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Esotericism, Symbolism and Romanticism

in

Christopher Brennan's Poems

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This thesis is my own original work.

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Abstract

Esotericism, Symbolism and Romanticism in Christopher Brennan’s Poems

Drawing on evidence from three important areas of Brennan’s interest, esotericism, Symbolism and Romanticism (especially early German Romanticism), this thesis argues that Brennan’s Poems (1914), regarded as a livre composé, focuses on the notion of an inner, higher or transcendent self, constituted by the imaginative union of the human mind and nature. In the introduction, this point of view is contrasted with the common perception that the single theme of Poems is the quest for Eden.

The first chapter examines poems which deal directly with the notion of the higher self, considering them in the context of the conflict between scepticism and the desire for faith in the long nineteenth century (roughly from the 1770s to the early 1900s), and the emergence of various concepts of a higher self during this period. The second and third chapters show that the “Lilith” sequence is central to Brennan’s exploration of the relationship of the mind and nature as constitutive of the higher self. Lilith symbolises nature itself, ambiguous in its ability either to trap the human mind in the merely material, or to raise it to a higher level if it can imaginatively unite itself with nature, or “find [Lilith] fair”.

The fourth chapter explores Brennan’s concept of “moods”, a theoretical notion of the union of mind and nature which he derives from German Romantic concepts of “Stimmung” (the mood of harmony between mind and nature) and “Gemüth” (in a specialised sense, employed in esoteric and mystical thought as well as Romantic psychology, the inner imaginative faculty within which the higher self can be brought into being); from early writings of Yeats; from his study of Les Dieux antiques, Stéphane Mallarmé’s work on mythology; and from Walter Pater.

The last three chapters show that the notion of “moods” underpins the structure of Poems. Instances of “equations” between human experience and the events of the natural cycles of day and year, which Brennan interprets in terms of the esoteric notion of “correspondences”, are examined in his elegy to Mallarmé, in the three poems (two called “preludes” and one called a “Liminary”) which survey the entire seasonal cycle, and in the patterning of individual pieces linking certain times of day and year to particular human emotions or experiences. The union of human mind and nature is effected within the poetry itself, art being the only means (as poems such as the “Liminary” show) by which the higher or transcendent self may actually be grasped.
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Introduction

In 1970, the Australian poet and scholar Judith Wright wrote of Christopher Brennan:

[...] if we are asked what original contribution Australian poets have made to the long philosophico-poetic argument of the West, our answer would have to begin, and even to end, with Brennan's work.

Yet there has been almost no recognition of this fact, except in Australia itself. This is what makes our view of him tentative, uncertain. The field he chose for his poetry was conspicuously un-Australian; the argument he pursues requires a background that was never provided here.

Thirty years later, this remains an important issue in Brennan criticism. In spite of ground-breaking work 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 L.J. Austin and Wallace Kirsop, among others, as well as some exploratory work into Brennan’s esoteric sources by Dorothy Green and A.D. Hope, an approach has not yet been established which would explore in more depth the “background that was never provided here”, as this informs his poetic output. 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 1980 critical biography. This work, while it does consider the influence of Gnosticism on Brennan’s work, as well as establish the continuing importance for Brennan of the works of the French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), and examine English influences, especially of the Victorian era, in some detail, is necessarily limited by its genre. If we look for recognition of Brennan outside Australia itself, we find that only a handful of non-Australians, notably Antoine Denat, Jean Seznec, Paul Kane and François Boisivon, have published on Brennan. “Writing in an environment and at a time utterly inimical to his work”, Livio Dobrez comments, “[Brennan] had the boldness to compete on equal terms with the finest European

2 There have, however, been several PhD theses. For the most recent of these (to my knowledge), see Justin Lucas, "Shut Out of Mine Own Heart: Reading Christopher Brennan" (PhD, UNSW, 1998).
talent". 4 A more thorough exploration of Brennan’s relationship to the “long philosophico-poetic argument of the West” is still needed.

Christopher Brennan (1870-1932) was an Irish-Australian poet and academic who lived in Sydney all his life, except for two years as a student in Berlin. He was educated at St Ignatius’ College (Riverview) and Sydney University. A precocious student, he made a major discovery about the descent of the texts of Aeschylus by the time he was eighteen. 5 The foundation of his later scholarly expertise in German and French literature was laid during his years in Berlin (1892-4); his interest in English literature, already established, was further extended there. He returned from Berlin in 1894 without the higher degree which 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. At about the same time, Brennan received a warm response from Mallarmé to his XXI Poems, which had been sent to the French poet after publication. Mallarmé described him as “Poète et poète merveilleux”, and spoke of “une parentée [sic] de songe” between Brennan and himself. 6

Employed at the Public Library of NSW in 1895, where he worked mainly as a cataloguer, Brennan was eventually appointed to Sydney University in 1909 as a lecturer in Modern Literature, teaching German and French (203). In 1920 he became Associate Professor in German and Comparative Literature. This made him the first Professor of Comparative Literature in Australia. 7 As Denat comments, “la vaste culture du nouveau professeur l’avait préparé à ce rôle : également instruit des langues grecque, latine, allemande et française (sans compter sa langue maternelle), Brennan représentait à cette époque à Sydney le type même d’un certain cosmopolitisme littéraire” (14). In 1925, after his marriage to Elisabeth had foundered, he was dismissed from his position by the University because of his relationship with Vie
Singer, and possibly for other reasons. After Vie's accidental death in 1925, Brennan lapsed into poverty and alcoholism, from the worst effects of which he was rescued by a small group of supporters in the years before his death (276-8).

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, entitled simply *Poems*, a collection of not many more than a hundred pieces, published in 1914. This is a work in five major parts, with preludes and interludes. The second part, "The Forest of Night", includes an important sequence about the relationship of Adam to his legendary first wife, Lilith. Other works by Brennan include *A Chant of 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. A facsimile edition of *Poems*, which demonstrates the original layout of the work, including page spacing and the use of italics for preludes and interludes, was published by Wilkes in 1972. In 1981 Brennan's responses to the *Coup de dés* of Mallarme, the *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope* and the *Pocket Musicopoematographoscope*, written for private entertainment, were published in a facsimile edition. Terry Sturm's Portable Australian Authors edition, *Christopher Brennan* (1984), includes selected correspondence, and a number of Brennan's prose writings, particularly on Australian topics, not published elsewhere. 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 G.A. 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, "Pauca mea" and the "Epilogues", were completed in 1908.

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10 Often referred to as *Poems (1913)* or *Poems [1913]*.
This thesis addresses the issue Wright raises by considering the influence on Brennan of three important fields. These are esotericism (usually spelt with a small “e” and referring to a group of currents which were brought together at the Renaissance, including Alchemy, Rosicrucianism and the theosophy of Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), and the ancient and medieval sources of these currents), Symbolism (especially the works of Mallarmé) and Romanticism (focussing particularly on its early manifestation in Germany at the turn of the nineteenth century). Its argument derives from an extensive study of works Brennan is known to have read in these three fields, as well as his annotated texts (excluding those of the early German Romantic period, to which I have not had access) and his prose works, in addition to the poetry itself.

The focus of this thesis is Poems. I argue that the fundamental principle informing the structure of Poems, regarded as a unified work, 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.12 In the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé, Brennan presents this conception in the following terms, drawing on two pieces from Divagations, “Crayonné au théâtre” and “Catholicisme”:

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.13

Evidence from Brennan’s articles on, and annotations to, works by Mallarmé indicates that the Australian poet considers 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 with the natural world, and the esoteric notion of “correspondences” between the mind, nature and the divine. This thesis demonstrates in detail that the “assimilation of our human passion to the tetralogy of the year” is a fundamental organisational principle

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of Poems. Further, it shows that both the “Lilith” sequence, and the work as a whole, explore the notion of the transcendent self as a union of self and nature.

Wright sees in the possibility that Brennan attempted such a task (which she does not explore in detail) evidence of delusions of grandeur. Quoting the above passage from Brennan’s lecture on Mallarmé, she comments:

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. 14

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. What he does achieve, understood in the light of the “assimilation of our inmost passion to the tetralogy of the year”, is exciting and original, implementing in his own terms what Mallarmé envisions, but does not carry out.

The field of Brennan criticism has been dominated by Wilkes’s insistence that “Poems (1913) has not two themes or three or four; it has one theme only — the quest for Eden”. 15 “Brennan’s whole personal endeavour”, Wilkes explains, “was to reach beyond the one life to the other, to the sphere ‘radiant with love and beauty’ — to recover Eden” (2-3). In his view, Brennan derives this emphasis from Mallarmé:

All the literature of the Decadence seemed to Brennan to be governed by a single impulse, diversely expressed. From Mallarmé [..] he learned to call it the paradisal instinct, the dream of Eden. 16

Wilkes suggests that Brennan explored philosophy and mysticism for “direct access to Eden” before settling on poetry as “an anticipation of the final synthesis, a symbol of the ideal”. 17 “Lilith”, he asserts, “symbolizes Eden, as it at this stage appears: the paradisal state after man has lost it, and before he has recovered it” (34). Eden is a lost paradise which might be recovered, a paradise which is at least partly accessible in poetry, where the image should be “a direct embodiment of the union between soul and nature” (52). There is a past and a future Eden, and “it is naturally the ideal unity of the

14 Judith Wright, "Christopher Brennan", in Preoccupations in Australian Poetry (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1965) 95.
15 Wilkes, New Perspectives 12.
17 Wilkes, New Perspectives 7.
future that is of greater moment” (2). The “Eden state” is the goal of evolution, an inner accomplishment of transcendence (12).

Wilkes’s assertion of the centrality of the “Eden” theme has been taken up by a number of other critics, becoming so entrenched that Vivian Smith’s attribution of the statement “Poems (1913) has not two themes or three or four” not to Wilkes but to Brennan himself is a significant slip.18 Hope refers to “the task of poetry, the recovery or restoration of Eden”.19 McAuley supports his assertion that Poems has “one underlying subject” by referring to Wilkes’s statement of the single Eden theme.20 Smith claims that a “unity is apparent within Poems 1913, and the search for Eden is the explicit central theme linking them together”.21 Kane states that “Brennan deploys the myth of Eden as the underpinning for Poems 1913”, and that Brennan’s work “is best seen overall in the terms G.A. Wilkes sets out”.22 Chisholm perceives several Edens, referring to “the loss of [Brennan’s] first Eden and its replacement by Edens of a different kind”.23 Others seek to modify the interpretation of Eden in different ways. Clark, for instance, while adopting the notion that the “search for Eden” is the “basic undertaking of Poems”, equates Eden with “an Absolute, […] a sense of organic wholeness […] which [Brennan] had lost when he abandoned his faith in 1890”.24 Dobrez recommends approaching the Eden myth “with the sophistication it deserves” as “a psychological or metaphysical reality”.25 Andrew Taylor considerably extends the psychological approach by comparing Brennan’s “Eden” with the Lacanian “infantile world of unmediated knowledge in which the I is free of all socially elaborated situations”.26

For many critics, the “quest” for Eden, often regarded as a failed quest, is the dominating impulse of Poems. Wilkes believes that the various sections of Poems focus on different aspects of the quest. Of the first section, “Towards the Source”, for instance, he says that “the love lyrics of Towards the Source eventually declare themselves as an attempt to explore love as an avenue to the lost paradise as one of the

22 Kane, “Christopher Brennan and the Allegory of Poetic Power” 79, 83.
24 Clark, Biography 173, 70.
modes of realising Eden”.27 Kane concurs, specifying that the love in question is “nuptial love”: "in this first section, what we discover is an initial desire to find fulfilment – an Edenic state – through nuptial love”.28 Clark refers to a dominating “search for Eden”:

[...] he 'went in' for verse after forming the belief that it was the means to the recovery of Eden, and probably in the very month that he acquired Mallarme's Vers et Prose. This belief did not inspire his poetry, in the sense that his whole poetic oeuvre up to 1914 must be judged primarily as an expression of the search for Eden. But the belief was the pre-condition of the poetry. [...] He did not really slacken until 1902, when the bulk of 'The Wanderer' was completed, and the search for Eden was practically abandoned.29

Of the “quest” nature of the entire work, Kane comments “Poems (1913) reads as the record of a failed quest, or rather as the failed quest itself in its imaginative form”.30 In his view, the failed quest reflects Brennan’s sense of his own inadequacy as a poet:

According to Brennan, Adam fails to have sufficient vision to repossess Lilith, just as he lacked the capacity to sustain their love in Eden initially. This mythological fall can be seen to re-enact Brennan’s own sense of a failure of poetic vision: whatever Brennan’s capacities were at the point of his imaginative incarnation as a poet, it seems that he experiences them now as a falling away, as an insufficiency, a lack. [...] At the end of ‘The Voice of Man’ soliloquy (ix), Adam (our surrogate poet) abdicates the magian search for the Lilith-principle [...] (89).

Wright, too, sees the “Lilith” sequence as the key locus for failure:

His Lilith never in truth became his bride; her ambiguities were never resolved. As he had seen from the beginning, only the most intrepid search for self-knowledge and self-control can lead through her traps and mazes and give the key to our hidden depths and to the dawn of a new Eden; and in that search he had failed.31

Macainsh considers Brennan’s enterprise in the light of Brennan’s own comment on the work of Henri de Régnier: “Imagine him returning from futile quests, having learnt that all quest of glory is vain, to give himself up to regretful musing in the home he forsook with hope”, although elsewhere he considers the term “quest” less appropriate than a sense of fatedness.32 According to John Docker, “Poems (1913) dramatises the failure of the Symbolist ‘drama’ itself. In the poem the personal does not possess the Edenic harmony even momentarily; every attempt to gain a promise of transcendence fails”.33 Green, on the other hand, is “not convinced” that the quest for Eden in human love and marriage is the dominating theme of “Towards the Source”.34

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27 Wilkes, "The Art of Brennan's Towards the Source"; 29.
28 Kane, "Christopher Brennan and the Allegory of Poetic Power" 85.
29 Clark, Biography 72-3.
30 Kane, "Christopher Brennan and the Allegory of Poetic Power" 88.
31 Judith Wright, "The Imagery of C.J. Brennan", The Maker 4 (1960): 7. This article is a “condensation by two students of Brennan's work from a lecture delivered by Judith Wright” (7).
In some of the comments about failed quests, there is a fundamental ambiguity: does Brennan deliberately set out to represent a failed or futile quest, or is the failure in the poetry itself? Many critics make some version of the latter view the basis for their less than enthusiastic reception of Brennan’s work. McAuley expresses himself strongly in this regard: “Brennan might have done better if he had been content with a less formidable poetic technology, and a more direct use of his personal experience”.35

Wright, too, queries the appropriateness of Brennan’s enterprise in the light of a perceived failure to transform his own experience into poetry:

 [...] his choice of the ‘Edenic myth’, of the figure of Lilith, and of the figure of the Wanderer, as the symbols through which he sets out his theme, was a choice not of the intractable matter of his personal experience, but of what had already been tamed and made ‘noble and fit for art’ by other artists; his poem is a synthesis of already-existing symbols, through which Brennan expounds his philosophy of man and the universe. The poem that he writes has, in a sense, already been written; the transformation has already taken place. He has inherited its riches, he has not worked for them.36

In her view, Brennan’s myth is secondhand. Clark takes a similar line:

Tangled, uncertain (and sometimes transparently immature) feelings are exploited as the raw material for an essentially Symbolist undertaking: the creation of the myth of the great search for spiritual fulfilment, for Eden. But the raw material was not easily refined to that end. Brennan attempted to convert private, personal confusions into a cosmic, mythic unity; he set out to follow certain poets, without evidently caring much whether in doing so he might have to distort or magnify the emotional experience – the raw material – out of which his poetry was made.37

The phrase “he set out to follow certain poets” suggests a fundamental lack of originality in the poetic attempt: a failure in the enterprise itself. Macainsh speaks of “a harrowing indictment of his own conception”.38

Commonly, the observation that Poems, especially the “Lilith” sequence, concentrates its quest on the inner self has raised the possibility that Brennan is taking up a philosophical position of solipsism, or is exploring, or himself subject to, the psychological condition we now call Narcissism. The comment of A.G. Stephens, who published Brennan’s poetry and critical articles in the Bulletin and the Bookfellow, that the verse was a “didactic sonorous spectacular commentary on I, Mine, Me” finds substantial agreement among a number of critics.39 Appropriately, given Brennan’s background in Kant, Fichte and the Romantics, Wright places the issue in the context of the insistence of David Hume that our perception is inescapably subjective, when she refers to Brennan’s exploration of “the chief problem of human knowledge – the solipsism of thought, when it is seen as a wholly individual and human product, the

36 Wright, "Christopher Brennan" (1965) 94.
37 Clark, Biography 90.
38 Macainsh, "Steps into the Forest": 247.
impasse posed by Hume and never answered”.40 “Underlying much of Brennan’s thought and poetry”, according to Sturm, “is a feeling that the self is the only reality in an unreal, insubstantial world; in philosophical terminology, it is solipsism”. He comments further: “Towards the Source and The Forest of Night are successive revelations of the conditions governing rejection of the external world and withdrawal into the self, a movement which reaches its climax in the solipsistic despair of the ‘Lilith’ sequence”.41 According to McAuley, “like Milton’s, Brennan’s work is ultimately solipsistic; it really contains only one living being, one powerful consciousness projecting its inner agonies into ‘myth’”.42 Clark feels that the “journey into the self”, whose climax is represented in the “Lilith” sequence, is most adequately described by the term “Narcissism”: “perhaps ‘Lilith’ most nearly approaches coherence if we read it as both an expression of the Narcissistic temperament, and an account of Narcissistic experience”.43 Docker and Kane support Sturm’s assertion of solipsism.44

Critics alleging solipsism or Narcissism tend to find in the poetry a lack of interest in the outside world, whether human or natural. Taylor, for example, comments that “there is little interest in Nature displayed in Brennan’s poetry”. He continues: “Brennan’s sense of the spiritual was ultimately transcendent, to be located – if at all – not within this world nor, even, beyond it, but only in absence. Not surprisingly, the physical world rarely appears in his poetry. Where it does […] it is fraught with a Baudelairean repugnance culminating in a wish for it to be destroyed”.45 According to Sturm, there is “a sense of the external world as something unstable, even unreal, and of the self as the only reality in such a world”.46 Macainsh refers to “a negation of the social reality in which [the poet] lives”.47

If the quest for Eden is seen as the primary, indeed only, theme of Poems, a sense of “failure” naturally follows, since Eden is presented in an equivocal fashion in the work: and in fact there are a number of Edens, past and future, as Chisholm points out (although we may not agree with his identification of them). It is perhaps unfortunate for the field of Brennan criticism that the assertion of the single theme (both that there is only one, and that it is the quest for Eden) has been adopted so widely, and that Wilkes’s intimations of the importance of an inner experience of the transcendent,
and of the role of poetry in anticipating the synthesis of human beings and nature, have not been considered independently of the Eden theme.

This thesis proposes that the notion of a higher or true self, in which, during the course of the long nineteenth century (roughly from the 1770s to the early 1900s), many found a possible substitute for the God of traditional Christianity, is more central to *Poems* than the concept of Eden. This notion of an inner, rather than external, Absolute belongs to an established tradition. As Dobrez points out, "Brennan is not a solitary phenomenon, at least when viewed in an other than Australian context. On the contrary he is, and very consciously, part of a complex tradition of thought".48 This tradition includes aspects of esoteric and mystical thought. The idea that the Absolute may be encountered within is also an important focus of German Romantic writers like Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772-1801). A number of pieces in *Poems* deal directly with the inner Absolute or true self, while others establish the necessity for some inner replacement for the divinities of superseded religions.

Clearly, it is this focus which has given rise to critics' perceptions of a philosophical position of solipsism or a psychological state of Narcissism in Brennan's poetry, perceptions which may be difficult to dislodge. This thesis shows, however, that, according to the tradition in which Brennan places his work, the focus is not on the self but on something believed to be beyond the self. It argues that, in the century preceding Brennan's primary productive years (the 1890s and early 1900s), explorations of a possible "religion of humanity" by thinkers like Pierre Leroux and Auguste Comte, the development of a psychology of the Unconscious by Eduard von Hartmann, and explorations of an occultist or esoteric nature such as the "esoteric Christianity" of Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, had an important common focus: the notion of an inner Absolute or higher self. Hartmann's Unconscious was a divine force within the human being. Kingsford and Maitland emphasised the release of an inner, higher self. Carl Du Prel's *Philosophy of Mysticism* postulated a "transcendental subject" accessed through altered states of consciousness. The notion that one may be able to access a more authentic self persists into our own time, although without the suggestion (at least overtly) that such a self could be a substitute for God.

Further, in the tradition in which Brennan's thinking should be considered, the turn within was to be succeeded by a turn to the outer world. This is a particular emphasis of thinkers of the early Romantic period in Germany, such as Novalis and Friedrich Schleiermacher. In Brennan's view, as attested by his prose writings and his

48 Dobrez, "Christopher Brennan" 23.
annotations to various literary texts, the higher self is constituted by the union of the human mind and Nature, as the split between subject and object is restored to unity. In keeping with the pre-Romantic and Romantic emphasis that the work of art is the locus in which the Absolute can be given expression, Brennan’s own livre composé unites mind and nature by means of the correlation it establishes between natural cycles and human experience. Assertions that the natural world is of no importance in Brennan’s work founder at this point.

Brennan’s central symbol of the possibility that a higher self might be constituted by the imaginative union of the human mind with external nature, of subject and object, is Lilith. The ambiguity of Lilith derives from the ambiguous function in the sequence of nature itself, which paradoxically both limits the human imagination to the merely material, and awakens human awareness of the higher self. The “Lilith” sequence shows both these functions in action. The original union of Lilith and Adam represents a single, transcendent, androgynous self, now lost, which could be recovered if human beings would “find her fair”, that is, address the split between subject and object by uniting their mind with nature. Since, according to Idealist and Romantic thought, the imaginative work of art alone can give expression to the transcendent, the “Lilith” sequence establishes the terms of reference for Brennan’s own artistic enterprise. It theorises its own production.

In order to make the argument that Brennan’s work may be seen in the light of Mallarmé’s proposal, it is essential to consider the work as a livre composé. As Wilkes argues, “Poems (1913) is not a simple assembly of verses, to be individually interpreted and appraised: it is a unitary structure, an organism complete in itself – a poem. For the proper understanding of the book, no consideration can be of greater moment”. McAuley, Dobrez and Smith all agree, while Clark prefers to consider the poems as individual pieces. Consideration of the work as a unity gives the themes and imagery of each piece a wider context. Writing the work in this way allows Brennan to employ the Symbolist technique of suggestion or allusion, evoking images or symbols established earlier in the work with only a few words. The rose, the dominant symbol of the equivalence of human passion with natural cycles, is established and developed using this technique.

Use of the word “esotericism” in this thesis is consistent with the field defined by Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff. Hanegraaff describes it in the following way:

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49 Wilkes, New Perspectives 12.
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.  

Of these currents, Brennan was familiar with Alchemy, Rosicrucianism, Kabbalah (although not necessarily the Christian Kabbalah established at the Renaissance most definitively by Pico della Mirandola), and theosophical currents, especially the doctrines of Boehme. Ancient sources of these currents, including Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, in both of which Brennan was interested, 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. Evidence from the Symbolism lectures indicates that Brennan thought Rosicrucianism was of medieval, rather than Renaissance, provenance, indicating his acceptance of Rosicrucianism's own myths of origin. Among nineteenth-century expressions of esotericism, Brennan knew of the "esoteric Christianity" of Maitland and Kingsford and various publications by the Theosophist G.R.S. Mead; he also owned a number of works by authors of the Neorosicrucian movement in late nineteenth-century France including "Sar" 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, where Yeats interprets Blake's poetry in the light of the doctrines of Boehme and Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772); and his copies of Yeats's Rosa Alchemica triptych. There is no evidence of Brennan's familiarity with the novels of Edward Bulwer Lytton, although these were so widely disseminated that it is unlikely he would not have known them at all. 

The thesis does not argue that Brennan's thinking fulfils the four essential criteria for "esotericism" which Faivre proposes in his Access to Western Esotericism: correspondences; living nature; imagination and mediations; and experience of transmutation; nor his two non-essential criteria, the praxis of the concordance and transmission. Rather, it shows that he drew on sources which are validly included

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51 See Prose 52.  
within the field of esotericism. Undoubtedly, the notion of correspondences is the most important of Faivre’s criteria to 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 (10).

As Faivre comments, however, “neither correspondences nor discordism necessarily mean ‘esotericism’” (11). Although Brennan cannot himself be classified as an esotericist, this thesis demonstrates that an approach combining insights from esotericism with those of Symbolism and Romanticism allows Brennan’s work, both at the level of individual poems and considered as an entirety, to be interpreted far more adequately. In addition, his work throws light on the interface between esotericism, Romanticism and Symbolism.

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

[...] the 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. 53

Brennan’s lecture “Vision, Imagination and Reality” demonstrates his fascination with visionary experiences, among which he includes those of Plato and the Neoplatonists, Pascal, Jan van Ruysbroeck, Maitland, Kingsford, Swedenborg and Yeats, as well as those described in the publications of the Society for Psychical Research. 54 However, unlike the presentation of “mysticism” in Symons’ work, Brennan’s study of the ideas of “the mystics” in relation to Symbolism employs concepts, and draws on writings, which are now included within the scholarly field of “esotericism”.

As Anna Balakian points out, the term “Symbolism”, with a large “S”, is used to refer to the historical period between 1885 and 1895, “during which [Symbolism] became a widely espoused literary movement and as a cénacle produced manifestoes, sponsored literary periodicals [...] , and attracted to Paris poets and literary personalities from all parts of the Western world”. With a small “s”, it refers to the poetic output of

54 Prose 22-30.
Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine and Mallarmé. Brennan begins his first Symbolism lecture with an amusing gesture towards his own definition of Symbolism:

The word “symbolism”, with which the title of these lectures begins, does not, I fear, correspond, in the majority of minds, to any definite, consistent, identifiable conception. [...] This confusion arises, perhaps, from the number of schools which call themselves, or are called by hasty critics, symbolist; from the number of different writers, with no apparent common character, on whom the title has been bestowed. [...] Now if you ask the generality of people what they understand when they speak of any one of these schools, you will find that, in the case of the French school, they think of a certain theory as to the colours of the vowels; the Irish school stands for a belief in fairies; the local practitioners for a discreet, but none the less repulsive, immorality. [...] you need not wonder that symbolism is regarded as something vague, eccentric, and negligible, were it not so decidedly unhealthy.

Brennan goes on to argue, over the course of the six lectures, that Symbolism is a continuation of the Romantic movement, or rather, that the Romantic movement was, with regard to literature, the beginning of Symbolism (131). His last 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, which “has been discharged from the old slavery to the constitutional and respectable aspects of life” to become “our medium of communication with the transcendent, a transcendent which, on the other hand, has been placed [...] in ourselves” (157). He 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” (171-2). These extracts from the Symbolism lectures give a good indication of what Brennan himself understood by the term “Symbolism”: a kind of poetry which gives expression to the transcendent self by using natural objects as symbols, and which therefore has a religious dimension.

With regard to Romanticism, the present thesis concentrates on the early German expression of the movement, associated with the Schlegel brothers and the publication of the Athenaeum journal (1798-1800). Brennan’s article “German Romanticism: A Progressive Definition” (published in 1920, but originally written as a lecture in 1909 or 1910) shows us which aspects of the movement appeared most significant to him. Some similar emphases to his description of Symbolism are apparent. “German Romanticism aims at a synthesis”, he says, “and might be defined (in a loose and popular way) as an endeavour to unite poetry and life, to find a common

56 Prose 48-9.
law for both”. In his view, it is “definable as a synthesis of opposites” deriving from “two antagonistic schools, viz., Rationalism and Sturm und Drang”. In Brennan’s view, the “early Romantic School starts from the theory of reason developed by Kant, which is an overcoming of rationalism on its own ground” (380). For him, the two most important contributors to the school were Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) and Novalis, “the brain and the spirit”, as he calls them (383). He discriminates between them on the grounds that, for Schlegel, the “ideal synthesis of perfection” was regarded as unattainable, this attitude being “the ground of romantic irony” which he describes as “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” (383-4). Novalis’ doctrine of “magical idealism” puts him at the other extreme, in Brennan’s view (386). Novalis is given the credit for introducing “the (real) mystical element into Romanticism”, but at the same time of subjecting that mysticism to “hard and continuous reflexion” (390-1). Unlike Schlegel, Novalis “conceives the ideal synthesis as attainable” through art (392). To Brennan’s definitions and discussion, we can usefully add the emphasis of Ernst Behler that, for the Schlegel brothers, “Romantic” literature was modern literature, as opposed to the literature of the classical period. “Schlegel considers it splendid”, according to Behler, “that the character of ancient poetry has been called ‘classical’ and the modern ‘romantic’, because this implies that what had earlier been considered the entire sphere of art is really only half of it, and can therefore now be better comprehended”. Behler points out that the early German Romantics move towards a position where “the romantic […] loses its chronological, historical character of designation and enters an anthropological, transcendental, absolute realm and becomes synonymous with the poetic” (28). Brennan’s inclination towards such a position is apparent from his own descriptions.

The interpretation of Brennan’s Poems offered in this thesis is, I hope, original in several ways. Wright does no more than suggest the possibility that Brennan’s work might have been inspired by Mallarmé’s discussion of the “assimilation of our inmost passion to the tetralogy of the year”. This thesis considers this proposition in detail, in the light of Brennan’s familiarity with Mallarmé’s œuvre, and particularly in the light of the reception of Mallarmé implied by Brennan’s elegy on his death, “Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed”. To my knowledge, oblique references to important aspects of

57 Prose 379.
Mallarmé’s thought in this poem have not been considered in detail before. The discussion offered here of the importance for Brennan of *Les Dieux antiques* (Mallarmé’s translation and adaptation of George Cox’s *A Manual of Mythology in the Form of Question and Answer*), in establishing the possibility of reading nature as myth or as having a correspondence with human experience, is also original. As far as I am aware, Brennan’s annotations to this work have been discussed in any detail only by Seznec, who does not relate them to Brennan’s poetry. Another aspect of the originality of the thesis is the detailed examination of Brennan’s concept of “moods” and its indebtedness to Yeats, to German Romantic thinking, and to Mallarmé’s equation of nature, myth and human experience. The examination of the way German Romantic writers like F. Schlegel and Novalis use the term “Gemüth” is an extension of Brennan’s own observations, made in the article on German Romanticism referred to above.

The discussion of the historical development of the idea of a higher self, while indebted to discussion of the “religion of humanity” in D.G. Charlton’s *Secular Religions in France 1815-1870* and in *Joachim of Fiore and the Myth of the Eternal Evangel in the Nineteenth Century* by Marjorie Reeves and Warwick Gould, as well as Bertrand Marchal’s consideration of the inner divinity in *La Religion de Mallarmé*, incorporates other figures of importance to Brennan, especially Maitland and Kingsford.

The approach combining insights from esotericism, Symbolism and Romanticism is especially fruitful in the exegesis of the “Lilith” sequence, yielding important insights into the symbolic associations of Lilith with the Sophia of Boehme and placing the inner quest in the context of the mystical rebirth of the divinity within the soul, demonstrating that charges of solipsism or Narcissism, while understandable, are inappropriate. This in turn illuminates the importance in the work as a whole of the union of mind and nature in constituting the higher self.

The reading of the “Liminal” offered in this thesis is also new. Although this poem has been examined in detail by Chisholm and McAuley, and although the latter, and Wilkes, both point out the relevance to the beginning of this poem of Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade*, no other critic, to my knowledge, has argued that the poem deals not with the union of the poet and his bride but with the momentary achievement of the higher self by the process of “raising to a higher power” described by German Romantic writers like Novalis and F. Schlegel, and the conversion of human experience into a lasting form in art. The reading of the “Wisdom” sequence offered here disputes Wilkes’s sense of “a dominant impression of sterility” in the work, arguing instead that
the poems present the potential for ancient esoteric traditions to become relevant again in the future. The discussion in this thesis of individual pieces in *Poems* points out many allusions which have not been recognised before, and which contribute substantially to our understanding of the work.

Because of its focus on German Romanticism, this thesis does not examine the influences of English Romanticism on Brennan. It omits Coleridge’s theory of imagination and Shelley’s symbolism, for example, entirely. Yeats is included, however, because he was an important source of esoteric understandings for Brennan, and Blake appears at second-hand, as it were, via Yeats’ commentary on his work in the first volume of the Ellis and Yeats edition. Other authors with a significant influence on Brennan who are not discussed include Milton, Emerson, Poe, Tennyson and Swinburne. There is no discussion of Oscar Wilde. Keats, George Meredith and Coventry Patmore are omitted from the general discussion of influences, but their works are used where relevant to interpret particular poems. There is no discussion of Pantheism. The examination of nineteenth-century studies of mythology does not include Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*. For reasons of space, it has proved impossible to include discussion of Brennan’s important sequence “The Wanderer”.

In the opinion of Brennan’s biographer, there is very good reason for assuming that Brennan read any books in his areas of interest which the Public Library of NSW held during the years he was working there.\(^{59}\) I have made use of the library catalogues for the relevant years, therefore, while being aware that the evidence for Brennan’s having read the books in question is not incontrovertible.

Translations of German passages are offered in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own. Passages in French are not translated, as French is now a more widely-known language than German. Where German authors are quoted in the text in English rather than German, this indicates that the relevant work has been read in translation.

As Brennan’s lectures on Symbolism were not given until 1904, after most of the pieces in *Poems* had been written, material included in them which supports the interpretation of poems written before 1904 is placed in the footnotes rather than the text.

\(^{59}\) Personal communication by Axel Clark.
Chapter One: The higher self and Brennan’s Poems

Introduction

In 1879, nine years after the birth of Christopher Brennan, Marcus Clarke wrote in the Victorian Review:

[...] we 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 has been a matter of personal observation for Clarke. 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” (676), Clarke hopes for a new form of religious expression, with a different object of veneration, which 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 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” (682-3).

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 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. Although the term “Agnosticism”, invented by Huxley in

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) 672-3.
1869 to contrast his uncertainty with the certainty or “gnosis” (“knowledge”) of others, was often taken as a synonym for atheism or scepticism, the main agnostics (Spencer, Huxley, Stephen and Tyndall) did not feel these terms accurately represented their position, which was one of genuine “un-knowing”. Brennan, however, adopted Agnosticism as “a positive intellectual position, an equivalent of his lost faith”, according to Clark. 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 he was “already beginning to elaborate a special epistemology of the Unknowable, which was the Absolute.”

Spencer's survey of “Ultimate Religious Ideas” in First Principles avoids the wholesale dismissal of all religious positions, even though he has demonstrated to his own satisfaction “that Atheism, Pantheism, and Theism, when rigorously analysed, severally prove to be wholly unthinkable”. Beneath the dogmas of all religions, in Spencer's opinion, lies the “mystery calling for interpretation” of the world itself (33). “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” (34). 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 inscrutable” (34). 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 the desire to develop “a special epistemology of the Unknowable” understandable, although apparently an oxymoron (as no doubt Brennan himself, looking back in 1930, was aware). Brennan's MA thesis, “The Metaphysic of Nescience” (1891), represents a further development of this position, as the title suggests. The word “nescience”, a synonym for Agnosticism, is one used by

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3 Clark, Biography 33.
4 C.J. Brennan, Christopher Brennan, ed. Terry Sturm, Portable Australian Authors (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984), hereafter referred to as “Sturm”, 177.
Spencer himself. The point of departure of Brennan’s thesis is the Kantian deduction that the noumenon is not accessible to the faculty of reason, in response to which the historical movement of Romanticism attempted to discover other human faculties which are not limited in this way, faculties of vision, imagination and intuition. The conclusion of Brennan’s thesis states:

[...] it may not be altogether out of place to say, that to me there appears to be no fundamental incoherence between knowledge and existence, and that the last altar of religion is that on which Paul found engraven, ἀγνωστὸν θέον – to the unknown and unknowable God.

In reading undertaken during the 1890s, Brennan explored possible alternative versions of the “unknown and unknowable God”.

This involved an investigation of Gnosticism. The term “gnosticism” refers to a group of related religious expressions from the early centuries AD with a strongly dualist emphasis, which came to be rejected as heretical by early Church writers such as Hippolytus, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. With its emphasis on “gnosis”, “knowing”, Gnosticism could be thought of as antithetical to Agnosticism. However, Gnosticism appealed to Brennan because it substituted for a personal (or knowable) God the notion that human beings themselves are of divine origin. On December 14th, 1900, Brennan 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.

6 For example, “Religion has, from the first, struggled to unite more or less science with its nescience; Science has, from the first, kept hold of more or less nescience as though it were a part of science” (79). For more on nescience and Agnosticism, see Livingston, “British Agnosticism” 233.

7 The influence of Kant on the thought of the German Romantics will be discussed in the next chapter. See page 59.


9 Letter to Delmer, 001, Brennan Papers, Fisher Library, Sydney. 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. The letter continues: “By this time, no doubt, you look back in satisfaction on the series of ‘glorious victories’ in Africa: I remain, like Laforgue, ‘profondément convaincu des phénomènes Néant, Nuit, et Mort’. For more on Brennan’s opposition to the British role in the Boer War, see Clark, Biography 151-2. Brennan found the Gnostic identification of the God of the Old Testament with the ineffectual or downright evil Demiurge very much to his taste, and used the idea in The Burden of Tyre [1903], the group of poems written in response to the Boer War. Lines such as “A lord of war, our God on high / sits thron’d” (stanza 3) of “They said, For us the deeps were stirr’d”) and “He views our wide-flung battle-lines /– for He must pass, if we forget!” (stanza 6) deliberately invoke, in order to critique, Kipling’s “Recessional” (1897). For more on the Gnostic representation of the Demiurge, see I.P. Couliano, The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism, trans. H.S. Wiesner and I.P. Couliano (n.p.: HarperSanFrancisco–HarperCollins, 1992) 93-137.
In Gnostic and mystical ways of thinking about divinity, to be discussed in more detail later in the thesis, Brennan found an alternative to the idea of a personal God. His rejection of a knowable God in favour of an “unknown and unknowable” one led him to explore attempts to find a divinity within human beings themselves in studies of the human Unconscious, and in contemporary examinations of ancient traditions which taught that the self might be regenerated as a divinity.

This chapter will argue that the search for alternative objects of belief in a climate of scepticism about Christianity in the later nineteenth century issued in the notion of a divinity to which one had access through the self, a notion that is of central importance in Brennan’s poetry. Studies of the human Unconscious such as those of Hartmann, and studies of ancient traditions such as those undertaken by Maitland and Kingsford, start from entirely different premises, but converge in the notion of a higher, divine self. Brennan explored both the gap left by the passing of religions, and the possibility that a higher self could take their place as an object of religious veneration, in a number of important pieces in Poems, his most significant poetic text.

The first section of this chapter considers the push for a “religion of humanity” by Leroux and Comte as a response to the conflict between scepticism and faith experienced in the nineteenth century. It discusses the impact of the “Higher Criticism” of David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) on sceptical responses to Christian supernaturalism, and the turn of one of Strauss’s translators, Ernest Renan (1823-1892), towards imaginative and mythological forms of insight. It considers those developments of the idea of a “religion of humanity” that are particularly relevant to Brennan’s concerns in his poetry: Hartmann’s theory of the Unconscious as a substitute for God, the search of Frederick Myers and the Society for Psychical Research for evidence of the survival of human personality after death, the “esoteric Christianity” of Maitland and Kingsford, and the examination of mysticism as a faculty for access to a “transcendental subject” and a “transcendental world” in the theories of Du Prel.

The second section of the chapter discusses Brennan’s poetic treatment of superseded religions and the effect of their passing on communities with a shared faith. The ‘Wisdom’ sequence is placed among these poems. The third section of the chapter argues that this sequence suggests through its dominant imagery of solidified fire that esoteric currents preserve ancient insights whose relevance is not outworn, although other forms of religion may have disappeared permanently. The fourth section of the chapter examines poems which intimate that an inner, higher self may become a focus
of religious longings in the light of contemporary notions of the Unconscious as an alternative to God.

1. Looking for a human divinity: some solutions to the crisis of faith in the long nineteenth century

In response to the conflicting pressures of scepticism and the desire for faith, there was 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 person to use the term “religion of humanity”, in 1838. For a brief period of time, Leroux was part of the community of the Saint-Simonians, sharing their belief that religion was a necessary foundation for society. 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”. Jesus became the symbol “de l’Homme-Dieu, du Dieu-Homme”, du Dieu-Humanité”. For Leroux, “poets and mystics were to become the revealers of the new religion” (51). 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.

The Positivism of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) included a religious ideal as well as the “positive” philosophy and political theory. His “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

10 Such a religion was to bring about the social cohesion formerly achieved by the Church. Some regarded the Medieval Church nostalgically because it was believed to have had such a function; Novalis expresses this view as early as 1800 in Christianheit oder Europa, which Brennan knew (see Prose 126). Social utopian Saint-Simon, while not wishing to return to the Middle Ages, looked to a future social structure inspired by Medieval faith and organisation (Alice Chandler, A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1970) 132-3). Dissidents and heretics of former eras were championed as revolutionaries who challenged the religious forms of their own day and preserved the insights of earlier traditions (Marjorie Reeves and Warwick Gould, Joachim of Fiore and the Myth of the Eternal Evangel in the Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 54). Brennan shows the influence of this thinking when, condemning the early church for dismissing Gnosticism as heresy, he says “the spirit of Urizen triumphed and they were cast out as heretics, with many accusations of evil thinking and evil living” (Prose 160-1).


12 See Reeves and Gould, Joachim of Fiore 51 and Charlton, Secular Religions in France 83-4.

13 Charlton, Secular Religions in France 84-5.

14 Quoted in Reeves and Gould, Joachim of Fiore 91.

15 See also p. 84 of this work.

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. 17

In fact, “for a time the Church of Humanity actually flourished, with temples chiefly in France and England”. 18 The “religion of humanity” had its own calendar of festivals, as Charlton indicates:

[Comte] established a cult of ‘sociolatry’, 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. 19

In Sydney, a freethought hall devoted “to teaching the highest of all religions – the Religion of Humanity” was built in 1890. 20 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 helped prepare the ground for the notion of the higher self.

Translations by Renan and George Eliot ensured a wide reception for 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, 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”. 21 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. 22

Renan’s scepticism is, however, modified by Romantic enthusiasm. His Poésie des races celtiques (1859), on which Matthew Arnold drew for “The Study of Celtic Literature” (1863), promotes Celtic literature as an important source of inspiration for Romantic writing, the Celts themselves being seen as exemplary in their employment of the faculty of imagination. 23 Renan describes the “ideal and

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17 Charlton, Secular Religions in France 89.
18 Reeves and Gould, Joachim of Fiore 50.
19 Charlton, Secular Religions in France 88-9.
22 Charlton, Secular Religions in France 18.
23 Later, Yeats draws on the studies of Renan and Arnold for his own “Celtic Element in Literature”, “consciously working in Renan’s tradition which assigned to the Celts this especial spiritual potential” (Reeves and Gould, Joachim of Fiore 216). Brennan, following Yeats in his turn, champions the
representative character” of Arthurian legend, which 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”. 24 At the end of this 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 (59).

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 authenticity, superior to that claimed by theology.

Theories of the Unconscious such as those of Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906) developed in a climate of widespread interest in various possible conceptions of a universal “religion of humanity”. Hartmann’s Philosophy of the Unconscious was published in 1869, translated into French in 1877 and English in 1893. According to Macainsh, Brennan “would certainly have known [...] of Edward Hartmann’s widely

visionary powers of the Celts in his large Musicopoematographoscope, where he implies that his Irish ancestors had privileged knowledge of the principle of correspondences:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{THIS} & \quad \text{but that were little} \\
\text{discrown’d} & \quad \text{degenerate} \\
\text{deg} & \quad \text{unabash’d} \\
\text{of them that ruled of old my Danaan isle} & \quad \text{descendant} \\
\text{by them} & \quad \text{Thule of mist} \\
\text{honour’d} & \quad & \text{& dreams} \\
\text{the singer} & \quad \\
\text{Ollamh} & \quad \\
\text{among the greybeards set the law} & \quad \text{in silence’ lucid gaze} \\
\text{holding} & \quad \text{the viewless code} \\
& \quad \text{clear-written or conceal’d} \\
& \quad \text{upon the sunset-smoke} \\
& \quad \text{within the nightly deeps.}
\end{align*}
\]

(C.J. Brennan, Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope and Pocket Musicopoematographoscope, ed. Axel Clark (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1981) [14]). Mallarmé’s Un Coup de dés, set out on the page in a similar way, was the inspiration for this piece. For more on the relationship between the two pieces, see Clark’s introduction to the Musicopoematographoscopes and Boisivon, "Musicopoematographoscope".

Scepticism towards Christian revelation is not necessarily extended by Renan, Yeats and Brennan himself to other traditions, which are championed for having authentic visionary access to a somewhat differently conceived, but still supernatural, world.

acclaimed *Philosophie des Unbewussten* (philosophy of the unconscious). In an 1895 article in the *Revue Blanche*, a volume with which Brennan was familiar, Jules Laforgue relates Hartmann’s work to trends away from personal conceptions of God (like that represented by Agnosticism):

> 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 infaillible – de par son inconscience –, le seul vraiment et sereinement infini, le seul que l’homme n’ait pas créé à son image.

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 the scepticism which feels obliged to reject traditional forms of religious expression. He presents his philosophy of the Unconscious as a form of Monism.

Hartmann relates it to religious and philosophical systems of the past, including Mysticism and Pantheism, as well as to the conceptions of Kant, Fichte and Schopenhauer. His system 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[...]? 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:


27 It is not clear why Hartmann’s Unconscious should be immune from the possibility of being itself a creation of the human mind.

28 According to Henri F. Ellenberger, the Romantic psychologist Carus “was the source of Von Hartmann and of the later philosophers of the unconscious” (*The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Allen Lane–The Penguin Press, 1970) 208). For a fuller discussion of conceptions of the self in Kant and Fichte, see page 59 below, and for discussion of early German Romantic notions of the Unconscious, see page 81 below.

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 (226).

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” (240). 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 (243).

Hartmann’s debt to German Romantic psychology is apparent here. As Brennan knew, Novalis describes the dissolution of the self in both the Hymnen an die Nacht and Heinrich von Ofterdingen. 30

Although Neoplatonism is not among the systems with which Hartmann compares his Monism in his chapter on “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. Bertrand Marchal points to the common ground with 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”. 31 Neoplatonism, founded by Plotinus in the third century AD, made an important contribution to mystical tradition. 32 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”, depends on a similar explanation of the interrelatedness of everything that exists to that of Neoplatonism. In a chapter entitled “The Unconscious and the God of Theism”, Hartmann attempts to demonstrate the superiority of his Unconscious to any conception of God as a conscious being. Although it must be designated by the negative prefix “Un-”, the

30 In his article on German Romanticism, Brennan quotes passages from both works. The first is “Die Sternwelt wird zerfließen /Zum goldenen Lebenswein, /Wir werden sie genießen, /Und lichte Sterne sein” (Novalis, Schriften, Paul Kluckhorn and Richard Samuel ed., 5 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960-88) 1:153: “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” (1:362: “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 Prose 385.
32 Brennan refers to Plotinus’ experiences of mystical “ecstasy” in his lecture on “Vision, Imagination and Reality” (1901) (Prose 22).
Unconscious "infinitely transcends the halting, stilted gait of the discursive reflection of consciousness". It is free from the limits of consciousness and might be more accurately designated as the "super-conscious" (247). In this, it resembles the "unknowable" God of Spencer. 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 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 (253).

It is apparent that Hartmann’s Unconscious was seen as fulfilling a religious function, acting as an inner, immanent divinity superior to "an external transcendent Creator". This conception of the Unconscious is pertinent to the notion of a higher self. Hartmann’s Unconscious 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.

Frederick Myers (1843-1901), in England, “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". 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. 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 psychic states which had attracted much interest in the wake of the phenomena of Mesmerism.

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


35 Myers’ findings were published posthumously in 1903 in Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death.
and later Spiritualism. In 1882 these researches culminated in the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research, with which William James, Henri Bergson and Carl Jung later cooperated. The group looked to abnormal states of consciousness, including mediumistic trance, for evidence of the existence of a non-material aspect of human existence which might continue after death. In the Symbolism lectures, Brennan quotes Myers and also refers to the work of the S.P.R. Phantasms of the Living, a work by Myers, Gurney and Frank Podmore, was in the Public Library of NSW by 1895.

The “esoteric Christianity” of Anna Kingsford (1846-1888)) and Edward Maitland (1824-1897) also emphasised that an inner, higher self may be released by a process of regeneration. Maitland 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, and forming a long-lasting friendship with Margaret Woolley, widow of Sydney University’s first Principal and Classics Professor.

36 See page 81 below for a discussion of Mesmerism. The widespread popularity of the Spiritualist movement in Australia is apparent in the number of the listings under “Spiritualism” in the Subject-Index to the Catalogues of the Public Library of NSW for 1869-95. Works listed include titles by Emma Hardinge Britten and the “leading proponent of spiritualism in France”, Allen Kardec (Christopher McIntosh, Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival (London: Rider, 1975) 59). Spiritualism was quite a powerful force in Victoria, as Al Gabay points out: “The disaffected in Victoria generally turned either to the Unitarian church, to the Secularists, those ‘brave witnesses to unbelief’, or to the largest heterodox religious organisation in the colonies, the Victorian Association of Progressive Spiritualists” (The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 8). Dr John le Gay Brereton, the father of Brennan’s close friend of the same name, was a Swedenborgian, as was Walter Richardson, father of the novelist Henry Handel. Alfred Deakin, second Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia, had a profound and sustained interest in Swedenborg. Swedenborgian doctrine, as well as the teachings and practice of Mesmerism or “animal magnetism”, provided Spiritualism with a theory of the relationship between this world and the heavenly realm which could support the idea of contacting those who had “passed over”. For more on Swedenborgianism in Australia, see Gabay, The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin 109-17 and I. A. Robinson, A History of The New Church in Australia (East Hawthorn: Excelsior, n.d.), passim.

37 Turner, Between Science and Religion 55.

38 Shadworth Hodgson, 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. In The Metaphysic of Experience, he says: “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” (395). This is evidently an attempt to give a physical explanation for what was traditionally regarded as an event occurring in the non-material realm of the soul or spirit. Brennan cross-referenced this work in his annotations to page 221 of G.R.S. Mead, Fragments of a Faith Forgotten (London: Theosophical Publ. Soc., 1900).

39 Prose 79, 80.

40 Brennan refers to Podmore in the lecture on “Vision, Imagination and Reality” (Prose 25).

41 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, 28
was in Free Thought, anti-vivisectionism, women's rights and vegetarianism. The partnership of Kingsford and Maitland began in 1873. They were associated with the Theosophical Society in London for a time, and subsequently with "The Hermetic Society".

The books of Maitland and Kingsford argue a Traditionalist position. According to Faivre, they declare that an ancient wisdom or tradition is the hidden meaning of Christianity and the Mystery Religions, as well as of other esoteric currents including Hermeticism, Kabbalah, Alchemy and Gnosticism, and has found continuous expression ever since. The tradition of "Hermeticism" or "Hermetism" is named after the "thrice-great Hermes", a figure syncretised from the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth, to whom the authorship of the Hermetic corpus is attributed. With Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, Hermeticism is one of the important ancient sources of esoteric currents. In their introduction to the second volume of Hermetic texts published in the Bath Occult Reprint Series, The Virgin of the World (Redway, 1885), Kingsford and Maitland represent the Hermetic texts as being of great weight and antiquity, embodying authentic Egyptian religious insights, even though fragmentary, within the text from the Hellenic period. The Egyptian religion itself is seen, with the Indian, as the origin of Greek philosophy and hence Western culture, and the Hermetic

1979) 27. Margaret Woolley was one of the early members of the Theosophical Society (Roe, Beyond Belief 14) and subsequently formed a friendship with Anna Kingsford as well.

Maitland chaperoned Kingsford to Paris from 1874-80 while she studied medicine there, having been refused permission to study in England (Green, "Edward Maitland" 29). They discovered the Theosophical Society and Isis Unveiled before leaving Paris, and became associated with the Society on their return to London. Kingsford became president of the Theosophical Society in 1883, but clashes with influential members, particularly over Kingsford's preference for Western esotericism and the Catholic Church over the Eastern bias of Theosophy, led to her being offered a separate "Hermetic Lodge" which soon became "The Hermetic Society" (Joscelyn Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, SUNY Ser. in Western Esoteric Traditions (Albany: State U of New York Press, 1994) 339, 344).

For more on Traditionalism, see Antoine Faivre, "Histoire de la notion moderne de Tradition dans ses rapports avec les courants ésotériques (XVe-XXe siècles)", in Symboles et Mythes dans les mouvements initiatiques et ésotériques (XVIIe-Xxe siècles) : Filiations et emprunts, Special Issue of ARIES (1999): 7-48 and Frank Paul Bowman, "Illuminism, Utopia, Mythology", in The French Romantics, ed. D.G. Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 78-80. A position of Traditionalism is also espoused by Godfrey Higgins in the two volumes of Anacalypsis (1833 and 1836), which were in the Public Library of NSW while Brennan was employed there. Godwin kindly offers a digest of Anacalypsis, as he is of the opinion that "few readers will want to find out [the secrets] by reading the 1500 pages" of the work (81). According to this digest, Higgins suggests that an ancient religious tradition, that of the Golden Age, has survived in various forms to the present, having as its primary doctrines "the immortality of the soul, metempsychosis, the final reabsorption of all things in the One, and the periodic renewal of worlds" (82).


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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 reverses the effects of the Fall into material existence. Maitland proposes a reinterpretation of the Fall and salvation in terms of access to 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.

The higher self is a latent potential which needs to be recognised as one’s “soul”, to be reclaimed as a lost heritage (“that from which we have sprung”). Maitland’s first work, The Keys of the Creeds, 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. Evidence from Brennan’s lecture “Vision, Imagination and Reality” (1901) indicates his familiarity with, and enthusiasm for, The Keys of the Creeds, The Soul and How It Found Me, The Perfect Way, England and Islam and the Life of Anna Kingsford. The texts of Kingsford and Maitland must be regarded, then, as an important source, at least initially, for Brennan’s understanding of Hermeticism and its relation to the mythological systems of Egypt and Greece.

Carl Du Prel’s The Philosophy of Mysticism (1884), which was held by the Public Library of NSW by 1895, listed under “mysticism” in the catalogue, describes “somnambulism” as the “fundamental form of all mysticism”. Somnambulism was thought of as “a state in which the inner sense made contact with the spiritual world, freeing the inner man to wander through space and time while his body remained fixed in a trance”.

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48 Maitland’s form of expression may be compared to that of William James in The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), which also employs language of salvation in speaking of a higher part of the self: “man identifies his real being with the germinal higher part of himself. [...] He becomes conscious that this higher part is conterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck” William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Fontana – Collins, 1962) 484). Brennan quotes James enthusiastically in the Symbolism lectures (Prose 79-80).
49 Prose 24-5.
50 Prose 24-5.
Redway in 1889 and dedicated “To the honoured memory of Mrs. Anna Kingsford, M.D., at whose instance it was undertaken”. According to the Theosophical Magazine *Lucifer*, Du Prel (1839-1899) was the “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”.53 His book postulates a “transcendental subject” which is accessed during the abnormal psychical state of mysticism, dream being “the portal to the dark region where we are to find the metaphysical root of man”, and a movable “threshold of sensibility” which separates normal consciousness from the workings of the “transcendental 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 (139). Du Prel credits Mesmer with the first discovery of the mobile “threshold of sensibility” which explains the mechanism of mystical vision:

[...]

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 (134). It is clear that Du Prel, like Myers, is looking for evidence of human immortality and a mechanism which might explain it, and using the evidence of altered states of consciousness to do so. Somnambulism, in revealing the transcendental faculties, may be regarded as “an anticipation of death” (147).

Brennan’s poetry, then, was written in a religious and intellectual context characterised by a combination of scepticism (encouraged by “Higher” Criticism) and a desire for some form of religious belief. This combination resulted, early in the nineteenth century, in the proposal of various forms of a “religion of humanity” by Leroux, Comte and Renan. Later explorations in the psychology of the Unconscious, including those of Hartmann, Du Prel and James, take the idea of a “religion of humanity” in a very different direction, as the human Unconscious becomes thought of as a divine or supernatural realm. The faculty of vision, apparent in mysticism and religious inspiration, as well as in the altered states of consciousness associated with “somnambulism” and mediumistic or Mesmeric trance, is the only means of gaining access to this realm, before which rationality fails. The scepticism applied to traditional

forms of religion is not necessarily extended to explorations of the visionary faculty, a privileged possession of poets and mystics. While the psychology of the Unconscious is being developed via studies of psychic phenomena associated with Mesmerism and Spiritualism, the notion of an inner, divine self, able to undergo regeneration and emerge with divine status, is also being explored by students of esotericism such as Kingsford and Maitland. Studies of esoteric currents, and research into the Unconscious mind, converge in the notion of the divine higher self. The following discussion shows that a number of pieces in Brennan’s Poems deal with the passing of various forms of religious beliefs, creating a context in which the notion of the inner divine self may be explored both as a psychological entity (the unconscious mind) and as an alternative form of religious belief.

2. "Twilights of the Gods"

There are two significant sequences of pieces on the theme of the passing away of religions in Brennan’s Poems, both in “The Forest of Night”. The first one 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”.

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 whose rose window no longer transforms the daylight into a mystical symbol of religious hope. The present dilapidation of the building is contrasted with its former role as a communal centre where, in the past, worshippers gathered “on labour-hardened knees” (l.4). Whereas once “the daedal glass compell’d to grace /the outer day’s indifferent stare”, the word “grace” having a religious connotation, now the daylight has a “disenhallow’d face” (ll.11-13). The “grey and dusty” daylight of the first line anticipates the unglamorous “grey 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 Biblical “dust” out of which Adam was created, and to which human bodies return at death. In the ‘Lilith’ sequence, the word “dust” refers to death in “when thou art seal’d in dust” (“O thou that achest”, l.119) and in “I shall muse above the little dust /that was the flesh that held my word in trust” (“Terrible, if he will not”, ll.130-1). “How long delays” in “The Womb
of Night” poses the question “must our heart /yet sleep in squalid snowdrifts of the dust”, “dust” being the lowest level of material existence to which we can be reduced. The poem expresses the dilemma a world empty of religious significance poses for its inhabitants.

Although Brennan’s poem 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 l.3 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. 54 “A gray and dusty daylight flows” also contains strong echoes of 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 music performed on the harp created by the evening flight of an angel: 55

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.

The “painted plume” of Brennan’s angels (“many an angel’s painted plume”, l.9) invokes Mallarmé’s angel, with her music of silence, while the absent rose suggests the possibility of another rose. The poem looks forward to the “secular flowering” of the Paradisal rose in the “Lilith” sequence, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The following poem, “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” (second stanza). 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, are absent: “no shade [...] / no spring” (stanza 1). Therefore, humans (“its leaning maid”, stanza 1) are also absent. The hope once aroused by an oasis in the desert has not been fulfilled. Whereas this poem and the previous one can be seen to have a similar theme, conveyed by different symbols of rose and oasis, the tones are

markedly different. In the second poem, no grounds for optimism, even in absence, are offered.

As well as including two poems concerning religions which symbolise the mystery and horror of night and nightmare as evil beings (Satan and vampire), “The Quest of Silence” contains one, “Out of no quarter of the charted sky”, evoking 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 believe having ceased when “in the smitten hero-hand the sword /broke” (l.7-8) and “a tragic flare /told Valhall perish’d” (ll.9-10). For these “folk”, it is the end of the world (“the trump that sings behind the end /exults alone”, ll.3-4). Their land is barren and infertile (“the land’s inflicted blight”, l.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 the “folk”. Such a loss of communal religious faith inculcates “despair” (l.10), leaving an empty place, formerly occupied by the gods, within the human psyche (“all disinhabitied, /a vault above the heart its hungering led”, ll.11 and 12). As we shall see further on, this emptiness may be filled by the 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”. The title of the sequence refers both to the passing of the gods of Norse mythology 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 IIII, second tercet) 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

56 I follow Branston (Brian Branston, Gods of the North, Rev. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980)) for the spelling of “Ragnarök”, which seems to have a number of variants.

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[...] 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 (stanzas 3 and 4).

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, we understand that the hero whose death has left the folk bereft is a pagan sun-hero, whose 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”, ll.9-11). “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 which were plucked by Hercules, interpreted as a sun-hero in a tradition going back, as Godwin points out, to Macrobius (fifth century AD).58 The defeat of the sun-hero by darkness figures the defeat of the pagan Norse religion by Christianity, evoked in the line “and the mount smoked and trembled, and thou wert lost”.59 Chisholm seeks to interpret this line as a reference to the possible explosion of a volcano in the Scandinavian region, but in my view it 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, depicted here.

The Norse hero to whom this piece is most likely to refer is Balder. In Mallarmé’s Les Dieux antiques, which Brennan knew well, Balder is discussed in the context of the “Crépuscule des Dieux”. His destruction by means of the mistletoe, the only vegetation from which he was not magically protected, is compared to the

58 Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment 27.
59 Iceland, the origin of the verse and prose Eddas which are our main source for Norse legend, accepted Christianity in AD 1000 (Branston, Gods of the North 30).
destruction of Adonis, another dying and returning fertility god. Balder's single area of vulnerability makes a connecting link with that of Solomon in the Wisdom sequence, to be discussed below. As a fertility god, Balder's loss would bring winter ("our wintry musings", 1.16). However, whereas other fertility gods, like 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 Ragnorök.

After the revelation in the fifth poem of the sequence that the conquering race have now lost the god they followed against their own better judgment ("who had dwelt right fain in vales of love and mirth; /but thy dire hest summon'd us at our birth", second quatrain), poems six and seven give the situation of the earlier pieces a wider application. Once gods, such as Moloch and Kronos, have been deposed, their conquering 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" (second quatrain, number VI). 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" (second tercet, number VII). 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.

The coming of a Ragnorök for the entire human race is envisaged, even wished for, as a catastrophe beyond which an entirely new world might appear, as in Norse legend.

When we consider the groups of poems just discussed, dealing with the passing of religions, in terms of the religious dilemmas and solutions of the latter half of the nineteenth century, we can appreciate how important these pieces are in the entire livre composé. Appearing both in the approach to the "Lilith" sequence and after it, they provide a context for the exploration of the higher self, considered at once as divine, and as part of the psyche, which is undertaken there. They consider the quest for the higher self in the context of loss of communal religious faith, which is powerfully felt and expressed. In their emphasis on the inexorable processes of loss of religious faith, and

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60 Stéphane Mallarmé, *Les Dieux antiques* (Paris: 1880) 35-7. The theory that Balder was a sun-hero was promulgated by Müllenhof as late as 1908, although according to Martin, it "waned with the fashion of meteorological interpretation of mythological themes" (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. The primary "key" to which the second title refers is the universal prevalence of sun worship, and Protestants are denounced in this work as hypocrites because they "indignantly denounce "idolatry", pagan or catholic, while themselves offering palpable homage to the sun under the name of Christ" (*The Keys of the Creeds* 61).
the uncertainty of future resolution, they add to the ambivalence of what is offered in the “Lilith” sequence, which will be discussed in the following two chapters.

3. Esoteric wisdom

In the Wisdom sequence, 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 preserve still-relevant hidden wisdom. In religious tradition, King Solomon is revered for his wisdom, recorded in the “Wisdom” literature of the Bible, including the books of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. In magical tradition, he is a powerful wizard, possessor of talismans such as the ring which bestows the power to communicate with animals; and authorship of important magical texts, the Key of Solomon and the Testament of Solomon, was attributed to him. The first three poems of Brennan’s sequence deal with the historical Solomon; the fourth poem 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, an author whom Brennan knew well, compares these beings with the elemental spirits of European tradition.

Peut-être les Européens se rendent-ils compte difficilement de ce qu’entendent les Orientaux par les races prédamites. – Ils supposent que la terre, avant d’appartenir à l’homme, avait été habité pendant soixante-dix mille ans par quatre grandes races créées primitivement, selon le Coran, « d’une matière élévéée, 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 prédamites.

61 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 C.J. Brennan, The Verse of Christopher Brennan, ed. A.R. Chisholm and J. J. Quinn (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1960) 262-3, but Wilkes retains the original order in the introduction to C.J. Brennan, Poems [1913] (Sydney: Sydney UP, 1972), 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 composer would presumably have had before him texts of Nos 74-6 headed ‘I’, ‘II’ and ‘III’, and of No. 73 headed ‘III’, 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’” (18-19). This is in spite of having supported Chisholm’s order in “The ‘Wisdom’ Sequence in Brennan’s Poems”, AUMLA 14 (1960). Agreeing with Wilkes’s later argument, I follow the original order of the poems.


63 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’” (Clark, Biography 144). Later, two articles on Nerval appeared as part of the series “Studies in French Poetry 1860-1900” (the Bookfellow, 1920).

Brennan would have found the Rosicrucian version of the European elemental spirits with whom Nerval compares the Preadamites in the *Entretien du Comte de Gabalis* (1670) of the Abbé de Villars. A translation of this work, under the title *History of the Count de Gabalis*, is listed in the catalogue of the Public Library of NSW at the time Brennan was working there.\(^\text{65}\)

The first poem in Brennan’s sequence recounts the meeting of Solomon, only referred to as “he”, with Queen of Sheba, “she”, known elsewhere as Belkiss or Balkiss.\(^\text{66}\) Solomon’s wisdom is “sterile” (first quatrain) 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” (second quatrain). The word “chymic” suggests alchemy, whose very name comes 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” (first tercet), and although the desert has long since covered over their traces, “one yellow desert” still joins them.

The identification, common in legend, of the Queen of Sheba with Lilith adds a further dimension to this poem. This connection is pointed out by Hope.\(^\text{67}\) 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. Lilith appears as the protagonist of this story in other versions. 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.\(^\text{68}\)

In this sequence, then, the Queen of Sheba is a later version of Lilith. The “Lilith” sequence is discussed in detail in the following two chapters. In Chapter Six there is a

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\(^{65}\) Listing under “Occult Sciences” in the *Subject-Index Catalogue* 1869-95.

\(^{66}\) I follow Brennan in referring to her as “Belkiss”. See *Prose* 160.


discussion of the prelude "O yon, when Holda leaves her hill"; Holda is a version of the German Frau Venus mentioned by Scholem.69

In the second and third poems of the "Wisdom" sequence, Solomon has dramatically extended his powers. The Solomon of the second piece has had the power to put elemental spirits to work building the Temple, and to keep them at work by ensuring that his body appears to be supervising the workers even after his death has occurred. The "Afrits" of the first quatrain are elemental spirits, mentioned in the quote from Nerval above; they reappear in the fourth poem of the sequence. Wilkes and Chisholm draw attention to the incident in the Koran on which this account is based.70

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", therefore still "sterile" (second tercet). This "solid fire" links the poem to the fourth one, where it appears in the breasts of the Preadamite Solomons.

In addition to the well-known influence on the fourth poem of William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), another source is likely: the interpolated story of the Queen of Sheba in Nerval's *Voyage en Orient*.71 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, to which the artisan of Solomon's Temple, the Masonic hero Adoniram, and the Queen

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69 See discussion beginning on page 193 below.
70 Wilkes, "The 'Wisdom' Sequence": 49; Chisholm, *The Forest of Night* 91-2.
71 Brennan was familiar with the works of Nerval by 1898, and later published two articles on him (see *Prose* 347-54). According to Alfred Dubruck, Nerval tried out the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba as an opera scenario, for which Meyerbeer never produced the score he was meant to write, then as a drama which was never performed, before incorporating it into the *Voyage en Orient*, although it had been written before Nerval left Europe for the trip which the book describes (*Gérard de Nerval and the German Heritage*, Studies in French Literature 4 (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1965) 27). The influence of *Vathek* on Brennan is discussed in Wilkes, "The 'Wisdom' Sequence": 48 and Chisholm, *The Forest of Night* 89-90.
of Sheba, whose lover he becomes, both belong as descendants of fire. At this point in the poem, it is not yet clear whether Brennan will support Beckford’s traditional morality, rejecting the esoteric as evil, or Nerval’s championing of it above conventional morality.

The second stanza of Brennan’s poem is of obscure provenance, but the third draws a different moral from Beckford’s tale. 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” (stanza 3). This is similar to the “solid fire” of the dead King Solomon in the previous poem. It represents 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. 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. The famous image of the “hard, gem-like flame” in the Conclusion to The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry of Walter Pater (1839-94) was surely familiar to him, and is clearly also relevant. The explicatory passage leading up to, and including, the phrase, are as follows:

72 Nerval, Œuvres 2:620.
73 Jean Richer suggests that Nerval, following the Gnostic doctrines of Martinez de Pasqually, “voudrait faire de Jehovah un Dieu jaloux et mauvais, et de la race de Cain, à laquelle il croit appartenir, une race élue” (Gérard de Nerval et les doctrines ésotériques (Paris: Griffon d’Or, 1947) 95).
74 Beckford actually led the lifestyle for which his story condemns the Caliph. See Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment 111-14.
75 It is clear that the second stanza adds some details to the subterranean sanctuary. A rose represented in the pavement is coloured by the rays of the sun, obviously coming in through a narrow aperture, or perhaps a series of apertures. The rose in the pavement is reminiscent of the rose on the ceiling of the initiatory chamber in Yeats’s “The Alchemical Rose”.
77 A late (1925) article on "The Aesthetic Novel" mentions Pater’s Renaissance (see Prose 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.
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 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. 78

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. Brennan’s “ruby of harden’d flame”, too, conveys latent power.

The image of precious stones storing something of value also occurs in Brennan’s “Liminary”, where we read of “opals that engeal the Boreal gleam /and diamond-drip of ether’s crystal thrill” (stanza 25). Discussion of this poem in Chapter Six will show that these lines occur in the context of a representation of the power of art to maintain what is valuable in mortal human experience even beyond death. 79 Pater’s “hard gem-like flame” is an obvious inspiration, although imagined and expressed in an entirely new way by Brennan.

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, in addition to loss, is conveyed by the imagery of solidified fire. The first poem emphasises that the relationship of Solomon and Belkiss has taken 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. However, the hints in the third and fourth poems 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 Norse religions in the ‘Twilights’ sequence. 80 Whereas other religions, linked to a particular community of

79 See page 190.
80 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 these currents from Ecclesiasticus to the Middle Ages in the following way: "Its statement goes back — I do not pretend to be able to fix a limit — to
people, pass away completely, esoteric wisdom endures, latent in the traditions which preserve it, somewhat equivocal in its value ("an ice-bound woe") but by no means as absolutely bad as it appears in Vathek.

This interpretation of the "Wisdom" sequence departs considerably from that of Wilkes and Chisholm, who both take the sequence to be negative in its attitude to the wisdom of the Solomons. In Wilkes's view, the "intention of the 'Wisdom' sequence is to expose the aspiration to knowledge as another of the modes through which Lilith mocks mankind, as men seek vainly for some substitute for the primal vision they have forfeited". 81 Chisholm says it "sets forth the tragic error of those who, like Solomon and his pre-Adamite forerunners, sought in the night not a new way to Eden, or a recreation of it, but material power, riches, sterile wisdom". 82 Discussion of the poem "1908" in the final chapter of this thesis will show that a similar attitude towards esoteric wisdom to the one I have suggested is displayed in the "Wisdom" sequence is apparent there.

4. "My hidden country"

One of the two Epilogues comprising the last section of Brennan's Poems draws on mystical theology such as that of Dionysius the Areopagite and Gnosticism for its exploration of a mystical 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" (stanza 4). In Theosophy or Psychological Religion (1893), a work whose title is very apt to Brennan's quest for the higher self, and which was held by the Public Library of NSW while Brennan was there, F. Max Müller discusses the mystical theology of Dionysius, a Christian Neoplatonist of around 500 AD, whose impact on the development of mysticism was profound and extended over many centuries, via the ninth-century translation of Scotus Erigena. 83 Müller identifies the Dionysian hierarchies of angels, intermediaries between the divine and the human, with the Gnostic Æons, hypostases appearing in Gnostic systems such as those of Valentinus.

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81 Wilkes, "The 'Wisdom' Sequence": 50-51.
82 Chisholm, The Forest of Night 93-4.
83 F. Max Müller, Theosophy or Psychological Religion (London: 1893) 461-84.
(who had thirty Æons, grouped into eight, ten and twelve), Basilides and the Docetae.

In the sixth stanza, Brennan links the mystical setting of the poem with Gnosticism by referring to “æonian life, larger than seas of light, more limpid than the dawn”.

According to Dionysius, the angels were charged with the task of mediating the divine light to human beings. Müller’s explanation connects the mystical teaching of Dionysius with 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 (ἀγνωσία). 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 (478-9).

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 in Brennan’s poem, 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,

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 [...] (stanzas 4 to 6).

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” (481). 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” (last stanza). 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:

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 of the notion of an unknowable God, in 1890, may be seen as the foundation of the mystical theology of the self adopted here.

Writers like 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” (stanza 3) 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. In Keats’s *Endymion*, a poet is granted special powers of expression after bathing in an “inspired place” (BkII, ll.830-9). In the notes Brennan wrote on Wordsworth’s Immortality Ode for the anthology he co-edited with Pickburn and Brereton, *From Blake to Arnold*, he glosses “thy being’s height” in the line “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”. 

Apart from the ‘Lilith’ sequence, to be discussed in Chapters Two and Three, several important poems from “*The Twilight of Disquietude*” and “*The Quest of Silence*”, and one of the two Epilogues to Poems, examine poetically the notion of a higher self, located within the psyche but having aspects of divinity, which Brennan, following important trends of his time, considered as an alternative to the superseded religious traditions he examined in the poems just discussed.

In “Disaster drives the shatter’d night”, the approach of disaster is heralded by the night, whose order, reflecting the cosmology of a stable religious system, has been fatally disrupted:

Disaster drives the shatter’d night  
before its coming thro’ the deep:  
the soul is swept with monstrous flight  
of fears upstartled from their sleep.

Its silent heaven is rolled away,  
and shaken stars flit to and fro:  
the mother-face is livid grey  
with dumb apocalypse of woe.

The “fears” are associated with the apocalyptic experience (“dumb apocalypse of woe”) of having all stability of religious belief disrupted. In the third stanza, the “heart that

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knows its naked doom /awaits the unspoken shock of fate”, unable to do anything to restore things to the way they seemed before. However, the possibility is envisaged that "beyond these powers that loom /its hidden god shall rise more great”. “Its” must refer to the “heart” of the first line of this stanza, making it clear that we are dealing with the possible revelation of an inner divinity or higher self.

Two poems 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 mother-deep, wise, yearning, bound” uses the image of “the mother-deep”, located “beneath my heart” (stanza 1).

“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 (stanza 2). Both the “deep” and the “depths” should be taken to refer to the higher self, thought of as the human Unconscious. The “solitary eyelit-slits” through which alone this realm may be glimpsed (“The mother-deep”, stanza 2) 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).

While the 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”, third stanza), 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” (stanza 3). The old stars having 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” (first stanza) would forge it 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”, draws on the notion of the Doppelgänger or “double” to help establish the notion of an alternative self. The setting of “Lightning: and momentarily” draws on European conceptions of the Orient.88 Lightning-flashes reveal glimpses of an Arabian city, a mirage. On the battlements appears a figure

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88 For a discussion of the phenomenon of European “orientalism”, see Edward W. Said, Orientalism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) 31-110. Said defines his term in the following way: “Orientalism is the generic term that I have been employing to describe the Western approach to the Orient; Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line. These two aspects of Orientalism are not incongruent, since by use of them both Europe could advance securely and unmetaphorically upon the Orient” (73).
whose face, under the “high turban’s plume”, is that of the speaker himself (last stanza). Explorations of the transcendental self such as those of Du Prel, and literary explorations of the Double in the stories of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Edgar Poe, are obvious influences, but the Oriental setting may be directly indebted to Nerval’s explorations of the double in the *Voyage en Orient* and *Aurélia*, explorations which are particularly relevant to this poem. The “Histoire du Calife Hakem” is interpolated in the *Voyage en Orient*, like the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba discussed above. Caliph Hakem has a double called Yousouf, who belongs to the religion of the Druzes. Only one of the men, the Caliph, is ever aware of the resemblance between them, 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.

As Macainsh points out, the double also plays an important role in Nerval’s *Aurélia*. 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. 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”. 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”. Later, the double assumes the power to act separately, even to bring 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

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89 Nerval himself was strongly indebted to Hoffmann. In fact, according to Dubreuck, the “most immediate impulse which set Nerval and all his contemporaries on the track of the fantastic was the appearance of E.T.A. Hoffmann on the French literary horizon. Appropriately enough, it was a posthumous appearance but quite as effective as the apparitions which occurred in his tales: Breuillac relates the heady enthusiasm of the French writers of 1830, when they first read this German author (in translation) who had died nearly a decade before. The most available source of information about German literature was in Mme de Stael’s *De l’Allemagne*, whose first publication unfortunately coincided with the beginnings of Hoffmann’s literary activity, undertaken after a long career in the civil service. Hence, he was not included in the only book in which the French were likely to find any information about German authors” (48). After describing the means by which Hoffmann’s works became well-known in France, Dubreuck comments that “in French literary circles for the next quarter-century Hoffmann was considered to be one of Germany’s leading authors […] It was not until 1856 with Baudelaire’s translations of Poe that Hoffmann’s repute finally diminished” (49). Brennan published an article on Hoffmann in 1924 (*Prose* 407-10).

90 For more on this story, see Dubreuck, *Gérard de Nerval and the German Heritage* 59-62.

91 Macainsh, "Steps into the Forest": 232.

92 The beginning of this work is quoted on page 189.

frappé de l’histoire de ce chevalier 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 (782).

Here we have the idea of an inner double who is part of oneself, a higher or more successful part.94 Considering the poem in the light of Nerval’s explorations of the doubled self helps to explain not only Brennan’s 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 discussed in this chapter deal overtly with superseded religions and the possibility of replacing them with an inner, higher self, in conceiving which Brennan drew on esoteric sources as well as contemporary psychology of the Unconscious. Subsequent chapters will show how Brennan made use of pre-Romantic, Romantic and Symbolist notions of the self and its relationship to the external world in order to convey, in the “Lilith” sequence, in some of the poems functioning as Preludes to sections of Poems, and in the structure of the entire work, a more complex notion of the higher self as an imaginative union of the self with the natural world.

94 Arthur Rimbaud is rather more well-known than Nerval for his formulation of the doubled self, “je est un autre”. According to Balakian, this notion is already present in the work of the German Romantic writer Jean-Paul Richter, making Rimbaud’s observation less “original” (The Symbolist Movement 22).
Chapter Two: The "Lilith" sequence: Part I

Introduction

Brennan's notes on the material included by Ellis and Yeats in their 1893 edition of The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic and Critical, made during his preparation for writing the "Lilith" sequence, afford some important insights into the multitude of significations of his Lilith, Lady of Night, and her relationship with Adam.\(^1\) The notes were certainly made after 11\(^{th}\) January, 1898, as there is a reference to the paper "Fact and Idea", delivered on that date. The Ellis and Yeats volume contains a long section entitled "The Symbolic System", written, according to a note by Yeats, mostly by Yeats himself.\(^2\) In the second chapter of this section, Yeats interprets the poetry of Blake in the light of the cosmogony of Boehme. Brennan's notes, adding a further layer of interpretation to Yeats's reading of Blake in terms of Boehme, make this into a fascinating four-way dialogue between authors widely separated in time and religious context.

Brennan's notes concentrate on the Boehmian Sophia, the "mirror" or "looking-glass" of the godhead, a powerful paradigm of the imagination as mediator between the noumenal and the phenomenal realms. These notes indicate his appreciation of the significance of this paradigm, and his wish to consider Lilith in relation to it. The following quotation from Yeats's description of the Boehmian imagination in relation to the symbolism of Blake indicates in italics the material Brennan extracted (Yeats uses another variant of Boehme's name, "Boehmen"):  

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

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\(^1\) These notes are to be found in one of Brennan’s notebooks (Christopher Brennan, Notebook RB509.1/26, Fisher Library, Sydney).

\(^2\) See Allan Wade, A Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968) 241.
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.

Characteristically, Yeats seeks to syncretise Boehme’s cosmogony with that of other esoteric currents; thus he begins “like Boehmen and the occultists generally”. Yeats describes how this “looking-glass”, which is emanated from the godhead itself, functions as the divine self-consciousness. The “looking-glass” holds the “thought-forms”, resembling the “ideas” of Plato, which will later become separate existences in the material world. 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. The “mirror” participates in the divine quaternary, as a fourth member added to the conventional Trinity comprising Father, Son and Spirit.

The term “mirror” conveys the process by which God becomes conscious of himself, by separating from himself a reflection. Boehme himself describes the generation of Sophia in the following way:

[...] God hath had no similitude, wherein he could discover his own Being or Substance, but only the wisdom, that hath been his longing delight [...]. It is a Looking-Glass of the Deity. For every Looking-Glass standeth still, or quiet and steady, and generateth no Image, but receiveth the Image: and thus the Virgin of wisdom is a Looking-Glass of the Deity, wherein the Spirit of God seeth itself [...].

Whereas yet in the Eternity, there are but Two in Being or Substance, and the Third is as a Looking-Glass of the first Two; out of which this world as a comprehensible or palpable Being or Substance, is created in a Beginning and End.

God’s self-consciousness, reflection or “mirror” is also the imagination of God, in which the creative Ideas of God are inherent, as Yeats explains. In Boehme’s Of the Becoming Man or Incarnation of Jesus Christ we find that “the Image of Angels and Men, have been from Eternity discovered in the Divine property in God’s wisdom [...]. But yet in no Image or, Being and Substance; but in the way or Manner, as in a deep sense, a thought darteth up, and is brought before its own looking-Glass of the Minde” (Bk I, ch.iii, 13-14). According to both Boehme and Yeats, it is a fault of imagination which causes Adam to fall as he imagines himself into earth rather than heaven. As Boehme states, “it is known to us, that being the first Adam had fixed his Imagination in the Earthliness, he is become Earthly, and that done against the purpose of God” (Bk I, ch.i, 61-65, 75).


4 “Thought-Forms” later became the title of an influential publication by two prominent Theosophists, Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater. See page 201 below.

5 Jacob Boehme, Of the Becoming Man or Incarnation of Jesus Christ (London: 1659) Bk I, ch.i, 61-65, 75.
ch.x, 11). Adam’s lapse of imagination causes his sleep in the Garden of Eden, a sleep which signifies his becoming ignorant of his heavenly origin and his surrender to the kingdom of the stars, that is, the power of fate (Bk.I, ch.v, 42-3). As a result of this sleep, Eve is created, signifying the loss of Adam’s original ability to generate magically, by means of his imagination, and his Fall into sexual generation.

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 spectreous, 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” (249).

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

Yeats’s “delusive goddess Nature” is an important source of Brennan’s Lilith.

This chapter and the following one will argue that the “Lilith” sequence further

[^6]: Brennan also refers to this image in the Symbolism lectures, where he includes the following in his discussion of Blake, presented in note form: “The Fall often told thus: a Zoa separates himself from his Emanation and sees her outside himself; he then desires dominion over her. Result – he changes to a spectre, a raging selfhood, a devouring hunger, pursuing her who flies from him, a melancholy shadow. She becomes his lost soul, being now higher than he in nature. But again, the emanation often becomes a symbol of evil, the delusive goddess Nature, the serpent-woman who is the mother of this world of mystery and jealousy. Vala. The Female” (Froze 101). Blake’s serpent-woman appears in the following lines of “Vala”, or “The Four Zoas”, where Enion and the Spectre (or emanation) of Tharmas engage in intercourse:

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 sealy 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 abhor’red by gods and men [...] (Night the First, ll.150-7).


Early versions of this passage are discussed in the section entitled “Fragments” at the end of Ellis and Yeats’s third volume, where they are taken to imply that androgyny was part of the early conception of the hybrid described in the lines quoted. 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” (147). The mermaid is an obvious symbol of androgyny.

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develops the notion of a higher self by means of a drama on the metaphysical plane in which are enacted the loss of the original union between the human mind and nature, the impact of that loss on both parties, and the drive to recover or recreate the lost divine status. As a symbol of night, which is an aspect of Nature, Lilith signifies both the ability of Nature to correspond with the divine, and the power of purely physical Nature to entrap the human mind in what is merely sensuous.

The following discussion considers in detail the first three poems in the “Lilith” sequence. Discussion of the first poem considers possible sources for the figure of Lilith, demonstrating that the major sources are likely to have been works on Isaiah by T.K. Cheyne, and contemporary literary treatments of the legend in English and French, rather than detailed direct knowledge of Kabbalic texts in which the legend is given a fuller development. The original relationship of Lilith and Adam was, the first poem implies, an androgynous one, suggesting that according to Brennan, when the union with Lilith was broken, a single, complete and transcendent self was lost. Taking up the pre-Romantic and Romantic debate about the relationship between the human mind and the external or material world, Brennan’s treatment of the relationship of Lilith and Adam suggests that the lost transcendent self may be recovered by a union or symbolic marriage of the mind and Nature.

The contrast between the tone and atmosphere of the final lines of the first poem and the entire second poem is interpreted in the light of relevant imagery of Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) and Mallarmé. The contrast between the expansion of mind brought about by imagination and the contraction resulting from a limitation to reason and the evidence of the senses which Yeats found in Blake is also relevant. This further supports the case for associating the positive aspect of Lilith with the faculty of imagination.

The choric voice of the third poem recommends that the search for the infinite be abandoned in favour of an exploration of an inner “abyss”. This emphasis on the inner quest, and imagery which associates night with death, are considered in the context of interpretations of the mystery religions as occulted accounts of the spiritual death and regeneration of the soul, both by the Neoplatonists, and by Romantic scholars of mythology who revived their allegorising hermeneutic. The emphasis on the search for the hidden inner self in mysticism, Pietism and spiritual alchemy is also an essential part of the intellectual context of Brennan’s inner “abyss”.

51
1. The “Argument” to the “Lilith” sequence

In the “Lilith” sequence, the “Lady of Night”, Lilith herself, becomes the focus of Brennan’s exploration of “The Forest of Night”. In the first piece, 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”, ll.2-4), Adam proving himself “uncapacious” 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 writhe thick of the mind”, ll.6-9).

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 Kabbalistic sources of the Lilith of legend does not claim to be based on knowledge of Brennan’s own sources for the material.7 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.8 The second page of these notes 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” (201). There is also a reference to Cheyne in a letter from Brennan to his friend John le Gay Brereton dated by Sturm to

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7 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 (Hope, “Brennan’s Lilith” 101). The Cabbale of Gérard Encausse (“Papus”) was in the Public Library of NSW by 1905, appearing with the third volume of the Jewish Encyclopaedia and the Commentaire sur le Séfer Yesira ou Livre de la Création by Saadya de Payyoum under the heading “Kabala” in the Supplementary Catalogue of the Public Library of NSW, Sydney, for the Years 1901-5 (Subject Index), (Sydney: Government Printer, 1906), but this is later than the writing of Brennan’s “Lilith” sequence (1897-8). The Kabbalah Unveiled of S.L. Macgregor Mathers is listed under “Kabala” in the earlier Subject-index Catalogue, to 1895, but this work, a translation of the Latin Cabbala deinukata by Knorr von Rosenroth, only includes three books of the Zohar, none of them relevant to the Lilith legend. Stirling’s The Canon is also listed, but there is nothing relevant to Lilith in the chapter entitled “The Cabala”. A.E. Waite’s Doctrine and Literature of the Kabalah claims that the Zohar as a whole “has not been translated into Latin nor into any European language” at the time of writing (1902). Adolphe Franck’s La Kabbale (1843), “a serious and detailed work devoted to a close analysis of the Sepher Jetzirah and the Zohar” (Mcintosh, Eliphas Lévi 201) would have offered no problems to Brennan’s expertise in French, but we have no evidence as to its availability in Australia at the time. There is also the possibility that Brennan’s interest in Kabbalah, like his interest in Gnosticism, arose during his years of study in Berlin (1892-4), opening up the prospect of more texts available to Brennan in German, French or Latin.

8 The first page of these notes appears opposite page 145 in Clark’s Biography.
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”. 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 an assumption that this represents early research in preparation for writing. Thus, we have two references to Cheyne, quite possibly relating to different dates and readings. The manuscript notes do seem to have been made to gather together 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 which contain notes on Lilith and were available by 1898. There is a brief comment on Lilith and the Assyrian-Babylonian “lil’it” in Introduction to the Book of Isaiah (London, 1895), and two relevant longer comments in The Prophecies of Isaiah, Volume I (London, 1880; third edition, revised, 1884). Neither these references, nor the one from The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, however, call the myth “ugly”, although this could be taken as an inference. 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: 21-2, Brennan could have gained much of the information he makes use of 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).

As Cheyne himself points out in The Prophecies of Isaiah, Lilith appears in the Walpurgisnacht scene of Goethe’s Faust I, although it is very unlikely that Brennan would have needed to rely on Cheyne for this information. Brennan’s emphasis on the beautiful hair of Lilith, which he associates with the starry night, could well be indebted to the threat posed to victims by Lilith’s beautiful hair, of which Faust is warned in Goethe’s work:

MEPHISTOPHELES. Betracht sie genau!
Lilith ist das.
FAUST. Wer?
MEPHISTOPHELES. Adams erste Frau.
Nimm dich in Acht vor ihren schönen Haaren,
Vor diesem Schmuck, mit dem sie einzig prangt!

9 Sturm 414.
10 See Wilkes, New Perspectives 17 and Clark, Biography 140.
Wenn sie damit den jungen Mann erlangt,
So läßt sie ihn so bald nicht wieder fahren (2, iv). 12

There are also a number of nineteenth-century literary explorations of Lilith by means of which Brennan could have become familiar with details of the myth. 13 There are two in English by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “Body’s Beauty” and “Eden Bower”, the first of which 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 God with which Brennan associates Lilith in his notes to the Ellis and Yeats edition of Blake. The second makes a strong identification between Lilith and the snake in the Garden of Eden; Brennan’s use of imagery of snakes and serpents is in keeping with this. Theodore Wratislaw’s “L’Éternel Féminin” (1893) has Lilith speak of the “hot snakes of my lascivious hair”, foreshadowing Brennan’s use of imagery associated with Medusa for Lilith, in lines such as “looks that turn his thew to stone” (“Thick sleep, with error of the tangled wood”, I.29). Lilith also appears in Victor Hugo’s La Fin de Satan (published 1886); Remy de Gourmont wrote a play entitled Lilith, first published in 1892; and Anatole France’s Balthasar (1889) includes the story “La Fille de Lilith”. 14 Thus, 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” (I.1), is an aspect of Nature. Brennan’s notes show that he subscribed to the idea that 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”. In Cheyne we find, as alternatives to “Lilith”, “night-monster”, “screech-owl” (denoted “AV wrongly”) and “lamia”. Hope points out that Babylonian

12 “MEPHISTOPHELES: Look carefully at her! That’s Lilith.
FAUST: Who?
MEPHISTOPHELES: Adam’s first wife. 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”.
representations picture Lilith with owls, signifying a goddess of night. Later chapters of this thesis will discuss Brennan’s treatment of times of the day, as well as the seasons, in *Poems* as a whole, where this treatment indicates the importance which he attached to them as aspects of nature with which human beings might imaginatively associate the cycles of their own lives. At the heart of this endeavour is “The Forest of Night”, and its central figures, Lilith, Adam and Eve. 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, by imaginatively uniting their mind with nature.

The “Argument” to the “Lilith” 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 “uncapacious”, begetting on Lilith “terrors unconfest” as her offspring (ll.5, 7). By different means to those by which Brennan establishes the “pale absence of the rose” in “A gray and dusty daylight flows”, discussed in the previous chapter, but with similar effect, Brennan establishes 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-described o’erhuman bliss” aroused by the Chimera (l.12), and the “hint of nameless things reveal’d” in the siren’s song (l.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

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15 Hippolytus begins his account of the heresies of Gnostic Basilides by comparing them with the monsters of Greek legends, the Cyclops, Scylla and Charybdis, and the song of the Sirens which Ulysses could only avoid being seduced by if he blocked his ears with wax. Hippolytus comments: “Which same thing it is my advice that all who fall in with these seducers should do, and either to stop his ears, on account of his own weakness, so to sail by unheeded the doctrines of heresies, without even listening to things too easily capable of seducing him by their sweetness, like the melodious Syrens’ song, or else faithfully binding himself fast to the Tree of Christ to listen to them without being shaken, putting his trust in that whereunto he hath been tied, and stand fast without wavering” (C.W. King, *The Gnostics and Their Remains, Ancient and Medieval*, 2nd ed. (London: 1887) 257). It is quite possible that Brennan had this passage in mind when writing of the allure of the Chimera and the sirens in this piece. Perhaps a subtext of this piece is something like this: what is feared as “heresy” in common wisdom may be a truth worth pursuing even into apparent danger.
“Argument”, first designating how the relationship appears to the “uncapacious” Adam in the phrase “that dreadful love” (1.5), 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” (ll.24-5), suggesting that if Adam were to overcome his incapacity, he might regard Lilith very differently.

The association of Lilith and her avatars, the “serpent-wives” (l.19), with hybrids of woman and snake implies androgyny. Brennan’s notes describe Lilith changing “to demon (serpent)” after the rift with Adam. 16 Under a heading “Serpents”, these notes include the Python, the Sphinx, and “sacerdotal snakes: Hermes & Aesculap”, as well as Gorgons, Hydras, Chimeras and Griffins. Medusa, mentioned under the heading “Night” in the same notes, is another mythical figure associated with snakes. 17 Lilith’s offspring are described as a “worm-brood” in l.7 of the “Argument”; the word “writhen”, intertwined, plaited or spirally twisted, in l.9, appears in William Morris’s The Earthly Paradise, which Brennan first read in 1892, 18 in the line “[full] of intertwining writhen snakes” (I, 258). Lilith declines “monsterward from that embrace”, her avatars appearing in myth and legend as hybrids of woman and serpent or snake: Chimera, siren, Lamia, Melusine. In legend, the Chimera has a serpent’s tail. According to notes Brennan made in preparation for writing the piece, in addition to those discussed above, 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 serpents or snakes with male sexuality. An examination of the Subject-Catalogues for the Public Library of NSW during Brennan’s time there shows various listings under the heading “Serpent Worship”, with cross-references to such headings as “Primitive Religions” and “Natural Theology”. The category of Mysticism is cross-referenced to Phallic Worship, among other categories. The Subject-Index for 1896 to 1900 refers readers interested in Symbolism to associated categories which include “Phallic Worship” and “Serpent Worship”. 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.

17 Brennan associates Medusa with Lilith in the annotations to Mallarmé’s Les Dieux antiques, probably made in 1896; for more on these annotations, see discussion beginning on page 136.
18 Robin Marsden, "Christopher Brennan's Berlin Years 1892-1894", Quadrant 21, no. 11 (1977): 38.
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 which was cut into two, producing a sense of loss which compels each half to seek out its complement (189E-193D). 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:

> When these three letters [comprising the divine name “Adam”] descended below, together in their complete form, the name Adam was found to comprise male and the female. The female was attached to the side of the male until God cast him into a deep slumber [...]. God then sawed her off from him and adorned her like a bride and brought her to him [...]. I have found it stated in an old book that the word “one” here means “one woman”, to wit, the original Lilith, who was with him and who conceived from him [...].

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. The Virgin Sophia contained both male and female and was identified with the archetypal Adam; its original destiny was to generate “another man out of himself according to his similitude [...], through the Imagination” rather than sexually. Yeats does not mention androgyny specifically in his chapter on Boehme in the edition of Blake, but Brennan had access in the Public Library to other books on Boehme at the time of writing the “Lilith” sequence. In Boehme’s androgynous Adam-Sophia we have a powerful figure of the divine human being, not merely made in the image of God, but an actual child of God himself (Bk.I, ch.iii, 75). We also have an image of a lost completeness which needs to be restored. While we may not be sure of Brennan’s familiarity with the *Zohar*, the sources in Plato, and probably in Boehme, would have been familiar to him.

Another important source for a model of humanity as originally androgynous, and for the idea that the androgynous union embraced Nature as well as the human, was

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23 Specifically, works by H.L. Martensen and Franz Hartmann (see entries under “Mysticism” in *Supplementary Catalogue of the Public Library of NSW, Sydney, for the Years 1896-1900 (Subject-Index)*, (Sydney: Government Printer, 1902). Hartmann’s *Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme* was also used by Ellis and Yeats (see Masterton and O'Shea, "Code Breaking and Myth Making" 58).
German Romanticism. According to Sara Friedrichsmeyer, the idea of androgyny aroused considerable interest among German writers of the early nineteenth century. Ricarda Huch, with whose work on German Romanticism Brennan was later familiar, was the first to identify the model in Romantic literature.24 Boehme’s Sophiology had exerted an indirect influence via Gottfried Arnold’s *Das Geheimnis der göttlichen Sophia* (“The Secret of the Divine Sophia”), 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 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, which was popular among the Pietists and praised by Jung-Stilling, was another important means of transmission of Boehmian Sophiology to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (36).25 In the view of Friedrichsmeyer, the Romantic 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 (50).

In the light of Brennan’s scholarly specialization in Romanticism, especially early German Romanticism (the *Frühromantik*), Romantic models of Nature as a complementary self which was originally paired with humanity in an androgynous union, as Friedrichsmeyer describes it, is of particular interest in interpreting the relationship of Adam and Lilith in Brennan’s “Lilith” sequence. According to Macainsh, a diary entry by Brennan “indicates the probability of Brennan’s giving German lectures at Sydney University in 1896, on Friedrich La Motte Fouqué’s *Undine* and on the *Nibelungen*”, suggesting that he had “substantial” knowledge of German literature at this time, before the “Lilith” sequence was commenced.26 Detailed knowledge of the works of Novalis, which Brennan “probably” commenced reading while a student in Berlin from 1892-4, is evident in the Symbolism lectures of 1904.27 The profound and original intellectual engagement with the thought of the *Frühromantik* apparent in the article “German

27 Clark, *Biography* 71.
Romanticism: A Progressive Definition”, which was “handed round among his senior German students at the University as a sort of introduction to his lectures on German Romanticism”; concentrating particularly on F. Schlegel and Novalis, is further evidence of the quality of Brennan’s response to the Frühromantik.

The thinking of the Frühromantik about the relationship of the mind and the external world was founded on the Idealist philosophy of Kant and Fichte. In the Foundations of the Metaphysic of Morals and the Critique of Practical Reason, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) argues that a human being can be both part of the phenomenal world, subject to the chain of cause and effect, and part of the noumenon, with the freedom to act morally. 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.29

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”.30 In the earlier Critique of Pure Reason he 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 which 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).31 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

28 See Prose 395.
According to 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” (62). 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” (66).

The attempt of J.G. Fichte (1762-1814), 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 F. Schlegel and Novalis, but they found it wanting 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:

Attend to yourself, turn your gaze from everything surrounding you and look within yourself: this is the first demand philosophy makes upon anyone who studies it. Here you will not be concerned with anything that lies outside of you, but only with yourself.

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. 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”. 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.

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32 Scruton, *Kant* 60.
The *Nicht-Ich* or Not-I is part of a dialectic, in which the ego engages in a constant striving, *Streben*, against the resistance, *Anstoss*, of the *Nicht-Ich*. The Not-I 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.” 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”, thus protecting himself against solipsism.

Kant’s “transcendental self” and Fichte’s “absolute ego” were both important and well-known models for early German Romantic ways of thinking about the relationship between the mind and the outer world, but the single most important model for Brennan in exploring this relationship through the “Lilith” sequence is, I believe, that of Novalis. Like F. Schlegel, who reacted against the Fichtean Non-Ego as “the purely negative [...] foil or barrier with reference to which the Ego defines itself”, Novalis was dissatisfied with Fichte’s conception of the non-ego. An important passage in his short novel Die Lehrlinge zu Sais describes the destructive effects of setting subject and object against one another:


37 La Vopa, *Fichte* 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 recontexting it” (203).


42 Novalis, *Schriften* 1.82-3. “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.

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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’s sentiments by M.H. Abrams’s explanation that the Romantics thought of the Fall as separation from Nature:

[...] the 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 [...] —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 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. 43

Both the inner and the outer split described by Abrams are apparent in the passage from Novalis just quoted.

Die Lehrlinge zu Sais 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 innere Musik der Natur verstande 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 unserm großen Bund trate, wie es hieß in der goldenen 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 ahnen können, und seitdem ist er keine begleitende Stimme, keine Mitbewegung mehr.“ 44

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

Through practice, developments happen, 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”. 43

43 Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 181-82.

44 Novalis, *Schriften* I: 95-6. “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”.

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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 [...].

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

Both F. Schlegel and Novalis want to elevate Nature into the non-material realm by thinking of it as a “Du”, a “thou” or intimate “you”. F. 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 Constituiren so schön bezeichnet. – Die σο [Synthese] wäre dann ein Du”.

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.

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”(351). 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’.

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 Verhältnis

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46 In his discussion of the English Romantic poet Shelley, Harold Bloom employs the distinction drawn by the twentieth-century Jewish theologian Martin Buber between “I-Thou” and “I-It” relationships. Bloom describes the “I-Thou” relationship as “a mode of imaginative perception” (*Shelley’s Mythmaking, Yale Studies in English* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1959) 2), and perceives such a “direct perception of a Thou in natural objects or phenomena” in Shelley’s poetry (5). The discussion of the desire to restore an I-Thou relationship between nature and the human mind in this thesis shows that Buber’s distinction is found much earlier, being an emphasis of early German Romantic thought.

47 “Not-I an empty word; it should be called Something. I is very good because it so neatly signifies the activity of self-constituting. – The synthesis would then be a You” (Translation by Mayer, *Jena Romanticism* 176 n.70).

48 Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler, et al., 35 vols. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958-) 12:337. “This led directly to a belief in a You, not one (as in life) to which the I is opposed, yet similar (human against human, not animal, stone against human) but generally as a counterself, and saying this inevitably entails belief in an archetypal I”.

49 “A loving union of the I with that which is the object [of love] of the 1, the You”.

50 Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* 191.
unsrer Welt einzusehn". In *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, the relationship of a poet with Nature is described as an I-you relationship, as one of the novices says "Wird nicht der Fels ein eigentümliches Du, eben wenn ich ihn anrede?" (1:100).

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 said "Die höhere Phil[osophie] behandelt die Ehe von Natur und Geist" (3:247). The young disciple in Novalis’s *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* elaborates on the idea of a marriage with Nature in the following terms:


Brown comments on 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 for the world around [...]. The lover of nature feels that it is separate from himself, but also feels their "wedded" unity.

Thus, the sense that Nature represents the lost complementary self of an originally androgynous union, and the tendency of F. 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, which the philosophy of Friedrich Schelling brought to its fullest expression in the *Identitätsphilosophie*.

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:

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52 "Does not the rock become a specific you, the moment I address it?"

53 "Higher philosophy deals with the marriage of nature and spirit".

54 "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".

55 Brown, *The Shape of German Romanticism* 155.

56 Schelling is not discussed in detail in this thesis, as I have come across no evidence of Brennan’s response to his work.
[...] that 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. 57

This sentiment, expressed at the time Brennan was planning and beginning the “Lilith” sequence, is absolutely in accord with Novalis’s 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 the collection From Blake to Arnold (1900), Brennan develops the notion of poetry as the vehicle of an exchange between, 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 [...] 58

The trope of a “nuptial exchange” is used again in the Symbolism lectures. The repetition three times between 1898 and 1904 of the idea of a harmonious exchange between the spiritual and the material indicates its importance in Brennan’s thought. Further discussion of the “Lilith” sequence, as this chapter and the following one proceed, will suggest that, in dealing with the union between the mind and Nature by means of the figures of Adam and Lilith, Brennan was engaging in a theorisation of his own poetic enterprise which was itself very much in keeping with the self-referential aspect of early German Romanticism.

The “Argument” to the “Lilith” sequence, then, in representing a lost, androgynous union between Adam and Lilith whose lack dominates Adam even in the Garden of Eden, as well as beyond it, is very much in keeping with important models of the relationship between mind and Nature, subject and object in early German Romanticism. This piece initiates a sense of tension between possible ways of regarding Lilith and the way she has been, and should be, related to Adam. Intimacy between Adam and Lilith in keeping with a single being, rather than two separate ones, is suggested as a possibility in the lines “close-dwelling, in the house of birth and death /and closer, in the secrets of our breath” (25-6). 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 piece, the stars of Lilith’s night are suddenly revealed, as though the doubts and fears explored earlier have been momentarily swept away, and an

57 Prose 190.
58 Sturm 222.
expanded vision has suddenly been granted, before the stars themselves are called into question by the piece which follows the “Argument”.

2. “The watch at midnight”

The extended vista of stars left as the final impression of the “Argument” is extinguished abruptly by the two words with which the second piece begins, “dead stars”. 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”, I.4). Whereas the word “cope” can refer either to a cloak or to a vault or expanse, the word “granite” makes it clear that here it is a question of limiting the expanse, creating an impenetrable ceiling past which thought cannot extend itself. Debts to Baudelaire, whose poetry Brennan began reading in 1891, and to Mallarmé (begun in 1893)59 are apparent in this imagery. One of Baudelaire’s “Spleen” poems (number LXXVIII of Les Fleurs du Mal) begins with the words “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.60 In the second stanza of this poem, “l’Espérance, comme une chauve-souris, /S’en va battant les murs de son aile timide”, 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 décourgée”.61 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 Coup de dés, with which Brennan was familiar, we find a wing which is “par avance retombée d’un mal à dresser le vol”.62 In the sonnet “Quand l’ombre menaç de la fatale loi”, the dream of the speaker is “Affligé de périr sous les plafonds funèbres”, but the dream retains its wing, “ployé […] en moi” (II.3-4).

Gardner Davies takes the “wing” of Mallarmé’s poetry as a metaphor for nostalgia for the ideal;63 Brennan’s representation of a state of mind in which the wing is “dash’d” and heaven closes in is analogous. The “watcher” to whose “watch at
midnight” the title refers appears 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”.

“Anguish” is also a feature of the Baudelaire poem quoted above. In the last three lines, hope is defeated, and “l’Angoisse atroce, despotique, Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir”. Anguish is a state of mind conveyed by Baudelaire by imagery of entrapment and limitation. In Mallarmé’s “Ses purs ongles très haut”, Anguish is a lampbearer at midnight, which “soutient […] Maint rêve vespéral brûlé par le Phénix”; 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 beyond exists, and that anything is left of his “eternity”, his quasi-divine union with Lilith, but a “wreck” in “the broad waste of his spirit” (last two lines). The doubts, like the “worm-brood of terrors unconfest” which were engendered in the human mind after the rift between Adam and Lilith, are “reptile”; snake-like, creeping. In Blake’s “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”, it is suggested that “reptiles of the mind” are the consequence of never changing one’s opinion; Brennan seems to have started reading Blake as early as 1893, in Berlin, and his term “reptile” could well be indebted to this reference, although his application is not the same as Blake’s.64

The sense of contrast between the expansion at the end of the first piece and the contraction conveyed in this one should also be thought of in the light of Yeats’s exploration of Blake’s imagery of expansion and contraction and its association with the human faculty of imagination. In his examination of “The Symbolic System” of Blake, Yeats discusses two poles or extremes, “the limit of contraction and the unlimited expansion”, or, in Yeats’s preferred terminology, “the personal and impersonal”.65

After his explanation of the Fall of the Boehmian “mirror”, discussed in the Introduction above, Yeats discusses how Blake diverges from Boehme, refusing to attribute to “desire” the responsibility for the Fall as Boehme did:

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 (1:247).

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

64 Clark, Biography 71.
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 [the “thought-forms” in the “mirror”] 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” (1:248).

Blake’s rejection of the central role accorded to reason by the Enlightenment is personified, in Yeats’s view, in 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 (1:252).

Reason produces a retreat into materiality. “Rigidity” and “opaqueness” of “stone” are conveyed by Brennan’s “granite cope” which restricts the penetration of the mind. The change of imagery between the end of the previous poem and the beginning of this one produces a contrast between expansion and contraction which conveys a restriction of imaginative vision of the kind Yeats discerns in Blake. Thus, Brennan’s imagery may be seen to convey not only the religious dilemma of a nineteenth-century mind for which faith in some kind of metaphysical Absolute seems simultaneously desirable and unthinkable, but 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 “mirror”, the creative imagination of God who becomes Nature after the Fall, demonstrated above, 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 (5:58-9). Later in the work, he develops this identification of Christ and imagination further, suggesting that Christianity itself is nothing other than the exercise of imagination:

I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination, Imagination, the real & eternal World of which

66 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’” (Prose 91). This lecture makes it clear that Brennan largely accepts the interpretation of Blake offered by Ellis and Yeats.
This Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, & in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more. (77) 67

This is consistent with the Boehmian 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 expansive vision and limitation of 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. This will be further explored later in the chapter.

3. “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 entire sequence. Here, for the first time, a choric voice addresses to the watcher 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” (stanza 1, ll.1-3). The import of the plumes is, however, accorded a certain equivocacy by the appearance of the stars, fiery eyes like the eyes in a peacock’s feather, established as a symbol of Lilith’s positive aspect at the end of the “Argument”. The “vast” of the second part of this stanza, in which “no way lies open” and “a placid wall” seems to restrict the watcher, should probably be taken to 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 pointless, 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”). In the third stanza, the frustration of the preceding piece is revisited and the attempt to escape from despair by penetrating new metaphysical heights is condemned because “the heart eludes thee still”.

67 Brennan quotes this passage in the Symbolism lecture on Blake, as evidence of his “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” (Prose 94).
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, or 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 by being embraced as an inner reality. The inner abyss, characterised by anguish in its “paining depths”, has its own heights and “vision’d shores”, we find at the beginning of the final stanza. 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.

One of Brennan’s most important sources for the idea that the metaphysical quest should be directed within the self was 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.68

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, who claimed in Luke’s Gospel that “the kingdom of heaven is within you” (17:21), Novalis declares that the worlds of eternity, even the past and the future, are within us or nowhere. Similarly, Brennan’s poem contrasts the metaphysical heights and depths which have repulsed the quest of the watcher with the inner abyss in which the true resolution of his quest must be found.

Brennan’s suggestion that the inner “abyss” holds the answers to the quest for metaphysical knowledge, and Novalis’s stress on the mysterious “inner way”, should be

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68 Novalis, *Schriften* 2:417-8. “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”.

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understood in the light of a doctrine of the inner regeneration of the self which Romanticism gained from esoteric and mystical traditions. Two important contributing factors to the influence of such traditions on Romanticism, not themselves unconnected, are the teachings of the Neoplatonists regarding the mystery religions of antiquity, and the principles of spiritual alchemy. The following discussion will demonstrate that the Romantics, and Brennan himself, encountered these doctrines in a number of different sources, and that they help us to understand the inner “abyss” in the lines from “The plumes of night, unfurl’d” quoted above.

Brennan’s notes for the writing of the “Lilith” sequence draw heavily on texts relating to the mystery religions. They begin “Hebr. Lil, night = mystery”. This is followed with 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; Hecate appears in that hymn 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: “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.

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69 As Stuart Atkins points out (Goethe’s Faust: A Literary Analysis (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1958) 91), Baubo appears in the Walpurgisnacht section (Scene 21) of Goethe’s Faust I, “[t]he only ‘witch’ mentioned by name”:

STIMME: Die alte Baubo kommt allein;
Sie reitet auf einem Mutterschwein.

CHOR: So Ehre denn, vem Ehre gebührt!
Frau Baubo vor, und angeführt! Ein tüchtig Schwein und Mutter drauf,
da folgt der ganze Hexenhauf.

("VOICE: Old Baubo’s coming alone; She’s riding on a sow.
CHORUS: Honour to whom honour is due!
Mother Baubo in front, in the lead! A hearty sow with the mother on it,
There follows the whole gang of witches").

70 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, including Cerberus, the Hydra, the Chimera and the Sphinx, is clearly relevant to Brennan’s Lilith (see Hesiod, Theogony, trans. Norman O. Brown, Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980) 61-2). The imagery Brennan
Brennan’s expertise in Greek and familiarity with dramas whose action is based around the mystery religions, such as the *Bacchae* of Euripides, his awareness of links between the mystery religions and esoteric currents, and his grasp of nineteenth-century research into classical mythology and the mystery religions, would have made their doctrines readily accessible to him. As the first chapter of this study has shown, Brennan was also familiar with Maitland’s view that the mystery religions, like the classical myths, concealed in allegory the message that human beings could become divine through a spiritual death and rebirth.\(^1\) When we understand that the idea of a symbolic death of the self was linked, in interpretations of the mystery religions, with the notion of the rebirth of the soul with a divine dimension, we can understand the appropriateness of Brennan’s funereal imagery in the first part of a piece in which the choric voice insists on the abandonment of the quest for an outer Absolute in favour of an inner “abyss”.

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:

> Even before our birth here below, we existed There, men of another sort, as individuals and as gods, pure souls and intellect in union with universal Being, parts of the Intelligible not set apart or severed, but integral to the whole; for even now we are not cut off from it. But another man, craving existence, has now approached that primal Man, and finding us within the All, has enveloped us and encumbered the Man that was formerly the true self of each of us. [...] We have become the dual Man, losing that former singleness, and on occasions the intruder only, while the primal self lies dormant or otherwise absents himself.\(^2\)

Of Plato’s works, the ones 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

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\(^1\) Speaking of the eighteenth century, Joscelyn Godwin points out that “Orphism and the Mysteries were magnets for those who investigated ancient religion, whether in a spirit of reverence or of disdain”. He discusses, for example, the interpretation of the mystery religions attributed to Nicholas Boulanger and rewritten by the Baron d’Holbach, “most extreme of the atheistic philosophes of the French Enlightenment”, explaining the Mysteries “as having taught, through impressive displays, the survival of the soul after death – a belief not generally held in the ancient world until proclaimed by Christianity. But the Orphics taught an even more esoteric doctrine: that of the past and future destructions of the world, and of the eventual death of the gods themselves”. Godwin comments “To attribute to pagan religions two of the central doctrines of Christianity, namely monotheism and the immortality of the soul, was a strategic move in the Enlightenment’s campaign to strip Christianity of its pretensions to uniqueness” (*The Theosophical Enlightenment* 4).

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*] with a commentary harmonising their teaching with Neoplatonism, and for Iamblichus and the Athenian School they became the supreme authority, exceeding even Plato”.\(^\text{73}\) 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’ére chrétienne en effet, se développait, 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.

> […] les Néo-platoniciens déployèrent 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 Chaldéens*.\(^\text{74}\)

The notion of a coded or occulted message, and the desire to assert an accord between the sacred texts of antiquity which Brisson mentions, are important aspects of Neoplatonic reading of the myths and mysteries, and were taken up again by nineteenth-century mythologists. Porphyry’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 of the regeneration of the soul.\(^\text{75}\)

\(^\text{73}\) R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, Classical Life and Letters (London: Duckworth, 1972) 105. Neoplatonism became the official teaching of Plato’s Academy in Athens in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Plutarch was the first Neoplatonic head of the Academy, and Proclus was the best-known of its proponents (138).


\(^\text{75}\) Homer’s description, as it appears in Porphyry’s account, is as follows: “At the head of the bay there is a long-leaved olive-tree, and near it a cave, enchanting and shadowy, a temple of the nymphs called naiads. In it there are mixing-bowls and storage vessels of stone; and there the bees store their honey. And there are tall looms made of stone there, where the nymphs weave garments of sea-purple, a wonder to behold; and there is a spring whose waters never fail. The cave has two doors, one towards the north for men to descend, and one that faces south for the gods; and no men enter by this, for it is a path for immortals” (*The Neoplatonists*, 204). In interpreting the symbolism of the cave and its two doors, Porphyry comments:

> "We must remember that the cave is an image or symbol of the universe. Numenius and his friend Cronius say that there are two poles in the heaven, the southern at the winter solstice and the northern at the summer; and the summer solstice falls under Cancer and the winter under Capricorn. [...] The poets interpreted Cancer and Capricorn as two gates, and Plato called them two mouths; and Cancer is the gate through which souls descend, and Capricorn their path of ascent. Cancer is to the north, and for descent, and Capricorn to the south, for ascent. The north is for souls coming to birth, and it is right that the northern gate of the cave is ‘for men to descend’, whereas the southern opening is not for gods,
Neoplatonism too, then, Brennan had access to readings of the mystery religions as accounts of the spiritual death and regeneration of the soul.

One of the most important of the Romantic researchers of mythology, mentioned by Brennan in the article on German Romanticism, was Friedrich Creuzer (1771-1858), who 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. Creuzer was influenced by the theories of Josef Görres (1776-1848), who argued for a higher truth which was common to, and expressed in, the myths of India, Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, China and Greece, as well as in the German spirit. 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, 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 (387).

Creuzer was the first in the nineteenth century to distinguish the chthonic, Apollonian and Dionysiac cults. Of these, the chthonic deals with myths of the earth or the underworld, as in the Eleusinian mysteries associated with the mythic cycle recounting the story of Demeter and the rape of Persephone; the Apollonian with myths of the sun; and the Dionysian with orgiastic or frenzied ecstasy. Creuzer’s distinction between the chthonic, Apollonian and Dionysian was given its best-known expression later in the nineteenth century by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nietzsche’s The 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 well; evidence from his annotated copies of Nietzsche’s works indicates the extent of his interested response, even though negative comments are made for souls ascending to the gods” (210). This forms part of an elaborate allegorical interpretation of the brief original passage in Homer. For a detailed discussion of Porphyry’s interpretation of the cave, and the various allegorical meanings he assigns to it, see Wallis, Neoplatonism 135-6. For more on the relation of Neoplatonism to esoteric currents, see Faivre, "Ancient and Medieval Sources" 8-12.

76 Prose 386.
79 Leon Surette comments that the “idea most firmly identified with The Birth of Tragedy – that Greek myth represents the survival of an ancient and primitive religious awareness or wisdom, and that this wisdom was unhappily supplanted by philosophy – is taken from Creuzer” (The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and the Occult (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 1993) 185).
in the Symbolism lectures. Thus 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 in the version promulgated by Creuzer and his successors.

For the English Romantics, Thomas Taylor, a contemporary of Blake, provided English translations of 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, used by both Mead and Yeats. Yeats used Taylor in his discussion of the Neoplatonist interpretation of Homer’s Cave of the Nymphs in his essay on “The Philosophy of Shelley’s Poetry” (1900), which Brennan knew, although not, of course, before writing the Lilith sequence. The allegorising reading of the myths and mysteries by Kingsford and Maitland, which were known to Brennan before the writing of the sequence, have been discussed in the first chapter of this study. Pater, too, made significant reference to the mystery religions, to be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. From these, in addition to his familiarity with texts of antiquity relating to the mystery religions, and his cognisance of nineteenth-century thinking about myth and the mysteries, Brennan’s own exploration of the regeneration of the self from within must have drawn significant inspiration.

In addition to the Neoplatonic tradition that the myths and mysteries hid a secret doctrine of the regeneration of the soul in an allegorical form of expression, the traditions of spiritual alchemy, which taught the transmutation of the soul, were also important influences on Romantic thinking about the self, transmitted via the teachings of Boehme, but also through Pietism, and through alchemical emphases of eighteenth-century Masonic groups. Alchemical doctrines regarding the regeneration of the self provide another important context in which Brennan’s discussion of the inner “abyss” in “The plumes of night, unfurl’d” should be considered.

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 study, La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme, explains the attraction of

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80 For a discussion of positive aspects of Brennan’s reception of Nietzsche, see Dobrez, “Christopher Brennan”. For an interpretation that is sceptical about possible influences of Nietzsche on Brennan, see Noel Macainsh, “Brennan and Nietzsche”, Southerly 26 (1966).
alchemical symbolism for Boehme, as well as Valentin Weigel (1533-1588) and Caspar Schwenkfeld (1489-1561), in terms of a salvation which is \textit{ab intra} rather than \textit{ab extra}:

Un trait commun unissait, en effet, tous ces opposants: pour eux, le salut, la justification, la régeneration (la seconde naissance, \textit{Wiedergeburt}) étaient et devaient être quelque chose de réel, quelque chose qui se passe dans l’âme \textit{réellement}, quelque chose qui l’illumine, la transforme, la régénère \textit{réellement} et \textit{effectivement}. Pour tous la justification, à laquelle est subordonné le salut du pécheur, se produit dans l’âme même de l’homme, se fait \textit{ab intra} et non \textit{ab extra} ; l’âme justifiée est une âme purifiée ; une âme renouvelée. Il est fort compréhensible que rien ne 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.\footnote{Alexandre Koyré, \textit{La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme}, Burt Franklin Research and Source Works Ser. 174 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968) 44.}

Koyré points out that Boehme followed the German mystic Meister Eckhart in using alchemical imagery to express mystical ideas (45); 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. Both operations were theoretically based on a single Gnostic and Neoplatonic principle, that all matter is derived by emanation from (rather than creation by) God, so that everything, whether inanimate or not, contains a seed or spark of God whose destiny is to return to its source. Boehme uses the alchemical concept of the universal “Tincture”, the metaphorical “colour” which transmutes into gold, associated elsewhere in his works with the Philosophers’ Stone and the Elixir of Life, to refer to a spiritual principle, present in everything in an impure state, but having the power to perfect itself:

The Tincture is a Thing that separates, and brings the Pure and Clear from the Impure; and that brings the Life of all Sorts of Spirits, or all Sorts of Essences, into its highest Degree. \[ \ldots \] But if we search what it is in Essence and Property, and how it is generated, then we find a very worthy Substance in its Birth, for it is come forth from the Virtue, and the Fountain of the Deity, which has imprinted itself in all Things. And therefore it is so secret and hidden, and is imparted to the Knowledge of none of the Ungodly, to find it, or to know it.\footnote{Jacob Boehme, \textit{The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Philosopher}, 4 vols. (London: 1764-81), \textit{Book of the Principles} ch.12, 25-6.}

The idea that the Tincture or Sophia 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 ; 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 [...]” (46). 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 and in superconsciousness.

The thought of Boehme is also an important source for Brennan’s term “abyss”. Boehme used the term “Ungrund” for the originary Nothingness, lacking any ground at all, from which the Deity developed. David Walsh relates this “Ungrund” to the “boundless” (apeiron) of Anaximander and the “abyss” (Abgrund) of Eckhart. Faivre explains the role of Sophia in engendering Being out of this “Ungrund”:

It is in issuing forth from this unutterable Ungrund that God conceives Himself as a subject, opposes Himself to Himself, engenders in Himself an infinity of ideas and of thoughts. A taking or seizing that is possible due to a mediating element – the first among all mediations – a mirror which no longer is exactly God, which is somehow outside Him, but which allows Him to know Himself in his multiplicity through the infinity of objects that already incarnate Him, revealing His infinite fertility. This mirror, or this eye, is Sophia, Divine Wisdom. The Objectum, or Gegenwurf, in relation to God, she is also the ideal image of the world, for she contains the ideal images of all individual beings. [...] the first face of the One, which the One needs so as to be revealed in multiplicity, she is also the first manifestation of the infinite in the finite, of the Absolute in a thing which, in a certain manner, is already concrete.

In English translations of Boehme, the word “Abyss” was used for the indescribable source of the godhead, from which issues the “Byss” or “Ground” of everything that comes into being.

The “mysterious inner way” proposed by Novalis in the aphorism quoted earlier with relation to Brennan’s inner “abyss” cannot be directly linked with Boehme’s concept of the inner “Tincture” which 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 well as his familiarity with Sophia mysticism via his Pietist upbringing, meant that there was little new in Boehme by the time Novalis’ study of his work began in 1799.

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(Novalis died in 1801). 86 Mayer distinguishes Novalis’ reception of Boehme from the much more substantial reception by F. Schlegel and Schelling. 87

Radical Pietism was an important means of transmission of Boehmian thinking to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both in communities of believers, and in Masonic and Rosicrucian groups influenced by Pietism. The influence of Gottfried Arnold, one of the radical Pietists, in the dissemination of Sophia mysticism has been discussed earlier in the chapter. 88 Arnold’s Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie (“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. 89 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”. 90 Apart from the teachings of Boehme, Pietism drew on other esoteric currents, as Ayrault explains:


The apparent influence of Boehmian ideas on writers such as Novalis, therefore, must be assessed in the light of important indirect means of transmission such as that 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 of spiritual alchemy, and of Boehme, regarding the inner rebirth of the divinity within the soul. 91 By various means, then, writers such as Novalis became familiar with alchemical and Boehmian doctrines of the inner transformation of the self.

87 See Mayer, *Jena Romanticism*, chapters eight and nine.
88 See page 58.
91 For more on these groups, 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. For more on Pietism, see Ernst Stoeffler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1973).
The "repliement de l'être sur son moi le plus secret" is an essential part of the intellectual context of Brennan's insistence in "The plumes of night, unfurl'd" that only the exploration of the inner, rather than the outer, abyss, will prove fruitful. Historically, this notion is pivotal in the transition from an outer to an inner Absolute, which issued in the nineteenth-century development of theories of the human Unconscious such as that of Hartmann, discussed in the previous chapter. 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". Gusdorf explains that 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." 92

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, 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". 93 According to Weeks, Eckhart's "small spark" or 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" (81). 94 The "fleshy Now" of Brennan's poem, in which the person addressed in "The plumes of night, unfurl'd" is exorted to "house" the "abyss", is consistent with this doctrine of mystical thought.

Owing to a particular usage in mystical tradition and Naturphilosophie, the term Gemüth, mind or soul, took on a special sense which is reflected in its employment by Novalis and F. Schlegel and in terms of which Brennan's inner "abyss" may be considered. Eckhart's Fünklein was passed on to Johannes Tauler (1300-61), as the spiritual faculty of human beings, the Seelengrund, Seelenfünklein or Gemüth. 95 In the Naturphilosophie of Paracelsus (1493-1541), the soul or Gemüth was seen as the inner

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93 Benz, The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy 21.
94 Weeks, German Mysticism 81.
95 Weeks, German Mysticism 96. For the sake of consistency, the older spelling with a final "h", used by Brennan himself, is adhered to in this thesis, rather than the modern Gemüt.
opening to the invisible world, the part of the human being in which images are conceived. For Boehme, the “divine image, our living mirror”, dwells within in the *Gemüth*, “consubstantial with it but nevertheless separate from it” (141). 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.*” Poetry is, like philosophy, “eine harmonische Stimmung ours Gemüths” (3:558). After the end of the Golden Age, according to the *Hymnen an die Nacht*, “Ins tiefre Heiligtum, in des Gemüts hohern Raum zog mit ihren Mächten die Seele der Welt – zu walten dort bis zum Anbruch der tagenden Weltherrlichkeit” (1:145). According to another of Novalis’ aphorisms, the visible world will be redeemed by becoming *Gemüth*: “Wird nicht die Welt am ende Gemüth?” (3:654). F. Schlegel uses the term *Gemüth* for the faculty to intuit the spiritual, essential to poetry:


The magic wand of *Gemüth* opens everything. It is the supreme faculty of inner beauty and completion, surpassing spirit and soul (*Geist and Seele*).
Thus it is apparent that the transfer of the locus of the divine within the self was supported by mystical and esoteric currents such as alchemy and Naturphilosophie which identified the faculty within the human being, the soul or Gemüth, as the place where the divine and human meet and the godhead itself undergoes rebirth. Romantic psychologists of the Unconscious were also interested in the hidden powers of the Gemüth in the specialised sense of the word discussed above, 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, Henri Ellenberger associates 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”.104 “Mesmerism” or “Animal Magnetism”, developed from the theories of Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) in the late eighteenth century and enjoying considerable popularity and prominence during the nineteenth century, explored so-called “somnambulistic” states of visionary trance. In Germany, Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817) associates these altered states of consciousness with mysticism, commenting:

The exaltation of the inner man rises in many persons to such a height, that they come into connexion with the invisible world, and they very frequently reveal hidden mysteries, and also remarkable things, which are taking place at a distance, or will shortly happen.105

Schelling suggests in The Ages of the World that sleep resembles other altered states of consciousness such as vision or mesmeric trance, and facilitates the emergence of a higher self:

Man kann etwas Geist haben oder 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 wenn er reif ist, hat er Sinn für alles. Geist ist wie eine Musik von Gedanken; wo Seele ist, da haben auch die Gefühle Umrüstk 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 namelose Kunst, welche das verwirrte flüchtige Leben ergreift und zur ewigen Einheit bildet” (Schlegel, Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe 2:225-6)

(“Feeling that is aware of itself becomes spirit; spirit is inner conviviality, and soul, hidden amiability. But the real vital power of inner beauty and perfection is Gemüth. One can have a little spirit without having any soul, and a good deal of soul without much Gemüth. But the instinct for moral greatness which we call Gemüth needs only to learn to speak to have spirit. It needs only to move and love to become all soul; and when it is mature, it has a feeling for everything. Spirit is like a music of thoughts; where soul is, there feelings too have outline and form, noble proportions, and charming coloration. Gemüth is the poetry of elevated reason and, united with philosophy and moral experience, it gives rise to that nameless art which seizes the confused transitoriness of life and shapes it into an eternal unity”).

Translation by Peter Firchow (Friedrich Schlegel, Philosophical Fragments (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis Press, 1991) 69. Firchow’s translation is modified by leaving the word “Gemüt”, which he renders as “temperament”, untranslated. Schelling, too, uses the term in a way which suggests a mystical or esoteric provenance of some kind. Mayer suggests that it is impossible to establish the exact provenance of Schelling’s use of the term (Jena Romanticism 182).

104 Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious 200.
105 Quoted in Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment 161.
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.  

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”. Some of the content of these lectures, given in Dresden, reached Australia indirectly via Catherine Crowe’s The Night Side of Nature or Ghosts and Ghost Seers, a work which influenced Baudelaire and which was in the Public Library of N.S.W. during Brennan’s time there, probably not fortuitously. In the lectures, Schubert follows Hamann in proposing the idea that the original or archetypal human being was designated as the reflection of Nature, the means by which Nature can contemplate herself. Schubert’s major work, The Symbolism of Dreams (1814), posits a universal symbolic or hieroglyphic language of dreams, based on images, which has a poetic, even an ironic, character. Schubert suggests that the language of dream and poetry may be the true language of the higher state of the self. In the work of another Romantic psychologist, the Swiss Ignaz Paul Vital Troxler (1780-1866), a disciple of Schelling, we find a further development of the Romantic interest in the Gemüth. Troxler’s fourfold human system, designated as the Tetraktyys, is held together by the Gemüth, described as the “true individuality of Man, by means of which he is in himselfmost authentically, the hearth of his selfhood, the most alive centrepoint of his existence.”

As Béguin points out, the Gemüth is, for Troxler, the centre where man perceives God; Troxler’s metaphysic of dream relates the inner dream of life or true reality to the Gemüth: “C’est dans ce centre que l’homme rêve le rêve profondément caché de sa vie,

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107 Schubert was influenced by Edward Young’s Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality (1742-45), which made an important contribution to German interest in the symbolism of night, appearing “in many editions and translations in Germany” (Benz, The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy 67). The Romantic era of fascination with night as a symbol of mystical vision was inaugurated by the Mistische Nächte (1791) and Die Wolke über dem Heiligtum (1802) of Karl von Eckartshausen.
108 As she acknowledges (14), Crowe also draws upon the works of Kerner, Jung-Stilling, Werner, Eschenmayer, Ennemoser and Passavant.
109 Albert Béguin, L’Ame romantique et le rêve : essai sur le romantisme allemand et la poésie française (Paris: José Corti, 1960) 104. Schubert was introduced to mystical thought by Franz Baader, one of the main transmitters of Boehme’s thought to German speculative philosophy and to the works of Tauler, Ruysbroeck, Gottfried Arnold, Angelus Silesius, and Swedenborg by a baker at Nuremberg with mystical interests (106).
110 Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious 205; Béguin, L’Ame romantique et le rêve 109.
111 Béguin, L’Ame romantique et le rêve 111.
112 Quoted in Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious 206.
The rhythmic alternation of sleep and waking is an expression of our double orientation towards Nature and spirit. Life is an unachieved unity which can only express itself in a double aspect. At moments between sleep and waking man glimpses "son véritable centre ; où âme et corps ne font qu’un" (96).

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, both of which Brennan knew well. In the former, night promotes the poet’s visionary experience at the grave of his beloved, releasing in the poet his own “entbundner, neugebomer Geist” (“liberated, newborn spirit”) and allowing him to glimpse her “verklarten Züge” (“transfigured features”). This vision is described as “der erste, einzige Traum” (“the first, unique dream”) which has changed night itself into a heaven lit by the beloved. Night is “geheimnisvoll” (“mysterious”) and “unaussprechlich” (“inexpressible”) as well as “heilig” (“sacred”) (131). Night is personified as a mother with tangled locks (133), perhaps inspiring Brennan’s phrase “her flung hair that is the starry night” (“Argument” l.28). Above all, night is “Ahnungsvoll” (131); the translation of this word as “menacingly” in the Higgins edition ignores the significance for German Romanticism (at least according to Brennan himself) of this word signifying the divinatory or prophetic power of intuition. Heinrich von Ofterdingen promotes dream as a means of vision. Although the father of the chief protagonist, Heinrich, argues that the days of “direct intercourse with heaven” by means of dreams have passed, the dream he himself recounts and several significant and premonitory dreams of 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? (198-9)

As Novalis’ exploration of night and dream in the Hymnen an die Nacht and Heinrich von Ofterdingen are fundamental sources for Brennan’s treatment of night in the

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113 Quoted in Béguin, L’Ame romantique et le rêve 93.
114 Novalis, Henry von Ofterdingen 19.
115 The word “Ahnung” (now “Ahnung”) is described by Brennan as one of the “driving forces of poetry”, the other being “Sehnsucht” (longing). Whereas the corresponding sense of the modern German “Ahnung” is a presentiment or foreboding of evil, Brennan glosses the word as “a Sehnsucht that is beginning to become conscious of its Etwas and its Woher?, of its object and its direction” (Prose 388). In the Symbolism lectures, he translates it as “full of sweet boding” (Prose 116). Schelling uses Ahnung in Ages of the World (115), with reference to the presentiment of the possibility of self-knowledge within the preconscious personality.
116 "Is not every dream, even the most confused one, a remarkable phenomenon, which apart from any notion of its being sent from God is a significant rent in the mysterious curtain that hangs a thousandfold about our inner life?". Translation by Palmer Hilty, 19.
“Lilith” sequence, Novalis’ association of night, intuition, dream and vision are crucial when considering the scope of Brennan’s own symbolism of night.

The significance of Brennan’s “The plumes of night, unfurl’d” in the “Lilith” sequence may be appreciated in the light of strong Romantic associations between night and the revelation of the human Unconscious, imagined as a higher self with particular imaginative powers. The poetic voice enjoins the watcher to abandon the quest for an infinite “out there” in favour of an inner abyss. Night is associated with death in the funereal imagery with which the poem opens. The inner abyss, which has associations with the mystical, esoteric and German Romantic concept of an inner faculty where the human self may undergo spiritual death and regeneration as a higher self, is also related to Romantic conceptions of the human Unconscious.

The inner abyss is not, however, represented as a final solution to the despair of the watcher, conveyed in the previous piece; 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”. 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” (stanza 4). The implications of this are further developed in the second epilogue to Poems, which, with its street setting in Sydney in the year 1908, firmly emphasises the importance of ordinary life in a specific place and time. This poem is discussed in Chapter Seven of this study.
Chapter Three: The “Lilith” Sequence: Part II

Introduction

This chapter completes the discussion of the “Lilith” sequence begun in the previous chapter. It considers how we might understand Brennan’s association of Lilith with “nothingness” and “silence” in the light of the Gnostic “nothing” from which everything develops, the doctrine of “negative theology”, and the French Romantic notion of the “Néant”, all of which convey the idea that the Absolute or divine is ultimately unknowable and inexpressible. In this context, the imagination as conceived by Tetens and Kant, whose ideas were developed by Romantic thinkers, becomes the only human faculty able to intuit and give expression to the inexpressible. Typically this takes place in art, especially in the creation of mythology (seen as a kind of art), which uses phenomenal objects as symbols of the noumenon. Brennan’s association of Lilith with “silence” and “nothingness”, then, is compatible with her central role in his own new myth, the “Lilith” sequence itself.

The chapter continues its exploration of Brennan’s myth by showing that the “gulfs” around which the cosmogonic imagery of “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast” is built symbolise the possibility of a creative act taking place within the unconscious. Imagery of likely alchemical and Boehmian provenance supports the identification of Lilith with the Boehmian Sophia made in the first chapter. Notions of the sleep of the soul after the Fall into material existence, drawn from Gnosticism, Neoplatonism and Boehme, underpin the choice of the mythical Adam to assuage his inner frustration (the voice of Lilith) by choosing to be satisfied with earthly, purely material, existence and to escape Lilith in sleep, where, however, she pursues him in dream.

The discussion of “Terrible, if he will not have me else” critiques psychoanalytical interpretations of the relationship between Adam and Eve portrayed by Brennan (such as that of McAuley, who took the relevant passages to refer to the sexual relationship of the poet and his wife). It argues that patterns of imagery of morning innocence associated with Eve demonstrate significant similarities with other pieces, written before Elisabeth arrived from Germany to marry Brennan. In addition, water imagery associated with Eve links her with the elemental spirit Undine, the focus of the Romantic fairy-tale by Fouqué, suggesting, with other evidence, that Brennan’s Eve symbolises the material aspect of Nature which needs to be granted a soul. Rather than
rejecting material existence in favour of the spiritual, as some of his sources do, Brennan’s piece implies that the material and the spiritual need to be reunited.

1. Five short pieces: from “The trees that thro’ the tuneful morn had made” to “The anguish’d doubt broods over Eden”

“The trees that thro’ the tuneful morn had made”, a sonnet, reflects a time-change and establishes a place. The “now” of “now stricken with misgiving of the night” (l.5) makes it clear that the poem is set at the onset of night, unlike the three preceding pieces in which night is fully established. The first quatrain looks back to earlier in the day, when the trees of a forest appeared in a kindly guise in the morning, and in a hieratic or priestly role in the afternoon. As night approaches, the trees become threatening, presaging or even inviting “some fearful coming” (l.7). In the sestet, a “garden”, attractive and “self-sufficing” (l.10) during the day, is pictured as overtaken by doubt at the coming of night. Given the context of the Fall established in the “Argument”, we think of the garden of Eden. Here, its greenness provides privacy for “the vision’d white /of limbs that follow their own clear delight” (ll.11-2). The mention of the “garden-state” of Adam in the “Argument” supports this. The sonnet implies that the coming of night disturbs the order and self-sufficiency of the daylight forest and garden, creating in the garden a sense of insufficiency hard to put into words: the garden “exhales towards the inaccessible skies, /commencing, failing, broken, scents or sighs” (ll.13-14).

This pattern, in which an intense dissatisfaction or frustration breaks in upon some originally satisfying experience, symbolised by day giving way to night, is characteristic of the “Lilith” sequence. We have already seen frustration succeed vision in the transition from the first piece to the second. As the sequence proceeds, the coming of night, of Lilith herself, constantly disrupts other attempts to find satisfaction or relief, whether in sex, religion, worldly achievements, sleep or even death. As the discussion of the remaining poems in the sequence proceeds, examples will proliferate.

The sonnet finishes with a colon rather than a full stop, leading into the next piece, “O mother, only”, which therefore represents the text spoken by the garden or, since the speakers refer to themselves as “we”, the human beings within the garden, the owners of the “white […] limbs”. To the “mother” are directed the almost inexpressible longings which have replaced the self-sufficiency of the daylight garden. Although longed for as “crown for the lonely brow, /bosom for the spent wanderer” (ll.3-4), however, she seems to be hiding (l.2), “undiscoverable” (l.8), “too vast to find” (l.9).
The reference to the “wanderer” recalls the “wide way of [Adam’s] travail” after the expulsion from Eden mentioned in the “Argument” (l.15). The form of this piece reflects the speakers’ tentative and halting expression. It also further develops the sense of frustration established at the beginning of “Dead stars, beneath the midnight’s granite cope”. Frustration (and the sense of loss which was conveyed by the beginning of the “Argument”) is focused now on the mother (later to be clearly identified with Lilith).

Whereas the speakers in this piece seem to feel helpless in the face of the impossible task of locating the “mother” they address, the chorus of stars in the two-line piece which follows are intensely “disdainful”, and the longer piece which follows explains their disdain. The stars themselves are the speakers in “They said, because their parcel-thought”, reporting unsympathetically the complaint of the flagging seekers in the first two stanzas, and scornfully condemning their failure in the remaining three stanzas (“O fools and blind, not to have found”, stanza 3). The speakers of “O mother, only” become “they” at the beginning of the first and second stanzas of “They said, because their parcel-thought”, 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, “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, and we know that although these lectures were not written until 1904, Brennan’s reading of Blake had begun a number of years before the “Lilith” sequence was conceived. Brennan’s comment on Blake’s reference in Jerusalem to the “Grain of Sand in Lambeth” which has an inner opening “into Beulah” is, therefore, relevant to the “nought/which is the hid heart of all place”. 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.¹

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

¹ Prose 96-7.
between “refurl’d” and “unfurl’d” emphasises the reversion from infinite space to the mysterious inner way recommended by Novalis.

The “nought” which is “the hid heart of all place” is the ultimate negative.\(^2\)

The Gnostic concept of the “nothing” from which everything derives, the doctrine of “negative theology”, and the “Néant” of French Romanticism, 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 originary “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 say, “nothing” existed,] God, “non-existent” (whom Aristotle styles “conception of conception,” but these [Basildians] “non-existent”), inconceivably, insensibly, indeterminately, involuntarily, impassively, [and] unactuated by desire, willed to create a world.\(^3\)

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”.\(^4\) In Plotinus’s Enneads we read:

> How do we speak of the One? We certainly speak about it, yet it eludes our words and we have no knowledge or intuition of it. So how can we speak of it when it escapes our grasp? If knowledge cannot comprehend it, is it utterly beyond our reach?

> We possess it, not as to state it, but so as to speak of it allusively. We state what it is not, not what it is, and make inference to it from its sequels.\(^5\)

As conceived by Plotinus, the One is beyond both speech and knowledge; we are reduced to negatives. Pseudo-Dionysius, writing in the sixth century AD, and strongly

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\(^2\) The “nought” becomes a recurring motif in Brennan’s Musicopoematographoscope, 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]). For more on the Musicopoematographoscope, see Boisivon, "Musicopoematographoscope": 42-5.

\(^3\) Hippolytus, The Refutation of All Heresies, trans. S.D.F. Salmon, vol. 6, Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: 1868) 274. Brennan could have found this passage in King, The Gnostics and Their Remains 73, if not in Hippolytus himself. King’s work was in the Public Library of NSW at the appropriate time.

\(^4\) Wallis, Neoplatonism 11.

\(^5\) The Neoplatonists, 41. It should be noted that there is no direct evidence as to the text of Plotinus Brennan himself would have used. It is likely, but not certain, that he read Plotinus in Greek.

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influenced by Neoplatonism, 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’ (aynosophia) which is freed of all concepts drawn from creatures.6

The way of “agnosia” described here is compatible with Brennan’s interpretation of the “agnosticism” of Spencer, discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. The “unknowable” is by no means the non-existent, but that whose essence is beyond human cognition.

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”.7 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’Etre sans restriction, dans son identité incaractérisable, avant que lui soient appliquées les formes restrictives de notre langage et de notre intellect. [...] L’Etre Absolu transcende le connaître, et cette transcendance se révèle à la conscience des hommes sous la forme obscure d’une permanente dénégation (116).

As it is beyond knowledge, 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” (116).8

The point of view that the Absolute is a “Néant” inaccessible to reason represents an extension of the Kantian embargo on attaining knowledge of the three fundamental metaphysical questions via pure reason, in the direction of Kant’s own view that the creative imagination, unlike reason, is able to give expression to the Ideas of the noumenon. In the Critique of Judgment, Kant in a sense transgresses the limits he established in the Critique of Pure Reason. In developing his ideas on imagination, according to James Engell, Kant attempts to combine the approach of the British empiricist school with a Platonic stream derived from Leibniz, Wolff and Baumgarten and influenced by Shaftesbury, Spinoza and Jacobi. Above all, Kant depends for his

7 Gusdorf, Du néant à dieu 115-116.
8 For Brennan’s response to the notion of the “Néant” as it appears in Mallarmé’s “Toast Funèbre”, see page 157 below.
ideas on 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 [...].

The work of Tetens explores “how the psyche, through complex and interconnected faculties, relates itself to the outside world” (119). Tetens’ notion of “a split (Kluft) between the human psyche and nature” was foundational for 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 (128).

Thus, the mystical notion of a reunification of Nature and mind had its counterpart in contemporary psychology in a notion of imagination 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” (126). Imagination intuits the inexpressible.

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” (132). Further, Engell argues:

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 (133-4).

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.10

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”.11 The imagination of the

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poet has the power to mediate, then, 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 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’ (65)."

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.

For Kant, and for Romanticism, then, that which is beyond discursive thought is accessible by means of imagination and at least partially expressible in art, in a process which unites Nature and the mind by employing the objects of nature as symbols of the noumenon. The desire to intuit the noumenon is not absolutely impossible of fulfillment. Imagination, the faculty for intuiting and expressing the "unknowable", is located within the human mind. We can appreciate the significance for Brennan of Boehme’s paradigm of imagination, discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter, as he prepares to write this sequence of poems dealing with the relationship between the human mind and the Absolute. As the discussion of the special use of the word “Gemüth” both in “Naturphilosophie” and by writers of the Frühromantik period in the previous chapter has indicated, the imagination itself is the interface between the human being and the divine.

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!” (stanza 3). 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.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Boehme locates within the human being, in the mind or soul (“Gemüth”), the inner capacity to bring about the rebirth of God, and identifies this with the divine imagination (Sophia). F. Schlegel thinks of the “Gemüth” as the faculty which intuits the “Geisterwelt” (spiritual world), and the Romantic
psychology of Troxler identifies the “Gemüt” as the centre where human beings perceive God. Kant’s “transcendental self” operates between the noumenon and the phenomenal world. There is a complex tradition, both mystical and philosophical, behind Brennan’s “hid heart of all place”.

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”, represents 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 which has recognisably Gnostic dimensions, we should take the “olden word” to refer to Gnosticism itself, whose appeal for Brennan has been mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis.

2. “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast”

A number of much longer pieces follow the five short poems just discussed. In the first of these, “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast”, the speaker, presumably the watcher previously referred to, who seems to be standing on the earth looking up at the sky, is caught up in a debate about whether he truly belongs to Lilith’s night sky, or Eve’s daylit Earth. This is a very difficult piece, as Brennan’s imagery is not always clear. The discussion which follows draws on Gnostic cosmogonic systems to interpret Brennan’s “gulfs” and “voids”. It considers Brennan’s suggestion that “silence” is the goal of the inner quest in terms of Gnosticism, Romanticism and Idealist philosophy; explores further aspects of Lilith in terms of Boehmian and alchemical imagery of Sophia, the alchemical Tincture, as mother, sister and bride; and indicates that the imagery contrasting day and night suggests that we are dealing with Adam’s Fall into material existence. It suggests that some aspects of the Sophia figure, as she appears in Gnostic myth and Boehmian cosmogony, are to be found in Eve as well as Lilith.

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” (ll.2-4). The oxymoron implied in the phrase “the distant centre of my brain” implies such 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 mentioned in ll.5-10, which “break away to the dark” and then return. In l.10,

12 See page 82 above.
we find that this pulse, the inner drive or ache introduced in the first line ("O thou that achest, pulse o' the unwed vast"), surpasses sexual desire, "the hard throbbing sun-smitten blood / when the noon-world is fused in fire". In ll.19-23, the "pulse" is imagined as a tide, pulling the "deep unlighted still" of the speaker's being, "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 my surmise" (l.5), where everything is "vanishing utterly out of mortal trace" (l.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:

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

While the connection to Gnostic myth seems correct, 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, too, 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.

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13 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 page 186 below.
14 Clark, Biography 131.
15 Hippolytus explains that the third Eon, "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 [which he derived] from above for any length of time to be snatched away by the darkness beneath" (312). The "spirit" which 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. The "rose" which is generated in Brennan's poem when the voids clash together "amorously" is "exhaled" in the abyss; both "rose" and "exhaled" are compatible with the "france" of the Sethian system. In the next paragraph of the poem, we find that the soul of the speaker has been generated out of the wind, becoming a "wind-waif upon the shore", while in the final paragraph of this piece, Adam addresses the following words to himself: Nay, not thus lightly, heart the winds have mock'd!
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 has Gnostic overtones. In the Gnostic system of Simon Magus, “Silence” is the origin of all the Æons, according to Hippolytus’ quotation of the “Revelation” of Simon himself:

There are Two stocks of all the Æons put together, having neither beginning nor end, springing out of one Root, the which is Silence, invisible, inconceivable, of which Stocks, the one shows itself from above, the which is a great Power, Mind of the all, pervading all things, and of the male sex: the other, showing itself from below, is the Great Intelligence, and is of the female sex, generating all things.16

The system of the Ophites, followers of the “serpent” or snake, also has an important figure of “silence”. According to the description of Irenaeus, as quoted by King, the originary 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) (95-6). The Valentinian system, too, includes Bythos (βυθός) as a member of a tetrad, this time with Sige, Nous (Mind), and Aletheia (Truth), but in this instance the unbegotten Father is the origin of everything, and Bythos is one of the Æons.17

We know from Brennan’s article on Gérard de Nerval, written long after the “Lilith” sequence (1920), that, by then, Brennan was familiar with “Sige” as the female double of the “Ineffable Father” and that he considered her the equivalent of Ennoia and the Helena of Simon Magus.18 Given his interest in Gnosticism from 1893, and the availability of works by King and Mead in the Public Library of NSW before the writing of the “Lilith” sequence, as well as 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 knowledge of Gnosticism until the finding of the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945), it is highly likely that Brennan would have been familiar with the characters of the various Gnostic cosmological systems when he was writing the “Lilith” sequence.

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

wings of fierce winds that o’er the star-strown height
sweep, and adown the wide world-ways unlock’d
feign for thy trouble a last conclusive fight (ll.110-113).

Wind, we observe, has a significant role both in Sethian Gnosis and in Brennan’s cosmology.

16 Quoted in King, The Gnostics and Their Remains 67.
17 Hippolytus, The Refutation of All Heresies 227. The English word “abyss”, originally “abyssm”, is derived from the Greek βυθός, “depth”. Brennan could well have been struck by the etymological connection between “abyss” and the Gnostic “Bythos” in his own mythological presentation of the role of Lilith in the origins and destiny of the human spirit, and his treatment of the outer and inner “abyss”.
18 Prose 349.
unknowable, except by means of the non-discursive powers of intuition and imagination, which according to Kant and the Romantic development of his thought can express the inexpressible 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. 19

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.

Romantic understanding of the relationship between art and the ideal world is founded on Kant’s explanation of the relationship between art and the noumenon. Warnock explains the Kantian point of view regarding the artistic work of 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. 20

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. Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) too thinks of art as embodying the ideal, describing the “beautiful in art” as “the ideal as it is cast in the garment of the real”, a “calling on reality to attain a higher state”. 21 According to Behler, Novalis was impressed by the following description in Shakespeare’s Midsummer Night’s Dream (V, i) of the faculty of imagination, which he was reading at the time he formulated his own idea of transcendental idealism as the fusion of subject and object, real and ideal: 22

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 (ll.12-17).

This is a powerful expression of the notion that imagination embodies ideas which cannot otherwise be given expression. F. Schlegel says in the Dialogue on Poetry (1800) that it was in Shakespeare that “ich das eigentliche Zentrum, den Kern der

19 Gusdorf, Du néant à dieu 423.
20 Warnock, Imagination 63.
22 Behler, German Romantic Literary Theory 46.
romantischen Fantasie setzen möchte“ ("I would like to fix the actual centre, the essence of the Romantic imagination").

Schlegel links the transcendental power of poetry with the creation of mythology. According to Athenaeum Fragment 238, the essence of “Transzendentalpoesie” ("transcendental poetry") lies in “das Verhältnis des Idealen und des Realen” ("the relation between ideal and real"). The “Speech on Mythology” which forms part of this work claims that what contemporary poetry is lacking is mythology (81). Schlegel proposes that the project of creating a “new mythology” is pressing, delineating its features in the following way:

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.

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 Realismus"). 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". Mythology, for Schlegel, unites "life" with "infinity".

An important aspect of the project undertaken in the "Lilith" sequence is the creation of a new mythology. The above discussion has demonstrated that the symbolic and mythological enterprise of Romantic poetry (evident in English Romantic poetry, of course, in the work of Blake, Shelley and Yeats) arises out of a notion of the

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23 Schlegel, Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe 2:335.
24 Schlegel, Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe 2:204.
25 Schlegel, Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe 2:312. "The new mythology, in contrast, must be forged from the deepest depths of the spirit; it must be the most artful of all works of art, for it must encompass all the others; a new bed and vessel for the ancient, eternal fountainhead of poetry, and even the infinite poem concealing the seeds of all other poems". Translation by Behler and Struc (Friedrich Schlegel, Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms, ed. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1968) 82).
26 Behler, German Romantic Literary Theory 162; Schlegel, Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe 2:315.
27 Schlegel, Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe 2:264: "The kernel, the center of poetry, is to be found in mythology and the mysteries of antiquity. Satiate the feeling of life with the idea of infinity, and you will understand both the ancients and poetry". Translation by Peter Firchow, 101.
inexpressibility of the Absolute. The speaker of “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast” finds “beyond our little limits of familiar cause” the “dark wings of silence”; the experience is one which “no lip” 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” (third stanza), and “Sweet silence after bells”, discussed in detail in the last chapter of this thesis. Brennan recasts Gnostic cosmogony into a form which suits his own purposes rather than those of its creators, working towards the creation of a new expression of mythology which, in the relationship of Adam and Lilith, is vitally concerned with the role of imagination in the Romantic project of “poesis” or “making”.

To understand the lineaments of Brennan’s myth, the text of “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast” must be considered in some detail. The “pulse” associated with Lilith directs the speaker’s attention to the “gulfs” which are “on the scatter’d edge of my surmise” (l.5), that is, beyond the reach of the senses, beyond conscious awareness. These “gulfs” or “voids” (l.24) are an important focus of this section. In ll.6-10, the gulfs incite what is on the edge of consciousness, where even the “twilit dreams fail off”, to lapse into unconsciousness. At the beginning of the next long sentence, which runs for the entire 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”. 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” (l.17) and “my deep /unlighted still” (l.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. The “still”, an apparatus, possibly alchemical, for distillation, but with a relevant adjectival sense as well relating to 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” (ll.24-5). The gulfs which have seemed to have a negative effect at the outset of the piece, and
which the speaker had 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 piece shares imagery of the inner deep and its gulfs with two poems discussed in Chapter One, “The mother-deep, wise, yearning, bound” and “What do I know? Myself alone”.28 The first of these uses the word “mother”, a place of origin of the self, to refer to the inner depths. The “mother-deep” (stanza 1) “haunts” the speaker (stanza 2), just as the “pulse” of Lilith exerts an unavoidable force on the human mind. It appears as a “grey unlit abyss” (stanza 2), 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” (stanza 1), 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”. The “word” is fulfilled, to the extent that this is possible, in the creation of the poetic myth of Lilith, the creation of a work of art being the only genuine way by which the inner Absolute may be given expression, in keeping with the views of Kant, F. Schlegel and others discussed above.

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 to an earlier manifestation (“of old”, l.37) 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 by bonds of blood and marriage”.29 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 further, 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

28 See page 45.
man. To 'marry the sister' was to overcome duality” (223). 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, is relevant at this point is strengthened by the occurrence of the phrase “dark fire” in l.49 of this paragraph (“the dark fire thy foresight did enmesh /within this hither and thither harried flesh”). In Boehme’s De signatura rerum, the polarities within the Godhead itself, from which everything developed, are the “dark fire” and the “light world”.  

The dark fire, therefore, is evidence of the godhead within, whose destiny is to be reunited with its origin in the “divine incest” (l.44) with Lilith for which Adam was created. Thus, Brennan’s imagery supports the identification of Lilith with the Boehmian Sophia which was suggested earlier.  

The “divine incest”, then, is marriage with the “mother” and the “sister”. Such a union 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” (l.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. 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 (l.47). 

One of the abortions produced by 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? (l.37-40)

In “The mother-deep, wise, yearning, bound”, “day” is, metaphorically, the restriction of perception to the evidence of the five senses denounced by Blake in “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”.  

The inner “abyss” is barely perceptible to the senses, which

31 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” (1:254). This is itself consistent with Boehmian doctrine, which of course Yeats discusses with reference to Blake, although not at this point.
32 Brennan, Musicopoematographoscopes [15].
33 See page 45 above.
impose a "mean inflicted schism /where day deludes my purblind wits". The "empty plainness of the day" referred to in the passage quoted above is, equally, a life restricted to what we can see with our eyes.

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 daylit 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" (ll.72-4). Adam is now committed elsewhere, "into dividual life" (l.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,
filled with slow ease and fresh with eastern beams
of coolest silver on the sliding wave:
such refuge the derisive morning gave,
shaped fealty in thy similitude, to attract
earthward the guity soul thy temptings rack'd (ll.80-87).

The term "dividual" should be considered in the light of the monism of Hartmann, discussed in the first chapter of this study, which suggested that the individual ego is merely phenomenal, and particularly in the context of the theory of Schopenhauer on the principle of "individuation", one of the most important sources of Hartmann's thinking in this area.

Arthur 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. [...] Space and time are the principle of individuation, or in his favoured Latin version, the princiump individuationis; and there can be no individuals on the 'in itself' side of the line.

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

34 See page 25 above for Hartmann's monism.
[...] 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 (83).

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 antiphennomenal as such. While the association of Eve with the natural beauty of the earth which follows the quoted line suggests that the phenomenal draws Adam away from his true destiny in Lilith, 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 the higher, imaginative, visionary self, but the achievement of a higher self by the union of the sensuous and the imaginative. Discussion in later chapters of Brennan’s term “moods”, to be understood as the union of natural and spiritual, supports this assertion.

Gnostic myth helps explain how Eve can be thought of as attracting “earthward the gusty soul thy temptings rack’d”. 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 (this work was held in the Public Library of NSW when Brennan was working there). King (also held in the Library, as we recall) summarises the adventures of Pistis Sophia in this work as follows:

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 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.36

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”. Brennan had for some time the firm intention to write a “Pistis Sophia” of his own, mentioned in the programme for the sequence produced in May 1899, but eventually abandoned the project.37 However, as the previous chapter and this one have

36 King, The Gnostics and Their Remains 15.
37 See Wilkes, New Perspectives [18].
shown, aspects of both the Boehmian and the Gnostic Sophia are incorporated into the “Lilith” sequence.

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 the Lady of Night. Eve is especially associated with the landscape as it appears in the morning, as we see from ll. 80-87 quoted above. A strong contrast is implied between the beauty of day (particularly morning) and of night. As the piece 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” (ll. 90-91), arousing the desire for the coolness of evening again. The failure of morning to fulfil its promises is an important theme of Poems as a whole, and is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven. 38

Whereas physical beauty claims to be able to satisfy completely, 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 turns to the manufacture of objects of worship for himself, “to rule and mould / in mine own shape the gods that shall be old” (ll. 105-9).

In the final verse-paragraph of this piece, the speaker counsels himself to “turn thee to earth” (l. 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 midst 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
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 (ll. 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” (l. 102) can safely be left to “the viewless dead” (l. 101).

In this piece, then, Brennan has drawn significantly on Gnostic cosmogonic myth, as well as pre-Romantic and Romantic thought, to set the parameters of his own

38 See page 214.
attempt to symbolise the inexpressible by creating a new myth. The piece is self-reflexive, using notions of “silence” and “nothingness” to convey what is, in fact, the object of his own myth-making: the inner world of the unconscious mind where, if anywhere, the Absolute is to be found. The “day” of sensuous, physical life is set off against the “night” which drives human beings, through intense dissatisfaction, towards acts of creation. The hidden trap inherent in choosing earth and sleep is revealed in what follows, as there is something in the self beyond the purely physical.

3. “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. As the discussion of the previous chapter has shown, Romantic psychology of the unconscious associated dream with vision and the release of a higher self. 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”, his illusion-producing disease, an “elaborate brute” (“Thick sleep, with error of the tangled wood”, ll.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” (ll.10-14). 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 for all except philosophers (who are naturally faster at everything!) to grow their wings again (249 A). Adam’s soul is “wingless” in Brennan’s piece because he is immured in the forgetfulness of physical existence.

The doctrine of the “sleep” of the soul after the Fall into material existence is common to Gnosticism, Neoplatonism and Boehme. The Platonic “forgetfulness” (“anamnesis”) of the soul after its birth into material existence became part of Neoplatonic doctrine.39 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:

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39 For a more detailed discussion of “anamnesis”, see page 206.
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, concerning divinity. But all, indeed, in descending drink of oblivion; though some more, and others less.\footnote{Raine and Harper, eds., \textit{Thomas Taylor the Platonist} 310-11 n.5. Porphyry's interpretation of the Cave of the Nymphs was discussed on page 73 above. As with Plotinus, there is no direct evidence as to whether Brennan would have read Porphyry in Greek or in translation. If he used a translation, it would presumably have been that of Taylor.}

This is the drink of forgetfulness. According to Werner Foerster, one of the five "main points of Gnosis" is the doctrine that the soul "has fallen into this world, has been imprisoned and anaesthetized by it, and cannot free itself from it".\footnote{Werner Foerster, \textit{Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts}, trans. R. McL. Wilson, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 9.} The descent into generation is, however, regarded more unfavourably by Gnostics than by Neoplatonists, Porphyry suggesting that divine beings enjoy their descent.\footnote{In the Cave of the Nymphs passage, Porphyry quotes the opinion of Heraclitus that "it is a delight, and not death, for souls to become moist, and their delight is their descent into birth" (\textit{The Neoplatonists}, 207).} The Fall into generation is also regarded unfavourably by Boehme, as the beginning of the second chapter of this thesis has shown. In \textit{Of the Becoming Man or Incarnation of Jesus Christ}, we read "Adam knew the Commandement [sic] well, and also did not eat thereof; but he Imagined thereinto, and was captivated in his Imagination, also quite powerless, also faint and weak, till he was overcome, then he fell down and slept" (Bk.I, ch.v, 41).

Sleep signifies his death as far as the heavenly kingdom is concerned, and his submission to the kingdom of the stars, that is, to fate. Adam's sleep in Paradise, the Fall, took place before the creation of Eve, and we still participate in this sleep or Fall. Sexual generation arose only at the creation of Eve, because Adam could no longer generate magically, by means of the faculty of imagination, as he had been able to do beforehand (Bk.I, ch.vi, 39).

In Brennan's "Lilith" sequence, the sleep of forgetfulness or oblivion is something chosen by Adam himself in order 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, like the Medusa, to stone:

\begin{quote}
as tho' a settling of tremendous pens,  
above the desolate dream, had shed immense  
addition to the incumbrance of despair  
downward, across this crypt of stirless air,  
from some henceforth infrangible attitude,  
on his breast, that knows no dawn renew'd,  
builted enormously, each brazen stage,  
with rigor of his hope in hopeless age  
mmimad, and look that turns his thew to stone ("Thick sleep, with error of the tangled wood", ll.21-9).
\end{quote}
Death and nightmare (which anticipates it) take away all the optimism and determination of Adam's earlier choice of earth and day instead of Lilith and night.

4. "Terrible, if he will not have me else"

In "Terrible, if he will not have me else", Lilith is given a voice for the first time. In the first verse-paragraph, she describes how she is able to undermine two ways in which Adam "seeks a refuge in his inner deep /of love, and soften'd fire, and quicken'd sleep" (ll.19-20): human love and love of the divine. The beauty of Adam's bride is figured as an "incarnate bright /and natural rose" (ll.4-5), whose perfume overflows the limits normally imposed by the physical senses and "saturates the dusk with secret gold" (l.9). Religious faith is another kind of rose, symbolised by the paradisal 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. However, this love is not immune from the inner dissatisfaction which "can bring that icy want even to the heart /of his most secret bliss" (ll.23-4). Chapter Seven of this thesis develops in detail the implications of Brennan's rose imagery, the associations of the word "incarnate", and his use of the paradisal rose of Dante.

A number of inferences regarding the sexual experiences of the poet himself have been drawn from the next verse-paragraph, beginning "Lo now, beneath the watch of knitted boughs". McAuley takes ll.44-58 as "Brennan's near-avowal of what really went wrong" with his own 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'.

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

43 Wilkes argues that the paragraph beginning "Nay, not thus lightly, heart the wings have mock'd!" in "O thou that achest, pulse o' the unwed vast" is also spoken by Lilith (Wilkes, New Perspectives [32]). He suggests that it is Lilith who "taunting, urges him to seek the repose of earth, to relax his exhausted spirit in sleep", and that Adam's voice follows at the words "Thou sleep, at least". In my view, this passage represents Adam arguing with himself about whether the winds in which he has originated have any message for him, and his decision that they do not: "thou dost foolish hold aught else inspires them than their cynic play" (l.116). This seems to me the plain meaning of the text, whose import has to be twisted into "taunting" to make them belong to Lilith rather than Adam.

44 See page 218.

45 McAuley, "The Erotic Theme in Brennan": 14.
passage in 'Lilith' may represent a disguised account of what precisely happened to give him this feeling.\footnote{Clark, Biography 119. “See now the time” is discussed in detail in Chapter Six of this thesis.}

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 psychological readings of Brennan's text. As the following discussion will demonstrate, the symbolism of the passage in question associates morning, innocence and water with Eve. 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, “The trees that thro’ the tuneful morn had made”, has already demonstrated. The symbolic patterns of the “Lilith” sequence show that the violent disruption of the innocence of 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,\footnote{Clark, Biography 105.} and therefore cannot be taken as evidence of the failure of the sexual aspect of that marriage in its early period.\footnote{Elisabeth Werth only arrived in Australia six days before she and Brennan were married (Clark, Biography 116).} Discussion in later chapters of this thesis will establish that morning and spring appear as interchangeable symbols of Edenic innocence in Poems as a whole.\footnote{See discussion beginning on page 203.}

We first met Eve as the “woman” of “O thou that achest, pulse o’ the unwed vast”, discussed above. She appears 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:

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 (“Terrible, if he will not have me else”, ll.27-32).

Eve is associated here with the coolness, dew and stillness of dawn. Lilith opposes to this coolness the memory of “the forces of tremendous passion” (l.37) which Adam has experienced with her. We must remember Eve is being described by the voice of Lilith,
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 is associated with "a flowery pasture fenced and soft with streams, fitfill'd with slow ease and fresh with eastern beams of coolest silver on the sliding wave" (ll.82-4). In ll.27-32 of "Terrible, if he will not have me else" quoted above, the dew of dawn, and the "cool glimmer" of early morning light on water, are mirrored in Eve's "crystal flesh". 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. In this story, the character of Undine is transformed when she acquires a soul, as she then stands out from the other human characters, especially her rival for her husband's love, Bertalda.

50 In Les Dieux antiques, an interpretation of myth as a reflection of natural cycles of the day and the seasons, Mallarmé interprets the innocent maidens of myth, left behind or seduced by their heroes, as representations of dawn or springtime (see discussion beginning on page 133). This provides another important underpinning of the imagery of morning innocence employed by Brennan in his portrayal of Eve. Brennan's annotations to this work, and its contribution to his symbolism, are discussed in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

51 I have not come across this interpretation of Undine in the scholarly literature on Fouqué's story that I have examined. Brennan's reading of the Undine symbolism in the notes and article of Mallarmé hints at such an interpretation, but it is not spelt out. It is, however, consistent with Brennan's insistence on the necessity for the union of Nature with the human mind, discussed in Chapters Two and Six of this thesis.
becoming more humane than they are. The story may be seen to express the I-You relationship between human beings and Nature proposed by F. Schlegel and Novalis, discussed in the previous chapter.

Brennan uses the story of Undine to interpret one of Mallarmé’s sonnets, “Ses purs ongles très-haut”, his interpretation throwing light on his use of Undine as a symbol. Towards the end of Mallarmé’s poem, “une nixe”, a “nixie” or water-spirit, appears, “défunte nue”, in a mirror. Brennan comments, “la nixe maintenant y est défunte, l’âme que l’homme lui avait insufflée – elle est une Ondine – étant partie”. It is clear that the bestowal of a soul on the elemental spirit is an essential aspect of the story for Brennan. He also discusses Undine in the second of the series of articles entitled “Minuits chez Mallarme” (1921), which was based on the earlier notes to the “Sonnet en – yx”. Here, he reads Undine as a symbol of “[t]he instinctive innocent soul” which “knows nought of the ills of life” until “stung with the splendour of a higher sphere”. He goes on:

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 (362-3).

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 reasonable 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” (l.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” (ll.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.

52 This aspect of the tale does not at all support a widely-accepted view that Fouqué represents Undine as a “femme fatale”, and that this interpretation is adopted by Brennan. Justin Lucas links the “Wasserfrau” with the “femme fatale” in Lucas, “Shut Out of Mine Own Heart” 93.
53 Annotation to Stéphane Mallarmé, Poesies (Brussels: 1899).
54 Prose 362. Brennan does not give a source for this quotation.
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 process is described in the lines which follow, spoken by Lilith:

my spectral face shall come between his eyes
and the soft face of her, my name shall rise,
unutter’d, in each thought that goes to her;
and in the quiet waters of her gaze
shall lurk a siren-lure that beckons him
down halls of death and sinful chambers dim:
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 misasm of flesh become a tomb:
than baffled hope, some torch o’ the blood to illume
and flush the jewel hid beyond all height,
and sombre rage that burst the holy bourse
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.

The voice, we should remember, 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. However, Eve, previously associated with the physical beauty of the earth, offers a “garden of pure sense” which is only destroyed (“wasted” – laid waste as well as the more usual sense) by such an 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 upon the “garden of pure sense” by “Ah, who will give us back our long-lost innocence”, part of a sequence with an apocalyptic tone placed earlier in Poems. In the third stanza, 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 have me else”, 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”. Such an experience is described in the lines under discussion.

We have already seen that Lilith and Eve are not unconnected. We have also seen that the Gnostic and Boehmian figure of Sophia, the “looking-glass” discussed in
Yeats’s interpretation of Blake, has elements in common with both Lilith and Eve. As the “delusive goddess Nature” of Yeats’s phrase, discussed in the introduction to the previous chapter, Sophia both gestures towards the divine, and draws the soul down towards entrapment in the merely material. 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 within what is external to it.

Whereas McAuley and Clark take the primary signification of the piece to be personal, the reading offered here assigns these lines a central place in the development of Brennan’s myth and the symbols which underpin it, placing these particular lines not only in the context of the sequence as a whole, but demonstrating how the myth is underpinned by a broad intellectual and religious context encompassing Gnostic myth, as well as Romantic and pre-Romantic thinking about the relationship between the mind and the outer world, the imagination and art.

The remainder of “Terrible, if he will not have me else” 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” (l.106) and immense monuments for himself like 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” (l.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” (l.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 this piece prefigure a “secular flowering /of the far-bleeding rose of Paradise”, a new form of religion which is to find its expression in poetry such as that of Mallarmé, “he that sleeps in hush’d Valvins”. Brennan’s interest in Mallarmé’s proposed “vrai culte moderne” will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

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

The final piece in the “Lilith” sequence draws together some of the themes established earlier. Repetition of sequences of words in the first four stanzas emphasises 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, discussed in the previous chapter. 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. The word “larve” (“with wavering face of larve and oily blur /of pallor on her suffocating coil”, ll.3-4) could well reflect the German word “Larve”, as it appears in Novalis’s 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 in the following words: “Mit kühnen Geist und hoher Sinnenglut /Nerschonte sich der Mensch die grause Larve”. Like the English “larva”, the German word “Larve” can mean “mask” or “grub”, but also “spectre” or “ghoul”. In the Encyclopaedia Britannica of 1882 we find “The dead were spirits of terror [...] in this fearful sense the names Lemures and still more Larvae were appropriated to them”. 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”.

In the fifth stanza, we learn that Lilith “knows each wooing mood”. She appears in a number of different guises, as the first four stanzas have shown. 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 use of the term “moods”, as subsequent chapters will show. Another aspect of the vulnerability of innocence, apparent in Eve in “Terrible, if he will not have me else”, 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.

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55 See page 56.
56 As later chapters of this thesis will show, some of Brennan’s diction is clearly derived from French, rather than English, usage, especially from Mallarmé. “Larve” seems to be an example of Brennan’s drawing from the German language in a similar fashion.
57 Schriften 1 142. “With bold spirit and higher sensuality /Humanity glamourised the fearsome ghoul”.
58 Encycl. Brit. XIV. 313/2, quoted in OED under “larva”.

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All that the “Lilith” sequence offers in the way of a resolution of the ambivalence of 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.

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” (last stanza of XXIII).59 “Beyond our ken” associates Lilith with the Absolute which is beyond both knowledge and speech, discussed earlier in the chapter. The “gods and stars and songs and souls of men” have been created in the chaos, recalling that, according to Basilidean Gnosis, there was “nor man, nor angel, nor a god” in the originary nothing. If he had this passage in mind, Brennan has added “stars and songs” to the gods, human beings and angels mentioned in it, omitting angels. Stars, we know, symbolise creation out of chaos in this sequence, and “song”, the poetic work, is a natural addition. “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”.

This chapter, and the previous one, have argued that we should think of the relationship between Lilith, Adam and Eve in terms of the split between the mind and Nature, the self and the Absolute, Nature and the divine, various aspects of which are discussed by pre-Romantics such as Tetens and Kant, and early German Romantic writers such as F. Schlegel and Novalis. This split can be healed by the inner faculty of imagination. These two chapters have demonstrated that esoteric notions of the regeneration of the self (deriving from classical and Hellenistic myth and mystery religions, Neoplatonism, spiritual alchemy, Pietism and Masonic groups) made a significant contribution to Brennan’s idea that the Absolute may be encountered within the self and is related to the powers of imagination. When the choric voice of the last piece in the “Lilith” sequence enjoins us to “find her fair”, this is an invitation, in terms of the traditions just outlined, to unite our minds with Nature in an imaginative act by means of which the higher or transcendent self can at least be glimpsed. In the next chapter, Brennan’s notion of “moods” is examined in the light of the union of mind and Nature.

59 Baudelaire, Œuvres complètes 1: 26-7.
Chapter Four: Brennan’s theory of “moods”

Introduction

Brennan’s notion of “moods” is fundamental to the structure of Poems as a whole. Up to the present, the field of Brennan criticism has not attempted either an extensive consideration of his use of the term “moods”, in the light of the signification of this term or related terms or concepts in works known to have influenced Brennan, or an application of this concept to the themes and structure of Poems.

Merewether notes the influence of Yeats on Brennan’s idea of “moods”, and points out that Brennan connects Yeats’s “moods” with Mallarmé’s “équations sommaires” (the importance of Yeats’s use of the term, and of Mallarmé’s “équations”, will be discussed later in the chapter).1 Smith comments:

[...] aware of the imperative dominance of subjective moods in the individual life, Brennan nevertheless restlessly strove to move beyond the vagaries of experience into an exploration and explanation of their cause and reason, and so wrote a myth poem centred on Lilith who both reflects and explains man’s frustrations and aspirations.2

Smith implies here that “subjective moods” are an important aspect of the structure of Poems. He further suggests that there are “contrasting rhythms of moods throughout and a progression from one state to another, sometimes in the same poem” (331). Neither Merewether nor Smith, however, goes into detail. Brennan’s use of the term “moods” in lectures and articles has generally been understood in its common usage, rather than as a term to which Brennan gives a special meaning. However, when Brennan uses the term, it has a much wider application than the succession of emotions or states of mind in an individual.3 It refers to the imaginative reunification of the human mind and Nature. For this reason, it is intimately related to the symbolism associated with Lilith, discussed in the previous two chapters.

It is well known that Symbolist poetry was interested in conveying moods. For example, the entry on Symbolism in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics states: “Symbolist poetry is a poetry of indirection, in which objects tend to be suggested rather than named, or to be used primarily for an evocation of mood”.4 There is no suggestion here that the word “mood” has any extraordinary significance for Symbolists. Writing of Verlaine in The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899), which Brennan knew, Arthur Symons comments: “to Verlaine, happily, experience

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2 Smith, "Poetry" 330.
3 For this reason, the word is used in quotation marks when its specialised sense is under consideration.
taught nothing; or rather, it taught him only to cling the more closely to those moods in
whose succession lies the more intimate part of our spiritual life".  Here, there is an
association of moods with the “spiritual life”, but the comment is brief and not further
developed. Although Symons, a close friend of Yeats, must have been aware that Yeats
used the term in a special sense, to be discussed below, there is no evidence of such
awareness here. Balakian suggests that when Baudelaire achieves a “unilateral
eexternalization of the inner mood” he is “at the origins of Symbolism”. She says of his
poem “L’Ennemi”:

This personification of the mind through the manifestations of nature is indeed the language
of future symbolism. It is on a level that is somewhat obvious and still too close to allegory
to be considered as actual Symbolism, but it sets the aesthetic direction which the Symbolist
movement will take.  Discussing Baudelaire’s “Harmonie du soir”, she comments that the “inner state of man,
his sadness, is molded with nature’s qualities”, and speaks of a “duality […] between
the mood of the poet and the appearances of nature” (39). In this association of the
“inner state” of human beings with “the appearances of nature”, we begin to grasp the
inflection of the term “moods” which Brennan himself used.

This chapter explores Brennan’s theory of “moods”. It examines three
important sources for his specialised use of the word. The first section of the chapter
discusses two German words associated with mood, and the particular nuances of
meaning they convey. The second section shows that Yeats uses “moods”, particularly
in the edition of Blake and the short story “Rosa Alchemica”, to refer to universal
mental or affective states, resembling the Platonic Ideas, to which art is able to give
eexpression, and that his discussion draws on the Swedenborgian notion of
“correspondences” between the human being, the natural world and the divine. The
third section relates “moods” to the analogy between human experience and the events
of the natural cycle which Brennan found in Mallarmé’s work on mythology, Les Dieux
antiques. The second and third sections of the chapter show that Pater’s use of the term
“mood”, and his presentation of myth, also contribute to Brennan’s idea of “moods”.
Brennan’s most detailed exposition of the term is to be found in the Symbolism lectures,
which were written after the bulk of the poems. However, these lectures demonstrate
Brennan’s dependence on Yeats, Novalis and Mallarmé, with whose works he was
familiar at the time of writing the poetry, so it is reasonable to expect that these authors

5 Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature 80.
6 Balakian, The Symbolist Movement 37.
7 For a discussion of the possible influence of this poem on Brennan’s “Dies dominica”, see page 200
below.
will throw light on the development of Brennan’s notion, as indeed they do. The fourth section discusses several important occurrences of the term, in its specialised sense, in prose Brennan wrote between 1896 and 1900, good evidence that the Symbolism lectures further develop an already established notion, rather than presenting entirely new material on “moods”.

The discussion in this chapter is primarily theoretical, rather than offering detailed exegesis of particular poems. Following chapters will draw on this theoretical framework to demonstrate the importance of the notion of “moods” in Brennan’s Poems.

1. “Stimmung” and “Gemüth” in German Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism

One important German word for “mood” is “Stimmung”. In addition to meaning “mood”, “frame of mind” or “humour”, the word 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, and expresses the fundamentally Pythagorean notion of world harmony, being a loan-translation from Latin words like “temperamentum” and “consonantia” or “concordia” which refer to a harmonious state of mind. 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 (5). He explains further: “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” (5). 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” (6). Further, originally it “did not suggest a changing, temporary condition, but rather a stable ‘tunedness’ of the soul” (7).

It is apparent, then, that the word “Stimmung”, “mood”, is particularly relevant to the gulf between subject and object perceived by Romantics and pre-Romantics, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the possibility of their reunification. According

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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:

Da in der Wirklichkeit keine rein ästhetische Wirkung anzutreffen ist (denn der Mensch kann nie aus der Abhängigkeit der Kräfte treten), 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 besonderen 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.9

This statement suggests that the work of art should be evaluated in terms of the universality of the mood it produces.

Novalis’s use of “übereinstimmen” in Die Lehrlinge zu Sars to refer to the desirable reunification of subject and object has already been mentioned.10 Subject and object, it is implied, can and should be in tune with one another. In the following passage from the same work, another musical metaphor is employed to express the desirable accord between a human being and the external world:

Er [Der Lehrling] merkte bald auf die Verbindungen in allem, auf Begegnungen, Zusammenstreuungen. 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 zusammuzubringen. 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.11

Becoming aware of the interrelationships between things, the disciple of the book’s title begins to fulfill the injunction to strike “ein Akkord aus des Weltalls Symphonie” (“a chord from the symphony of the universe”) (79). In one of the Blühenstaub Fragments, Novalis links human emotions with particular times of the day or seasons of the year, claiming that such times can be revelatory: “Sehr viele Zufälle, manche Naturereignisse, besonders Jahrs- und Tageszeiten, liefern uns solche Erfahrungen. Gewisse

9 “Since in actuality no purely aesthetic effect is ever to be met with (for man can never escape his dependence upon conditioning forces), the excellence of a work of art can never consist in anything more than a high approximation to that ideal of aesthetic purity; and whatever the degree of freedom to which it may have been sublimated, we shall still leave it in a particular mood and with some definite bias. The more general the mood and the less limited the bias produced in us by any particular art, or by any particular product of the same, then the nobler that art and the more excellent that product will be”. Translation by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters, ed. Elizabeth M Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 152-3).

10 See page 62.

11 Schriften 1:80. “He [the disciple] began to pay attention to the links between everything, meetings, encounters. He began to be aware of 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”.

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Stimmungen sind vorzüglich solchen Offenbarungen günstig"(2:421). As further discussion will show, Brennan found another kind of association between human experience and certain times of the day or year in Mallarmé’s *Les Dieux antiques*.

One of Novalis’s *Teplitzer Fragmente*, with which Brennan would have been familiar from 1901 when these fragments were published for the first time in the Heilborn edition of Novalis, is given prominence in Brennan’s article on German Romanticism, where he finds of some interest Novalis’s combination of “Stimmung”, “mood”, with the specialised sense of the word “Gemüth“ discussed in Chapter Two. The aphorism, quoted in that chapter, is usefully repeated: “Gemüth – Harmonie aller Geisteskräfte – Gleiche Stimmung und harmonisches Spiel der ganzen Seele”(2:613).

In the article, Brennan glosses this aphorism as “highest mood and harmonious equilibrium of all the powers of the soul”. “Harmonious equilibrium of all the powers of the soul” must encompass both “Harmonie aller Geisteskräfte” and “harmonisches Spiel der ganzen Seele”, with perhaps some of the connotations of “gleiche Stimmung”, “equal tuning”, contributing to the word “Spiel”, “play”, to give “harmonious equilibrium”. “Highest mood”, therefore, must be, not a word-for-word translation, but an indication of what Brennan took “Gemüth” to refer to, perhaps with the word “Stimmung” making a contribution to this part of the gloss as well as the second part. Brennan adds a comment which indicates that he was aware of the specialised usage of the term “Gemüth”, at least among the early German Romantics, employing it himself: “The region or state of consciousness in which imagination identifies itself with, and thereby momentarily attains the absolute […] is called Gemüth”. Here, Brennan links the “Gemüth” with the inner faculty of imagination, which connects the human being with the divine, as he may or may not have known that Paracelsus and Boehme did earlier.

Thus, Brennan’s word “mood”, at least by the time the article on German Romanticism was written, but probably from his first exposure to this particular fragment by Novalis, seems to have been linked not to one but to two German words, “Gemüth” and “Stimmung”. The words “Gemüth”, and “Mut”, from which the former is formed, are cognate with the English word “mood”, while “Stimmung”, as has been

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12 “Very many chance incidents, many natural events, particular times of the day and year bring us such experiences. Certain moods are especially favourable to such revelations”. Translation by Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: SUNY, 1997) 27).
13 See page 79.
14 “Gemüth – harmony of all spiritual powers – equal tuning and harmonious play of the entire soul”.
15 *Prose* 388.
16 See page 79.
shown above, is linked to “mood” by meaning. “Gemüth” as “mood” refers to an inner human faculty for union with the Absolute or the divine. “Stimmung” as “mood” refers to human connectedness with the external world, in a condition which is both feeling and atmosphere and which has a connotation of “being in tune with”. Thus “moods” connect human beings both 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. He quotes from the following well-known passage on the ideally poetic nature of the novel, also first published in the 1901 Heilborn edition, 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 (3:558).18

Here, poetry, like philosophy, is a “Stimmung” of our “Gemüth”, a revelatory state of mind which makes it seem as though, before poetry made its revelation, no one had been really 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” (“Poetry is the representation of Gemüth, of the inner world in its entirety”; 3:650), Brennan excerpts “Darstellung des Gemüths” as another definition connecting poetry with the inner faculty of “Gemüth”.

It is apparent, then, that Brennan’s notion of “moods” is inflected by both German words, “Stimmung” and “Gemüth”, which relate the human being both horizontally, to nature, and “vertically” (in a sense), to the inner faculty where the divine makes its appearance, and that, following Novalis, he thinks that it is the job of poetry to bring about such a “musical” relation.19

18 “A novel must be poetry through and through. For poetry, like philosophy, must be a harmonious mood of our mind, where everything is made beautiful, where everything finds its proper aspect – everything finds an accompaniment and surroundings that suit it. [...] We think it could not be otherwise, and as if we had only been asleep in the world before now – and now for the first time the right meaning for the world dawns on us”. Translation by Stoljar, 153. Part of this aphorism was quoted earlier, see page 80.
19 Brennan’s reading of Maeterlinck’s edition of Novalis may have drawn his attention to the specialised meaning of “Gemüth” discussed in this section. Brennan’s library included many titles by Maeterlinck, and he recommends the latter’s translation of Novalis (Novalis, Les disciples à Sais et les fragments de Novalis, trans. and ed. Maurice Maeterlinck (Brussels: Lacomblez, 1909)) in the Symbolism lectures (Prose 108). In Les Affinités allemandes dans l’œuvre de Maurice Maeterlinck (Paris: Presses
2. Concepts of “moods” in early Yeats

W.B. Yeats should be considered the single most important source for Brennan’s concept of “moods”. In the Symbolism lectures, Brennan says that the word was “definitely brought into circulation by the editors of Blake”. The doctrine is discussed in the chapters of the Ellis and Yeats edition of Blake dealing with the Boehmian “looking-glass”, discussed at the beginning of Chapter Two of this thesis. Yeats’s authorship of this section has already been mentioned. As the following discussion will show, Yeats uses the word 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 Boehmian notion that the universe is a “correspondence” (Swedenborg) or “signature” (Boehme) of the divine immanent within it.

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 discussed in the previous two chapters of this thesis with particular emphasis on its appearance among German thinkers. Yeats’s idea of “moods” may be seen as the heritage, not only of Pater and Shelley, as Harold Bloom and R.F. Foster respectively suggest, but more widely of that interaction of English and German Romanticism during the nineteenth century to which Coleridge and Carlyle made an especially important contribution. 21

Universitaires de France, 1975), Paul Gorceix comments regarding the German “Gemüt”, consistently translated by Maeterlinck as “âme”:

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 XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle ! Chez le romantique allemand Gemüt équivaut 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 piéistes 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 cristalliseraient autour d’elle. Par-delà les piéistes, par delà Novalis, le Belge rejoint sur le plan de l’introversion une disposition spéculative qui appartient en propre à la mystique germanique” (119-20).

20 Prose 84.
The last two chapters have shown that such ideas represent a significant interaction of Romantic approaches with ideas derived from esoteric currents including mysticism, spiritual alchemy, and, above all, Neoplatonism. 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 Prásád’s *Nature’s Finer Forces*, I have found 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. Yeats’s connection of “moods” with the Swedenborgian and Boehmian notion of “correspondences” or “signatures”, and the parallels between his thought and the notion 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, Patmore and Mallarmé.

Yeats begins “The Symbolic System” with a discussion of the doctrine of “correspondences”, as formulated by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). In order to explain the doctrine himself in the 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”. 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”. 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.

It is somewhat startling to find that, according to Yeats, God himself is 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 (1:239).

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 takes on materiality:

“First, a bodiless mood, and then a surging thought, and last a thing” (1:241). 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 including those of Swedenborg, the Kabbalah and Theosophy, as well as the Christian Trinity. The process is also the foundation of the 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 (1:239-40).

Brennan summarises this distinction between the three “degrees”, two of which have form and one (the emotional) which does not, and writes opposite the word “Mood”, “The indwelling mystery we cannot elude – that which transcends even the highest form”. This perception of the divinity as indwelling is in keeping with the interest in an inner divinity, which Brennan shared with a number of contemporaries, discussed in Chapter One. The notes made by Brennan acknowledge the important role Yeats accords to emotion by commenting “cf Novalis ‘Thought is a pale desiccated emotion’”.

As Bloom points out, Yeats’s 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”.

Pater’s use of the term “moods” accords with Yeats’s in some important respects; like his, it conveys considerably more than “emotions”. In the Renaissance, Pater discusses

25 Bloom, Yeats 70-71.
“moods” with reference to Botticelli, the nature of whose (visual) art is contrasted with that of Dante in the following passage:

[...] the 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.  

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’s explanation 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” (1:250) is not particularly illuminating, although we may draw the inference that the human “mood” corresponds to the inner action of the divine, in which case the affinities with the German esoteric and Romantic use of “Gemüt” to refer to the inner faculty where the imagination acts as the inner representative of the divine become apparent. 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” (1:239).  

In the notes he makes from Yeats’s third chapter, Brennan notes that archetypes of the divine, that is, the “intellectual” degree of Yeats’s three-stage process of emanation from the divine, may be embodied in human beings as “mental states”: “God only acts

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26 Pater, The Renaissance 42.
28 Some light may be thrown on the primary role Yeats assigns to emotion by considering other cosmogonic systems in which emotion, in some form, plays a major role, such as those of Swedenborg and Boehme. Yeats suggests that his “emotional” degree is “associated with will by Swedenborg”. In the much later article “Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places” (1914) Yeats says that he had read Swedenborg “with some care before the fascination of Blake and Boehme had led me away”, and suggests that only emotion and thought survive death ("Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places", in Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962) 32). In Boehme’s cosmogony, an internal conflict within the godhead, which certainly could be considered “emotional”, provides the essential dynamic for the emanation of the physical universe. What is traditionally represented as a contrast or conflict between light and darkness becomes a conflict of love and anger (Boehme, The Signature of All Things ch. ii, 20). According to Boehme, contrary emotions are at the centre of human life, too: “evil and good are in the centre of each life, and [...] no joy could arise without sorrow, and [...] one is the curer of the other” (ch. ii, 24).
29 This passage appears as “All Religions are One” in the Keynes edition of Blake.
or is in created beings (mental states) or men”. Such mental states dominate not only individuals but ages of human history. As later chapters of this thesis will demonstrate, Brennan develops in Poems, where we find a poetic enterprise structured around the notion of “moods”, Yeats’s suggestion that large-scale human emotion or passion reflects the immanence of the divine in the human.

At two points in his extracts from the edition of Blake, Brennan refers to Mallarmé. The second of these makes an important connection between “the hierarchy of moods and correspondences” Brennan found illuminated by Yeats, and “Mallarmé’s ideal drama”. Brennan adds in parentheses, “feebly hinted in ‘Fact & Idea’”. The relevant passage in the 1898 talk “Fact and Idea” refers to “all those countless rapports between ourselves and Nature”, in which Brennan sees the possibility of achieving “the last Unity of World and Human”.30 These comments are an important indication of the direction in which Brennan took Yeats’s notion of “moods”. The next section of this chapter, and the chapter which follows, will discuss Brennan’s own poetic enterprise in terms of Mallarmé’s “ideal drama” and the “countless rapports between ourselves and Nature” which Brennan built into his own ideal drama of correspondences between human life and the daily and yearly cycles of nature.

Brennan knew Yeats’s essay “The Autumn of the Body”, in which the author envisages the work of art becoming “the signature or symbol of a mood of the divine imagination”.31 In the short story “Rosa Alchemica”, published in the Savoy in 1896, which Brennan also knew, Yeats describes how the imagination is able to embody the intellectual archetypes in art.32 In this story, Michael Robartes, adept of the Order of the Alchemical Rose, explains to the narrator that literary works embody divinities. In the period intervening between editing Blake and writing this story, Yeats has manifestly become more inclined towards a polytheistic form of thought:

‘And yet there is no one whocommunes 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 under the power of all those countless divinities who have taken 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

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30 Prose 11.
31 W.B. Yeats, “The Autumn of the Body”, in Ideas of Good and Evil (London: Bullen, 1903) 305. This essay was first published under the title “The Autumn of the Flesh” in the Dublin Daily Express, December 1898.
32 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 Mitchell Library, Sydney. 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 to other annotated texts, these cannot really be described as “heavily marked”.

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everything of their ancient worship except the sacrifice of birds and fishes, the fragrance of
garlands and the smoke of incense. 33

Hamlet and Faust are literary figures, and Roland, too, should probably be thought of in
this context as a literary hero rather than as a historical figure. Here Yeats expresses the
doctrine that art embodies the noumenon, discussed in the last chapter with reference to
Kantian and post-Kantian aesthetics. 34 Later in the story of the “Alchemical Rose”, the
narrator is conducted to the headquarters of the Order in order to undergo initiation.
The material he is given to read 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” (142). According to the narrator, 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 [...] (143).

This is the magical power of the imagination, creating forms for the incarnation of the
formless divinities called “moods”. As possessors of the faculty of communication with
the divine, artists 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”. 35 Here, the
“moods” are mediators between the divine and the human.

While the role of the Yeatsian “moods” as supernatural beings mediating
between the divine and the natural does not seem to have been adopted by Brennan, 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. Such emphases are clearly in accord with the
emphasis of the German words discussed in the previous section on the correspondence
between the human being and Nature, and between the human and the divine.

Brennan’s notes on the Ellis and Yeats Blake, made after Mallarmé’s Les Dieux

34 See page 90.
antiques was acquired in 1896, indicate that, in considering what Yeats had to say about “moods”, he was struck by parallels with the Mallarmean “ideal drama” which was to express the “countless rapports between ourselves and nature”. The next section of this chapter considers Les Dieux antiques as another important source for Brennan’s notion of “moods”.

3. Les Dieux antiques and “moods”

Although Brennan himself does not use the word “moods” with reference to Mallarmé’s work on mythology, Les Dieux antiques (1880), there is evidence that he read it in terms of the theory of correspondences, which, as the above discussion has indicated, influenced his notion 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 […].36

Brennan takes Les Dieux antiques to be “a reading of the drama of nature in terms of man”, that is, founded on the “countless rapports between ourselves and nature” he mentions in his notes on the Ellis and Yeats edition of Blake. The phrase “philological research” applies to both the works to which he refers. Les Dieux antiques, like Les Mots anglais, is fundamentally concerned with language. It argues that the gods of mythology were once words denoting elements in the cycles of nature: dawn, noon, dew, sunset clouds, spring, autumn. Brennan implies that Mallarmé’s work on mythology, as well as his work on English words, exemplifies the principle of “correspondences”. The following discussion will consider what the term “correspondences” might mean in relation to this work, and how the latter contributed to Brennan’s notion of “moods” as the correspondence of human passions with the events of natural cycles.

Although the location of Brennan’s copy of Les Dieux antiques has been known since the publication in 1978 of John Foulkes’s article “Mallarmé and Brennan”,37 to my knowledge the study of Brennan’s annotations to this work which follows is the first of its kind. Seznec’s discussion of Brennan’s annotations does not

36 Prose 144.
37 Foulkes, “Mallarmé and Brennan”: 34-45.
relate them to his poetry. Brennan’s copy is dated “Monday, 8th June 1896”, and contains numerous underlinings and a number of marginal comments, evidence of careful reading of the entire text. There is no evidence, as there is with some other texts annotated by Brennan, of rereadings occurring at later times, although this is not conclusive evidence that they did not take place.

Mallarmé’s text is a version of George Cox’s *A Manual of Mythology in the Form of Question and Answer* (1867). Mallarmé himself describes his work, with *Les Mots anglais*, as “des besognes […] dont il sied de ne pas parler”, but this self-deprecatory assessment is contested by Peter Brown, Bertrand Marchal, and implicitly by Brennan’s own enthusiastic response. 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 (1159).

As Marchal points out, Mallarmé’s alterations to Cox’s references to God are of considerable interest. Where Cox uses the word “God” with a capital letter, Mallarmé systematically evades translating it directly. 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”. 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 fut possible de parler de la divinité, inscrite au fond de notre être”, a reference to an inner divinity of the kind discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, in which Brennan and others sought an alternative focus for their desire for faith.

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40 Marchal goes further: “Si nous avons fait des Dieux antiques le centre de cette étude, comme le point de départ de ses divagations poétiques, ce n’est pas seulement par respect de la chronologie ; prolongeant les travaux universitaires de la fin des années soixante en même temps qu’ils servent de révélateur au rêve poétique de Mallarmé, *Les dieux antiques* constituent en effet le lieu où se noue toute l’aventure du poète, le modèle – au sens scientifique du mot – qui lui permet d’intégrer et d’articuler ensemble son univers imaginaire, pour reprendre un titre célèbre, et sa réflexion sur l’homme et son langage” (*La Religion de Mallarmé* 103-4).
41 See Marchal, *La Religion de Mallarmé* 154-5.
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:

Ne point croire que, dans les temps antiques, un homme qui prononçait fréquemment le nom de Zeus, fit une allusion continue 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.  

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, and that there exists a religion which is at the foundation of both paganism and Christianity and which is “latent”, presumably within the soul.

Cox’s interpretation of mythology was derived from the theories of Oxford professor Max Müller (1823-1900), a specialist in Sanskrit and the Zend Avesta. Müller’s chair in comparative mythology was among those proliferating in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, Romantic enthusiasm for myth having been transmitted to the nineteenth century when K.O Müller edited the notes on mythology of Karl Solger, an associate of the Jena Romantics. Müller’s Theosophy or Psychological Religion was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Eighteenth-century reductive readings of myth, such as those of Dupuis and Volney, reappeared in the nineteenth, particularly in the work of Max Müller and A. Kuhn. Müller’s Comparative Mythology (1856) was translated into French by Renan in 1859. In Müller’s view, mythology and language were closely related, myths having originated from words for natural phenomena such as sun, clouds and storm, which lost their

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42 Mallarmé, Les Dieux antiques 11.
44 See page 42.
45 Godwin points out in The Theosophical Enlightenment that reductive readings of myth, including Christian myth, had been suggested in works such as Dupuis’ L’Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle (1795) and Volney’s Les Ruines des empires (1791), the latter a work which has “been kept in print to this day by small presses devoted to the secularist cause” and which “became one of the foundational works of freethought in the English-speaking world (35). Both Dupuis and Volney applied their theories to Christianity. Godwin summarises Dupuis’ argument in the following way: “Jesus Christ, in a word, is the sun, and his life is nothing but an allegory of the sun’s course through the zodiac, from birth, through crucifixion on the cross of the solstices and equinoxes, to resurrection. Thus the Christian religion is just another distorted representative of the great, original religion of Nature” (34). The similarity with the thinking of Edward Maitland, discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, is obvious.
original signification when tribes moved to new locations. Müller and Kuhn parted company over which natural phenomena had been instrumental, Kuhn 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 on a daily and yearly basis.\textsuperscript{46} 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”.\textsuperscript{47} Gods who are only words can no longer be scandalous.

The reductionist position regarding myth was challenged by representatives of the traditionalist position and by Neopaganists. Charlton describes traditionalist principles in the following way:

\begin{quote}
Derived in part, no doubt, from the Christian and Rousseauist ideas of man’s state of innocence before his fall into sin, and also from illuminist sources, the idea spread that myths express divine truths to which our corrupted, ‘civilized’ minds are closed. This view was held by German and French philologues alike, although there were divisions of opinion as to whether the revelation was given to the priests alone or to the people as a whole and whether its truths were consciously allegorized or were actually apprehended in symbolic form. The consequence most often drawn from this belief is not far to seek: the essence of any religion, however overlaid by dogma and superstition, is true – true (some added) for the present as well as for the past.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Creuzer, whose work was made known in France through Guigniaut’s translation (1825-51), and popularised in Benjamin Constant’s \textit{De la religion} (1824-31), is an important representative of the traditionalist position. Creuzer’s opinion, following Görres, that a common higher truth or tradition is hidden in the myths of the world, has been discussed in Chapter Two.\textsuperscript{49} Eliphas Lévi (pseudonym of Alphonse Constant, 1810-1875), mage and cabbalist, 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.\textsuperscript{50} Neopagansists, too, disputed reductive readings of myth. Louis Ménard, whose \textit{Rêveries d’un païen mystique} was in Brennan’s library, extended the position of Creuzer, defending mythology in \textit{Du
polythéisme hellénique (1863) against Max Müller’s interpretation by emphasising its symbolic function: “les religions sont des ensembles de symboles, c’est-à-dire des idées exprimées sous des formes concrètes.”

The primary thesis of Les Dieux antiques is that words signifying natural phenomena become gods upon the dispersal of peoples. In the introductory chapter, the following passage is, according to the editorial note, taken directly from Cox:

[...] tant que ces antiques peuplades demeuraient 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.

Brennan has marked a later passage which further explicates this principle as follows:

[Les tribus] emportaient au moins une langue commune, à laquelle étaient confiés des mythes communs. L’éloignement où vécurent l’une de l’autre les peuplades errantes où fixées, fit que leur langue se différencia 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 (16).

The first sentence is also marked down the side. In these two passages we find the fundamental explanatory principle of Mallarmé’s work: words, corresponding with nature, become gods.

It is well known that the Swedenborgian notion of “correspondences” influenced the Symbolist movement. This is discussed in detail by Balakian and Michaud. The idea that Nature signifies, that it is a symbolic language, was a theme of Swedenborg, as discussed above with reference to Yeats. The doctrine of “correspondences” was famously given expression by Baudelaire, in his article on Victor Hugo and in the poem “Correspondances”, and before him by Lévi (Constant).

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

51 Quoted in Marchal, La Religion de Mallarmé 121.
52 Mallarmé, Les Dieux antiques 3.
the social significance of a language of nature. Within this context, an allusion to "correspondences" would almost certainly refer 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.55

Wilkinson’s emphasis on the link between the idea of a language of Nature and schemes for social and political reform, of whatever persuasion, are important in the light of Brennan’s interest in Mallarmé’s proposal of a “vrai culte moderne”, discussed in the next chapter, and Brennan’s own attempt to produce a body of poetry appropriate to such a project, discussed in the final chapter of this thesis. 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”.

He says:

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?”.

Brennan was clearly taken by the notion that Nature is a symbolic language which needs to be deciphered. He continues by offering a prose translation of the first part of Baudelaire’s poem, as follows: ““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.”” As 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.57

Symbolism relies on a modified version of the doctrine.

Several passages from Mallarmé, and the article Brennan wrote for the Bulletin in November 1898, taking the affirmative side in the debate “Was Mallarmé a Great

55 Wilkinson, The Dream of an Absolute Language 26. Jane Williams-Hogan suggests that the doctrines of Swedenborg are not entirely congruent with those of esotericism, as the notion of “living nature”, one of Faiivre’s essential criteria for esoteric currents, discussed in the introduction to this thesis, is not found in Swedenborg’s works ("The Place of Emanuel Swedenborg in Modern Western Esotericism", in Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion, ed. Antoine Faiivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Gnostica (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) 220-22). However, Swedenborg’s notion of “correspondences” is a point of agreement with esoteric currents, and, as the discussion of Yeats above has shown, Brennan derived his understanding of the principle at least partly from Yeats’s identification of Swedenborgian correspondences with the patently esoteric “signatures” of Boehme.

56 Prose 55.

57 Balakian, The Symbolist Movement 14.
Poet?”, throw light on what Brennan would have taken as instances of the notion of “correspondences” in the work of the older poet. The discussion of Baudelaire and “correspondences” in Brennan’s first Symbolism lecture is followed by an example of “correspondences” in Mallarmé’s work. Brennan offers his own (albeit questionable) translation of a passage from “La Musique et les lettres” which 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”. Here, Brennan uses the word “mood” to translate “quelque état intérieur”. His (questionable) 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 analogous connection between “the symphonic equation proper to the seasons” and the human passions:

Un homme peut advenir, en tout oubli – jamais ne sied d’ignorer qu’expres – 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.

Here Mallarmé uses the word “équation” for the relationship between seasons and human passions, a relationship which, as the word “symphonic” implies, is also a musical one. It is apparent that the understanding of “moods” Brennan gained from early German Romanticism, discussed in the first section of this chapter, would have been in accord with Mallarmé’s “symphonic equation”.

Elsewhere, in “Ballets”, Mallarmé uses the phrase “équations sommaires” (306). As mentioned earlier, Brennan quotes this phrase in a note which 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.

58 Prose 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” (Mallarmé, Œuvres complètes 647).
59 Mallarmé, Œuvres complètes 646.
60 C.J. Brennan, Notebook MS 3246, Christopher Brennan Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
Mallarmé uses “équations” again in the 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”.61 Here, the equation seems to be between the foreshadowed book and the dream of an “orphic explanation of the earth” and the equation again is conceived in a musical metaphor, as rhythmic. “Orphic” 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.62

Human “ardours”, we find, receive “corroboration” by means of their “correspondences” in nature’s spectacle”, from which myth is derived, making it of lasting relevance.

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. This paragraph, footnoted as “Note particulière à la Traduction”, 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”.63 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 interpretive 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, with Brennan’s underlinings shown:

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 retraçent la lutte de la lumière et de l’ombre ; les dieux et les héros deviennent tous, pour la

61 Mallarmé, Œuvres complètes 663. Brennan quotes this passage in "Quelques Vers de Mallarmé épars aux feuilles".
62 Prose 282.
63 Mallarmé, Les Dieux antiques 12. 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 153-4).
The daily and yearly "events" of nature are seen as a drama, whose events provide universal material for myth.

Brennan’s underlinings and annotations demonstrate his interest in the myths which the text links with dawn or morning. According to the methods of comparative mythology outlined in the avant-propos, which use philological studies of other languages, especially the language of the Vedas, to explain myth, a number of personages in Greek myth have such an association. The story of Procris, for example, may be reduced to “trois simples phrases”, namely “le soleil aime la rosée”, “le matin aime le soleil” and “le soleil est la mort de la rosée” (189). Brennan underlines all these phrases. The text offers to “translate” the myth of Procris into its natural analogues (“poursuivons et traduisons”) (189). The love of Adonis for Aphrodite is traced to a similar origin. Mallarmé writes “Voici l’histoire d’Adonis. Sa grande beauté charma Aphrodite, mais il ne paya pas cette passion de retour”. Brennan’s marginal note reads “day flying the dawn” (93). Dawn is associated with the tenderness of first love: “le charme du matin suggera l’idée de tendresse et d’amour, qui passa par mille formes, selon l’âme des nations auxquelles arrivèrent ces traditions.” Brennan has marked this passage in the margin (91). Another marked passage has a similar theme:

[… le 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 soleil, se présentent à nous comme délaissant celle à qui ils avaient donné leur foi première (104).

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 (135).

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”. The “poetic”

64Mallarmé, Les Dieux antiques 12.
65 Mallarmé, Les Dieux antiques 54.
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 rejouit 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 (10).

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 effects the conversion of nature itself 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 made in Mallarmé’s text by its use of personification, which is supported by its tone.

In making nature into myth, in identifying natural cycles with large-scale human passions, Les Dieux antiques should be seen as making an essential contribution to Brennan’s notion of “moods”. Mallarmé’s discussion of myth can be interpreted as an attempt to humanise nature. As earlier discussion has shown, Brennan’s notes to the Ellis and Yeats edition of 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”, where he discusses “all those countless rapports between ourselves and Nature” which point in the direction of “the last Unity of World and Human”.66 Brennan claims in the talk that “Man’s task is to spiritualise, idealize, humanize […] the world”.67 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. Brennan clearly took it as an instance of “correspondences”. In addition, he brought to his interpretation of the text the imperative of early German Romanticism to reunite the soul and Nature, to bestow on Nature the quality of “Gemüth”, as discussed in the previous two chapters.

A number of Brennan’s Poems make use of imagery associating dawn or morning with the innocent tenderness of first love, following the symbolism suggested in Mallarmé’s text. In “Where the poppy-banners flow”, number fifteen of Poems, the growth towards sexual maturity of the couple represented in the poem appears in the transition from “girl and boy” to “youth and maid” (stanza 2), as the appearance of

66 See page 123.
67 Prose 10.
poppies in the fields indicates the arrival of summer. The original innocence of the couple is paralleled by the "spotless morn" (stanza 1). Number 19, "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" (l. 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", ll. 9 to 13). The pale colours of "maiden Dawn" are paralleled by the "delicate feather-pinks" (l. 7) and the "pale sweet grass" (l. 8), 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 of flowers ("blue-eyed flower-births", "forget-me-nots and violets", ll. 15-16) are also associated with spring and innocence ("bashful", l. 15, "maids", l. 17), just as Mallarmé associates the colour violet with the innocent dawn, first beloved of the sun-hero. As the previous chapter has shown, Brennan makes Eve a symbol of innocence in the "Lilith" sequence by associating her with the freshness of early morning. Subsequent chapters will show that morning innocence is a crucial thematic element in the symbolic equivalence of natural cycles with human passions which structures Poems as a whole.

The climax of Mallarmé's drama of nature comes at sunset. In the story of Hercules, who epitomises the solar hero, this is the moment of his self-immolation in a funeral pyre on the summit of Mount Oeta, 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 at the side 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 ardent les 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 couleurs du soir semblent le consoler dans l'agonie de sa disparition (135-6).

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 by the side of Hercules) console him in his death-throes. Consideration of other texts in which Mallarmé uses the sunset as a symbol of the self-sacrifice of the hero in the next chapter will demonstrate that this is fundamental to his work, as Brennan was well aware. The image of the funeral-pyre appears in Brennan's elegy to Mallarmé,

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"Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed" (to be discussed in the next chapter), and in stanza 14 of Brennan’s “The hollow crystal of my winter dream" (discussed in Chapter Six), reappearing in stanza 22.

Mallarmé’s text makes the Medusa a significant symbol of night. Brennan’s notes for the writing of Lilith 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. Altrée d’amour humain et de sympathie, elle visita ses parents les Grecs, qui ne voulaient l’aider. Aussi quand Athéna vint du pays libyen, implora-t-elle son aide ; mais la déesse la lui refusa, allant que les hommes reculaient 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’Athéna ; 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 temps (166-7). The entire passage is marked down the side, in addition to the underlinings indicated.

The ambivalence of Medusa as a symbol in Mallarmé’s text is apparent here; Brennan transfers this ambivalence 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 only becomes beautiful when “we find her fair” (“She is the night: all horror is of her”, stanza 10). The second passage quoted in the notes is entirely underlined in Brennan’s copy of the text: “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” (171). 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 in which, like sunset in the daily cycle, 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” (127). The thorn-induced sleep of Brunehilde and the serpent-bite which sends Eurydice to the Underworld are interpreted as “cette épine de la nuit ou de l’hiver” (33), underlined by Brennan as shown: 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 Brunehilde a cross-reference to Dornröschen, the Sleeping Beauty.Obviously he felt that the story of the Sleeping

69 The first reads “Dornröschen, the earth” (31) and the second, “cf. again Dornröschen” (33).
Beauty was another instance to which the Mallarmean interpretation of the thorn or bite of night or winter, which sends the earth into a death-like sleep, could be applied. The German name *Dornröschen* makes the connection even clearer, having the literal meaning “little rose thorn”.

This marginal annotation has a particular relevance to the first piece in Brennan’s *Poems*, “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude”. Stanzas 4 to 6 of this poem contain an obvious reference to either the Sleeping Beauty or Snow White (probably both). The succession of winter by spring is figuratively represented as the awakening of Snow White or the Sleeping Beauty (“the tranced maiden”, stanza 5) from their sleep. In his discussion of the myths of Dionysus, Demeter and Persephone in *Greek Studies*, Pater offers 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 (123), and “See Pater’s Greek Studies” beside the chapter on Demeter (73), in his copy of *Les Dieux antiques*. The Sleeping Beauty symbolism in “MDCCCXCIII: 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 is at once reductive and poetic:

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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 fleurit 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, git enveloppée et cachée à tous les yeux mortels (171).
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Pater suggests further 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 like hope of resurrection:

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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 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 [...].
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This reading of myth is neither sceptical nor reductive (although somewhat arrogant). It is an expression of religious hope, addressing the possibility of a spiritual “second birth” outside the terms of “the coarser and more material religion of the many”, and

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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”, discussed above, that of Pater is more overt. What Brennan, inspired by Pater and Mallarmé, makes of this four-way analogy between the seasonal cycle, the Sleeping Beauty, the mythical cycles of Dionysus, Demeter and Persephone, and the spiritual destiny of human beings, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

Brennan’s annotations indicate that he found important common ground between the treatment of myth by Mallarmé in this text, and the work of Pater. In addition to those cross-references noted above, there is an implicit one to Pater’s Greek Studies in an annotation to page 21 opposite Mallarmé’s discussion of Indra as the god of fire and rain, where Brennan has written “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, 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.71 The tone Pater uses in discussing the significance of important Greek myths is very comparable with that of Mallarmé, and Brennan’s numerous cross-references make it clear that he feels the resemblance strongly. 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” (29). Here we are back to Kantian and Romantic notions of the power of imagination to unify outer and inner worlds, as discussed in the previous two chapters. Pater’s theoretical description of “the office of the imagination […] in Greek sculpture” is “to condense the impressions of natural things into human form” (32), a description which could be applied to Mallarmé’s actual practice in the poetic prose of Les Dieux antiques.72

71 Pater, Greek Studies 91-3.
72 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 is ready for publication much earlier, in 1871 (Marchal, La Religion de Mallarmé 134), before Pater’s articles on
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". In the light of the discussion of Brennan's notion of "moods" in this chapter, it is particularly significant that Brennan should have made such a comment as late as 1921, seven years after Poems was finally published, and when he had all but ceased to write poetry. In the article, Brennan refers to Mallarmé's refusal to acknowledge these works, and comments that "only the purified results pass into his work" (363).

We have seen, then, that Brennan takes the analogy between human passions and the events of nature which Mallarmé represents as the basis of all mythology in Les Dieux antiques to be a form of "correspondence". This correspondence makes an important contribution to Brennan's notion of "moods", resembling the accord between the human mind, the natural world and the Absolute expressed by the German words "Stimmung" and "Gemüt". Myth, as Mallarmé presents it, derives from, and expresses, fundamental analogies between human beings and nature. In one sense this is reductive, but in another sense it represents an elevation of nature to the status of myth. The poetry Brennan built on the notion of "moods", to be discussed in the last two chapters of this thesis, corroborates this.

4. "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. Apart from the readings and annotations discussed in the first three sections of this chapter, there is evidence of his interest in his so-called "Chevaux de Frise", and from his introduction to the English verse anthology, From Blake to Arnold, published in 1900. In both, Brennan applies the notion of "moods" specifically to poetry.

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. 74 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. 75

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” (88). However, the discussion of “moods” in this chapter has suggested that Brennan’s terms should be taken 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). 76 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”. 77 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” (xviii). 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” (xxv).

We recall from Chapter Two that in Brennan’s opinion, the creation of poetry involves an exchange between “spiritual and material fact” (xviii). 78 Some of his expressions are usefully repeated here. He says, for instance:

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 [...] (xviii).

This strongly recalls Pater’s description, quoted in the previous section of this chapter, of the power of Greek imagnation to make “for the human body a soul of waters, for

74 See G.A. Wilkes, "Interpreting Brennan's Poetry; or 'The I of My Verses is not Necessarily ME'", Southerly 37 (1977): 421-2 and Clark, Biography 88.
75 Clark, Biography 88.
76 According to Clark, “Brennan wrote the introduction and most of the notes for this book” (Biography 154).
77 Brennan, Pickburn, and Brereton, eds., From Blake to Arnold xv n.1, xvii.
78 See page 64.
the human soul a body of flowers”. In the review “Victor Daley’s At Dawn and Dusk” (1898) Brennan uses a trope of marriage again:

[...] that 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.

The trope occurs again in the Symbolism lectures, making altogether, as earlier discussion has pointed out, three public repetitions of the idea of a harmonious exchange between the spiritual and the material between 1898 and 1904.

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”. 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”, this time within the human personality itself. 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” (xiii). 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 (xiii).

A footnote (xxvi n.1) describes “moods” as “intellectual raptures”, a phrase which reappears in the Symbolism lectures, again with reference to the union of abstract ideas and emotion (86).

The Introduction presents the “moods” as “large, rhythmical states” of the soul, “the abiding figures whose union is the type, the ideal or perfect human figure, which it is not given to any one man to be” (xviii). We recognise the influence of Yeats’s idea of the “moods” as large affective states not restricted to the merely individual, itself

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79 See page 138.
80 Prose 190.
81 We also recognise the contribution of Mallarmé’s version of the “type”, “la figure que nul n’est”. For more on this, see pages 152 and 167 below.
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’lyn father only
Knoweth. No Individual knoweth, nor can know in all Eternity (Night the First, ii. 9-13).

Blake’s “Universal Man” is not individual but type. The idea that the “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”. Earlier, I quoted a passage from this talk in which Mallarmé proposed that we should “seize the relations […] existing between different seasons” and “simplify the world in accordance with some inner mood”, according to Brennan’s translation, which continues like this:

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.82

The “kinship of all being”, the “silent melodic notation of themes which form a logic out of our own living fibres” are, according to Brennan’s 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 quoted above to “all those correspondences

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82 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” (*Prose* 56-7). The original reads as follows:

La Nature a lieu, on n’y ajoutera pas ; que des cités, les voies ferrées et plusieurs inventions formant notre matériel.

Tout l’acte disponible, à jamais et seulement, reste de saisir les rapports, entre temps, rares ou multipliés ; d’après quelque état interieur et que l’on veuille à son gré étendre, simplifier le monde.

A l’égal de créer : la notion d’un objet, échappant, qui fait défaut.

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 reconnaît ; et d’anxieux accords. Avertissant par tel écart, au lieu de déconcerter, ou que sa similitude avec elle-même, la soustraie en la confondant.

Chiffonnée mélodique tue, de ces motifs qui composent une logique, avec nos fibres. Quelle agonie, aussi, qu’agitée la Chimère versant par ses blessures d’or l’évidence de tout l’être pareil, nulle torsion vaincue 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” (Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes* 647-8).

For a discussion of the idea of the “arabesque” in German Romanticism, see Brown, *The Shape of German Romanticism* 90-98.
between nature and spiritual life, out of which myths arise”, and in the following statement:

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 (xix).

Brennan gives examples of the emotions typically evoked in human viewers by the sunset or the dawn as examples of “moods” which 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 (xix).

The connection between human passion and the events of natural cycles which 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 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 (xxv).

“True art” establishes the correspondence between the human being and nature which constitutes the “mood”, and this is the foundation of myth.

Thus, we have considerable evidence that the concept of “moods” was central to Brennan’s thinking at the time he was composing the majority of the Poems. We have established that “moods” are not just feelings; they represent the union of intellect and emotion as well as the correspondence of inner and outer worlds. They relate to the archetypal human being or the “type” rather than the individual, thus evoking the “higher self” discussed in earlier chapters of this thesis. According to this theory, art is able to incarnate the “moods” via the imagination, the human faculty which allows access to the Absolute in visionary experience. This function of art creates myth, an expression of the principle of “correspondence”. It is clear from the Introduction to From Blake to Arnold, as well as the notes on individual poets included in that collection, that Brennan’s notion of “moods” was significantly influenced by English
Romantic and Victorian poetry, in addition to the contribution to his thinking made by the German Romantics' sense of an accord between human beings and Nature, Yeats's discussion of "moods" in the edition of Blake, and Mallarmé's representation of nature as myth, as examined in this chapter. Wordsworth's exploration in "Tintern Abbey" of "that serene and blessed mood, /in which the affections gently lead us on – /until, the breath of this corporeal frame /and even the motion of our human blood /almost suspended, we are laid asleep /In body, and become a living soul"(ll.41-6), for instance, is obviously very much to the point, but further discussion of this is beyond the scope of this study.

The next chapter shows the fundamental importance of Mallarmé's "equation" of natural cycles and human passions to Brennan's poetic ideals by examining in detail his elegy to Mallarmé.
Chapter Five: Brennan’s elegy to Mallarmé

Introduction

Brennan’s 1896 reading of Les Dieux antiques established an approach to Mallarmé which he still found useful more than twenty years later. 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 makes this interpretation the point of departure for one of his “Minuits chez Mallarmé” articles, published in the Modern Language Review of NSW in 1920, which 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. He says:

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. Brennan construes the symbol of the suicide in terms of the “equations” discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. Although he does not mention Les Dieux antiques, it is apparent that his understanding of its themes 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” (357). The question of the relationship of “idea” and Nature in Mallarmé is a vexed one. According to the deconstructionist approach of Jacques Derrida, now widely accepted, Mallarmé’s work does not signify any “idea” at all beyond itself. In his 1970 article “La double séance”, 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 which reproduces it, so that “l’imiter est plus réel, plus essentiel, plus vrai, etc., que l’imitant”, Mallarmé’s piece “se lit tout autrement que comme un néo-idéalisme.” Further, “[i]l n’y a pas d’imitation. Le Mime n’imiter rien.

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 Prose 357. Brennan gives the source of the Poizat article as Revue de Paris, July 1918, 187 f.

3 Suicide” in the final form of the poem replaces “désastre” in the earlier version, and “ciel évanoui” replaces “soirs évanouis”.

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” (221). 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 been another immensely influential work in furthering a reading of Mallarmé as a series of texts which do not signify anything beyond themselves. According to Peter Dayan, the “systematic displacement” of the “logocentric” approach to literary criticism “historically begins with Mallarmé’s own ‘poèmes critiques’.”

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. In fact, as Macainsh points out, 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 (1892-4), as a renewal of Romanticism, especially German Romanticism.

Macainsh comments:

[...] among young writers in Berlin, Brennan was far from being the first and only one to enthuse over the newer French literature. The 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 [...] 

Macainsh states further, “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” (89). 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. George's manifesto on art was
published in the first issue of Blätter für die Kunst ("Pages for Art") 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 (89). 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” (89). Brennan is very likely to have known them.

The themes of German Romanticism in terms of which Brennan understood the “equations” of Les Dieux antiques concern precisely the relationship mentioned in the article on “Victorieusement fui le suicide beau” between Nature and the Idea. The correlation between the human mind and Nature expressed by German words related to the English “mood” is meant to resolve the perceived, and lamented, split between the two, discussed in regard to Brennan’s “Lilith” sequence in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis. The transcendental self of Kant, and the notion of the inner divinity for which later German Romantic thinkers also drew on esoteric and mystical traditions regarding imagination and the “Gemüth”, represent attempts to resolve the dominant question of the relationship between inner world, outer world, and the Absolute.

In his elegy to Mallarmé, “Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed”, Brennan draws on Mallarmean equivalences between natural cycles and the universal events of human life to express his own perception of Mallarmé’s art. By means of a technique founded on the theory of “moods”, and by a complex series of oblique references to passages where Mallarmé himself treats the issue of the relationship between Nature and the Idea, this poem suggests, without stating, that a transcendental or true self is constituted by the union of mind and Nature in art, and that this, the only Absolute, no external Absolute existing, is sufficient. The art of Brennan’s poem, like Mallarmé’s own poems in honour of dead poets, pays tribute to the art of Mallarmé, an achieved transcendence despite the death of the individual. This chapter suggests that the poem makes unmistakeable reference to the process Mallarmé called “transposition”, the transformation of the physical into the Idea, a notion whose precursors in German thought, as detailed discussion shows, are not limited to Hegel. In addition to the inherent interest in Brennan’s response to Mallarmé, condensed into the fourteen lines of a sonnet, the poem has an important role in Poems as a whole, introducing themes which are more fully developed in the “Liminary” which follows, to be discussed in the

following chapter, and representing the achieved transcendence of art as a moment of suspension, around which, as the arrangement of other poems shows, life itself has to continue.

“Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed”

The words “red autumn” and “flame” in the first stanza of Brennan’s elegy establish the symbolism of autumn as a funeral pyre, in keeping with Les Dieux antiques (although this symbolism only becomes explicit in the second-last line of the poem). The elegy 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” and “Bucolique”, where the poet spent his holidays, then increasingly more time after his “retirement” in 1880. Autumn is represented as “un holocauste d’année” in “Hamlet”, one of the prose pieces in Mallarmé’s Divagations. As in English, the French word “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). We recall that autumn and sunset are associated with the self-immolation of the sun-hero in Les Dieux antiques.

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 des soucis médiocres (299).

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 his “unique œil lucide”:

what god now claims thee priest, O chosen head,
most humble here that wast, for that thou knew’st
tho’ 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 piece can “spell our glory in blazon’d ether spread”, that is,

10 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” (Prose 317).

11 Mallarmé, Œuvres complètes 300.
understand and use as the basis of his artistic technique the equation of natural event and human experience. Mallarmé develops the trope of nature as a theatre in “Hamlet” in the following passage:

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 déshabitués de l’horizon pourpre, violet, rose et toujours or. Le commerce de cieux où je m’identifie cesse, sans qu’une incarnation brutale contemporaine occupe, sur leur paravent de gloire, ma place tôt renoncée [... ] (299-300).

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 favourably with this play relative to other plays), unlike others who are “trop vite déshabitués de l’horizon pourpre, violet, rose et toujours or”. What goes on in the skies is itself a drama.

Brennan’s word “blazon’d” creates an effect which might be compared to Mallarmé’s “toujours or”. In its sense of “coloured” or “painted”, and in recalling the word “blaze”, it suggests the flame-like colours of sunset; in its heraldic associations it suggests a noble ancestry in keeping with “our glory”; while its association with the proclamation of a trumpet suggests the public announcement of something affecting everyone. What is “blazon’d” on the sky cannot be ignored. A similar effect is created by the third line of one of the poems in “The twilight of disquietude”, which reads “my trumpets flood the air with gold”, where a correspondence between the sunset and the mood of the onlooker is asserted. Trumpets, “tout haut d’or pâmé sur les vélins”, appear in the final line of Mallarmé’s “Hommage” to Richard Wagner.

In the passage quoted above, Mallarmé identifies himself with the “commerce of the skies”, a drama of nature in which human beings, it seems, are implicated. The piece “Crayonné au théâtre” makes this clearer:

[Brennan’s copy of Divagations has single lines under “pour ceux n’ayant point à voir les choses à même !” with “la pièce écrite au folio du ciel et mimée avec le geste de ses passions par l’Homme” doubly underlined. In these lines, the drama presented in an actual theatre is itself seen as “une représentation” of a more fundamental drama. In that drama, humanity itself is the actor (implied by “mimée”) and the cycle of human passions is the plot. Brennan’s elegy to Mallarmé situates the poet in such a drama.

12 Chisholm takes the phrase “our glory in blazon’d ether spread” to refer to the constellation remaining at the end of Mallarmé’s Coup de dés. See A.R. Chisholm, “Brennan and Mallarmé Part One”, Southerly 21, no. 4 (1961): 5.
The autumn setting, as we have seen from the discussion of *Les Dieux antiques*, signals the funeral ceremony for the hero, who is consumed in a pyre for which the colours of autumn are a natural symbol. This is made more explicit in the sestet:

\[
\text{Silence alone, that o'er the lonely song}
\]
\[
\text{impends, old night, or, known to thee and near,}
\]
\[
\text{long autumn afternoon o'er stirless leaves}
\]

\[
\text{suspended fulgent haze, the smouldering throng}
\]
\[
\text{staying its rapt assumption-pyre to hear}
\]
\[
\text{what strain the faun's enamour'd leisure weaves.}
\]

The firelike “fulgent haze”, lying over the forest, suggests smouldering leaves, although the pyre is not mentioned explicitly until the second-last line. 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.

Brennan associates the dead poet with the words “kingdom” and “priest”. In Mallarmé’s “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 envoles 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 trônes au déversement sur un d’orgueils surhumains (or ne faut-il pas qu’on en constate l’authenticité ?) ni passer le seuil où des torches consument, 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’attends, pour l’être [... ] (289).

“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. Robert Greer Cohn comments: “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”.\(^{13}\) 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 pieces), suggesting that his poem is a deliberate reworking of some important themes of that piece. The word “glory” in “our glory in blazon’d ether spread” recalls the title. The function of the word “suspended”, prolonging the moment in the forest, is similar to the effect of the following lines, earlier in “La Gloire”: “Une quiétude menteuse de riches bois suspend alentour quelque extraordinaire état d’illusion”. Here we find the same word “suspend”, used in

reference to the prolongation of illusion (288). 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” (289). Mallarmé’s forest is “en son temps d’apothéose”, at the crucial point of the cycle of the seasons, celebrating the consecration of the poet into priest or king while the train which 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” (second stanza, l.1).

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*. I have been unable to find any 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 to his friend Cazalis of 1867 in terms of his own “death” as an individual. In this well-known letter Mallarmé states: “je suis parfaitement mort, et la région la plus impure où mon Esprit puisse s’aventurer est l’Eternité”; 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”.14 However, the metaphorical “death” of the poet is the theme of the following passage from “Crise de vers”, which Brennan knew very well indeed:

> L’œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l’initiative aux mots [...].

> Une ordonnance du livre de vers pointue ou partout, élimine le hasard ; encore 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 suppose, ne reste pas exclusif de complémentaires, la jeunesse, pour cette fois, en poésie ou s’impose une foudroyante et harmonieuse plénitude, bégaie 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 paraphe amplifié du génie, anonyme et parfait comme une existence d’art (366-7).

“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 a sacrifice: “le poète doit faire le sacrifice de sa conscience individuelle et renâître”. 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

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14 Mallarmé, *Correspondance* 1: 240, 42.
dépouillement total dans le sens d’abstraction". 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 répercute et vain désormais s’exhale par la chimère orchestrale (370).

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. 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?

In this respect, there is a significant continuity between the Romantic conception of the poetical self (this time, it is English Romanticism that is relevant) and that of Mallarmé. This, then, is one aspect under which the theme of sacrifice appears in the work of Mallarmé: the sacrifice of the individual personality of the poet in favour of the work. This helps to explain the significance of the “assumption-pyre” in Brennan’s elegy. It is not merely a funerary pyre, but 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 renaitre, héros (654).

15 Davies, Mallarmé et le drame solaire 22.
16 For a discussion (with some Mallarmean premises) of how the work of literature may stand independently of individual authorship, see Roberto Calasso, Literature and the Gods, trans. Tim Parks (London: Vintage, 2001) 189-91.
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’.

Here it is implied that the “instinct du ciel” is involved in the clash between dream and suffering in human life, indeed that Brennan takes Mallarmé’s phrases “l’instinct de ciel en chacun” and “l’antagonisme de rêve chez l’homme” to be parallel. The latter phrase comes from “Hamlet” (300). 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 in the above quotation. 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 to Vittorio Pica quoted in *La Revue indépendante* in March 1891, in which Mallarmé further expanded on the role of literature in the “vrai culte moderne” which might address this tension:

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.¹⁹

This is a crucial passage for Brennan’s enterprise in *Poems*, as the two final chapters of the thesis will demonstrate in detail. Here we find that literature itself, in the form of “a book”, can provide the “explication de l’homme” which would be adequate to our dreams, and which would itself constitute the desired new form of religious expression. This explanation is already “written in nature” quite unmistakeably 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.

Cohn explains the following passage from Mallarmé’s “La Musique et les lettres” in terms of an equivalence between the seasons and human passion:

Un homme peut advenir, en tout oubli – 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

Cohn takes the principle expressed here 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. Brennan’s notion of “moods” and Cohn’s interpretation of Mallarmé’s “symphonic equation” are very close here. The relationship Mallarmé suggests between “notre passion” and “divers ciels” is also found in the passage from “Crayonné au théâtre” quoted above, where 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, the drama which, in performance, could form the basis of the “vrai culte moderne” is allied with the Passion of Christ celebrated in the Catholic rite:

Brennan underlines “Mystère, autre que représentatif et que, je dirai, grec. Pièce, office” in his copy of Divagations. Here Mallarmé brings together two kinds of religious cycles, the Greek and the Catholic. The Passion of Christ is thought of as a drama, like the Greek tetralogy, the cycle of four plays, three tragic and one satyric, which was performed at the festival of Dionysus. Both of these are 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”) being particularly relevant to a new form of religious expression which would unite human, rather than divine, passion with natural cycles.

This passage, and the one from “La Musique et les lettres” quoted just before, are crucial both to Brennan’s reading of Mallarmé, and to his own work. Brennan’s own scholarly fascination with Greek drama, especially that of Aeschylus, and his Catholic background, would have made Mallarmé’s association of the two of particular interest (Brennan suggested to his friend Peden that the best way to prepare for reading

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21 See page 149.
22 Cohn, Mallarmé’s Divagations 322.
Mallarmé was to read Aeschylus first!). Both Greek drama and Catholicism contribute, in Mallarmé’s thought, to a new form of religious expression which was neither, though it had echoes of both. Both of these elements were united with a third, the cycles of the natural world, thus addressing the gulf between the human mind and Nature which it was the project of Romanticism to bridge. Obviously this aspect of Mallarmé’s thought was very much in the forefront of Brennan’s mind when, after most of the pieces comprising Poems were written, although not yet in their final order, Brennan wrote in the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé (a passage already quoted in the Introduction to this thesis):

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.24

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

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23 Clark, Biography 69. According to Clark, Brennan’s interest in the works of Aeschylus began “as early as his second-last year at school”. The interest became a full-scale intellectual pursuit during his years at Sydney University, involving “an examination of various editions of the seven surviving tragedies, to determine the ancestry and authority of the extant manuscripts.” Clark describes the outcome in this way: “[...] towards the end of 1888 he discarded the orthodox view of the descent of these manuscripts, and decided they had all descended, by significantly different paths, from a lost archetype. This view is now generally accepted: at the time of his eighteenth birthday, in colonial Sydney, Brennan had independently made a discovery of major importance to classical scholarship” (26). His findings, written up subsequently in Berlin, were published in the Journal of Philology in 1894 (62-3). This story was concluded only after Brennan’s death. Clark writes: “Brennan did not live long enough to see a full acknowledgement of his achievement in this article. Nearly a decade after its publication, he had the satisfaction of seeing his argument praised for its ingenuity by Arthur Sidgwick in an important edition of the tragedies of Aeschylus. But Sidgwick did not agree unreservedly with Brennan’s view, and in any case the favourable remark appeared only in a footnote. About 1900 Brennan, speaking of his studies of Aeschylus to A.G. Stephens, said: ‘Perhaps I wasted my time’; Sidgwick’s footnote was apparently the closest Brennan got to fame as a classical scholar during his lifetime. Not until the appearance of Eduard Fraenkel’s monumental three-volume edition of the Agamemnon were the correctness and importance of Brennan’s arguments authoritatively confirmed. In this edition Fraenkel credited Brennan and three other scholars (whose work was either inaccessible or unpublished while Brennan was working on Aeschylus in Sydney) with having produced ‘really conclusive evidence’ to show that the later manuscripts containing the Agamemnon and Eumenides were not derived from the Mediceus [manuscript]. Fraenkel’s Agamemnon was published by Oxford in 1950: the true magnitude of Brennan’s achievement as a young man was not recognized until eighteen years after his death” (63).

24 Prose 145.
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 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.  

For Mallarmé, as for Brennan, human passion is seen in terms of the Passion of Christ. As the first chapter of this thesis pointed out, 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 “Dream” of the death of God (well before Nietzsche) of Jean-Paul Richter (1763-1825) had been conveyed to France in the more pessimistic version of Madame de Staël (1766-1817), 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 marts s’ecrierent : - O Christ ! n’est-il point de Dieu ? Il répondit : - Il n’en est point. [...] le 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, ou est-tu ? [...] Relevant ensuite mes regards vers la voûte des cieux, je n’y ai trouvé qu’une orbite vide, noire et sans fond.  

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”.  

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 quoted above emphasises that there is no individual hero, but 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 (396).

In his interleaved copy of the 1899 Poésies, Brennan writes opposite 1.25 of “Toast funèbre”, which refers to “le vierge héro de l’attente posthume”, “héro puisqu’ élevé à un moment d’éternité : tout homme qui meurt devient héro”. As this poem deals with

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25 Cohn, Mallarmé’s Divagations 322.  
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”. We have already seen that “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.

Brennan’s response to “Toast funèbre” in terms of the poet as hero is relevant to his own elegy to Mallarmé. Opposite the beginning of Mallarmé’s poem, he writes “On n’invoqua pas le spectre : le poète s’évanouit tout dans la gloire vespérale; ne laissant derrière lui que le corps vain que couvre la tombe”. The lines in the first stanza of his elegy, “thy spirit induced /might vanish away in magic gold diffused”, suggest 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 ll.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 ? »
Hurle 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’édén l’inquiète merveille
Dont le frisson final, dans sa voix seule, éveille
Pour la Rose et le Lys le mystère d’un nom.

In Brennan’s view, the poet has an answer for the gulf of the “Néant”, the universe deprived of a personal God in the aftermath of de Stael’s Richter. Opposite “la Terre” he has written “donner un sens à la Terre, devoir de l’Homme”. Opposite “Le Maître, par un œil profond” we find “voir clairement et parler, devoir du Poète”. As a gloss on “édén” 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)”. In face of the Néant, he implies, the poet has the power to authenticate the earth. The writer in Mallarmé’s “Le livre, instrument spirituel” is “l’homme chargé de voir divinement”:

L’hymne, harmonie et joie, comme pur ensemble groupé 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 feuilletés (378).

“L’homme chargé de voir divinement” may be compared with the “œil profond” of the Master in the “Toast Funèbre” and Brennan’s gloss “voir clairement et parler, devoir du Poète”. To “see divinely” is connected with the “relations entre tout” which comprise the harmony of the “hymn”. Speaking follows seeing. The artistic act, “parler”, puts into effect the “Parole par qui les choses vraiment sont”, resuming the role of the unfallen Adam of naming things in their true significance. Brennan knew Mallarme’s statement in a letter to Léo d’Orfer of 1884, which reads:

La Poésie est l’expression, par le langage humain ramené à son rythme essentiel, du sens mystérieux des aspects de l’existence : elle donne ainsi d’authenticité notre séjour et constitue la seule tâche spirituelle.²⁹

Obviously he 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 which has taken the place of an external divinity or Absolute, is, Brennan implies, sufficient.

We have established, then, that Brennan pays tribute to Mallarme by situating the elegy in a theatre of nature where we are to see commemorated not only the physical death of the poet, but the metaphorical “death” of his own disappearance in favour of his art. The lines “his lucid gaze was used /to spell our glory in blazon’d ether spread” characterise Mallarme as one whose poetic art confers authenticity on Nature by perceiving it in relation to human passion. As Poet, Mallarme is seen to be consecrated as king or priest for the sake of humanity.

As we will see now, the second part of the poem develops the funeral-pyre imagery. As the smoke of the pyre, imagined into being from the flamelike colours of the autumn leaves and the haze in the air, hangs suspended, it symbolises the transformation of the poet. To the question posed by the octet, “what god now claims thee priest”, the sestet makes three answers: “silence alone”, “old night”, and “long autumn afternoon /o’er stirless leaves /suspended fulgent haze”. The “night” is the night of mystery, described in the discussion of the Lilith sequence, but especially the midnights of Mallarme about which Brennan wrote his two 1920s articles, “Minuits chez Mallarme”, in the first of which the “minuit” in “Victorieusment 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”.³⁰ The “silence” which “impends” over the words of the

²⁹ Quoted by Brennan in “Quelq’es [sic] Vers de Mallarme épar aux feuilles”, from La Vogue, no. 2, 18²⁸ April 1886.
³⁰ Prose 359-60.
poet (the "lonely song") is the inexpressible, to which words can merely point, as discussed in earlier chapters of this thesis.

Brennan's translation of part of Mallarmé's "Bucolique", from the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé, throws further light on the "suspended fulgent haze" of the elegy. Brennan certainly knew this piece at the time of writing his elegy. The following section is particularly relevant to its imagery:

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, 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 volatilisation 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 (151-2). 31

Here, we find a metaphor of volatilisation, the transformation, by burning in a "funeral pyre" or "furnace", of physical substance ("Nature") into non-physical "music".

Reciprocally, Nature is seen as "the Idea made tangible", and music as "the

31 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 ave 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 renaiscente flamme, où se sacrifierent les bosquets et les cieux ; là, en public, événée 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 chartes, le même, au cours de la transformation naturelle en musicale identifié (402-3).
transformation of nature”, a complex development of the relatively simple “equation” of sunset and sacrifice in Les Dieux antiques. Nature and music both hint at the “true self”. Not only “skies”, but also “words” are sacrificed (“not merely the text being abolished but the image, too, left latent”). The process of volatilisation described here (which is given prominence by Brennan’s use of the noun to translate Mallarmé’s verbal phrase “volatil dépouillement”), produces something non-physical; the funeral pyre of Brennan’s elegy produces a “suspended fulgent haze”.

The process to which Brennan alludes in this imagery is, I believe, what Mallarmé calls “transposition”. In “Crise de vers”, we read of the abolition of the physical aspect, the “thingness” of the image, in the poem:

Abolie, la prétention, esthétiquement une erreur, quoiqu’elle régit les chefs-d’oeuvre, 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 (365-6).

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 (“sortilege”) 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, natis, 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’a subie l’art littéraire, elle le borne et l’exempte. Son sortilege, à lui, si ce n’est libérer, hors d’une poignée de poussière ou réalité sans l’enclôre au livre, même comme texte, la dispersion volatile soit l’esprit, qui n’a que faire de rien outre la musicalité de tout (366).

Here 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”:

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 (366).

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.” 32 In discussing the production of the symbol by the manipulation of correspondences, Brennan quotes (in translation) two passages from Mallarmé dealing with “transposition”:

32 Davies, Mallarmé et le drame solaire 26.
"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." 33

This is not only a description of Symbolist technique, but deals with the relationship between the "brute reality" and the "essential", 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 gène d'un proche ou concret rappel, la notion pure.

Je dis : une fleur ! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relège 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 (368).

A natural object almost disappears in being transposed by the play of words into "la notion pure"; the word "flower", spoken, calls up, distinct from any particular, known, flower, "l'absente de tous bouquets". 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" (522). 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, in the lecture on German Romanticism, calls Mallarmean thought "Hegelian", he is almost certainly thinking of the "third aspect" referred to in his translation above. 34 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". 35 "Aufhebung" was the name G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) applied to his dialectical method. It was fundamentally logical, but Hegel extended its use from the field of logic to his philosophies of Nature and Spirit and to the phenomenology of Spirit. 36 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) (132).

33 Prose 61-2.
34 Prose 388.
35 Cohn, Mallarmé's Divagations 246.
The German verb *aufheben* means at once “preserve”, “abolish” and “raise”. In the logic of the *Encyclopaedia*, we find that in “the Dialectical stage these finite characterisations or formulae supersede themselves, and pass into their opposites”. The speculative stage “apprehends the unity of terms (propositions) in their opposition – the affirmative, which is involved in their disintegration and in their transition” (152). The self-contradiction of the two poles, thesis and antithesis, has “a positive outcome, a new category” which “unites […] the preceding categories”.

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, discussed by Brennan in his article “German Romanticism: A Progressive Definition”. Here, various versions of the Romantic synthesis, especially those of F. Schlegel and Novalis, are presented and compared. 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”. However, Brennan’s interpretation of “contraries” is quite wide, extending to “elements which have become negative opposites by misuse” (382). 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 individual element is sublimated”. 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 version. Novalis’s 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 selbzwieen und nicht allein das, sondern auch selbdreien, selbzwieen 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) (393).

38 Forster, "Dialectical Method* 132.
39 *Prose* 384.
The mathematical metaphor of “raising to a higher power” was popular among the early German Romantics. F. Schlegel’s description of Fichte as “Kant raised to a higher power” has already been mentioned. Although Brennan does not draw any parallels in this article between Novalis’s triad and Mallarmé’s “Transposition”, the “third aspect” of the latter (“a third aspect will be the result, fusible and clear, offered to the divination”) certainly resembles the former.

Brennan is not enthusiastic about excessively abstract readings of Mallarmé. In an immensely important passage in the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé, he discusses in what ways the thought of Mallarmé 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 àνάμνησιν applied to poetry. Not that Mallarmé ever goes so far as to maintain that there is àνάμνησις 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 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 (143).

While Brennan calls the thought of Mallarmé “Platonic”, he makes it clear that he is referring to an inner, rather than an external, noumenon, which he calls “our true self”. This self can only be manifested by the union of human being and “world”. The previous chapter has shown that Brennan expressed his notion of “moods”, in various writings preceding to, or roughly contemporary with, the writing of the bulk of Poems, in terms of a union of inner and outer worlds, mind and Nature. The paragraph preceding the one just quoted speaks of Mallarmé’s art as “bodying forth the essential imaginative harmony between man and the world”. The typescript of these lectures, which gives the references in the margin, mentions a specific passage in Divagations and adds “et passim”, implying that Brennan found this to be a consistent theme of Mallarmé’s work. For Mallarmé, Brennan implies, the true self 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 to 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 (143-4).
The attitude expressed here is echoed in his annotations to Camille Mauclair’s 1898 article “L’esthétique de Stéphane Mallarmé”. Mauclair makes the following statement about the Hegelianism of Mallarmé:

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.40

Brennan has underlined “les idées pures” and added a note, “say, the Moods: & expect light from the coming philosophic revival. The purely intellectual absolutism has done its work: enough will always remain”. Although the intent of this comment is not absolutely clear, it seems to imply a 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”.41

Brennan’s annotations to Remy de Gourmont’s Le Livre des masques : portraits

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41 Robert Wicks, "Hegel’s Aesthetics: An Overview", in The Cambridge Companion to Hegel, ed. Frederick C. Beiser, Cambridge Companions (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 350. The question of the relationship of Hegel’s conception of the universe as the self-actualisation of Spirit and Boehme’s theory of the world as the self-consciousness of the godhead is an interesting one. As Hanegraaff points out, nineteenth-century evolutionary thought differs fundamentally from that of Boehme in that it envisages the temporal evolution of Spirit. Hanegraaff sees the Romantic tendency to “interpret Jacob Böhme as a prefiguration of Hegel” as a misunderstanding of Boehme, whose “cosmogony entails something that modern minds find particularly hard to imagine: a dynamic process that unfolds outside of time” ("Romanticism and the Esoteric Connection" 261). Thus, he argues that, once the evolutionist way of thinking had emerged, “it provided a context that seemed to make new sense of traditional notions of ‘process’ such as had been expressed mythically and symbolically in mystical, Neoplatonic, alchemical, or theosophical traditions” (262).

Hegel includes Boehme in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy. Although he describes him as “a complete barbarian” in terms of his powers of philosophical conceptualisation (Lectures on the History of Philosophy, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 1955) 189), he praises the De signatura rerum, the book Brennan also commended for its explanation of correspondences or "signatures", commenting: “Thus by means of the signatures or figures, lineaments, and colours which were depicted, he could, so to speak, look into the heart and inmost nature of all creatures” (190). Hegel also praises Boehme for conceiving the Absolute as an inner, rather than an external, phenomenon. He says: “The matter of Jacob Boehme’s philosophy is genuinely German; for what marks him out and makes him noteworthy is the Protestant principle [...] of placing the intellectual world within one’s own mind and heart, and of experiencing and knowing and feeling in one’s own self-consciousness all that formerly was conceived as a Beyond” (191). This response to Boehme demonstrates the interface between Idealist philosophy and the mysticism of the inner quest discussed in the second chapter of this thesis: the transfer of the divinity from outside to within the human heart, “in one’s own self-consciousness".
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 comments, “ce qui demeure [sic] vrai, même donné un monde existant par soi et à lui seul”.

The process which takes place in Brennan’s elegy, therefore, in which the “spirit induced” of the dead poet seems to hang suspended over the autumn forest, may be considered in the light of the Mallarmean process of “transposition”. As we have seen, “transposition” itself has often been connected with Hegelian “Aufhebung”, but other versions of the Romantic triad, in which the self is “raised to a higher power”, may be more appropriate comparisons, especially in the light of Brennan’s discomfort with too-abstract interpretations of Mallarmé’s thought. Now we can grasp more fully the extent of his tribute to the dead poet in this elegy. In the “rapt assumption-pyre” the poet becomes hero, type, rather than individual. The “transposition” accomplished in his own art is recalled, symbolised by the leaves of autumn which are imagined smouldering, producing a haze which remains suspended, undispersed, throughout the course of the poem. Three phrases, “long autumn afternoon”, “o’er stirless leaves” and “suspended fulgent haze” are placed in parallel, without grammatical links, in a style resembling that of Gerard Manley Hopkins. The effect enhances the sense of “suspended”, which refers not only to time, but also to the smoke hanging in the air above the forest. The union of mind and Nature which 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, and this is sufficient, even though there is no Absolute external to the human being. Thus, it is apparent that Brennan’s elegy to Mallarmé represents a profound engagement with the thought of the older poet. The autumn setting, with a funeral pyre for the poet-hero, draws on the interpretation of nature as myth presented in Les Dieux antiques, as well as prose pieces such as “La Gloire” and “Bucolique”. The poem demonstrates the Symbolist principles it celebrates, drawing on the correspondence between nature and “the Passion of Man”, 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.

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43 Hopkins’ expression “rolling level underneath him steady air” in the poem “Windhover” is an example of this style.
According to Brennan’s translation of “Nature”, music is the product of the “volatilization” of the concretely physical. In Brennan’s elegy, the “fulgent haze” of the “assumption-pyre” lingers to hear the “music” of Mallarmé, not actual music but Mallarmé’s own verse. In the final stanza, “the smouldering throng” of autumn leaves waits “to hear /what strain the faun’s enamour’d leisure weaves”, an obvious reference to “L’Après-midi d’un faune”. Whereas Schopenhauer gives music a privileged place within the arts as the one form of aesthetic expression which requires no mediation, Mallarmé’s response to the ascendency of Wagner was circumscribed by his desire to achieve a poetic version of the “Gesammtkunstwerk”. 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”, Cohn writes:

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 […].

Verse, then, is itself to aim for “musicality”. Brennan’s poem suggests that the “Après-midi d’un faune” achieves the desired transformation of the physical into “musicality”.

The interpretation of Brennan’s elegy offered in this chapter is corroborated by the article “Was Mallarmé a Great Poet?”, which 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 curtained in death. […] no more can one think that somewhere this man walks on earth and reads with certainty the signs of our greatness. Here we find reference to the “theatre” of nature and the “lucid eye” of the poet which is able to read and interpret the spiritual correspondences of nature on behalf of humanity. Further on, we find evidence that Brennan thought the work of Mallarmé could be compared with that of 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

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44 For more on Schopenhauer’s view of music, see Cheryl Foster, "Ideas and Imagination: Schopenhauer on the Proper Foundation of Art", in The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer, ed. Christopher Janaway, Cambridge Companions (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 244-6.
45 Cohn, Mallarmé’s Divagations 242. Brennan knew the letter to Gosse, to which he refers in the first Symbolism lecture (Prose 57).
46 Prose 281.
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. Glory [...] 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. [...] 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’èst, with which all may feel themselves akin? (281-2)

Brennan speaks of Mallarmé’s “transposition” of reality, its “transmutation”, the “glory” which constitutes the correspondences between nature and “man’s ardours” which, as in Les Dieux antiques, are the foundation of myth. 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’èst”. 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, éléver une voix en pureté, as he defines it, with subtle and decisive simplicity – this was his aim (282).

Here we encounter music as the harmonies between things, the spirit freed from reality. It is apparent that this piece encompasses many themes discussed in this chapter.

“Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed” represents art, in this case the art of Mallarmé, as a moment of achieved perfection which seems to suspend time. The piece Brennan called “Liminary”, to be discussed in the next chapter, places the suspended moment represented by art in the context of the cycles of natural and human life.

47 Brennan’s alchemical imagery, implied by his use of “transmutation”, and his reference 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”.

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Chapter Six: Two Preludes and a “Liminary”

Introduction

Following the discussion of Brennan’s theory of “moods” in Chapter Four, and the demonstration in the previous chapter that Mallarmé’s “symphonic equation” between the seasons and human passion is of crucial importance to Brennan’s reception of Mallarmé, this chapter will argue that Brennan’s concept of “moods” is an important thematic and structural principle in Poems, where certain aspects of human experience are identified with particular times of the day and the year. Three pieces, “MDCCXCIII: A Prelude”, “The hollow crystal of my winter dream” and “Oh yon, when Holda leaves her hill”, which are given prominence as “preludes” or “liminaries”, introduce a pattern of human experience with which certain times of day or year are associated. Spring and morning correspond to innocent hopefulness, summer and noon to transient 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 two preludes and “liminary” have a major role in Poems, holding the entire work together. They provide a pattern in terms of which the individual poems of “Towards the Source” and “The Forest of Night” may be understood. These three poems are the only ones which represent the entire cycle of day or year, the other poems in the first two sections of Poems mostly concentrating on a single “mood”. The three poems differ, however, in significant ways. The first prelude, which begins Poems, is a poem about the education of the poet. The “Liminary” explores the cycle of human experience in far more depth. A consistent reading of this obscure and enigmatic poem may be made in terms of early Romantic concepts such as self-reflection, raising the self “to a higher power” and the “marriage” of Nature and spirit. These concepts will be explored in detail as the chapter proceeds. The second prelude, “Oh yon, when Holda leaves her hill”, associates times and seasons with legend and myth, which populate the Romantic forest and connect nature with the creatures of animistic paganism.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, these three poems have not been examined together before in the light of the correlation established in them between the seasonal cycle and certain aspects of human experience. Chisholm’s extended discussion of the “Liminary” in his study of “The Forest of Night”, and briefer examinations by McAuley in “The Erotic Theme in Brennan” and Docker in Australian
Cultural Elites, do not link this poem with the others. Chisholm’s exegesis of the poem is limited because he does not move beyond equating the speaker and his “summer bride” with Brennan and Elisabeth, or taking the “Year of the Soul” to relate entirely to Brennan’s experience as an individual. McAuley’s attempt, more psychoanalytic in approach, has similar limitations, as does that of Docker.

The interpretation of the “liminary” offered in this chapter is quite new. Although others (such as Chisholm) have pointed to the influence of Mallarmé, no one, as far as I know, has suggested that the oblique references to Hérodiate at the beginning of the poem are also consistent with German Romantic reflection formulae and the notion of “raising” the self “to a higher power”. The discussion which follows explores these notions in detail. There is also significant original material in the discussion of “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude”, particularly in its use of evidence from Brennan’s annotations to Les Dieux antiques to show that “Beauty” evokes not only the poet’s courtship of the beautiful Elisabeth in Berlin, but also the true or transcendental self of whose regeneration, traditionally, the cycle of the seasons is regarded as an allegory. The discussion of “Oh yon, when Holda leaves her hill” demonstrates the relevance of Pater’s discussion of Venus and Neopaganism to its themes, and argues that Brennan’s discussion elsewhere of Fouqué’s Undine illuminates the appearance of the water-sprite in this prelude.

1. MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude

This poem, written in 1897, but looking back to 1893, is placed as a “prelude” to the first section of Poems, “Towards the Source”. By reason of its placement, it necessarily also functions as a prelude to Poems as a whole. The first three and the final four stanzas, which are separated off from the rest of the poem by long dashes, frame the entire piece. 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” which now dominate his life. By the latter phrase, we should understand the themes and issues explored in Poems by means of imagery of night, especially in the “Lilith” sequence, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis: the sense of dissatisfaction and frustration which impels the speaker to explore his own inner “abyss” in search of an elusive transcendent or true self which can only be glimpsed, never fully attained. The second stanza of the prelude anticipates Lilith in

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1 See Chisholm, The Forest of Night 52-61; McAuley, "The Erotic Theme in Brennan" 10-11; and Docker, "The Eternal Hermit" 11-12.
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 the beginning of Brennan’s courtship of Elisabeth. “Song”, it is clear (“O poets I have loved”), refers to the works of writers Brennan was reading in Berlin in 1893. According to Clark’s biography, these writers included Mallarmé, Flaubert, Gautier, Huysmans, Villiers, Maeterlinck, Corbière and Verlaine, and probably Baudelaire, Novalis and Rimbaud. “Sun” refers, at one level, to the physical beauty of spring which surrounded the courtship in Berlin.

The framing stanzas of the prelude, therefore, portray the education of the young poet via his love-experiences, 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 edlen Trieb erregt
Tief ins Gemiit 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 (1:193). ³

“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”. Brennan’s identification of the influences of “love, song and sun” is comparable. Thus, Brennan begins Poems, a work in which “moods” play an important

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² Clark, Biography 68-71.
³ “You have awoken in me the noble urge / To look deep into the soul of the wide world; / Confidence seized me with your hand’s grasp / 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 stirred the heart of the youth to take its highest flight”. See note on “Ahndung”, page 83 above.
thematic and structural role, with a survey of his own education by the beauty of “love, song and sun”.

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 and moral being of man from the dawn of consciousness to the stage of full maturity”.  

4 Fichte, according to La Vopa, “found the structuring principle of spiritual biography” in Bildung.  

5 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.  

6 The central section of Brennan’s prelude begins with spring imagery in stanza 4. In the first three stanzas of this section, fairytale figures of the Sleeping Beauty or Snow White appear 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 trance’d 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 “Beauty”, introduced in the second stanza of the piece (“sweet dawn of Beauty’s day”), reappears implicitly in the Sleeping Beauty imagery. This maiden of the spring, as we know from Brennan’s cross-references to Pater’s study of the Greek myths in his annotations to Les Dieux antiques, discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, is equated with Persephone as well as the Sleeping Beauty. The flowers with which she

4 Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism 187-8. See pages 95 and 116 of this thesis for more on Schiller’s notion of the beautiful. Brennan mentions Schiller’s “aesthetic education” in the lecture on German Romanticism, Prose 382, where he suggests it derives from Shaftesbury.  

5 La Vopa, Fichte 68.  

6 Brennan compares Goethe’s novel with that of Novalis in the fourth Symbolism lecture. He says: “Goethe had published Wilhelm Meister in 1795. The book fascinated Novalis. It was hardly ever out of his hands. He was continually re-reading, continually analysing its elements. For its art he found no praise too high, but towards its spirit he felt the strongest antipathy. [...] Now in Wilhelm Meister he found the mere prose of life glorified. [...] In contrast to this book Novalis resolved to write a romance, wherein he should employ all the resources of simple style and all the ingenuities of natural art which his subtle analysis had detected in Goethe’s book but to a different end. [...] Novalis takes a boy of the middle ages – Henry of Ofterdingen is the name of an actual minnesinger – and shows how his natural tendency towards poetry is brought out and heightened by every circumstance of his life. Here life is shown in continuous transformation into poetry” (Prose 106-7).
is associated ("petal-hearts" of "a tender blue") have undergone a "dark winter-sleep" beneath the ground.

Stanzas 7-9 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;

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.

"Romance", in the context, does not refer to lovers, as in the modern sense of the word, but to the literature of Romanticism. As Behler points out, one of the two important senses of the word "romantic", as used by the Schlegel brothers, "referred to a tradition of literature originating in the Middle Ages and pervading literary writing in modern Europe, but which was held in low esteem by neoclassicists and even excluded from the canon" (the other had a typological reference, relating to "a mixing or crossing of styles").

F. Schlegel refers to the "Zeitalter der Ritter, der Liebe und der Märchen, aus welchem die Sache und das Wort selbst herstammt" ("age of knights, love and fairy-tales in which the thing itself [post-medieval literature] and the word for it originated").

In view of the progression of Brennan’s poem from imagery taken from the fairy-tales of Snow White and the Sleeping Beauty to the appearance of figures from the literary fairy-tales of the Romantic period itself, the word “Romance” should be taken in Schlegel’s first sense of the term. Fouqué’s version of the story of Undine has already been mentioned. Goethe and Tieck both wrote versions of the story of Melusine. Both Undine and Melusine show themselves at water-sources in forests, like the forest well in Brennan’s poem. Macainsh rightly compares the “well” with the fountain appearing in the compelling dream of the young poet in Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, and notes the association of “well” with the German word “Quelle”, meaning both “well” or “fountain”, and “source”.

In stanzas 11-14, the Demeter and Persephone imagery becomes more overt:

[...] Beauty came to save
the prison’d life and wave
above the famish’d lands

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7 Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* 25-6.
8 Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* 2:335.
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).

Now, “Beauty” appears as Demeter, who, by saving “the prison'd life” (Persephone) brings healing to the countryside whose infertility (“famish'd lands”), according to the myth, resulted from Demeter’s search for her daughter, snatched away to the Underworld by Hades. As shown in Chapter Two, Brennan used the Homeric Hymn to Demeter as background for the writing of the “Lilith” sequence. Like Lilith, “Beauty” arouses conflicting emotions, being “a dear annoy” who is “sweet pain to kiss” and “sharp pain to miss”. She is elusive, and may be rarely found, but even a single encounter is “well-won”. In this, she anticipates Lilith herself. This poem was written in late 1897, when Brennan was already planning the “Lilith” sequence, and the role it would have in Poems. The anticipation of Lilith is made clearer by the reference in stanzas 8 and 9 to Melusina and Undine, with whom Lilith is associated in the “Argument”. Melusina haunts the waters, “a witching ill”, while Undine’s voice is heard in the “hid streamlet”.

The discussion in earlier chapters has shown that there is a strong tradition interpreting the Demeter and Persephone cycle as a seasonal allegory of the spiritual “sleep” or “death” and regeneration of the human soul, and that Brennan knew this tradition. The examination in the first chapter of this thesis of the quest for a human divinity, and in the second chapter of the inner “abyss”, showed that currents such as Neoplatonism, spiritual alchemy and mysticism supplied nineteenth-century students of myth, especially Creuzer, and, much later, Maitland, with the notion of an inner rebirth, “Wiedergeburt” or regeneration of the divine potential within the self. Creuzer followed the Neoplatonists in interpreting Greek myths as an allegory of the regeneration of the soul. Others, like Maitland, took this theme to be the hidden meaning of all systems of religion. Chapter Four has shown that Mallarmé’s Les Dieux antiques demonstrated, for Brennan, the transformation of natural cycles into myth by

10 See page 56 above.
means of “equations” between the “events” of such cycles and universal human passions or experiences. Further discussion in Chapter Three of the role of imagination in intuiting and giving expression to the noumenon, in the thinking of Tetens and Kant, as well as early Romantic and Idealist writers such as Schelling, has explained how art came to have, for the Romantic movement, the unique role of imaginatively uniting the human mind with the outer world, as the objects of nature become symbols of the noumenon or the Absolute. Brennan’s account of the salvation of the “prison’d life” by Beauty, then, 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.

To identify “Beauty” with an inner Absolute or divine self is consistent with, although not identical to, the identification of Beauty with the Divine in Neoplatonism. Plotinus wrote:

Where then is he who made this great beauty and this splendid Life, the begetter of Being? You see the beauty that plays upon all the forms themselves in their intricate variety. It is beautiful to linger in contemplation of this, yet in the midst of beauty you should look to see their source, and the source of their beauty. [...] his beauty [...] is of another kind, Beauty that transcends beauty. For how could it have beauty, which has no being? But it is lovable and will beget beauty. So it is the power that begets all that is beautiful, and the bloom upon it, Beauty that creates beauty. And it not only begets beauty but makes it yet more beautiful by the Beauty that overflows from itself, as the source of beauty and the limit of beauty.11

What we perceive as beauty arises out of the ideal Beauty that “transcends beauty” and “creates beauty”, the One itself. Brennan demonstrates his familiarity with Neoplatonism, and sympathy for at least some of its principles, at the end of the second Symbolism lecture, where he identifies its interpretation of the Fall with that of Gnosticism: “this myth [of the Fall] is to be read in the same sense as that in which the Gnostics and Neoplatonists reshaped it: the fall is the birth of the soul into matter, which is its bondage”.12 The moment of ecstatic union with the “Sungod” later in “MDCCCXCI: A Prelude” makes us think of Plotinus, too, as later discussion will show.

Like the Sleeping Beauty, the “Beauty” of stanza 12 is hidden or occulted (“in hidden ways walking”), concealed behind a “leafy maze /with magic odour dim /far on life’s rim” which recalls the magic forest that grew up to conceal the fairy-tale heroine as she slept. Brennan is obviously using these resonances to strengthen the suggested connection between fairy-tale and myth. Both, it seems, conceal a similar deeper

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11 The Neoplatonists, 49-50.
12 Prose 88-9.
signification of “Beauty”. This implication is strengthened in the final stanzas of the poem, with their reference to “unseen Beauty” and “occult law” and 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” which invites the speaker to engage in “some undying war” reminds us of the ambiguities and frustrations of Lilith’s demands.

By placing the seasonal cycle, which he associates symbolically with the awakening and subsequent experience 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. Here, Brennan’s own art associates human experience with the cycle of the seasons. The events of a particular year, falling in love, reading for the first time some of the writers of most significance to him, enjoying the warmth of summer (“love, song and sun”), are extended into an account of more universal human experience, as the discussion which follows demonstrates. The cycle of the seasons corresponds with stages in human experience.

Having dealt with spring, the poem introduces the dominant figure of summer and autumn, the sun, seen as a god, in stanza 15. The reading of the mythical gods and heroes as tropes of the sun itself in Les Dieux antiques helps us to understand the nature of the drama Brennan is depicting here. The innocence of the “girlish” spring, her “liquid laugh” associating her with the water-sprites of earlier stanzas, attracts the attention of the sungod himself.

In a union with the divine, the young girl who represents the spring achieves a state of ecstasy in the divine embrace. Given that Brennan definitively associates “ecstasy” with Plotinus in the 1901 talk “Vision, Imagination and Reality” (describing “that state of union with the divine, which Plotinus termed “ecstasy”, a state to which he attained three times during his life”), we may take his use of it in this poem to refer to visionary union with the divine.13 The phrase “a rain of gold-linked throats” not only conveys the ecstatic moment by means of imagery of music, but recalls Zeus’s union with Danae in the form of a golden shower. The ecstatic union, revealing “life beyond all dream /burning, supreme” (stanza 22), robs the spring of its innocence and beauty;

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13 Prose 22.
the carefully chosen word “adust” means “parched”, “seared” or “scorched by the sun”. We recall 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 autumn indicating her fate.

The events in the cycle of the seasons correspond to human experience. The innocent hopefulness aroused in human beings by the return of spring is transient. It is in the nature of the ecstatic moment that it cannot continue. However, this poem suggests that something important remains from the cycle of human experience corresponding to the cycle of the seasons. We read in stanzas 27 and 28 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, which reverses the entrapment of the soul in matter.14 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. 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”.15

The overt alchemical reference here should make us look again at related imagery in earlier stanzas, such as the “gold-linked notes” of stanza 24. In stanza 16 the summer unrolls a banner of “blazon’d gold”; the multiple signification of the word “blazon’d” has already been discussed in the previous chapter with reference to the elegy to Mallarmé. Honey, mentioned in the same stanza (“the honey’d time”), is also golden-coloured. Stanza 19 mentions “the yellow meads of May”. Stanza 20 uses the word “fulgent”, meaning “glittering” or “resplendent”, which could also suggest gold. In the “Liminary” to “The Forest of Night”, which we will consider next, the imagery of gold is transferred to the “summer bride”, who takes the role of the male sungod in the poem currently under discussion.

14 See page 76 above for a discussion of spiritual alchemy.
15 Prose 170.
“Beauty” in this poem, then, refers both to the “true self”, and to the art which alone is able to express it. The drama of spring, summer and autumn symbolises the drama of the human soul, the higher self which escapes from the restrictions of material existence in ecstatic union with the divine. Although such an experience is transient, its “gold” may be rescued from extinction by transmutation into art. 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 next poem to be discussed, the “Liminary” to “The Forest of Night”, draws on the symbolic pattern which has been established in the prelude to Poems, developing and extending the patterns of correspondence between seasons and the human soul set up by the poem Brennan chose to open his livre composé.

2. “The hollow crystal of my winter dream”

“The hollow crystal of my winter dream” is a hugely ambitious poem. Because it has proved resistant to credible interpretation as a complete piece, its crucial importance in Brennan’s Poems has not been recognised. 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. The original title of the first 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 images in that poem.

The first three stanzas read as follows:

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 star’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 (“the royal weft of arduous device”; “illusive artifice”) is “shed away”. The third begins with “no more”; the disappearance marked at the end of

16 Before the death of Mallarmé on September 9th.
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”. Similar imagery (“the northern kingdom’s dream /prison’d in crystal gleam”) is employed in stanza 3 of “MDCCXCIII: 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.

It is possible to find in the imagery of snow, ice and crystal a considerable number of literary resonances with works Brennan would certainly have been familiar with at the time he wrote this piece, which might assist us somewhat in interpreting the winter symbolism of the first three stanzas. However, one author is paramount, and that author is Mallarmé. The “shadowy pride” of Brennan’s speaker recalls the opening lines of Mallarmé’s “Scène” for “Héroïdiade” (“Tu vis ! ou vois-je ici l’ombre d’une princesse”), which Brennan knew intimately. In this poem we find a mirror described using imagery like that of Brennan’s first stanza, as well as a passage which allows us to make a satisfactory explanation of the puzzling reference to the “royal weft of arduous device” in the second. We also find a representation of what Brennan took to be a “mood” of static absorption in the Ideal beauty of the self, a position which Héroïdiade herself will not abandon. In the following lines, addressed by Héroïdiade to her nurse, the mirror of Héroïdiade 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 !

17 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 “Klingsor’s Tale” in Novalis’ Heinrich von Ofterdingen; and the crystal breasts of the wizards in Beckford’s Vathek.
18 McAuley and Wilkes both find Mallarmean echoes in this passage. McAuley comments “Mallarmé is visibly present in the symbols of the icy mirror and the silence, and some other details” (“The Erotic Theme in Brennan”: 11). According to Wilkes, the “deliberate withdrawal from the world of which Axel’s castle has become one symbol, and the mirror of Héroïdiade another, is the conception employed in Brennan’s ‘Liminary’” (“Brennan and his Literary Affinities”: 79).
19 As Chisholm points out, “during the period when Brennan was writing the pieces later included in Poems 1913, the only sections of Héroïdiade 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” (“Brennan and Mallarmé Part One” 5).
Nourrice, suis-je belle? 20

Hérodiade seeks in her mirror the memory of her past self, like dead leaves under the surface of a pond. 21 This is the “dream” with which she is “distraught” (Brennan’s word) or desolated, the dream which appears “scattered” in the mirror. The “royal weft of arduous device” which is “shed away, leaving the naked side” in Brennan’s second stanza may be explained by reference to another part of Mallarmé’s “Scène”:

[... ] 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 natinement la femme se dévoile,
Me voit dans ma pudeur grelottante d’étoile,
Je meurs! 22

The “royal weft of arduous device” of Brennan’s poem can be taken as an oblique reference to the robes of Hérodiade (“royal” because she is a princess), given the preponderance of other imagery recalling Mallarmé’s piece in Brennan’s poem. Hérodiade is associated throughout the “Scène” with an artificial environment of metals and jewels, antipathetic to natural beauty such as “le tiède azur d’été”. 23 The shedding of the robe, “starr’d with strangest gems”, part of a “ritual of illusive artifice” in Brennan’s poem, contrasts with Hérodiade’s refusal to abandon the artifice of her robes (and her virginity). Brennan’s poem can, therefore, be read as a response to the obsession of Mallarmé’s heroine with the beauty of the Ideal, as opposed to the real. His 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”. 24 He takes Mallarmé’s poem to be a critique of this position,

20 “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 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, Prose 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” (137). In his view, it is this which appears to Hérodiade in her mirror as the “réve épars”.

22 Mallarmé, Œuvres complètes 47.

23 In the Symbolism lectures, Brennan refers to “the perverse princess who 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” (137). Brennan uses the word “shadowy” in the poem under discussion.

24 Prose 313.
its central character a symbol of “the soul”. The phrase “House of Contemplation” itself is used in the second part of the poem, in stanza 26, providing further evidence for the important influence of the Mallarmé poem on “The hollow crystal of my winter dream”. This will be discussed further on.

Brennan’s poem, then, is a response to the error of Hérodiade. For the stasis of Hérodiade’s attitude, it substitutes a process. The following discussion will suggest that this poem’s structure is based on Brennan’s interpretation of the Frühromantik theory of “potentiation” or “exponentiation”, the notion of “raising the self to a higher power” which employs the mathematical notion of the exponent. This theory is intimately connected to Brennan’s notion of “moods”. Brennan built up a theoretical understanding of the emergence of the higher or transcendent self, founded on principles drawn from Kant, Fichte, Novalis, F. Schlegel, Schleiermacher and Hegel. He also drew on the Mallarmean principle of “transposition”, which, as the last chapter has shown, may be seen as analogous to the Romantic principle of “raising to a higher power”. This, rather than his relationship with his fiancée, is the theme of the poem, which gives a central role to the union of the self with Nature, the emergence of a transcendent self, and the Mallarmean “transposition” into art.

The process which began with the irruption of movement into stasis continues in the fourth stanza with the emergence of a second figure upon the “passing” of the speaker. Stanzas 8 and 9 describe the union of this figure and the speaker, stanzas 10 to 12 their soaring flight. Stanzas 14 and 15 describe their sacrificial love-death. This brings the first part of the poem to an end. The second part revisits the love-death from a different perspective, before the poem returns to the solitude of the speaker at the beginning of the poem. The following discussion will consider the significance of each stage of this dynamic process in the light of the Romantic theory of “raising”, in order to demonstrate what kind of stages in “the year of the soul” are being associated with the seasonal cycle.

The “mirror-gleam” of the first stanza implies self-reflection. Whereas Hérodiade (according to Brennan’s interpretation of Mallarmé’s poem) ponders the beauty of an Ideal not directly attainable, Brennan’s speaker engages in the kind of self-reflection proposed by Schleiermacher and Novalis, which looks within in order to discover there the image of the outer world. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), 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:

The anxious wall of division will be torn down; everything external to him is merely an other within him; everything is the reflection of his spirit, and his spirit is the reproduction of everything. The human spirit will dare to seek itself in this reflection without losing itself or going out of itself; it can never be exhausted while intuiting itself, for everything lies within it.  

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:

You will not consider it blasphemy, I hope, that belief in God depends on the direction of the imagination. You will know that imagination is the highest and most original element in us, and that everything besides it is merely reflection upon it; you will know that it is our imagination that creates the world for you, and that you can have no God without the world (53).

By uniting the mind with the world, Schleiermacher implies, the imagination also unites the mind with God. Novalis, whose recommendation of the “mysterious inner way” was discussed in Chapter Two, wants us to follow that up with an outward look:

Der erste Schritt wird Blick nach Innen, absondernde Beschauung unsers Selbst. Wer hier stehn bleibt, gerath nur halb. Der zweyte Schritt muß wirksamer Blick nach AuBen, selbstthätige, gehalte Beobachtung der AuBenwelt seyn.

The speaker of Brennan’s poem, I suggest, is engaging in 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.

The previous chapter suggested that the “suspended fulgent haze” of Brennan’s elegy to Mallarmé obliquely referred to the process of “transposition”, and that that process itself bore some important resemblances to the mathematical metaphor of “raising to a higher power” employed by early German Romanticism. Novalis’ version of this process, in which the self is “raised to a higher power” to become a transcendental self (differing from Kant’s “transcendental self” in not necessarily being conceived as a bridging self between the noumenon and the phenomenal world), is particularly relevant to the mirroring of the self in Brennan’s “Liminary”. Novalis expresses the concept like this: “Die höchste Aufgabe der Bildung ist – sich seines

26 Schriften 2:423. “The first step will be an inward gaze – an isolating contemplation of ourselves. Whoever stops here has come only halfway. The second step must be an active outward gaze – autonomous, constant observation of the external world”. Translation by Stojar, 27.
transcendentalen Selbst zu bemächtigen – das Ich ihres Ichs zugleich zu seyn”.

This raising of the self to a higher power is an aspect of “romanticising” the world:


According to Novalis, to raise the world “to a higher power” necessarily involves uniting the “lower self” with a “better” or “transcendental” self; the processes are interconnected.

Margaret Stoljar expresses the opinion that this concept of “potentiation” is extremely important in Romantic thought, and the version of Novalis 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.

Stoljar argues, however, that to understand Novalis’ concept precisely is to distinguish it, as a kind of distancing from the self, entirely from Narcissism. 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 F. Schlegel’s version of the reflection formula which is expressed in the famous Athenaeum fragment on romantic poetry:

27 Schriften 2:424. “The highest task of education is – to take command of one’s transcendental self – to be at once the I of its I”. Translation by Stoljar, 28.

28 “The world must be made Romantic. In that way one can find the original meaning again. To make Romantic is nothing but a qualitative raising to a higher power. In this operation the lower self will become one with a better self. Just as we ourselves are such a qualitative exponential series. This operation is as yet quite unknown. By endowing the commonplace with a higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious respect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I am making it romantic. The operation for the higher, unknown, mystical, infinite is the converse – this undergoes a logarithmic change through this connection […].” Translation by Stoljar, 60.

29 Philosophical Writings 6.
While Schlegel’s version does not share Novalis’ emphasis on the transcendent potential of self-reflection, it does emphasise the standpoint of hovering between subject and object. This is the action associated with the German verb schweben, used by Fichte to describe the action of the imagination, suspended between subject and object, the self and the outer world. 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) (2:204). 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”. 31

The extent of Brennan’s familiarity with the theory of the Frühromantik in the last years of the nineteenth century has been established in Chapter Two. Although it may seem unlikely that someone would set out to write a poem whose dynamic arises out of the theoretical concepts of self-reflection and “raising”, Brennan’s familiarity with writers of the Frühromantik may (rightly) have made him feel he was particularly well-equipped to undertake such a task, as well as inspiring him with enthusiasm for such ideas.

So far, we have considered that part of the Frühromantik process of self-reflection which deals with the mirroring of the self, and to which the reflection of the speaker in the mirror of the first stanza of Brennan’s poem may be taken to correspond. What ensues is the division of one into two. In Brennan’s poem, the “secret shrine […] wherein day nor night has part” gives way to an act which “makes the ways of earth divine / with the wild splendours of a mortal heart” (stanza 3). The “retreat” of the speaker coincides with the appearance of the “summer bride, new life from nuptial

30 Schlegel, Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe 2:182-3. “[Romantic poetry] alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also – more than any other form – hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors”. Translation by Firchow, 31-2.
lands” (stanza 4). The speaker may be involved in a “passing”, but persists. The single speaker has been doubled into a self and a bride.

Fichte’s notion of the origin of the non-Ego in the self-consciousness of the Ego, discussed in Chapter Two, was considered by F. Schlegel, Schelling and Hegel in the light of Boehme’s derivation of the world from the self-consciousness of God. The poem under discussion suggests the cosmogony either of Boehme or of some other emanationary system such as Neoplatonism, when it states that “my passing makes the ways of earth divine /with the wild splendours of a mortal heart” (stanza 3). We know that Brennan was discovering Boehme via Yeats around 1897, and that he was thinking of the Boehmian mirror when he was planning Lilith; so it seems likely that the mirror of self-reflection in the first stanza of this poem is influenced by Boehme’s mirror as well as the reflection formulae of the Frühromantik. Among German writers of the early nineteenth century, the idea of the positing of the outer world by the self-conscious ego was represented by the figure of an ellipse with two centres. According to Marshall Brown, Goethe’s essay “Problem und Erwiderung” (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”.32 Franz Baader and Görres both used the symbol of the ellipse with two foci (178-9). 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 earlier reading of writers of the Frühromantik would have made him familiar with the notions of the exponentiation of the self, and his familiarity with the Boehmian mirror would have encouraged him to interpret those notions in terms of the divine self-consciousness which posited the world of Nature.33

32 Brown, The Shape of German Romanticism 158. For a further discussion of the figure of the ellipse in German Romanticism, see pages 161-79 of this work. Mayer objects to Brown’s insistence that the figure of the ellipse represents the single borrowing from Boehme by writers of the Frühromantik (Mayer, Jena Romanticism 178 n.74).

33 One of the most important figures in the transmission of Boehmian thinking to Germany and France at the turn of the nineteenth century and beyond is Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803). This writer, the so-called “Unknown Philosopher”, learnt German specifically in order to translate Boehme into French, and became “the major intermediary through whom Boehme’s thought reached the early nineteenth century”, according to Arthur McCalla (“Illuminism and French Romantic Philosophies of History”, in Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion, ed. Antoine Favier and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Gnostica 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) 255). From a background in the Masonic school of Martinez de Pasqually, to which he added Boehme’s combination of theosophy and alchemy, Saint-Martin reinterpreted esoteric themes in the light of contemporary concerns. He suggested that human consciousness has the role of reintegrating nature. As Nicole Jacques-Chaquin puts it, nature “reste l’expression voilée, le « medium » des propriétés de la Nature divine et de la Sophia” (“La philosophie de la nature chez Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin”, in Epochen der Naturmyth. ed. Antoine Favier and Albert Zimmerman (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1979) 327). The first German translator of Saint-Martin (1792) was Matthias Claudius. Bishop Sailer of Regensburg, a leading figure in the Catholic reform group, “was at the centre of the circulation of Saint-Martin’s books within the important intellectual circles in Germany at that time, among romantic poets, among scholars attracted by the romantic movement, and among the adherents of the Catholic and
In Brennan's poem, the "summer bride" appears simultaneously with the world of nature in stanza 4. The imagery of stanzas 5 and 6 actually connects her with nature:

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 6 (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".34 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 spring or morning ("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"). The same cluster of significations apply to the golden hair ("her crown'd body's wealth of torrid gold") as to "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude", the word "ardent" ("the ardent brake") contributing a connotation of "burning" or "flaming" as well as "eager". The association of gold with a storm or tempest is made in the second line of Mallarmé's "Victorieusement fui le suicide beau", discussed in the previous chapter, where the words "or, tempête" are applied to a sunset.

Thus the speaker of the "winter dream" has experienced a "passing", in that his unity has become a duality. Nature appears as the complementary other self, in a process closely resembling the thought of the Frühromantik. We should recall from Chapter Two of this thesis that both F. Schlegel and Novalis were dissatisfied with

34 McAuley, "The Erotic Theme in Brennan": 11.
Fichte's Not-I and wanted to substitute a "Du" to correspond to the "Ich", conferring on Nature a soul or spirit. As previous chapters have shown, there is a fundamental connection between the idea of Nature as a "thou" with which the self must be united, and the concept of "moods". The discussion of Les Dieux antiques has shown that, by transforming nature into myth, the imagery of this work can be seen to "humanise" nature. This thesis argues that Brennan's Poems are structured around the idea of "moods" as the union of Nature and the mind. In this context, we can appreciate the importance of the enactment, in the "Liminary", of the reunion of the human soul with the natural world.

The consummation represented in stanzas 7 to 9 of Brennan's poem 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. It suggests that the seasons of the year ("die Zeiten des Jahres") should be united with those of the human race ("des Menschengeschlechts"). Such a union, as this thesis has shown, 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 "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", which claims that "without Contraries is no progression". The union of antitheses in a Romantic triad, such as the Hegelian "Aufhebung", is another, related, instance. In all these examples, a "third" thing is achieved from the union of opposites. This is also the case with Novalis' version of the triad, the "raising" of the I "to the power of itself", where the transcendental self is the "third" thing.

Stanzas 7 to 9 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"

35 See page 63.
36 Brennan refers to this poem in the article on German Romanticism (Prose 393).
37 Another possible model, with which Brennan had been familiar since 1892, is William Morris's The Earthly Paradise. This work is a cycle of stories linked to the months of the year, two stories to a month, with a verse introduction to each month. Some of the choices of story could have influenced how Brennan thought of the months: the story for May, at the height of the European spring, is Cupid and Psyche, very relevant to a poem about the experiences of love and the soul. For February, winter in Europe, the story is "The Hill of Venus", particularly relevant to the next Prelude to be discussed, "O yon, when Holda leaves her hill". The poem for December takes "dream" as a theme, as Brennan does at the beginning of his poem. It is likely, therefore, that the idea of connecting human experience with the cycle of the seasons could go back as far, for Brennan, as 1892.
(stanzas 8 and 9). We recall the fiery sungod of “MDCCCXCIII: 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” recalls the epithet “crown’d”, applied to the “summer bride” in stanza 5, and suggests that the speaker seeks to share the “crown’d” status of his bride. Such an aspiration is in keeping with the system of the Kabbalah, in which “Keter” or “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).

Stanza 10 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 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. The story, however, does not end with transcendence. The achievement of transcendence is necessarily transitory, but art, by fulfilling the task of “transposition”, can achieve something more permanent. We move into this domain as the poem proceeds into its autumn “mood”, at the end of the first part and through much of the second part.

This section employs some similar imagery to the elegy to Mallarmé (which immediately precedes it), discussed in the previous chapter. At the end of the first part of the poem, sunset and autumn are equated. Stanza 14 reads as follows:

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 we have a love-death

38 Clark, for example, comments: “a sluggish, overheated, heavy-blooded discomfort characterizes so much of Brennan’s poetry of 1894-5 (and later: consider, for example, the first half of the ‘Liminary’, poem number 32, written in September 1897), that one may fairly ask whether his sexuality stood largely outside the poetic scheme into which he tried to fit his experience” (Biography 89-90).

39 For more on the emanation system of the Kabbalah, see Scholem, Kabbalah 96-116.
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; this is implied by the phrase “burnt incense-wise”. The participial phrase “exhaled in music” must be understood in the light of the extensive discussion in the previous chapter of Mallarmé’s “la dispersion volatile soit l’esprit” with relation to the “suspended fulgent haze” of Brennan’s elegy. It suggests that the love-death of the protagonists releases a spiritual essence which constitutes its musicality. This sublimation or vaporisation is taken up in much more detail in the second part of the poem.

At the beginning of the second section, the mood changes dramatically. The first part was fundamentally triumphant in tone, even when dealing with the love-death. The claim of the speaker at the end of the third stanza of the poem, “my passing makes the ways of earth divine /with the wild splendours of a mortal heart”, is developed differently in the first and second sections; while the first section focuses on the “wild splendours” and on making “the ways of earth divine”, the second part develops the implications of “a mortal heart”. The first three stanzas of the second section read as follows:

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 8 and 9 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 which ends the first section now appears as “vain”, an ephemeral song of the “minstrel summer”. These stanzas are a very good example of the correspondence between the seasonal changes of nature and the universal experiences of human beings which form the foundation of “moods” as Brennan conceives them. Again, autumn and evening are equated: the “eve of smoky brown” corresponds to the descending mists of autumn.
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 Frühromantik “raising to a higher power”; and the “transposition” of art which Mallarmé suggested. In stanzas 19 to 21, the heroic acts undertaken in religious wars (“the red crusades of ire /following some dusky king of might 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 the elegy appears in stanza 22. Like the “suspended fulgent haze” of the elegy, “the ghost of flame” “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 22-3). This reference invokes the tutelary deity of Hermeticism, alchemy and magic: Hermes Trismegistus, the “thrice-great”. It is an overt reference to the release of the spiritual from the material which was 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 important work Aurélia, published after his death in 1855. 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’élève 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.40

Brennan uses a similar identification of dream and death in the stanzas under consideration. This is implicit in phrases such as “the cortèges of dream”; although the word “cortège” means simply “procession”, it is normally used with reference to

40 Nerval, Œuvres 1:753. The epigraph of the second part of Aurélia, “Euridyce ! Euridyce !” relates his work to Orpheus’ visit to the underworld as well as to that of Aeneas.
funerals. By the last line of stanza 27, “the fixed light that charms the fields of death”, death has been made explicit. The repeated word “pale”, occurring in three of the four stanzas, and twice in the fourth one, 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, “pale” day which 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”. The connection of pallor in the sky with the blood shed in the sacrifice of sunset occurs elsewhere in Poems, and will be further discussed in the next chapter.

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 into art. The reference to the “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, 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 25 to “opals that engeal the Boreal gleam /and diamond-drip of ether’s crystal thrill” recalls the “hard, gem-like flame” of Pater, discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Whereas the “ruby of hard’en’d flame” occurs in Brennan’s Wisdom sequence in the context of esoteric wisdom, suggesting that such wisdom has a latent value which 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 more importantly in this context, by art. In this context, the relevance of Pater’s “hard, gem-like flame” is immediately apparent, even though Brennan has entirely reworked the image. The word “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”).

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41 See Brennan, Notebook MS 3246, National Library of Australia.
42 See discussion beginning on page 40 above.
The “House of Contemplation” belongs to death rather than life. This is the phrase which Brennan used twice to refer to Mallarmé’s “Hérodiade”, and its use towards the end of the cyclic movement of the poem returns us to the wintry “mood” of the first part. To the “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 which parallels the “suspended fulgent haze” of the elegy:

A little yet, a little – wait, O files
obedient to my dumb command […]
wait; and thou,
dark presence, large above the passing world,
biding the full hour of the fated stroke,
er 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”, discussed in the previous chapter, 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.

The “dark presence, large above the passing world” may be Isis, who appears by name in the final stanza of the poem. A piece about Isis is included in Nerval’s “Les Filles du Feu”. In this piece, 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 Lucrece, le matérialiste, invoquait lui-même sous le nom de Vénus céleste, a été préféérablement 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 !

43 Chisholm calls “files” “the most puzzling term in this stanza”. Perhaps reflecting his academic lifestyle, he thinks of files of papers or books, “the accumulated writings of those who through the ages have probed Reality and found vanity in all things” (The Forest of Night 60). It is clear, however, that this word is a synonym for the “cortèges” of stanza 25, whose progress is halted on the word of the speaker.

44 Nerval, Œuvres 1:656-7. The text of The Golden Ass, which has been well known and readily available for many centuries, has Isis speak of herself in the following way: “[…] the entire world worships my single godhead in a thousand shapes, with divers rites, and under many a different name. The Phrygians, first-born of mankind, call me the Pessinuntian Mother of the gods; the native Athenians the Cecropian Minerva; the island-dwelling Cypriots Paphian Venus; the archer Cretans Dictynnan Diana; the triple-
If, as has been suggested, the conflation of dream and death in stanzas 24 to 27 of Brennan’s “Liminary” recalls Nerval’s *Aurélie*, the appearance of Isis in the poem is unsurprising. In the eighth chapter of the first part of *Aurélie*, “une déesse rayonnante” appears who “guidait, dans ses nouveaux *avatars*, l’évolution rapide des humains” (1:777). Later, she is revealed as Isis. This is consistent with Brennan’s “dark presence”. Like Brennan’s Lilith, she has for Nerval, as is traditional, a lunar aspect. She appears in “Isis” with a moon on her forehead, in a deep black cloak sewn with stars, and her hair is a striking feature (1:657). In Nerval’s *Voyage en Orient*, Isis appears before the initiate into her Egyptian 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” (2:249). 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 Brennan’s poem, then, is appropriate, foreshadowing the appearance of Lilith, “Lady of Night”.

Isis was a popular literary subject at the time of Schiller and the writers of the *Frühromantik*. Schiller’s famous poem of 1795, “Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais”, 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, and 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. The title of Madame Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled* (1877) indicates the extent of the revelation she 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 the figure of Isis, but those that are most relevant in terms of the concerns of this poem are the literary ones of the Romantic movement, both French and German, and the associations 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,
Schopenhauer often refers to our ordinary experience as not penetrating the ‘veil of Maya’. 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. Brennan’s poem strongly suggests the workings of an unyielding force associated with the “dark presence, large above the passing world, biding 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 also to return to the beginning, with its potential for further emanation of one into two. According to the interpretation I have offered, the poem takes as its point of departure what Brennan perceives as Mallarmé’s critique of the attitude of Hérodiade, and follows this with a symbolic representation of the splitting of the self-reflecting self, its reunion with its complementary other, the transitory achievement of transcendence and the turn to art to achieve a more lasting transcendence of material existence in the face of human mortality. These are the aspects of “our inmost passion” which are linked to “the tetralogy of the year” (and of the day). The poem dramatises the unifying of the mind and Nature which is the essence of the idea of “moods”.

3. “Oh 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”. This section is itself an introduction to “The Quest of Silence”, making the poem about Holda a prelude to a subgroup, and to a larger arrangement. This 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 “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude”) with figures of legend such as fairies, knights, wood and water nymphs, who animate the various seasons and their equivalent times of day. By associating times or seasons with particular myths, legends or fairytales, it extends the association of these times with particular “moods” which has already been established in “MDCCCXCI: A Prelude” and the “Liminary”.

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 winter. This, then, is a Germanic version of the

46 Janaway, Schopenhauer 15.
seasonal myth which appeared in its Hellenist 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.47 Like Wagner’s Venus, this 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.

Pater’s Studies in the History of the Renaissance was probably an important source for Brennan’s treatment of Holda in this poem. In the following passage, Pater uses the Germanic legends of Venus as evidence of the survival of paganism during the Middle Ages, and its return in what Pater designated as 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 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.48

Pater’s association of the Germanic legend of Venus with the survival of paganism is particularly relevant to Brennan’s poem in that the following group, the “Secreta silvarum”, demonstrates that that “secret of the woods” is such a survival, figured appropriately by Brennan as the god Pan. 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”.49 Moreover, he uses the cyclic return of this Venus as a metaphor for the recurrence of ideas in a cyclic fashion in human history. Paganism, it is suggested, recurred at the point 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” which may be exceeded by those

47 J.R. Dyce, "An Assessment of the Poetry of Christopher Brennan in Poems (1913) and The Burden of Tyre" (PhD, University of Newcastle, 1983) 143.
49 For a further discussion of Pater’s interpretation of the antinomian strain in medieval thought, see Reeves and Gould, Joachim of Fiore 166-74.
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.50 “Beauty” is one of the hypostases in “MDCCCXCI: A Prelude”. In the prelude to the “Secreta silvarum”, then, the legends with which the seasons and times of day are associated have their own secrets.

The first stanza suggests night as well as winter. Blackness is conveyed by the contrast between the “black oaks” and the “emerald lampllets” of new growth which “flicker forth”. In the fourth stanza, night is recalled 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 2 and 3, 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 (“whist” means “silently”, “quietly” or “without noise”) with full awareness of their meaning. 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 5, 6 and 7 spring is associated with the legend of Undine. This legend has already been discussed in Chapter Three with reference to Lilith.51 In the poem currently being discussed, the story of the water-nymph is interpreted according to the principle propounded in Les Dieux antiques, that myths originate in the events of the cycles of nature. The wooing of Undine by Huldrad (whose name suggests a fire), is, it is suggested, linked to the evaporation of mist into clouds in the blue sky by 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”).52 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 Huldrad has abandoned her for a fully human lover, Bertalda, is like that of the original fiancées of the sun-hero in Les Dieux antiques. Figures such as Aurora and Andromeda, representing the beauties of spring or dewy morning, are left behind by the sun on its journey through the day or the year, or destroyed by the heat of noon or summer.53 The word “laughing” is important, not only in this poem but in a number of poems in “Towards the Source”, discussed in the next chapter. Before Fouqué’s Undine

50 See page 128.
51 See page 107.
52 “Brand”, in German, means “burning”, “fire” or “firebrand”.
53 See Mallarmé, Œuvres complètes 1204.
gains her soul by marrying Huldrand, she is constantly laughing, smiling or joking, often inappropriately. She first appears in the story in the following way: “Da flog die Tür auf, und ein wunderschönes Blondinchen schleppte *lachend* herein” (my italics).54 Her inability to take anything seriously, it is implied, is a consequence of not having a soul; after having acquired one, her behaviour is no longer characterised by levity. Earlier discussion of the story of Undine has suggested that Brennan took her as a symbol of the “instinctive innocent soul” who must “learn sorrow”. The word “laughing”, therefore, suggests an innocence which further experience of life will remove.

If the poem under discussion is considered in the light of Brennan’s allegorical reading of Undine as the soul destined to lose innocence as a consequence of being broken in upon by the divine or the absolute, the nature myth takes on a further level of meaning. 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 evaporation of water into cloud, but to the regeneration of the soul injured by the pain associated with life itself. Such a soul, whose predicament is like that of Undine, may aspire to an experience of the Absolute in which it is released from the limitations of physical existence. “That glad blue” is both sky and heaven, like the “azur” of Mallarmé’s “L’Azur”. This is a further level of signification of the imagery of the evaporation of water into cloud, and is similar to the volatilisation of spirit from its physical existence discussed in the previous chapter with regard to Brennan’s elegy to Mallarmé.

We should recall that Undine is also associated with spring in “MDCCXCIII: A Prelude”, and a reference to her is implied in the following words of the “Liminary”: “our link’d approach shall flush the water-maid /that dreams her limpid realm with wistful eyes, /our noontide rest shall haunt her memory’s shade, /vexing her dim breast with unwonted sighs” (stanza 12). This provides further evidence for the interpretation offered here of the Undine references in the “Holda” poem. In the “Liminary”, the “water-maid” 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 “MDCCXCIII: 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 sungod, but subsequently scorched,
appears in the phrase "the liquid laugh / of girlish spring" (stanza 17). Thus, the "Holda" poem unites into one figure, referred to as Undine, the two figures of spring in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude".

In addition to its association with the innocence of spring, the laughter should be taken as a reference to the sounds of spring, especially the sound of running water. This is particularly apparent in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude", with its reference to weeping, and "murmuring low / her silvery woe". Undine is the voice of spring, and her legend gives a voice to the spring waters. This is also the voice or expression of a particular mood associated with the laughing, innocent spring, not only in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude" and the "Holda" poem but in a number of other poems of "Towards the Source" where the figure of the laughing spring appears. The next chapter will demonstrate that this figure is indeed associated with a particular mood of hopefulness associated with the daily or annual return of dawn or spring, and should not be identified only with Brennan's fiancée (later, wife), Elisabeth.

In stanzas 8 and 9, 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".55 To associate these stanzas with this poem of Mallarmé's is to recognise an oblique intimation of noon, the "heure fauve" of Mallarmé's poem, as well as summer. Stanza 10, moving to "royal autumn", recalls sunset as well: "smouldering magnificence" evokes skies as well as leaves. This stanza recalls the imagery of the elegy to Mallarmé and the "Liminary". In the lines describing the "mad desire and pain that fill'd / red August's heart of throbbing bloom", the next stanza recalls the rape of spring by August suggested in "MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude". We are reminded of the return of reflection at the end of the "Liminary" by the "wisdoms of forgotten sense" at the end of stanza 10, and the "knowledge still'd / where glory ponders o'er its doom" of stanza 11. Stanza 12 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 which separate sections of Poems. The silence of the winter forest is accentuated "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".

55 Mallarmé, Œuvres complètes 52.
Although the primary associations of this poem are Germanic, the Romantic forests of Keats’s “Endymion” are also relevant. This poem employs the legend of Venus and Adonis to figure the death of the earth in winter and its resurrection in spring, and 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”.56 Brennan’s poem evokes Romanticism, both German and English, by referring to the Romance stories of knight-errantry from which, as discussed above, Romanticism drew its name.

The three poems discussed in this chapter clearly have common themes and sources. They associate certain “moods” with aspects of the daily and yearly cycle, establishing a dramatic order of events in the life of the soul. These “moods” may be summarised as follows, although such a summary cannot render the complexity of Brennan’s exploration of the subject or the ambiguities and ambivalences involved in that exploration. Spring or dawn symbolise a time of innocence, before a person has experienced the revelation of the absolute which will cause them to suffer from the clash of perfection and imperfection in life. Summer or noon symbolise the experience of ecstasy, which releases the soul from the limitations of sensuous life, but is transient. Autumn, sunset or evening symbolise the “transposition” of the beauty of natural life into art, the only means of preserving them from the time process. Winter or night is the time of dream and reflection, and also of death. The next chapter will examine how the “moods” established in the survey of the seasons accomplished in each of these three poems are developed in Poems as a whole.

56 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”

Introduction

The original names of a number of the pieces in Poems referred to the Office or Mass of the Catholic Church. “The Forest of Night” was formerly “The Office of Night”. The poem about bells from the earlier XXI Poems (1897) which “Sweet silence after bells” replaced in Poems was entitled “Compline”. “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”) (36). Although these names were excised from Poems, the liturgical function is still apparent in the diction, imagery, theme and tone of “Sweet silence after bells” and “Dies Dominica” in “Towards the Source”, and “The banners of the king unfold” in “The Twilight of Disquietude”. These poems should be considered in the light of Mallarmé’s discussion of the “assimilation humaine à la tétralogie de l’An” in terms of the festivals of the Church. The passage from “Catholicisme” (one of three pieces grouped together under the title “Offices” in Divagations) in which this connection is explored has already been quoted in Chapter Five, but can usefully be reiterated here:

Mystère, autre que représentatif et que, je dirai, grec. Pièce, office. [...] Ici, reconnaissiez, désormais, dans le drame, la Passion, pour élargir l’acceptation canoniale ou, comme ce fut l’esthétique fasteuse de l’Église, avec le feu tournant d’hymnes, une assimilation humaine à la tétralogie de l’An.3

We should not forget, either, that Comte established a detailed secular liturgy in the early part of the nineteenth century, discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, and that his “religion of humanity” extended, later in the century, to England and as far as Sydney. Brennan’s Poems themselves undertake to “enlarge the canonical meaning” 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. He says that “this art [poetry] was meant to be fasti, the communion of

1 Wilkes, New Perspectives 23.
3 Mallarmé, Œuvres complètes 393.
4 See page 22 above.
man with his glory". In the passage quoted above, Mallarmé uses the term “fastueuse”, derived from “faste” which, in addition to having a connotation of “pomp and magnificence”, may be used to refer to the sacred festivals of the Church, and is also the French version of the 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”, firmly connects his comments with the “esthétique fastueuse de l’Église” mentioned by Mallarmé in “Catholicisme”. Brennan’s art, too, is “meant to be fasti”.

There is an ecclesiastical aspect to the three poems mentioned above, which gives them an important role in the conception of the entire work. “Dies Dominica” 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” of scents from the fields. We recall the “sungod” of “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude” and the flame of the “summer bride” in the “Liminal”. Nature itself, with the speaker included as part of it, is figured as a chalice, a single flower burning incense towards the “blue” which 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”). Brennan’s flower, however, celebrates morning rather than evening. Obviously, he was well aware of etymological connections between “chalice” and “calyx”. 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). In this poem, then, nature itself initiates a service of worship, drawing into the rite the person who observes the beauty of the morning.

The word “claustral” (pertaining to a “cloister”) in the second stanza links this poem to a slightly earlier one, “Sweet silence after bells” (1913), 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 Mallarmean silence later in Poems, especially in the ‘Lilith’ sequence (“even hers [Lilith’s], who is

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5 This statement is quoted in context in Chapter Five. See page 167.
the silence of our thought, /as he that sleeps in hush’d Valvins hath taught”, “Thus in her hour of wrath”, II.55-6). As “Dies Dominica” celebrates a festival of morning, this poem celebrates evening.7

“The banners of the king unfold” is based on the conceit of a correspondence between human experience and the sky at sunset, also found in the elegy to Mallarmé discussed in Chapter Five (“our glory in blazon’d ether spread”).8 In the former poem, 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 achieves, by means of this conceit, a “marriage” of mind and Nature. It implies that such a marriage 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”.9 This, then, is another poem with traditional liturgical associations, which 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 Mallarmean sun-hero of Les Dieux antiques, whose shed blood of sacrifice, in the reciprocal process, discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, which makes natural events into myth as well as myth into natural events, is equated with the red sky of

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7 Two other possible influences on this poem should be noted. One is Keats’s Hyperion, Book II, l.128, which reads “Leave the dim’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, Quest Book ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Quest-Theosophical Publishing House, 1975) 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” (69). Later in life, Brennan sometimes attended Leadbeater’s Liberal Catholic Church in Sydney (Roe, Beyond Belief 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. For more on the Liberal Catholic Church, see Robert S. Ellwood, Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality in New Zealand (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993) 134-8.

8 In this chapter, I use the word “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, the word corresponding to the Italian “concetto”. Joseph Anthony Mazzeo relates the metaphorical “conceit” to the notion of “correspondences” (“A Critique of Some Modern Theories of Metaphysical Poetry”, in John Donne’s Poetry, ed. A.L. Clements, Norton Critical Editions (NY: Norton, 1966), 134-43). See Prose 53 for a brief comment by Brennan on metaphysical poetry.

9 Clark, Biography 103.
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 so characteristic of Novalis’ Hymnen an die Nacht.

These three important poems, then, are evidence of a liturgical aspect to Poems. Whereas, as shown in the Introduction to this thesis, critical attention to Poems as a livre composé has been dominated by Wilkes’s view that “Poems (1913) has not two themes or three or four; it has one theme only – the quest for Eden”, the discussion which follows shows that the work is dominated, rather, by an “assimilation of our inmost passion to the tetralogy of the year”, an association of human “moods” with the daily and seasonal cycles of nature. Patterns established in the important preludes and "Liminary” discussed in the last chapter are characteristic of the entire structure. The interplay of different “moods” as a large-scale poetic technique allows Brennan to develop ambiguity in his handling of optimism and disillusion as part of the “Passion” of human experience. Memories of the Berlin courtship, often represented as a “dream” in “Towards the Source”, are particularly associated with spring and morning. Other stages in the human Passion are associated with autumn, evening and sunset. These times of day and year do not represent a single “mood”, but a variety. Whereas a tone of triumphant transcendence of coming death characterises the autumn “mood” in “Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed” and the “Liminary”, as has already been discussed, other autumn poems are characterised by wistful melancholy or bitter disillusion. As the work proceeds into “The Twilight of Disquietude” and beyond, the hope inspired by spring and morning yields to cynicism, anguish and despair as promised new beginnings fail to develop into anything of lasting value. As a focus of human optimism, Eden becomes equivocal, unattainable except in glimpses; the desire to return to the former Eden of innocence appears inappropriate. In the end, as the final poem shows, the hoped-for Eden must be seen from the perspective of daily life.

In Poems, Brennan uses the technique of suggestion, based on previously established symbolism, in the work as a whole, as well as in smaller subdivisions and individual pieces. He discusses the symbolist technique of suggestion rather than description in the first “Minuits chez Mallarmé” article. With reference to 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". In the notes on the 1899 Poésies, he discusses 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 “etudes [sic] d’aspects d’abandon, de désuétude, de manque, ou l’absence”, and 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”. Description vanishes, and 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, as the following discussion shows.

The first section of this chapter considers the correspondence of times and seasons with human experience in the apocalyptic sequence (numbers eight to thirteen of Poems), the third section of “Towards the Source”, and the “Secreta silvarum” and “Interlude” poems of “The Forest of Night”. The second section deals with the protean symbol of the rose in “Towards the Source”, the “Interlude” poems, and the poems accompanying the “Lilith” sequence. The chapter ends with an examination of the second Epilogue. Of necessity, poems are usually discussed in groups rather than individually, and the discussion of particular poems is often brief.

1. Times, seasons and human experience

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 manifestation of spring (sky, flowers) and heaven. In “Dies Dominica”, the incense of the flowers is directed “toward the blue”, both sky and heaven, or even sky as heaven. In “MDCCCXCI: 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”, at the beginning of the apocalyptic sequence which forms the second part of “Towards the Source”, “azure” functions as a shorthand in the line “My days of azure have forgotten me” (l.6). The “days of azure” are the courtship days, but also the soul’s memories of archetypal beauty. These memories are contrasted with the

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10 Prose 358.
11 Annotations to Mallarme, Poésies.
12 Brennan follows Mallarme in using “azure” with a multiple connotation, referring both to the sky, and to the heaven which, in the early poems of Mallarme, is longed for but not believed in. See Mallarme’s “L’Azur”. 

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speaker’s present physical and spiritual context which appears as “walls of ugliness” (l.4; emphasis mine).

This theme of the loss of a former heaven becomes explicit in “The yellow gas is fired from street to street”, the second poem of the apocalyptic sequence which follows “The grand cortège of glory and youth is gone” and is set off from the rest of “Towards the Source” by being both preceded and followed by a blank page. 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. In referring to the “paradisal instinct” (“where’er our paradisal instinct starves”, stanza 2), Brennan obviously had in mind Mallarmé’s phrase, “l’instinct du ciel en chacun”, discussed in Chapter Five.13 “Our old joy” in stanza 6 (“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 veines”, 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.14 Brennan’s poem contrasts the “delusive dream” of city-dwellers (stanza 2; an earlier title of the piece was “Cities”) with the heightened sense which 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).15 According to Spitzer, as discussed in Chapter Four, to be able to sense the music of the spheres is to experience Stimmung, the “mood” of harmony with nature which for German Romanticism served a similar function to the pre-Enlightenment idea of the concord of the universe.

In the next poem, 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” is now associated 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)

13 See page 153.  
14 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” (53). The Wordsworth reference is to 11.357-400 of Book 1 of The Prelude.  
15 Ambrosia being the nectar of the gods, Brennan implies that to sense the music of the spheres is to experience heaven.
The heavily apocalyptic tone of “The yellow gas is fired from street to street” is continued here, in a poem which depicts the relinquishment of Eden, the subsequent wandering and suffering, and the awakening of desire inspiring 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 Fall portrayed here appears to be a “felix culpa”, a “fortunate fault”, as Milton’s Adam suggests that his own may have been in *Paradise Lost*, claiming that it both occasioned the divine grace manifested in the Incarnation and produced a paradise superior to that which had been lost (Bk.XII, ll.458-78). 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) which they originally experienced, by fusing “the full-grown sense with soul” (stanza 3). The “dark lust” and the “darker fire” of stanza 3 should be taken to refer to Boehme’s Godhead, constituted by polar opposites of dark fire (wrath) and love, as discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.  

“The blue” (stanza 8) is explicitly associated with the lost paradise. The ugliness of cities is associated with suppression of the paradisal instinct, with “our long disease” (stanza 4). Thus, the apocalyptic 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” play with contrasting pairs: Australia and Berlin; innocence and experience; lived experience and the experience of the soul; spring and autumn; dawn and dusk; and another grouping whose terms are almost equated, memory and dream. Except for two poems of passion and consummation, “Where the poppy-banners flow” and “White dawn, that tak’st the heaven”, 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:

*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 “paradisal instinct” of the soul (associated with the blue of sky and heaven in the preceding apocalyptic sequence). The “dream that

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16 See page 99.
wanders on the breeze” of the epigraph harks back to the lines “a breeze /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 of the third section, such as “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 this section, “And shall the living waters heed”, is overtly religious in its reference, recalling the paradisal 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 shows that such memories are aroused at twilight, presumably because it is a contemplative time, as the previous poem has shown in its reference 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” (stanza 2 of “When Summer comes in her glory”). In “And shall the living waters heed”, it is 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 paradisal 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).17 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 rebirth of the soul in which periods of unembodied and embodied life alternate.

Neoplatonic and Gnostic versions of the doctrine, emphasising that the soul has been drugged into forgetfulness of the former life, as well as the Boehmian version of the

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“sleep” of Adam, have been discussed in Chapter Three. Hermeticism, too, embraces the doctrine that the soul is divine in origin and may return to its divine source.\(^\text{18}\)

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 (ll. 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 this piece in *From Blake to Arnold* trace the notion of metempsychosis back as far as Pythagoras and link Plato with “what later philosophers have called innate ideas, or a priori conditions of knowledge”. He comments:

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.\(^\text{19}\)

Further discussion will demonstrate the relevance of Blake’s contrasting pairs, innocence and experience, to Brennan’s presentation of the Passion of human life.

Of the poems of spring or morning in the third section of “Towards the Source”, then, we have one poem in which “sleeping memories” are to be interpreted as the soul’s memory of paradise. Most of the other poems in this section deal with memories of Berlin. Such memories are strongly associated with dreams, especially the dreams with 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 one of its variants. “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). In this poem, dream has “touch’d that far reality /of memory’s heaven” (stanza 2), suggesting a symbolic link between the memories of


\(^{19}\) Brennan, Pickburn, and Brereton, eds., *From Blake to Arnold* 158.
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. As well as “And does she still perceive, her curtain drawn” and “Where the poppy-banners flow”, whose association of dawn or spring with virginal innocence has been discussed in Chapter Four, 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, according to 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, since Brennan’s discussion of Wordsworth’s “Immortality Ode” explains the contrast between early childlikeness and its passing in these terms. Following the pattern established in the three pieces discussed in the previous chapter, Poems shows 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 a 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

20 The second of Brennan’s Symbolism lectures is devoted to the clash between glimpsed perfection and the experience of imperfection. At the beginning of this lecture, Brennan says “The first and most patent fact with which poetry has to do is the imperfection of our life: and this involves the contrary fact of its possible perfection. Out of the conflict of these two facts poetry is born: and its office is to exasperate or reconcile that conflict, indeed both to exasperate and reconcile it. The imperfection is in ourselves; the imperfection of a divided consciousness, a divided life; war within us and war upon the earth” (Prose 67-8).
"low-laughing child haunting my old spring ways" is invited to reappear, "sororal in this hour of tenderness" (ll.12 and 14). The word "sororal" could be an oblique reference to the perceptive sister in Mallarmé's "Prose: pour des Esseintes" ("Nous filmes deux, je le maintiens"; "cette sœur sensée et tendre", stanzas 3 and 9), or 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 (in "Tintern Abbey", as discussed in Chapter Four, it is an experience to which the word "mood" is applied). Henry Weinfield draws a connection with "Tintern Abbey" in his discussion of the Mallarmé poem.21 As Weinfield 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 "Anastasius", "resurrection".22 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. If Brennan thought of the Mallarmean "sister", giving up ecstasy for resurrection, in terms of this transformation, then the laughing figure of Undine also becomes relevant. 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" is an important figure in poems which 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.23

22 Brennan makes an ironic reference to this part of Mallarmé's poem in the Musico-poematographoscope. Whereas Mallarmé writes: "L'enfant abdique son extase /Et docté déjà par chemins /Elle dit le mot Anastase! /Ne pour d'éternels parchemins", Brennan writes, with reference to the critics who fail to appreciate his own "parchments", "the rest /methinks /a parchment without /Anastasius' name". According to the notes to the 1899 Poésies, Brennan took "Anastasius" to refer to "Anastase le revolte [sic]", ainsi nommé, mais réellement le seul qui perpétue la vraie tradition antique, comme l'empereur [sic] Anastase (491-518), à tort attequé à cause d'hérésie, continuait celle maintenue par Pulchérie (impératrice et sainte 450-457 A.D.)." He makes the obvious further identification of Pulchérie with beauty: "Pulchérie esprit de beauté". The emperor to whom he refers, Anastasius I, emperor of Byzantium, embraced the Monophysite heresy, according to which Christ had a single, divine nature, his role as a heretic would have attracted Brennan.
23 In the 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 ἀνάγκη, 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 Inmigkeit" 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" (Prose 385-6). 209
We have seen, then, that the association of morning or dawn with the loss of Eden or the abrogation of the “paradisal instinct”, established in the poems of the apocalyptic sequence, is reworked in the poems of memory and dream dominating the third section of “Towards the Source” by means of a play between actual memories of the spring courtship in Berlin, and the soul’s memories of a former life. Spring and morning are associated with childlike innocence, the association of these with the figure of Undine suggesting that such innocence will be undercut by subsequent experience. Whereas critics such as McAuley and Clark, reading these poems primarily or entirely as relating to the courtship, find the emphasis on innocent childlikeness naïve or inappropriate, I would argue that it makes considerably more sense in terms of the overall pattern of equivalences between universal human emotion and times or seasons that Brennan establishes here. Further discussion will show how strongly the innocent “mood” of spring is undercut later, in some of the poems of autumn and sunset, and in poems which revisit dawn or spring with disillusionment rather than optimism.

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 consummation of marriage, was “Blue-flower”, and although the title has gone, the blue flowers are still present in ll.15 to 17, “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 “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude” to “the tender blue /of petal-hearts” (stanzas 5, l. 4 and 6, l. 1) is an overt reference to the “blue flower” of Novalis’ novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.24 “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 *Les Dieux antiques* in the representation of virginal innocence is apparent not only in the colours associated with dawn, discussed above, but in the association of “shy evening” with lilac colours (ll.28-9). In the Passion of humanity, love bestows the blessing of “grace” (l.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

24 Macainsh, "Christopher Brennan and Die Romantik": 153-4.
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 himself described this as a “Patmorian Ode”. What he meant may be inferred from his comment in a later article on Patmore’s poetry:

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.25

An unfortunate consequence of the melding of embodied and spiritual experience in “White dawn, that tak’st” is the sense, which is hard to avoid, that the beloved is excluded from the deepest meaning of the experience. The rose symbolism in this poem will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

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” (ll.24-5), but still validly recalled 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” (ll.32-3). 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 (l.7), to return to his home “behind the panes that come and go /with dusk and firelight wavering low” (ll.5-6), the poem perversely finishes with the dream in the ascendant. However, 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”.

The ambivalence with which morning innocence is regarded 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 (discussed in Chapter Five) and “The hollow crystal of my winter dream” (discussed in Chapter Six), forming an introduction to the whole section. Most of the poems in “The

25 Prose 272-3.
Labour of Night” have been discussed in Chapter One. Part of “The Quest of Silence” is a sequence of five poems, the “Secreta silvarum”, the prelude to which, “Oh yon, when Holda leaves her hill”, has been discussed in the previous chapter. In number I 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” (stanza 1). 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 “Oh yon, when Holda” (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” (second quatrain). In ll.3-4 of the sestet, “her beasts”, “with ivory single horn”, identify her 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” (ll.1-3 of sestet) of the unicorns of the “Lady of the Forest”. The colours evoked by the denial of their presence in the first line of this piece (“emerald”, “royal autumn-red”) are a shorthand or condensed means of bringing to mind the symbolic meanings associated with spring and autumn in many of the preceding poems, first established in “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude”.26

“Secreta silvarum” draws on the use of morning as the symbol of innocence established in both Preludes and the “Liminary”, as well as in the third section of “Towards the Source”. The figure of the virgin of the forest, suggesting refuge from the invasion of innocence by experience, is another variant of the Undine symbol. Brennan makes the connection between the two in the article on Mallarmé’s “Sonnet en – yx”, discussed in Chapter Three.27 He says “the couchant unicorn is, in art, the symbol of virginity”, and adds a footnote to medieval translations of Psalm XXI, “Salva me ex ore leonis: et a comibus unicomium humilitatem meam”. The unicorns of the first and fifth poems of “Secreta silvarum”, then, evoke an entire cluster of associations. The sequence marks the transition from innocence to experience.

According to Brennan’s friend and editor J.J. Quinn, the second of the “Secreta silvarum” poems belongs to a particular Australian setting. Chisholm reports that

26 In this poem, the colour green is strongly associated with spring (stanza 7). Poppies are associated with autumn (stanza 26); in later poems, the red colour of poppies is emphasised. Livio Dobrez suggests, convincingly, that Brennan has aligned his colour symbolism with that of the liturgy, green for spring (advent), purple for the Passion of sunset (Lent), and so on (Personal communication).
27 See page 107.
Quinn "confidently affirmed that it refers to the trees around St Ignatius College, at Riverview, on the Lane Cove River – hence ‘anciently I grew’". The poem is also linked to Brennan’s own imaginative history. In an 1899 letter to Brereton, Brennan says: “I only know that I allow something in me to speak that gazes 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”. This seems to be a response to a comment by Yeats in “The Philosophy of Shelley’s Poetry”, marked in Brennan’s copy of Ideas of Good and Evil, that “there is for every man some one scene, some one adventure, some one picture that is the image of his secret life” (Brennan chooses two scenes rather than one). “O friendly shades, where anciently” uses the phrase “tuneful boughs” (l. 8) from Brennan’s comment in the letter. It also bestows on the forest a significance beyond the material, when it suggests that it possesses a certain potential for revelation. The words “divined” (l.11) and “foreboding” (l.15) should be interpreted in the light of the favoured word of the German Frühromantik, “Ahn(d)ung”, discussed in Chapter Two. 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.

This next poem is “The point of noon is past, outside”. It 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” (ll.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 strongly recall the “confused words” spoken by the living pillars of Nature’s temple in Brennan’s translation of Baudelaire’s poem “Correspondances”, discussed in Chapter Four. The trees of Brennan’s forest communicate the kinship of a correspondence between nature and the human mind, again like Baudelaire’s trees which “look upon [him] with looks that he recognizes as kin”.

Such kinship is expressed symbolically by the mythical inhabitants of the forest, and especially by their foremost figure, Pan. Pan symbolises the mystery at the

28 Chisholm, The Forest of Night 68.
29 Sturm 416.
30 W.B. Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil (London: Bullen, 1903) 140.
31 See page 83.
32 Prose 55.
heart of the “Forest of Night”. He shares the ambiguity of the Lilith figure, also associated with the Forest via her avatar, Holda, who presides over the forest in “Oh yon, when Holda leaves her hill”. 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 (ll. 27-32).

These lines associate Pan with noon, so that his presence is hinted in the next poem, “The point of noon is past, outside”, even though he does not appear in it. In number four of the sequence the Mallarmean “horror of the forest” appears, as night and mystery take over the innocent morning and the revelatory noon in the forest. The passage from “Crise de vers” in which the phrase “l’horreur de la fôret” is found has been quoted in Chapter Five. “The point of noon is past” leads up to the portrayal of the sinister Pan revealed at the end of the fifth poem. Pan is a faun, like the protagonist of Mallarmé’s “L’Après-midi d’un faune”, a poem set in a forest on a sleepy afternoon in which, according to Brennan, beauty is glimpsed in an experience whose status as either lived experience or a dream is ambiguous. As we noted in the previous chapter, 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.

The overtaking of morning innocence by mystery found 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”. “Twice now that lucid fiction”, one of the two “Interlude” poems between “The Quest of Silence” and “The Shadow of Lilith”, deals with a “weary mood” (l.5) in the face of the relentless return of the seasons. The coming of spring is painful, an enticing “lure” which stings (ll.6-9). The spelling “kist” for “kissed”, jarring for a modern reader, sounds an awkward note in

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33 See Wilkes, New Perspectives 49.
34 See page 160.
35 In the Symbolism lecture on Mallarmé, Brennan makes the following comment about this poem: “L’après-midi d’un faune (1876) [is] a poem which has a double outlook; one, backwards along Mallarmé’s earlier poetry summing up all its intentions; one, forwards to a new poetry. The symbol is plain; a faun, a child of earth, wakes on a hot morning in the woodland. Through his sluggish earthly brain flits a vision of beauty, nymphs seen beside waters the afternoon before – or was it only a dream of sleep?” (Prose 142).
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'erflaked 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 quoted above function as both nouns and verbs. The procession of adjectives accompanying "burn" and "sting", not separated even by commas, foreshadows the disassociation of words from traditional grammatical patterns, and reassembling in new patterns, which is apparent throughout the Musicopoematomatographoscope and is further evidence of Brennan’s response to Mallarmé’s radical disturbance of syntax. 36 The return of Eden promised by spring, the "magic dream of gold" (ll.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 (ll.20-22). Indirectly, by means of correspondences earlier established between human and natural seasons, human experience of disillusion is conveyed. The two "interludes" 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 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", ll.12-13). Both the "Secreta silvarum" poems and the "interlude" poems discussed here, then, undercut the mood of spring or morning

36 The effect of Mallarmé’s prose style on Brennan’s own is particularly apparent in two articles, spaced more than twenty years apart. The beginning of the review of Victor Daley’s At Dawn and Dusk (1898) is condensed and cryptic in Mallarmean style, and relies on analogies which are merely hinted: To give one’s standard of poetry and what is best in poetry – such request has been well defined as ‘a fist thrust under one’s nose’.

Not that the difficulties notoriously attending such definition need reduce the utterances appearing on this page to the level of mere opinion: no more than rays refracted in many prisms cease to illuminate.

Shortly, then, as is desired – that 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” (Prose 190). The use of dashes in this quotation is also a Mallarmean characteristic. The first of Brennan’s “Minuits chez Mallarme” articles (1920) is introduced in a style which is even more elliptical: “M. Tout-le-Monde long ago exhausted his method on Mallarmé; understanding comes by nature, with writing and reading; so that one criticizes a contemporary without more ado. A few have taken the trouble, not always with success. A recent failure will serve as occasion (354)".
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 equivocacy.

The “mood” of disillusion which ultimately attacks the hopefulness associated with spring and morning is more consistently associated with autumn. In the first section of “Towards the Source” there 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, represents a funeral procession of “discrown’d belated dreams”. When Brennan read Keats in December 1894, he responded to ll. 212 to 239 of Book II of Hyperion, describing the old gods yielding place to the new, with the following comment employing the same form of words as his poem: “The essence of the poem: for what other idea is presented to us than the passing of discrown’d dreams” (italics mine). Near the lines describing Hyperion’s eclipse of Saturn, at the end of Book II, he wrote: “The most regal of dreams is the last to die”. At the end of Keats’s poem we find:

> 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.

Although he wrote the poem before the reading of Keats, his comments indicate that, at that time, Brennan was thinking about dreams in terms of the passing of former gods and also in terms of Platonic myth. The passage quoted earlier from Plato’s Phaedrus about the soul’s memory of heaven occurs in the context of a discussion of the soul’s ability to recover its “wings” so it can return to its divine existence; Brennan’s comment, too, uses the figure of “wings”. The comment about the death of the old gods is in keeping with the original title of Brennan’s poem, “Funera regum”, “the funerals of the kings”. In the above quotation, Brennan speaks of the Muse of memory, Mnemosyne, in such terms as suggest he thought of the Muses, or at least this one, as a “mood” in Yeats’s sense of a dominating idea, as discussed in Chapter Four. These considerations give “Autumn, the year breathes dully towards its death” a certain importance in “Towards the Source”, which, as I have already shown, 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

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37 See Sturm 405.
38 Clark, Biography 87.
39 With reference to Keats’s Hyperion, however, this is also relevant to art.
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” (ll.2, 5).

This poem and “The grand cortège of glory and youth” together 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; the poem advertises the absence of “cymbal-clash”, “piled pyres of the slaughter’d sun”, “silver sheen of eve”, blood and wound (“yellow and bloodless, not a wound to boast”, l.14). 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” (l.19); the new line accuses the church of “cozening youth’s despair o’er joy that dies”. The phrase “flaunt standards” (l.2) is from Keats.40

This section has shown, then, that the themes and emphases of poems in the apocalyptic sequence and third section of “Towards the Source”, and the “Secreta silvarum” sequence and some of the “interlude” poems in “The Forest of Night”, are consistent with an overall structure founded on the equations between the cycles of nature and the patterns of human emotion and experience which Brennan designated by the term “moods”. The hope or inner “instinct” of Eden, these poems show, is characteristic of a state of innocence which we cannot hold onto forever. The pain associated with the loss of this innocent hopefulness is part of the cycle of human passion. The poems of the Berlin courtship are poems of memory, dream and longing which signify, beyond the direct experience which engendered them, the conflict between innocence and experience, between hope and disillusion. As the next section will show, one dominant symbol expresses the equivalence of human experience and natural cycles in its various manifestations.

2. Symbolism of the rose

Brennan’s leading symbol of human experience in correspondence with the drama of nature is the rose. It is associated with a number of important stages in the course of experience, itself undergoing a series of changes in both signification and value which

40 In the margin beside the beginning of Keats’s drama “King Stephen” in Brennan’s copy of Keats, where the phrase “flaunt standard” occurs, someone has written “C.B. cribbed this (1928).”
Brennan represents under the analogy of the transmigration of souls in the “interlude” poem “Twice now that lucid fiction”. In two of the poems in the third section of “Towards the Source”, the rose, and the red colour associated with it, symbolise the fulfilment of human sexual passion. In “The Forest of Night”, the “bleeding rose” (“Cloth’d now with dark alone”, last line), symbol of the human Passion, is associated with night and Lilith, night being the time of sexual fulfilment and, by transference, of mystical fulfilment. The dream of an enduring golden rose, like that of Dante’s Divine Comedy, is held up as an ideal in “This rose, the lips that kiss”, while its failure to materialise elicits cynicism in “Twice now the lucid fiction” and despair in “Chimaera writhes”. In addition to being associated with human experience and aspiration, the rose is also associated with the sky. This is overt in “The window is wide”, where the white light of dawn is described as “rose passioning to white”, but it is arguably also implied in several other important poems. The rose symbol is also suggested wherever “rosy” or “rose” are used to denote colours. If we take into account both explicit and implicit uses of the motif, the rose appears as a key factor in Brennan’s handling of the correspondence between the human mind and nature, between the human Passion (which sexual passion symbolises) and the analogous Passion of Nature; and a means of symbolically reuniting mind and Nature.

There are multiple antecedents for Brennan’s rose symbolism, ranging from Dante to Yeats, and including Australian as well as European sources. 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, is obviously deliberately evoked by Brennan’s vision of the “deathless rose of gold” in the last line of “This rose, the lips that kiss”. Brennan was familiar with Yeats’s rose symbolism in The Secret Rose, which included “Rosa Alchemica”, the first of the Alchemical Rose trilogy, discussed in Chapter Four with relation to the concept of “moods”. On the question of influence by Yeat’s rose symbolism, Brennan wrote, somewhat defensively perhaps:

[... 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 resolved when the stars have entirely faded & clash together in the womb of night.]

41 Clark discusses the relevance of Dante’s white rose with regard to “The window is wide” (Biography 143). He 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”. This poem is discussed in detail below.
42 See page 123.
43 Sturm 413.
Here, he claims his own right to make use of a widely-dispersed and popular image in European thought and literature.

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 of Fiore. However, imagery of lilies and roses together (no nettles!) in another poem of the apocalyptic series, “Let us go down, the long-dead night is done”, could be indebted to Boehme, Mallarmé or Yeats (perhaps all three). This visionary and optimistic poem, which, as Kane points out, 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 which (as we saw in earlier discussion of the thought of Boehme) is a consequence of the Fall. Boehme’s prophecies of the regenerated human being employ imagery of lilies and roses. For example, in the “Book of the Three Principles” he says: “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). Although Brennan may not have been aware of this particular prophecy before acquiring the four-volume 1764 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, and Brennan could have found it elsewhere. Mallarmé uses lilies and roses in the “Toast funèbre”, discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis, in the line “pour la Rose et le Lys le mystère d’un nom”. 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, of course, is permeated with rose symbolism.

Another poem of the apocalyptic sequence in “Toward the Source”, “I saw my life as whitest flame”, speaks of a colour in the sky which dies sacrificially. This “colour” is very likely an allusion to Boehme’s identification of Sophia, present as the inner divinity in the regenerated human being, with the alchemical “tincture”, the

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44 For a discussion of the prevalence of this symbolism in nineteenth-century European thought, see Reeves and Gould, Joachim of Fiore (passim).
45 Kane, “Christopher Brennan and the Allegory of Poetic Power” 87.
46 Boehme, Works 1: Bk II, ch. 20, 38.
47 For a discussion of the “Lilienzeit”, see Benz, The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy 11.
48 See page 157.
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”. The stanza in question reads:

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, as discussed in earlier chapters of the thesis, and probably both should be borne in mind here.

The image of the bleeding sunset is also symbolised by the rose in Poems. In addition to Les Dieux antiques, Brennan could have encountered this in the reiterated line from Baudelaire’s “Harmonie du Soir”, “Le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige”, to which Chisholm draws attention in another context.49 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.50 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”.51 Given the value Brennan placed on such an achievement, as this thesis demonstrates, 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 between 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 6 to 8.

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”. The journal included prose pieces of a Theosophical or mystical bent by authors

49 Chisholm, The Forest of Night 56.
50 For more on the relationship of the two poets, see Clark, Biography 125-6.
51 Sturm 426.

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such as Bernard O’Dowd, as well as verse. These make largely heavy-handed use of various symbolic roses such as the “Rose of Beauty” and the “Mystic Rose”. There were translations of, and articles about, French Romantic and Symbolist poets such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Verlaine. Brennan’s friend Brereton also published in it. A comparison of Brennan’s rose symbolism with the contents of this journal, and with the poetry of Victory Daley, demonstrates the complexity of Brennan’s conception of the symbol. In addition, his symbolist technique enables him merely to suggest the rose symbol in a number of places without actually mentioning it.

Rosicrucian symbolism is another important source for Brennan’s rose. Rosicrucianism combined many of the esoteric currents which attracted Brennan’s interest and attention. As mentioned in the Introduction, he was familiar with the Neorosicrucian movements of late nineteenth-century France, led by colourful figures such as Stanislaus de Guaita, Joséphin (self-styled “Sar”) Péladan and Gérard Encausse (“Papus”). No less than eight titles (dated from 1891 to 1915) by Péladan, founder of the “Salons de la Rose-Croix”, appear in the H.M. Moran collection at the Australian National University, and Brennan had access to (and probably ordered) Encausse’s “Cabbale ; tradition secrète de l’Occident”, which was in the Public Library of NSW during his time there. The name “Rosencreutz” signifies “Rosy cross”. 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). According to Faivre, the first of these manifestoes contained “traces of the Christian Kabbalah, Pythagorism, and a strong dose of Paracelsism”. McIntosh describes an amalgam of the “old alchemical-kabalistic-Hermetic outlook” with Pietism in the German Rosicrucian groups of the eighteenth century. A.E. Waite’s The Real History of the Rosicrucians (1887), to which Brennan also had access in the Public Library, discusses two possible derivations for the first element in the name “Rosencreuz”. An explanation linking it to “Ros”, dew, is rejected in favour of an association with the Rose, although both derivations are

52 Of the eight titles by Péladan in the catalogue of the Moran collection, which contains mainly, but not exclusively, texts from Brennan’s library, one clearly belonged to Moran himself rather than Brennan. Brennan’s name is written in only two, La Science de l’amor and L’Art idéaliste et mystique. Three others (La Gynandre, Pèrigrine et Pèrigrin and La Vertu suprême) have been lightly marked in a manner consistent with Brennan’s marking habits, but cannot be definitively identified as his. 53 1901-5 Catalogue, sub-heading “Kabala”. For more on Neorosicrucian organisations during the French Decadence, see McIntosh, Eliphas Lévi 157-76. 54 Faivre, Access to Western Esotericism 64. For more on the early history of Rosicrucianism, see Frances A. Yates, The Rosicrucian Enlightenment (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) passim; Faivre, Access to Western Esotericism 64-6; and McIntosh, The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason 23-36. 55 McIntosh, The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason 30, 32-3.
represented as tentative.\textsuperscript{56} Waite mentions Eliphas Lévi’s interpretation of the symbol of the rose in the \textit{Roman de la Rose} and Dante’s \textit{Paradiso} as “the symbol of the Rosicrucians publicly and almost categorically revealed”, an interpretation flawed, as Waite points out, by an unsupportable assumption of the antiquity of the Rosicrucian movement (13-17). Bringing together the rose and the cross, Rosicrucian symbolism is obviously appropriate for Brennan’s association of the rose with the human “Passion”. According to Merewether, Brennan wrote beside Yeats’s note “[t]he rose is a favourite symbol of Irish poets” the comment “likewise a symbol of mediaeval use. Rosicrucian etc” in his working copy of Yeats’s \textit{Poems} (1895), acquired in 1896.\textsuperscript{57}

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 in “Where the poppy-banners flow”, especially the correspondence between the poppies and the lovers’ experience of passion established in the lines “poppies flush all tremulous; /has our love grown into them, /root and stem, /are the red blooms red with us?” (stanz 6). Part of Brennan’s technique depends on building up imagery gradually over the course of a number of poems, so that just a few words can evoke an image established earlier. For this reason, it is unsatisfactory to consider individual poems in isolation. 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” (ll.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.\textsuperscript{58}

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 of the ceremonies of the Mass (“no golden web, no censer-fire”, ll. 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 which celebrates the union of the soul with God using sexual

\textsuperscript{56} A.E. Waite, \textit{The Real History of the Rosicrucians} (London: 1887) 7-8.
\textsuperscript{57} Merewether, “Brennan and Yeats” 396. It is clear from this and other comments that Brennan, unlike Waite, was convinced of the medieval origins of Rosicrucianism.
\textsuperscript{58} “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.

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symbolism, as in the *Song of Songs* and the poetry of St John of the Cross. Brennan’s comment on the verse of Patmore, quoted earlier in the chapter, indicates that he took this 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”. 59 “Incarnate” also suggests the French word “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 the word used by Mallarmé, and the implications of the English word. “Incarnate” appears as well in “Terrible, if he will not have me else”, where it is also associated with rose imagery. 60

So far, we have examined a number of possible antecedents, both literary and otherwise, for Brennan’s rose symbol, demonstrating its affinity with Boehme’s “tincture” and the symbolism of roses and lilies used by Mallarmé and Yeats. We have also considered the use of the rose in “Towards the Source” to symbolise both marital union and the union of the soul with the divine in a context of incarnation. Between the second and third sections of “The Forest of Night” Brennan has placed two poems which together are entitled “Interlude: The window and the hearth”. These poems immediately follow pieces dealing with the passing of religions, discussed in Chapter One. 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. 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” (ll.3-4). “Metempsychosis”, as mentioned earlier, is another word for the transmigration of souls. Here, 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 which 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 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 [...]. 61

59 See page 211.
60 See page 225 below.
In “Twice now that lucid fiction”, the Passion of Nature, in its association with the Passion of humanity, as symbolised by the transmigration of the rose itself, appears futile, ultimately leading nowhere. The mood of the next poem, “Chimaera writhes beside the tragic flame”, while not mirroring the weary futility of the last, finds agony in the fate of “the heart’s rose-flushed dream of living gold” which is reduced to “sullen embers” (ll.14 and 15). The Chimaera itself, and the handling of it, are strongly indebted to Mallarmé, as Brennan himself acknowledges 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.”62 Agony over the clash between dream and lived experience is another theme Brennan perceived in Mallarmé’s work, as the discussion of Chapter Five has indicated. This is “l’antagonisme de rêve chez l’homme” discussed there.63

One important stage in the “metempsychosis” of the rose symbol is night. All three poems framing the “Lilith” sequence in the section entitled “The Shadow of Lilith”, immediately following the two “interlude” poems just discussed, explore the rose symbol in the context of night, and two are overtly alchemical and Rosicrucian in their symbolism. The third and fourth stanzas of “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 limbeek 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 [...].

Faivre explains this form of palingenesis in the following way:

Dès 1715, l’abbe 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.64

According to Seligmann’s The History of Magic, the process involved mixing the essence extracted from the rose-seed with dew. This explains Brennan’s reference to “thy dewy essence”.65 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

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62 Sturm 401.
63 See page 153.
64 McIntosh, The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason 46.
transmutation of metals"). Brennan's knowledge of alchemy could have been gained from the *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum* of George von Welling, a popular work of the period McIntosh is discussing, and the text which Goethe had used as a source of information on alchemy. He also had access to the holdings of the Public Library of NSW under the subject-category “Alchemy”. For the years 1869-95, these included two works by Athanasius Kircher, the *Mundus Subterraneus* and the *Oedipus Aegypticus*, and the Early English Text Society’s edition of the *Book of Quinte Essence*. The Library also held the “Magical Writings” of the seventeenth century Rosicrucian author Thomas Vaughan, known as “Eugeni Philalethes”.

The conceit of the rose in Brennan's poem is worthy, at least in ingenuity, of the English Metaphysical poets whose work he admired. The “wifely guise” of Eve (stanza 3) should be taken to refer to 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”, II.4-5), and in which the word “incarnate” brings with it the complex group of associations discussed above with reference to “White dawn, that tak’st”. In “Cloth’d now with dark alone”, 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. As earlier discussion has shown, this is consistently associated with night and therefore

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66 McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason* 85.
67 See Weeks, *German Mysticism* 217-8. Brennan lists Welling’s work under “W” in the alphabetical bibliography in one of his working notebooks. His description reads as follows: “Herr Georgii von Welling Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum. Darinnen der Ursprung /Natur /Eigenschaften und Gebrauch /Des Sallzes, Schwefels und Mercurii, In dreyen Theilen beschrieben /Und nebst sehr vielen, sonderbahren Mathematischen /Theosophischen /Magischen und Mystischen Materien, Auch die Erzeugung der Metallen und Mineralien /aus dem Grunde der Natur erwiesen wird; Samt dem Haupt-Schlussel des ganzen Wercks /und vielen curieusen Mago-Cabbalistischen Figuren, Deme noch beygefiigt: Ein Tractiirlein von der Gottlichen Weisheit; Und in besonderer Anhang /Ehrlicher sehr rar- und kostbarer Chymischer Piecen. Nunmehro das erstemahl also zusammen zum Druck befordert von einem Liebhaber Gottlicher und Natürlcher Geheimnissä. 4 to. Homburg vor der Höhe, 1736 [Parchment binding. Preface signature C.S. completed C. Schütz in MS. Lothar Bucher’s copy].” (*The Opus Mago-Cabablisticum et Theosophicum of Herr Georg von Welling*. Wherein may be found the origin, nature, properties and use of salt, sulphur and mercury, described in three parts, and besides, many wonderful mathematical, theosophical, magical and mystical subjects, also the production of metals and minerals from their natural base will be demonstrated; together with the master-key of the whole work and many curious magical-cababalistic figures added: a little treatise from divine wisdom; and in a special appendix of reliable, very rare and expensive chemical pieces. Collected and brought to press now for the first time by a lover of divine and natural mysteries*). For more on Welling, see Petra Jungmayr, *Georg von Welling (1655-1727)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1990) and Joachim Telle, “Zum Opus mago-cabbalisticum et theosophicum von Georg von Welling”, *Euphorion* 77 (1983) 359-79.
68 Subject-Index Catalogue 1869-95, subheading “Rosicrucians”. Later, Brennan owned an edition of selected poems by Vaughan, the *English Verse-Remains* (1905). This included a number of verses extracted from Vaughan’s esoteric works, the *Anima magica abscondita, Magia Adamica* and *Anthroposophia Theomagica*.
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” (II.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 both in the previous poem (“some rose of rare-reveal’d delight”), and in the second stanza of “Cloth’d now with dark alone”, where we find that “heaven and earth, seeking their boon, /meet in this troubled blood”.

The bleeding rose appears twice in “Cloth’d now with dark alone”, in the reference in stanza 5 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”, discussed earlier, takes on further significance. The conceit employed there, “the riches of my heart are bled /to feed the passion of the west”, can be seen to foreshadow the symbol of the bleeding rose, appearing in later poems, which unites the Passion of Nature with the Passion of humanity. In that poem, which in its anticipation of night looks forward to the “Shadow of Lilith” poems, it is the speaker himself who suffers the Passion; in “Cloth’d now with dark alone” it is the rose, associated with Lilith. This provides further evidence for identifying Lilith with the higher or transcendent self, the inner divinity.

This, then, is Brennan’s working out of the Mallarmean desire for a “vrai culte moderne” in which, as we have shown in Chapter Five, Christ stands as a “type” for humanity itself, and the calendar of festivals is to be based on the equivalence of natural cycles and human passion. The rose, which as “bleeding rose” conveys both the “suffering” of nature at sunset and in autumn, and the passional suffering of humanity, is the 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 Greek tetralogy (and, as Chapter Five has indicated, the Wagnerian tetralogy of the Ring Cycle).

In the last three stanzas of “Cloth’d now with dark alone”, the rose, and, by implication, Lilith herself, are associated with Paradise. As has been shown above, 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”, where a reference to the “secular flowering” of the rose, l.48, clearly Mallarmé’s “vrai culte moderne”, is followed by an invocation of the “far-bleeding rose of Paradise” (l.49). This passage reads as follows:

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.

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. 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 […]..

One of the two important poems with rose symbolism which follow the “Lilith” sequence, “The window is wide”, represents similar suffering, but with “Beauty” as the protagonist rather than Lilith, referring to “cavern tracts, whence the great store of tears
/that Beauty all the years /hath wept in wanderings of the eyeless dark” (ll.3-5). Clearly “Beauty” in “MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude”, associated with the hidden “true self”, is an avatar of Lilith too, as discussion of this poem in the previous chapter has suggested.

“The window is wide” has an important role in the development of Brennan’s rose symbolism. This poem poses a central question: is Paradise ever recoverable, or is

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69 Note that “A gray and dusty daylight flows” in “The Quest of Silence” uses the rose to symbolise the Christian faith, whose certainties are no longer felt as such. See discussion of this poem on page 32.
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.70

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 how’d
invades with numbing shroud
this dwindling realm of listless avatars.

The word “whence” in l.3 has a dual function. If a verb such as “come” is understood to have been omitted, we have “whence come”, referring back 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, it makes “the great store of tears” the subject of this verb, so that another sense is added: “whence the great store of tears [which] invades with numbing shroud /this dwindling realm of listless avatars”.71 Again, Brennan’s willingness to condense his verse by making words function syntactically in several different ways is a response to Mallarme.72 The central image in this poem is the ending of night, the fading of the stars, “rose passioning to white” (l.14). This image is profoundly ambiguous. The “passioning” rose is bleeding to death, but is it the night or the morning which is dying? The “fainting night” (l.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” which may in fact never “return /sprung soft and sudden on the fainting night” (ll.12-13). The reference to the “amaranth” (a flower reputed never to fade), l.11, supports the hope of an unfading rose, the “deathless rose of gold” which the other poem with rose symbolism following the “Lilith” sequence, “This rose, the lips that kiss”, invokes, following Dante. However, the “amaranth”, although fadeless, is also imagined and poetic, something

70 See Hope, "Christopher Brennan: An Interpretation" 141-2.
71 Hope also objects to the word “cark” as obsolete. His comment is entertaining but self-indulgent: “Cark is an obsolete word now only used in the not very familiar phrase “cark and care”. What a cark is, nobody but a philologist can be expected to know and what a long cark is, even less; it has the same sense of absurdity that we would have if instead of a stock phrase like “he went off in a high dudgeon”, we said he went off in a fairly low dudgeon with luminous wheels” (142).
72 In the large Musicoepoematographoscope, one adjective, “hawklike”, modifies two noun phrases which 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".
envisioned but not necessarily achievable, like the Absolute of the Früherromantik. The question posed by this poem receives no definitive answer.

We have seen, then, that Brennan’s symbol of the rose, in addition to being indebted to a variety of sources, both Australian and European, has a number of different significations as a symbol of Passion. It relates to the human memory of Eden, to the experience of ecstatic fulfilment which itself prefigures union with the divine, and to the hope of future perfection. It connects these different aspects of human religious experience with the drama of nature as it is played out in the skies of dawn and sunset and in the seasons. The “bleeding” rose symbolises the “Passion” of the skies as well as the human Passion, and relates these two to one another. The suffering involved in the continual return of the unfulfilled promises of spring and dawn produces cynicism or anguish, or resignation to the necessity for a final cataclysm. The mystical fulfilment symbolised by the night, like that of noon, may not ultimately protect against the enigmatic message of dawn. The correspondence of the mind with the times and seasons of nature as a foundation for the representation of human life produces a satisfyingly complex, rather than merely schematic, study of human experience and emotion.

3. The conclusion of Poems

Brennan chose to finish Poems on a positive note. The first of the Epilogues, “1897”, has been discussed in Chapter One. Unlike almost all of the Poems, the second Epilogue, too, has a title, “1908”. In this piece, Brennan presents a conclusion to his livre composé whose hopeful tone is 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) 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 dream and the promise of Eden are brought into the perspective of lived experience and identification with other human beings. This perspective is very much in accord with sentiments expressed in relation to George Meredith in the Symbolism lectures, written

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73 Daley uses “Amaranth” as the title of one of the poems in the collection From Dawn to Dusk, discussed earlier in this chapter.
74 For a discussion of this somewhat romanticised view of the university, see Clark, Biography 259-60.
The tram-journey in the poem is taking the speaker (justifiably taken as Brennan himself in this poem) towards “yon four-turreted square tower” (l.5) of Sydney University, where Brennan was a casual lecturer at the time, teaching Latin and Modern Literature (200-1). On the way, the tram passes “the plain obt truncate chancel” of St Benedict’s Church, which provides the occasion for a reflection on Brennan’s experiences within that congregation. His description of the atmosphere and community of that church, and of Christ himself, is warm, 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” (ll.51-2). These lines complete the long verse-paragraph in which they appear, establishing a consistent tone. The next paragraph expresses Brennan’s revulsion against the doctrine of Hell, “that grim maw /and lazar-pit that reek’d beneath” (ll.54-5). The word “beneath” attacks the very foundations of the Dantean imagery of transcendence 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?” (ll.57-8).

The remaining lines of this important verse-paragraph, the fourth of the poem, present more overtly 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 (ll.63-4), 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). What he finds is “that hard atom of the soul, /that final grain of deathless mind” (ll.68-9). The word “atom” implies an inability to be further reduced, but the succeeding lines go on to suggest that something which may be known is actually within it. What we are dealing with is something “deathless”, that is, either not subject to mortality or able to survive death. The aspiration towards discovering such a quality within the human being should be considered in the light of Frederick Myers’ search for empirical evidence that something, but not the soul as conceived by Christian tradition,
might survive bodily death, as discussed in Chapter One. Brennan’s atom is “stubborn”, that is, presumably, resistant (I.73); in I.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 (we should recall the gems of the “Liminal”, discussed in the previous chapter, which preserve the light and beauty of spring and summer).

The power to probe within the “hard atom of the soul” is supplied by the “guarded ray” (I.80). As Chisholm points out, this phrase is a translation of “luce abdita”, which appeared in association with the epigraph to “The Wanderer” when first published in Hermes (1902). There, Brennan attributed the four lines of Latin verse to “Frater Basilius de Luce Abdita”. 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. However, there is 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. A.E. 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”. Perhaps Brennan was deliberately trying to cover his tracks, or perhaps he had forgotten the source of the name “Frater Basilius”. Whatever the explanation, the association with 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 which had illuminated his religious and metaphysical quest.

Thus, the “guarded ray” of the traditions of Gnosticism, Alchemy, Neoplatonism and Rosicrucianism discussed in this and earlier chapters of this thesis, 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. As Chapters Two and Three have shown, this notion is also important in German Romantic thinking, and in theories of the unconscious mind, such as those of Hartmann, which developed out of Romantic psychology. Mallarmé’s reference to “la divinité

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76 See page 27.
77 Brennan, Verse 263.
78 See R.G. Howarth, “The Wanderer of the Ways of All the Worlds”, Southerly 10 (1949): 238; capitalisation of the Latin is as given there.
79 See Chisholm’s note in Brennan, Verse 263.
80 Yeats, Secret Rose [Variorum] 129. This story is discussed in Chapter Four.
inscrite au fond de notre cœur”, discussed in Chapter Four, is another version of the notion of an inner divinity. According to “1908”, “the guarded ray /broke on my eagerness”, supplemented by “the lucid diamond-probe” of Brennan’s own (formidable) intellect (ll.80-82). These two forms of insight, applied to the quest for the higher self, were supplemented by “the extreme /blind vehemence of travailing dream” (ll.83-4). In the phrase “driving it behind”, the subject of “driving” must be “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. 81

“Dream” should be taken to refer to the “paradisal instinct” represented in “Towards the Source”, discussed in detail above, 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 déparées par le malheur”. 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 not subject to mortality and mutability (“Eden, clad in nuptial morn, /young, fair, and radiant with delight /remorse nor sickness shall re quite”, ll.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 is another example) as well as “a state, an age, a country”, and by the time of writing what became the article on German Romanticism (1909-10) Brennan was expressing strong misgivings about the kinds of thinking which continually hark back to a past Eden or Golden Age. 82 “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 the time process:

Yes, Eden was my own, my bride;
whatever malices denied,

81 McAuley agrees with this reading of the syntax, commenting: “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 travailing dream’)” (Christopher Brennan 39).

82 See page 209 above.
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 (ll.91-6).

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” (ll.98-100)."Cipangos" is an old name for the islands of Japan. See Dyce, "An Assessment of the Poetry of Christopher Brennan" 309. A similar sentiment is expressed in the following statement about Novalis made by Brennan in the article on German Romanticism:

It is [...] an inexorable demand of the romantic theory and characteristic of Novalis himself, that, the more mystical the ultimate becomes, 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."

The process of “hard and continuous reflexion” is the “thought” of l.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”, has a similar import.

Brennan does not, however, represent his “high attempt” (l.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?”, ll.56-7). 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” (ll.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”, 1.12) and new (“the electrics’ ghastly blue”, 1.14), emphasises the particularity of time and place of the poem’s setting, but at the same time demonstrates the universal tendency of human beings - which takes on a religious aspect - to congregate in the light. Although the people are seen to be following a “delusive dream” (l.24), there is no round condemnation of the delusion, as in some earlier poems with a prophetic or apocalyptic tone, but the dream is seen as the expression of “their unwitting need /one with my own, however dark” (ll.26-7), and their destination a common one (“questing towards one mother-ark”, l.28).

83 The “Cipangos” is an old name for the islands of Japan. See Dyce, "An Assessment of the Poetry of Christopher Brennan" 309.
84 "Prose" 391.

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Thus, the reassessment of the Eden symbol made 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 (II.113-18).

The daily experience represented in the poem will be repeated many times, and the
"striving" (I.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 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? (161)

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 which 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”. 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. This chapter has

85 C.J. Brennan, “Translation of Mallarmé’s Toast funèbre”, Southerly 10 (1949). See further discussion
of Brennan’s annotations to this poem on page 157. Brennan’s comment in an undated fragment of a
letter to Dowell O’Reilly, “if you only knew that the reason why I gave up writing is that I thought it a
better thing to apply your Art to your own Life than to make it a thing apart”, seems to be a further
expression, or perhaps development, of the sentiment of this poem (Sturm 396).
demonstrated that the structure of *Poems* as a whole, as well as the themes, atmosphere and tones of its component pieces, accomplishes the “assimilation of our inmost passion to the tetralogy of the year”. To do this is indeed to “give earth a sense”, to reveal its spiritual aspect in its correspondence with the human experience. Brennan has carried out Mallarmé’s aspiration, which he interprets in the light of Romantic emphases on the marriage of the mind and Nature and the role of art in embodying the Absolute, as well as the contemporary search for new forms of religious expression. The entire work has a liturgical aspect, celebrating the correspondence of the Passion of humanity with the drama of natural cycles. The symbol of the rose, in its various manifestations, is a dominant motif supporting the union of mind and Nature accomplished by the poetic enterprise itself.
Conclusion

Rather than a "quest for Eden", a "failed" quest, or a solipsistic or narcissistic exploration of a single self, Brennan's *Poems* is an ambitious attempt to give imaginative expression to the union of the mind and Nature which, in the climate of scepticism or loss of faith in traditional Christianity of Brennan's own time, took the place, for him, of other objects of belief.

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 Boehmian Sophia, the original, archetypal self-consciousness or "mirror" of the godhead, the divine imagination. 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, with an inherent ambiguity, since nature can appeal to the human imagination, the inner evidence of our divine status, in two conflicting ways. Nature can either entrap the human mind in purely sensuous, physical existence, or can direct the 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 between the human mind and the external world, subject and object, brought about by rationality, and their possible reintegration, particularly evident in the writings of Novalis, help us understand the ultimately simple requirement Lilith makes of humanity, to "find her fair". To do so is to reunite mind and Nature and thereby glimpse or momentarily achieve the higher or transcendent self.

The exhortation in the "Lilith" sequence to turn to the "abyss" within should be understood in terms of pre-Romantic and Romantic, and mystical and esoteric, notions of an inner Absolute. German Romantic thinking about the reunification of subject and object and the relationship of the phenomenal self to the noumenon sets out from the "transcendental self" and the "absolute ego" posited by Kant and Fichte respectively; it is also indebted to alchemical and mystical notions of a rebirth or regeneration of the inner spark of the divine. 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 thought of as a possible substitute for the God of Christianity in a "religion of humanity". The turn to the inner "abyss" is only part of a process which continues with a turn to the outer
world. This is an important emphasis of Novalis and Schleiermacher. 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 union with Nature and the transitory achievement of the transcendental self.

According to Kant and others, the imagination is the only faculty which is able to intuit the noumenon, and the imaginative work of art, by its use of objects of the external world as symbols of the absolute, is uniquely able to give it expression. Brennan uses the term “moods” to refer to the union of inner and outer worlds which 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 way of thinking of the natural daily and seasonal cycles as myth; he also found what he took to be a “correspondence” between nature and human emotion. This 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 Brennan took from Les Dieux antiques, and elsewhere in the works of Mallarmé, 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 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, functioning as preludes in the work as a whole, 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, spring and dawn themselves are seen to be ambiguous or deceptive in their promise.

The final epilogue, “1908”, brings the themes and concerns of the entire work into perspective. The poet considers his own individual religious choices in the light of a 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 of which he is part. His own private exploration of the “guarded ray” of esoteric traditions, assisted by rigorous intellectual scrutiny, has brought useful insights into the inner, higher self. However, such exploration can, of necessity, provide only transient glimpses of the Absolute. The optimism of the epilogue is founded in the here-and-now, in the circumstances and experiences of ordinary life.

Brennan’s work is worthy of being known more widely, not just in Australia but internationally. I hope that the examination of Brennan’s Poems offered in this thesis will help to achieve this.
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