

THE SYMBOLISM OF C. J. BRENNAN.

A study of Brennan's symbolic practice in Poems 1913.

by

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(ii)

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text.

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CHAPTER ONE . INTRODUCTION AND AIMS.

Every poet stands for trial by the new generation: continual effort is demanded, for not until we have examined all the evidence at our disposal, are we fit to judge. In Brennan's case, an effort greater than usual is required, for though the body of his poetry is not large, a considerable amount of extraneous material surrounds it. Our way is obscured at the outset by an army of exegetical writings. The ultra-serious modern critics of Brennan, who tend to regard the whole matter as that difficult and many-sided subject, the "Poetry of C.J. Brennan", analyse it in parts, with detailed explications de texte. For instance G.A. Wilkes's study New Perspectives on Brennan's Poetry⁽¹⁾ is thorough and well-executed, an indispensable aid to the student of Brennan. Wilkes is, as much as any scholar now living, an expert in the field: but does he finally come to grips with the poems themselves?

It is clear that what much recent criticism of Brennan fails to supply is an evaluation of the verse; and so from the outset this was my final goal. But how was that goal to be achieved?

A primary glance at the verse revealed that the "difficulty" of Brennan was not all in the eyes of the critic. Even after I had decided to limit my efforts to the most important sequence in the Verse,⁽²⁾ that is to Poems 1913, I found there was an involved textual history. To be properly understood each of these poems must be traced to its very sources and all the subsequent alterations studied, to show how the sequence was evolved; and this study can become a complete subject in itself. I began to envisage fanciful chapter-headings: "The Birth-Pangs of

'Towards the Source'", "The Mutations of 'Lilith'," "The Gestation of 'The Wanderer'," and in fact my first proposed thesis was the testing of Wilkes's statement, which he spends most of New Perspectives in trying to prove, that Poems 1913 is a "unitary structure" (p.12) and a single poem.

Wilkes makes clear for us the nature of Brennan's structural intentions, describing very precisely the way in which "Lilith" became the centre of "The Forest of Night"; how Brennan in 1897 had already begun to envisage "Lilith" as part of a "second and enlarged edition wherein the unity of the book shall be more apparent" (pp.15-16);⁽³⁾ and so by dint of well-chosen quotations he woos us to his thesis.

Yet it seems to me that there are in "The Forest of Night" many excellent little pieces, complete in themselves, which can be interpreted without their relationship to the whole being established and indeed of better quality than those which do contribute to the "single poem". Such for instance is the "Tomb" poem (31)⁽⁴⁾ at the beginning of that section. We can see little connection between this and earlier or later poems, in terms of imagery or theme. We could perhaps argue that the motif of "leaves" which pervades the poem is taken up again from the "Source" poem (4); but it is noticeable that there "leaves" are being used to denote death and decay, the despair of the poet unable to recover a golden past:

I see my dreams dead colours, one by one
while here the leaves are "watchful flame", the poet's glorious
assumption-pyre, ablaze with colour.

The piece was written for a particular occasion, the death of Mallarmé, and is a conscious development of that poet's ideas of absence and silence in the creative process. It is a theme which finds no

correspondence in the whole of Poems 1913. We can only conclude that "Red autumn" exists in its own right as a compliment to another poet,⁽⁵⁾ and as a successful piece of artistry. It is quite independent of the rest of the poems, for it follows through and achieves a single unique mood: that I think is a proof of its success.

Let us take on the other hand the poem which begins a subsection of "The Forest of Night", (49) of "The Quest of Silence". Here we find a lamentable diffuseness, a failure to create a unity of image, mood and theme. Obviously the poet is attempting to fit the piece into the whole series, for in the first stanza he carries on the mood of silvery enchantment already established in the "Holda" prelude:

not here the innocence of morn is fled:
 this green unbroken dusk attests it wed
 with freshness . . .

So far although the diction is somewhat stilted, that mood is achieved. But after this, some strange syntactical dislocation occurs:

. . . where the shadowy breasts are nude,

 hers guess'd, whose looks, felt dewy-cool, elude -
 save this reproach that smiles on foolish dread:
 wood-word, grave gladness in its heart, unsaid,
 knoweth the guarded name of Quietude.

We may well wonder what has happened to produce this curiously crippled verse. But if we go to the original version of the poem as it appeared in The Australian Magazine (29 April, 1899) we find, ironically, that it is the direct result of Brennan's attempt to improve the piece, to polish it up and make its place in the whole sequence more apparent.

In the earlier version of the poem Brennan made no attempt to run the last line of the first stanza on to the first line of the second. For the first two lines of stanza two he contented himself with this:

Unto that dewy eyed rebuke intrude

not riot, nor the mad world's foolish red.

Although there is a certain crudeness and imperfection about that opening,⁽⁶⁾ it is at least relevant to the whole mood of the poem. For instance "the mad world's foolish red" corresponds to the first line of the poem "What tho' the outer day be brazen rude", hence it adds to our impression of the forest as a quiet sanctified place shut away from the strife of everyday existence.

Brennan in his alterations to the poem was clearly hoping for a greater sophistication; hence he abandoned those two lines we have just discussed and used the run-on technique, with the result that the second stanza went awry. The poem as it was first published is in fact superior to the final version. So far then we cannot dispute Wilkes's contention that Brennan intended to create in the verse a symphonic whole. But it is by no means clear that his attempts at artistic unity always succeeded. When it is placed beside the self-contained "Tomb" poem,⁽⁴⁹⁾ pales indeed.

No. 49 illustrates too another difficulty in our consideration of Poems 1913 as "a single poem". As we have seen it was first published autonomously and before Brennan had begun to envisage "The Quest of Silence" as a subsection tributary to "Lilith". It was later amended and fitted in, but still contains certain features peculiar to itself. We do not find anywhere else in this area of Poems 1913 so much loaded archaism, such an overcrowded heraldic picture.⁽⁷⁾ Besides, who is this figure of Quietude? Does she correspond in some way to the "lost Undine" of "Towards the Source"⁽¹⁾

or Holda of the previous poem? Does she in some dim way, prefigure Lilith?

It seems more likely that Brennan is overcrowding his canvas, uncertain of what he is working towards. As James McAuley points out, Brennan is deliberately fitting pieces into a whole devised only after they were written. Poems 1913 "really represents only a broken arc of his whole life-cycle; and even that arc is constituted by the careful mosaic-work of fitting disparate pieces into a frame."⁽⁸⁾ Wilkes claims that "To have deduced from the manuscripts, the structural unity of his project, is to have disposed of half the difficulties of Poems 1913" (p.23). I think that, on the contrary, a study of the manuscripts only serves to emphasize its difficulty. The numerous sections and sub-sections of "The Forest of Night": "The Twilight of Disquietude", "The Quest of Silence", "The Shadow of Lilith", "The Labour of Night" with its subsections "Twilights of the Gods and the Folk" and "The Womb of Night" tend to obscure the real centre of the poems, which is "Lilith". Some of the sections too contain only a handful of poems, "The Shadow of Lilith" (previously to consist of five poems)⁽⁹⁾ has only two.

The many plans, proposed earlier versions and constant rearrangement of the poems show I think a certain self-consciousness and lack of assurance on Brennan's part. They are as it were, over-organized. Apart from the centre I have suggested, a great number of pieces float rather uneasily. We feel they could be placed in a different part of the whole sequence without causing a major disturbance to the disposition of images and themes.⁽¹⁰⁾ Some poems such as (49), discussed above, could be removed altogether without damaging the symphonic whole. So out of the discussion of textual alteration the question arises: is Poems 1913 as we have it in the perfect and final order which Brennan intended?

Finally, although I had been tempted for a while to share Wilkes's preoccupation with the architecture of Poems 1913 it was an approach that I now abandoned as fruitless. It seems to me he is indulging in a little wishful thinking when he asks us to read the series as a "single poem". He has shown the design which Brennan had in mind for the poems, and his remarks can be supported from the Prose.⁽¹¹⁾ But that design was never achieved.

I am not suggesting that the future editor of Brennan should take upon himself the task of removing or rearranging any of the poems. If Poems 1913 is published again I should not like to see any of the pieces omitted, for it is in this imperfect whole that we must view the poet's achievement. But clearly the study of textual alterations does not provide a satisfactory approach to our interpretation of the sequence. We must look further than this.

What other approaches can we find to Poems 1913? A considerable body of material, letters, documents and notes relating to Brennan's life, lies in the Mitchell Library waiting to be handled. A second field then awaits the student of Brennan, that of biographical conjecture, of reading Poems 1913 as Brennan's spiritual biography. No one so far has undertaken the full task of a biographer. J.J. Quim, although he collected data for it, never began his intended life of Brennan. A.R. Chisholm's "Biographical Introduction" to the Verse is excellent within limits, chronologically presenting the significant facts of Brennan's life in an intelligent and illuminating way: but it makes no attempt to relate these facts to the work.

I do feel that an understanding of Brennan's life just as much as

a thorough knowledge of the textual history of the poems is an essential part of our search for their meaning. And I insist upon this despite McAuley's claim that "Brennan matters today to the extent that his work matters"; the rest, the legend surrounding the poet-bohemian should be dismissed as "a set of tiresome clichés"(5). It is true that we should as far as possible ignore the Brennan "legend", as an obstruction to a proper criticism of the poems, and the legend, with which we are all too familiar, I do not propose to discuss. However the question of biography surely deserves more time and consideration than McAuley gives it when he relegates all the details of Brennan's life to a dry and abbreviated summary on the first couple of pages of his study.⁽¹²⁾ If a façade of legend has been built around the poet, then surely it is our job to break it down and see what really lies behind?

As a further proof of such a need, we might note a distinction between the older and the more recent critics of Brennan in their approach to the biographical question. It seems to me that the older critics, perhaps because they knew Brennan or were of his times and therefore more aware of him as a living artist, made much more honest and straightforward attempts to come to grips with the poetry. P.I.O'Leary, Chisholm, and even A.G. Stephens, despite his sweeping condemnations of the verse (perhaps the most famous is his calling it "a bush that smoulders but never really burns"),⁽¹³⁾ all had a feeling and a sympathy for Brennan which went no little way towards helping them understand his work. And they were not afraid of making evaluations on a personal basis.⁽¹⁴⁾

This kind of procedure is anathema to the modern critic, ideally dispassionate in his judgments. But the result has too often been that

no judgment is made at all. The thesis I began to formulate then was this: that an understanding of Brennan's life is essential to our understanding of the verse. It is just this kind of sympathy and understanding that the modern critics fail to bring to their reading. Yet we find very often in their writings mysterious comments to the effect that Brennan's poetry is "personal". Cecil Hadgraft, an historian of Australian Literature feels much as McAuley, that we should be wary as Brennan can be misconceived on account of the very striking appearance he presented, "If he was large in personality and learning, then it was tempting to suppose that his poetry would correspond in stature."⁽¹⁵⁾ Yet later in the same essay he says of the poems, "A power of personality pervades all."⁽¹⁶⁾ McAuley also, in his study, speaks of Poems 1913 as "a brooding monody", having a band of "intimately personal" significance(p.12).

Nearly all the critics of Brennan, dispassionate or otherwise, have at some stage in their writings said or implied that the poetry is personal. Yet they are curiously loth to divulge in what ways it is personal, or why. It seems then that they are evading discussion of a question they have raised themselves. If Brennan's poetry is self-absorbed, then surely at least one way to approach it is through the poet himself?

Jack Lindsay writes in retrospect: "Brennan if not a fully great poet, had many elements of greatness."⁽¹⁷⁾ I do not think it is possible to disagree with that statement; for, putting the legend aside, we must acknowledge the question of greatness is still being raised about Brennan and as long as it is raised, then he will have to be given the kind of attention we give to all memorable artists. Lindsay continues: "For this reason all the significant details of his life are of the utmost interest. He is big enough to need and demand the most searching

light on all his deeds."

What are the "significant details" of Brennan's life? Is Brennan really so inaccessible, so buried in legend that we cannot dig him out? I suggest the first question that needs discussing is "In what respects does Brennan belong to his day and age?" He wrote of himself as reaching "vague hands of sympathy/ a ghost upon this common earth" (34). He was writing this, we should remember, in Australia and here he lived his whole life apart from a brief sojourn in Germany from June 1892 until August 1894: and those are the dates of his departure and return. In all, the period of his absence amounts to less than two years. Yet against what background is Brennan usually placed? It is French, or German or English, but rarely Australian. Moreover Brennan wrote most of his verse in the late eighteen-nineties and the very early years of the new century. The "nineties" then might be said to form the background of Poems 1913. These were the "golden days" of the Bulletin, and literary activities were sprouting and spreading along with economic enterprise and political theories.⁽¹⁸⁾ In 1898, the year in which Brennan first began to envisage "Lilith", Brereton wrote: "This is the year of magazines - a meteoric shower. I hear rumours of new Sydney magazines nearly every day."⁽¹⁹⁾ In the first years of the new decade Brennan began to write for these, pieces later to be included in Poems 1913; so, although his academic interests were strongly specialized, he was well aware of what went on in Australian literary circles.

But the literary historians have made little or no attempt to establish or question Brennan's Australian identity. Cecil Hadgraft lumps him with seven succeeding poets into one chapter bearing the rather inane title "The New Century: First Harvest of Poetry". Brennan is hardly

considered against any background at all.

This first question we have raised is perhaps not relevant to the discussion of the "personal" nature of Poems 1913. We are moving closer to that, in the next area of consideration which presents itself from the maze of vague commentary surrounding the poetry: and that is the question of Brennan's scholarship. Throughout the history of criticism of the verse we find a stream of insinuations that Brennan's learning in some way interfered with his poetry or prevented him from being a proper poet. A.G. Stephens quoted Johnson on Dryden that he "studied, rather than felt" and he described Brennan's mind as being "like a Museum, Art Gallery and Public Library rolled into one."⁽²⁰⁾ He called the poems "an apparatus of patient craft that seldom becomes an artistic engine"⁽²¹⁾; but as he does not really get down to discussing in what ways this deficiency results from the poet's scholarship, or how the scholarship is related to Brennan's art as a poet, we cannot regard his comments as either relevant or important.

Another early critic, B. Stevens, wrote: "In Brennan the scholar has half-choked the poet."⁽²²⁾ This is one of the first instances of a critic using Brennan's scholarship as an adverse judgment upon his art; but without taking any trouble to refer to the poetry itself. Thus, his point loses much of its intended force. Then, we find the type of remark upon Brennan's scholarship which serves as a kind of polite introduction to remarks upon the poetry. The critic evades the discussion of the latter, which is evidently beyond his comprehension, but "rewards" Brennan, as it were, by saying he was a learned gentleman. Thus Nettie Palmer writes in a review of Randolph Hughes's book: "Brennan emerges from the study as a great if frustrated man, a great if almost

unacknowledged scholar and a most uneven poet."⁽²³⁾

The latest contribution to this confused hotchpotch of criticism is A.L. French's article,⁽²⁴⁾ in which he speaks of the "International Fallacy" with regard to Brennan. He suggests that Australian critics have wanted to find "a poet of international stature: he is expected to be difficult, foreign and to require deep study." When we have pierced behind the façade of learning, French contends, we find a very poor and imitative poet. It is "vagueness masquerading as profundity." The remarks in general show French virtually accusing Brennan of surrounding himself in the poems with an air of scholarly obscurity. But the evidence he uses to support his argument that Brennan is not a good scholar, is exceedingly weak⁽²⁵⁾ and as he fails to show the relationship of his thesis to the actual verse we can only conclude that any "Fallacy" that exists is invented by French himself and forms no useful contribution to the criticism of Poems 1913.

It is from misconceptions such as these that the legend of Brennan's "difficulty" has arisen. Just as the question of his Australian identity has been evaded, so has his "scholarship" been allowed to obscure the proper personal and critical issues that surround the poetry. It will be for his biographer to sort out this confusion of different roles the critics have seen in Brennan: the poet, the scholar and the man. But I am sure this is not the kind of confusion Brennan meant when he wrote:

The years that go to make me man
this day are told a score and six
that should have set me magian
o'er my half-souls that struggle and mix. (34)

This is from one of the few pieces in Poems 1913 that are frankly

autobiographical and it shows that Brennan saw himself as an enigma. So we come to our innermost biographical concern, the poet himself.

A.R. Chisholm in his "Biographical Introduction" has already given us a coherent account of the life and career, and it is unnecessary to repeat those facts in this context. Our concern is to reach an understanding of the text of Poems 1913 and since our brief review of the historical and scholarly approaches to Brennan's biography failed to bring us any closer, I attempted to isolate certain facets of Brennan which seemed to relate to the form and the themes of the poems. Could we go a step further than Chisholm, by conjecturing that there is an intimate linking between the life and the work, and that the one can be used to illuminate the other?

We could perhaps begin with the rather general and perhaps sweeping view of Brennan that there is in the man a strange remoteness, a diffidence; a lack of will, or of vision which seems to lie deep in him. He is unable to see anything in life, and least of himself, as a whole. But there seems little point in simply presenting the "enigma". Could we perhaps see a connection between our view of the poet, and his admission of metaphysical failure in Poems 1913: the search for and eventual loss of Eden, which forms his central theme? Our most suitable starting-point then would be the German episode which is the background to his writing of those pieces later to begin the whole sequence as "Towards the Source". In 1892 Brennan set off on a travelling Scholarship to Berlin, a renowned centre of classical studies. He had already established for himself a promising if somewhat perverse University record⁽²⁶⁾ and before he left had completed an M.A. with honours⁽²⁷⁾.

Brennan arrived in Germany with practically no knowledge of the language; but he had come there, after all, to study in Greek and Latin.

So far, the picture is coherent enough. But what did Brennan really do in Germany? The autobiographical notes are extremely obscure. He speaks of what he read and saw, "loafed and invited my soul, haunted picture galleries, operas, beer shops, meadows, woods" (p.33). That facetious phrase "loafed and invited my soul" seems characteristic. Brennan in fact was hotly engaged in two pursuits that were to profoundly affect the rest of his life: wooing Elisabeth Werth, and reading Mallarmé with all the devotion of a fanatic.

Now anyone who has studied Mallarmé knows what considerable labours are required on the reader's part. Chisholm records that Brennan would not rest until he had obtained all Mallarmé's poems that mattered. He bought a copy of Vers et Prose and had "this volume interleaved and copied into it all the other poems by Mallarmé that he could trace."⁽²⁸⁾ But if Brennan was seeking to further his career he could hardly have done worse. He failed to attend lectures by well-known Professors and nearly lost his Scholarship.

At the end of his stay in Germany, what were the alternatives that would have presented themselves to Brennan? We cannot help wondering why he never took the opportunity of visiting France, where his chief literary interests now lay. The study of the French poets was to lead him nowhere on his return.⁽³⁰⁾ All his cultural outlook was turned towards the Old World, and the best resources available there, of books and men. By returning to Australia and a dismal job as a cataloguer Brennan was in fact isolating himself from his true "centre", his cultural home.⁽³¹⁾

One fairly irrevocable event had occurred in Germany however. Brennan was betrothed to Anna Elisabeth Werth and probably the necessity

of preparing a home for his bride hastened his return. Once again it is tempting to speculate on a "might-have-been" basis, for as Colin Roderick points out the course of the future could have been very different had Brennan stayed in Germany, or Elisabeth come sooner.⁽³²⁾ Undoubtedly during the period of their separation Brennan built up such an idyll from his memory of the beloved that Helen of Troy herself arriving in Sydney at the end of these two years would have been a shattering anticlimax.

What relationship has this very personal issue to Poems 1913? It has a great deal in fact, for it is generally supposed that Brennan wrote in the first section an account of his separation from the loved one and his anticipation of their reunion and nuptial fulfilment. But as the autobiographical notes show⁽³³⁾, an annoying vagueness surrounds the whole German period. It is as if Brennan is deliberately trying to obscure those days of courtship and pretend they never were. We are in the curious position then of seeing actuality only through the art that Brennan devised around it. But in the "Source" poems we find too an obscurity, for they shift continually from reality to dream. They seem "real" enough in their registering of simple romantic emotions of nostalgia for a lost past, and longing for a distant fair one, yet they bear an uneasy relation to reality. T.I. Moore presents a typically simplified view of the themes of "Towards the Source": "the spirit is fresh and joyful, the air that of morning youth, with love and beauty of Nature as the main themes".⁽³⁴⁾ It is true that some poems of the first phase⁽³⁵⁾ do have a "fresh and joyful spirit". "Sweet Silence after Bells", and "Dies Dominica" for instance, are expressions of hope and faith, and they are filled with an imagery of light. But Brennan is describing here a visionary experience on the level of cosmic dream, which it would be very hard to pin down to

the year of courtship in Germany; while other early pieces are a plain expression of his ennui:

Where star-cold and the dread of space

in icy silence bind the main

I feel but vastness on my face,

I sit, a mere incurious brain (5)

in which the beloved is not present at all.

Again, the middle phase of "Towards the Source" fails to fit into the framework of themes suggested by Moore. "Under a sky of uncreated mud" is an expression of Brennan's revolt against his unhappy imprisonment in the Library, on his return. The stinking, sullen well into which he thinks to sink at the end, is very far removed from the "source", "free and clear", to which the lovers are supposed to be aspiring (18). Through all this section the mood of ennui widens and intensifies beyond an affected poetic "soul sickness" (as in 5) to a sense of a "poisoned world" (10), suggesting the consequences of the Fall upon all men. It is a despair which no beloved could allay: that is if the "source maiden" hinted at in "A Prelude" were still present in these poems; but she is not.

Do we anywhere in "Towards the Source" receive a definite impression that Brennan is writing for, or of, or to his beloved? In the last "phase" which is more coherent than the preceding two, Brennan has clearly made a conscious attempt to create the picture of a pair of lovers. In "Deep mists of longing" (16) for instance he imagines their hands are joining:

almost I think your hand might leave

its old caress upon my hand

and in the next poem the dream becomes more visual, the beloved is almost

given body:

then sure it were no surprise

to find thee beside me sitting, the pitying eyes of old. . . .

But the beloved of "Towards the Source" remains always elusive and wrapped in dream. We may catch her in glimpses of "hands" and "eyes", but at the end she is surrounded by "dim fields of fading stars"(27). She is the Melusina or "lost Undine" of "A Prelude"; she is the sister or "Psyche" seeking with the poet a dim garden-goal (11); she is a "low-laughing child" lost in dreams of poppies, violets and golden meadows (19) or, as in (20), enveloped in darkness, folding the poet to her heart in "some long-gone kingdom". She is always a figure of dream and apart from those few tantalizing glimpses of actuality that we have discussed, impossible to grasp.

Add to this the difficulty of identifying the "I", the persona of the poems⁽³⁶⁾ and we can only conclude that the poet is constructing in "Towards the Source" an artful dream, a wished-for world that bears only some relation to the "single year" (28) in Germany and is for the rest deliberately vague and melancholy because that is his mood.

In "Towards the Source" Brennan has only two serious preoccupations; one is with the search for Eden, and the other with himself:

My home is in a broader day
at times I catch it glistening
thro' the dull gate, a flower'd play
an odour of undying spring. (25) &

The "Source" poems then provide an unsatisfactory comment upon the incident of Brennan's courtship but they are not irrelevant to his life for in them we can already see that search for perfection, to grasp the "undying

spring" of love and art, and that unwillingness to hold and enjoy the reality of the present, which will form the very basis of his personal unhappiness and lead in time to the creation of "Lilith". "Towards the Source" does not end, as Wilkes suggests with "a sense of nuptial consummation"⁽³⁷⁾; it ends with disenchantment, a foretaste of the restlessness and sense of cosmic failure that pervades the whole of Poems 1913. We see the poet forced forward into the unknown, always engaged in a search for the harmony of Eden, and in this search the beloved of the Source is accorded a very small part. Brennan except in "Towards the Source" is preoccupied little with the ordinary things of life and even here "there is something that breaks through the containing framework; a high metaphysical quality that foretells emotional disaster; for what woman will accept the cosmos as a rival?"⁽³⁸⁾

We might end our biographical speculations about "Towards the Source" on a less serious note but one no less typical of Brennan than Chisholm's comment. Among the "dream of love" poems of the last phase is one which records the actual voyage of the beloved to these shores ("Spring breezes o'er the blue"- 26). That, so far as I can see, is its only significance for it is not a successful poem. How characteristic it is of Brennan that he confused the dates and neglected to meet the boat, so that his prospective bride, with practically no English at her command, was obliged to find her way to him at the University.⁽³⁹⁾

Anna Elisabeth Werth arrived in Australia late in 1897, and was married to Brennan in December. Most of "Towards the Source" had been written, and he was beginning to envisage "The Forest of Night" with "Lilith" as its centre. It never ceases to amaze me that all this text of nightmare, frustrated metaphysical dream and disillusioned love was written

during the very early years of Brennan's married life. Yet we know even less of those years than of the German period, for Brennan did not mix his public and private lives, and even in his public life was something of a recluse. Much of what we say about his personal life as background to the reading of "Lilith" must be based on sheer conjecture. We assume that he was unhappily married, for a contented man could not have written this "terrible" poetry: but we should not of course suppose that his nuptial disillusionment alone caused the creation of "Lilith". The nuptial theme though important and even central, is not the only theme of the poems; and Lilith is after all an "established" mythical figure whose legend was handled by other poets⁽⁴⁰⁾ of the nineteenth century.

How then would we conduct a biographical reading of "Lilith"? It is by no means so simple a case as that of "Towards the Source", where it is clear that most of what Brennan did while in Germany, does not greatly affect the verse.⁽⁴¹⁾ Here, there is little biography or even biographical criticism to help us. As I mentioned earlier, A.R. Chisholm, Brennan's only biographer to date, does not attempt to relate the life to the work. But it is interesting to note that in an earlier "Biographical Introduction" to a proposed volume of "Collected Prose and Poems" Chisholm suggests that the story of Brennan and the plot of "Lilith" might be identified. He calls the Watcher "Brennan-Adam" and writes:

"Over the Eden of the bridegroom hung the imperious shadow of his genius, his detachment, his erudition, his nostalgic atavisms, his intellectual self-sufficiency . . . an aloof Hamlet had wed an earthly Ophelia; there could be no peace because there is no ultimate reconciliation possible between 'To Be' and 'Not to Be'."⁽⁴²⁾ There is in this a strong hint of melodrama which Chisholm now scrupulously avoids.⁽⁴³⁾

In his "Biographical Introduction" to the Verse he makes no judgment or conjecture about Brennan's marital affairs, and the omission seems conscious on Chisholm's part.

It is indeed tempting to be melodramatic on this subject, when we consider the contrast between Brennan's outwardly quiet, secluded, almost anonymous existence during these early years of marriage, and the gripping horror of what he was creating in "Lilith". Colin Roderick finds his sympathies engaged with Brennan to such an extent that he virtually identifies Elisabeth Werth with Lilith herself: "Brennan, back in Australia, bemoaned the absence of his ideal, the one destined so soon alas to be for him the incarnation of Lilith."⁽⁴⁴⁾ That interpretation is, of course, de trop; it is just the kind of reading of "Lilith" that we should avoid. For it is our aim to discover the meaning of the poetry, not to pass personal judgments on Brennan's wife.

A more cautious and sensible treatment of the question is given by James McAuley who quotes the difficult nuptial passage of "Lilith"(x), where Lilith comes between the Watcher and his bride. Here I give an extract from that passage:

he shall not know her nor her gentle ways
nor rest, content, by her sufficing source,
but, under stress of the veil'd stars, shall force
her simple bloom to perilous delight
adulterate with pain, some nameless night
stain'd with miasm of flesh become a tomb.

McAuley suggests there Brennan is bordering on an "anguished personal statement" (p.30) and I think he is right. Yet Brennan, if he is writing of his own situation, does everything to disguise it. The

innermost meaning, if it is there simply cannot be grasped, even after a number of readings. We can interpret the passage as I shall later show in terms of the imagery of its surrounding context. It is part of a developing train of images that suggest carnality, corruption and death. It can also be understood, to a certain extent, in the light of the first nuptial passage (in ix) between Lilith and the Watcher. However the merely "textual" reading will not explain all of the passage which is typically "ingrown" and suggestive of a tormented psychic condition; and McAuley even in this rather clinical and down-to-earth interpretation does not claim to have understood it all:

The passage has, I confess, some obscurities in its sinister force, as it seems to present the destructive effects on marital relationships of an exasperated sensuality, driven on by an unconscious rage for transcendental fulfilment. It may simply refer to a collision between an aroused male sensuality and the pure and 'innocent' i.e. unresponsive frigidity of the wife; and this is what I think it does mean, though it seems to hint at something darker and more perverse.(p.29)

This "sinister force" and this dark "perverse" quality seem to characterize much of the series and the discussion of this one passage opens up the whole question of how "Lilith" should be read. The curiously convoluted syntax which circles around the meaning, and almost hides it from us, suggests there may be something known only to Brennan at the very base of it, compelling him to write. Is he attempting to relieve his personal frustration and despair by projecting it into the vast cosmic frustration of "Lilith?" Is he using the myth for the outpouring of his soul? It is notable that in just those passages which

seem to contain this compulsive quality, where we feel his anguish the most strongly, there is the most obscurity. Should this obscurity be a warning to us not to delve too deeply into the verse for a meaning which Brennan did not intend should be brought to light?

Probably Lilith should be viewed as the vast mythical-divine creation of the poet's imagination, a figure in whom he is trying to encompass all the possibilities of joy and suffering. The "Argument" tells us he is writing of: -

her that is the august and only dread

close-dwelling, in the house of birth and death.

Clearly he is not writing of himself, his wife or any human individual. He is involved in the myth of Adam, Eve and Lilith, a myth with general significance for the human condition that refers not only to these players in it but to the whole of mankind since the Fall. As Wilkes says in New Perspectives it is a drama; "the whole is an action shaped to a result" (p.27). The poems then may be rooted in Brennan's private hell, they may be the outpouring of his frustrated soul but is not their final intended importance perhaps of a cosmic, universal order?

Yet can we ignore the enigma of "Lilith", that it is at once deeply personal and apparently impersonal? At this point I was obliged to problems of a biographical reading of "Lilith" unresolved for I could arrive at no conclusions.

By this stage of my consideration I had become very much aware of the difficulties involved in reading Poems 1913 as Brennan's spiritual biography. The procedure of relating an author's life to his work is always rather dangerous, and should only be undertaken by one with a precise knowledge of both subjects. Did I have enough material to undertake such a task?

In Brennan's case there is the added difficulty of the "psychic" element we have noted in "Lilith". It is tempting to dabble in speculations yet we must acknowledge that at certain points the "biographical" reading would shade off into psycho-analysis and for that I am not equipped.⁽⁴⁵⁾

But the advantages of reading the poems in this way were clear. An examination of the textual history of Poems 1913 had failed to reveal the unity which Brennan probably intended to create. But the biographical reading was one way of seeing Poems 1913 as a whole. We have already noted how the disenchantment with human love at the end of "Towards the Source" prepares the way for the cosmic anguish of "Lilith". Now could we complete the circle of meaning, relating Brennan's biography to the last section of the poems?

After "The Forest of Night" came the "Wanderer" and in that series Brennan does not pretend to describe anything but actuality.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Nevertheless "The Wanderer" is as much as the two earlier sections of Poems 1913 the record of Brennan's mental and spiritual development, and as such it has a personal import. It does seem at first a release from the knotted tensions of "The Forest of Night". That sequence ends on a note of anguish with the wish for total oblivion. Now a new note is taken up, superficially strident and stoical. There are new longer lines, a freer form of verse and little "symbolism" to contend with. It seems at last that Brennan is on the way to himself and returned into reality.

Yet a closer examination shows "The Wanderer" is pervaded with restlessness and uncertainty. No one mood prevails. The "Wanderer" at once asks us to pity him in his rootless state, and expresses his desire to leave the sheltering hearth (88). He envies those returning from

their sea voyage "glad of the shore", and longs to find oblivion "when waves are hard and rain blots out the land" (87). It is again the annoying vagueness of "Towards the Source". Despite the Wanderer's assertion at the end of the last poem, "I feel . . . a clear dusk settle, somewhere, far in me" I think we detect a deepening anguish on Brennan's part and a wish behind the dramatic pose for the total dissolution of self.

If that is the dominant note of "The Wanderer" then it is possible to view all three groups of poems, as a whole, as the result of Brennan's mental and spiritual dissolution. The youthful hope of retaining a paradise of love in "Towards the Source", the frustrated groping towards a mythical centre in "The Forest of Night" and the blankness and lack of direction in "The Wanderer" all reaffirm my theory (above, p.11) that Brennan's chief characteristic is his perversity. He is a man without a centre and this essential diffuseness is nowhere more apparent than in Poems 1913.

But the kind of reading we could conduct along these lines, even following through the quest of Eden as a central guide to the poems, might lead in the end to a completely negative judgment, if we can only see Brennan's metaphysical failure as the result of our reading. Moreover the problems of how to conduct the reading are still there in relation to "Lilith" and at that point I had to admit my defeat.

Therefore with some reluctance I abandoned the idea of capturing the man and the work together, as the approach I would take to Poems 1913. I still felt very strongly that to understand that sequence we must understand the "significant details" of Brennan's life. For this reason I have devoted a considerable space to discussing them but all these comments will serve only as introduction. There is an outstanding need

for a good biography of Brennan, as an essential background and companion to the poems. I hope this need will soon be fulfilled.

My next field of endeavour was an approach to Brennan through the various literary influences at work upon him; and so I found myself involved in that common critical tangle, the "problem of influence". Much recent writing on the subject of Poems 1913 has been concerned with detecting the existence and determining the extent of its author's borrowings. So much discussion has taken place in fact, that the criticism itself has added to the difficulty, presenting barriers that must be crossed before we are allowed to arrive at the poetry itself.

What is the nature of the "problem" I speak of? One of the best general discussions of the way in which influences may work upon a poet's mind, I found in Joseph Chiari's study of Mallarmé's relationship to Poe and to the Symbolist movement as a whole;⁽⁴⁷⁾ and it is from him that I borrow the phrase "the problem of influence".

Joseph Chiari takes the viewpoint, supporting himself from appropriate modern poets, that perhaps such a "problem" does not exist at all. He cites Valéry's comment that "Le contraire naît du contraire"⁽⁴⁸⁾. In other words, the same ideas are being used in poetry continually, and even if it is in reverse, we can see them being restated over and again. Valéry also said that he himself could never be sure who had "influenced" him, and how much. T.S. Eliot, also quoted by Chiari, supported Valéry in this matter of influence, for underlying most of his comments is uncertainty as to whether any direct influences work upon a poet. He writes "the greatest debts are not always the most evident,"⁽⁴⁹⁾ and he

saw this whole "problem of influence" as being integrated in a much vaster process: the conscious development of all poetry in "the growth of mind." No poetry is original; or if so then it is subjective and of no use. (50)

We do not expect these poets, who are really talking about their own work, to be objective. But Chiari, distilling his theory from theirs, presents a sensible enough "middle-of-the-road" argument. He suggests that the themes which preoccupy a creative artist, are his own. This does not mean that they were never used by other artists, but that all ideas in verse derive from the poet's own mind, his own experience; and in this way, he dismisses the problem.

But Chiari's discussion raises many interesting questions that directly relate to Brennan: he is a case of "influence" if ever there was one, who has been charged with "borrowing" from so many other poets that it is likely within the next few years of criticism, even the slightest suspicion of an imitation in his work will be given a microscopic attention. It would be fine indeed if we could credit Brennan with absolute originality but that would be dishonest, when it is clear that so many of the ideas and motifs in Poems 1913, even the central theme of a quest for Eden, have been suggested to him from outside sources. (51)

Chiari's "problem" then does not dismiss itself so easily in the case of Brennan. But his discussion is important to us in that it draws attention to the difficulties of establishing the precise nature of influences in any poet's work, in respect of the amount of "unconscious borrowing" that takes place between the artists of most ages. It is useful to view Brennan against this wide background of uncertainty: it warns us against making wild speculations, it shows us that some limits must be

fixed to our discussion: for there is something of a "hit-and-miss" quality about the question: "Who influenced Brennan?" If we excluded from our answer most poets previous to the nineteenth century and left in it all the nineteenth century English poets from Keats to Yeats, plus most of Brennan's French and German contemporaries in poetry and philosophy, we would not be clearly wrong. But the question does not involve a "right" and a "wrong". It involves an accurate study of the text in relation to all its possible sources; and it is doubtful whether any critic, however ardent and persevering after the truth, would have the time for such a study.

Putting aside for the present Chiari's discussion and the general questions it has evoked, we try to fix some limits to the discussion of influence in Brennan. It is natural enough to turn at this stage to those studies already made: what main lines have the detectors of influence taken? And in what way have their writings created a "barrier" to the reading of Brennan's verse?

First, to take a general view of these critics who concern themselves solely with Brennan's "influences"; it seems that their approach by excluding other possible interpretations, lacks a certain balance. Much recent discussion has sought to establish which influences bear the most weight in Poems 1913: whether it is the contemporary English poets (Rossetti, Patmore, Swinburne and sometimes Francis Thompson, are cited) or the French symbolists (Baudelaire, possibly Nerval and certainly Mallarmé are named). Generally a dash of "Die Romantik" is added to the ingredients, but grudgingly, except by German scholars who would of course prefer to regard Poems 1913 from their own angle. So much weighing has taken place, and so much deduced or guessed on the basis of evidence from

this poem or that - evidence heavily biased according to the critic's particular academic interest or field - that Poems 1913 has almost been lost from view. We find ourselves involved in a kind of "hunt" for influences and obliged to "take sides".

Now to look a little closer at the kind of criticism that is being produced along these lines, we find there is often a lamentable vagueness. For instance A.L. French in his article⁽⁵²⁾ compiles a catalogue of Brennan's borrowings. Brennan has "the City from Baudelaire, certain images - stars, roses, ice - from Mallarmé - the notion of the livre composé from almost any of the Symbolists, and the hieratic tone from almost anyone" (p.8). These he calls "specific" elements: I cannot see anything specific about them. His remarks are so broad and the tone of them so nonchalant as to be of little use to our discussion. He lists his items wholesale without attempting to illustrate in what ways they are used in the verse, or what their importance is to the text. This dangerously careless kind of generalization, clever but shallow, tries to reduce Brennan's achievement to nothing.

French is not only an example of the critic who uses the poet as his quarry; he also takes a "side" in the game, by insisting that Poems 1913 is essentially the product of English poetic influence. Brennan's poetic sensibility, he claims, is very much of his age: "it is late Victorian, and has been formed by Shelley, Keats, the pre-Raphaelites, Swinburne and minor figures like James Thompson and Coventry Patmore"⁽⁵³⁾. French allows his almost personal dislike for these poets to influence his opinion, without going into the detail necessary to back up such a broad discussion of borrowings. His article is called "The Verse of C.J.Brennan" and we would expect it, ultimately, to be about the Verse.

However French devotes most of his space to wild generalities supported from the Prose. For instance, Brennan called Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven" "one of the great religious poems of the world"⁽⁵⁴⁾ and French quotes this, throwing up his hands in horror: but I cannot see how Brennan's judgment, however rash we may think it, necessarily affects the writing of the verse.

The most interesting feature of French's discussion, however, is the way in which he justifies his view that Poems 1913 is predominantly English. He announces that: "we imagine that the difficulties would evaporate if we knew enough about the French Symbolists" (8). Does anyone seriously imagine that? Then, there is his rather unnecessary reminder that the poems were written in English: but in what ways would this render the foreign influence less important? Finally, there is his grand judgment that where the poetry is worst, there the French influence is most pronounced: but this is almost entirely unaided by fact, or reference to the actual text.

French's argument for the predominance of the English influence in Brennan's verse is weak, because the possibility of the opposite being true, has not been satisfactorily dismissed. James McAuley also taking the "English side", presents a far more rounded and convincing argument for it; he does also point to borrowings in Poems 1913 from Mallarmé and the French Symbolists and denotes their importance in the whole framework of imagery and themes. However in writing of its English sources he too shows a tendency to exaggerate, to dramatize his criticism at Brennan's expense:

From Francis Thompson . . ., come much of the besetting latinate inflation and aureate vocabulary - too often gilt rather than gold. From Coventry Patmore come his early attempts at the irregular ode, with the embarrassing false tone, the sickly domestic - cosy sentiment, the lush - plush -blush eroticism trying to achieve a sacramental character (9).

McAuley does give an example of all these, it is true, yet his judgment is sweeping and he errs in supposing that Brennan borrowed only the worst features of the pre-Raphaelite school.

But McAuley's study as it aims at presenting every aspect of Brennan's verse is of necessity abbreviated. We do find an occasional precise comment on borrowings, in writings on a lesser scale. For instance Martin Haley has noted the use of the Alexandrine in "Ah who will give us back our long-lost innocence," one of the "Source" poems.⁽⁵⁵⁾ He notes also the influence of Mallarmé, Baudelaire and Herédia and suggests, though he does not absolutely state it, that "Towards the Source" is a "French-dominated book". The generalization is fair, because it is substantiated by some detailed evidence, and a coherent argument.

Mr. Haley's article, however is severely limited both in length and intention. Let us take as a final example of criticism, Randolph Hughes's study⁽⁵⁶⁾ to which I shall later refer in greater detail. Hughes's study of Brennan really takes the form of an exegesis of the verse, along Symbolist lines. Indeed, as reviews of the book show, it might well be taken as an excuse for Hughes to demonstrate his own thorough and intimate knowledge of the whole subject of Symbolism: that is if the author were not so thoroughly humble and reverent to Brennan, in his tone. Now Hughes is I suppose the perfect example of the "one-

eyed" critic, for he scarcely even acknowledges the existence of English poets writing prior to Brennan, and likely to have influenced him. His view then is diametrically opposed to that of French, for he believes that the best in Poems 1913 is due to Brennan's adaption of Symbolist principles and techniques. He takes no heed of other possibilities at all in this:

The best of his own poetry in its general feeling and atmosphere, and in several, and the most important, of its distinctive technical procedures, is definitely and intentionally Symbolist, to a much greater extent than any other poetry in English; in fact it is the only example of thorough-going and fully-maintained Symbolism that exists in English Literature (p. 63).

Now our brief examination of these critics who approach Brennan along the lines of influence shows that most fall into one of two chief dangers: either they regard the whole question as an amusing game at the poet's expense, and of this French is the outstanding example; or they take it very seriously detail by detail and in doing so, reveal their own bias, and an inability to form critical judgments. In both cases, Brennan tends to be ignored. Every "side" has been taken except his own and since all the approaches English, French or German, intentionally or otherwise, seem to reduce his achievement in the verse, we begin to wonder whether the approach through "influence" has any merit in it at all.

However the "problem of influence" is undoubtedly present in Brennan's work, and must be faced. We have seen the futility that results from "taking sides", but we cannot deny that Brennan consciously or unconsciously,

owes much to the nineteenth-century poets who preceded him. McAuley sums up this feeling for us when he relates Brennan to the English school:

It does not seem possible to avoid the conclusion that Brennan achieved nothing like the sustained and unified artistry of Rossetti or Thompson or Patmore or the early Yeats. Whatever our view be of the achievement of these, our view of Brennan's poetic achievement must be decisively lower, because he could not fuse and unify his styles and influences into a new and stable compound with sufficiently distinctive and valuable properties (p.33).

In other words Brennan did not make all the ideas and forms he borrowed, truly his own: "there is not a Brennan style: there is simply a period conglomerate, which can be separated into its components," (p.34).

Here McAuley comes closest, of all the critics, to facing the problem honestly in relation to the actual poems. Nevertheless as we have seen all his comments must be foreshortened and he cannot enter into the detail that should lie behind his judgments. Do we agree with his thesis that we are experiencing Brennan's poetry as the result of influence, because he has not moulded all the materials at his disposal into a unified work of art? And what are the "components" into which Brennan's style can be "separated"?

McAuley's criticism is valuable in that it takes the whole form of the verse into account. Nevertheless we find ourselves back with the old problem of "fixing limits" to the discussion. One difficulty lies in deciding which particular poets were instrumental in the making of Brennan. As we have seen from French's article, it is no use vaguely lumping them all together. Milton and Keats might be said to have

"affected" Brennan in an historical way, but they are hardly "influences" upon him. There is no evidence from within the text of Poems 1913 to support the notion that Brennan has borrowed a single theme or image from Milton. Perhaps we could name Rossetti and Patmore among the English poets, as having the greatest influence upon Brennan's style and diction; and this would bear out T.S. Eliot's thesis that younger poets are more likely to be influenced by minor, than major figures. Yet turning to the French influence, we would choose Mallarmé and Baudelaire from all the Symbolists, as having the greatest influence upon Brennan - and these are major poets. Eliot's thesis then, is exploded and Brennan further reveals himself as a difficult case, a true example of the "problem of influence".

Another problem which arises is that of identifying suspected borrowings. For instance, the form of a great many of the poems with the exception of the major "Lilith" pieces, the "Interlude" poems and "The Wanderer" series, corresponds to the octave and sestet of the sonnet which, it is interesting to note, Rossetti eventually adopted as the main mode in "The House of Life". But the sonnet, as it is set down by Brennan in two quatrains and two three-lined stanzas, is the typical form of Mallarmé, Baudelaire and the Parnassian School which preceded them. Who then is influencing Brennan in his selection of verse form?

Finally of course it cannot be attributed to either, for both possibilities are present. But it is not a question of whether Brennan owes more to French or English sources: it is "what use did he make of the poetic materials available at the time he was writing?" Poems 1913 must be placed full in the nineteenth-century context, for the nineteenth-century influences can be seen working through it. But it is difficult

and sometimes impossible to isolate these various influences into poets and schools: to separate what McAuley calls "a period conglomerate" into its "separate components."

What conclusions can we draw out of all this discussion of influences? Since the "problem of influence" undoubtedly exists in full force in Brennan's poetry it must be taken up and discussed. Yet could it lead to a full and proper understanding of Brennan's work? There is always the danger as the critics we discussed have shown, of producing a negative judgment, of reducing Brennan's achievement to nothing. I could not agree with McAuley's final comment, though there is some truth in it, that "there is no Brennan style"; undoubtedly we can feel Rossetti, Patmore and Thompson pervading the earlier parts of Poems 1913 in the landscape, the themes, even in turns of phrase. But later in the poems, especially in "Lilith" and "The Wanderer", where Brennan has found his own "voice", his own poetic diction, these influences begin to drop away.

Whether the individual poems fail or succeed, we must remember that Brennan and no-one else is responsible for the writing of them. If many of his themes and motifs are borrowed, at least the expression of them is Brennan's own. Finally, although the limits of the various influences must be found and set down, it is not what is left that is the poet's achievement. Our concern is with Poems 1913 as a whole, a total achievement, a work of art. If we do not view it as the product of one mind and one sensibility, to which all details of influence, artistic device are subordinate, then how can a final evaluation be made?

I had by this stage examined three possible approaches to Brennan:

the textual history, the biographical interpretation and the influences which helped to form the verse; and I was now beginning to understand why Brennan is acknowledged a "difficult" poet. The more one explores these surrounding interests, the more are the problems that swarm about him. Much of the criticism I had read, too, seemed to obscure the actual text of Poems 1913, to render it almost inaccessible.

However it was at this very point, when the text seemed furthest removed, that my central thesis became suddenly quite clear and simple. I wanted to find the best way to read Poems 1913: not to impose on them a unified design which the text does not support, nor to ignore their imperfections and obscurities as individual pieces, but to read and understand them as a series, in the fullest and deepest way.

Now which kind of reading would offer the fullest interpretation of the text? Of the three approaches I had tested, the study of influences brought us closest to the actual form of the verse: indeed a proper study of that kind can only be conducted on the level of form. French's "International Fallacy", which is not related in any way to the text of Poems 1913, has illustrated the dangers of applying a mere theory to the question of influence in Brennan. Yet even the accurate examination of the various borrowed elements and their sources might lead to an unbalanced viewpoint, or a failure to see Poems 1913 as a whole. This would make a doubtful basis for evaluation in the end.

I had abandoned the third possible way of approach and still not reached the text of the poems. Then I came upon McAuley's suggestion that we should approach the poetry "by the most simple, trusting, co-operatively alert attention to Brennan's basic symbolic script, allowing its elements to develop their imaginative possibilities in our

minds" (p.12). The kind of reading that McAuley advocates and to a limited extent gives to the text promised not only to reveal the main patterns of imagery but also to suggest the whole intellectual structure of Poems 1913. His own discussion of the reversal of symbolism which occurs in "Lilith," and its relationship to what he sees as the central theme of the poems, the search for Eden, is successfully carried out according to the method he lays down.

I decided then that my own thesis should test this proposition, and that I would conduct my discussion of the poetry along these lines. However, before launching straightaway into the symbolic script I will sketch in a separate chapter, by way of forming an entrance to it, some of Brennan's poetic theory. Large portions of this are derived from the French Symbolist school, whose principles I will also sketch in, for this will help us to place Poems 1913 against a wider background when we finally come to assess the sequence.

Thus, while I am dismissing the "problem of influence" as the one and only way of approach to the poetry, I am not discounting the importance of the Symbolist influence in helping us to understand Brennan's intentions and practice. As Wilkes shows in New Perspectives, Poems 1913 is an attempt to emulate the Symbolist "livre composé". Were it not for this ideal of a symphonic whole which Brennan bears before him, we might not be reading the poems in a sequence or considering them as a single group at all. But if the theory of the Symbolists helped to form Poems 1913 as a total work of art, we should not forget the very vital influence that the English poets have on the level of diction and choice of motif. Poems 1913 should be seen against the general background of the nineteenth-century poetry, both of England and of Europe. I would

36.

not care to have to judge which "side" is the more important in forming Brennan's poetic practice.

- FOOTNOTES, - INTRODUCTION AND AIMS. -

1. See Bibliography for details of the publisher's name and the place, date and manner of publication. It seems unnecessary to repeat those details in the body of the text, or in the footnotes appended to it. This policy will be adhered to throughout the thesis. Unless it is otherwise stated all succeeding reference to Professor Wilkes's criticism will be to New Perspectives.
2. For all succeeding reference to and quotation from the poems, see The Verse of Christopher Brennan, ed., A.R. Chisholm and J.J. Quinn. For purposes of abbreviation, this will be referred to as Verse.
3. Prospectus, 6 October 1899, with courtesy Mitchell Library.
4. All poems referred to in the text will be numbered according to Verse.
5. The deliberate obliqueness of the piece, which recalls Mallarmé's own "tomb" poems to Verlaine, to Gautier and to Poe, further emphasizes that it is a tribute to the dead Master.
6. These lines are typical of many in the poetry, which through their very inadequacy vividly convey a mood or thought. The second is sheer tautology, with "mad" and "foolish" placed so close together; yet I wish he had retained it.
7. Beside the first printed version of the poem is an illustration showing an armoured man riding past or away from a naked woman "concealed" behind a tree. The poem has the same exaggerated and contrived quality about it. Why should the forest, seen elsewhere in "The Quest of Silence" as a peaceful natural setting, be suddenly filled with satyrs, miscreants and heraldic beasts?

8. James McAuley, Australian Writers and their Work: C.J.Brennan, p.14. For all succeeding references to McAuley's criticism of Brennan in Chapter one, see this work.
9. Wilkes demonstrates his argument for unity by carefully quoting Brennan's tentative plans for "The Forest of Night", sent to Brereton in 1899 (pp.18-19). But does he adequately support it by reference to the definitive text? It is hard to see how in this particular case the alteration Brennan subsequently made contributes helpfully to the architecture of Poems 1913.
10. For instance the poem beginning "Sweet Silence after bells" (3) is one of the finest in "Towards the Source," but provides no continuity of theme or imagery for that section as a whole. Its claustral mood entirely separates it from all the poems surrounding it. Its nightly setting and main theme of "perfection in silence" would seem to fit it better for inclusion in "The Quest of Silence".
11. For instance Brennan noted his interest in the "new ideal of the concerted poem in many movements" (p.178), and spoke of "the sublimation of a whole imaginative life and experience into a subtly ordered series of poems, where each piece has, of course, its individual value, and yet cannot be interpreted save in its relation to the whole" (p.329). The abbreviation Prose refers throughout to Chisholm and Quinn's edition.
12. As if it were to be got over as quickly as possible. However McAuley does not present us with any facts that Chisholm has not already supplied. He simply makes Brennan's life sound more unpleasant.

13. Christopher Brennan, p.42.
14. For instance A.G. Stephens wrote "Yet the moode persisted: here at the beginning was Brennan as he poetically ended with his didactic, spectacular, sonorous commentary on I, Mine, Me" (Christopher Brennan with a living thought from A.G.S., p.41). The thought is "loving", for he is writing of an old friend. Yet he has the air of stating a fact about the poetry, of passing judgment on it. This is borne out by his remark in a letter to Brennan: "The effect of your later verse is to be too personal: it doesn't escape to the audience."
15. Australian Literature: A Critical Account to 1955, p.116.
16. Ibid., p.122.
17. The Roaring Twenties, p.152.
18. The political and economic background of the nineties is not irrevelant to the poetry. Vance Palmer in The Legend of the Nineties describes it as a time of unstable politics, and an era of dream. The idea of Utopia was widespread among Australians, for whom opportunities then seemed abounding; they envisaged the country as a future homeland of independent people free to create any kind of society they wished. There is probably some correspondence between this climate of ideas and Brennan's search for Eden which the poems record. His own career was not unaffected by the general instability, for he arrived home from Germany on the eve of a banking crisis and was forced to accept a job far below his capabilities. That he stayed in the job for so long was doubtless his own fault, but it is likely that he joined in the general dream of prosperity and peace; in The Burden of Tyre and in the political parts of the "Lilith" narrative (ix,x) it is given

18.(contd). some expression.

19. Postscript to a letter to A.G. Stephens, 1898 (with courtesy Mitchell Library).

20. Christopher Brennan, p.45.

21. Ibid., p.42.

22. "Notes on C.J. Brennan and other Australian authors", p.4.

It is interesting to note that Stevens who knew Brennan as a speaker at the Casual Club, draws this judgment out of a comparison between Brennan and another member of the Club, Randolph Bedford. The remark immediately follows Stevens's assessment that "Brennan carries a higher powered intellect and is ever so much superior as an artist; but Bedford has had a much wider and more varied experience of life and is a much more prolific writer." It seems that Stevens was somewhat prejudiced against Brennan who had shown him ill temper in a feud over Baudelaire(which started when Stevens called that poet "the iridescent scum on a stagnant pool"); and inclined to stand up for Bedford who was the only member of the Club ever to outtalk Brennan. Therefore we might count Stevens's judgment as somewhat personal and biased.

23. "The Discovery of C.J. Brennan", Manuscripts, pp.1-6. Mrs. Palmer is ostensibly reviewing C.J. Brennan: An Essay in Values; but the article really amounts to an enunciation of her own views on Brennan.

24. "The Verse of C.J. Brennan," Southerly 1964, pp.6-11.

25. For instance French uses as evidence the notes of one of Brennan's students at the University, which are supposed to reveal that the lectures were not so impressive as it is commonly believed. The

- 25.(contd.) notes are quite reliable in his opinion, as it was a "good student" who took them: but this seems a very weak basis for such an important judgment as French makes of Brennan's status as a scholar.
26. A.B. Piddington who was Brennan's companion in his University days reports in his "Notes" that "what he read or studied he really read or studied in proof to please himself, and not to please an examiner". Brennan disappointed the Professor of Classics by showing little interest in the texts set for examination and followed his own mode of study." He seems too to have been somewhat presumptuous, making his few friends among the staff rather than the students; and in concluding one examination question wrote, "This view is at present held by only four Professors." He named three and included himself, "the writer": behaviour which hardly fits the "typical undergraduate".
27. Because of some irregularity (which Brennan himself pointed out), the degree was not to be conferred until 1897, well after his return from Germany. Again this long delay seems characteristic of the poet.
28. A.R. Chisholm's "Biographical Introduction", p.20.
29. Awarded to Brennan no doubt, in the hope that he would undertake a Doctorate in the classics. That would have been the logical course to pursue had he been interested in furthering his career.
30. It was not until 20 June, 1920 that Brennan was appointed Professor of Comparative Literature.
31. It is tempting to imagine what the course of events would have been if Brennan had stayed in Europe. Would he have found fame among men of letters, or sunk into the anonymity of Bohemia? He seems

31.(contd.) again at this stage curiously remote from his own interests.

Piddington verifies this for us in his "Notes": "Brennan was a man quite without worldly ambitions. Whether he was a cataloguer or a Professor, he did not care."

32. "Portrait of Christopher Brennan", p.11.

33. They tell us of what Brennan read and saw, but nothing of his romance. Was it only when he returned and began to write the verse, that the dream of love began?

34. Six Australian Poets, p.152.

35. Here I am using the framework of "three phases " which G.A.Wilkes suggests make up the structure of the sequence, in "The Art of Brennan's 'Towards the Source'."

36. The mention of "amber locks" (28) assures us that the bridegroom is not, literally, Brennan. Wilkes (ibid.) uses "persona".

37. Ibid., p.39.

38. Southerly 1949, p.195.

39. A.R.Chisholm, All About Books, tells the story.

40. Notably Rossetti, in "Eden Bower" and a sonnet "Body's Beauty".

41. Except of course that he was imbibing Symbolist techniques.

42. Op.cit. (see note 39), 200.

43. Neither will Chisholm commit himself in conversation. When I questioned him (February 1965) on the subject of Brennan's disillusionment with his bride, Chisholm replied "She was very beautiful of course", to which he later added cautiously "There could be no meeting-point between them . . . they were really in different worlds."

44. Op.cit; p.11. But to be fair we must outline his intentions.

Colin Roderick suggests a twofold reading of "Lilith": first, on

- 44.(contd.) the mystic level, where he offers some helpful interpretation; second, on the personal level, as being rooted in the actuality of Brennan's unhappy marriage. Here he goes too far, but as the "Portrait" was originally intended for a broadcast, perhaps the "sensationalism" may be forgiven.
45. Vivian Smith in "Brennan for a New Generation" suggests: "No doubt a Jungian could give us a fairly satisfactory gloss;" but he adds a doubt as to whether this would help us with the poems as such (p.14). The psychological interpretation might indeed only serve to increase the difficulties of "Lilith".
46. We know that in 1901 the Brennan family moved to Mosman, to a house "facing towards Manly and overlooking Balmoral Beach" ("Biographical Introduction" p. 23). It is not difficult to imagine that the setting of "The Wanderer", with its windswept ways and "ever-complaining sea" (86), was inspired by the poet's weekend surroundings. At times the situation seems so real that we could almost imagine the Wanderer to be Brennan himself (e.g. 91).
47. Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé: The Growth of a Myth.
48. "Lettre sur Mallarmé" (Paris: Albert Messein), p.9.
49. In his talk on Dante in On Poetry and the Poets Eliot expands this point further. He claims that young poets are not likely to be influenced by major poets as they are too awe-inspiring. It is the minor poets who form them.
50. Eliot's Introduction to Selected Poems of Ezra Pound (Faber) pp. x-xi.

51. McAuley suggests an "interesting parallel" (p.15) between Brennan's idea and Mircea Eliade's comments in Traité d'histoire des religions. The notion of Eden was also common among the French Symbolists, especially Mallarmé. It is virtually impossible to say which literary source Brennan is drawing upon: but see also note 18.
52. op.cit. (see note 24).
53. ibid.
54. Prose, p.276.
55. Annals of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, p.192.
56. Op.cit. (see note 23).

CHAPTER TWO: BRENNAN AND SYMBOLISM.

It is our intention in this thesis to present a reading of Poems 1913 along symbolic lines. However our interpretation of the poems will also be placed against the Symbolist background, from which Brennan derives much of his poetic theory, and which therefore forms a frame of judgment for the verse. It becomes necessary at this stage to define "Symbolist". What do we mean by the word when we apply it to Poems 1913? Was Brennan himself a Symbolist?

Randolph Hughes has made an important claim for Brennan, which provides our first guiding thread:

The best of his own poetry in its general feeling and atmosphere, and in several, and the most important, of its distinctive technical procedures, is definitely and intentionally Symbolist, to a much greater extent than any other poetry in English . . . Brennan rendered a notable, (and as yet quite unrecognized) service to English poetry by importing into it, and as far as was necessary, acclimatizing in it the spirit and principles of that kind of Symbolism which I have called esoteric.⁽¹⁾

What is "esoteric Symbolism", and how would we apply the doctrine to Poems 1913?

First I shall attempt to sketch out in a general way, with the help of Hughes and other critics, what the Symbolists were attempting to do. The use of symbols in literature is age-old of course, but when we speak of "esoteric symbolism" we are referring to that particular school of poets that arose in France in the second half of the nineteenth century, and to their doctrine. Brennan himself indicates, at the beginning of his essay on "Symbolism in Nineteenth Century Literature",

that while symbolism had always been "the practice of art in all times", it was not until this school arose that the world was made conscious of the importance of the doctrine; nor knew it as "the universal orthodoxy of art".

But how did the school arise, and how do we describe its beliefs? First it can be seen as the direct result of a reaction against the ~~Pamassian~~ cult, with its emphasis on the brilliant description of hard tangible objects; and a still larger reaction against the materialism and rationalism of the two preceding centuries. Now what is its central doctrine? Despite the considerable differences that exist between one Symbolist poet and the next - we have only to think of Verlaine's melodic simplicity and subdued half-tones against Mallarme's dense, cryptic "emblem-writing" accessible only to the few possessing an acute inner hearing, to realize these differences - we can discern a general set of preoccupations and techniques that most of the Symbolists share.

Perhaps the most important of all these is a poetic idealism, their vision of Eden or our faulty world perfected. Hughes's title "esoteric symbolism" is very apt; for the true Symbolist poet writes with an ideal before him. His work is mystical, and aimed at divine revelation. Symbolism taken as a whole is in fact no less than a religion, with true and false prophets, scriptures and a liturgical language. Everything in Christianity is there by analogy - except Christ. Poetry in itself becomes an act of creation, a spiritual reading of the world: it has its own laws and its own inner life. Chiari admirably sums up the mystique of Symbolism, when he calls it "a belief in a world of ideal beauty and the conviction that it can be realized through art." (2)

That Brennan himself saw Symbolism in this way is made clear by his remarks on Mallarmé. We notice a curiously sacramental tone in them, as when he claims that the poet "speaks for the people, for humanity: and the work of art only attains to its full significance when attended by the whole people, as a religious service."⁽³⁾

His "conviction" and "belief" in Symbolism are also conveyed in this: "Mallarmé has found solutions of the questions, What is life? and, What is poetry? The duty of man, who is a spirit, is to read the sense of the earth, to speak divinely."⁽⁴⁾ Here it is evident that while Brennan is speaking of Mallarmé, he is also holding that poet up as an example for all symbolists to follow. He is "the poet", and the high priest of poets. Brennan sees him fulfilling the role of the "seer", the prophet of Symbolism. And so to a large extent he was.

We have established then that Symbolism is for the French Symbolists, and for Brennan, a mystery. We must now try to be more precise. What are the techniques by which the poet conveys the mystery to the world? As our main concern is with Brennan's poetry, we shall not go into details of the practice of individual poets. We shall only try to sketch out an idea of the whole. Again Chiari's definition (above) comes to our aid. The Symbolist believes that the world of "ideal beauty" can be "realized through art". This suggests that the general principles of his practice will show a linking between the actuality of the poem, and the divinity of the ideal. The poet must distill his experience from life and so refine it that only the pure and essential element remains. Thus he can be likened to an alchemist, turning the base metal of life into gold. But we must qualify this definition further:

it is not his ordinary experience of this life, but his inner experience that is undergoing such a process. Everyday things are cast away from the beginning, and the remaining essence will mount like a breath of incense towards the divine.

But we are still very much on the mysterious level. How is this transition to the divine to be achieved? It is by "correspondences", at once the central doctrine of Symbolism and the cornerstone of Symbolist technique. The term actually derives from the nineteenth-century philosopher Swedenborg, but it can be traced back much further, for instance to the Platonists who regarded everything on earth as having a heavenly counterpart. Mallarmé was to develop the doctrine along those lines. However, it first came to the Symbolists through Baudelaire. He was separated from the other poets of his age and especially the Parnassians who, as we have seen, were obsessed by material objects, by "his preoccupation with spiritual matters and with the mystic aspects of religion."⁽⁵⁾ Baudelaire, however, was not a Christian for while he retained a belief in certain darker aspects of the faith, for instance the sense of sin which resulted in men's minds from the Fall, he had jettisoned the belief in Christ and the conventional Way of Salvation. He was forced to find a substitute for these beliefs, and this substitute he found in art. The central tenet of his new belief became the "correspondence" which implied for him not only the synesthesia of his famous poem,⁽⁶⁾ but an all embracing philosophy: "C'est cet admirable, cet immortel instinct du beau qui nous fait considérer la terre et ses spectacles comme un aperçu, comme une correspondance du ciel."⁽⁷⁾

Now let us sketch in a little more of the background of symbolist techniques. We have established that the poet, by means of "correspondences",

aims at showing the divine world, that which is beyond the apparent. He also uses what Hughes describes as . . . "a process of suggestion or adumbration, as distinct from any process of developed statement - narrative, instructive, protreptic or discursive in any way."⁽⁸⁾ The process that Hughes describes was often referred to by the Symbolists as "incantation": the associated sounds and images of the poem should have an hypnotic effect upon the reader, wafting him towards some divine revelation. Thus in Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au Voyage", the poet urges his companion, his sister or mistress (as the poem is in the true symbolist manner her identity is made somewhat dim) to depart with him to an imaginary world of beauty. The refrain of the poem:

Là, tout n'est que beauté

luxe, calme et volupté

constitutes as it were a world of beauty in itself. The soft and liquid sounds communicate the meaning of the poem in themselves, acting as a kind of spell upon the reader. Such a process too was often likened to music. Baudelaire was first to point out that poetry approximates to music through a prosody whose roots plunge deeper into the human soul than any classical theory has indicated.⁽⁹⁾ Both arts can thus be seen springing from a common source. This old affinity between poetry and music had been understood long before the Symbolists took it up, but they were perhaps the first to insist upon it to this degree.

As we have seen the symbolist poet casts aside his mundane surroundings and devotes himself to describing his inner thoughts and dreams, the flux of mind. He builds up a mass of suggestions into a single theme, the poem. To do this he borrows certain properties commonly attributed to music, as part of his technique. Thus Enid Starkie contends that Baudelaire in his remark (above) does not "speak merely of the harmony of the line or

the melody of the words . . . music does not consist solely in a sequence of pleasant sounds and Baudelaire did not mean that, when he spoke of the intimate connection between poetry and music. He meant that a poem should have the power of evoking in the reader, by whatever means it chose, the sensations and emotions which music could arouse. It was to evoke, in the words of the symbolist poets, "un état d'âme"⁽¹⁰⁾. That last phrase which cannot really be translated into English means literally "a state of soul".

Now when the symbolist poet uses these difficult techniques of correspondence and incantation, what is the result? We have seen what a process of refinement the poem can become: but what does it finally communicate to the reader? A name was given to the result: "le Rêve" and its essential nature is brilliantly summed up by Alan Boase when he remarks "Le Rêve with its glorieux mensonges - we might also call it Beauty, or a superior kind of Truth - is literally the creation of the poet."⁽¹¹⁾ In other words the Symbolist never spontaneously outpours his emotions, although this might well be the effect he wishes to create. The "état d'âme" he evokes is carefully controlled and contrived: essentially an artifice. Thus while it claims to project a dream, an atmosphere, the poem is a definite act of will.

In Mallarmé's sonnet "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui" we see the full irony of "le Rêve" at work. Despite many claims that its theme is man or the human condition, I believe that it really is about the poet himself, in search of perfection. We see the swan surrounded by the purity of winter frozen into a lake, who thinks only of escaping his "useless exile". However he is imprisoned by his own contempt for the world and cannot take flight to the heavens glimpsed above. Finally,

immobility and whiteness triumph and he remains entrapped in the ice. In this sonnet Mallarmé achieved verbal perfection but as A.R.Chisholm points out the "ice-bound grimoire" of the poem is also the poet's dilemma. This is summed up in a phrase from the poem, "vols qui n'ont pas fui": Chisholm remarks "the real flights have never flown, and can never fly, even with the help of winged words."⁽¹²⁾ Mallarmé remains imprisoned in his own beautiful poem, which is so pure and refined that only a few experts in Symbolism have been able to understand it. Apparently impersonal, it is in fact highly subjective for it describes an inner experience which only Mallarmé could have felt or imagined. Hence it is about nobody but himself.

Mallarmé illustrates the furthestmost limits of the Symbolist position. None of the other poets pushed "Le Rêve" so far. Nevertheless we have attempted to describe that rather elusive concept in order to clarify the position against which Brennan will be placed. As James McAuley has pointed out, "though Brennan held back from the Mallarméan ascent into absence, or silence, he could respond to the lure of "Le Rêve".⁽¹³⁾ We shall have cause to examine the idea again when we discuss Brennan's symbolic practice in Poems 1913.

Now that we have outlined some preoccupations and principles of symbolist theory, let us see what Brennan has extracted from it. The main body of his theory is found in the essay on "Symbolism in Nineteenth-Century Literature"; indeed this work constitutes his "poetics." However we should be aware from the beginning that Brennan is not writing a prescription for his own verse. His concern is to describe the

Symbolist position in England, France and Germany, therefore rather than criticising the essay, we shall seek our objective by following the main lines of his exposition.

Brennan devotes considerable space in the essay to "correspondences" and the "musicality" of poetry, both of which, as we have seen, are basic symbolist preoccupations. He speaks of "the law of correspondences" as if this were an important fact of poetry, and takes it direct from Swedenborg. However the main body of his argument for correspondences comes, as it came to the Symbolists, through the medium of Baudelaire. He even translates for us the passage in which that poet announces his debt to Swedenborg and claims correspondences for literature (p.55). Brennan then begins to make clear for us the difference between those "prolonged echoes" of the poem which the world has mistaken for "correspondences",⁽¹⁴⁾ and the real implications. However this discussion is interrupted by some philosophizing, and he does not return to it until the "Corollaries" of the essay. Up to this point, Brennan's theory has not moved far beyond Baudelaire's, and can be seen as deriving wholly from the Symbolist school.

When Brennan takes it up again asking: "What is the nature of that law of correspondences with which we began and with which we never seem to be finished? . . . Well, is it a law from all eternity or what?" (p.162); he uses a bantering, conversational tone. Yet the seriousness of his questions is felt when he suggests the law could be "from all eternity". He seems to be reaching for some kind of ultimate definition and this he finds after some rather cumbrous discussion of the distinctions to be drawn between poetry and philosophy, symbolism and religion.

He claims that correspondences supply "the continual symbol: the harmony of the mind and the world in poetry is a symbol. Correspondence implies the ideal kinship of all things - a symbol of the final coalition of actual and potential, of transcendental and real, of idea and fact" (p.167). Ironically this definition is almost an exact reiteration of Baudelaire's description of the philosophy quoted by Enid Starkie (above, p.48). Brennan is quite within the bounds of esoteric theory and while he adds nothing new to the discussion of "correspondences", reveals his understanding of that important Symbolist philosophy.

It is interesting that at no stage does Brennan really descend from these rarefied regions of definition to give an explanation of the "law" in practice. He claims it has "nothing specifically mystical about it", that it is "nothing more, viewed technically, than the only possible explanation of all expression, the only possible ground of all imagery" (p.157). But there, while he claims to view correspondences "technically", he is still speaking in the broad theoretical terms. His statement that they are "the only possible explanation of all expression" has a strong ring of idealism about it. In the whole discussion of correspondences then Brennan shows himself to be very much involved with the Symbolist "mystique". This might pose something of a problem for us when we come to relate his theory to our reading of the verse. Nevertheless it is plain that "correspondences", if he regards them as "the only possible ground of all imagery", will form an important part of his symbolic technique. It is perhaps one principle then which can be safely applied to the practice, and we shall presently examine its workings in Poems 1913.

In his discussion of correspondences Brennan does not exactly describe how they work in poetry. He gives instead a clear and comprehensive

exposition of the Symbolist theory of correspondences, calling them the "ideal kinship of all things." Now we have seen how the symbolist poet uses to convey his ideal a process of suggestion, often incorporating into his verse the properties of music. The second area of the theory of writing poetry which arises from Brennan's essay is that of musicality. For instance he quotes Mallarmé's famous statement that "My poetry is music" (p.57) and speaks of the one perfect work that Mallarmé was trying to write, one which would be "an impersonal work . . . bodying forth the essential imaginative harmony between man and the world" (p.143). However Brennan brings us no closer to understanding that first statement than we have ever been; and it is by no means certain that Mallarmé's intentions to create "a perfect work" were more than verbal ones. His "Grand Oeuvre" might in fact consist of those fragments and poems already written, or might only be a dream-project which he never contemplated putting into a book at all.⁽¹⁵⁾ So far then Brennan is only penning his admiration for Mallarmé and we have grasped nothing of his own theory. When he does arrive at a more particular discussion of the affinities between poetry and music we find a tendency on his part to confuse the two arts, or assume that one can almost be exchanged for the other. D.S. MacColl in his Nineteenth Century Art puts down the enormous effect of music to its power of creating "abstract moulds" of all the passions. From this Brennan extracts his theory: "The only moulds which music can fashion are rhythmic and melodic forms. And if these are to fit our passions there must be correspondence. Well, that is fairly plain. The mind has its own rhythms" (p.59). The discussion so far is reasonable enough - but Brennan is not yet talking of poetry.

He is describing the effects of music. In that last phrase "the mind has its own rythms" Brennan seems to be grasping at something essential to both the art forms, but even this is taken from the theory of Mallarmé.⁽¹⁶⁾

The discussion of "musicality" in poetry up to this point of the essay is rather loosely woven and unsatisfactory. We cannot imagine applying it to the verse; and when in the next passage Brennan descends to a more detailed practical description of the "musical" workings of the metre of poetry⁽¹⁷⁾ we feel he contributes very little to the subject of "musicality". Moreover as we have seen, large portions of the theory are imported direct from the prose writings of Mallarmé and placed uncritically before us. Thus when we come to read the verse in the light of this essay, we must bear in mind the special reservation that what Brennan tells us about "musicality" and "suggestion" and "correspondences" in poetry might describe very well what happens in Mallarmé's poems, but will not illuminate Brennan's own symbolic script. The essay leaves us in no doubt that Brennan admired this poet above all others, and that he possessed an unusually good understanding of his difficult writings in verse and prose. But we cannot reach Poems 1913 à travers Mallarmé.

Of what use then is the discussion of "musicality" in "Nineteenth-Century Literature"? It shows first that Brennan was deeply interested in and involved in the Symbolist methods of suggestion. In seeking a definition of the law of correspondences he suggests it may be found "in the answer to this other question. 'How can music be expressive?'" and from this query his whole discussion of musicality begins. The discussion, even if it is unsuccessful and unoriginal, shows at least that

Brennan has thought intensely about the subject. Therefore even if Brennan does not achieve the "musicality of all things" which he perceives in Mallarmé, we cannot altogether reject it as a criterion when we come to our reading of the verse. It is part of the whole process of suggestion.

From Brennan's whole exposition of the subject I would like to isolate one important idea, the concept of the arabesque. This is taken from Mallarmé and translated thus: "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" (p.56). Later in the essay, Brennan repeats this in simpler form: "every poem, like every melody, has its own design, its own arabesque" (p.61). That explanation seems to clarify much of the whole discussion of Symbolism, and what Brennan takes from it. We shall have cause to refer to the idea again.

It is clear that in much of his discussion of how poetry should be written, Brennan is greatly indebted to the French Symbolists and especially Mallarmé. Hughes describes the latter as "the master of Brennan's special election" and "a most powerful force in determining Brennan's aesthetic theory."⁽¹⁸⁾ Indeed much of the essay proves this to be so. Brennan devotes considerable space to other symbolist poets, Novalis and Blake, but he derives little of his theory from them. The rest of the discussion dealing with the imagination, the philosophy of poetry, and mysticism in poetry seems there only to offset Mallarmé, the brightest star in the symbolist constellation. But Brennan also

derives his theory from the school in general; he tells us again and again that poetry is to contain suggestion; the principles of "correspondence" he describes are those used by all the followers of Baudelaire, and so when we come to read Poems 1913 we can also relate it to this wider background of thought.

Perhaps of all the formulae presented in the prose writings, the one which we can most clearly apply to the verse is Brennan's definition of a symbol. It is strange to find such a very simple and concise definition planted among so many high-sounding statements about degrees "continuous and discrete"⁽¹⁹⁾ and "abstract moulds" (above, p. 54). Yet there it is, and central to the whole discussion for it is the only practical part of it. Brennan disengages himself from the Symbolist mystique and steps forward to explain the symbol.

The definition begins with a brief history of those features of the poem which preceded the symbol. Brennan begins with the image which "of course has been the natural means of expression in poetry of all ages", but especially important was "the image as expressing a likeness and a kinship." First of this kind was the simile; however it soon became "overlaid with detail" and irrelevancies. Next, the metaphor arose, "more direct, more energetic, more expressive . . ." However this too proved unsatisfactory, as it was not a living part of the poem for it condensed into itself "the life and beauty of the poem". Images must be, he claims "the flesh and blood, the living body, the living garment of poetry." One should not be able to extract from the poem an "affidavit-passage" of prose; nor should the images be merely ornaments, the "clothing of ideas" (pp.50-51).

Now that definition of an image is quite clear and valuable in itself, for our reading of the poems. But some ten pages later when he resumes the discussion he shows he has a more important idea to put forward. He comes out with this immediately and it is this: "The symbol is simply that image which, for the special purpose in hand, condenses in itself the greatest number of correspondences. It is the meeting-point of many analogies." Here we see that while the image helps to form the symbol, it is a lesser part of poetry. The symbol is given pride of place because it is the "meeting-point of many analogies." Brennan emphasizes further this capacity for condensation which the symbol possesses. "It is . . . a summing-up, a synthesis, a rarefaction. It stands not for any one thing that might be rendered in a dozen different ways, but for a whole class of things, for their kinship, of which it is the natural expression artistically." (p.61). Later in the essay, Brennan stresses again that the symbol is not accidental, but "is and must be something very precise and definite, for it is charged with a complex significance." (p.122).

Brennan also very clearly describes the role of the symbol in the poem. It is there to govern all the other components, for instance correspondences and images which lead up to it: "A real symbol governs and unites its poem: it is at once starting-point and goal, starting-point as plain image, goal as symbol: the poem rises out of it, develops within its limits, and builds it up by successive correspondences." Thus the use of the symbol helps us to get rid of "the annoying wobble between image and non-image." It also dispenses with the "dull old squabble as to matter and form by their relative importance" (p.62).

Finally, in Brennan's definition, the ideal poem is itself seen as a symbol, a unity of significance, and an organic whole. This is one of the most lucid explanations of a symbol ever given by a poet, and it is the most impressive part of Brennan's whole essay on "Nineteenth-Century Literature". It shows him going beyond Mallarmé and Baudelaire and formulating a clear rule of his own. It will be one of our major concerns to judge whether his own poems attain to these standards. Does any of them amount to a true symbol in which every line, every correspondence contributes to the "living body" and the organic whole?

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER TWO.

1. C.J.Brennan: An Essay in Values, p.63.
2. Symbolism from Poe to Mallarmé, p.47.
3. "Nineteenth Century Literature", p.145. All references are to Prose.
4. Ibid., p.142.
5. Enid Starkie, Introduction to Les Fleurs du Mal, p.xii.
6. "Correspondences". The second stanza is the one most commonly quoted to explain the law, but there Baudelaire only describes the relationship between perceived things e.g. "perfumes, colours and sounds" (Brennan trans.) p.55.
7. Baudelaire, Notes Nouvelles sur Poe. Could be translated thus:
"It is this admirable, immortal instinct of beauty which we possess that leads us to regard the earth and its show as a glimpse, a correspondence of Heaven itself." Cited by Enid Starkie (ibid).
8. Op.cit. (see note 1) p.64.
9. "Oeuvres Posthumes", Mercure de France, 1908. "La poésie touche à la musique par une prosodie dont les racines plongent plus avant dans l'âme humaine que ne l'indique aucune théorie classique".
10. Introduction to Les Fleurs du Mal, p.xi.
11. The Poetry of France, Vol.II. The phrase "glorieux mensonges" (glorious lies) is from a letter of Mallarmé, 1865.
12. "Mallarmé's Edens", AUMLA no.13, p.22. Chisholm's thesis is that Mallarmé substituted for banality four worlds of spirit - an "ideal love", beyond the hazards and storms of passion; an "exquisite subtlety of expression", enriched by correspondences; a "poetic absolute"; and a "world of genius", luminous enough to outshine the materiality of the cosmos.

13. Australian Writers and their Work: C.J. Brennan, p.71, p.7
14. See note 6.
15. This is A.R.Chisholm's thesis in Mallarmé's Grand Oeuvre.
16. Quoted on p.57. From an extract of a letter of Mallarmé: "My poetry is music and thereby I do not mean verbal music - that is a first, necessary condition: use the word in the Greek sense, signifying in the last resort the Idea, which results from a rhythmic set of relations" (Brennan trans.) .
17. For instance in the statement that just as the rhythm of music "plays freely within and across the bars ruled on the stave to mark its metre", so "the most creative, the most distinctively poetic act of poetry is the invention of the rhythm which circulates freely within the limits of a given metrical norm" Brennan is almost guilty of being superficial. What he says about rhythm and metre is so obvious that it need hardly be said at all.
18. Op.cit. (see note 8), p.94.
19. p.52. Here Brennan expounds Swedenborg's philosophy in order to explain "the nature of correspondence". On the next page he gives up the attempt, referring us to Heaven and Hell. His explanation is not very lucid.

CHAPTER THREE.I.

Our study of Brennan's writings on Symbolism against the whole esoteric background shows that while most of his ideas derive certainly from that main stream of thought he has in the process of appropriating, assimilated them and experienced them subjectively, to the point where he is presenting his own variety, his own brand of symbolism. We must now turn from the Prose to Poems 1913 and begin our examination of Brennan's actual poetic practice.

To tackle the symbolic script of Poems 1913 is rather a formidable task, for at first sight it seems that Brennan is running through the whole gamut of possibilities for those motifs he has chosen: and the range of motifs is very wide. He is drawing in fact upon a fund available to all nineteenth-century poets and it is to be feared that many of these images, in retrospect, appear hackneyed.⁽¹⁾ Moreover Brennan does not always endow his motifs with significance and, as with some inferior individual poems, we can only view them as parts of a developing sequence of thought and mood; even then, their place in the whole symbolic scheme is not made clear.

The question is: "Where to begin?" Perhaps we could make first the general observation that during the writing of Poems 1913, Brennan gradually progresses towards a homogeneity of thought and image. There is a considerable difference between "Towards the Source", with its uncertain shifting landscape of dream and the very uniform and recognizably natural setting of the later section "The Wanderer." In the two sequences of course Brennan is doing completely different things: the "Source" poems are deliberately vague and misty because he is exploring in them those areas of semi-consciousness between memory and illusion, which the lover

deludes himself into taking for actuality; while in "The Wanderer" he is deliberately placing himself in the present and refusing to admit dreams of the past to intrude because a positive line of action must be taken. However it does seem that there is a movement within Poems 1913 towards integration. We can feel this movement, this search for harmony, even when it is not achieved.

But these remarks do not truly form a way of approach to the "symbolic script". How can we come closer to it and begin to grasp it? Could we perhaps distinguish between Brennan's technical and his metaphysical intentions: between what is on the one hand inside, and on the other somewhat outside his poetic control? Certainly Brennan has to some extent organized and manipulated his various images, symbols and settings into a design. G.A. Wilkes suggests that he is deliberately using "iterative imagery". He states a motif, the cycle moves on, and then the motif is repeated but slightly changed:

Brennan's characteristic method . . . is to repeat and vary a motif for a time, then to allow it to be absorbed by a larger rythm, which is duly absorbed by another farther on, giving the sense of deepening resonance as the cycle advances.

(New Perspectives, p.49)

This kind of reading is suggested by the text itself, and we shall follow it through. But does it account for the way in which certain images have, as it were, taken control of the poet? I propose that Brennan's metaphysical intentions should also be taken into account when we consider the symbolism of the poems, for it is not only a matter of his use of well-known artistic devices: it is also a matter of compulsion.

I suggest that the "metaphysical" pattern is something like this. Partly it is thematic and partly quite compulsive; but when it is operating properly we can see it upholding all the various trains of imagery. The pattern is three-fold. First, the poet experiences suffering. He has a continual sense of separation: from the beloved in "Towards the Source", from the whole world in "The Forest of Night", and in "The Wanderer", from his noble past. Human love fails him in the "Source" sequence; and in "Lilith" divine love too is seen to be a mockery. From the resulting disillusionment there arises a strong wish for oblivion, and from this wish, most of the large settings and their corresponding moods derive: sea, desert, the dark forest, night and rain. But the poet finally passes into a third stage, where he finds a kind of comfort in isolation. Thus, in the first Epilogue he speaks of himself as quite intact and raised above all human suffering:

The gift of self is self's most sacred right:

only where none hath trod,

only upon my secret starry height

I abdicate to God. (104)

But here I am only suggesting a very wide framework into which the symbolism of Poems 1913 might be fitted. The sequence indeed demands both these readings: on the artistic and compulsive levels; but they are not always to be separated and if we went through the poems dividing them up in this way, we should be guilty of imposing on them a "theoretical" pattern of our own invention. It is time now to look at the poetry itself, trusting to the "basic symbolic script" for what it can reveal.

II. Let us begin with the earliest section of the poems, "Towards the Source", and see how Brennan handles images and symbols in conjunction with theme. As we have already noted,⁽²⁾ the influence of the French Symbolists is strongest in the earlier parts of Poems 1913, before Brennan has developed his own style and "metaphysics". Here it is from this school in general that he derives not only the techniques but the moods and subjects of his poems. There is then a curious ambivalence about "Towards the Source". It is on the one hand very much the subjective experience of Brennan, in his youthful naiveté feeling out the wonders of awakening love and the joys of nature. On the other hand it is quite unoriginal, for nowhere else in Poems 1913 do we find so much sheer "art", so much dwelling on a particular moment for its own sake, and so much self-conscious imitation of models.

Precisely because both of these aspects are visible in the verse, there is no distinctive landscape and little sense of continuity in motif. No doubt it is true, as Wilkes suggests, that Brennan developed the sequence from at least four earlier versions. Wilkes claims that the "Source" poems have been studiously grouped to allow the modulation of themes from each phase into the next:

and trains of imagery have been sustained and developed to make the series cohere. It is this coherence, with the art bestowed upon it, that has still to be recognized."⁽³⁾

Certainly "Towards the Source" has of all the sections of Poems 1913 the most involved textual history: but where is the coherence that Wilkes describes?

Our best starting-point is with "A Prelude" that opens "Towards the Source". It was a piece added in after the main body of the sequence (as we have it in XXI Poems) had been written. Nevertheless Wilkes

claims that this poem "sets the imagery of that whole section
 ["Towards the Source"] and reveals its antecedents."⁽⁴⁾ This is true
 enough of Brennan's procedure throughout the rest of Poems 1913:
 whenever he begins a fresh movement he uses a prelude to establish its
 setting, and a train of images to correspond to that.

Yet here Brennan does not seem to be establishing anything of
 importance. In "A Prelude" he states nothing and tells no story; he
 only whispers to us, and the whispers are very hard to hear. There is
 an almost Verlainian quality about the whole piece: a dimness, a mistiness,
 a deliberate lack of meaning. Brennan is working very delicate and
 slight motifs that are like flowers pressed into a book, emitting faint
 odours.

If there is no narrative in it, then how can we describe the poem?
 It is all atmosphere and emotion; but the atmosphere is indistinct,
 the emotions are very vague and general. The poet presents us with a
 dim correspondence between a maiden's eyes and the transition between the
 seasons:

the tranced maiden's eyes
 open'd, a far surmise
 and heaven and meadows grew
 a tender blue

Here he is evoking a sweet image, an atmosphere of beauty to which the
 indistinct figure of the maiden is secondary. Spring will give way to
 summer, and the lover's feelings turn to lust:

O natural ecstasy!
 O highest grace, to be,
 in every pulse to know
 the Sungod's glow!

but there he is speaking as much of art as of love; and in the last stanzas he addresses those poets to whom in fact he owes his inspiration:

your jewelled phrases burn
richly behind a haze
of golden days. -

but it is useless to try and separate out the different themes. The poet is referring to no particular occasion, or person, or poet, but simply recalling all the beautiful and happy moments in his past, when he was experiencing nature through love or art. "A Prelude" closes on this note, which in a dim and far-off way seems to herald "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

but such a long-range intention is doubtful, for Brennan there is wholly entangled in his own diction. The abbreviated and twisted syntax - "not/are ye forgot" refers back to a phrase fully six lines above - suggests that Brennan is in fact subordinating content to form, and trying to achieve the simple effects of song by short lines and hackneyed inversions.

His sole aim in "A Prelude" is the creation of beauty: the matter of it is unimportant. A deliberate cultivation of nostalgia, the evocation of a romantic scene, is all it can really claim to do.

But it is not to our purpose to dismiss or condemn "A Prelude" for

despite its weaknesses in diction it does show Brennan consciously rehearsing himself in the French mode. It reveals the embryo of a Symbolist; he is trying out the techniques of suggestion and correspondence which later it will be interesting to relate to the whole of Poems 1913. We are concerned rather with testing Wilkes's statement that the poem "sets the imagery" of "Towards the Source". It is hard to see how Brennan can have intended to do anything so positive, when so much vagueness surrounds it. But let us explore a little further.

Does "A Prelude" bear any relation in mood, image or theme to those pieces which immediately follow it?⁽⁵⁾ Here we find a wide divergence of motifs, pine-trees, bells, dying leaves and stars (in the first phase); and of settings, night, the city, "grimming deserts" and paradise (in the second). All these seem to draw us far away from the "sweet days of breaking light" suggested at the opening of "A Prelude". True, Brennan again evokes a dawn setting in "Dies Dominica! the sunshine burns" (6) and in "Let us go down, the long dead night is done" (12), but both these pieces differ greatly from "A Prelude".

Wilkes calls the mood of the first "a mood of yearning"⁽⁶⁾. But yearning for what? If it were for a lost past or a distant beloved, we could perhaps place it in line with "A Prelude" and the poems of the third phase. But "Dies Dominica" is distinct. It is the first of what we could call Brennan's "vision-poems": those rare moments of clarity when the poet seems to stand above time experiencing pure delight in the whole of being:

this hour is my eternity!

sums up the feeling of it. Surely the mood is one of sheer tremulous rejoicing.

Besides this, "Dies Dominica" stands quite apart from "A Prelude"

because it is essentially a religious poem.⁽⁷⁾ The use of the incense motif, which pervades the whole piece, and of such words as "soul" (three times), "passion" and "claustral", indicate that Brennan's concern is to present all natural beauty as the glorious expression of God, to whom the poet is offering it up again.

"Let us go down now" is a more purely atmospheric piece working, like "A Prelude", by suggestions of beauty. But again his use of the dawn is quite unrelated to any memory or illusion of a beloved maiden. The poet envisages a general awakening far in the future in "the eternal morn". As in "Dies Dominica" there are specifically religious overtones. The earth is described as "perfect with suffering for her Lord's embrace" and "the adoring whole". But apart from this it must be admitted that the poem is somewhat vague; for instance in:

soul, let us go, the saving word is won,
down from the tower of our hermetic thought.

Is it the poet, descending from his ivory tower: or is it all souls he describes? Brennan in all probability is not saying anything at all: the most important feature of the poem is its landscape, which has the exact qualities of a late Victorian water-colour:

The spaces of the waters of the dawn⁽⁸⁾
are spiritual with our transfigured gaze;
the intenser heights of morning, far withdrawn,
expect our dream to shine along their ways

This pale, and weak imagery is in sharp contrast with the bright and well-defined contours of "Dies Dominica"; but its vagueness also quite precisely distinguishes it from "A Prelude" where we detect the influence of Verlaine. It is the same kind of unfortunate vagueness that

we see in Tennyson, Swinburne and Patmore, the English poets.

Now if Brennan is using the same setting in each of these three poems and yet we cannot trace any train of thought that leads directly from one to the other, then what conclusions can we draw? He is at this early stage of his writing concerned almost entirely with the creation of beautiful effects, and with the texture of the verse. Sometimes this texture, as we saw at the end of "A Prelude", is very weak and thin; this shows him to be at the imitative stage, still experimenting with various verse forms and motifs, so that there is an almost accidental quality about the content of the poems. We can see little correspondence between these three early pieces: instead there is a dimness and diffuseness. The reader is conscious of a lack of continuity.

Perhaps it is unfair to test the "coherence" of the early poems by choosing those set in "dawn". The second poem of "Towards the Source" for instance, would seem to be much more firmly set in actuality. We have here the pair of lovers who "sat entwined" by the sea:

dreamt that strange hour out together

fill'd with the sundering silence of the sea.

We will discount for the present the idea that "A Prelude" sets the imagery of the "whole" section; for it contains no mention of "sea". Nevertheless Brennan does nicely round off the poem by maintaining his setting at the end, where the lovers (still presumably entwined and sitting) feel themselves enveloped in "the irresistible sadness of the sea". This strong concluding line catches up the entire mood of the poem. Moreover Brennan successfully creates a correspondence, for the lovers are seated "underneath pine-trees" and can hear "in their boughs the murmur of the surges". An equation is made therefore between the

trees and the sea: both can evoke the feelings of melancholy in separation.

Yet if the poem is read very carefully a doubt arises: what seems actual, might not be so at all. Are the lovers sitting by the sea: or is the sea only suggested by the noise of the boughs above them? From here it is only a short step to wondering whether even the trees are there for the last line of the first stanza is:

stirr'd by the sole suggestion of the breeze

Could that line in fact be responsible for the whole poem?⁽⁹⁾ I think we again see Brennan consciously rehearsing himself in the symbolist techniques of suggestion and correspondence. We cannot blame the very young poet for doing that. Yet in some way I think we feel cheated.

"We sat entwined" cannot be condemned on the grounds of artificiality, for it is irrelevant to discuss whether the experience described in a poem is based on an actual, or a personal experience. It might or might not be, with perfect propriety on the poet's part. What worries us here I think is the doubt that Brennan himself shows in creating such a confused landscape. He is not quite in command of the different elements that have gone to make up the poem, of the real and ideal: His landscape, which apparently was actual, is in fact undecided and elusive.

But to return to the question of how "A Prelude" relates to the whole of "Towards the Source"; as we have seen, the poems of the first phase do not correspond to that opening piece in imagery or theme, and there is a lack of coherence between them. But after the first transitional piece (9), there is some unity of theme and setting; the picture of the poet imprisoned in "some narrow world of ever-streaming air" behind "the dun blind of the rain", does vividly suggest the dark, almost putrid

atmosphere that surrounds the middle phase. The imagery of (9) is reiterated and developed in the following poem, where the sickly "yellow gas" is seen dimly lighting "rows of heartless homes" and "dead churches" till finally:

on the utmost post, its sinuous gleam
crawls in the oily water of the wharves

In (11) these correspondences are carried to a conclusion, for we are presented with the city as a place of pollution and evil, the very sign of our fall from grace:

And see! for ages have we dragg'd our long disease
o'er many a hideous street and mouldering sepulchres,
till not a capital of towers and blacken'd trees
but reeks with taint of us, drips with our blood and tears.¹⁰

We can see this much coherence in the imagery. But when we examine the individual pieces more closely we find the same kind of inner diffuseness that prevailed in the first phase. For instance "The yellow gas", while it opens brilliantly with a sordid city scene, positively reeking with the poet's ennui, falls afterwards into unrelated chaotic fragments. We might say that the image of water prevails through the poem. It is seen at first lapping dirtily around the wharves of the town. Then in the next stanza, the poet waxes fanciful, and refers to "Homer's sea"; a line later, he mixes this classical allusion with a religious touch, when he speaks of the "priest-like waters". Straight after this, we are confronted with "fat and strange-eyed fish that never saw / the outer deep, broad halls of sapphire light." The sacramental quality of the waters has apparently dropped away; we have travelled a long way from the Sydney Harbour. But Brennan saves his final flight of

fancy for the imagery of the end of the poem:

[we] had thrilled to harps of sunrise, when the height
whitens, and dawn dissolves in virgin tears,
or caught, across the hush'd ambrosial night,
the choral music of the swinging spheres⁽¹¹⁾

We find ourselves condemning this stanza, less for its obvious artificiality than for the fact that it relates in no conceivable way to the rest of the poem. The imagery of water which provided, even in its confusion, a guiding thread to the poem has been lost, and the threat of a fearful ending to the world, that comes at the end of the poem in the form of "red flame or deluge", simply fails to affect the reader.

The general vagueness of these poems of the middle phase prevents them from amounting to a unity of significance. So far Brennan has not succeeded in creating any image or setting that will be important to the whole of Poems 1913. He is still quite uncertain of the direction his poetry will take, and the imagery of "cities" is picked up only briefly, then dropped again. Once again we see him indulging in the sheer atmosphere, the "art" of poetry and experimenting with borrowed landscape and forms.

It is not until the fifteenth poem of "Towards the Source" that we are returned to the early morning atmosphere of "A Prelude" and that the theme of newly awakened love clearly declares itself. But by this stage "A Prelude" has ceased to matter to the section as a whole. The third phase of the poems is really introduced by "Where the poppy-banners flow" (15). This had not been included in XXI Poems, and obviously Brennan added it in for that specific purpose. A note he made

upon "Poppies" which Wilkes quotes, is a further proof of its introductory function:

It is the first in date of the third section of
 "Towards the Source"; and with all its precious faults
 gives, in its right intensity I think, a dominant motive of
 all that section.⁽¹²⁾

When he speaks of its "precious faults" Brennan shows some criticism of it, but the criticism is mild. Indeed it would be hard to condemn "Poppies", for while it is little more than a ditty, a self-conscious confection of affected naiveté and cloying-sweet sentiments (sometimes almost overtly borrowed,⁽¹³⁾ it is a complete unity. The atmosphere is a nice mixture of the real and the ideal; the situation of the pair of lovers wandering hand-in-hand through a field of poppies is quite a possible and likely one, although the poet has romanticised it a little:

in and out amongst the corn,
 spotless morn
 ever saw us come and go

 hand in hand, as girl and boy
 warming fast to youth and maid,
 half-afraid
 at the hint of passionate joy

Brennan as yet is nowhere near achieving a symbolic poem - that is, a unified significant whole governed by a "symbol" which relates it to some higher order of reality - yet he has, in "Poppies", successfully woven together imagery and theme, so that one sustains the other. And perhaps this is for the first time in Poems 1913.⁽¹⁴⁾

But in what ways does "Poppies" give the "dominant note" of the last section? And how much coherence do we find there? Certainly these poems form a more clear-cut group than those earlier in "Towards the Source". The list of motifs that Brennan made out for the third section of XXI Poems does give us some idea of his intentions here: "mists", "seas", "source", "blueflowers" "romance"⁽¹⁵⁾ They suggest the Romantic forest and the Nordic setting against which the lovers will be placed; they will help us to trace through the delicate pattern of corresponding images of the last phase.

Now "Poppies", as we have seen, was not previously included in XXI Poems: but Brennan has added in this and other poems as his purpose becomes clearer. He establishes the pair of lovers in a landscape that is half-real and half of dream. The next piece in "Towards the Source" begins "Deep mists of longing blur the land." The poet looks back to a time of joy with the beloved; and at the end he looks forward to their reunion. But it is all quite purposefully vague. He speaks of "this floating world of dream"; and this forms the context of all the poems of lovelonging that follow. He is exploring the emotions of youthful love: the yearning, the pain in separation in that charming stanza:

And I am in a narrow place,
and all its little streets are cold,
because the absence of her face
has robb'd the sullen air of gold. (25)

the imagined meeting in:

. . . happy lovers' rest

lost in that timeless hour when breast is joined to breast. (19)

Finally the dream of love culminates in a rather beautiful poem beginning

"White dawn", which might well be called the "Epithalamion" of "Towards the Source". The imagery of light that filled these poems of the last phase is dismissed, and replaced by night:

Nay, virgin dawn, yet art thou all too known,
too crowded light
to take my boundless hour of flaming peace:
thou common dayspring cease;
and be there only night, the only night. (27)

Here we are seeing right forward to "Lilith".⁽¹⁶⁾

We might say that Brennan at least from the point where he included "Poppies" in "Towards the Source", succeeds in creating a train of corresponding images and a central theme (love dreamt of, and then achieved). Yet as we have seen the poems of the last phase do not end with (27)⁽¹⁷⁾ and looking back at them individually we find inner inconsistency, a lack of continuity between imagery and theme. For instance the image of lovers in "Of old, on her terrace at evening" is haunting but elusive. Their somewhat ominous surroundings: "the gloom of the forest" that shuts them in, and "the Night with her spread wings rustling" seems to suggest a mood greater than that of mere lovelonging. But the poet reminds us he is not describing a moment of the present:

not here - in some long-gone kingdom
of old, on her terrace at evening . . .

How, in a "long-gone kingdom", could there be a terrace? The mood which the image releases, though indefinable, is charming enough: but does it convey any meaning either in itself, or for the section as a whole? Once again we find Brennan indulging in the sheer art of poetry,

creating a delightful imagined setting for lovers who yet cannot be seen except dimly, through a context of dream.

Sometimes his imagery is not so well sustained as in "Of old". In (23), for instance, the lover is seen sitting in the twilight and dreaming that the spring maiden might arise before him. He envisages the lost past, in this hour of gentle recollection:

the thunderwheels of passion thro' the eve,
distantly musical, vaporously agleam,
about my old pain leave
nought but a soft enchantment, vesper fable.

The first two stanzas show the young poet at his best. He is using the process of suggestion: soft blurred images which combine not in a contrived but in a natural and pleasing way to produce a single mood of tender yearning. Also the landscape of the poem corresponds to "Poppies", which introduced the third phase:

I feel the simple flowerets where we strayed
in the clear eves unmix'd with starry strife

This is in pleasing contrast to the overdone melodramatic settings of the earlier poems, for instance (7) and (10). But the whole piece is ruined by the last three lines which hang unsteadily onto the end of the poem like a hideous plaque all embroidered with flowers:

an hour of happy hands and clinging eyes -
on silent heartstrings
sweet memory fades in sweet forgetfulness.

For a Victorian reader that image might not have seemed distasteful: for us it is hackneyed, devoid of meaning and quite artificial. The freshness which characterized the setting of the earlier parts of the

poem, and the unity of subject, tone and imagery that Brennan had woven, are entirely lost. We remember only the last quite extraneous fragment of it, which remains fixed in the mind because it is so outstandingly bad.

Often the matter of these "dream-of-love" poems is so slight that even a unified imagery fails to impress us. In "Was it the sun that broke my dream" Brennan says nothing at all. The faint correspondence between the "dazzle" of the beloved's hair and the early morning sun is virtually the whole substance of the poem and the threefold repetition of the first line, rather than creating the Symbolist effect of incantation, persuades us that Brennan is hard put to it to stretch his meaning out over three stanzas.

But perhaps the most misty piece in all the last phase is "When the spring mornings grew more long" (22), a poem which Brennan presumably added onto the last group of XXI Poems in order to clarify his associated themes of lovelonging and fulfilment. By the time we reach (22) we have grown quite used to the poet's "floating world of dream". We recognize that he is never describing the present moment, and when he says he wishes to "awake", he means of course into the past or the imagined future. But the confused picture of (22) is almost impossible to grasp:

early I woke from dream that told
of dreaded parting . . .

The poet wakes from a dream that tells of parting from the beloved; but in the last stanza:

- as now I long only to wake
 once in that quiet shine of spring
 and dream an hour the hour will bring
 thy laughing call that bids me wake

he longs for a dream that will tell of waking with the beloved. All this complication is confusing for the reader, who wonders why the poet did not quite simply say that he misses his beloved, and longs to be with her. (18)

The third phase then does contain a greater coherence of imagery and mood than the earlier sections of "Towards the Source". The "Poppies" envoi gives the "dominant motive" of the dream of love, and we do find something of a controlled movement of thought towards the "Epithalamion". But the poems within themselves are frequently vague and diffuse and we see Brennan falling again into the weaknesses of "A Prelude".

Is our judgment of the poems perhaps too harsh? As we have pointed out before, the poet's real concern in "Towards the Source" is to exercise himself in the elementary Symbolist techniques, to create fragments of Beauty. The essential nature of the whole process of suggestion is its dreaminess, its vagueness and mystery which obliquely present the divine world, the poet's vision of perfection. But unfortunately, a large part of the general shifting-about and dreaminess of these early poems is not the result of Brennan's conscious use of esoteric methods: it shows his own lack of control, his failure to integrate the products of his imagination into an organic whole.

Before making a final statement about the imagery of "Towards the Source", let us look back over that section as a whole. We have already claimed that Brennan fails to organize his motifs and settings into a coherent frame. Perhaps the most notable proofs of this failure are that the imagery of spring, which as "A Prelude" indicates was intended to dominate "Towards the Source", does not assert itself; and that the one image which the title of the series leads us to believe will be central ("Source") is barely established at all.

Thus in "A Prelude" we are shown spring as a delicate maiden, released from the spell of winter:

The northern kingdom's dream,
 prison'd in crystal gleam,
 heard the pale flutes of spring,
 her thin bells ring:

But as we have seen this delicate and beautiful imagery is succeeded, in the first and second phases, by other more sombre settings: autumn (4) the crumbled hostelry (7) the city and night (10). We are only returned to it in the last movement.

Wilkes in his discussion of how the pieces were fashioned into "a single poem" claims that in "Towards the Source" the imagery of spring is "most conspicuous", and "the interval of separation from Elizabeth is measured as 'four springtimes lost'"⁽¹⁹⁾ Certainly in the poem that follows the "Epithalamion", the lover speaks as if this were so:

Four springtimes lost: and in the fifth we stand,
 here in this quiet glory, still,
 while o'er the bridal land

the westerling sun dwells in untroubled gold. . . (28)

but is the imagery of spring so conspicuous throughout the whole section?

We do catch faint glimmerings of the spring here and there: "the bashful blue-eyed flower-births of the North" (19); "low-laughing child haunting my old spring ways"(23); and "an odour of undying spring"(25). But these are very fleeting suggestions, and when in (28) the "woodland prime of love, its violet-budded vow" is seen receding "farther and farther down the past", it is really no surprise to the reader, who was almost unaware that anything so definite had existed.

Wilkes discusses also Brennan's use of the romantic forest, the forest of German legend which forms a kind of general setting for the poems. Were this more firmly established it might form a kind of window into "The Forest of Night" where the enchanted woodland setting appears again, in "The Quest of Silence". But in "Towards the Source" all settings are vague and lacking in significance, so we shall leave our discussion of "the forest" for the next chapter. More tangible perhaps is the motif of "Blueflowers" which, as we have seen Brennan listed in front of XXI Poems. Wilkes quotes a note from the Prose:

As against the flushed and flaunting rose, the small blue flowers that scarcely venture to show themselves have been from time immemorial associated in the popular mind with the more contemplative quiet and enduring emotions. (20)

This gives us the background of Brennan's intentions and certainly when we turn to the text of "Towards the Source" we find the motif has been

used. Blueflowers are suggested in "heaven and meadows grew/a tender blue "(1); in the phrase quoted above (p. 81) from (19); in "dear / small flowers" (22). But the poet also uses other flower motifs, for instance the poppy (15); and in (19) there is a veritable mélange of flowers, "the delicate feather-pinks", "forget-me-nots and violets of the wood", snowdrops and at the end, "the streaming lilac-bloom."

Brennan does not show the power of selection we will see when in "The Forest of Night" a single flower, the rose, is chosen and developed in all its natural and occult aspects. In other words he does not endow the motif of blueflowers with significance for the whole of "Towards the Source". The association between the flowers, the forest and the spring are there but they are very dim. The reader is left to complete them and again, we see that the section as a whole does not attain to the "coherence" which Wilkes believes Brennan has achieved.

Even more muffled and indistinct are the suggestions that surround the "Source". What did Brennan intend this to signify? Once again, Wilkes comes to our assistance by sketching out the probable origins of the motif. He quotes an unpublished epitaph:

Towards the source withouten way
intend, where thou alone may'st drink;
thin^e ancient soul upon its brink
stands naked in a whiter day.

Also he notes that in his "Lectures on Symbolism, 1904", Brennan speaks of Eden, the "Golden Age" and the "Fountain of Youth". Gathering these pieces of evidence together, Wilkes claims that the poet is using the "Source" in the sense of "glacier springs," as in the "Epilogue, 1897" which Brennan originally considered as a prelude to "Towards the Source":

For there I know the pools of clearest blue,
 glad wells of simple sooth,
 there, steep'd in strength of glacier springs, renew
 the lucid body of youth.

We are indebted to Wilkes for this invaluable knowledge: now let us turn to the text of "Towards the Source". In "A Prelude" we are presented with the picture of a "romantic glade" and a dim legendary figure bending over a well:

lost Undine wept
 where the hid streamlet crept

Is this the "Source" of the poems? Is this the lost beloved? The suggestions that the image evokes are not made clear until (18):

Why shouldst thou come to squander here
 the treasure of those deeps on me?
 nay, where our fount is free and clear
 stay there, and let me come to thee!

but by then the source maiden of "A Prelude" is forgotten. Who then is being addressed? As we have seen (Introduction, p. 16) the beloved of "Towards the Source" is not one, but a number of figures. There is in the same poem a third, even fainter suggestion that the Source, if recovered by the poet, would yield up the whole secret of Art:

And oft, in twilights listening
 my sleeping memories are stirred
 by lavings of the unstaunched spring
 upwelling in a sudden word.

In the text of the "Source" poems then we can find little to help us understand the "Source". There is more explanation of its meaning

in poems outside it, such as the "Epilogue" mentioned by Wilkes, and the unpublished piece which begins:

She listens by the sources
where olden quiet lies
unto the silent forces
where the bound depths are wise. (21)

There at least Brennan suggests a correspondence between the beloved and the source. But in "A Prelude" and in (18) the image is not given a clear significance, nor can we see its relationship to the title of the poems.

We are now ready to conclude our comments upon the imagery of "Towards the Source". Although we have been able to trace out some association between theme and setting, especially in the last phase, the general effect that the sequence creates is that of uncertainty and immaturity. We feel that if Brennan had worked again upon all the correspondences of spring, love and dream, a much greater coherence could have been achieved. For instance he could have used the "Source" as a central symbol, to govern and unite all the poems. Instead we have a series of filaments that are not woven together. All the different motifs, including the "Source", remain on the level of "image"; at best they are integral parts of the individual poems, but cannot be accorded the status of "symbol."

However, in "Towards the Source" Brennan has profitably used many Symbolist techniques. Probably here he comes closer than anywhere else in Poems 1913 to creating "le Rêve;" it is more beautiful than any other section except "Lilith". Ironically, it is this very success which proves his artistic failure. Because he is still the self-conscious imitator, still experimenting with forms and motifs, he has not yet

created a convincing poetic landscape. Much of the imagery that we have discussed has a falseness about it because it does not properly relate to the themes of the poems. We are left with an impression of charming diffuseness.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER THREE.

1. We should remember however that an imagery of ice, stars and gems which Brennan initially "borrows" from the English Romantics or from Nerval and Mallarmé would even for a reader at the turn of the century appear relatively fresh.
2. Introduction, p. 33.
3. "The Art of Brennan's 'Towards the Source'"; Southerly 1961, p.28.
4. Ibid.,p.35.
5. Here I am referring again to the framework of three "phases" or "movements" that Wilkes suggests in his article. He describes XXI Poems as "not an assembly of poems in chronological order, but a single poem in three movements, with an envoi" (ibid.,p.31); and traces the evolution of "Towards the Source" from this. Certainly the setting out of the poems in both volumes upholds this grouping into three. But is XXI Poems "a single poem"?
6. Ibid., p.36.
7. Previously, in Brennan's plan for XXI Poems this was grouped with "Let us go down" under the title "Easter"; and, as a further proof of its religious nature, "Dies Dominica" translated from Church Latin means "the Lord's day."
8. This line is awkwardly expressed: another proof of Brennan's youthful experiments in diction.
9. The actual situation (if the poem is based upon one) might well be the more mundane one of the lovers sitting on the verandah of Frau Werth's boarding-house in Berlin, and feeling a slight breeze come up off the street.

10. The influence of the poètes maudits is felt very strongly here, which robs the image of much of its intensity. There is a contrived melodramatic quality about the stanza, as if Brennan were simply describing but not imaginatively feeling the horror of his image; c.f. "Lilith" where the horrid aspects seem to arise from his own mind.
11. This is the perfect illustration of McAuley's comment that "there is no Brennan style" (Australian Poets series: C.J. Brennan, p.34). The whole poem, starting with a vision of the desolate Cité and then passing into this "ambrosial" landscape represents a kind of forced marriage between Baudelaire and an English post-Romantic poet (Swinburne or Patmore), elements of whose verse Brennan has not quite fused into a whole.
12. In the note Brennan also said that he had a "foolish and special affection for it". Does "precious faults" refer to this "affection", or is he recognizing its artificiality? Probably the latter.
13. The line "hid in the summer's rose unblown" comes almost unaltered from Keats's "Sleep and Poetry". The borrowing could be quite unconscious on Brennan's part.
14. Except in "Bells".
15. The list of motifs for the first phase does not assist us, since ~~these were~~ considerably altered between XXI Poems and Poems 1913; the list for the second, "Cities", "Soul-Sickness" and "Dawn" is rather too brief to indicate Brennan's intentions there.
16. Where the nightly setting is used for the nuptials of Adam and Lilith.

17. See Introduction, p. 17 . "Towards the Source" ends in fact with a short poem(30), which provides the transition into "The Forest of Night".
18. Patmore causes the same unnecessary complications in his poem "The Day After Tomorrow" where the lover in effect says nothing except that he will see his beloved (the day after tomorrow).
19. "The Art of Towards the Source", p.34.
20. Ibid. The quotation is from a note to From Blake to Arnold (pp. 201-2). It is unfortunate that Wilkes does not back it up by detailed reference to the text of the poems. Yet the collection of evidence about the motif, from Brennan's letters and writings, is extremely valuable to the student.
21. Verse, p.215.

CHAPTER FOUR: "THE TWILIGHT OF DISQUIETUDE" AND "THE QUEST OF SILENCE".

Now as we have seen the imagery of spring is dismissed at the end of "Towards the Source" in (28). "Red autumn"; the first poem of the next section, is distinct in mood and theme from all those which follow it. The series really begins with "Liminary" (32), which introduces new trains of imagery and foretells the whole main movement of thought in "The Forest of Night".

"Towards the Source" ended with the bridal couple about to unite (27); yet the final poems released a mood of restlessness and discontent. The lover wishes to "follow the roads and follow still," to find his beloved "as once . . . ere I might dare to woo" (30). This suggests that he is still restless, and committed to a search for fulfillment. The nuptial hour described in (27) has failed to satisfy him.

"Liminary" takes up again the twin themes of dream and passion. As McAuley says, the lover finds the bride of "Towards the Source" is "a mere earthly mate and not the perfect spirit bride, and is thrust out from the paradise he was about to re-enter." Now, in "Liminary" he "looks forward to the hour of nuptial union as an initiation into the divine realm . . . the fusion is attempted of aspiration to the divine and most intense eroticism. Sexual union is to be a transfiguration and a raising to the divine level."⁽¹⁾

Clearly then the theme of "Liminary" reflects back upon "Towards the Source", but also by passing through hope to disillusionment, from joy to a final futility, it points forward to the conclusion of "Lilith". Thus, it extends beyond the "intense eroticism" that McAuley finds in it: it serves to knit together all the early sections of Poems 1913.

But since our main concern is with the imagery and symbolism of the poems, let us examine "Liminary" along these lines. When we look closely at the text we find there is a circular movement of thought which the imagery makes visible for us. Thus, at the beginning the poet decides to move out of the state of dream and re-enter the normal stream of life:

The hollow crystal of my winter dream
and silences, where thought for worship, white,
shimmer'd within the icy mirror-gleam

Thought or dream is represented by the whiteness of "crystal" and the "mirror-gleam", which also suggest isolation and aloofness. The new life he is about to enter is by contrast filled with vivid colours, "the flood of broader light". He resolves also to cast away the "ritual of illusive artifice" in his verse and show "the naked side".

The poet now describes a scene of passionate physical union which with its hues of red and gold and luxuriant imagery reaffirms his dismissal of the white "winter dream":

The hidden places of her beauty hold
the savour 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.

This is the "hour of nuptial union" which McAuley describes. It shows the poet is indeed returned into reality and actively living in a moment of the present. But if he has dismissed mere contemplation, I think we begin to detect an exaggerated quality in his description (above). This is made more apparent in the stanza that follows it:

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

. . .

which shows Brennan is aware that he is exaggerating. The whole movement of thought is most carefully controlled and sustained by the slightly florid description. The "too eager life" and the image of "rich noons" on "each lustrous slope" is deliberately overdone. In other words, the movement from life back into dream has already begun, the "circular movement" which is typical of "Liminary" and all "The Forest of Night".

In the next passage the idea of the dream of love is built up by further correspondences. The scenes of passion take on the tones of "intense eroticism" (see McAuley, above), as the lover fiercely addresses his mistress:

Oh, take me to thy bosom's sultry beat,
 steep all my sense in thy long breath of flame

but also their union becomes cosmic in its implications. As their passion mounts, they imagine themselves to be kings or gods of the earth:

our joy shall swell the exultant heart of day,
 our love shall tinge the rose of sky and sea.

This is very far removed from any suggestion of actuality; and the nuptial passage ends wholly in a context of dream:

pallid seers proclaim the doom-day nigh
 and shuddering nations watch the death of kings.⁽²⁾

It is easy enough to see how the development of thought gives rise to different types of imagery: the "white" of thought giving way to the "red" of desire. Now that the lovers' desire has been fulfilled, the

colour turns to brown, it is an "eve of smoky brown." The scene changes to the desert which will be a significant setting in "The Forest of Night". He speaks of "the unslaked caravans of vast desire": desert stands for a sense of waste and desolation, the moods which are now returning into the poem. Love has been experienced to the full, but is now expent.

However the passage that follows this description of the death of love is somewhat obscure. The desert imagery is dismissed, and the poet seems to be referring to some dim legend, which perhaps disguises a personal experience. But there is no apparent relationship between these lines and the nuptial theme of the poem:

A little yet, a little - wait, O files
obedient to my dumb command - the brow
may waive its frigid lordliness . . .

The prophetic tone is full-blown and false. Moreover the allusions to "some viewless Trismegist," "the Boreal gleam" and "the veils of kindly Maya, leaf or smoke", all within the same context, are confusing and obscure. We suspect that Brennan is using a pseudo-myth in order to create an atmosphere of dream.

But a certain direction of thought is given to the last passage of the poem by his image of

the House of Contemplation, vaulted room
soaring, with shade that broods above pale day.

Brennan in writing of Mallarmé described how that poet, at the end of Hérodiade, "saw clearly how morbid the mood was that he had taken on him to symbolize. The house of contemplation has become a crypt: the coldness of death is in it."⁽³⁾ I do not suggest that Brennan draws

either the image or the idea behind it from Mallarmé, but his comment helps to illuminate the sense of "Liminality". For through the rest of the poem we see a conflict between reality and dream. Like the creator of Hérodiade, Brennan is meeting the "temptation to withdraw from life". He would like to "ponder with luxurious regret / over the singing golden morning flown" - that is he would like to indulge again in the nuptial fantasies of the earlier passage - but feels himself instead impelled back into the role of solitary observer:

soon, soon enough the spirit, unproved,
shall on its proud predestin'd circle range,
in dread indifferent solitude . . .

This time, it should be noted, the isolation from life takes on an ominous aspect. The House of Contemplation is a "vaulted room" with "shade that broods". . . .: the image casts a gloom over the end of the poem, creating a sense of imprisonment, ennui and even negation. But also, the circular movement of "Liminality" is completed and its full irony reveals itself. The poet is willing himself to return into that seclusion from which, at the beginning of the poem, he desired to escape. This is a foretaste of the futility we will find in the conclusion of "Lilith".

In "Liminality" Brennan has travelled a long way from "A Prelude" which opened "Towards the Source". Where that was simply a train of dim correspondences, amounting to no total significance, in "Liminality" Brennan has successfully united imagery to theme so that the latter can only be seen through the images. They are indeed the "living body" of the poem. Moreover, while "Liminality" can hardly be termed a "melody" it has "its own arabesque". Despite the obscurities we noted

in the last passage, the poem shows a unity of design. There is no central symbol to which all the elements of the poem, correspondences, themes and settings are subordinate, yet we see in it the rudiments of the "symbolic poem" of Brennan's definition. It contains a largeness of suggestion and a harmony of thought not achieved before in Poems 1913. The central symbol of that sequence has yet to be supplied: "Liminary" helps to prepare its way.

It is unfortunate that immediately after the impressive opening of "Liminary", which later can be seen to illuminate the whole of "The Forest of Night", Brennan falls back into the old weaknesses of the "Source" poems where image and theme are barely held together. The first poems of "The Twilight of Disquietude" are fragmentary and of little individual worth. Some of them are very weak and contribute only in the faintest way to the significance of the series as a whole.

In "Liminary" the study of imagery provided our guiding thread to significance; here no definite train of imagery can be discerned. In "The years that go to make me man", from which we have already quoted in the Introduction,⁽⁴⁾ the poet presents himself in a fine state of confusion:

In wide revolt and ruin tost
against whatever is or seems
my futile heart still wanders lost
in the same vast and impotent dreams.

The context of these early "Twilight" poems is indeed one of "vast and impotent dreams". While (34) can be understood in plain biographical terms the two poems which follow it are obviously unreal, surrounded as they are by an aura of flame and mist. The diction is severely dated.

It is aureate and late-Victorian in the worst possible way. Lines such as "shall mingle boons right glad to wed" (35) convey no emotion, no significance of any kind. But the fault of the poems does not lie in the diction alone, even if this restricts them at the outset: the trouble with both of them is that they are all landscape and no thought.

"I said, And let horizons tempt" is outstandingly bad. If we seek to regard it as a unity of meaning we find sheer contradiction. The poet, calling upon our pity for his exiled state, seeks a "garth", a cloistered place from which no horizon or "windy gates of eastern flame" shall tempt him forth. But the significance of that last motif is somewhat doubtful. As A.L. French has pointed out, we are not sure where to situate the poet, the gates and the flame.⁽⁵⁾ By the third stanza, the poet imagines he has found peace again and expresses this in the rather sickly couplet:

the mild ray of the distant star
and the mild oil earth's patience bred.

However at the end of the poem he again voices dissatisfaction, for the "garth" does not appear to be his resting-place after all: " - No roof-tree join'd the unfinish'd walls". He is still a prey to the calling of the winds:

only the wind - the wind that calls -
may sing me welcome . . . who return.

We will forbear to ask to which place the poet returns. The meaning of those final two lines, surrounded by "wind", is quite obscure. They seem to make utter nonsense of everything that goes before.

"The pangs that guard the gates of joy" shows the same uncertainty as (35). The landscape of "rosy mist" again recalls that piece, although some forest imagery has intruded ("the light heart of leafy mirth"). The

theme would appear to be that of youth awakening into manhood, but the dim diffuse imagery prevents its proper emergence. Instead of the return into rigid contemplation which was promised at the end of "Liminary", we find the poet continually escaping from actuality into a vague dreamland.

"My heart was wandering in the sands" (37) still is filled with an indeterminate imagery of sands, flame and wind. The setting is not so well-defined as to correspond to the desert established in the nuptial passage of "Liminary". Nevertheless this poem does succeed in creating a single mood, hence it contributes to the "Twilight of Disquietude" as a whole. Originally it formed a part of XXI Poems but it is interesting to note that Brennan did not later include it in "Towards the Source". In that series he was concerned with presenting the dream of love, the hope that love would be fulfilled. Here, in (37) he shows the lover's disillusionment. He had hoped by performing the act of love to burn away all the "old unrest and scorn and shame" of his heart and find "the fervid peace of molten suns". Instead he finds

my heart still walks a thing apart,

my heart is restless as of old.

Thus the poem relates to the nuptial theme of Poems 1913 and it sets the mood of restlessness for the "Twilight" movement. The poignant statement of those last lines gives the reader a clue to the function of the series as a whole. It is the first poem of significance.

However the mood and direction that have just been established are soon interrupted, this time by an entirely new strand of imagery in (38) and (39). These poems are infuriatingly vague. We find ourselves again in "vast and impotent dreams." This time the poet seeks to evoke an

heraldic setting and a dream of kingship, but the attempt is a dismal failure. It is not that we condemn Brennan for using heraldic imagery, or expressing nostalgia for a lost great past: but the pictures and the sentiments are obviously artificial, pseudo-heraldic and pseudo-heroic:

What of the battles I would win?

alas! their glory is unheard:

the wind of song wakes not their din

wandering in shadowy glens unstirr'd. (39)

However there is in the first of these poems (38) one significant stanza:

Hasten, O night with nuptial breath!

O hour remote from any face!

vain-glories fade to sweetest death

heart-whelm'd in her divine embrace.

The intrusion of an imagery of night throws the whole context of the poem, with its bright banners, kings and trumpets, into confusion. Nevertheless the new setting will give meaning to the whole series. We notice first of all that there is a compulsive quality about it. This is conveyed by the sudden appearance of the imagery in the context of heraldry. It is also conveyed by the urgency of the tone in which the poet addresses night. Secondly, the image relates to the nuptial theme. He speaks of night as a bride with "divine embrace". This suggests that night will be a salve for the lover's disillusionment expressed in "Liminary" and in (37). Night can perhaps supply that sense of mystery which the earthly mate failed to bring him.

The setting of night is resumed in (40), "Disaster drives the shatter'd night", but this time the strand of nuptial significance is lost.

It is hard to see any continuity between this and the stanza (above):

the mother-face is livid grey

with dumb apocalypse of woe.

Instead of the mere restlessness evoked in the earlier pieces we find a sense of oncoming cosmic disaster. The mist-and-flame poems beside this appear polite and inane. But what is the direction of (38) and (40)? We see night filled with nuptial promise (38) and yet threatening to destroy the world (40): What is the real significance of the setting?

In the next poem Brennan begins to draw these different strands of meaning together. He presents night as the landscape of the mind:

. . . mighty hands have lock'd the keep

and flung the key, long ages past:

there lies no way into the deep

that is myself, alone, aghast.

Here night is being seen as the image of his own despair, his inner chaos, his failure to find himself. Hence the image takes on an inward significance which later characterizes "Lilith".

We have now the sense of approaching a centre. In these last poems of "The Twilight of Disquietude" we are, as it were, on the very verge of discovering some central meaning. The nightly setting pervades them all. The poet describes himself as embarked on a quest:

What do I seek? I seek the word

that shall become the deed of might (42)

and it seems that for the first time since "Liminary" he is writing with certainty and direction: "This is the sea where good and evil merge".

The image of sea now makes the apparent ambiguity of (38) and (40) clearer.

Night is beyond all divisions, it is seen as a great sea on which we are bound to travel:

The night is black: we sail towards what sun
or lurid star may flare beyond the verge.

Thus at the end of "The Twilight of Disquietude" we see the poet's quest widening from a personal wish for peace and repose, into a search for cosmic significance. His days of dream are finished, "Those days of sweetness and of dream are flown", and he is driven forward into the night.

In these final poems we find some unity of significance. I suggested that in (41) we see the "inward" landscape that will characterize "Lilith". It is also true that in all the imagery of night, the presence of Lilith is already felt. Although she has not yet been named, the nightly setting that will surround her begins to emerge in its beauty and terror, its final ambiguity:

Out beyond good and evil are we blown:
then wait not that the dark One lift his scourge.
shake out the sail: somewhere his face is shown.

At that stage we are, as it were, on the outermost perimeter of "Lilith".

However when we look back upon the whole series of "Twilight" poems we find a diffuseness, a tendency for images and themes to fall apart. True, Brennan does create a general mood of restlessness and yearning, but this mood is given no definite direction until we come to the poems of night. Then, we are aware that the poet is committed. In (44) the motif of wings is used for the first time to describe a compulsive flight:

the birds that return not, lost wings of unrest,
have carried my heart into the night.

There we have the first suggestion of man's aspiration to the divine. The motif will also be important in "Lilith". But the suggestion is dropped and the "Twilight of Disquietude" ends on a different note which sounds the new series, "The Quest of Silence."

II.

Had Brennan proceeded straight from the poems of night into "The Shadow of Lilith" he would have preserved a continuity of imagery and theme. Instead we are delayed and sidetracked into "The Quest of Silence", which was not previously envisaged as a separate subsection of "The Forest of Night". At first sight this seems to add little to the development of that sequence as a whole and the imagery first evoked in (45) of "The Twilight of Disquietude" seems an interruption to the cosmic theme:

Peace were in the woods, perchance,
where the kind paths of romance
know a dear deserted hall.

What has a "dear deserted hall" to do with the poet's quest for the "mother-deep" of Night?

Moreover the "Interlude: The Hearth and The Window" seems to represent a further disruption to the strands of imagery and theme that were gradually developed in the "Twilight" poems. The mood of ennui and desolation evoked by phrases such as "my sickly garden"(46) and the picture of the poet standing alone at the window in an "uneasy pause of rain", gazing out on a desolate landscape (47), is entirely new to Poems 1913. We cannot quite see how it forms a bridge between the two sections.

However if we patiently trust to the symbolic script of "The Quest

of Silence", we begin to perceive the reason for this apparent lack of harmony, and discontinuous landscape. At the end of "The Twilight of Disquietude" the poet seemed to have dismissed light fantasy and to have seen the reality of his situation. However the thought of the impending evil and destruction of night was as it were too much for him to face; so he turned away from those terrible gulfs of thought and entered into a new phase of dream. There is something quite compulsive about the transition. What appears to be a lack of artistic unity is really the result of a perfectly natural mental process: the restless and fevered mind seeks tranquillity and peace. The setting must be changed and so we have the opening of "The Quest of Silence" in an aura of legend and woodland mystery.

Let us now examine the new imagery in greater detail. The Holda prelude, "Secreta Silvarum", shows Brennan in full flight from reality. At the beginning we see that his whole intention is to create an atmosphere of dream:

black oaks with emerald lamplets thrill
that flicker forth to her magic tune.

This is little more than a repetition of the romantic "Source" poems, in a more sophisticated vein. Holda's wood is a beautiful piece of escapism, a kind of Keatsian elysium in which the poet can imagine himself at ease:

the while on half-veil'd eyes to feel
the yellow sunshafts broken dim,
and seldom waftures moth-like steal
and settle, on the bare-flung limb

But I do not suggest that Brennan has borrowed his setting from Keats.

While there is an obvious parallel between the cobweb delicacy of this description of repose and certain passages in Sleep and Poetry or Endymion, the cultivation of the Celtic faery setting is Brennan's own. Moreover the atmosphere and imagery of the forest, though seen in this artificial "magic" light, are carefully controlled by the poet's thought:

and mad desire and pain that fill'd
red August's heart of throbbing bloom
in one grave hour of knowledge still'd
where glory ponders o'er its doom

He deliberately puts aside the theme of passion and the quest for nuptial perfection. This is one quiet, perfect moment of recollection when the poet can indulge in his art. It is an instance of *le Rêve* with its "glorious lies", its own confession that it is artificial and contrived. The poet's dream is carefully controlled.

But the forest in "*Secreta Silvarum*" is not only a place of enchantment. For, lying on his back and looking up to the sky, the poet observes:

. . . that glad blue that seems to flow
far up, where dipping branches lift
sidelong their soft-throng'd frondage slow
and slow the thin cloud-fleecelets drift.

That description, while it has a tinge of romanticism about it, is perfectly natural and even contains realistic detail. It is exactly how the sky would appear to a person lying on the ground and looking up at it through branches. Therefore the setting of forest contains a duality of meaning.

A.R. Chisholm has suggested that the forest in "*The Quest of Silence*"

has the same kind of "inner antimony" as the sea. To illustrate this point he goes outside of Brennan's verse, to Valéry's "Cimetière Marin", in which the sea is like a roof of brilliant tiles, representing the calm of the gods, "the everlasting silence of non-dividuation": but it can change, to mirror the "tumultuous energies of life."⁽⁶⁾ Now the forest is like the sea in that sometimes it teems with life and can be illuminated by the beauty of the sunlight filtering through the branches. But at the same time it can shut you off from the world, thus becoming the symbol of hermeticism and containing the principle of darkness - so that night itself, the garment of the "increate" can be looked upon as a forest.⁽⁷⁾

Here Chisholm is touching upon something quite significant: the meaning of the title which Brennan gives to the whole central section of Poems 1913: "The Forest of Night". That title in itself suggests of course that the two settings are intimately connected: that night can be seen as a forest, and the forest as night.

However for the present let us go to the text of the poems and examine the truth of Chisholm's statement from that. In the first poems of "The Quest of Silence", the large duality he describes is not apparent. We are presented with the forest as a real, a natural place, full of light and life. In (49) its greenness is impressed upon us, "this green unbroken dusk" and again in (50) it is described with a "roof of lucid emerald". In the same poem the child, entering the forest at dawn hears "the myriad small noise /and flitting of the wood-life's busy joys." The tiny, acute details of sight and sound - as it would appear to a child - render the forest lifelike. So the forest can be seen to "mirror the tumultuous energies of life."

The other aspect is not so successfully sustained , for unfortunately in these early poems Brennan found himself obliged to crowd the forest with heraldic figures and grotesques (see Introduction, p.3). No. 49 is the worst example of overcrowding, but most of the pieces suffer from an excess of detail. The "legendary" atmosphere, nicely established and with some restraint, in the Holda prelude, is now laid on with a trowel. The result is this kind of writing:

and gaping trunks protrude a snaky root
o'er slinking paths that centre, where beneath
a sudden rock on the short blasted heath,
bare-set, a cavern lurks . . . (52)

The horrific description is stretched out in this manner until the end of the poem, where the poet confronts a "squat shade" and a "broken blade". It is sheer melodrama. But the antimony which Chisholm describes becomes apparent in the single line at the beginning of (52), repeated again after the vision of the cavern: "The forest hides its horrors as the sea". Although Brennan has not followed the double vision through with complete success - for the "horrors" are unconvincing ones - we now begin to see the significance of the forest setting.

In "No emerald spring, no royal autumn - red" the darker side of the forest is fully established. The mood expressed here is that of utter disenchantment. We have witnessed in "Liminary" the poet's movement out of dream and into the hard reality of thought. The same process works here: "No silver bells around the bridle-head/ ripple, and on no quest the pennons play" . . . "The Lady of the Forest was a tale" . . . In these strong short lines the whole context of forest-legend is dismissed and we are prepared for a vision of evil. In (50) the figure of Pan was glimpsed by the wanderer in the woods:

with chuckle of laughter in his thicket-beard,
and rustle of scurrying faun-feet . . .

There he is a merry, playful fellow; but in "No emerald spring" he is seen as an embodiment of evil, "lord of loathly deaths that creep", and the poem ends with an image of "the senile leer of Pan." It is perhaps the only forest poem apart from the Prelude which amounts to a unified significance, and once again, we see that this significance is conveyed through a careful organization of images.

When we look back upon the poems of "The Quest of Silence" up to this point where the forest setting is dismissed, what do we find? Brennan has created a web of images which, while they do not always convey an individual significance, amount in the end to a coherence of thought and mood. This coherence is given them by the setting of forest which can be termed a symbol, in that it governs and unites a whole group of images and themes. The elements contained in it are not fully harmonized: for instance as we have seen the melodramatic vision of (52) does not convey the "horrid" aspect of the forest, hence it is somewhat extraneous to the body of the poem. Yet forest has a large importance for "The Forest of Night". It is the correspondence of night and prepares the way for the duality of that setting, the beauty and terror that will surround "Lilith".

In "No emerald spring" the forest was dismissed. This marks the transition into another group of poems on the theme of absence, in which any definite train of imagery is hard to find. They are no longer held together by a process of suggestion for the poet now turns to a wide variety of settings and motifs: desert, deserted dwellings, the city, flame, rose and witch. "The Quest of Silence" threatens to break into two parts: those poems which have the forest for their governing

symbol; and those which are independent fragments of thought.

We find within some of the latter a disharmony of thought and image. For instance in (58) Brennan describes "the northern witch" farewelling the city with its "stagnant waterways" before passing behind a "glacier wall." The city setting is entirely foreign to "The Forest of Night"; its "stagnant waterways" sound suspiciously like sewers. Into this setting comes the witch, also new to the whole sequence. There seems to be some confusion in the situation, for witches and "stagnant waterways" do not mix well together, especially in the context of church windows, ancient temples and flaming deserts suggested by the surrounding poems.

The city setting is employed again in (61) but this time the atmosphere is quite different. Where (58) was filled with greyness, this is romantic and colourful:

Lightning: and, momentarily, the silhouette,
flat on the far horizon, comes and goes
of that night-haunting city; minaret,
dome, spire, all sharp while yet the levin glows.

However the setting conveys no definite meaning; at least in the poem about the witch, we received a sense of desolation. Here, for all its "mystery" the poet is really describing nothing except the effect of neon lights upon a city horizon. The apparition at the end, of a face "'neath the high turban's plume", staring across the "breast-high stone", is sheer sensationalism:

his face drew mine across the milky gloom:
a sudden moonbeam show'd it me, my own!

This is a return to the self-conscious romantic dream-world of the early "Twilight" poems.

However in the more successful individual poems Brennan does create an intense mood of desolation and despair. "Fire in the heavens" while it is an anthology piece, also conveys this larger mood. In tone and motif it corresponds to the nuptial passage of "Liminary". It is fierce and pulsating and strong; but also it is short, and there is no room for florid extravagant description:

This valley, long ago the patient bed
of floods that carv'd its antient amplitude,
in stillness of the Egyptian crypt outspread,
endures to drown in noon-day's tyrant mood.

The setting of desert is not new to "The Forest of Night". As we have seen it was also used in "Liminary" but while there it was somewhat obscured by pseudo-legend, here it declares itself quite simply as a symbol of waste and futility. The rocky, barren valley that the poet describes was perhaps the scene of ancient greatness, but now deserted it "endures to drown in noon-day's tyrant mood". We are made aware of the total absence of life and sound. The scene is intensely desolate.

The desert, like the forest, shuts one away from the outside world:

vast life's innumerable busy littleness
is hush'd in vague-conjectured blur of sound

However this lack of noise becomes unbearably monotonous, "dulls the brain with slumbrous weight" so that the sudden sharp "torture-point" of the cicada acts as a kind of relief. The poem ends brilliantly on this single acute note of despair which sums up its whole mood of desolation.

The setting is used again with significance in (57). The traveller sees from afar

Breaking the desert's tawny level ring
three columns, an oasis . . .

but on drawing near the place he realizes with horror that:

. . . no shade
falls from the curl'd acanthus leaves; no spring
bubbles soft laughter for its leaning maid.

We are again made aware of a total absence of life. The images of "curl'd" leaves and the maiden cast in the attitude of drinking, contribute to the significance of the poem for they are seen to be unreal.⁽⁸⁾

Again there is a splendid economy in the descriptions. The whole poem consists of only two quatrains, in which not a single word is wasted. In the first the traveller approaches the deserted building, in the second he sees that "The cell is waste" and the desert continues uninterrupted through and around it:

enter, and lo! once more, the hopeless road
world-wide, the tawny desert's level ring

Again the utter monotony of the setting are insisted upon. Whichever way the traveller turns the road is endless, there is no way of escape. The horror and futility of his situation are emphasized by the last line of the poem, which is almost an exact repetition of the first: except that "the desert's tawny level ring" becomes "the tawny desert's level ring." That slight rearrangement of words only increases the sense of imprisonment that the landscape imposes, and the horror of its endlessness.

The desert then in these two poems is a symbol of significance. It unites and governs image, theme and mood. It has the same "inner antimony" as the forest and later, night. All these settings promise tranquillity but finally they are revealed as evil; they smile a welcome to the poet then turn around to mock him and increase his anguish.

However this last setting does not govern all the later poems of

"The Quest of Silence" and its full significance for "The Forest of Night" is not revealed until after "Lilith", in "The Labour of Night". "Fire in the heavens" and "Breaking the desert's tawny level ring" are essentially individual pieces and independent from each other and the series as a whole. Up to this point then, we have not been able to establish any definite train of images to show the final direction of the "Quest of Silence". It seems that Brennan is seeking a dream of perfection in art and love, in every possibility of location and person, but each is in turn rejected. As we have seen many of the figures and settings are lacking in significance. Their importance does not extend beyond the individual poem, and even within these bounds they do not "exist" in a convincing fashion: for instance the witch of (58) is dim and improbable. In the whole of "The Quest of Silence" only the two settings of the forest and the desert attain to the cosmic level where the end of the previous section suggested the poet's quest would take place.

However if we look hard at the last disparate fragments of "The Quest of Silence" we can see some unity emerge. It is nothing so definite as a train of associated images, nor is it an example of "le Rêve": what we do find is a change in colours, something of an atmosphere to prepare us for the transition into "The Shadow of Lilith". As we have seen, in "Lunary" and in (54) and (57) the desert is a fiery place and filled with the corresponding hues of red and gold: it is the "tawny" desert. Now the general movement of all these poems is out of hope and into futility or despair. As hope fades, so colour fades, thus in the last poems of the series we are aware of an absence of colour. In (56) the poet describes a church window which once enclosed a glorious rose. Now there is nothing there:

. . . its disenhallow'd face

beholds the petal-ribs enclose

nought, in their web of shatter'd lace

save this pale absence of the rose

It is hardly necessary to explain that the poem is on the theme of absence. We shall explore the rose motif in greater detail later, with relation to "Lilith", for it occurs only once in "The Quest of Silence". The poem's importance for the series is that it helps to establish an atmosphere of gloom. The picture created here is especially forlorn. Through the hole in the window flows a "gray and dusty daylight"; this enhances the impression of the vivid rose-colours which once filled it. We are painfully conscious of the lack of colour and light.

In (58) as we have seen Brennan uses a very different motif and setting and not with any outstanding success. But if the poem fails to create any unity of sense, it does evoke a single mood, a sense of utter monotony and ennui. "Hence came one greyness over grass and stone:/ the silent-lapping waters fade and tone / into the air and into them the land." The greyness of this scene corresponds to the dismal tones of (56). We can now see the imagery of "The Quest of Silence" moving in a sure direction. The grey which predominates in these poems is the colour of ennui; it represents futility and the absence of hope. Now as we approach nearer to the centre of "The Forest of Night", it is superseded by black. In the next poem we are presented with a stony plain that "blackens with rapid night". All suggestion of movement and life is, as it were, cut off by the sound of a solitary "trump":

The strident clangour cuts; but space is whole,
inert, absorb'd in dead regret.

and there the sense of an impending disaster, an "irretrievable doom" broods over the end of the poem. In (62) the nightly setting again is used and this time its sinister aspect is even more strikingly and realistically impressed on us when the poet describes "the whole lifeless world" of the city with the tide lapping in evil fashion around it:

where the dead tide lies flat round the green quay,
hinting what self-fordone despair it nurs'd.

And at the end of the poem we are presented with a vision of total corruption: "mask'd no more, the maniac face of sin".

The general movement of "The Quest of Silence" then, is towards a vision of evil and destruction. Despite a considerable diffuseness of images and themes within the series, the poet is governed at the end by a compulsive mood of gloominess which draws him towards night. We are at this stage ready to enter into the poems immediately surrounding "Lilith".

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER FOUR.

1. Australian Writers and their Work: C.J. Brennan, p.16.
2. It is interesting to note that Brennan's first plan for "The Forest of Night" began with "Two Luminaries": "The crystal chamber" and "See now the time". He has successfully united them into the one "Liminary".
3. Prose, pp.137-141.
4. Chapter one, p.11.
5. "The Verse of C.J.Brennan", p. 13. One of the rare occasions on which he closely examines the text.
6. Southerly, No.4, 1949, pp.195-203.
7. ibid.
8. An example of what Baudelaire described as "reversabilité". What appears beautiful is also filled with horror.

CHAPTER FIVE.I.

In the Interlude poems that follow "The Quest of Silence" we are at last approaching "Lilith" and the heart of Poems 1913. Of the two pieces, "Chimaera writhes", is easier to understand in terms of imagery, for in its blackness and horror it corresponds to the desolate poems we have just examined:

Chimaera writhes beside the tragic flame
of the old hearth: her starting jaws proclaim,
a silent cry, the craven world's attaint

That "silent cry" recalls the mood of the traveller entering the deserted cell; and the solitary "One!" of the poem that described the dead city(62). Yet the new image contains suggestions of even wider significance. There is a terrible note of intensity about it. We are no longer reading about the poet's search for tranquillity, but being prepared, it seems, for some kind of cosmic disaster. The "moi" of "The Quest of Silence" has passed into an objective vision of mankind.

As we read further into the poem these cosmic proportions become more apparent. It is suggested in the passage (above) that the whole world will suffer from the consequences of Chimaera's death("... her starting jaws proclaim / a silent cry . . .") and that there will be some general cutting-off of rights, or tainting of the blood, ("the craven world's attaint"). The sinister "red flare" of her pyre could reflect on us all:

kindle disastrous on our burning eyes
 from where the sullen embers agonize,
 once the heart's rose-flusht dream of living gold

There the poet's mention of "our" eyes, and "the heart's rose-flusht dream" suggests that Chimaera stands for the death of hope and dream in all men. The monster dying in magnificence is a kind of symbol of the human condition.

Chimaera is the largest and most terrible of all the legendary figures used so far in Poems 1913. In her splendour and in her terror she seems to prefigure Lilith. Yet the poem is not easy to grasp and until we have read the whole of "The Forest of Night" her symbolic function is by no means clear. The figure seems large and impressive enough to deserve the title of "symbol"; yet according to Brennan's definition (see Chapter two) a symbol should govern and unite the poem and Chimaera does not entirely fulfil these conditions.

We will note some of the difficulties involved in reading the poem, as they will recur in "Lilith". Let us take first the rather puzzling lines:

Her vans that beat against a hard constraint
 leap, as the coals jet in a moment-spasm:
 yet their taut ribs hurt not the serpent chasm
 of shade, that slips swift to its absent den,
 to settle, grimmer, at her throat again.
 And, starward were their prison-roof increas'd,
 no sun that bathes him for a dewy east
 would light her mail, above the tainted air
 a meteor-dazzling gem . . .

The whole poem presents a similar looseness of syntax: this gives of course the effect of large sweeps of thought, but when we look closely at the passage in question, we find its meaning is somewhat vague. For instance, does "their prison-roof" refer to Chimaera's vans or ribs? Our commonsense tells us what the syntax does not: that it is her ribs. The next lines too are rather obscure. What does the sun bathe himself in? We are accustomed to think of the sun bathing objects with light; the following phrase, "for a dewy east", seems an unwarranted intrusion into the nightly setting and in the next line, the mention of "meteor" and "gem" confuses us further, for it appears we must now dismiss the idea of sun and consider Chimaera's mail: that is, if her mail is being referred to in that phrase "a meteor-dazzling gem." But this is not certain.

Thus the picture evoked in "Chimaera writhes" is incomplete and difficult to see. Perhaps Brennan has tried too hard to create an "arabesque," a unity, and overcrowds his canvas. Too many images or correspondences of light to describe the Chimaera's mail have resulted in grotesquery. We noted a similar overcrowding of imagery in the earlier heraldic poems; but here the root of the trouble seems not to lie in an uncertainty of purpose and direction as it did before. The significance of Chimaera is seen from the very beginning of the piece: she is a tragic figure announcing disaster to the world. That is plain enough. The "obscurity" of the poem probably results from the very syntax Brennan uses. It is "convoluted" yet diffuse, simply because it runs on without a break. The rhyming couplets do not form self-contained units of sense, nor do they build up to any total significance. There is a tendency to create long sentences which circle round the meaning rather than express it plainly. So the central image is not made

clear.⁽¹⁾

If Chimaera is not quite a symbol, a "meeting-point of many analogies", she can yet be accorded an important place in the symbolic script; for the figure does sum up moods and scenes of the earlier poems and also prepares the setting of "Lilith". But as her full significance is not made clear till we have read further, let us turn for the present to the other Interlude poem.

The imagery of window and hearth which Brennan suddenly introduced to prepare our transition into "The Quest of Silence" seemed to represent an interruption to mood and theme. It is not picked up again until this point where it puzzles us still further. The "lucid fiction of the pane" with its "suffering rose" cannot be comprehended at all until we have reached the end of "The Forest of Night" and traced through all the associations of gem and rose. However we can fix with certainty upon the imagery of spring. When the poet expresses a wish that the "old illusion of the spring/ might perish" we are transported back momentarily to the end of "Towards the Source", where the lover watched his dreamtime of bliss vanishing further and further down the past; we remember too the search for love in "Liminary" which resulted in strong disillusionment and a wish to withdraw from life. "Twice now" is taking up again the nuptial theme, repeating it briefly, then announcing it will be dismissed. The Interlude ends with this couplet, which suggests the whole quest for satisfaction in human love is in fact futile and empty:

lewd summer's dusty mock and roses' fall,
and cynic spring returning, virginal

But the imagery of that is dense and obscure. The seasons, which Brennan had used in "Towards the Source" to announce the positive emotions of

hope, joy and fulfilment are now, as it were, being used in reverse. We have to delve deep for significance.

Could we again find illumination in McAuley's exposition of the nuptial theme in Poems 1913? He showed how in "Liminary" the lover was seeking initiation into "the divine realm", but his bride "a mere earthly mate" failed him. Therefore he turns to Lilith, "the object of man's inmost spiritual quest, the Mother and bride of the spirit, man's true Eden, Eternal Beauty."⁽²⁾ Certainly the lines we have quoted ring of strong disillusionment; and McAuley's exegesis helps us to see the general drift of the poem with regard to the themes of the whole sequence. We might expect this Interlude, at the beginning of "Lilith" to balance "Liminary", where the search for fulfilment in human love was rejected: but is this in fact the point at which the turn towards Lilith occurs?

In the first poem of "The Shadow of Lilith", Brennan introduces yet another strand of imagery. This time its setting is the garden:

The tuberose thickens the air: a swoon
lies close on open'd calyx and slipt sheath
thro all the garden bosom-bound beneath . . .

It seems strange that he should use a botanical imagery, which has appeared nowhere else in "The Forest of Night". This forms an interruption to the setting of black night established at the end of "The Quest of Silence" and in "Chimaera writhes". It does not correspond either to the window setting or seasonal movements of "Twice now". It seems to destroy the continuity of the sequence.

Yet Brennan's description of a great flower about to bloom seems to obliquely announce a coming. Is it the coming of Lilith? We are not yet

conscious of her presence: perhaps the veiled description of it, by use of the garden imagery, increases the sense of great mystery which must surround her. In "Chimaera writhes" the horrid aspect of night was declared; in (66) its beauty is suggested:

Ay, surely near - the hour consents to bless! -
and nearer yet, all ways of night converge
in ~~that~~ delicious dark between her breasts

In that stanza we are made to feel night as a physical presence approaching "near . . . and nearer yet". The last line suggests that night is a desirable woman, a nuptial figure. Again, the nuptial theme is taken up from (64) and we begin to glimpse the "Eternal Beauty" of Lilith. Human desire has failed the poet and so he turns to a more cosmic lover, one who will satisfy all the cravings of his spirit. Hence the image is deliberately large and vague, at once suggesting the occult and actual worlds: On one hand there is in "all ways of night converge": the sense of endless distances, on the other there in "that delicious dark between her breasts", the sense of a physical presence which will fulfil the natural desires of man.

But these are only the dimmest of suggestions. It must be admitted that the imagery surrounding the entrance to the Lilith poems is dense and obscure. It does not reveal a definite pattern of thought, and cannot be understood until we have read all the sections that follow. As the title "The Shadow of Lilith" suggests, it is Brennan's intention to shroud his figure in mystery. Her presence can only be hinted, through the Chimaera, through the flower about to blossom. But why this should be so, we are as yet only permitted to guess; and the variety of settings the window, hearth, garden and night, tends to create confusion

in the reader's mind.

With the help of McAuley's exegesis we have managed to establish the main direction of theme up to this point. In the argument which precedes the "Lilith" section we receive a little more enlightenment. Here we learn that Lilith is "Lady of Night": she is to be identified with that setting. Also her monstrous aspect is described. She is to be associated with Chimaera and all the other fearful figures that haunt man:

whatose'er of serpent - wives is feign'd,
or malice of the vampire-witch that drain'd
fresh blood of fresh-born babes, a wicked blast:
faces of fear, beheld along the past
and in the folk's scant fires: the lore misread,
of her that is the august and only dread . . .

In this passage all the evil figures of legend that have occurred in "The Forest of Night" from the "dark One" of "The Twilight of Disquietude", to the Chimaera of the Interlude, seem to be gathered together. But their purpose is not yet made clear. Is Lilith responsible for them all? Are they to be identified with her? That last line states that they are "of her"; "misread" suggests that they are not.

The poem is thick with images that are difficult to understand, and it is marked by the same diffuseness as "Chimaera writhes". Brennan circles round the meaning, suggesting that Lilith is the fear of night without actually stating it. This obliqueness does not seem altogether due to a deliberate use of the process of adumbration or suggestion; it rather shows an uncertain syntax, a lack of verbal control. A central symbol is hinted, but not fully established. The result is not an

arabesque but a loose floating mass of suggestions.

In the poems of "The Watch at Midnight" Brennan uses for the first time an imagery that is coherent and builds up a uniform setting. Wilkes suggests that these poems constitute the first act of the drama of "Lilith". They set the scene for the action to follow; for now Brennan is objectifying his quest and moving out of the lyrical mode: "'Lilith' is not a series of confessional lyrics, but a drama of conflicting personages . . . the whole is an action shaped to a result."⁽³⁾ Here for the first time, the issues are stated. The "Argument" has already told us that man has fallen from the favour of Lilith. Wilkes points out that now we are being prepared for an encounter. The forces are personalized yet must have no precise features; a setting is needed yet the drama must be sceneless.⁽⁴⁾

We have already noted how in "The Twilight of Disquietude" and "The Quest of Silence" there was a gradual movement away from light and into darkness. The same transition was described in "Chimaera writhes", where the dying monster was at first surrounded by flames, which then subside to sullen embers, till finally

. one spark
flies up, the lesser'd ghost of flame: her flight
stiffens, and is a settled piece of night.

In "The Watch at Midnight" there is no further confusion of imagery nor uncertainty about the direction of theme, for Brennan preserves the setting which ended the previous sections. It now logically becomes the "sceneless scene" of the poems. The only setting of these poems is the night, and his insistence upon the same vast features over and again creates a brooding intensity and releases large associated moods of mental anguish, frustrated physical desire, and the yearning for a spiritual

consummation.

The first poem to establish this setting is "Dead stars" which sketches out the huge dimensions of the Watcher's surroundings. In the last poems of "The Quest of Silence" Brennan dwelt upon great monotonous landscapes: the desert and the city of desolation. Now we are moved into a scene of utter despair. What could be more hopeless than the motif of "Dead stars" which he has chosen to open the poem? In those first two words it seems, all light is extinguished and the Watcher's world is plunged in darkness. However the imagery that follows suggests an even greater depth of despair. Let us examine it more closely. First there is the sense of a fall. This is impressed upon us by "angelic" imagery in:

and fall not, since no lower than any place

needs, when the wing is dash'd and foil'd the face

which seems to be an oblique reference to Lucifer and his angels, hurled out of heaven into the abyss. Brennan then is using the Christian story of the Fall to create a picture of utter futility and despair. However he is only using it up to a point. When he speaks of "coasts of night that well might be supposed / the exiled hall of chaos late-deposed," the use of "supposed" indicates that he is only dimly suggesting the Fall in order to create another, limitless set of circumstances.

The image is deliberately oblique, yet it reveals the theme clearly enough. As we already know from the "Argument", man has "fallen" from supernatural joy, from Lilith's grace, and is separated from her. The suggestions of (ii) lead up to a further encounter with Lilith, but her presence must not yet be felt. The location must be prepared, but the players must be "featureless" (see above, p.120).

Wilkes's description of Brennan's "dramatic" intentions at this point also helps us to understand the second significant strand of imagery in the poem. The setting must be dim because the action also occurs within the Watcher's mind. Perhaps the most important lines of the poem are these, in which he ponders over the scene, wondering whether it could have been created by his own thoughts, or whether it imposes the thoughts upon him. Addressing the dead stars, he asks:

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

That phrase "the dumb and suffering dark" has the dimensions of psychic suffering. The two words "dumb" and "suffering" strain against one another in meaning, creating a sense of tremendous torment, and a longing for release. How can something which is "dumb" express its suffering, or contain it? Is the "dumb and suffering dark" that part of the Watcher's mind which is not yet fully conscious, nor even aware of its own existence?

The same psychic dimensions are apparent in the next poem which creates the impression of vast spiritual suffering. The Watcher looks up for a way of escaping the void that surrounds him; he takes flights upward but cannot penetrate the utter darkness, or find where he is intended to go. The flights image his own restless imagination; the darkness is the projection of his own despair and mental blindness:

O weary realm, o height
 the which exhausted flight
 familiar finds, home of its prompting ill!

and in the next stanza the connection between the landscape and his own mind is even more evident:

Rest - and a new abyss
suddenly yawns, of this
the moment sole, and yet the counterpart:
and thou must house it, thou,
within thy fleshly Now,
thyself the abyss that shrinks, the unbounded hermit-heart!

This and the corresponding passage in "Dead Stars" seem to have a psychological basis; but it is more important at this point simply to realize that the landscape has an inward significance. Whereas before, many images and settings in Poems 1913 were used to evoke minor poetic moods of dream, lovelonging and ennui, these new suggestions open out, as it were, into infinity. We feel a single human mind, in contact with cosmic vastness and whether this mind is that of the poet, or his dim dramatic figure "the Watcher", an acute and genuine sense of despair impresses itself upon us.

It is interesting to compare these "psychic" passages with Milton's Samson Agonistes, in which we know Brennan was well-versed:

Thou art become (O worst imprisonment!)
The Dungeon of thy self: thy Soul
(Which Men enjoying sight oft without cause complain)
Imprison'd now indeed,
In real darkness of the body dwells,
Shut up from outward light
To incorporate with gloomy night

In Milton's (Samson's) case it is an actual blindness that is described. Yet in both poets, it is not only the night but the self which imposes

an imprisonment on the soul; and it is the mind which creates the state of blindness, not the lack of sight.

But let us examine the nightly setting of (iii) further for its sheer atmosphere. What does it add to the developing drama? The motif of plumes at the beginning of the poem increases the sense of an impending disaster which was dimly felt in (i) and (ii):

The plumes of night, unfurl'd
and eyed with fire, are whirl'd
slowly above this watch, funereal (iii)

Night is now seen to be funereal, and filled with gloom; and in the last stanza:

the mightier heart untold
whose paining depths enfold
all loneliness, all height, all vision'd shores

we receive the sense of a tremendous abyss which is about to be identified with some vast presence. The Lady of Night will soon be revealed. The "paining depths" corresponds to the "dumb and suffering dark" of the previous poem. These phrases suggest an unfulfilled desire, both physical and occult. The Watcher seeks a mistress, who will also be divine and mysterious. Here the different strands of imagery draw closer together and we begin to glimpse the significance of "Lilith".

Let us now proceed straight to the opening passage of the first long poem in the series (ix). Here we are placed at once inside the Watcher's mind:

O thou that achest, pulse o' the unwed vast
now in the distant centre of my brain
dizzily narrow'd . . .

The image of a pulse, aching and throbbing, greatly increases the intensity

of the situation. We have now the sense of an approaching crisis: but whose or what pulse is the Watcher addressing? To put it very literally, how can the "vast" have a "pulse"? If we read the script very carefully, it begins to yield its meaning. The pulse is within the Watcher's mind, in its "distant centre". The "unwed vast" suggests his own physical desire, and perhaps approaching nuptials with some being or presence who can fill the vast around him. The pulse is aching, which increases the suggestions of a frustration, a yearning for physical fulfilment. Hence the nuptial theme is taken up again and obliquely stated through the imagery of night.

The psychological basis of the poetry is now made more explicit than in "The Watch at Midnight". Wilkes explains in New Perspectives how Brennan's reading of such works as The Varieties of Religious Experience⁽⁵⁾ had made him familiar with the theory of consciousness as a "magnetic field":

Our whole past store of memories float beyond this margin, ready at a touch to come in; and the entire mass of residual powers, impulses and knowledges that constitute our empirical self stretches continuously beyond it.(p.232)

This knowledge certainly helps us to grasp the complex opening lines, with their mention of such obscure locations as the "distant centre" of the Watcher's brain, the "scatter'd edge" of his "surmise". But the passage can be understood also if we simply attend to its imagery, and read it in the light of what follows; for the pulse of the opening lines is soon identified as the "pulse of night", drawing the Watcher away from the world with which he is familiar, "our little limits of familiar cause", towards "some dark moon of vastness". Again the theme

of approaching nuptials is conveyed through the imagery - apparently diffuse but in fact perfectly controlled and moving towards an end.

In " . . . as tho' the tense and tortured voids should dash /
ruining amorously together", the poet drops the idea of "pulse" and begins to suggest the occult aspect of night. The voids clashing together will produce "a clash / portentous with some rose of thinnest flame." An aura of great mystery and sanctity surrounds the lines that follow, the last lines of the passage, after which we will come to the first nuptial scene of "Lilith":

and to the soft-sprung flush all sanctity
surrenders, centring in the blossom'd Name,
as the dark wings of silence lovingly
hover . . .

The flight of the poet's heart, begun in (44) (see p. 99) is nearing completion.

Before we read further into "Lilith", let us look back at this "first act" of the drama and consider the large effects created by images and settings. We find that Brennan has succeeded in evoking an atmosphere out of all these, and we can trace through the poems correspondences of motif and mood. The "dumb and suffering dark" (ii), the "paining depths" (iii) and the "tense and tortured voids" unite to create the impression of the awful vastness of night. The setting is also filled with significance. As we have seen it represents the Watcher's own mental blindness, his search to find himself which is just a continuation of the poet's search through all "The Forest of Night" now taking on more cosmic dimensions; and it foretells the nuptial mystery of Lilith which is about to be discovered.

In "Towards the Source" Brennan did by his use of associated

images of spring, flowers and romance achieve something of "le Rêve" - that atmosphere of enthusiasm or dream by which the Symbolist poet aims to communicate his inner thoughts to the reader. However Brennan did not succeed in making a unity out of theme and image in the "Source" poems. His dream of spring is disjointed and broken by glimpses of other worlds: the desolate city, the heraldic setting and night. The sense of a fragmented world continues through the first sections of "The Forest of Night". Certainly a loose process of adumbration is at work there: we see images and settings which "correspond" to one another; but it is not until we come to "The Watch at Midnight" that a continuous train of images is employed, which will be related to a central significance. Then our attention is directed in one direction only: towards night.

We have observed how in "The Watch at Midnight" Brennan prepares the setting of "Lilith". Let us now turn our attention to the imagery of the long central poems. We have noted in "The Quest of Silence" a gradual fading away of light and increasing suggestions of terror. At the bottom of a gloomy crypt he discovers "some old vampire-god whose bulk, within / lies gross and festering in his shroud of sin"(63). In "Chimaera writhes", the poet speaks of the "obscene blackness" and the "serpent-chasm" of shade which is the monster's tail. These grim details take on evil hues, but we cannot yet see the purpose of them. As we read they seem melodramatic. However in the "Lilith" poems what had been a series of dimly related scenes and motifs is given significance. Already in the "Argument" their function begins to come clear. We have already noted the difficult and tortuous syntax of this piece, which we would expect to bring clarity to the whole sequence. Nevertheless we find important lines which tie the preceding images together.

Adam "uncapacious" of Lilith's "dreadful love", begat on her

. . . not majesty, as Jove,

but the worm-brood of terrors unconfest

that chose henceforth, as their avoided nest

the mire-fed writhen thicket of the mind

Now that passage taken in isolation is difficult to understand: it seems to circle right around the meaning, leaving it in a kind of vacuum.

Brennan is probably saying that because Adam was mere man and could not satisfy or grasp Lilith's greater, superhuman love, terror seized his mind; and after him terror resided in the minds of all men, who are aware of a mysterious, ideal love but cannot find it.

That would be the "affidavit-passage" of the text: what we can extract from it in prose. However the prose statement only approximates to the verse. Brennan deliberately dims the meaning: we are obliged to pay full attention to the imagery. This I think is because he wishes to create a framework of images, a series of suggestions reaching wider than the particular passage. In other words he is setting up correspondences. We are seeing the Symbolist process of adumbration fully at work, and though no central symbol has been established certain phrases become the meeting-place of analogies. For instance the last line of the passage above, "the mire-fed writhen thicket of the mind," gathers into itself the vampire-god, Chimaera and all the evil suggestions of the previous poems. These now convey a central significance: they are related to the union of Adam and Lilith and the superstition and terror that resulted from their falling-apart.

But before we enter into a further exploration of these suggestions of evil and torment, let us examine the framework of imagery from another

angle. We have noted that as we approach "Lilith" through "The Forest of Night", the mood of the poems deepens or increases from ennui into despair. Fittingly, we are presented with suggestions of decay and death. In "One! an iron core", the poet speaks of the "dead tide", the "corpse of time" and "the dance of death"; again, at the end of (63), we find him descending to a crypt where the vampire-god lies rotting in a "dense enormous hearse". These take on a greater meaning when we come to "The Watch at Midnight". Further suggestions of death and destruction in "Dead stars" and "the wreck of his eternity", the funereal plumes that wave above the Watcher, add to the previous motif a cosmic significance.

Thus, when we come to the opening action in "Lilith", the nuptial scene of (ix), two important strands of analogy have been woven: evil figures such as Pan, the vampire-god and Chimaera, now joined with the fearful vampires, witches and serpents that issued from the womb of Lilith; and the scenes of decay, coffins, crypts and corpses all contributing to the deathliness of the abyss, the void which is now the setting of the poems. The strands are also woven together: they suggest the terror of night.

When we finally reach the passage of (ix) there is a tremendous complexity, a further widening of theme, scene and motif. The Watcher recalls the hour of his nuptials, the brief joy of it:

where thou didst wait some hour of sharp delight
to wither up in splendour the stark night . . .

he also recalls the fear that followed it:

what terror clutched me, even as ecstasy
smote dire across transfigured mystery

But added to these tremendous dimensions of description there is another set of suggestions connected with the nuptial aftermath. The Watcher, unable to remember the face of the deity or her identity, addresses her thus: "O mother thou or sister or my bride". . . . Did this figure who perhaps bore him ("Were thine of old such rythmic pangs that bore / my shivering soul". . .) also keep him for "some dim end" of her own, for "some divine incest", "some hour of sharp delight"? These suggestions, vague and dimmed, are carnal: they further the sense of sin that surrounds the passage. But whose sin does the Watcher refer to? And why should there be a sense of sin at all?

Again, we struggle to uncover a hidden meaning: but the verse will not yield it up. So we are driven back to a reading of the "symbolic script" and here we find that the analogies of evil and corruption traced through the poems up to this point, give continuity to the passage. After the Watcher and his bride are mated, fearful creatures are seen to issue from the "violated womb":

shapes of snaky horror, grisly jaw,

cold fear, and scaly fold, and endless maw

which corresponds to "the mire-fed writhen thicket of the mind"; but here the terrible figures and scenes of the previous poems are surpassed. The Watcher, or Adam, is standing at the mouth of hell itself.

There is also around the aftermath of the nuptials an aura of sin and shame. As we have seen, he believes that incest has been committed; he feels the tremendous shame of his vanished bride:

whose the sin that doom'd thee to disgrace,

to haunt the shapeless dark, a burning face

That last image, a "burning face", at once suggests frustrated desire, and shame or regret. It links the passage onto the scene that follows where each night she returns to haunt him to "re-win / virginity and shed the doubtful sin": further suggestions of sin and shame are released.

Now if we try to read the passage for its apparent literal meaning, we are doomed to fail. For instance, what does Brennan mean by the re-winning of virginity and "the doubtful sin". Why should Lilith wish to be virgin again? But if we read these difficult lines in the whole context of the surrounding images we are getting somewhere: even if it is only feeling our way along. The nuptial scene can be understood through the multiple suggestions of evil, corruption and carnality it evokes. It represents a weaving-together of those strands of imagery we have already distinguished.

As the memory of the nuptial scene fades from the Watcher's mind, he describes how in order to shelter from the great haunting figure of his first bride, he has taken "the woman for his wife." They dwell together in an earthly paradise:

a flowery pasture fenced and soft with streams,
fill'd with slow ease and fresh with eastern beams
of coolest silver on the sliding wave

which forms a strong contrast to the surrounding horror of night. The description has, however, a slightly artificial quality about it: as if it were an illusion soon to be dispelled. The Watcher finds reality only in the night and something of the huge anguish and frustration of the previous passage is recaptured in his cry:

I sicken with the long unsatisfied

waiting: the sombre gulfs of night divide

Finally, in the last lines of the poem he turns away from striving with these giant desires and seeks an oblivion in earth. The winds taunt him:

childlike, lay thee in her torpid lap

there to reflush those flaccid veins with sap

from spilth of sleep, where herbs of drowsy bane

spring in slow shade and death is sprinkled sweet

in those words "torpid" and "flaccid" and "splith" there are suggestions of fleshly corruption, an over-feeding of the body in sickly repose.

There is something over-rich about the whole picture, finally caught up in "death is sprinkled sweet". The Watcher's sleep is no ordinary one, but filled with forebodings of decay and death. The process of adumbration is at work to unite these suggestions with the earlier visions of decay and evil which lurked behind a desirable appearance: in the woods and in the desert. Sleep is very close to death and the wish for oblivion: (ix) then might be said to have progressed from vast scenes of tumultuous conflict to a vision of repose, where there is a wish for an end to existence. It is the kind of transition that has been described by Keats's critics as "an inner movement into stillness."

The connection between sleep and death is suggested again at the beginning of (x). There is a sense of increasing corruption in the opening lines:

Thick sleep, with error of the tangled wood,

and vapour from the evening marsh of sense

and smoothness of the glide of Lethe . . .

where the phrases "thick sleep" and "marsh of sense" suggest a setting or curdling of the atmosphere. The use of "marsh" also seems to imply a pollution, and in the fifth line an unhealthiness is signified: "cool'd of his calenture, elaborate brute."

Yet the opening passage is obscure and difficult. It is close-packed with possibilities, some of which bear no apparent relation to the developing themes and imagery. For instance, what is the exact meaning of "beam" here?

the devious and covert ways of dream
shall lead him out upon no temper'd beam
or thick-grass'd ease . . .

Perhaps the word is being used in the sense of balance: the poet is using an imagery of scales and weights. But this has nothing to do with the surrounding imagery of marshes and night.

The appearance of an imagery of tropical fevers is also somewhat unexpected in this setting, but can be seen as contributing to the sensuous effects the poet is seeking to create: if we trust to the atmosphere, the overall effects of corresponding images. Thus in

What night is this, made denser, in his breast
or round him, suddenly or first confest
after its gradual thickening complete

we begin to feel the world grow "sick" around the Watcher. The great void of night, which previously he had not been able to fathom, now fills up around him and becomes fixed: "a crypt of stirless air".

All the ideas and images of the opening passage, unhealthy sleep, marshes, fever, contribute to an atmosphere of despair.

The narrative is now entirely halted and we are prepared for Lilith who is about to become visible. She is made evident in a little vision

of death. The Watcher is

even hers, that is his strangling sphinx, made known
with, on her breast, his fore-erected tomb,
engraven deep, the letters of his doom.

He "sees" his own tomb, his failure to achieve eternal life. The impotence of man is outweighed by the strength of the divine malevolent Lilith. All the preceding correspondences of evil, destruction and death have built this image up. We are compelled to believe that it is real.

Thus while the opening of (x) stands outside the "action" of the poems, it helps to clinch the scenes and motifs that have gone before, in (ix). Also it foretells the whole movement that is to follow, towards a similar vision of death and the annulment of human endeavour. Lilith will intercept man in all his earthly activities, of war, of empire and of love and finally, at the end, she will preside over his tomb.

There follows the obscure passage of Lilith's address to man:
"Terrible, if he will not have ^{me} he else " She has announced a plan of wrathful vengeance because Adam turned from her to his earthly bride. Thus the nuptial theme is taken up again; but it is only with great difficulty that we can extract significance from lines such as these:

he seeks a refuge in his inner deep
of love, and soften'd fire, and quicken'd sleep,
tho' knowing that I, the bride his sin dethroned
and exiled to the wastes that lie disown'd,
can bring that icy want even to the heart
of his most secret bliss . . .

which forms part of a much greater sentence stretching for twenty-six lines, convoluted, dense with images and almost impossible to decipher.

However our reading of the "drama" to this point helps us to grasp some of its significance. The "inner deep of love" and "quicken'd sleep" refer to the earthly mate and the elysium of (ix). Lilith is "the bride his sin dethroned", because Adam has now taken a new bride and deserted her: the sin is that desertion.

In the nuptial scene that follows this first address, all the suggestions of wrongful love, sin and shame which pervaded (ix) gather into a bitter conclusion. This is perhaps the most obscure passage in all Poems 1913. As we have indicated in Introduction, no amount of analysis will force a meaning out of it. Even the "dramatic" reading breaks down because here we are confronted with emotions vaster than those which belong to the "personages" of the myth, Lilith, Adam and Eve. Yet we are compelled to read and reread: it is a tremendously impressive scene.

The general significance of the passage seems to be in its correspondence to the nuptial hour of (ix) where Lilith and man are united. Now Lilith plans to come between man and his new bride in their nuptial hour. Thus there is a kind of ironic counterpointing of scenes.

But these generalizations do not cast much light upon the text, which can only be reached or guessed through the framework of corresponding images that we have described. Now let us look at this in closer detail. Because man dimly remembers how in Lilith's "far lair/ the forces of tremendous passion stir" he will always feel her presence between himself and Eve:

and in the quiet waters of her gaze
shall lurk a siren-lure that beckons him
down halls of death and sinful chambers dim

That mention of "a siren-lure" and "sinful chambers dim", has implications of sheer carnality and evil. Further, Adam speaks of forcing Eve's "simple bloom" to "perilous delight", which hints of cruel perversion. The "nameless night" on which he will perform this act is "stain'd with miasm of flesh". That last phrase re-echoes the sense of sickness and fleshly decay suggested in the "fever" images earlier in the poem, thus adding to a picture of fleshly suffering and corruption. Finally, "the sun-god's garden of pure sense" seems to refer almost overtly to a foolish sexuality from which the mysterious aspect is altogether excluded.⁽⁶⁾

It seems as if the poet worked out in this passage all the frustration and carnality and disillusionment of his nuptial theme, for after this the poem proceeds in a plain straightforward manner. Lilith reviews all the other activities in which man will engage and over which she will preside. An imagery of tombs, crypts and monuments prevails. She will lurk within the "sightless stare" of man's "impassive idols", at whose feet he will offer the blood of his own children. He will seek also to eternize himself in vast monuments:

heaven-threatening Babels, iron Ninevehs

square thought with rigid will . . .

imposing enough to endure forwever. But this effort too is seen to be fruitless: they will impress noone but "blank tribes of shrunken days". Finally, for all man's attempts to grasp the unknowable, death reduces him: a mere "pinch of dust" will "quench the eyes / that took the azure curve of stainless skies." The passage is filled with ironic significance and each successive correspondence is a step leading up to the final image of the tomb where man is laid, with Lilith herself "immensely throned" on the top, "with viewless face and viewless vans outspread."

This is the second and final "vision of death" which shows "Lilith" brought to an impasse. In this last image, the whole fearful predicament of man is described: there is no resolution, no hope of escape. "Lilith" has proved his efforts futile. The series has circled around on itself, for the keynote at the end as at the beginning is flat cosmic despair.

II.

Wilkes suggests that Lilith is a "major symbol capable of including all others": this is "suggested by the First Sketch and proven by the facts of the poem."⁽⁷⁾ More than this, I think Lilith is the focus, the central figure of the whole of Poems 1913. The nightly setting suggested as early as "The Twilight of Disquietude", and the developing correspondences of sin and death, beauty and mystery, are there to build this symbol up: she is "the meeting-point of many analogies."

How or why did Brennan select this most important symbol? Wilkes mentions the "First Sketch" in which Brennan sets out a rudimentary plan for the poems:⁽⁸⁾

How she bore him that he might love her
and by love know her

How he loves yet fears and flies her and her serpent-brood . . .

It gives the main lines that the narrative will follow and the story of Lilith (as it was also used by Rossetti), but we note also, even before this story is put into verse, an impassioned tone, a lofty and prophetic ring. The plan shows already the grip this figure has taken on Brennan's mind.

If the story in its rudiments was also that used by Rossetti, is it not possible that Brennan has borrowed the idea and the figure from his predecessor's verse? We know that he was influenced by Rossetti, and had thoroughly studied his works before commencing "Lilith". Now James McAuley suggests that "the sonnet 'Body's Beauty' is very likely the seed from which Brennan's 'Lilith' grew", and quotes the sonnet's octave as proof.⁽⁹⁾ Yet he does not demonstrate in what ways this "seed" could have produced Brennan's poem, and indeed any real connection between them is hard to see save perhaps in the rather vague correspondence between Rossetti's description of Lilith's "enchanted hair" and Brennan's use of the same motif, for instance at the end of (xii):

gods and stars and songs and souls of men
are the sparse jewels in her scatter'd hair

It is interesting that Rossetti also presented the whole story of Adam, Eve and Lilith in his long poem "Eden Bower", where he insists upon the theme of the vengeance of Lilith upon man. The tone is not unlike that used in (x):

Then Eve shall eat and give unto Adam;

(Alas the hour!).

And then they both shall know they are naked

And their hearts ache as my heart hath achéd.

However Rossetti's Lilith has none of the mystery and grandeur of Brennan's figure, and the whole of "Eden Bower" dwells solely on the one theme of lust.⁽¹⁰⁾

A poem written by Brereton on the vampire-theme and his ensuing correspondence with Brennan, throws interesting light on this question of the genesis of "Lilith".

Brereton is generally seen through the rose-coloured glasses of

posterity as a gentle, retiring Elizabethan scholar, one who was not himself a great writer, but did much in a noble self-effacing way to foster talent in others.⁽¹¹⁾ But an examination of Brereton's correspondence with the formidable "A.G.S." reveals a much tougher personality, well able to stand up for himself in days where an artist must either sink or swim. Many of his generation, for instance Lawson and Furphy, sank. Brereton however had powers of rebound. When Stephens was in a more secure position than Brereton, he was inclined to jeer, but the latter sprang back, accusing A.G.S. of "spitting at a slave because he winces at the galling of his chains."

This "other" Brereton once wrote a poem about a vampire, inspired by a certain woman of his acquaintance whom he detested: and took precautions that she should not read it. Brennan made a not-too-serious attempt at the same subject, in verse, probably in order to tease Brereton who had just returned from a bush-walking trip. He began his sonnet with a dedication in humorous vein, to "Brereton, the vegetarian" Just returned from exploring certain rivers. . . where, as he had written to me, leeches creep beneath the sleeper's eyelids and lianas bar the way, the region being therefore that of Lilith, Mother of Mystery, Serpent-Wife, Vampire-Mother, whom yet to see in her secret beauty is the poet's eternal task and particularly mine."⁽¹²⁾

The sonnet itself is written in a slightly more serious manner than Brereton's effort. The poet claims to seek in Lilith an ideal of beauty: all those who would press toward the realms of solitude will find her in the marsh and in the woods:

You that tramp and I that tarry long,

brooding, are one beneath her sheltering wing

Was this verse written simply as a kind of joke, to welcome a friend home

after a trip? Or is it the beginning of Brennan's "poetic vision", the vision that engendered Lilith?

Mystery: this would seem to be the quality about Lilith that first captured Brennan's imagination. Whatever the origins of the figure in his reading, or his own verse, we can see clearly from the first plans for "Lilith" that he indeed regards her as "Mother of Mystery". Both his attempts at a definitive version of the series in Fl. 1 and Fl. 3 were entitled "Lilith: A Mystery."

Notes written at the end of the "Lilith" text in Fl. 1 also show clearly how this figure came to gain predominance in the poems. Lilith heads the list in biggest letters and some of her essential nature is shown here as well as her close identity with night:

Hebr. Lil, night = mystery . . .

first wife of Adam: changed to demon (serpent):

brood of devils, dragons; she becomes a haunting of the
night

These are of course the rudiments of the story as it is told in the "Argument" of the poems: but the list also helps to clarify the associations from which Lilith is built up. After all, it is not the story, the narrative which engages our interest in the poems. As Wilkes points out, two-thirds of the drama has already occurred when we begin to read⁽¹³⁾ (see above, p. 120). It is rather the idea of Lilith that has seized his mind and especially, as the list shows, her correspondence with night: "she becomes a haunting of the night."

The next item of the list, also gathered under the larger title "Lilith", is headed by "nuptial attraction of mystery, revulsion, disillusion." Now this underlines another aspect of Lilith in the poems,

which we have already noted in our discussion of correspondences:
that is her tremendous desire for man, which he fails to satisfy:

and the distraught desire to bring a kiss
unto the fleeting centre of the abyss,
discovering the eternal lack . . . (x)

There we feel her frustration almost as a physical pain: but its cosmic dimension is also present, her's is "an eternal lack." She is a most mysterious, a divine lover, with the "nuptial attraction of mystery", and it is on account of these attributes that Brennan has chosen her for the central figure of his poems.

Beneath the sub-heading (above) other figures are listed:

compare witch-marriage and change at midnight

Gautier's Albertus, Lamia, Melusina,

visions round Undine's bride-bed

and further down Brennan groups "Medusa and Echidna", and beneath "Water", Melusine and Undine appear again. It is interesting to hypothesize over the list. As the notes were added to a text already completed, it seems unlikely that Brennan was considering these figures as an alternative to Lilith: simply he is associating ideas around her. However there is a distinct comparison between Melusine and Undine and Lilith. Both the former are deities with malevolent mystic aspects, whose stories show, just as "Lilith", the impossibility of a love between a god and a human.

Yet it was the setting of Night which captured the imagination of the poet. As we have already seen in "The Forest of Night" he explores all threatening figures and associations of that setting: the "Gorgons and Hydras and Chimaeras dire" of the list, but all of these are finally seen as the surroundings of Lilith, the great central figure of the poems.

The figure of Chimaera which Brennan so powerfully imagined in her death-throes (65) is there only to prepare us for her coming.

Since "Lilith" is equivalent to Night in all its aspects of beauty and terror, it is not necessary for her to be made visible. Indeed it would detract from her "mystery" if she were given a concrete form. (14)
Her presence is to be felt, yet she is to be distant from the world:

Far, where our oubliette is shut, above
we guess the ample lids that never move
beneath her brows, each massive arch inert

hung high contemptuous o'er the blatant wars (60)

The Watcher, when he relives in memory the nuptial scene, cannot remember her identity (see above p.130) and he speaks of: "a memory that wavers, formless form / of superhuman nuptials". All this the poet deliberately makes obscure and uncertain, for he wants to make Lilith a mysterious, an unknowable figure encompassing all aspects and all possibilities. She is to be terrible, "infamous as devil's dam"(i) and the source of all the terrors of mankind; voluptuous, beckoning Adam away from his bride, with "siren-lure"; deathly, as when she sits over his tomb, "a strangling sphinx"; and beautiful, "the jewel hid beyond all height"(x). Out of all these suggestions and images, the arabesque of the poems is made. The consummate piece of the sequence (xii) gathers all themes together, the horror, love and mystery of "The Forest of Night" and establishes Lilith as the principal symbol, the meeting-point of all. These three stanzas will suffice to show the nature and scope of the poem:

She is the night: all horror is of her
 heap'd, shapeless, on the unclaim'd chaotic marsh
 or huddled on the looming sepulchre
 where the incult and scanty herb is harsh

.....

The wooing night: all nuptials are of her;
 and she the musky golden cloud that hangs
 on maiden blood that burns, a boding stir
 shot thro' with flashes of alluring pangs

.....

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.

Lilith herself, being a true symbol, is somewhat veiled and obscure, and we perceive her only in the web of images that surrounds her, to which she is the centre. Perhaps the most significant of these images is the rose, in which she is made manifest and "visible". The rose is itself a sign or symbol of the greater symbol Lilith, and if we trace Brennan's development of this motif through the whole of Poems 1913 we can see much of his central design.

The idea of the rose is first introduced in the "Epithalamion" of "Towards the Source" (27), where the poet speaks of a nuptial rose, a rose that promises the lovers complete bliss:

be the sole secret world
 one rose unfurl'd
 and nought disturb its blossom'd peace intense

This is one of the first associations that surround the rose: it is the flower of love.

It seems a pity that Brennan has used a motif that is overlaid with so much figurative usage: surely his choice is banal. However the significance of this first use of the rose is to be revealed gradually through a series of correspondences and analogies. It occurs again at the beginning of "The Forest of Night", in "Liminary" where, as we have seen, the poet moving away from his isolated world of contemplation and dream, turns to the life of ordinary men and women and seeks the consummation of physical desire. He speaks here of

The unslaked caravans of vast desire,
seeking in furnace-sands some fierier rose
with deadly heart . . .

Now the connection between the rose of the "Source" and this "Liminary" rose should not be stretched too far: otherwise we will be in danger of destroying the delicate chains of suggestion that link them. However it should be noted that while the earlier rose, "the rose of all fulfill'd delight", promised a blissful union, this flower signifies burning desire, a love that cannot be satisfied. Both indicate their own connection with the nuptial theme of Poems 1913: the search to find Eden in love.

Now the motif occurs again much later and is used very differently, in one of the most beautiful pieces of Poems 1913. In "A gray and dusty daylight flows" we are made aware of a rose of ideal beauty. Once, set high above the people in a church window this flower inspired them with faith:

they saw the rose of heaven bloom
 alone in heights of musky air,
 with many an angel's painted plume

Being the "rose of heaven" it is placed far over them, "alone in heights of musky air": this picture gives the impression of great remoteness. But it is distanced even further because it is no longer there in the window: it is "pale absence of the rose". This adds to the motif another more mysterious dimension: the absent rose is perfection. Whereas previously in Poems 1913 the rose had stood for fleshly reality, it now takes on an occult significance.

At this stage it is difficult to see any connection between this piece and the earlier poems that took the rose for their central image. It seems that Brennan is using it for a wide variety of purposes, with no unity of design before him. Is (56) simply an atmospheric piece, the pale, absent rose being used to augment the aura of gloom that surrounds all the later poems of "The Quest of Silence?"

When the rose appears with yet another setting in the "Interlude: The Window and The Hearth" (64), we are again at somewhat of a loss to understand its significance:

Twice now that lucid fiction of the pane
 dissolves, the sphere that winter's crystal bane
 still-charm'd to glass the sad metempsychose
 and futile ages of the suffering rose

Why should the rose which in "Towards the Source" and in "Liminary" had stood for the search for fulfilment in love, suddenly become identified with suffering? The image is obscure and dim. Later in the same piece, where Brennan expresses strong disillusionment with human love, we begin to grasp some of its meaning:

I would this old illusion of the spring
 might perish once with all her airs that fawn
 and traitor roses of the wooing dawn

Here Brennan is dismissing the natural rose that represented physical union, because it is traitorous and it has failed to procure him Eden. He is turning now towards a greater love, a divine lover; and so the rose takes on holy and supernatural qualities. The "rose of heaven"(56) was preparing us for such a transition.

It is not until we come to the "Lilith" sequence and the heart of Poems 1913 that all these different suggestions are gathered in order, and placed before us as a unity. Whereas earlier in the poems Brennan speaks of the rose in this sense and that, leaving the reader to trace out the possible connections between them, here we are presented with the essential rose.

In "The tuberose thickens the air" the poet describes a great flower about to bloom in the night. The next very beautiful piece precedes "Lilith: Argument", where the action of the series is foretold. Here the poet suggests the coming of a rose that will encompass all aspects of beauty. It is seen first thus:

Cloth'd now with dark alone, O rose and balm,
 whence unto world-sear'd youth is healing boon

It is a sign of peace, a healing flower; but as it is "cloth'd in dark alone" it is also nuptial, thus continuing the suggestions that surround the "Source" rose. In the next line the "tense dark" and the "pulsing" around the rose, suggest again the lover's desire, a mood of yearning for fulfilment. But the rose is now seen to surpass the physical needs of man:

Eve's wifely guise, her dower that Eden lent,
 now limbeck where the enamour'd alchemist
 invokes the rarer rose, phantom descent

This stanza though intensely beautiful is surrounded by a certain dimness. Who is the "enamoured alchemist"? And what is "the rarer rose"? If we trust entirely to the symbolic script, the imagery itself begins to impart the meaning. The "rarer rose" is Lilith, not yet perceived by man but felt through the correspondence of the flower. The "enamour'd alchemist" is the poet himself: out of the body of love ("Eve's wifely guise") he is distilling soul. The poet is deliberately dimming his central symbol, and figuring her forth in the rose to increase the sense of mystery and nightliness that must surround her.

In the central stanza, all the physical and occult qualities of the rose are gathered:

Rare ooze of odour drowns our faint delight,
 some ^{speech} splith of love that languishes unshared,
 a rose that bleeds unseen, the heart of night

The rose bleeding unseen is Lilith, whose love is too great for man to share. This image or sign of her sheds light on the whole difficult "drama" that follows in (ix) and (x).

We have already explored the theme of frustrated desire, as it was expressed in the correspondences of sin, carnality and death. However it is interesting to note two points: first, that Brennan's use of the rose greatly clarifies the two sets of terms which tie up the narrative framework of Lilith. As we have seen in the lines quoted above, the rose which is Lilith derives from "Eve's wifely guise": she is "the rarer rose, phantom descent" in whose form Adam's new wife is made. Now in (x), Lilith's address to man, two roses are again discussed:

distinguished: "the bride's incarnate bright/ and natural rose" and "the miraculous rose of heaven". The human and the divine thus are held in opposition, yet they are connected, and it is the contest between them that the narrative describes.

The second point is this: that during the course of "Lilith" and the ensuing poems, the rose takes on a further set of associations, this time of Christian origin. The "miraculous rose of Heaven" (x) and the "rose of Paradise" (xi) suggest Mary herself, the Mother of God: could Brennan be presenting her, in this oblique fashion, with blasphemous intent? It seems more likely that he is using the motif of "rose of Heaven" in a purely figurative sense, to represent Lilith and increase the aura of sanctity and mystery that surround her.

All ideas of the rose are gathered together in the one figure of Lilith. She is seen at the end of the series as taking on herself the sufferings of her "chosen ones", a sacrificial figure:

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

She bleeds afar because she stands for "eternal suffering", and this suffering is also identified with her beautiful and beneficent aspects.

Now that significant phrase "the far-bleeding rose of Paradise" leads us to look again at the difficult opening passage of the "Interlude" (64) (see p. 145) where the poet speaks of the "suffering rose" held in the "lucid fiction of the pane." We now read this in the knowledge that the suffering rose is revealed as Lilith. But how do we account for the imagery of glass?

In order to understand this passage completely it is necessary to explore Brennan's use of a whole subsidiary train of images, relating to glass, ice and gems. The correspondences of his motif in (64) can be traced to the very beginning of Poems 1913, where in "A Prelude" the poet speaks of: "The northern kingdom's dream/ prison'd in crystal gleam." The motif is used again in "Liminary", this time filled with significance for the poem: "The hollow crystal of my winter dream." Throughout the sequence winter with its ice and crystal is associated with solitary thought and dream. It is a state from which the poet longs to escape, but into which he must constantly return.

The window in (64) corresponds to the ice and crystals of the earlier passages. It is being used as a kind of mirror, to reflect life. Its pane is "lucid fiction" because it is transparent and holds light in it; also because it reveals truth. Certainly the motif is complex, but we should also note that the poet succeeds in conveying through it a mood of weariness and gloom ("winter's crystal bane"; "the sad metempsychose /and futile ages of the suffering rose) which reflects back upon and sums up many of the preceding passages. This is achieved in a subtle, almost musical fashion: a chord has been struck here which reverberates right through Poems 1913.

Corresponding to the images we have described are the suggestions of gem. In the earlier parts of the sequence these are somewhat obscure and seem to relate to no developing train of thought. We have noted for instance Brennan's use of emerald to describe the forest scene (e.g. 50). There is also in "The Watch at Midnight" (iv) a passage which takes the emerald for its central motif:

the garden that had sparkled thro' its sheen
all day, a self-sufficing gem serene,

hiding in emerald depths the vision'd white
 of limbs that follow their own clear delight

There is no suggested correspondence with the forest setting: the gem is being used to "enclose" and figure forth the nuptial theme (the vision'd white/ of limbs . . .).

In "Lilith" these isolated suggestions of gem are at last gathered together into a unity of significance. In (x) Lilith describes the miraculous rose of Heaven as unfolding "out from its heart of ruby fire" and raining "unceasing drift of petals" and in the following passage, where she comes between Adam and his bride, tells of man's endeavour to "flush the jewel hid beyond all height." If we read these lines on the purely symbolic level, much of their apparent obscurity drops away. The "miraculous rose" suggests Lilith herself; she is also "the jewel hid beyond all height." We perceive and glimpse her through these esoteric signs.

"Lilith" also points to a certain correspondence between rose and ruby. The ruby is traditionally a mysterious gem, and an object of perfection. It was the alchemist's dream to discover "the flower of the Sunne, the perfect ruby which we call elixir." In colour the ruby corresponds to the rose; it shares too many of its associations. Both motifs of ruby and rose, here gathered together, help to emphasize the extreme beauty and rarity of Lilith.

From following the symbol of the rose to its ultimate conclusion we know that it is a suffering, sacrificial flower. The imagery of (x) and (xi) suggests that Lilith is herself the "far-bleeding rose of Paradise", held in suffering. Now if we read the opening lines of "Interlude" in the light of these gem and rose passages of "Lilith" we

can see them as contributing to the whole thematic development of the sequence. We see too that all the significant motifs of Poems 1913 are finally centred in the symbol of Lilith.

III.

The motifs of rose and ruby derive all their importance from being parts of the unity of "Lilith". Without this central idea and direction, they would mean very little. After the last "Lilith" poem (xii) we feel a distinct drop in quality, and a return to that vague mélange of images and settings that characterized many of the earlier poems of "The Forest of Night".

In No. 69, this confusion is already apparent. The poem is placed in isolation after the end of "Lilith" and before the "Interlude: The Casement", which begins the last major section of "The Forest of Night". Its main interest to us is that it resumes the rose motif, but because of a strange convoluted syntax and an overcrowding of thought, the rose is surrounded with some obscurity. "This rose, the lips that kiss, and the young breast," the opening line, does not promise very much clarity. The rose is being associated here, erotically, with parts of the body. The mystery that surrounded the flower in "Lilith" has vanished. Is it then to be connected with the nuptial rose of "Towards the Source"? But surprisingly, at the end of the eighth line this fleshly rose is dismissed:

how soon within this wandering barrow grows

the canker'd heap of petals once caress'd

and out of the perished rose arises the new hope of "the morning of the deathless rose of gold."

Wilkes in New Perspectives offers the interesting suggestion that

the rose Brennan uses in "Lilith" is perhaps Dante's flower symbolizing the Resurrection, of which Christ is the core and the redeemed the petals. Yet it is hard to see what significance this has for Poems 1913.

It could be that since night failed him, Brennan is seeking a solution in the Christian faith: this poem would imply such a possibility. But if so, it is only the first of a whole series of solutions to be offered in "The Labour of Night". For instance in (84) he wishes for cataclysm:

Oh that all ends of the world were come upon us,
and fire were close beneath earth's stubborn crust,
and all our days were crumbling, ruinous

and in the last poem of the section, since no comfort is to be found:

Therefore, if never in some awful heart
a gather'd peace, impregnable, apart,
cherish us in that shrine of steadfast fire

he longs for an absolute silence to envelop the world, and turns to the motif of wings, "the wings of silence, adamant, dense", which are oblivion.

Therefore "This Rose", bearing no apparent relationship to "Lilith", sinks into insignificance. This is the case of most of the poems comprising "The Labour of Night." The intense, brooding atmosphere of "Lilith" and the all-embracing symbol of Lilith herself, are lost: we have instead an indistinct waste landscape that is neither night nor day:

Stars that with all our glory laden shift
aimless, what term is set unto this drift?

All dawns are split along the hopeless way (83)

It is as if Brennan had put all his poetic powers into the making of "Lilith", and these poems record only his exhaustion, the pathetic remains

of his endeavour to create.

It could be said that the poems of "Twilights of the Gods and the Folk" reflect back upon the images and themes of Lilith's final address to man, in which she threatens to intercept him in all his battles and political activities:

. . . he seeks to whelm
 infinite learning with a little realm,
 beating together with ungentle hands,
 enslaved, the trembling spawn of generous lands
 whom he shall force, a busy swarm, to raise
 last bulwarks of his whelming discontent

.

a wonder to blank tribes of shrunken days.

In the "Twilights" poems he is describing these "blank tribes" and their sorrow for great lost leaders; but they fall into diffuseness both within themselves and in relation to one another. Brennan creates no symbol, no images of significance and the myth he is using makes little impression upon us. (15)

A confused imagery of dead gods, vanished stars and impotent necromancers fills the "Interlude" poems and "The Womb of Night". We feel that they could be related to the imagery surrounding Lilith, but the connections are almost too faint to discern. Sometimes we can almost sense her presence, as in (84), where the poet speaks of "ravish of night's mother ark," and a great womb about to bring forth some miracle: "the gulfs are strain'd and stark / dark stress, delay, distress, and vanishing." but as we have seen (p.152) the poem ends in the desire for oblivion and death.

The only exception to this general fragmentation of imagery, landscape and theme is in the five poems comprising the "Wisdom" series. These, with splendid objective irony, reflect back upon the conclusion of "Lilith": that all human endeavour being bounded by time is condemned to failure. Wilkes remarks "The movement of each poem, with the imagery sustaining it, contributes to a dominant impression of sterility."⁽¹⁶⁾

In particular, Brennan creates two images of significance. The first of these is:

There, in the limpid pave, a cloudy rose
mirrors eternal agony, in bands
of saddening purple shed from shrouded strands
where the snared sun a fix'd disaster glows

A ruby of harden'd flame, an ice-bound woe,
burns in their crystal breast whose wizard brow
was gemm'd with name of Soliman long before.

Wilkes identifies these wizards as the "eternally-dying pre-Adamite Solimans" from the end of Beckford's Vathek.⁽¹⁷⁾ They were princes inhabiting the earth before Adam was created, ruling the orders of genii and possessing the secrets of necromancy. When they fell into corruption, the angel Eblis was sent to confine them to subterranean regions where they are said to remain in a state of living death, their bosoms as transparent as crystal, showing the heart within enveloped in flame.

Now out of this myth Brennan has created a motif which is an extension of those already used in "Lilith". As we have seen, in "The Interlude: The Window and the Hearth" there is a correspondence between the rose and the ruby. Out of this correspondence Brennan now creates a magnificent image, to convey a sense of eternal suffering.

We now see the rose which began in "Towards the Source" a living, natural flower, as "cloudy" and unreal. To symbolize this unreality, it is held in ice, "an ice-bound woe." We receive impressions of imprisonment ("the snared sun") and of anguish and death ("saddening purple shed from shrouded strands"); the deliberate dimness and artificiality of the setting suggests extreme isolation, and enforced estrangement from life.

The image is interesting for it shows, if in an oblique fashion, much of the general mood of the "Lilith" series. It is a completely honest confrontation with the mood of suffering that those poems have released; it sums up their beauty and terror, their inner movement towards rigidity and death.

The second image of significance occurs in (74), where Brennan describes the marriage of Wisdom and Beauty. The ancient figures, Solomon and Sheba, were once united in love, and the desert is said to have blossomed between them. But this has faded into legend:

And now their tale beguiles a wandering race
where, parch'd by the hard sun's indifferent flame,
one yellow desert billows o'er their place.

The setting of desert, used at various points early in "The Forest of Night", now reaches its full significance as a symbol of utter sterility.

It is interesting to note that the imagery of this poem has a correspondence even at the beginning of "Towards the Source". In "We sat entwined" (2), the lovers sitting close together feel themselves separated and absorbed into "the irresistible melancholy of the sun / the irresistible sadness of the sea." In (74) the desert "billows" like a sea between Solomon and his bride, the sign of their eternal separation. Thus we see that images set wide apart in Poems 1913 can

contribute to its total significance.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER FIVE.

1. Brennan's rough translation of Mallarmé's writings on the Chimaera - figure supports the main idea of the poem, that she is a universal symbol of suffering: "No matter how great may be the agony of the fallen Chimaera, 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" (pp.56-7). But "Chimaera writhes" does not attain to this ideal of unity.
2. Australian Writers and their Work: C.J. Brennan, pp.16-17.
3. New Perspectives, p.27 .
4. *ibid.*, p.30.
5. William James, 1902.
6. This figure of the sun-god is dwelt upon at greater length in the Fl.3 text. He is "the petty lord of noon", ~~wreaking "full pleasure in the~~ garden of pure sense." His foolish aspect is insisted upon: he seeks only the pleasures of the body.
7. New Perspectives, p.34.
8. Fl.2. Quoted in full by A.R. Chisholm in Appendix G. Verse, p.292.
9. *Op.cit.* (see note 2) p.9.
10. e.g. Fold me fast, O God-snake of Eden!

(Sing Eden Bower!)

What more prize than love to impel thee?

Grip and lip my limbs as I tell thee!

There is no parallel to this in "Lilith". Even the passage of carnality in (x) is veiled in mystery and majesty of Lilith.

11. See for instance H.R. Heseltine's article, "J.le Gay Brereton - and the World of Letters," Southerly, No.3, 1962.
12. Uncat. MSS, with courtesy Mitchell Library.
13. New Perspectives, p.30.
14. In "Eden Bower" Rossetti gives his Lilith the form of a snake and she descends to unite herself with Adam on earth: result, the supernatural splendour of Lilith is lost.
15. Brennan is using the myth of the Ragnarok. It is interesting to note that Zora Cross, his contemporary, used the same story in her poem "The Ragnarok of Regeneration", which for all its "blood-and-thunder", shows a certain magnificence of spirit and does mount in a coherent and unified (if unlikely) way to the final vision of "a strange sweet Presence": probably Christ. This provides a solution to the picture of suffering and destruction contained in the myth; but Brennan shows only the suffering, with no direction and no conclusion. Hence the general effect is of negation.
16. "The 'Wisdom' sequence in Brennan's Poems", AUMLA , No.14, p.50.
17. Ibid., p.48.

CHAPTER SIX. "THE WANDERER" AND "EPILOGUE" (1908).

When, last of all, we come to "The Wanderer" we find an imagery that is in sharp contrast to the obliqueness and confusion of "The Labour of Night":

now it is clear grey day and the day is plain (99)

Man is returned into a natural landscape of rocks, hills and the sea. This acts as something of a relief after the dense inward symbolism of "Lilith", where the straining gulfs, the aching void and nightmareish figures were the expression of a tormented mind.

Moreover, the landscape of "The Wanderer" has coherence. Here we are presented with Nature in her unkind aspects. We see the rougher elements of wind, wave and rain, in a bleak world of ~~deserted~~ and endless paths. The landscape also fits the mood of the poems: for what could be more suitable for conveying a mood of restlessness than lines such as these:

I would spread the sail to any wandering wind of the air

this night, when waves are hard and rain blots out the land.(2)

It is a mood that we have all experienced.

The key to the imagery of the whole section is given in the Latin epigraph, where the Wanderer tells us that, since he yearned after the "hidden heart", he has become one with the "viewless winds". He is cast out into the waste, and forced to find his way alone.

At first the setting of "the Wanderer" seems so wide as to resemble the bottomless universe; but Brennan handles his images with certainty and a sense of direction. The terms of "The Wanderer" can be seen plainly enough, from the beginning, in the opposites of home and the waste. These

concepts are not new to Poems 1913, for previously, even in "Towards the Source" such an opposition was suggested:

when the room is high and chill and I seek my place in vain

I know that seas splash cold in the night and the world is wide.(17)

Also it was evident in the Interlude where the persona of "The Forest of Night" stood at the window and gazed at

. . . the lonely road

winding into the exiled west, across

the desolate plain . . . (47)

Now in the first poem (86) we see the Wanderer leaving the shelter of the town, with its "window-lamps", behind him, and coming "among the rougher hills". Home is asserted as a warmth and a security for man, a centre of life. Sometimes it is deprecated for its narrowness, as in (88) where it is described as a "clinging home", and in "You, at whose table I have sat", where the Wanderer pities the homedwellers who are bound by a dull routine:

For not alone the bread I broke, but I tasted too

all your unwitting lives and knew the narrow soul

that bodies it in the landmarks of your fields,

and broods dumbly within your little season's round,

where, after sowing, comes the short-lived summer's mirth,

and, after harvesting, the winter's lingering dream,

half memory and regret, half hope, crouching beside

the hearth that is your only centre of life and dream.(93)

But the Wanderer not only deprecates the home; in the same poem he points out its fragility:

the home of man how feeble and builded upon the winds

and in the next piece, "I cry to you as I pass your windows in the dusk", he issues a warning to the homedwellers. They have built their "unmysterious homes" in the forest thinking the wood was their "friendly barrier," but outside are the waste and the winds and they will "come forth at dawn" to find ruin all about them:

ye shall stand at amaze, beholding all the ways overhidden
with worthless drift of the dead and all your broken world.

The picture presented there is somewhat melodramatic. Nevertheless the Wanderer's words create a strong mood of mockery and the limitations of the home are vividly impressed on us. Finally, man is urged to leave his shelter altogether; the Wanderer assuming a near-prophetic tone, commands:

Come out, come out, ye souls that serve, why will ye die?
or will ye sit and stifle in your prison-homes

.

go: tho' the going be hard and the goal blinded with rain
yet the staying is a death that is never soften'd with sleep. (95)

However home in "The Wanderer" is not merely a place of sloth and dreariness; it has also its positive and benevolent aspects. Often this is symbolized by the hearthfire, as in (90):

Once I could sit by the fire hourlong when the dripping eaves
sang cheer to the shelter'd . . .

and in "O desolate eves" (98), where the Wanderer speaks of "the circle of the ruddy hearths." There particularly, the hearth is surrounded by an aura of Celtic legend, suggesting comradeship and past heroic deeds.

The images of hearth and home are held in constant opposition to the waste. Outside the circle of the hearths are "the naked spaces of

the world", where "the formless winds plunge and exult for aye." The motif of wind has already been used in "Lilith" (ix), where the Watcher is tossed around mockingly by "wings of fierce winds", their "latest toy" for:

the aimless idle sport they plann'd of old
to while the waste hours of their tedious state
and shall pursue when thou art seal'd in dust

There as in "The Wanderer" the winds are seen as the winds of fate. In that phrase "the formless winds", we again receive the impression of a bottomless universe. The elements are very large and will endure for ever; man is very small and doomed to perish after a short while. The waste also is sometimes seen as a place of horror and of evil, as in "Dawns of the world", where the Wanderer is aware of: ruin:

. . . huddled bulks of gloom
that crouch, malicious, in the broken combs
witness to foulnesses . . .

and in the last poem of the series the atmosphere of Celtic past is used again, this time to increase the impression of a waste, a lost desolate landscape. The Wanderer sees himself finally passing through:

a limbo of defeated glory, a ghost:
for wreck of constellations flicker'd perishing
scarce sustain'd in the mortuary air,
and on the ground and out of livid pools
wreck of old swords and crowns glimmer'd at whiles . . .

There at the end of the poems we are made aware of the negative aspect

of the waste: the terrible ruin and chaos that the elements can wreak on the works of man. The adjectives "mortuary" and "livid" indicate a death of endeavour, a lack of hope for the future. However the waste, like the hearth, has also its desirable aspect, for it can be used as a means of escape or oblivion. The Wanderer envies those returning from sea-voyage, refreshed because "the great winds/ have search'd and swept their hearts of the old irksome thoughts," and he longs himself to

. . . spread the sail to any wandering wind of the air

this night, when waves are hard and rain blots out the land.(91)

Home and the waste then both have the same inner duality as the night in "Lilith". They are at once desirable and undesirable, longed-for and then detested. Moreover the two milieux are continually conflicting in the Wanderer's mind: when he is shut inside, crouching over the hearth, he longs for the freedom of the waste; but when he is battling the elements alone, he longs for the warmth of a home.

Home and the waste provide the whole framework of the Wanderer's world. This world is coherent: but what is its significance, its contribution to the whole meaning of the series? Certainly "The Wanderer" has a distinctive setting, and as a work of sheer imagination it is complete. But is this setting properly rooted in thought?

We can see easily enough the large imaginative terms of "The Wanderer" but on looking hard at the individual poems, we often find an incoherence, a lack of positive meaning. It is not necessary of course for Brennan to offer us a message through the verse: but we do expect some integration of mood, theme and motif. The trouble begins in the very first poem. "When window-lamps had dwindled" divides neatly enough into the three parts of an argument. First the Wanderer, leaving the town at

dusk, passes "a certain door" and reflects on how different his life could have been had he taken the path once offered him there. Next, he tells us that the path he chose and has followed was that of night. Lastly, he is about to walk on into "the rougher hills" and the waste. The whole poem can be seen as the Wanderer's journey through life, cast into the simple form of a progression from evening through night and into day.

Yet there is a considerable vagueness about the diction of the poem: as if a rhetorical scaffolding had been constructed on material not strong enough to hold it, and the whole meaning threatens to float away. It is not Brennan's use of imagery which is at fault. Indeed his description of the three successive scenes, the town at dusk, the night "that was not stirr'd with any tide", and the dawn with the restless sea nearby, gives the poem all the coherence it has. Without this changing imagery, the poem would have almost no substance. Yet the imagery is not really conveying a meaning: therefore it cannot be described as the "flesh-and-blood, the living garment" of the poem.

It is quite erroneous of course to separate form and matter in verse, but in this case we are almost forced to do so. There really seems to be a lack of connection between them. The piece has been, as it were, too easily imagined. It is not based on a properly felt experience: it is too dramatic. Probably the fault of this, and all the unsuccessful "Wanderer" poems, lies in the very syntax. We noted the same weakness in "Chimaera writhes", where the significance of the image is obscured by a contorted diction. Here the problem is not so much that of contortion and obscurity as of a studied over-simplification of diction.

James McAuley, in his evaluation of "The Wanderer", remarks:

. . . the five-stress and six-stress metres are handled with a vigour and flexibility that are admirable . . . But . . . the content is attenuated . . . the rythm carries us forward through a rhetoric that does not really explore the experiences implied, but slips too loosely over them.⁽¹⁾

McAuley does not suggest that the imagery is at fault: it is the diction.

Brennan himself in a letter to Richard Pennington⁽²⁾ wrote of the "blank-verse measures" he had used in the verse; he also noted that he had used "mobility of stress . . . so as to bring two stresses together", and "the freedom of varying - within the limits of the norm - the number of syllables in the unstressed space". He had in other words taken every liberty with the form of the verse, provided it did not cause perplexity on the reader's part.

Brennan has certainly saved the reader perplexity, but the result is a free swinging verse which provides every opportunity for diffuseness and a slackness of meaning. The very facility with which the landscape is created does not really make up for the lack of hard thought behind it.

Another illustration of this diffuseness is in (93). The passage describing the life of the homedwellers which I have already quoted (p. 160), effectively produces a mood of dreariness and ennui. It is a picture which conveys its own significance; but the poem as a whole fails to bring forth any clear meaning. The Wanderer, at the beginning, addresses those who have given him meals by the wayside:

. . . you pitied me
to be driven an aimless way before the pitiless winds,
how much have ye given and knew not, pitying foolishly!

The threefold use of "to pity" is somewhat confusing nevertheless the main argument seems to be that it is the homedwellers rather than the Wanderer, who are to be pitied. He pities them, as the next passage shows, for the narrowness of their existence. However his own way of life, "to be driven an aimless way before the pitiless wind," does not sound any more attractive.

In the last two lines of the poem, this confusion reaches its height:

I have lived your life, that eve, as you might never live
knowing, and pity you, if you should come to know.

What is the Wanderer trying to say? To whom or to what does "knowing" refer? Is it referring to the phrase three lines above, "the world how limitless and the way how long"? Again, the sudden proviso at the end, "if you should come to know", adds nothing to the meaning of the poem.

The irony of the ignorance of the homedwellers as against the wisdom of the Wanderer has already been established in "all your unwitting lives".

We simply cannot understand what the Wanderer is saying: it seems he is at once asking our pity for his exiled state, and yet urging us all to go out and join him. If irony was intended then it has misfired.

It is interesting to read the comment of a contemporary writer upon this poem. For him:

it conveys the impression somehow that one has been living in a narrow box, and that the bottom has suddenly dropped out of it, precipitating one into immensities. We find in this poem that profound dissatisfaction with life as it is today, which is the moving spirit of all evolutionary progress, and also a noble craving to fight against and overturn the powers of evil. There is no happiness in inertia. Energy, for the strenuous upward climbing, and

courage for the combat - these are the themes of Mr. Brennan's muse... (3)

The feeling it arouses in the modern reader is not nearly so intense: the poem is empty, directionless bombast from which the single compact central image cannot save it.

An exception to Brennan's general failure to unite imagery and theme is "O tame heart" (89), a poem which records the Wanderer's memory of the heroic, active life and his sorrow that he cannot recover it. The imagery of chivalric adventure is not new to Poems 1913 - it was also used in "The Quest of Silence" - but it is nowhere better employed than in these lines:

And is your dream now of riding away from a stricken field
on a lost and baleful eve, when the world went out in rain
one of some few . . .

We notice first of all the motif of rain, which is repeated in each of the three stanzas and creates, almost is, the mood of the poem. In the first, where the Wanderer sits by the quiet hearth, he speaks of "the roof that forbids the rain"; in the third stanza he reminds himself that he is only dreaming, not living, the scene of glory, "it is but the ancient rain / that minds you of manhood forgone . . ."; but in the middle stanza the motif is given its central significance. The phrase "the world" (4) "went out in rain" suggests not only a natural event, but some kind of cosmic annulment: the end of all hope.

Brennan's diction in this poem very carefully supports the imagery and its corresponding mood of despair. In the first stanza, for instance, he is concerned with presenting a picture of the home as a place of peace and safety, in contrast with the wild and dismal battlefield of the

second. In the FL.3 version, the first half of the second line read: "here is the hearth by the fire". Brennan changed this to: "here is the hearth with its glow". The second version creates a more positive impression of warmth. Again, in the third stanza he has: "Nay, tame heart, be not idle." "Idle" was evolved from "vain" and then "foolish" (FL.3). It is the strongest word of the three that Brennan could have chosen for the context, for it works in two significant ways: it means first of all "inactive", (hence corresponding to "tame"). The Wanderer is chiding himself for his sloth, expressing a deep dissatisfaction with his present life. It also means something like: "indulging in foolish dreams." The Wanderer is telling himself not to be deluded: it was not him in that heroic moment (described in the second stanza).

Hence the irony of the poem, its self-mockery, is controlled and sustained by imagery and diction. This kind of achievement is rare in Poems 1913; but "O tame heart" almost lives up to his prescription for a symbolic poem. There is no "annoying wobble" between "image and non-image";⁽⁵⁾ the whole is governed and united by the motif of rain.⁽⁶⁾

There is another interesting example of Brennan's use of imagery in conjunction with theme:

O waves of all the seas, would I could give you peace
and find my peace again: for all my peace is fled
and broken and blown along your white delirious crests! (97)⁽⁷⁾

The imagery of sea was used earlier in Poems 1913; for instance in (2) ("the irresistible sadness of the sea"); and it is used elsewhere in "The Wanderer", as in "the ever-restless, ever-complaining sea"⁽⁸⁶⁾. But in the sea image of (97) there is a greater intensity, a note almost of compulsion. The Wanderer is seeking oblivion in the sea, just as the persona of "The Forest of Night" sought oblivion in the vast settings of

the desert, the forest and night.

We see in this a wildness, a looseness of diction that is typical of the whole series. Yet it is filled with significance; it sums up the restless mood of "The Wanderer". More than this, the image contains deep undertones of cosmic importance: in "your white delirious crests" the poet expresses a wild exaltation, a frenzied joy in life; at the same time he is wishing for his own destruction. The "black maw of hunger" that gapes wide before each new wave crashes into shore, suggests death. This is an example of what I meant in the Introduction when I spoke of Brennan's wish for "the total dissolution of self".

But perhaps we are forgetting that the "I" of the poems is not Brennan: it is the Wanderer. There has been much discussion of the series as a whole, but few attempts made to establish the identity of this figure. Is it possible to submit it to the same kind of examination as we used for Lilith: that is, can we regard the Wanderer as a symbol having a complex significance?

Probably the most complete attempt to describe the function of the Wanderer in the series and in Poems 1913 as a whole is found in Wilkes's New Perspectives. He sees "the Wanderer" as part of an interesting and coherent process of thought which underlies the verse and runs in parallel fashion through the prose. Brennan in his "metaphysical voyage" (p.1) takes up and then rejects several systems that attempt to explain the human condition. In an early essay, Fact and Idea, he states his belief in an ultimate unity: man and the world will be one. But how can this perfection be attained? First he seeks it through philosophy, but this fails because it divides and analyses the oneness. Moreover, being a finite system, it cannot describe what is ineffable. Brennan

then turns to Mysticism, and from this he extracts his theory of art, for instance the law of correspondences. However this still does not answer man's metaphysical need. Finally, he comes to believe in Pragmatism, and the latest ideas of psychical research. Pragmatism provides a consolation to the seeker for Eden, and a belief in the subconscious mind gives him a certain direction.

Now Wilkes sums up the effect of Brennan's evolution of ideas upon "The Wanderer" series and places the figure of the Wanderer in the centre of it: He quotes from the Prose:

We are turned out on the road, it is true, and our house and home is broken down: but we have received our stick and crust and it would seem that the road does lead somewhere (pp.11 -12).

The world is in constant evolution, in a time-process, and so too we can view man. Although we are not yet self-conscious, we might later be: "as the subconscious is made more and more explicit."⁽⁸⁾ For the first time in Poems 1913 then, we do have an answer, we are given a direction. Wilkes quotes from Philosophy and Art: "It does lead somewhere. Man the wanderer is on the way to himself."

It is clear from Wilkes's "metaphysical" analysis of the poems that he regards the Wanderer as being no less than a representative of all mankind. Therefore he is a figure of great significance, offering a message of comfort to all seekers after perfection. And if we view the Wanderer in this light we can regard the series as the fitting conclusion to Poems 1913.

But unfortunately Wilkes does not apply his own or Brennan's writings to the poetry itself. He feels that "'The Wanderer' requires no exegesis" (p.45); the whole series emerges quite naturally and easily from the body

of Poems 1913: "as he [the Wanderer] makes his choice, all the discord and frustration accumulated in the previous stages of the saga at last find a triumphant issue."⁽⁹⁾ But Wilkes does not indicate at what point in the poems this "choice" occurs. I have already suggested that many of them are self-contradictory. When we come to the final poem the Wanderer speaks of: "no ending of the way, no home, no goal". What kind of ending is that? True, there are for instance in (98) strong suggestions of stoicism, as in the motif of trumpets:

old trumpets, resolute, stark, undaunted,
singing to battle against the eternal foe
.....
in some last fight . . .

but it does not seem to me that the "triumphant issue" Wilkes describes comes clear.

If we do not regard the Wanderer as a figure of metaphysical stature, then how should we regard him? A number of critics suggest that the Wanderer is Brennan himself. For instance the series is described as: "essentially the song of Brennan, the gifted but lonely Celt, the metaphysical exile driven through rain and wind along a hopeless road, crying out aloud in his misery but never bowing his head."⁽¹⁰⁾ It is easy enough to relate "The Wanderer" to Brennan's biography, and at several points in the poetry we do seem to catch glimpses of the poet in his familiar landscape.⁽¹¹⁾ But it does not do to sentimentalize about the Celt in lonely exile: our concern is to understand the poetry. We have already examined its landscape and concluded that it is not backed by hard thought. Now does this central figure give meaning to the series as a whole?

I do not think he does. The same shallowness prevails in the creation

of the Wanderer as in the content of the poems. He is essentially a superficial figure, placed in dramatic attitudes that fail to convince us. For instance in the grandiose conclusion to (95):

Go: tho' ye find it bitter, yet must ye be bare
to the wind and the sea and the night and the wail of birds
in the sky;

there is too much of "ye", too much of a condescending tone. The Wanderer is not speaking for everyone. He is not illustrating the human condition. He is Brennan's easy rhetorical "voice" devised to cover up an ultimate indecision. The Wanderer then does relate to the "metaphysical voyage" presented in Poems 1913 but not because he provides a "triumphant issue" to that sequence. He proves that the quest is unresolved. Rather than marking a return into actuality and the "time-process", he indicates Brennan's further departure into dream. (12)

This is not to say that we should deny Brennan his imaginative achievement in "The Wanderer". As we have seen, he does create an impressive and coherent landscape; and from this the central personage arises naturally enough, a part of the waste and the lonely roads that surround him. When he announces in (99):

. . . I know I am
the wanderer of the ways of all the worlds,
to whom the sunshine and the rain are one

we can suspend our disbelief. But the lost, ruined plains that the Wanderer traverses do not quite attain to the symbolic level: they remain a stage setting where the single performer poses to catch our sympathy. There is not the same intense, careful knitting together of images and themes that we noted in "Lilith"; and beside the vast central symbol of

Lilith herself the Wanderer is a pallid skeleton of a figure, seen fading into the oblivion of his surroundings.

Perhaps the real importance of "The Wanderer" lies in the way that it relates to the whole of Poems 1913. We can read it as part of the basic symbolic script. James McAuley points out that in "Lilith" a reversal of symbolism occurs. Night replaces day which, though it is filled with light, comes to represent our fallen state. Night is now seen as a beautiful mystery, "the womb of possibilities," and day becomes desolate and detestable. (13)

This reading can be followed out by an examination of the poems. In (ix) the Watcher, exiled from his divine and nightly lover, speaks of "the empty plainness of the day". Now when we come to "The Wanderer", we find much of it is set in the dawn. This is established in the first poem:

. . . O, what horrible dawn
will bare me the way and crude lumps of the hills
and the homeless concave of the day . . .

There is in that a sense of exile and desolation, increasing the mood created earlier, in "Lilith". This mood reverberates through the whole series, gathering further suggestions in its wake. In (96) the poet again describes the dawn:

a homeless light, staring, disconsolate,
on the drear world it knows too well . . .

and we are shown a ruined world:

unmet by any miracle of night,
that mocks it rather, with its shreds that hang
about the woods . . .

The chaos and fragmentation of the picture remind us that "The Wanderer"

is the aftermath of "The Forest of Night", in which man's dreams of glory and of union with Lilith have been frustrated. The promised miracle of night with its "vermeil and gold, soft fire" (84) is forgotten; the landscape of "The Wanderer" is predominantly grey, to signify the death of hope. Thus "The Wanderer" relates back to and clarifies the changing landscape of Poems 1913.

The main strength and centralizing force of Poems 1913 lie in the symbol of "Lilith". However it should be noted in conclusion, that "Towards the Source" and "The Wanderer" do to some extent correspond to one another, thus forming a kind of circle around "The Forest of Night". In "The Source" poems, Nature is shown in her gentle and restful aspects, while in "The Wanderer" she is wild and restless. Dawn which in "Towards the Source" was peaceful and filled with light is, in "The Wanderer", gloomy and malevolent. Since "The Wanderer" is a coherent world and "Towards the Source" rather elusive the circle they form is imperfect. But the "occult" imagery of "Lilith" in the middle of Poems 1913 points to a certain balance or parallel between them.

We have said that the landscape of "The Wanderer" is coherent and recognizable, even if it is not sufficiently sustained by hard thought. When we come to the Epilogue (105), we find a scene which is not merely recognizable but actual. The opening lines:

The droning tram swings westward: shrill
the wire sings overhead, and chill
midwinter draughts rattle the glass

set the poem firmly in a city street, which is presently revealed as Broadway, Sydney; and:

. . . the dusking way I pass
 to yon four-turreted square tower
 leaves us in no doubt that Brennan is speaking of himself, on his way to
 an evening class at the University.

The meaning of the next passage is equally plain. The poet vividly
 describes the street he passes through, its dreary upper stories
 contrasting with the sordid gaiety beneath:

. . . the shop-fronts' cover'd ways
 bask in their lampions' orange blaze,
 or stare phantasmal, weirdly new,
 in the electrics' ghastly blue:
 He describes the people, walking slow where the lights are bright, but
 hastening through the shadows.

The whole picture has a lively quality; it is also curiously touching,
 for the poet feels himself in sympathy with the poor creatures of the
 pavement. He can "read the urge of their unwitting need/ one with
 my own". . .

The imagery of the next passage where Brennan describes the church and
 nostalgically recalls his childhood days is even more striking. It provides
 first a contrast to the din of the tram and the shops:

sudden, a gap of quiet air
 and gather'd dark . . .

The Church, set a little off the street, is described as "the plain obtruse
 catechismal chancel". The image is dexterous for it at once suggests that the
 Church stands apart from the street, yet in its ugliness belongs to it.
 Next, the Church creates an impression of welcoming warmth. Its "lancet
 windows faintly show / suffusion of a ruddy glow / the lamp of adoration . . ."

Again, we have the sense of the poet in sympathy with a whole body of people. They are united by the love of Christ, "man's pleading, patient amorist" and their central purpose is beautifully described in this image of the Eucharist:

. . . likeness of a candid rose,
 ascending where the gold heart glows,
 cirque within cirque, the blessed host, (14)
 their kin, their comfort, and their boast.

That phrase "cirque within cirque" creates the impression of souls circling around a centre, which is the "gold heart" of Christ. The last line furthers the sense of warmth and comfort: Christ is, as it were, right among his people.

Now the atmosphere that Brennan creates in both these opening scenes is brilliantly successful. There are few that can match them in the whole of Poems 1913 for clarity, verisimilitude and attention to detail. But do the Epilogue images bear any relation to the rest? For the first time in our reading of the sequence, there is no persona placed between the reader and the verse. That is because the Epilogue is autobiographical, while the rest of the poems clearly are not. Moreover, the "democratic" tone assumed by the poet, while it is convincing enough, is fairly untypical of Poems 1913. (15) The scenes he has chosen are set apart from the main body of the text; for instance there is no correspondence between the church imagery of the second passage and the earlier "religious" poems. "A gray and dusty daylight flows", which we have already examined, is less an expression of faith than an elaboration on the motif of rose, underlaid with the rather abstract theme of perfection in absence.

Again, the imagery of gems that is used in the last passage of the "Epilogue" is quite distinct from the symbolism of Poems 1913:

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 plentitude beyond impeach,
 single, distinct, and whole in each

It would be impossible to read these lines in the light of the gem passages of "The Forest of Night" where, as we have seen, all the associations of the motif are subsumed in the symbol of Lilith. The "Epilogue" passage bears no relation to "Lilith". From where then does Brennan derive it? Probably from the early series, The Burden of Tyre, where we find this stanza that resembles it, at least in theme:

But, because Eden lives by strife
 of loving powers, that all may reach
 the plenitude of beauty and life,
 single distinct and whole in each

The last line of this corresponds exactly to the last line of the "Epilogue" passage, above.

What then do we conclude about the imagery of the "Epilogue"? It is successfully related to the biographical story it presents and it is in itself vivid and compact: yet finally it bears no relation to the basic symbolic script of Poems 1913.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER SIX.

1. Australian Writers and their Work: C.J. Brennan, p.31.
2. Uncat. MSS, with courtesy Mitchell Library.
3. Newspaper Cuttings. Uncat. MSS, with courtesy Mitchell Library.
4. It is interesting to note that in the FL.3 version of the poem Brennan had "the sun went out in rain". The use of "world" makes his meaning much more final.
5. See Chapter two, p.58.
6. It is also interesting to note that in (89) Brennan reverts to the shorter verse-form used through most of "Towards the Source" and "The Forest of Night" (except "Lilith"). The division into stanzas and the use of rhyme does seem to give him much tighter control over what he is saying.
7. Cf. Brennan in the first of XXI Poems; and Rimbaud's Le Bateau Ivre (e.g. "O que ma quille éclate! O que j'aille à la mer!").
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p.9.
10. A.R. Chisholm, Christopher Brennan: the Man and his Poetry, p.30.
11. See Introduction, p.22.
12. The last two lines of "The Wanderer" seem to be an evasion of actuality. The series as a whole has not prepared us for the "peace" the Wanderer now claims he will find.
13. Op.cit (see note (1)); p.17.
14. In the FL.3 version, Brennan has for this line "that over them, ring within ring". That is at once less interesting and less pointed than the final version.

15. An exception to this would be "Twilights of the Gods and the Folk"; but any democratic sentiment expressed there is somewhat oblique.

C O N C L U S I O N S .

When we have completed our symbolic reading of Poems 1913 what conclusions can we draw? First, that it reveals to us the intellectual structure of the work. In "Towards the Source" the poet seeks an ideal of perfection in love. The quest ends in disenchantment, and in "The Forest of Night" we see his theme widen into transcendental terms. By the end of "The Quest of Silence" series the poetry is moving from the search for earthly happiness into more general considerations: philosophical, social, religious, mythical. To use one word, it is "cosmic". The poet comes to use symbols and settings of broader significance: for instance the rose is taken up again from the "Source" but it is the absence and the past perfection of the rose which now concern him (see p. 145).

Still the poetry is kept within limits, confined by a set form (the four-lined or three lined stanza). Brennan is not quite ready to start into the unknown, hovers uncertainly between the forest setting, heraldic figures, the city and the gulf of night. A lack of centre is more obvious here than anywhere in Poems 1913: we feel him to be constantly on the brink of some great discovery. Then at last he takes a deep breath, throws aside the neat but restricting verse-forms of sonnet and quatrain, and launches into "Lilith".

"Lilith" is central to the whole of Poems 1913, as an intensification of the search for Eden, and all the resulting disillusionment: all the ruin waste and defeat prefigured in the "Silence" poems and earlier, in "Towards the Source", where absence was compelling the poet to write: absence of the beloved, of the beautiful past. All these themes and images are made absolute as Adam awaits Lilith, the divine lover who is

the "eternal lack" (x). Man's desires can never be fulfilled.

At the end she orders him "Go forth: be great, O nothing. I have said."

After "Lilith", the central theme follows a somewhat tortuous course through "The Labour of Night". Various myths and dim settings are used with no particular direction. We receive the impression of vast cosmic failure, a gradual vanishing of Lilith as the centre of aspiration and dream. Then we arrive at "The Wanderer" in which as McAuley says, the Eden-quest "is, and is not, given up."⁽¹⁾ A coherent framework of images fails to amount to a unity of significance. The series ends with negation.

Looking at the whole intellectual structure we see that the search for Eden is the most important theme of the poems. It provides us certainly with a guide to the sequence yet if we studied the progress of this quest alone we would not understand all that Brennan is trying to convey. It is through the landscape and the symbolism of the poems that we really feel his governing spirit.

The general picture of the landscape of Poems 1913 is one of great diversity and some confusion. Out of this there rises the one important symbol of Lilith which provides a focus, a centre for all the significant analogies of the poems. Before "Lilith" there is some incoherence; and after, a general dissolution of imagery and theme.

Thus it is possible for the reader to grasp Poems 1913 through a study of the symbolic script. But of what use is our understanding of a single poetic sequence if we do not relate it to some larger context of ideas? Let us try to view the work against the background of esoteric symbolism which we sketched out before our analysis began, and from which we saw Brennan deriving much of his poetic idealism. An estimation

of the exact extent of his debt to the Symbolists had to be suspended until after our reading was complete.

We have seen how many techniques used in Poems 1913, correspondence, suggestion and the creation of beauty, are also important Symbolist techniques. We see however few of the effects of musicality which the Symbolists sought to achieve. Sometimes by the interweaving of scenes and motifs which subtly reappear at given points in the poetry Brennan appears to emulate Mallarmé's symphonic architecture; but this interweaving of suggestion is virtually limited to "Lilith" and the poems that immediately surround it. Poems 1913 is hardly a case of "la musicalité de tout" (see Brose, p.282. . .).

It is rather Brennan's idea of the symbol (which as we have seen he distilled from the French school and made his own), that formed some frame of judgment for symbolic practice in Poems 1913. In "Lilith" alone was the perfect symbol realized; and this is the most impressive part of his poetry.

Alec King in one of the best recent criticisms of Brennan puts the whole position in a nutshell when he calls the poet a "near-Symbolist."⁽²⁾ He suggests that Brennan shows "the doubt . . . of how poetry could be written in his age. Like many Symbolist, and near-symbolist, writers, but not the greatest, he often combines in curious confusion the symbolism of recall and the manner of self-expression." These two kinds of practice are explained in greater detail. Symbolism was born out of a reaction against eighteenth-century rationalism and nineteenth-century materialism. John Stuart Mill produced the first clear statement of the Symbolist position: "Poetry embodies itself in symbols that are the nearest possible representation of the feeling in the exact shape in

which it exists in the poet's mind." King also cites Pater's Renaissance and in particular the passage on pulses⁽³⁾ which suggests that the mood of the poet when he is alone with himself is irresistibly attractive and exciting. King claims however the opposite case is nearer the truth.⁽⁴⁾ The technique of "symbolism of recall" was far from being spontaneous self-expression. "It was a method of summoning to the mind, through a more or less deliberate handling of certain kinds of symbol, and of words whose indicative functions were carefully submerged under their suggestive functions . . . a summoning to the mind of as rich and variegated a content as possible" . . .⁽⁵⁾

The key-word there I think is "deliberate". The technique of "recall" is a fully conscious process, and artificial because the Symbolist poet is supposedly capturing intense eternal moments. Linked with this is "self-expression", from which point of view Brennan's poetry is seen:

full of impurities, of unimportant attention to the goings-on of the mind, not those passionate acts of deliberation which we find in metaphysical poetry, but only and necessarily those slack movements, ruminations, turnings and counterturnings of the mind unengaged with what is outside it, things or ideas asking to be firmly held and known. His poetry wanders on, often, with a freight of symbolist words and a grammar of self-expressive doubts" . . .⁽⁶⁾

How well that description fits much of Poems 1913. But King's discussion also sums up Brennan's relationship to the Symbolists. He is very far from achieving Mallarmé's verbal perfection: he remains as it were on the outer verge of the Symbolists. He has glimpsed their ideal of perfection, but in practice has not passed beyond the preliminary stages

of "le Rêve". Thus his poetry can appear as the mechanical workings of techniques of "recall" - stilted and unreal.

But "Lilith" does not fall into this category: for all its obscurity it rings true. And there is no parallel to it in all of Mallarmé's work. Hérodiade alone is of a length comparable to Brennan's central poems, yet it would scarcely be possible to compare them. The whole conception of Hérodiade, the shadowy princess living in the world of her own reflected beauty and refusing to commune with humanity or submit to the divine, differs entirely from anything in Poems 1913. The poem too is essentially a fragment, while "Lilith" is the centre of the whole sequence of "The Forest of Night". There is some borrowing of motif from Hérodiade, namely ice, rose and gem but as we have seen Brennan uses the gem and its associates as part of a whole movement of spirit and thought: not as, Mallarmé, simply because they are beautiful and stand for perfection.

It seems then that the study of Brennan against the Symbolist background will not provide us with a final evaluation. What evaluation can be made from that angle has been made already and very successfully, by Alec King. It is hardly possible to quarrel with his conclusions about Poems 1913. But what is really needed I feel is an evaluation of "Lilith".

We spoke in the Introduction of the "difficulty" surrounding Brennan. But when the poems have been read and analysed does not this difficulty finally narrow itself down to "Lilith"? It is these twelve pieces that have puzzled the critics and led them to regard the poetry as obscure.

The symbolic reading of Poems 1913 certainly reveals many of Brennan's themes and poetic intentions but does it finally tell us why

the poetry was written? Lilith, arising out of Poems 1913 as a vast central figure, has undoubtedly some compulsive base. The poet's search for perfection in life and art, or his search for Eden, seems to end here in a baffled fashion. In this figure the mind seeks to disencumber itself of confusion, or purge itself of fear, in a definite willed act of creation. But this is not, as King suggests, a continuation of the mode of self-expression.⁽⁷⁾ "Lilith" represents a genuine search for lucidity.

In his essay "Blake After Many Years", Brennan speaks of the way in which one is often "crushed" by Blake's mythology:

The symbolic vision is presented to us, not in terms of poetic imagery, but in a mythological system invented and elaborated for the nonce. That is to say, the symbol ceases to be essentially beauty, and becomes a script, a language to the acquiring of which we must direct our first attention, to the interpreting of it the second.⁽⁸⁾

Do we have the same experience in reading "Lilith"?

Certainly the mythical element in "Lilith" is somewhat obscure and sometimes seems to overlay the verse rather than arise from within it.

McAuley's evaluation of the series is not unjust:

The mixture of lyrical, meditative and epic modes, loosely connected with factitious matter, is too makeshift. The weaving together of Adam with "ego" with mankind-in-history is sound in principle but seems to blur the narrative framework.

But as we have seen, the "narrative framework" is not of great importance in "Lilith"; nor is it Brennan's sole intention to figure forth the myth. The real importance of the series, as I hope to have shown, lies

in the symbol of Lilith, which gives sense and direction to the whole of Poems 1913.

At the same time it is impossible to ignore the fact that the syntax of the poem can circle so far around the meaning that it entirely hides it. Lilith is an essence extracted from a context of mythical nightliness, hence she is intentionally a dark veiled figure: but is this obscurity only due to the poet's symbolic handling of materials?

Perhaps in "Lilith" we are embarked, with the poet, on a search for lucidity. Certainly the series demands a multiplicity of approach that few poems of such a length require. However the critical judgment we have finally to make should not lie in counting over the many means of approach we are forced to take, but in the way we think the poet has handled so much material. Does any total meaning emerge? Is a unity forged from so many strands of significance?

Finally I think that "Lilith", on the whole, succeeds. The symbol does not cease to be "essentially beauty"; it is never in danger of degenerating into mere script. The series is great, if not for the poetic achievement, for the immensity of mental effort and spiritual intention that lie behind it. It shows the potential proportions of Brennan's mind, his capacity for reaching into the inner recesses of an "ideal" mind. It shows also perhaps his ultimate failure as a poet: the limited vessel which is the verse is not large enough to hold his intentions. But that failure is the proof of his honest attempt.

In "Lilith" too Brennan comes closest to realizing the vision of beauty, the "ideal kinship" of all things which the Symbolists strove to capture in their art. We see here the integration of his central theme, the Eden-quest, and his central artistic tenet, which is the creation

of Beauty. Beauty itself is seen as a symbol of Eden, the life which is beyond the labour and division of our human state, "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."⁽⁹⁾

In Poems 1913 what is Brennan's final achievement? We see a failure to create unity and frequently, a failure in the expression of ideas. Yet it contains some striking individual poems and one group, "Lilith", in which the whole framework of images and themes is encompassed with far-reaching significance. Artistically Poems 1913 can both fail and succeed, but finally, it is a vision which compels.

FOOTNOTES TO CONCLUSIONS.

1. Australian Writers and their Work: C.J. Brennan, p.21.
2. "Thoughts on the poetry of Brennan", Westerly 1961, p.4.
3. Pater wrote: "Every moment . . . some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us - for that moment only. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is seen in them by the finest senses?"
4. Op.cit., p.4.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.5.
7. Ibid.
8. Prose, p.250.
9. Corollaries to "Nineteenth Century Literature", Prose, p.172.

- B I B L I O G R A P H Y -

NOTE: Because of the unusually complicated nature of the material consulted, I have divided the Bibliography into two parts. Part I lists studies of Brennan with their reviews. Part II contains a list of Brennan's own writings, his letters, notes and early versions of the poems (of interest to the evolution of Poems 1913). Here I have listed the items alphabetically according to the main sources of interest or information. Where groups of material are divided between the two parts (e.g. the Papers of J.J. Quinn, which include material both on and by Brennan) the appropriate cross-reference is made.

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