

Yeats's Book of 'Numberless Dreams': His Notebooks, 'Visions: 1898-1901', and the Irish 'Unwritten Tradition'

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Stephen Overy's flattering invitation to speak suggested but one guideline: a talk on Yeats and the 'learning of the imagination'. The phrase set me thinking of Dr Kathleen Raine. Her *Defending Ancient Springs* (1967), purchased and read by me when I was an undergraduate in Australia—I still have it—helped to awaken my interest in Yeats's writings. I first met her at the Yeats Summer School in Sligo in the early 1970s, where her lectures anticipated her *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn* (1972) and *Yeats the Initiate* (1986).¹ She shared Yeats's sense that there are ways of knowing more appropriate to the production and reception of art than those of shuffling editors such as myself, those

Bald heads forgetful of their sins,
Old, learned, respectable bald heads
[who]
Edit and annotate the lines
That young men, tossing on their beds,
Rhymed out in love's despair
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.²

Mea Culpa. I hope Yeats's rebuke will propitiate the lofty shade of Kathleen Raine. As an Advisory Editor of my journal, she wrote

* This is the text of a lecture delivered to the Temenos Academy, 8 October 2018.

1. Such as 'Yeats, Neoplatonism and the Occult' (1972, 1973), "Hades Wrapped in Cloud": Yeats's essay "Swedenborg, Mediums and the Desolate Places" (1974), later revised and reproduced in *Yeats the Initiate: Essays on Certain Themes in the Work of W. B. Yeats* (Mountrath: Dolmen; London: George Allen and Unwin, 1986). Deeply immersed as she was in Yeats's own thought, it is notable that Kathleen Raine cordially relinquished the editing of Yeats's occult papers leading to *A Vision* (1925, 1937) to her co-editor, Professor George Mills Harper. I've often wondered if *as poet* she found Yeats, as would-be seer and as system builder, almost too influential. She had, as I recall, been given Yeats's fountain pen by the late Mrs George Yeats.

2. *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957; cited from the corrected third printing, 1966), p. 336. Hereafter *Variorum Poems*.

of a submission: 'This young woman, for I judge her to be a young woman, would be well advised to join a magical order so that the veils of illusion can be stripped off her, one by one'—advice which I did not pass on. As a *poet* Raine depended on centuries of book-learning. As a *scholar* she compounded it. Her book had brought me to Yeats's inexhaustible library of book-learning, the British Museum Library, where occasionally she was to be glimpsed. She took it for granted that the imagination was *learned*, as had W. B. Yeats before her. Many years after Yeats had worked upon the 'Visions' Notebooks, he recalled when he

began to question the country-people about apparitions. . . . [from 1897 onwards] Lady Gregory collected with my help the stories in her *Visions and Beliefs*. Again and again, she and I felt that we had got down, as it were, into some fibrous darkness, into some matrix out of which everything has come, some condition that brought together as though into a single scheme 'exultations, agonies', and the apparitions seen by dogs and horses; but there was always something lacking. We came upon visionaries of whom it was impossible to say whether they were Christian or Pagan, found memories of jugglers like those of India, found fragments of a belief that associated Eternity with field and road, not with buildings; but these visionaries, memories, fragments, were eccentric, alien, shut off as it were under the plate glass of a museum; I had found something of what I wanted but not all, the explanatory intellect had disappeared.³

The key phrase is 'fibrous darkness' (or, as in the poem 'Fragments', 'forest loam'),⁴ by which Yeats means the beliefs of country people. These, he thought, were ancient deposits—like turf, rotted down as it were, into tradition. Endlessly inspiring sods could be recovered by certain kinds of learned approach. Yeats had once sought an Irish 'ancient discipline, a philosophy that satisfied the intellect', which, he thought by 1932, he had also found in Indian thought. In both traditions, it seemed, new poems could return into traditional peasant

3. 'An Indian Monk', i.e., Introduction to *An Indian Monk: his Life and Adventures* by Shri Purohit Swami (London: Macmillan, 1932), p. xviii; reprinted in W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 428–9.

4. See *Variorum Poems*, p. 439.

oral culture. ‘Though intellectual Dublin knew nothing of it’, Douglas Hyde had ‘considerable popularity as a Gaelic poet’:

. . . mowers and reapers singing his songs from Donegal to Kerry. Years afterwards I was to stand at his side and listen to Galway mowers singing his Gaelic words without their knowing whose words they sang. It is so in India, where peasants sing the words of the great poet of Bengal [Tagore] without knowing whose words they sing, and it must often be so where the old imaginative folk-life is undisturbed . . .⁵

‘The Free State Army’, Yeats boasted in 1935,

march to a tune called ‘Down by the Salley Garden’ [*sic*] without knowing that the march was first published with words of mine, words that are now folklore.⁶

As a scholar, Raine depended upon lines of thought such as those which Yeats had first set out in writings published at the turn of the twentieth century. From words of Proust, she fashioned the title lines for her volume of poems, *The Lost Country*.

The only Paradise, Proust said,
Is the lost country that has passed
Out of time and into mind,
Nor can we come into our own
Till time’s last heart-beat has been sped,
Our sole desire all we have lost.⁷

Recovering that ‘lost country’ which to both poets was the imagination, renewing tradition through learning and inspiring others to follow, Yeats left certain prose *manifesti* about his work which defined the beliefs against which he compiled his ‘Visions’ Notebooks. Certain ‘popular’ poets—Felicia Hemans, Lord Macaulay, Longfellow and Walter Scott, even Burns—had been

5. *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 217.

6. *Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, intro. Kathleen Raine (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), Letter of 29 September 25 [1935].

7. *The Lost Country* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1971), p. 34: ‘In Answer to a Letter asking me for Volumes of my Early Poems’.

poets of the middle class, of people who have unlearned the unwritten tradition which binds the unlettered . . . to the beginning of time and to the foundation of the world, and who have not learned the written tradition which has been established upon the unwritten.

Yeats then claims that 'what we call "popular poetry" never came from the people at all'.⁸

. . . [G]o down into the street with some thought whose bare meaning must be plain to everybody; take with you Ben Jonson's 'Beauty like sorrow dwelleth everywhere,' and find out how utterly its enchantment depends on an association of beauty with sorrow which written tradition has from the unwritten, which had it in its turn from ancient religion; or take with you these lines in whose bare meaning also there is nothing to stumble over, and find out what men lose who are not in love with Helen—

Brightness falls from the air,
Queens have died young and fair,
Dust hath closed Helen's eye . . .

He then roundly declares:

There is only one kind of good poetry, for the poetry of the coteries, which presupposes the written tradition, does not differ in kind from the true poetry of the people, which presupposes the unwritten tradition. Both are alike strange and obscure, and unreal to all who have not understanding, and both, instead of that manifest logic, that clear rhetoric of the 'popular poetry', glimmer with thoughts and images . . . I learned from the people themselves, before I learned it from any book, that *they cannot separate the idea of an art or a craft from the idea of a cult with ancient technicalities and mysteries. They can hardly separate mere learning from witchcraft, and are fond of words and verses that keep half their secret to themselves . . .* the art of the people was as closely mingled with the art of the coteries as was

8. Thus, from an essay collected in 1903 entitled 'What is Popular Poetry?' (*Essays and Introductions*, pp. 3–12), which Kathleen Raine cites in her 'Ben Bulben Sets the Scene', first given at the Yeats International Summer School in Sligo (1979), and also collected in her *Yeats the Initiate*, pp. 45–64 (p. 56).

the speech of the people that delighted in rhythmical animation, in idiom, in images, in words full of far-off suggestion, with the unchanging speech of the poets.⁹

Middle-class Ireland, with its prolific journalism, its Young Ireland Societies and cultural/national fervour, Yeats felt, had at the time no 'cultivated minority': hence the Irish absorption of English middle-class values and its popular poetry. He plied them with folklore essays which are barely read now. He offered folkloric notes to his over-freighted symbolical poems. *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) contains just 37 poems in 62 pages, with 44 pages of such notes, some of them as long as 8 pages of that book. He later pruned them, forcing the poems to become self-sufficient.

As a boy in Dublin he had had 'one unshakable belief':

I thought that whatever of philosophy has been made poetry is alone permanent, and that one should begin to arrange it in some regular order, rejecting nothing as the make-believe of the poets. . . . Since then I have observed dreams and visions very carefully, and am *now certain that the imagination has some way of lighting on the truth that the reason has not, and that its commandments, delivered when the body is still and the reason silent, are the most binding we can ever know.*¹⁰

The 'Visions' Notebooks consist of two small vellum-bound volumes, the first of which is 236 × 184 mm, the second 233 × 179 mm. They are of high quality, with unnumbered blank pages, bound in Florence, and were probably the gift of Maud Gonne. Yeats used them between 11 July 1898 and 31 March 1901. He kept them, and between 1948 and 1951, well after his death in 1939, they were given by Mrs Yeats to Maud Gonne with a dry or wry note saying that perhaps they would mean more to Maud Gonne than they meant to her. Her grand-daughter, Anna MacBride White, began to transcribe them at the kitchen table. Her transcriptions though incomplete are extraordinarily valuable, precisely because they are those of an innocent eye, rather than of a Yeats scholar: she misses a great deal, but she reads nothing into

9. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 7, 8-10; emphasis added.

10. From 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' (*Essays and Introductions*, p. 65); emphasis added.

what is, as it turns out, a very 'dark scripture' indeed.¹¹ She sold them in the late nineteen sixties or early seventies to pay for school fees, and they were subsequently sold on three or four times: I tracked them through the sale rooms and examined them twice in Sotheby's. They are currently sequestered (and not for the first time) in a private collection, but the Yeats Estate owns the copyright. Deirdre Toomey and I used them extensively to annotate Volume II of the Yeats *Letters*. We made a preliminary transcription available to Roy Foster for the first volume of his biography of Yeats, *The Apprentice Mage*, and hope soon to publish them, working from a microfilm, shot in haste and only for preservation purposes about fifty years ago—scratched, dusty, readable only if eyestrain is a condition of employment.

THE BOOK OF MY NUMBERLESS DREAMS

Writers' notebooks are usually private, and many are chaotic. The mixture of genres is often the very thing one wishes to communicate, the cauldron of creative excitement which demands fidelity to the use of the opening, or the page. Blake's or Leonardo da Vinci's or Flaubert's notebooks, each seemingly incommunicable, endlessly throw out insights into the germs of masterpieces. Yeats himself with Edwin Ellis, producing the first modern three-volume edition of Blake in 1893, had to rescue Blake as poet and artist from the mass of his remains, preserving some sense of facsimile whilst gaining for Blake readability and an audience. In such documents—I think in particular of the notebooks of Yeats's fellow member of the Order of the Golden Dawn, Florence Farr, aptly known to Yeats as 'Spillikins'—wild diagrams from untraced recondite sources; lecture notes from theosophical study groups; the mock-up title of a book never published under that title (Coleridge comes to mind here, of course); self-laceration in the light of her teaching, including grumbles about two of her lovers, Yeats and Shaw; wisdom from the Tiger Māhātma, Sri Agamya Guru Paramahansa: a text, intended only for one, scattered in disorder for the many.

11. 'Sleep's dark scripture' is Swinburne's phrase: see his 'A Midsummer's Holiday: On the Verge' in *Decadent Verse: An Anthology of Late-Victorian Poetry, 1872–1900*, ed. Caroline Blyth (London: Anthem Press, 2011), p. 420. In December 1891, Lionel Johnson remarked to Campbell Dodgson: "I have an armchair now, and I live in it: so my delicate scripture will be more than commonly dark" (British Library Add. Ms. 46363; quoted in *The Collected Poems of Lionel Johnson* edited by Ian Fletcher, 2nd & revised edition [New York: Garland, 1982], p. xliii).

Such materials rarely reach print. We are much more familiar with publication of a different class of 'creative writing' manuscripts: working drafts, as found, e.g., in both the Cornell Wordsworth and Yeats Manuscripts Series, ordered by title of the finished work towards which the working manuscripts mark key moments of progress, printed with imaged pages set side by side with typographical facsimiles, verso and recto. But when a writer himself uses a blank book bound before purchase, the process is harder to reproduce in facsimile or to follow. Yeats 'liked the two page spread' each opening provided.¹² He usually drafted on the right-hand page and added comments on the left-hand page. His main text is continually interrupted by additions and interpolations, the possibilities of which he has carefully allowed for. The immediacy of '*thinking on paper*' is apparent, as are chances for reflection on what has been written.¹³ Padraic Colum says that when writing poems, Yeats would cut a cigarette in half, write a line, and smoke half before proceeding (rather like a plasterer smoking as he waits for the plaster to go off).¹⁴ And of course on numerous occasions—then and later—he added on the verso page corrections and qualifications or inserted the letters, improved the drawings, completed the horoscopes, or added new ones for the time of the event to analyse it and understand it.

We have all recorded dreams, but few with a vellum-bound commitment to permanence. Yeats already had a history of writing in bound

12. Curtis Bradford, *Yeats at Work* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), pp. xiii–xiv.

13. The phrase is Jon Stallworthy's; see his *Between the Lines: Yeats's Poetry in the Making* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), pp. 9–10. Resonant enough to become the title of A. Norman Jeffares's (at the time anonymous) review of the book in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 29 March 1963 (p. 218), it describes a situation Stallworthy likens to a locksmith's 'opening a safe' by 'listen[ing] for the click of cogs slipping into place' (p. 5). Stallworthy's is a metaphor countering Yeats's own famous phrase, '[t]he correction of prose, because it has no fixed laws, is endless, a poem comes right with a click like a closing box': see *Letters . . . to Dorothy Wellesley*, p. 22. Stallworthy even suggests that as Yeats 'grew older he wrote . . . often with no intention of reading what was before him on the page: his fingers were simply turning the dials . . . listen[ing] to the stirring of the cog-wheels in his brain . . . *thinking on paper*'. Stallworthy tells us that he wrote his study of poetic manuscripts without a great deal of access to prose manuscripts (p. 5); but of such that he had seen there was, he reported, much less evidence of revision. These notebooks offer evidence of a revisionary writing process; and, for all their manifest difficulties for the reader, were clearly preserved for re-consultation by the poet himself.

14. Colum's 'Reminiscences of Yeats' were first published in the *Tri-Quarterly* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), W. B. Yeats Centenary Issue, no. 4 (Fall 1965), pp. 71–7; reprinted in *The Yeats We Knew*, ed. Frank MacManus (Cork: Mercier Press, 1965), pp. 13–24, also in *W. B. Yeats: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. E. H. Mikhail (London: Macmillan, 1977), 2 vols, pp. 205–212 (210).

manuscript books: the 'Flame of the Spirit' Notebook in which he put poems for Maud Gonnet; the 1893 notebook with its brocade cover which he flaunted for his first interview with Katharine Tynan; the 'Keltic Twilight' scrapbook into which he pasted texts from periodical publications and projected lists of the order of its contents; the White Notebook for the poems of *The Wind Among the Reeds*. Antonia Byatt from time to time shows her own very tidy writer's notebooks when asked to talk about her creative processes, but one can hardly imagine Yeats excavating the 'Visions' Notebooks from his bag and hauling them out for public view. These were written for a readership of one.

Yeats is unusual among writers who record dream-material in that he sought to keep and to annotate a record of dreams and visions, separate from the diarizing of outer life. (Coleridge, Kafka and Sylvia Plath, for example, recorded significant dreams in notebooks or diaries alongside details of daily life, of books read, poems drafted, health recorded, and appointments kept, but I have handled a volume of Graham Greene's dedicated dream diaries.)

Yeats's warning 'Private' is no mere Cerberus, it imitates the stern injunctions given in other manuscript books of the period, such as the manuscript books of rituals of the Order of the Golden Dawn which members themselves had to transcribe and compile. But this is not a book of ritual though its subject matter is one of the bases for Yeats's own unsatisfactory rituals for a new Celtic Mystical Order. It is a Spiritual Diary, a revisited, self-annotated text. Annotating it and editing it, we are trying to recover some sense of its use at various points in Yeats's life thereafter.

Once we had deciphered it, it was apparent that much material scattered throughout Yeats's published prose and verse depended upon it. It became for him a quarry for meditative and autobiographical writings, folklore essays such as are found in the 1902 edition of *The Celtic Twilight*, and his philosophical writings such as *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917): it is, then, another 'matrix out of which everything has come'. His dreams (some drug-induced), visions (some drug-suppressed), and occult experiences for that 33-month period provided him with evidence of what he would call wisdom that had come to him, as he came to believe and tried to understand, directly from *Anima Mundi*. In *Autobiographies*, he writes:

It was at Coole that the first few simple thoughts that now, grown complex through their contact with other thoughts, explain

the world, came to me from beyond my own mind. I practised meditations, and these, as I think, so affected my sleep that I began to have dreams that differed from ordinary dreams in seeming to take place amid brilliant light, and by their invariable coherence, and certain half-dreams, if I can call them so, between sleep and waking ... such experiences come to me most often amid distraction, at some time that seems of all times the least fitting, as though it were necessary for the exterior mind to be engaged elsewhere, and it was during 1897 and 1898, when I was always just arriving from or just setting out to some political meeting, that the first dreams came.¹⁵

Both his unfinished *Memoirs* and *Autobiographies* draw upon the dream-world's singular experiences in works of self-construction, 'at once the discovery, creation and imitation of the self';¹⁶ while the 'Visions' Notebooks do not entirely follow their own professed agenda. Much material is tipped in, including his own horoscope done by a fellow member of the Golden Dawn, an illuminated manuscript of a poem by Nora Hopper, and letters from Maud Gonne; the dreams and visions of a number of other people—many of these being about Yeats himself and his relationship with Maud Gonne. These last are pasted in in their envelopes.

Immediately from this example one can see how codical form and structure are the very basis of Yeats's project: a Book of Evidence for a single reader, himself, which depends on, even as it violates, the sequential nature of the codex, always irrupting into parallel texts, subsequent interpolations, footnotes, etc. Sometimes, as in the pasted-in envelopes containing letters from Maud Gonne, the parallel texts can be of almost simultaneous composition, received by Yeats a day or two later. Other interpolations and self-annotations were clearly added much later. There are also horoscopes, tarot readings, and other souvenirs tucked away in envelopes.

Later interpolations are frequently dated, additions and explanations and amplifications, as are the pasted-in envelopes containing letters and parallel visions by Maud Gonne, to the tarot readings and astrological calculations and predictions. Think of fold-outs in books, or those wonderful constructions (such as Law's translation of Boehme

15. *Autobiographies*, p. 378.

16. Quoted from an unknown source by Michael Longley in *Tuppenny Stung: Autobiographical Chapters* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1994), p. 11.

in which panels can open and shut to show the microcosmic, inner organs of macrocosmic, symbolical diagrams). Think, too, of high-tech children's pop-up books, or any books which play with the idea of grangerization and inclusiveness. Nick Bantock's *Griffin & Sabine: An Extraordinary Correspondence* and *Sabine's Notebook* (1991–3), and later visual novels in the series, by a wonderful coincidence, employ epigraphs from 'The Second Coming': ('Turning and turning . . .' and 'The best lack all conviction'). Bantock admits the influence of Yeats's thought, but not, it seems of the forms of his many notebooks.¹⁷

CONTEXTS: CELTIC MYSTICAL ORDER

Yeats had become dissatisfied with the 'elaborate style' of the *Rosa Alchemica* stories of 1896–7. These stories belong to the genre known as 'the fantastic' and the reader hovers between natural and supernatural readings of their characters' subjective experiences: a simplified example of which would be to ask 'Are the narrator's experiences the result of drug-induced hallucinations, or are these true visionary experiences?'¹⁸ George Russell wrote 'Ah wicked wizard . . . The *Rosa Alchemica* is a most wonderful piece of prose. . . . A book sustained at that level would be one of the greatest things in literature'.¹⁹ To its author, however, its

17. Sabine lives at 41 Yeats Ave., London NW3, as does Griffin, at another date. Nick Bantock's *Ceremony of Innocence* (1997) is a CD ROM game based on these books.

18. *Rosa Alchemica* and its companion stories *The Tables of the Law* and *The Adoration of the Magi* (the first published in April 1896) are Poe-esque (rather than Paterian, as Yeats claimed) narratives of failed initiation. The great set pieces are Robartes's temptation of the narrator in his house in Dublin, and the narrator's entry into the temple of the Alchemical Rose. See *The Secret Rose, Stories by W. B. Yeats: A Variorum Edition*, ed. Warwick Gould, Phillip L. Marcus, and Michael J. Sidnell (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 132–6 and 144–8 esp. pp. 145–7, lines 532–88. Hereafter *VSR*. They can be read as the narrator's visions, or as mesmerism caused by Michael Robartes's evocation. Incense possibly acts on the narrator as a drug, as does the gum in the torches in the hands of companies of immortal beings which pervade the ending of the second story (the immortal demons of the third story). Attempted domination is resisted by mental struggle. These stories pre-date Yeats's experiments with drugs. Yeats's first recorded hashish experience is in Paris in December 1896. Recreational and apparently his first experiment, it took him on a singular adventure among the Martinists. Havelock Ellis first experimented on him and on Arthur Symons with mescal (that 'some stray cactus, mother of as many dreams' which, with hashish, 'keeps alone . . . immemorial impartiality') in April 1897. See 'Concerning Saints and Artists' (*Essays and Introductions*, pp. 281–3).

19. See *Letters from AE*, selected and edited by Alan Denson, with a foreword by Dr Monk Gibbon (London etc.: Abelard-Schuman, 1961), pp. 18–19. The letter is of 3 April 1897, written on the publication of *The Secret Rose*, itself dedicated to Russell.

style was 'too elaborate, too ornamental' and embodying 'little actual circumstance, nothing natural, but always an artificial splendour'.²⁰ The fantastic is a mode of fiction from which (bluntly) Yeats felt he had to turn away as he embarked on (to him) frail, if real, visionary experience and unsatisfactory drug experiences. An early draft of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* acknowledges 'The world of spirits became & still is the great preoccupation of my life . . . a study, that even more than poetry has absorbed my life'.²¹ That preoccupation needed to be externalised: actual experience in all its complexity showed that the fantastic, or quasi-gothic fiction was not the way forward. There was no way to put such experience before the public.

Dissatisfaction led him to seek, with the mediumship of his mistress, Olivia Shakespeare, the advice of a 'symbolic personality' called Megarithma, who advised him to 'live near water and avoid woods because they concentrate the solar ray'. Yeats interpreted 'solar' influence in terms of that growing artifice of style he detected in the 'goldsmith'-like elaboration of *Rosa Alchemica* (1896). Water was 'lunar', referring to 'all that is simple, popular, traditional, emotional'.²² This 'enigmatic sentence', Yeats came to believe, 'came from my own Daimon, my own buried self speaking through my friend's mind'.²³ It was thereafter associated with the 'Archer Vision' of August 1896 in Tillyra castle,²⁴ and these two experiences are most of what we know of Yeats's visionary life before the 'Visions' Notebooks.²⁵

The Notebooks bring to light some of the more recondite activities of a small group of late *fin de siècle* writers, Irish nationalists and occult experimenters, all via the kaleidoscope of Yeats's inner life. Celtic mythography had been an interest ever since his recording of folklore for *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) and was key to the symbolical sources

20. *Spiritus Mundi*, National Library of Ireland MS 30,532, but the same point exists in numerous contexts, e.g. a revulsion from the 'extravagant style/He had learned from Pater' denounced by Robartes in 'The Phases of the Moon' (*Variorum Poems*, p. 373).

21. This is the text *Spiritus Mundi*, cited in the preceding note. To be published in *Yeats Annual 22* (2020).

22. At some time before mid-August 1896, Olivia Shakespeare—not a member of the Order of the Golden Dawn—passed 'into a condition between meditation and trance' and 'obtained . . . sentences, unintelligible to herself' under the influence of Yeats's 'cabbalistic symbols' (*Autobiographies*, p. 371). See also *Memoirs: Autobiography—First Draft: Journal*, transcr. and ed. Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972; New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 100. Hereafter *Mem.*

23. *Autobiographies*, p. 371. 24. *Ibid.*, pp. 372–5.

25. See also *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 2: 1896–1900, ed. Warwick Gould, John Kelly, Deirdre Toomey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 658–63.

of all his early poems and plays, but here we see him recording the visionary work of himself and others preparatory to the founding of a Celtic Mystical Order, based upon the old Celtic Gods. This had almost certainly been Yeats's intention when he began the first Notebook in July 1898. The ultimate source of this Celtic Mystical Order is a story by Nora Hopper, 'The Gifts of Aodh and Una', with its 'Temple of Heroes' on an island in the Shannon. Yeats was obsessed by the story in early 1895,²⁶ and, while staying with Douglas Hyde in April that year at Frenchpark, Co. Roscommon, he wondered whether Castle Island, Lough Key, might not become his 'temple of heroes', the centre of 'mysteries like those of Eleusis and Samothrace'.²⁷ For the next 'ten years' his

most impassioned thought was a vain attempt to find philosophy and to create ritual for that Order. I had an unshakable conviction . . . that invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Swedenborg, as they opened for Boehme . . .²⁸

There was a wider ambition at work here:

I must find a tradition, that was a part of actual history that had associations in the scenery of my own country, and so bring my speech closer to that of daily life. Prompted as I believed by certain dreams and premonitions I returned to Ireland, & with a friends help [Lady Gregory's] began a study of the supernatural belief of the Galway and Arran cottages. Could I not found an Eleusinian Rite, which would bind into a common symbolism, a common meditation a school of poets & men of letters, so that poetry & drama, would find the religious weight they have lacked since the middle ages perhaps since ancient Greece. I did not intend it, to be a

26. *Ballads in Prose* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head; Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1894), pp. 123-44. To end a plague and famine caused by blight, Aodh, a Prince of the O'Rourkes and Una, 'of the royal blood of Ullad' journey to the 'temple builded to the heroes of the Fianna' and the 'temples of Crom . . . the Thunderer' (p. 132) on a 'shadowy island' in the Shannon (pp. 132, 136). Aodh pledges to the Fianna and their gods his youth (to Diarmuid), his knowledge (to Grania), and his death (to Oisín). He pledges to other gods his hope, faith, courage, dreams, and heart (to Maive), love (to Angus), and soul (to Finn). Una gives her life to Crom, while Aodh lies 'as one who is dead' for seventy years before returning to the Temple and joining the Heroes: 'She gave: and I gave; and who shall reckon up our gifts?' (p. 142).

27. *Collected Letters*, II.176, 663-9; *Autobiographies*, p. 254. 28. *Autobiographies*, p. 254.

revival of the pagan world, how could one ignore so many centuries, but a reconciliation, where there would be no preaching, no public argument.²⁹

The Celtic Order was not to be part of the Order of the Golden Dawn, but it was to have a similar structure and rites. MacGregor Mathers, on behalf of the 'Chiefs of R.R. & A.C. . . . promise[d] recognition and help'.³⁰ In November 1897 Yeats began magical work towards the creation of the Order, with a group of Golden Dawn Second Order members, of whom only Dorothea Hunter and George Pollexfen were Irish. From the outset Yeats seems to have kept discrete cells working on symbolism for the Order. He drew regularly on visions experienced by Maud Gonne, George Russell (who had visions 'perhaps more continually than any modern man since Swedenborg'),³¹ William Sharp (and 'Fiona Macleod'), occasionally using Nora Hopper and Susan Mitchell. Papers in the National Library of Ireland record these activities and contain draft Rituals for the Order.³²

Dorothea Hunter recalled that '[h]e could not himself get the visions he so desired; he said his mind was too analytical & questioning'.³³ The 'Visions' Notebooks contain his own 'private' work on proposed Outer Order Rituals to be structured on Celtic Divinities of the pre-Christian era, about which Yeats had done a lot of reading when writing his epic 'The Wanderings of Oisín' (1889): the Tuatha de Danaan, the otherworld tribes of the Goddess Danu, associated with ancient passage tombs, portals to the Otherworld; and their rivals, the Fomorians, the harmful or destructive powers of nature, whom the Tuatha de Danaan defeat in the Battle of Moytura. The talismans of the Tuatha, the Sword, Stone, Cauldron and Spear;³⁴ the twelve Irish coloured winds; the four mythical cities, Gorias, Findrias, Murias, Falias, which subsequently turn up in 'Baile and Aillin', and their respective associated gods, give some sense of system and seem to have been the basis for (now lost) Celtic Tattwa cards developed by Yeats and his followers. From 12 September 1898 onwards, he evoked Irish gods and goddesses daily, summoning Aengus, Boann, Bobh Derg and An Dagda. Thus

29. *Spiritus Mundi*. 30. *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 665. 31. *Autobiographies*, p. 242.

32. Dublin, National Library of Ireland MS 36,281.

33. See Warwick Gould, "'The Music of Heaven": Dorothea Hunter', in *Yeats and Women*, ed. Deirdre Toomey (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 73–134 (p. 98).

34. George Pollexfen also kept a Visions notebook which records his own work for the proposed Order: Yeats added some genealogies of Irish gods to it. It is now among the Yeats papers in the National Library of Ireland, donated by Michael Butler Yeats.

Last night I evoked Connla's Well.³⁵ I got some new expressions. The nine hazels are fiery and masculine, the water is feminine. The well is the primordial duality. The well is the circle of the mind [&?] of space [Etc.?] ³⁶

CONTEXTS: MAUD GONNE AND THE SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE

Yeats's emotional life breaks through this visionary work, and the unreconciled struggle between the would-be magus and the man in love with Maud Gonne is established on the second page of the first Notebook. This intersection explodes in December 1898, the time of their 'spiritual marriage'. On 8 December came the catastrophic revelations of Maud Gonne's secret life, her long and now fractured

35. Connla's Well was the central symbol of the Celtic Mystical Order (CMO). On 29 December 1897, Yeats and other members of the Golden Dawn including Dorothea Hunter and Mary Briggs had begun to explore the world of Celtic Mythology via this well. Their explorations continued into 1898 and three such explorations are preserved among Yeats's CMO papers in the National Library. Yeats's ultimate source for the myth of Connla's well is Eugene O'Curry in *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, 2 vols (London: Williams and Norgate, 1873), II.143: 'In those very early times there was a certain mystical fountain which was called *Connla's Well*. . . . As to who this *Connla* was, from whom the well had its name, we are not told; but the well itself appears to have been regarded as another Helicon by the ancient Irish poets. Over this well there grew, according to the legend, nine beautiful mystical hazel-trees, which annually sent forth their blossoms and fruits simultaneously. The nuts were of the richest crimson colour, and teemed with the knowledge of all that was refined in literature, poetry, and art. No sooner, however, were the beautiful nuts produced on the trees, than they always dropped into the well, raising by their fall a succession of shining red bubbles. Now during this time the water was always full of salmon; and no sooner did the bubbles appear than these salmon darted to the surface and eat [i.e., ate] the nuts, after which they made their way to the river . . . the fish was supposed to have become filled with the knowledge which was contained in the nuts, which, it was believed, would be transferred in full to those who had the good fortune to catch and eat them. Such a salmon was . . . called the *Eo Feasa*, or "Salmon of Knowledge". This book is in Yeats's library: see Edward O'Shea, *A Descriptive Catalog of W. B. Yeats's Library* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1985), p. 1478. George Russell's poem 'Connla's Well' was much praised by Yeats in his lecture on the Celtic Movement in 4 December 1897; it provided a focus for the rituals of the Celtic Mystical Order, and was anthologised in Yeats's *A Book of Irish Verse* (London, Methuen: 1900), 225A. As 'The Nuts of Knowledge' it was first collected in the volume of that title (Dundrum: Dun Emer Press, 1903), and eventually led to Yeats's play, *At the Hawk's Well*.

36. The transcriptions offered here from the Notebooks are not *literatim*, although Yeats's eccentric spelling where it is easily decipherable has been reproduced. Editorial correction and editorial conjecture are expressed by square brackets and question marks, while Yeats's own *currente calamo* cancellations are signalled within angle brackets (<>) and deciphered where possible. The ^ symbol indicates an interlineated insertion.

relationship with Lucien Millevoye, and of the two children she had born him. Yeats intensified their shared magical and visionary life, and work for the Order. At 9 p.m. on 17 December they experienced the 'Initiation of the Spear' after evoking Aengus, who was ominously 'laughing and mocking':

He said we were one in the prenatal life and that this pre natal life was now bringing us together. When asked to show us in that life he showed PIAL³⁷ a stone and me a most beautiful golden flame-like form. Presently PIAL saw Lug who said we could now take the initiation of the spear. She saw a tree with a serpent and then a great fountain of fire. [. . .] The spear was held over us and we were told to hold to this. We rose up through the fire. I saw a kind of feathery flames like the branches of some kind of trees or bush and heard sounds as if made by falling and crashing metal. Presently I saw the spear put upright—we holding it no more. I was then drawn up as it seemed into the form of a great goddess who seemed like PIAL and like a stone Artemis—I looked out of her eyes. We were told that we would get to real initiation in sleep that night and would remember enough to teach others.

Maud Gonne left for France on the evening of 19 December, with their relationship unresolved and Yeats's belated proposal rejected. The Notebooks hold the ring, as it were, for the dreams and visions of others and the 'spiritual marriage' to Maud Gonne is countered by the dreams of Florence Farr and Olivia Shakespeare. Thus, by 10 April, Yeats records 'two incarnations' of himself. Florence Farr sees him

dressed in some kind of mediaeval dress kneeling before a way side shrine of what seemed the magdalen, in what seemed to be Italy. She saw a spirit haunting this shrine—the spirit of the woman—and that my longing had made this spirit almost material, had given it a body

37. *Per Ignem ad Lucem* ['Through Fire to the Light'] was Maud Gonne's Golden Dawn Order motto. She had joined the Order in November 1891, but had demitted in December 1894 for a variety of reasons, ranging from suspicion of the Masonic organisation of the Order to objections to its 'Biblical symbolism' (see *A Servant of the Queen: Reminiscences*, by Maud Gonne MacBride, edited by A. Norman Jeffares and Anna MacBride White [Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1994], pp. 211–2; *Mem* 73). That Yeats continued to address her and refer to her by her Order motto suggests rather more than a wish to conceal her identity.

and that I saw it. She tried to get the history of the spirit. She saw a woman, very full of life, with whom I was in love. I was some kind of student, and yet some kind of a noble. I and this woman quarreled but whether she loved me was [not] quite certain, on the whole it seems that she did[,] but [there] were all kinds of complications and because of this the woman killed herself. It was then that her spirit began to haunt the shrine and I to pray there. I seemed to pray there for many years until at last I died and all the while that I prayed the woman was full of hate, the hatred of that quarrel doub[t]less. When I was dead I became a bird and lighting on a bough sang my love to the spirit,³⁸ but she made her hate into a serpent and the serpent climbed the tree and killed the bird. Then the soul that had been the bird became a violet high up <at> the hill over the shrine and now at last the spirit changed from hate to love and <wept> became dew and wept over the flower but the cold of that high hill froze the dew <also> round the flower and there it remained for many years <inclo> enclosed in ice until at last ice and flower <withered withered> perished, the one melting and the [other] one blackening and withering.

The <second> ^other incarn[ation] was seen by O S. She saw me in a <persia> Persian garden among roses. I was a greek prisoner, and taught many prisoners the platonic philosophy, and made many poemes for I was honoured and well cared for. In the middle of the garden was a marble tomb in which there was the marble image of a very beautiful woman, and in this tomb I was accustomed to offer incense of sacred herbs that I gathered in the garden and to lie long in trance communing with her who [was] buried there and my longing had almost made for her a living body. Among the students most said that no one new the name of the queen who was buried there for she a very long time ago but one said that it was Cyrene. At last the Persian queen, who loved that man who was myself, became angry because of the woman in the tomb and because ^he <illeg> would have no living love and ^because ^he said that no living beauty was like that marble beauty, and she had him thrust into the tomb and fastened the door upon him for ever.³⁹

38. An early source for the golden bird on the 'golden bough' in 'Sailing to Byzantium': see *Variorum Poems*, p. 408.

39. It is evident from Olivia Shakespear's vision that she and Yeats had ended their estrangement (which had lasted since c. February 1897) before April 1900, possibly in late

This record seems an obvious source for ‘The Living Beauty’:

I bade, because the wick and oil are spent
 And frozen are the channels of the blood,
 My discontented heart to draw content
 From beauty that is cast out of a mould
 In bronze, or that in dazzling marble appears,
 Appears, but when we have gone is gone again,
 Being more indifferent to our solitude
 Than ‘twere an apparition. O heart, we are old;
 The living beauty is for younger men:
 We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears.⁴⁰

Material from the Notebooks is heavily used in the draft autobiography, which culminates (in narrative if not in actual chronology) in December 1898 with this ‘spiritual marriage’—which, by 1917, Yeats had come to see as the greatest crisis of his life. But the ‘spiritual marriage’ kept reverberating in the Notebooks. In an extraordinary interlude at Sligo between 23 December 1898 and 8 January 1899, wild visions of Aengus as ‘enthusiasm, intoxication’ and as an Irish Hermes alternate with visions of a ‘severed head, bloody or with red hair’, ‘brown human skulls’, as well as sexually charged visions such as that of a man with a ‘great tongue too large for his mouth’, followed by a hallucination

1899. Yeats had found that she had some visionary powers early in their relationship: he had asked her to meditate on the tarot trump ‘The Hermit’ in 1894 (*Collected Letters*, II.650 n. 5) and had questioned her while she was in a trance in the early summer of 1896: she had contacted various spirits and had told him that he was ‘too much under solar influence’ and that he was to ‘live near water and to avoid woods, which concentrate the solar power’ (*Memoirs*, pp. 99–100; cf. notes 22 and 23 above). Olivia Shakespeare’s vision, apart from its striking communication of her attitude to Maud Gonne, has some family resemblance, in its tomb imagery, to Joseph Quinn’s vision of 1893 (*ibid.*, p. 70). Yeats was probably recalling this vision when he wrote to Olivia Shakespeare in April 1921, urging her to read a study of Greek and Roman religion ‘mainly as displayed on tombs . . . their religion was full of all those images you and I have found in vision’: see *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, edited by Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954; New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 668. Cf. *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, General Editor, John Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press [InteLex Electronic Edition] 2002), Accession No. 3899. The iconography of Olivia Shakespeare’s vision might have been influenced by a story by her favourite writer, Henry James. In ‘The Last of the Valerii’ (1868), Count Valerio falls in love with a beautiful marble statue of Juno disinterred from his garden and offers libations and sacrifices to her. His young wife has the statue re-buried, in order to cure the Count of his obsession.

40. *Variorum Poems*, pp. 333–4.

of Maud Gonne's violet scent. George Pollexfen and Mary Battle (his second-sighted servant) rose to the occasion with visions of Aengus and of the marriage of heaven and earth.

CONTEXTS: DREAMS AND VISIONS

Mainly, Yeats used standard Golden Dawn evocations to induce visions.⁴¹ Tattwa cards—symbols of the elements—were employed, typically to direct clairvoyance in others but also to banish evil or negative visions.⁴² There are what the Golden Dawn classified as 'etheric' experiences, i.e., three-dimensional, with the visionary at times a participant.⁴³ Some visionary experiments recorded are joint: Yeats and George Russell seeking visions of hamadryades in Lydicaun Castle saw

clearly faint, slight but beautiful persons. They seemed to have less personality than most spirits. They seemed to be like sylphs but had a little of the nymph nature but seemed less sensual. They looked very gentle. They wore blue and pearl grey.

Thus Yeats recorded. Further tree spirits, opalescent beings and six-winged angels were seen in Tillyra Castle: 'All things even trees have human shapes' said Russell, who made drawings of the Irish Gods and spirits, even some in pastels in the Notebooks, which suggest that the

41. 'Evocation' is properly a long and complicated ritual and when Yeats describes evocations with George Pollexfen in Sligo in the winter of 1898–9, it seems as if they were following a version of the ritual Z 3, in which a virtual Golden Dawn Temple has to be created, and there is much chanting, purification and elaborate use of wands. Yet Yeats also uses the term 'evocation' for a simple ceremony which involved using a branch of a blossoming tree or a flower (real or imagined) as the starting point for a vision in sleep.

42. 'Last night I saw a man with bleeding eyes before going to sleep. I banished him. woke up at 4.30 after a commonplace nightmare about a burgler. <illeg> [illeg] white light and then *prithivi tattwa* to change influence. Had broken sleep but saw no result from *prithivi* until 9.30.'

43. 'Friday night evoked Lug for FL ... and while he was seeing went through initiation of spear. Went up through flames and found everything all round me growing dark and then found myself suddenly lying upon my back stretched upon a wheel. Later found the flames becoming silver. Found myself stretched upon a silver [*sea/seat*]. Realised that I had been when upon the wheel the symbol of the microcosm and was not the symbol of the macrocosm (knew this by the position of the body [which] was that in certain Kabalistic drawings). Saw a kind of [roring/running] darkness sweeping over waters and knew that I saw the marriage of the spirit with the waters, heaven with the world.'

Irish Gods prefigured David Bowie in a punk head-dress; but many of Russell's otherworldly drawings show resemblances to Mohawk styles and Red Indian costumes.

Some of this visionary activity was recorded by Lady Gregory. At Lydicaun Castle, Yeats and Russell:

. . . saw visions of a man in armour & a black pig & a tall woman & a black man—AE saw all of these—Yeats some only.

In August 1900 she recorded

AE is doing wonderful pictures . . . The deep pools delight him . . . AE and Yeats tease each other . . . AE and W. B. Y. had a fiery argument in the woods yesterday on the sword, whether it was the symbol of fire or air—and called each other 'all the names'—but were good friends in the evening.⁴⁴

I will return to these quarrels with Russell over the results of visions and even the nature of vision itself.

Key episodes from the Notebooks are transcribed directly, sometimes glossed with additional memories plainly mobilised by the very process of re-reading into Yeats's published prose. Sometimes an experience which is only sketched or recorded fragmentarily in the Notebooks—for example, George Russell's suicidal impulses of the time—is expanded with great frankness in *Memoirs*.⁴⁵

44. See *Lady Gregory's Diaries 1892–1902*, ed. James Pethica (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1996), pp. 189, 275–6. The Sword of Light (*An Claidheamh Soluis*, later the name of the Gaelic League journal) was the subject of intense visionary activity by Yeats and AE, and 'fiery argument' about its meaning in the last week of July 1900, at Coole (*ibid.*, p. 276). In *Memoirs* Yeats recalled a darker aspect of Russell's constant contact with the spirit world: his suicidal temptations, an episode alluded to obliquely in the Notebooks—and concealed from Lady Gregory (pp. 130–31). In the Notebooks, Russell's impulse towards suicide in 1900 is recorded almost in code: 'He now was <illeg> worn out and weak and saw it in at last that it was a struggle with the longing to go away <with the beyond> into the [water] world for ever. These forms were the <illeg> [water] <illeg> [water] world will always allure men.'

45. See preceding note, and cf., 'he had seen in the stagnant pool figures that promised him all wisdom if he would but drown himself' (*Mem* p. 131). By 1916 Yeats's closest period of friendship with Russell had receded, and he was less inhibited by a desire to protect his oldest friend. (Russell also recalled this episode in *The Candle of Vision*, but repressed his suicidal impulses, dwelling on the power and beauty of his vision of the water world.)

VISIONS OF BOOKS

Visions of books usually arise in or from dreams: thus, in August 1898

On Sunday night or rather early last Monday morning I went asleep on my back⁴⁶ with the result that I seemed to pass through a half night mare state of no great importance & then to awake into a kind of beatific trance. I was shown two books full of pictures of marvellous & curious beauty & told that one contained lost poems by Blake⁴⁷ & the other something—whether doctrine or what I could not remember that had influenced him. I remember too a picture—whether by him or an influence over him I know not—which was round—a sky full of faces—faces more greek than his pictures are.⁴⁸ I saw diagrams too showing Satan & his symbol rise into the heavens. There was much about his wings.⁴⁹ I remember too that his hurting the head of Christ meant the maiming of imagination by reason.⁵⁰ The poems were illuminated beautifully but not quite in Blakes way.⁵¹ I read then I presently came to a bad verse. A voice then

46. Throughout the 'Visions' Notebooks Yeats refers to this position as likely to produce visions. There is some evidence that this posture can cause some temporal lobe activity, which in turn can lead to hallucinations: see Jim Schnabel, *Dark White* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), pp. 135–6.

47. From his use of Blake's Notebook for his work on *The Works of William Blake Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical, edited with lithographs of the illustrated "Prophetic Books," and a memoir and interpretation* by Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats, 3 vols (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1893). Yeats was aware of several 'lost' works by Blake—i.e., works projected but never apparently realised—such as the 'Book of Moonlight'. See *The Notebook of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman and Donald Moore (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), N 46; see also *Works of William Blake*, 1.203; and *Essays and Introductions*, p. 119.

48. Greek faces are recalled in 'A Voice'; see W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies*, ed. Warwick Gould and Deirdre Toomey (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 46 and 262, nn. 5 and 6.

49. This is possibly a memory of Blake's Notebook design for Satan from *Paradise Lost*; Satan is depicted soaring into the heavens, holding his spear and shield, with his wings lightly indicated (*Notebook of William Blake*, N 112). In the colour print *Satan exulting over Eve*, Satan is hovering, rather than rising. The emphasis on Satan's wings may, however, gesture towards Plate 3 in Blake's watercolour 'Butts' series devoted to 'The Book of Job' (now in the Morgan Library, New York; call number E.18.5.6). See: <<http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/but550.1?descId=but550.1.wc.03>>.

50. This possibly derives from a memory of Blake's 'The Vision of the Last Judgement', which Yeats and Ellis had transcribed (*Works of William Blake*, 11.393–403). In this text Christ is identified with the Imagination.

51. In *Works of William Blake*, Ellis and Yeats had reproduced in black and white copies most of the Illuminated Books etched, printed and in most cases hand-coloured by Blake and his wife Catherine. Yeats would have been familiar with the British

said that I was no longer seeing properly. I asked questions but was told, I think, I could not hear or see more then. I heard something heavy struck on the ground & then a wind swept over me from feet to head & I awoke. I felt all trance an extraordinary ecstasy. During the vision I heard a voice speaking & a voice answering. The voice that answered was like the voice of SSDD. x*x .⁵² What I was able to remember on waking was certainly but a small & unimportant part of the whole. I then got the vision again by going asleep on my back but only got a passing but very vivid glimpse of water & very light green grass & willows & a black ox.⁵³ Not any place I knew but excepting the willows of the general character of the edge of Coole lake furthest from the house or of parts of Coole river when flooded.

On another occasion shortly after 1 October 1898, Yeats tries to summon 'PIAL['s] book of the gods':

I saw a book written & painted on <?> dual leaves & <?> fixed my eyes on a sea now <purple> ^indigo dark on one page—a kind of abyss or the night sky. The book changed into a shower of ^withered leaves. I then saw other withered leaves. I heard a voice say that the woman in the white dress was a spirit of November & of winter nights. <Then I saw purple ^indigo ^colour &> I heard a voice say 'Your heart is heavy as lead <your> The light of your eyes is dead. <& x x x x x x> Think of the world to come. We are the whirling ways!' I felt a sensation of winds blowing. I saw indigo colour & a

Museum collection of illuminated books, but he had also had extensive access to the impressive Linnell collection while transcribing *Vala for Works*. The Linnell Blake collection included nine illuminated books: *All Religions are One*, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (two copies), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *America a Prophecy*, *Europe a Prophecy*, *Jerusalem*, *On Homer's Poetry and on Virgil* and *The Ghost of Abel*. The hand-coloured copies were, with one exception, late versions typically printed in orange-red or red and elaborately painted in water-colour heightened with gold.

52. Florence Farr (1860–1917), actress and novelist, who had joined the Order of the Golden Dawn in 1890 as *Sapientia Sapienti dono data* and was by now Praemonstratrix of the London Temple. She had been a friend of Yeats's since May 1890 and was to play Aleel in the first production of *The Countess Cathleen* in Dublin in May 1899. The pattern of crosses is unexplained.

53. The last lines of *The Countess Cathleen* come to mind: 'The years like great black oxen tread the world,/And God the herdsman goads them on behind,/And I am broken by their passing feet'. See Yeats's *Poems* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), p. 156; *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Russell K. Alspach, assisted by Catherine C. Alspach (London and New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 169.

great white cross I was conscious of being unable to see things that were all about me. I saw to my left but very badly many laughing faces & to my right <> a sheeted and death like spirit. I heard a voice cry 'lay your hand over my heart and your lips upon my lips'⁵⁴ I saw <?a> a most radiant & noble face bend over mine but was conscious of the same struggle⁵⁵ to realize, things that I could not realize—all the while I saw Russell with my outer eyes. He was perfectly still, so still that <for a moment> I thought he was unconscious. Suddenly I saw queer green & spring flowers & the moment after Russell awoke. He had seen a great abyss of spirits and great shining things, and a spirit of a man laid out in a trance upon a cross and much more that faded from him as he awoke.

Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' comes to mind here, and poems fading even as they are being written, the poet never finishing the poem, even as he or she foresees the end.⁵⁶

54. This remembered cry and the quatrain fragment in the passage are close to passages in *The Wind Among the Reeds* but in all cases from poems which had already been written. There is, then, a sense of redreamed poems collapsing into visions, or De Quinceyan involutes.

55. Cf., the struggle between the magus Michael Robartes and the unnamed narrator in *Rosa Alchemica*, lines 230–279, *VSR*, 134–36.

56. Of numerous 'fatal book' stories in which such experiences find a codical, as distinct from a merely textual form, none is finer, perhaps, than that of Sean O'Brien's 'The Custodian', in which the reader of a fatal book finds lost poems by Baudelaire, Yeats, and finally himself: 'I knew with exultant certainty that I was the first, the only person, other than the author, ever to have read it. . . . when I looked back the sonnet was disappearing line by line, from the bottom upwards. . . . I felt forcibly that here was something unnatural and vile. . . . I found I could not remember a single word of the poem. . . . then there was another poem, this time indisputably by W.B. Yeats, late work known only to me, the black type testifying that it had always been there, though I knew that I alone had seen it. Once more I made to copy the poem; once more the words wriggled their way intolerably off the page, out of the world and out of my memory. . . . I resolved on a third and final attempt. Again, the blank appeared, and then, again, in a moment or two the immortal type—but this time . . . this time the poem was mine, the great lyric was mine, whispering its musical secret to the desert air! And if it was mine, how could I lose? . . . I took up the pencil. Once more the words began to slip away. I cried out in pain. The very act of trying to record the words seemed to accelerate their departure. All gone. If this was my poem, though, then I would remember. But I did not remember—not a line, not a word, not a letter, not the shape of the incomparable rhythms sketched on the inner ear. All I could remember was the fact of forgetting. It was as if I had died.' See Sean O'Brien, *The Silence Room* (Comma Press, 2008, Kindle Edition), cols 538–60.

DRUGS AND VISION

Conscious of his weaker visionary powers, Yeats tried enhancing the visionary experience with both hashish and mescal (which 'certainly in my case interferes with inner vision'). Hashish resulted (after an invocation of Midhir) in that 'pattern containing a severed head, bloody or with red hair', but actual experience of drugs seems to have shown him that their effects were in fact quite distinct from those obtained by meditation or evocation. Drugs complicated the matter, and Yeats's record of his use of them could easily be overstated.

At Coole in July 1900, he decided to evoke with apple blossom:

I had no true vision but a visionary dream. I dreamed that I was going through a great city—it had some likeness to Paris about Auteuil—at night. Presently I saw a wild windy light in the sky and knew that dawn was coming in the middle of the night and that it was the last day.

In February 1903 this visionary dream was published as 'A Dream of the World's End' in Pamela Colman Smith's *The Green Sheaf*, and offers a phantasmagorical condensation of the events, private and public, of 1898. The published text has an introductory paragraph:

I have a way of giving myself long meaning dreams, by meditating on a symbol when I go to sleep. Sometimes I use traditional symbols, and sometimes I meditate on some image which is only a symbol to myself. A while ago I began to think of apple-blossom as an image of the East and breaking day, and one night it brought me, not as I expected a charming dream full of the mythology of sun-rise, but this grotesque dream about the breaking of an eternal city.⁵⁷

Perhaps grotesque dreams were an occupational hazard of the dreamer caught in failed thaumaturgy: the magus cannot control visions which, as it were, turn against him.⁵⁸ They also seem related to Yeats's limited visionary powers. A taxonomy of visionary experiences,

57. A meditation inexplicably not collected in the recent *Collected Works* volume, it was published in Pamela Colman Smith's *The Green Sheaf* (London: Elkin Mathews, February 1903), and concludes with a rhetorical question 'Was this some echo of what the Bible has said about "one who shall come as a thief in the night?"' (pp. 6–7).

58. Much of the darker personal material is expressed in this way.

too, was to be expected from a writer who *redreamt* materials from his own writing,⁵⁹ and *re-read* his own record of visions and dreams as he *rewrote* his poems.⁶⁰

I want to pause for a moment on this redreaming and re-reading and rewriting. That Yeats rewrote his poems continually, before and after publication and collection, is almost the first thing a reader of his work comes to learn, sometimes disarmingly. I have remarked that the Notebooks demonstrate only a few particular sources for poems, and I have noted two, 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'The Living Beauty'. These offer evidence for patterns of obsession with symbolical subjects, already published in some shape or form, but yet to reach their 'final' forms or indeed the forms in which they would be first collected. Yeats's dreams play across the entire symbology of what he had already published—plays, poems, *The Celtic Twilight*, *The Secret Rose*—on the one hand delving deeper into Celtic folklore, on the other and less successfully, laying some groundwork for the ordering of these materials into the rites of his Celtic Mystical Order and, always, involving his love for Maud Gonne. On 23 June 1938, Vernon Watkins came to see him at Riversdale, and he later versified the interview in 'Yeats in Dublin (In Memory of W. B. Yeats)'. At one point in the poem he asks Yeats:

'Did the idea come slowly,'
I questioned, 'did it unfold
At once, or from the leaves themselves
As from a sculptor's mould?
Was it your mind that saw the words,
Or was your mind told?'

Yeats's reply came at once:

'I made it,' with a slow smile
Said that Irishman,
'Looking at a lady's photograph

59. As in the 27 December 1898 vision, involving the Celticizing of the vision of Eros in *Rosa Alchemica*. See *VSR*, pp. 145–7, lines 532–88; and *Mythologies*, pp. 189–90.

60. Outer delay to that volume (from 1893 to 1899) was due to the intervening, troubling love affair with Olivia Shakespeare, the disorganised designer, the mean and quarrelsome publishers, the transatlantic printing and the fire in the Boston Bookbinding Company.

Where all those myths began;
So naturally it came slowly.⁶¹

This seems to me to be a compelling response, one where, as so often with late Yeats, the poet represents his early self and work with complete honesty, despite the deep solipsism usually found in writers as self-readers. In 1893 Yeats had drafted a quatrain claiming that his

. . . rhyme must be
A dyed & figured mystery,
Thought hid in thought, dream hid in dream.⁶²

In 1908, reflecting on certain poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds*, Yeats had recalled:

When I wrote these poems, I had so meditated over the images that came to me in writing 'Ballads and Lyrics', 'The Rose', and 'The Wanderings of Oisín', and other images from Irish folk-lore, that they had become true symbols. I had sometimes when awake, but more often in sleep, moments of vision, a state very unlike dreaming, when these images took upon themselves what seemed an independent life and became part of a mystic language, which seemed as if it would bring me some strange revelation.⁶³

I offer these records to account for the apparent lack of a connexion between the Notebooks and the poems. The dreams recorded in the Notebooks are partly controlled by the dreamer and hypnagogic visions before sleep; 'concurrent dreams' later analysed in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. There are also waking hallucinations superimposed upon the ordinary, non-hallucinatory environment. Failure of true vision was as central to the writer's creative economy as was delay. The composition of *The Wind Among the Reeds* depended upon obsessive and recurrent

61. See Watkins's *Collected Poems* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1986), pp. 59–68; *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 20. Also to be found in *A Widening Gyre: Poems on W. B. Yeats*, ed. with preface by Toshi Furomoto (Tokyo: privately printed); quoted passage at pp. 320–21. For the date of the interview, see John Kelly, *A W. B. Yeats Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 309.

62. See W. B. Yeats, *The Early Poetry*, vol. 2: *'The Wanderings of Oisín' and Other Early Poems to 1895: Manuscript Materials*, ed. George Bornstein (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 489.

63. *Variorum Poems*, p. 800.

imbrication of redreamt dreams, and it had become a De Quinceyan involute of earlier works.⁶⁴ Thus Yeats's 1899 note to the lyric entitled 'The Cap and Bells':

I dreamed this story exactly as I have written it, and dreamed another long dream after it, trying to make out its meaning, and whether I was to write it in prose or verse. The first dream was more a vision than a dream, for it was beautiful and coherent, and gave me the sense of illumination and exaltation that one gets from visions, while the second dream was confused and meaningless. The poem has always meant a great deal to me, though, as is the way with symbolic poems, it has not always meant quite the same thing. Blake would have said 'The authors are in eternity' and I am quite sure they can only be questioned in dreams.⁶⁵

Once composition had reached the watershed of first volume publication,⁶⁶ Yeats seems to have been able to distance himself somewhat from obsessive dream-patterns. He could therefore contemplate a somewhat divested volume rather differently:

Being troubled at what was thought a reckless obscurity, I tried to explain myself in lengthy notes, into which I put all the little learning I had, and more wilful phantasy than I now think admirable, though what is most mystical still seems to me the most true. I quote in what follows the better or the more necessary passages.⁶⁷

64. It would be a mistake to think that the Notebooks provide the sources for the poems of *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). As indicated above n. 54, all its poems except 'The Cloths of Heaven' had been published before the records of the Notebooks had commenced.

65. *Variorum Poems*, p. 808.

66. The poems of *The Wind Among the Reeds* met with comparatively little by way of major rewriting or improvement after 1899, which is not to say they were not textually developed, significantly reordered, and changed by that reordering.

67. *Variorum Poems*, p. 800. The cut passages are recoverable in the variorum edition, but a broad summary might be helpful. Yeats cut entirely the notes entitled "'Aedh," "Hanrahan" and "Michael Robartes" in these Poems', "'A Cradle Song". "Michael Robartes asks Forgiveness because of his many Moods"' and "'Michael Robartes Bids His Beloved be at Peace"' . Passages within notes were cut, such as those from 'A solar mythologist' to 'little at a time' (in the note to 'Mongan laments the Change that has come upon him and his Beloved' and 'Hanrahan laments because of His Wanderings') from 'It is possible' to 'different countries' (in the note to 'The Valley of the Black Pig'), from 'Two Birds' to 'forgetfulness' in the note to 'The Secret Rose', which removes the entire history of Cuchulain, recoverable from Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. In the same note, the gesture to Yeats's source for Caoilte mac Rónáin ('I am writing away from most

He introduced his *Poems* (1901) saying 'I do not think that anybody who knows modern poetry will find obscurities in this book', and immediately qualifying that rash statement with

In any case, I must leave my myths and symbols to explain themselves as the years go by and one poem lights up another, and the stories that friends, and one friend in particular [Lady Gregory] have gathered for me or that I have gathered myself in many cottages, find their way into the light. I would, if I could, add to that majestic heraldry of the poets, that great and complicated inheritance of images which written literature has substituted for the greater and more complicated inheritance of spoken tradition, some new heraldic images, gathered from the lips of the common people. Christianity and the old nature faith have lain down side by side in the cottages, and I would proclaim that peace as loudly as I can among the kingdoms of poetry . . .⁶⁸

MYSTICAL VISIONS

Self-reading was often the way forward for Yeats: re-reading the Notebooks for the draft Autobiography⁶⁹ seems to have provided a stimulus for *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918), which is really a meditation upon the extraordinary spiritual experiences of 1898–1900. 'I am writing out these thoughts to escape from their obsession,' Yeats announces at the outset of its *ur*-draft, *Spiritus Mundi*,⁷⁰ linking the themes and material of 'Swedenborg, Mediums and the Desolate Places' (written in 1914, not published until 1920),⁷¹ to the mystical experience of July

of my books') is made more triumphantly evasive: 'maybe I only read it in Mr. Standish O'Grady, who has a fine imagination, for I find no such story in Lady Gregory's book'. The same note is now further cross-referred to Yeats's own *Deirdre* (*Variorum Poems*, p. 814).

68. *Variorum Poems*, p. 847.

69. Much later, other segments of *Autobiographies* are rich in references. *Hodos Chameliontos* contains Russell's visions of 1897 as well as the Sligo visions of winter 1898–9 shared by Yeats with George Pollexfen and Mary Battle.

70. See n. 21 above.

71. 'Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places', dated '14th October, 1914', appeared in the 'Second Series volume of *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* Collected and Arranged by Lady Gregory: With Two Essays and Notes by W. B. Yeats', 2 vols (London and New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), later collected under the same title and with a Foreword by Elizabeth Coxhead (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Limited, and Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, in association with Colin Smythe Limited, 1970).

1898.⁷² *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* ascribes to the poet a liminality which is the condition that distinguishes him from the magus, the mystic or the saint: he 'may not stand within the sacred house but lives amid the whirlwinds that beset its threshold'.⁷³

Accordingly, the Notebooks also demonstrate how rare were Yeats's *mystical* compensations for failures of vision, unexpected and wholly personal blessings.⁷⁴ Here is one, recorded on 27 August 1898:

Shortly after the visions of the Book of Poems recorded July 14 I had another experience, when sleeping on my back. I awoke slowly & could not remember what I had seen but new that I had been told that the love of god was infinite for every human being, because every human being is unique & gods love can find no other capable of satisfying the same need. This was mixed up with some incoherent dream. I was not in a true trance but <probab> ^perhaps had <ben> been. The day before I had suddenly felt a sense of dependence of the devine will & had passed for a moment into a state of passive mysticism unusual with my nature, which has been shaped by thaumaturgy. I had also the experience of the wind blowing over <fr> me from the feet up again but cannot recollect the circumstances. In my divination of two or three days ago I noticed that the great difficulty is that the cards produce the vision appropriate to their universal symbolism more redily [?] than the <symbolism> vision of their partial symbolism in the divination.

72. '... and this thought came to me, as I believe, supernaturally "The love of God for every human soul is infinite for every human soul is unique; no other can satisfy the same need in God"'. The moment is returned to in 'Anima Mundi', section V of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, clearly written with the Notebooks by him. See *Mythologies* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1959), pp. 347–8.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

74. The visions of other Golden Dawn members which survive tend to be more coherent and stereotyped—more banal, even—than those recorded by Yeats. Mary Briggs ('Per Mare ad Astra'), a 'gifted seer', whose 'Visions on the Paths' of July 1897 Yeats valued enough to preserve, follows a quite controlled and (in terms of her belief-system) predictable narrative. In the first group of visions she meets Hermes, who guides her to a crystal-floored temple where the Archangel Raphael is enthroned holding the sun: in the middle of the temple is the Ark of the Covenant 'wherein all the secrets of the world lie hid'. On opening the Ark, it is discovered to be the Pastos of Christian Rosenkreuz; the figure lying in the Pastos rises to announce that he is 'Alpha and Omega'. Few other surviving Golden Dawn visions match this in originality and impressiveness; many are utterly formulaic, not to say bathetic—in one a Second Order member notes 'among vegetables I received the impression of the banana'.

‘[T]his thought came to me, as I believe, supernaturally’, he later recalled, and the axiom derived from this experience was alluded to in many places in his prose, published and unpublished, and was repeated in his table-talk. Such direct experience of the numinous was believed by Yeats to be ‘the root of Christian mysticism’.⁷⁵ Its rarity guaranteed the poet’s place in the scheme of things, below the saint or the magus. It fed back directly into what Yeats published directly as folklore. ‘A Voice’, in the *Speaker* of 19 April 1902, one of the ‘New Chapters in the Celtic Twilight’, is an adjusted account of two experiences taken almost word for word from the Notebooks.

One day I was walking over a bit of marshy ground close to Inchy Wood when I felt, all of a sudden, and only for a second, an emotion which I said to myself was the root of Christian mysticism. There had swept over me a sense of weakness, of dependence on a great personal Being somewhere far off yet near at hand. No thought of mine had prepared me for this emotion, for I had been preoccupied with Aengus and Edain, and with Manannan, Son of the Sea. That night I awoke lying upon my back and hearing a voice speaking above me and saying, ‘No human soul is like any other human soul, and therefore the love of God for any human soul is infinite, for no other soul can satisfy the same need in God.’ A few nights after this I awoke to see the loveliest people I have ever seen. A young man and a young girl dressed in olive-green raiment, cut like old Greek raiment, were standing at my bedside. I looked at the girl and noticed that her dress was gathered about her neck into a kind of chain, or perhaps into some kind of stiff embroidery which represented ivy-leaves. But what filled me with wonder was the miraculous mildness of her face. There are no such faces now. It was beautiful as few faces are beautiful, but it had not, one would think, the light that is in desire or in hope or in fear or in speculation. It was peaceful like the faces of animals, or like mountain pools at evening, so that it was a little sad. I thought for a moment that she might be the beloved of Aengus, but how could that hunted, alluring, happy, immortal wretch have a face like this?⁷⁶

These experiences remained fused in his recall: the mystical experience of July 1898 and the Grecian dream of 20 September of the same year

75. *Mythologies* (2005 edition), p. 46. See also *Autobiographies* 379, *Mem* 126, *I&R* 142.

76. *Ibid.*

are recalled over and over.⁷⁷ The mystical words are given to Yeats's hero Michael Hearne, in his unfinished novel, *The Speckled Bird*, as the culmination of various records of Hearne's symbolical visions. Every one of these is drawn from the visions described in these pages, and some characteristics of these brightly coloured visions, such as lying on one's back, the sensation of a wind passing over the body from feet to head, are also repeated.⁷⁸ The vision is also pursued in *Spiritus Mundi, Per Amica Silentia Lunae* and elsewhere.⁷⁹ Its central catchphrase became part of his table talk in Oxford and spiritual advice to students with 'doubts'. Leonard Strong, recalling his encounters with Yeats as an undergraduate at Wadham in 1919, remarked that "Every human soul is unique, for none other can satisfy the same need in God" would be uttered by Yeats 'unexpectedly to those who did not know him'.⁸⁰ It lies behind that doctrine found in his fiction of the uniqueness of every human soul sometimes referred to by Yeats as the God-given 'separate wisdom for everything which lives' or unique 'law of our being'.⁸¹

QUARRELS WITH GEORGE RUSSELL

The declension (Mystic/Saint, Magus, Poet: in actual personalities the early George Russell, MacGregor Mathers—the Magus of the Golden Dawn—and Yeats himself) broadly accounts for Yeats's differences with Russell. Russell, the Saint, seems to have had at this stage of his life a capacity for effortless mystical vision as well as deeply concrete action: conversely, he was a careless, at times even negligible, if well-selling, poet. Yeats the Poet struggled with visionary activity and sought to spur it on with Magic whilst, unlike Mathers, being pretty talentless when it came to writing rituals for his Celtic Order. 'Magic' (1901) was Yeats's strongest public declaration of his magical beliefs,

77. See also *Memoirs*, pp. 126–7; *Autobiographies*, pp. 378–9; and *The Speckled Bird by William Butler Yeats: An Autobiographical Novel with Variant Versions: New Edition, Incorporating Recently Discovered Manuscripts*, edited and annotated by William H. O'Donnell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 26.

78. *Speckled Bird*, pp. 24–6.

79. *Spiritus Mundi* MS; *Mythologies* (1959 edition), pp. 347–8; *Memoirs*, p. 172.

80. *Green Memory* (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 246. The passage is revised from a BBC Third Programme broadcast, printed in *The Listener* (London), LI, 22 April 1954, pp. 689–90.

81. *Mythologies* (1959 edition), pp. 172, 305; *Mythologies* (2005 edition), pp. 114 and 323 n. 6; 198–9 and 415 n. 37, 417–18 n. 49.

and it affirms his belief in the 'Great Memory', that 'invisible beings, far-wandering influences, shapes that may have floated from a hermit of the wilderness' actually determine history. Wizards were now imaginative writers who had once chosen to act directly on the minds of others, rather than by 'paper and . . . pen', i.e., poetry is a modern descendant of 'enchantment', or magic.⁸²

Yeats's hierarchy of activity places the artist below the magician, but both use symbols. He and Russell differed over whether the things 'seen' in vision, were symbolic or actual, with Yeats affirming

I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist.⁸³

For Russell, however, it was according to Yeats an impiety even to record visions, and here we may recall Dorothea Hunter's view that Yeats could 'not himself get the visions he so desired; he said his mind was too analytical & questioning'.⁸⁴ 'Magic' is a commentary upon the primary experiences recorded in the 'Visions' Notebooks. In Oxford in 1919, when Yeats met members of a Wadham College literary society, he shared some of his mature views with Leonard Strong—himself, by that time, no stranger to Psychological Research.⁸⁵ Strong had

had the opportunity to see as much of this side of his mind as anyone of my generation, and I know that he was anything but credulous in his approach to so-called psychic and occult phenomena. . . . He *had* his credulous phase, but that was long before his Oxford sojourn. It belonged to the days when, under the guidance of A. E., he invited visions, and accepted them at face value.⁸⁶

Strong immediately follows on with a piece of Yeats's table-talk:

'This went on for some time, until one day I saw in a vision the lower half of John Bull. And as I could not conceive of John Bull as an inhabitant of eternity, I decided from that moment to scrutinise and interpret all that I saw.'

82. *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 41–3. 83. *Ibid.*, p. 49. 84. See above n. 33.

85. *Green Memory*, pp. 172–8. 86. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

From this experience came the axiom on which he insisted to me [more than once]: 'The thing seen is never the vision, the thing heard is never the message'. Both were images, like the images of persons seen in dreams, which according to Yeats were always the results of 'a substitution'. This theory . . . meant that Yeats aligned the images seen in dreams with poetic imagery, fitting both into his theory of symbolism, and claiming that both needed to be interpreted. A. E., on the other hand, regarded them as things given; they had to be taken at face value.⁸⁷

Between 1920 and 1923, according to Strong, 'advances in scientific thought' gave 'additional support' to Yeats's views.

Yeats's experience . . . showed that human perceptions might be extended, spontaneously or experimentally, beyond the agreed average range, so as to apprehend in material form things to which the label was not applied. As I heard him put it 'Nowadays, the subjective can walk about the room'. He met this problem by believing that all material forms were interpretations put by our senses upon eternal reality. True to his nature, he called them dramatizations[; images].⁸⁸

Here, it seems to me, is the essence of the quarrel with Russell. Yeats, as Magus, could not take the visionary 'at face value'. His views had been formed well before the visions in the 1898–1901 Notebooks. What he had called the doctrine of 'the independent reality of our thoughts' had been fully formed for the fictitious book of rituals for the 'Order of the Alchemical Rose' in *Rosa Alchemica*:

The book then went on to expound so much of these as the neophyte was permitted to know, dealing at the outset and at considerable length with the independent reality of our thoughts, which was, it declared, the doctrine from which all true doctrines rose. If you imagine, it said, the semblance of a living being, it is at once possessed by a wandering soul, and goes hither and thither working good or evil, until the moment of its death has come; and

87. *Ibid.*, p. 249. The passages in square brackets in this and the next quotations are found only in the periodical version (see n. 76 above), while the final sentence, distinguishing between the views of Yeats and Russell, is found only in *Green Memory*.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

gave many examples, received, it said, from many gods. Eros had taught them how to fashion forms in which a divine soul could dwell and whisper what it would into sleeping minds; and Ate, forms from which demonic beings could pour madness, or unquiet dreams, into sleeping blood; and Hermes, that if you powerfully imagined a hound at your bedside it would keep watch there until you woke, and drive away all but the mightiest demons, but that if your imagination was weakly, the hound would be weakly also, and the demons prevail, and the hound soon die; and Aphrodite, that if you made, by a strong imagining, a dove crowned with silver and bade it flutter over your head, its soft cooing would make sweet dreams of immortal love gather and brood over mortal sleep; and all divinities alike had revealed with many warnings and lamentations that all minds are continually giving birth to such beings, and sending them forth to work health or disease, joy or madness. If you would give forms to the evil powers, it went on, you were to make them ugly, thrusting out a lip with the thirsts of life, or breaking the proportions of a body with the burdens of life; but the divine powers would only appear in beautiful shapes, which are but, as it were, shapes trembling out of existence, folding up into a timeless ecstasy, drifting with half-shut eyes into a sleepy stillness. The bodiless souls who descended into these forms were what men called the moods; and worked all great changes in the world; for just as the magician or the artist could call them when he would, so they could call out of the mind of the magician or the artist, or if they were demons, out of the mind of the mad or the ignoble, what shape they would, and through its voice and its gestures pour themselves out upon the world. In this way all great events were accomplished; a mood, a divinity, or a demon, first descending like a faint sigh into men's minds and then changing their thoughts and their actions until hair that was yellow had grown black, or hair that was black had grown yellow, and empires moved their border, as though they were but drifts of leaves. The rest of the book contained symbols of form, and sound, and colour, and their attribution to divinities and demons, so that the initiate might fashion a shape for any divinity or any demon, and be as powerful as Avicenna among those who live under the roots of tears and of laughter.⁸⁹

89. *Secret Rose*, pp. 142–4; *Mythologies* (2005 edition), pp. 186–7; and, for its occult sources, including works by Cornelius Agrippa, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Éliphas Lévi and William Law's edition of Jacob Boehme, see *ibid.*, pp. 393–4 n. 62.

As we have seen, Russell thought *Rosa Alchemica* 'a most wonderful piece of prose' but the product of a 'wicked wizard'.⁹⁰ When reviewing Russell's *Song and its Fountains* (London: Macmillan, 1932), Yeats recalled such tensions:

our disputes began in earnest. I insisted that these images, whether symbols projected by the subconscious, or physical facts, should be made to explain themselves; sometimes I broke off abruptly, afraid that he might never speak to me again. Sometimes I quarrelled with something said or done in the ordinary affairs of life which could not have been said or done, as I thought, had he not encountered the Magical Emblems and the Sick King and refused to ask questions that might have made the soil fruitful again.⁹¹

Russell knew and loved Yeats's early poems in their first states and republished some in those states despite Yeats's resistance and preference for his revisions of them. This is of course a further denial of what for Yeats was a long process, as well as a misunderstanding of the relation between lyric poetry and other forms of writing, or the economy (I can put it no other way) of Yeats's writing. It was, in essence, the same quarrel.⁹²

THE HAPPIEST AND THE WISEST

In 'Anima Mundi' Yeats summed up this great period of vision and dream:

I had found that after evocation my sleep became at moments full of light and form, all that I had failed to find while awake; and I elaborated a symbolism of natural objects that I might give myself dreams during sleep, or rather visions, for they had none of the confusions of dreams, by laying upon my pillow or beside my bed certain flowers or leaves. Even today, after twenty years, the

90. See n. 19 above. Robert Bridges 'hope[d] . . . that the saints or goddesses will preserve you from too much of the *Rosa Alchemica*. I am glad that Michael Robartes is dead': *The Correspondence of Robert Bridges and W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (London: Macmillan, 1977; Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 10–11 (30 March 1897).

91. *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 413–14.

92. Russell's printing of 'Lyrics from "The Island of Statues"' in *The Irish Homestead: A Celtic Christmas* (December 1899) was unauthorised. See Warwick Gould, 'How Ferencz Renyi Spoke Up, Part Two' (*Yeats Annual* 3, pp. 199–205).

exhalations and the messages that came to me from bits of hawthorn or some other plant seem, of all moments of my life, the happiest and the wisest.⁹³

The Stirring of the Bones concludes with a magnificent realisation of the shaping power of the period of intense visionary activity in the light of the revelations of the Automatic Script. Recalling yet again the mystical experience in Inchy Wood of July 1898, Yeats indicates the way in which such experiences were still, after twenty years, part of his daily thought as well as an essential element in his philosophy:

I woke one night to find myself lying on my back with all my limbs rigid, and to hear a ceremonial measured voice, which did not seem to be mine, speaking through my lips. 'We make an image of him who sleeps,' it said, 'and it is not he who sleeps, and we call it Emmanuel.'⁹⁴ After many years that thought, others often found as strangely being added to it, became the thought of the Mask, which I have used in these memoirs to explain men's characters. A few months ago at Oxford I was asking myself why it should be 'an image of him who sleeps', and took down from the shelf, not knowing what I did, Burkitt's *Early Eastern Christianity*, and opened it at random. I had opened it at a Gnostic Hymn that told of a certain King's son who, being exiled, slept in Egypt—a symbol of the natural state—and how an Angel while he slept brought him a royal mantle; and at the bottom of the page I found a footnote saying that the word mantle did not represent the meaning properly, for that which the Angel gave had the exile's own form and likeness.⁹⁵

Why did Yeats give up the Notebook record at the end of March 1901? The quarrel in the Order of the Golden Dawn had estranged Yeats from Florence Farr and Dorothea Hunter—the latter a key figure in visionary work for the Celtic Mystical Order, and women's vision was crucial to his work.⁹⁶ The theatre increasingly consumed him, and his

93. *Mythologies* (1959 edition), p. 345.

94. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 366. Yeats also gave to Michael Hearne, the hero of *The Speckled Bird*, his own experiences of summer 1898, including that of the voice which spoke through his lips saying 'We make an image of him who sleeps and it is not him who sleeps, though it is like him who sleeps, and we call it Emmanuel' (*Speckled Bird*, p. 30).

95. *Autobiographies*, p. 379.

96. 'At times one would work with some woman, & nearly all other [magical] students did the same. It gives one a deceptive feeling of power one is always on the edge of some

own great period of visionary activity seemed to be over. There might have seemed little point in seeking from others what he could not achieve himself.

I see the trajectory of Yeats's work, then, as something like this. In so far as visionary experience was concerned, *Rosa Alchemica* and the fantastic as a style had to be written off as surely as Michael Robartes had to be killed off.

Experience had to find a way to prevail over literary convention. Speculative prose took over from fiction. Yeats's first published reference to the Notebooks is in 'Magic', drafted in December 1900, offered as a lecture on 4 May 1901 and published in *The Monthly Review* in September 1901. It includes one episode from the Notebooks. 'I have written of these breakings forth, these loosening of the deep, with some care and some detail, but I shall keep my record shut,'⁹⁷ wrote Yeats. 'We who write, we who bear witness, must often hear our hearts cry out against us, complaining because of their hidden things.'⁹⁸

Garnered folklore, the witness of others (first tried out in the six faery lore essays), became the accompaniment to self-revelation as passages of the diary were impressed into the revised *Celtic Twilight*. Learned in written testament from Swedenborg and the Cambridge Platonists, Yeats could supplement such witness in 'Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places' and other (unpublished) occult essays before similarly buttressing his own great pre-marital testament to vision, *Per*

great discovery. Because the critical faculty, the mans half of the mind, can prevent the evocation succeeding at all, one prefers to use some woman for seer. The visionary sight is often so vivid with her that she is entranced & no longer sees the real world at all, but she can suspend with much more difficulty than the man her likes & dislikes, & one is constantly deceived. . . . The great work can only be accomplished when there is but one operator, who can still within himself both the man & the woman.' (*Spiritus Mundi* MS.)

97. *Essays and Introductions*, p. 38. The episode is 'I find in my diary of magical events for 1899 that I awoke at 3 A.M. out of a nightmare, and imagined one symbol to prevent its recurrence, and imagined another, a simple geometrical form, which calls up dreams of luxuriant vegetable life, that I might have pleasant dreams. I imagined it faintly, being very sleepy, and went to sleep. I had confused dreams which seemed to have no relation with the symbol. I awoke about eight, having for the time forgotten both nightmare and symbol. Presently I dozed off again and began half to dream and half to see, as one does between sleep and waking, enormous flowers and grapes. I awoke and recognised that what I had dreamed or seen was the kind of thing appropriate to the symbol before I remembered having used it' (*Essays and Introductions*, p. 47). In *Memoirs* he recalled his inhibition: 'I tried to describe some vision to Lady Gregory, and to my great surprise could not. I felt a difficulty in articulation and became confused. I had wanted to tell her of some beautiful sight, and could see no reason for this. I remembered then what I had read of mystics not being always [able] to speak . . .' (p. 128).

98. *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 51–52.

Amica Silentia Lunae, where the evidences of the Notebooks offered Yeats his escape from fantastic fiction into the 'mythic method' of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. Yet it remained as the Book of Evidence—to himself—that he had undergone a period of vision, however fragmented, and was not simply dependent on the powers of others.⁹⁹ The problem for Yeats's belief in visionary experience was that he was a *writer*. Representing experience of the supernatural to unbelievers is difficult. Affirmation by declaration proves the best accommodation of the supernatural. In *Spiritus Mundi*, the draft of *Per Amica*, he wrote that the Notebooks contained

Much there I recorded at the moment it happened, and while the memory was clear, that once I thought to publish but I am no longer of that mind. Why should I hope to convince when notably accurate and careful men have failed? I am an imaginative writer and so must appear to be of those who lose themselves in the fancy <their own imagination> . . . No I will but say like the twelve year old boy in the Arabian Nights 'O brother I have taken stock in the desert sand and of the sayings of antiquity' [.]¹⁰⁰

99. The republication of a part of *The Stirring of the Bones* (first privately printed by T. Werner Laurie in *The Trembling of the Veil* as 'A Biographical Fragment with some notes' in October 1922) in *The Criterion* and *The Dial* in July 1923 comes at the close of George Yeats's work as a medium. Yeats's own moments of visionary enlightenment are to some extent set *against* George Yeats's six-year output of automatic scripts and expositions in sleep.

100. Thus drafted for *Spiritus Mundi*, but slightly emended, it will be found in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae: Mythologies* (1959 edition), p. 343. The story Yeats refers to is 'King Wird Khan, his Women and his Wazirs', in *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments, Now Intituled The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, tr. and ed. Richard F. Burton (Benares: Kamashastra Society, 1885-86), IX.117 (Night 925); see Warwick Gould, "'A Lesson for the Circumspect": W. B. Yeats's Two Versions of *A Vision* and the *Arabian Nights*', in *The Arabian Nights in English Literature: Studies in the Reception of The Thousand and One Nights into British Culture*, ed. Peter L. Caracciolo (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 245-6 and 275 n. 6.