of the things I had made: Mars blushed as he looked down on the shame of his sister planet: cruelty and hypocrisy became so hideous that the face of the earth was pitted with the graves of little children among which living skeletons crawled in search of horrible food. The pangs of another birth were already upon me when one man repented and lived three hundred years; and I waited to see what would come of that. And so much came of it that the horrors of that time seem now but an evil dream. They have redeemed themselves from their vileness, and turned away from their sins. Best of all, they are still not satisfied: the impulse I gave them in that day when I sundered myself in twain and launched Man and Woman on the earth still urges them: after passing a million goals they press on to the goal of redemption from the flesh, to the vortex freed from matter, to the whirlpool in pure intelligence that, when the world began, was a whirlpool in pure force. And though all that they have done seems but the first hour of the infinite work of creation, yet I will not supersede them until they have forded this last stream that lies between flesh and spirit, and disentangled their life from the matter that has always mocked it. I can wait: waiting and patience mean nothing to the eternal. I gave the woman the greatest of gifts: curiosity. By that her seed has been saved from my wrath; for I also am curious; and I have waited always to see what they will do tomorrow. Let them feed that appetite well for me. I say, let them dread, of all things, stagnation; for from the moment I, Lilith, lose hope and faith in them, they are doomed. In that hope and faith I have let them live for a moment; and in that moment I have spared them many times. But mightier creatures than they have killed hope and faith, and perished from the earth; and I may not spare them for ever. I am Lilith: I brought life into the whirlpool of force, and compelled my enemy, Matter, to obey a living soul. But in enslaving Life's enemy I made him Life's master; for that is the end of all slavery; and now I shall see the slave set free and the enemy reconciled, the whirlpool become all life and no matter. And because these infants that call themselves ancients are reaching out towards that, I will have patience with them still; though I know well that when they attain it they shall become one with me and supersede me, and Lilith will be only a legend and a lay that has lost its meaning. Of Life only is there no end; and though of its million starry mansions many are empty and many still unbuilt, and though its vast domain is as yet unbearably desert, my seed shall one day fill it and master its matter to its uttermost confines. And for what may be beyond, the eyesight of Lilith is too short. It is enough that there is a beyond. [*She vanishes*]¹.

¹ Bernard Shaw, *Complete Plays with Prefaces* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1962), II, pp. 260-2.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the text the overall background for the scene needs to be established.

Back to Methuselah bears the subtitle *A Metabiological Pentateuch*. Shaw is referring in the title and the subtitle to several things. First, the Biblical character Methuselah, the oldest person mentioned in the Bible; secondly the title is a itself a cataphoric reference to the rallying cry of the brothers Barnabas in the second play, *The Gospel of the Brothers' Barnabas*. The subtitle combines two ideas, metabiology, a word that is unique to Shaw and one that is constructed along the same lines and conveys the same import as metaphysics, in other words metabiology is analogous to metaphysics in that it is philosophically oriented. Then the word *pentateuch* appears in the subtitle. Pentateuch means simply five books but is most often found in discussions of the first five books of the Bible, so the play is linked to other texts from the outset by the use of the name Methuselah, which is a direct Biblical reference, to philosophy through the neologistic formation of *metabiological* and then refers back to the Bible in a formal sense by adding the word *pentateuch*. Shaw could have called the play a *quintet* and seems to have chosen the word *pentateuch* precisely because of the Biblical associations; the word *quintet* would have musical connotations which Shaw apparently wanted to avoid. It is important to realize that Shaw, in other texts, expressed the view that what he advocated was a religion and that his plays were in some sense religious texts².

This Biblical patterning is exhibited in the first two plays *In the Beginning* and *The Gospel of the Brothers' Barnabas*. The first title echoes the opening of the first book of the Bible, Genesis, whose opening words are "In the beginning" This play deals with Adam and Eve and the temptation in the garden in its first act and with Cain in its second. The second play, which uses the word *gospel* in its title is intended to echo the gospels of the Bible, as such the connotative meanings of the word include those of message or news that is promulgated and doctrinal belief.

² Shaw in his "A Foreword to the Popular Edition of *Man and Superman*" says:

I have a special reason for making this book more widely accessible than it can be, even in these days of free libraries, at the customary price of my books. It is described on the title page as "A Comedy and a Philosophy". It might have been called a religion as well; for the vision of hell in the third act, which has never been performed on the stage except as a separate work, is expressly intended to be a revelation of the modern religion of evolution. (Shaw, III, p. 747.)

Later on he says, "I think it well to affirm plainly that the third act, however fanciful its legendary framework may appear, is a careful attempt to write a new Book of Genesis for the Bible of the Evolutionists...." (Shaw, III, p. 748.)

The third, fourth, and fifth plays within the cycle are entitled *The Thing Happens*, *The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*, and *As Far as Thought Can Reach* respectively.

The plays trace the evolution of the human race and predict its future evolution and vary from mythological and symbolic significance in the first play to standard drawing room comedy and satire in the second and third plays to melodrama in the fourth and depiction of a utopian society in the fifth.

The main concern, however, of this paper is an analysis, which makes use of the terms and concepts of discourse analysis, of Lilith's concluding speech. In order to do this it is necessary to provide a brief summary of the plots and thematic content of both plays.

Background Summary

Back to Methuselah opens with *In the Beginning*, which is designed to parallel the opening chapters of Genesis. The cast of characters in the first act is limited to Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. The first act hinges on the discovery, by the human characters, of a dead deer. They realize that it is possible for them to die by accident, as the deer has and so Adam decides that he shall set a limit on the span of his life and live for a thousand years. Eve acquiesces in this decision after she has been told about sex by the Serpent. It is the serpent who mentions Lilith and says,

I remember Lilith, who came before Adam and Eve. I was her darling, as I am yours. She was alone: there was no man with her. She saw death as you saw it when the fawn fell; and she knew then that she must find out how to renew herself and cast the skin like me. She had a mighty will; she strove to renew herself and strove and willed and willed for more moons than there are leaves on all the trees of the garden. Her pangs were terrible: her groans drove sleep from Eden. She said it must never be again: that the burden of renewing life was past bearing: that it was too much for one. And when she cast her skin, lo! there was not one new Lilith but two: one like herself, the other like Adam. You were the one: Adam was the other.³

It is noteworthy that rather than being Adam's first wife and a demonic character, as she is in Judaic legend, Lilith is here described as a proto-being, one who is almost divine.

The second act of the play takes place several hundred years later and the characters are Adam, Eve, and Cain. This episode takes place after Cain has killed Abel and is the scene in which the symbolic nature of the characters is brought to

³ Shaw, III, p.9

the fore. Cain is representative of the hunters and warriors; Adam and the dead Abel are representative of the farmers; the unseen Tubal and Enoch are representative of the clever artificers and religious mystics and Eve is, of course, the mother of all of them.

The fifth play, *As Far as Thought Can Reach*, takes place in 31,920 AD and presents a typical day in the life of a utopian community of a race of people who represent the next step in evolution, as such it has no plot to speak of, there is merely a succession of incidents which include the birth of a new member of the community (the people are oviparous and are born at what we would take for the biological age of seventeen); a visit by some older people, referred to as Ancients, who live an eremitical existence on the periphery of the community; an exhibition of a scientific exhibit (laboratory created human beings) by Pygmalion, who is killed by his creations; the departure of a young person who has started to turn old, to become one of the ancients and, finally, when the day is over, the ghostly appearances of Adam, Eve, Cain, the Serpent, and Lilith.

In the course of the fifth play there is discussion of evolution and the teleological impulse behind evolution, which is, for the Ancients, to achieve power, specifically intellectual power, and to eliminate the body and become immortal spirits without bodies, to become vortices.

It is at the end of the fifth play that our fragment of discourse appears, after the characters from the 30th millennium have left the stage the characters appear one by one and converse until finally Lilith appears.

Before giving a detailed analysis of Lilith's speech it seems advisable to discuss the overall patterns of reference in the fragment given here.

The Scene

The first thing that is noticeable about this fragment is the identification A VOICE. The character is not named until another character has used the character's name, this pattern of character identification only after the character has been identified by another is typical of printed Shavian dramatic texts and is found throughout the corpus of his work.

The voice states that it came before the serpent, thereby indicating its antiquity. The serpent responds by recognizing it as "the voice of Lilith, in whom the father and mother were one." This is the first reference in our scene fragment in which the reference is to the first play. Lilith was described in the first play as coming

before Adam and Eve and has not been mentioned again until now.⁴ Lilith then becomes visible between Cain and Adam, not between Adam and Eve or between Eve and the Serpent but between the two representatives of distinctly different types of men, between Adam, the gardener and farmer, and Cain, the hunter and warrior. Lilith then speaks and continues the reference begun by the Serpent and describes the pain she endured in bringing about the creation of Adam and Eve from herself. She then asks Adam what he makes of it and refers to him by his relationship to her, i.e., “my son.” This pattern of statement and reference will be repeated by each character in turn, except for the Serpent, first they will state what they have done, then say what has become of it, and then ask another character what they make of it. The Serpent, however, varies the formula by saying “I am justified,” and then making his statement. All the statements refer to events depicted or described in the first play. Further, no character in his or her statement refers directly to what the character preceding him has stated. The reference in each case is to what the character did or represented in the first play of the cycle. Lilith’s statement is about cleaving herself in two and making man and woman but Adam’s is about his life as a farmer and Eve’s is about nourishing the egg in her body; Cain’s statement is about conquest and mastery and the snake’s is about choosing wisdom. This apparent irrelevance, however, is dependent upon the reference, in each case, of the word *it* in “What do you make of it...” In order for the reference not to be irrelevant it is necessary for the anaphora to be not to the statement that the character has just made but to the scene which has just been played out and to which Lilith, Adam, Eve, Cain and the Serpent have just been unseen spectators. This reference to the scene is something that will be emphasized in Lilith’s concluding speech.

The formulaic nature of these utterance serves at least two purpose, topical statement and symbolic representation. The speaker is at once presenting a topic, one which has been discussed or dealt with throughout the cycle and also presenting themselves as the symbolic inventor of the thing (sexual duality, war, and so on). The question then becomes not one of what someone thinks about what has happened but “Was I justified in doing what I did; does the course of events bear witness to my success or failure?” The Serpent therefore is the last to speak in this sequence and the first to vanish and his speech states that he was justified and pleased with the results of his decision.

⁴ Cf. p. 4, above.

Since each of these utterances by the character refers to something which is not immediate to the reader or audience and which lies outside the fragment of the play which is presented here it is unclear whether this should be construed as exophoric or endophoric. Insofar as the episodes, in a staged production, would be seen with one or more breaks of uncertain duration between them or even with a break of one or more days, it would be exophoric and each play within the cycle would be a separate event. From the standpoint of the author, or of a person who reads the cycle at one sitting, the lines are endophoric inasmuch as the plays form, from his perspective, a unified whole. From the viewpoint of an audience, which may experience the plays as a series of events over a number of days, the references are exophoric. Insofar as the plays form a unified whole and represent a single work the pattern of pronominal reference could be construed as endophoric and it is as an endophoric reference based on the act of *reading* rather than as an audience *viewing* the cycle that we shall take as the pattern of pronominal reference.

Cain is the last human to speak in this sequence and he addresses the Serpent who makes his statement and then vanishes. At this point the characters begin to disappear from the stage in the opposite of the order in which they have just spoken. Cain makes a statement, which contains a quotation from Shakespeare, and then vanishes; Eve and Adam then speak and disappear so that only Lilith is left alone on the stage. It then falls to her to draw together the themes of the five plays and bring about an overall unity to what would otherwise be five isolated plays of varying quality strung together in a haphazard fashion.

This is accomplished indirectly and in part by the nature of the anaphoric reference in her speech. The use of *they* in the first sentence "They have accepted the burden of eternal life" makes no sense if it is to be understood as referring to the spirits who have just vanished, particularly since Adam and Eve are explicitly represented in the first play as having rejected "the burden of eternal life." Subsequent pronominal references then must be understood as having for their antecedents not the most immediate preceding direct statement but some other event or person or scene that precedes it.

The reference of the pronouns continues to be to the actors of the scene we have just witnessed up until Lilith says "I had patience with them for many ages..." At this point the reference seems to shift away from the immediately preceding scene to something else and this shift in reference is accompanied by a shift in tense from the perfect tense of "They have accepted...They have taken...their life does not fail them..." to the past tense of "I had patience...they did terrible things." The

reference cannot be to the ancients and the children of the fifth play because it has already been established that they live in a utopia so the reference must be to something or someone else. The reference remains ambiguous until Lilith says “one man repented” here the reference is to a character in the second and third plays, the Reverend Haslam, who is the first man, since Biblical times, to live for three hundred years. At this point the immediately preceding references become clear, the reference is to the people that lived up until the time when Haslam “repented” and chose to live for three hundred years.

The reference immediately shifts again, however, and the *they* in “They have redeemed themselves...” cannot be understood as referring to Haslam and to those preceding him so it must be to something subsequent to Haslam’s time and this is the ancients and children of the utopian community depicted in *As Far as Thought Can Reach*. This point is the last time the reference shifts in a major way or for an extended period of time to the generation of man that has just stepped off the stage although there are references to “the woman,” who is most likely Eve, as Lilith’s daughter or female side.

Lilith’s speech takes a different turn when she says, “I will not supersede them.” Prior to this point she had been a symbol of a sexual unity that diverged and became a duality, at this point, however, she begins a process that can only be called an apotheosis. The implicature of “I will not supersede them” is that she, Lilith, has the power or capability of supplanting the human race. Her next sentence, “I can wait: waiting and patience mean nothing to the eternal.” is ambiguous in its use of the word *eternal*. The word *eternal* is used in an anaphoric way referring back to the *I* of the opening. What is ambiguous, however, is whether “the eternal” is used as referring to one of a number of eternal things of which Lilith is but one or whether it is used as referring to the concept of the eternal itself. The meaning seems to be clarified when Lilith says, “I am Lilith: I brought life into the whirlpool of force, and compelled my enemy, Matter, to obey a living soul.” Here the identification of Lilith seems to be with some eternal force, an immaterial force that is opposed to matter. The statement “I am Lilith” is in this context more than a simple statement of identity, the qualifications that are added after this clause indicate that it is said as the result of an apotheosis so that the meaning of “I am Lilith” becomes identical with the the statement “I am God.” This continues in the next utterance of the speech in which Lilith says “I will have patience...” and then ends. At this point Lilith switches and speaks of being superseded by the ancients and then proceeds to an encomium on Life. Finally she concludes that whatever may lay beyond that

point is too far away for her to see but that it is sufficient that there is a beyond. She vanishes and the final play is concluded.

The speech of Lilith then brings to a conclusion the cycle of plays that Shaw has presented and it does this by the use of a pattern of reference to the previous scenes but it does not conclude by simply summarizing the events of the play, for example the fourth play, *The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman* is not referred to at all by Lilith and the second play, *The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas* is referred to only indirectly insofar as the Reverend Haslam, the one who repents and lives for three hundred years, is a part of that play. The central points of reference then are the first play, *In The Beginning*; the third play, *The Thing Happens*; and the fifth play, *As Far as Thought Can Reach*. These are the plays that contain events that Lilith refers to by indirection rather than coming out and saying something like “You remember Haslam, he chose to live for three hundred years.” The pronomial reference then is indirect and serves to bring the play to a complete close by repetition of the important philosophical ideas of the play. Lilith, however, conveys new ideas that are themselves of philosophical importance. Specifically the opposition of Matter and Life as entities has never been broached before; also the identity of Lilith with the creative principle itself is not made until her line beginning “I am Lilith,” which is a new idea that has never been suggested before.

The speech summarizes and brings to a close the cycle and it also points to what may be beyond the far future when Lilith says “And for what may be beyond, the eyesight of Lilith is too short. It is enough that there is a beyond.”

A detailed analysis of Lilith’s speech is given in an appendix below, immediately following the summary.

Summary

Lilith’s speech brings a very long dramatic cycle to a close. The entire cycle occupies over two hundred and sixty pages of type and would probably take six or seven hours to present in its entirety on the stage. Since the play represents not only a dramatic fiction but also a philosophical and religious statement, as evidenced by the subtitle *A Metabiological Pentateuch* it is necessary to bring the play not only to a dramatic conclusion but also to a philosophical one. This is done in Lilith’s speech which acts as a topical coda to the plays and summarizes and introduces new material as part of the statement of the play’s topic.

The topic of the cycle is not necessarily the dramatic events that are portrayed in the play but what motivates the play, in this case a presentation of biological and

philosophical doctrine. Lilith presents these doctrines in a summary form in her final discourse, a discourse that breaks down into three major sections, and a possible fourth section, or coda, that are marked by changes in tense and apparent changes in the reference of the third person pronouns which are used throughout the analyzed text. This may be referred to as the macro-structure of the text and can be determined by looking at the changes in tense and in pronominal reference that accompany the change in tense.

The macro-structure can be seen by breaking the speech into sections on the basis of the shift in tense from the perfect to the past and by the shift in pronominal usage from “they” to “I”. Based on this it can be seen that the first part includes some material marked by the use of “I” but which is put into the first part because it is conjoined with the use of the perfect tense. The second section begins with Lilith asserting she had patience with them for many ages and is marked by a shift to the past tense. The third section is marked by a shift to the perfect tense again and the fourth by a shift in tense and mood, which goes from the indicative to the imperative and then alternates back and forth between the two moods before finally settling down into the indicative again.

In the first part of the speech, which is presented in the perfect tense she is referring to the ancients and to the fact that they have evolved into a race of long-lived human beings. The second part is presented through a shift to the past tense and is a description of the pain and suffering that ensued as a result of the First World War.⁵ The third section seems to shift back to the ancients and to the evolved race of humans that have inherited the earth. Lilith then moves into what can only be described as an apotheosis or coda, which marks a fourth section, distinguished from the other three by the use of the first person singular, in which she reveals herself or identifies herself with life and with God and finally concludes with a vision of life’s many mansions and the statement that for what may lie beyond the next step in evolution her, that is Lilith’s, eyesight is too short.

The play is brought to a conclusion by the summation that refers back to the events and descriptions of the last play, by the shift in reference to the character of Haslam, the man who repented and chose to live for three hundred years, and then by shifting back to the ancients again. This serves to establish the relationship

⁵ The play’s title page indicates that it was written between 1918 and 1920 and first performed in New York in 1922. The opening of the second play places it in “the first years after the war...” (Shaw, II, pp. v, 37.)

between the ancients and their short-lived ancestors and to provide the topical links between the second and third plays and the fifth play.

When Lilith refers to herself, or to “the woman,” as she does in fragment 55, she is referring to the personages of the first play and to the event which the Serpent describes as giving birth to sexual duality and this sets the stage for her apotheosis.

The difficulty with the text arises from the shift in reference and in tense. A cursory reading would suggest that the third person pronouns that are used throughout the speech always refer to mankind in general but a closer examination, such as this, shows that in some cases it is clearly necessary for the reference to be to the ancients and in others to their short-lived predecessors. This ambiguity, however, can be resolved by noting that it is accompanied by a shift from the perfect tense to the past and back again so that two different groups are clearly referred to, one of which is acting in the present and one which did something in the past. Topical links between the plays are then established by the constant back and forth reference to events and scenes that are presumably still fresh in the viewer’s/reader’s mind.

The play is therefore summarized and new directions are indicated by the concluding speech and the play is thus brought to a satisfying dramatic and philosophical conclusion.

APPENDIX

Detailed Analysis

In the analysis that follows Lilith's speech has been broken up into a series of fragments based on two principles, that of punctuation, where a pause has been indicated by a period, comma, semicolon, or colon that portion has been treated as a separate fragment, and by breaking on what seem to be minor pauses, which are not indicated by punctuation marks, but which also seem to be relatively complete information units.

Each fragment is preceded by a number in a bold typeface and then given immediately below it in a contrasting bold typeface.⁶

Each fragment, except for those fragments that are composed of single words, such as fragment 77, contains information that is, in terms of discourse analysis, of both the given and new types, however, rather than attempting a mechanical breakdown of the information into these categories it has been mentioned only in those places where it seemed to affect the interpretation of the text or its oral interpretation by someone portraying Lilith on the stage.

1.

LILITH.

Lilith is identified as the speaker of the text.

2.

They have accepted the burden of eternal life.

The first problem is the anaphoric reference of *they*. The characters who have vanished could be the *they* but this seems not to be warranted because they are described earlier as having rejected eternal life. It is precisely because Adam set a limit on the human life span that life has been shortened. The reference therefore must be to some other group of characters. The only characters that the description would fit are those that are characterized as ancients⁷.

⁶ ITC Galliard is used for the main text of this paper and ITC Bold Century Old Style is used for the fragmented text.

⁷ The first reference to the older long-lived characters in the fifth play is when a youth speaks to an older male and says "Now, then, ancient sleepwalker...." The reference is immediately continued in the play's stage directions where he is referred to as "The Ancient". Shaw, III, 206.

For the sake of convenience in referring to this race the entire set of long-lived beings in this play will be simply referred to as ancients (lower case), whether they are children or mature specimens, to distinguish them from their short-lived predecessors and the mature adults will be referred to as Ancients (initial capital).

3.

They have taken the agony from birth;

Once again the pronoun refers to the ancients. The new information that is conveyed here is that these people have taken the agony from birth. They have done this by becoming oviparous as we witnessed at the opening of the fifth play.

4.

and their life does not fail them

“Their life” in this instance refers to either their individual lives or to the principle of life. This seems to be ambiguous

5.

even in the hour of their destruction.

The ambiguity is resolved here. It, “their life,” does not fail them even in the hour of death. There is a kind of immortality predicated about the ancients.

6.

Their breasts are without milk:

The children are presented as being born at a state of development that would correspond to about seventeen or eighteen so milk is not necessary and the She-Ancients are presented as being sexually unattractive and withered. This restates the description of the Ancients given earlier in the play. The first reference to the Ancients’ lack of sexuality is as follows:

THE YOUTH. You old fish! I believe you dont know the difference between a man and a woman.

THE ANCIENT. It has long ceased to interest me in the way it interests you. And when anything no longer interests us we no longer know it.⁸

A She-Ancient is described in a stage direction as being “like the He-Ancient, equally bald, and equally without sexual charm...”⁹

7.

Their bowels are gone:

Just as the mammary glands have lost their function so the bowels have also lost their alimentary function and nutrition is accomplished through some means that is never specified within *Back to Methuselah*.¹⁰

⁸ Shaw, II, p. 207.

⁹ Shaw, II, p. 211.

¹⁰ However, see *Far-Fetched Fables* for a possible suggestion regarding dietetics of the next evolutionary step. (Shaw, VI, 504-6)

8.

the very shapes of them are only ornaments

The bodies have become useless because they have no procreative function and are reduced to inspiration for artistic composition and sentimental lovemaking.¹¹

9.

for their children to admire and caress without understanding.

The children admire and caress each others' bodies without understanding the nature of the sexual act, partly because they are oviparous¹² and partly because they do not seem to have sexual intercourse but only to engage in cuddling and non-sexual acts of affection.¹³

10.

Is this enough;

Is this evolutionary development enough, that is, is it satisfactory.

11.

or shall I labor again?

Labor in this context has two possible meanings, both of which may be present. "Shall I work again. Shall I Lilith attempt to bring forth a new race of beings again by my effort." It can also mean "Shall I undergo labor, the pangs of a new birth in order to bring forth a new race." In this case the denotative usage of work and the connotative usage of the labor involved in birth co-exist.

12.

Shall I bring forth something that will sweep them away

Lilith here implies that she has destructive capabilities as well as the procreative capabilities described above. She can bring forth on her own initiative as it were a race of beings that is capable of doing away with the ancients and their civilization.

13.

and make an end of them

That the sweeping away will be total is suggested by the use of the word *end*. There will be no more men if Lilith chooses to bring forth a new race of beings.

¹¹ Shaw, II, p. 211 *et passim*.

¹² Shaw, II, p. 214.

¹³ Shaw, II, p. 210, 233, *et passim*.

14.**as they have swept away the beasts of the garden,**

The beasts of the garden must refer to the garden of Eden. No other garden has been mentioned in the play up until this moment so the reference of the beasts of the garden must refer not to a particular real garden but to a garden that stands as a symbol. This is the garden of Eden. The beasts of the garden then becomes symbolic of all animals. The ancients have done away with all of the animals that formerly inhabited the garden of Eden.

15.**and made an end of the crawling things**

Among the animals that they have done away with are the crawling things, i.e., snakes and other animals that crawl along the ground.

16.**and the flying things**

The have also killed off all of the birds.

17.**and of all them that refuse to live for ever?**

The implication of this is that these creatures refused to live forever, they chose, in some fashion, to die, and therefore the ancients did away with them.

18.**I had patience with them for many ages:**

The tense has shifted to the past tense here. Is Lilith referring to the race of ancients or is she referring to some other race, the race that preceded the ancients perhaps?

19.**they tried me very sorely.**

The people, whœver they were, *tried* Lilith. Try is used here in the same way that it is used in the phrase “try my patience.” Trying Lilith in this case means to test her, to bring her to the limit of her endurance.

20.**They did terrible things:**

These people did things, things which will be enumerated in the next clause or series of clauses.

21.

I stood amazed at the malice and destructiveness

Lilith is perplexed by the capacity for evil exhibited by these beings.

22.

of the things I had made:

She created them

23.

Mars blushed

Mars can be used in two senses that are widely known, as the next planet out from the sun and as the Roman god of war. The war god can also be associated with the planet as he is in astrology.

24.

as he looked down on the shame of his sister planet:

The sense now becomes clear, the planet Mars is referred to but is there also a connotation of Mars the war god?

25.

cruelty and hypocrisy became so hideous

At this point we still do not know whether Mars is merely an astronomical planet with no meaning beyond his closeness to the earth or whether it has some deeper significance.

26.

that the face of the earth was pitted with the graves of little children

The fact that the earth is “pitted with the graves of little children” suggests that this is something which happened in the past and that this was in the nature of a catastrophe. The implication seems to be that it was the cruelty and hypocrisy that caused the earth to contain these graves.

27.

among which living skeletons crawled in search of horrible food.

Starvation and cannibalism are suggested here.

28.

The pangs of another birth were already upon me

Lilith was ready to supersede the human race at this point.

29.

when one man repented

This one man who repented is Haslam, the minister of the second play and a major character in the third play of the cycle. The chain of reference that was started earlier, in fragment 18, has therefore shifted from the generation of ancients to the earlier race of men that was not long-lived. The reference to Mars now becomes clearer. The second play refers to events of the First World War and the Barnabas brothers developed their biological doctrine in response to the events of that war. The use of Mars is then a reference not only to the planet's proximity to earth but also its mythological associations as the planet of the war god.

However, since all of the things, the hypocrisy and cruelty, the First World War, in short all of the things referred to in 20–27 occur outside of the play these references are clearly exophoric and the reader/audience is expected to share, with Lilith, some of this knowledge.

30.

and lived three hundred years;

The use of the word *repented* in 29 indicates that Haslam chose to live for three hundred years. The fact that Lilith says three hundred years refers back to the doctrine of the brothers Barnabas that three hundred years was the minimum amount of time necessary for a hum being to develop political capacity.

31.

and I waited to see what would come of that.

Lilith stood aside as a silent witness to see the progress of mankind after a long life had been chosen and she decided not to supersede mankind. Here the *that* refers to the decision to live for three hundred years.

32.

And so much came of it

Lilith, after a full stop, returns to the thought of what came about as a result of the decision to live for three hundred years. This sentence is therefore, in some sense, a continuation of the thought of the previous sentence. The *and* in this sentence differs from the *and* in the preceding sentence in that it comes after a full stop, indicated by the period, and represents a return to or a reply to the subject of the first sentence. The *and* in fragment 31 is used as a simple conjunction between

two clauses while in this case there is a different process going on than merely linking two clauses. *And*, used here as indicative of the consequence that followed upon an action is an additive conjunction that imposes a greater addition to the topic of fragment 31. It would be at this point that the actress portraying Lilith would add stress to the utterance and thereby indicate the importance of the consequences of this action.

33.

that the horrors of that time seem now but an evil dream.

The *horrors of that time* refers to either a specific period of time, such as the First World War or to the period when the short-lived race of men dominated the earth.

34.

They have redeemed themselves from their vileness,

This cannot refer to the people of the past because it has already been established that they were marked by cruelty and hypocrisy. The tense has also shifted, however, and it has gone from the simple past tense of 18–33 back to the perfect tense of 1-17. The reference of the pronouns must also have shifted then and the reference is not to the past generations but to those living as Lilith speaks, that is to the ancients.

35.

and turned away from their sins.

Just as Haslam repented so also the race of ancients has repented.

36.

Best of all,

There is more that is even better than the fact that they have repented and turned away from their sins.

37.

they are still not satisfied:

The ancients are not fulfilled by what they have done.

38.

The impulse I gave them

Lilith gave them something but what it was and when she gave it to them are uncertain until the identification is made in fragment 39.

39.

in that day when I sundered myself in twain

Lilith is not talking about the ancients now but the race of man as it was when it began. This is indicated by the shift back to the past tense in 38 and continued in 39 where the time is specifically indicated, the day when she divided herself into two. The time is therefore ancient and the reference of *they* refers not to the previous race of men or to the ancients alone but to mankind as a whole and thus includes both groups.

40.

and launched Man and Woman on the earth

Lilith's act of rendering herself brought sexual duality into being.

41.

still urges them:

The impulse still exists.

42.

after passing a million goals

Here million is used not as a precise number but, because it is a round number, as one that is suggestive of an enormous number. The goals are what? not goals in soccer or rugby surely but goals of a personal or racial nature. They have passed all expectations might be another way of putting it.

43.

they press on to the goal of redemption from the flesh,

They, again the ancients are referred to, have yet another goal in mind. To be redeemed from the flesh. Lilith again uses a form of the word redeem, which she used before in 34, just as she has earlier used the word repent when she referred to Haslam. Lilith has used the word repent in 29 and sins in 35. The repeated emphasis of words with explicitly religious meanings suggests that Lilith is linking biology and religion into one whole. The fact that men refuse to live for three hundred years or more is therefore a sin but one that can be remedied and redemption, of a kind, obtained by embracing eternal life.

44.

to the vortex freed from matter,

Lilith now refers to an earlier dialogue between the two Ancients and the children¹⁴ in which the He-Ancient states that he wants to be a vortex.

45.

to the whirlpool in pure intelligence that,

The nature of the vortex is stated. It is something that exists in pure intelligence.

46.

when the world began,

The vortex existed from all time, or from the beginning of time when the world was created.

47.

was a whirlpool in pure force.

The nature of the vortex was different then. It was a vortex in pure force, not a vortex in pure intelligence. Intelligence and force are different then but what is the nature of the difference between force and intelligence?

48.

And though all that they have done seems but the first hour of the infinite work of creation,

The sentence begins with an and after a full stop but here Lilith does not return to the topic of 47 she goes on to a different topic which is what *they have done* but is the *they* to be understood as the ancients or as mankind in general. The fact that the tense is the same tense as in 34 would seem to indicate that it is the ancients that she is referring to but the use of the word all makes the implication seem more inclusive, all that they have done would seem to indicate that Lilith is referring not just to the race of ancients but to mankind in general.

49.

yet I will not supersede them

The yet suggests that something would be proper but that it will not be done. The sentence now comes to mean that even though it would be proper and Lilith has the capability and the power to supersede them, in this case not the vanished race but the race of ancients, she will not do it.

¹⁴ Shaw II, p 255.

50.

until they have forded this last stream

The delay in supersession, however, is only temporary, only until they have achieved what Lilith describes as fording the last stream.

51.

that lies between flesh and spirit,

This last stream is that which separates flesh and spirit. The metaphor is drawn of flesh and spirit as two shores or the two banks of a river that are separated by a current.

52.

and disentangled their life from the matter that has always mocked it.

There is not a separate life of flesh and one of spirit but a single life as indicated by the use of *their life* (singular) instead of *their lives* (plural) and this life is entwined with matter. Matter, however, has always mocked *it*, the life of the flesh and the spirit.

53.

I can wait:

Lilith expresses her ability to wait and endure, but she pauses here, as if she expects to add a qualification to this statement.

54.

waiting and patience mean nothing to the eternal.

At this point Lilith qualifies the utterance in fragment 53 that she can wait by saying that she is eternal. At first glance this piece of information, which must, in this utterance, be classified as new, both on the grounds of stress, which would fall naturally on eternal and in terms of conventional description, seems ambiguous. Lilith could be saying that she is one of a number of eternal beings and the utterance could be interpreted as meaning, “waiting and patience mean nothing to eternal beings, of whom I am one,” or it could mean “waiting and patience mean nothing to the principal of eternity, which is myself.” This will not be clarified until fragment 74 and the utterances that follow it.

55.

I gave the woman the greatest of gifts:

Lilith gave the woman a gift. In this case the woman is a substitutive usage that refers to Eve. We know this because the Serpent has told us earlier¹⁵ that Eve was born from Lilith's attempts to cleave herself in two and thus bring about a bisexual method of reproduction.

56.

curiosity.

The gift of Lilith to Eve is identified as curiosity, in this case the ability to wonder and wait and see what will happen as the result of her actions.

57.

By that her seed has been saved from my wrath;

The *seed* that Lilith mentions must in this context mean both the race of short-lived and the race of long-lived humans, both of which have Eve as their common ancestress. The word *wrath* is suggestive of more than passing anger and refers back to her earlier utterances beginning with fragment 12 about sweeping them away.

58.

for I also am curious;

Lilith now gives a reason for her hesitation in sweeping away the human race, that she is curious as well. Instead of saying "I am curious also" she says "...I also am curious" which serves to shift the emphasis onto the fact that she, Lilith, is curious, as well as Eve. This intensifies her statement.

59.

and I have waited always

The conventional way of phrasing this utterance would be "and I have always waited," the shift in position of the adverb *always* suggests that here the stress is placed on *always* as conveying new information. The fact that Lilith has waited has already been given earlier, what is now conveyed through the placement of the adverb is the duration of the waiting, this has been eternal, or nearly so and is conveyed by the shifted position of *always*.

60.

to see what they will do tomorrow.

¹⁵ Cf. p. 4, above.

The purpose of her waiting is now stated, and that is to see what they will do in the future, *tomorrow*, in this case not representing a day which is the successor to the current day but rather an indefinite period of time in the future.

61.

Let them feed that appetite well for me.

The them in this case follows the pattern that we have seen earlier in which the pronoun is used with the present or the perfect tense to refer to the current race of people or ancients and not to their short-lived predecessors. There is a shift in mood here from the indicative to the imperative. Lilith is now beginning to assume the aspect of a god who is capable of imposing orders upon her creatures.

62.

I say,

The mood continues to be in the imperative mood begun in 61 but it now becomes more intense with the “I say,” which is suggestive of of a moral commandment.

63.

let them dread,

They, the beings who inhabit the earth are supposed to experience an emotion, the emotion of dread.

64.

of all things,

This phrase carries the implication not only that there is a set of things which should cause them to experience this dread or which is related in some way to the dread which they are to experience but also that there is something, yet to be named, which is particularly dreadful.

65.

stagnation;

The most dreadful thing is named, *stagnation*, or standing still.

66.

for from the moment I, Lilith,

At this period Lilith will experience something which may cause her to make good the threat implied in fragment 12. This is intensified by using the pronoun *I* and then repeating her name, *Lilith*. We already know her name so the repetition

immediately following the pronominal reference can only serve to intensify it, as if she were to point out not she is not merely a person but that she has a special identity and nature.

67.

lose hope and faith in them,

Lilith will experience a loss of faith and hope in the creatures that live upon the earth if they stagnate. It is now clear that stagnation is linked in a causal way to a loss of faith and hope on the part of Lilith

68.

they are doomed.

The race will be doomed to extinction and she will make good her earlier threat to sweep them away.

69.

In that hope and faith I have let them live for a moment;

She returns to the idea of faith and hope but it is now clear that it is not the faith and hope of the creatures but the faith and hope that she has in them. It is as a consequence of this faith and hope that she has let them live. The period of time that they have lived is described as a moment, this contrasts sharply with Lilith's description of herself as eternal in fragment 54.

70.

and in that moment I have spared them many times.

This fragment is linked with the preceding one by a simple and, which is used here purely to connect the two clauses, unlike the earlier usage in fragment 32. The repetition of moment emphasizes again the brevity of time but then is contrasted immediately by the fact that she has spared them, the people, "many times." In other words in a brief period of time which seems to an eternal being to be merely a moment she has spared mankind an indefinite number of times.

71.

But mightier creatures than they have killed hope and faith,

The earlier usage of conjunctions after full pauses has been to use an additive conjunction, primarily and, now Lilith shifts from an additive to an adversative conjunction when she begins her next utterance with but. This indicates that it is still a possibility that they could be superseded and she makes this clear with "mightier creatures than they" which may indicate some larger and more ferocious creatures

than human beings existed and vanished. These creatures have killed hope and faith, so what became of them?

72.

and perished from the earth;

The question is answered, those beings that have killed hope and faith have become extinct.

73.

and I may not spare them for ever.

Here she refers to the possibility of human extinction again and indicates that it is very possible that she may supersede the human race despite her curiosity and patience.

74.

I am Lilith:

We already know that she is Lilith. Here the utterance must have the stress on the word Lilith, so what is new is not the fact that she is Lilith but that Lilith is a special person, one with a special identity.

75.

I brought life into the whirlpool of force,

Lilith's identity is beginning to become clearer. She is not merely a proto-being who divided herself into two and created man and woman out of herself, she also has a cosmic identity in that she was capable of dealing with an abstract entity, life, and bringing it into a "whirlpool of force," which might be construed as energy as a physicist understands the concepts.

76.

and compelled my enemy,

Enemy here is clearly new information. There is a brief pause, indicated by the comma and the stress of the line, when it is spoken, would seem to demand that enemy be stressed. Since we have had no previous indication that Lilith had any enemies this would seem to need immediate clarification.

77.

Matter,

The enemy is identified as matter. The capitalization in the printed text would seem to indicate that this word is to be particularly stressed and is immediately

recognized as new information. We have never before known that life was opposed by matter.

78.

to obey a living soul.

Matter is organized, made organic, and forced to take orders from the spiritual entity which it envelops.

79.

But in enslaving Life's enemy I made him Life's master;

Lilith again uses the adversative conjunction *but* after a full stop. The contrast started at the beginning of this fragment is carried through in the full fragment through the use of *enemy* and *master*. These two words connote an adversative relationship in and of themselves.

80.

for that is the end of all slavery;

For is a causal marker and here the utterance states that the end of all slavery is for the slave to become the master's master.

81.

and now I shall see the slave set free

Lilith returns to the additive conjunction and implies that she is certain to see at some time in the future, indicated by *shall*, the soul set free from the confines of matter.

82.

and the enemy reconciled,

Matter and life will be reconciled and cease to be enemies once the two are separate from each other.

83.

the whirlpool become all life and no matter.

She refers back to the whirlpool of force mentioned in fragment 75. This also refers back to the conversation between the two Ancients and the children¹⁶ in which the He-Ancient expresses the wish to be a vortex.

84.

¹⁶ Cf. p. 12, above.

And because these infants that call themselves ancients are reaching out towards that,

Lilith, after a full stop, refers to the older members of the long-lived race and calls them infants. This is contrastive, she is contrasting those individuals who live for even as long as eight hundred years¹⁷ with the eternal being, Lilith and saying that they are mere infants compared with her. The fact that they aspire to be vortices is, however, given by the fact that they are “reaching out towards that,” where *that* is understood as the whirlpool referred to in the preceding fragment.

85.

I will have patience with them still;

Despite all of her threats she will have patience with them. This is emphasized by the placement of *still*, the final position in the clause, coming as it does at the pause indicated by the semicolon would seem to show that it is to be stressed and that the *still* is new information. She will have patience with these creatures now and for an indefinite period of time seems to be the implicature of the word *still* in this fragment.

86.

though I know well that when they attain it they shall become one with me and supersede me,

Lilith again switches to an adversative formation with *though* and it becomes not a question of whether or not the human race can attain this goal but a question of time, as shown by *when*. The attainment of the goal is certain then but this will have consequences for both the race and Lilith in that they will become one with her and supersede her. The supersession will be because no one is around to remember her.

87.

and Lilith will be only a legend and a lay that has lost its meaning.

Lilith continues and adds the information that she will be a legend and a lay, which is used here as a synonym for song, in this case a song on an heroic or epic theme, but that it will have no meaning because no one will exist in a material form and understand sexual duality and material existence.

88.

¹⁷ Shaw, II, 252.

Of Life only is there no end;

In the printed text *life* is capitalized, this would again seem to indicate that a greater stress is to be placed here, so *life* is effectively new information and the fact that it is the only thing that has no end is emphasized by the placement of *end* before a major pause as indicated by the semicolon. *Life* and *end* are therefore marked as new information, but if life is the only thing that has no end or finality then the inference to be made is that everything else has an end.

89.

and though of its million starry mansions many are empty and many still unbuilt,

The most important point to be gotten from this fragment is the allusive nature of the word mansions. This is an exophoric reference to the scriptural verse where Jesus says “In my father’s house are many mansions.”¹⁸

90.

and though its vast domain is as yet unbearably desert,

The *domain* is that of life and Lilith states by implication that despite all of the time that has passed and all of the people that have lived the house of life is as yet unfilled, hence the domain is a desert.

91.

my seed shall one day fill it and master its matter to its uttermost confines.

Mankind is now identified not as the seed of Eve but as the seed or progeny of Lilith. Further the universe shall be filled and the matter that composes it shall be controlled or mastered by mankind until the farthest reaches of the universe are brought under the control of mankind.

92.

And for what may be beyond,

Once again there is a full stop and Lilith continues with the additive conjunction and. She has evidently paused and then gone on to say that there is the possibility of something beyond even this.

93.

the eyesight of Lilith is too short.

¹⁸ John 14:2.

Eyesight is used as a symbol of thought, the usage here is similar to the usage of foresight in which knowledge and vision are implicitly related. The fact that her eyesight is too short is used as a substitution for near-sightedness, or myopia in which objects that are near to the eyes are seen in focus and those that are distant are blurred. The utterance then means that her intellectual knowledge or vision cannot focus beyond a certain point and so she cannot perceive or know what lies beyond this point, that of becoming a vortex or disembodied spirit.

94.

It is enough that there is a beyond.

This does not matter, however, the fact that there is an eternity in which all of this can take place and that there is something beyond even the furthest point that she can see is itself sufficient.

95.

[She vanishes].

Now that she has said her piece she joins the other ghostly characters and disappears and the play ends.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brown, Gillian and Yule, George. *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1983.

Shaw, George Bernard. *Complet Plays with Prefaces*. 6 vols. New York: Dodd, Mead. 1962.