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# "Rosa alchemica," "The tables of the law," and "Adoration of the magi," edited and with an introduction

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“ROSA ALCHEMICA,” “THE TABLES OF THE LAW,” AND “ADORATION OF  
THE MAGI,” EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION

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A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts in English literature

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By

Brady J. Peneton

Spring 2013

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## MASTER'S THESIS

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### Abstract

This volume contains an introduction to William Butler Yeats' early occult short stories "Rosa Alchemica," "The Tables of the Law," and "The Adoration of the Magi." Panned by critics over the last century, the three stories contained in this volume are both controversial and difficult. The introduction explains the language of occultists and alchemists in terms of Jungian psychology and describes how alchemical doctrine influenced Yeats' writing and the largely alchemical mythology contained in *A Vision*. Yeats' desire for apocalypse is identified as a desire for the general population to see the divine through symbol and to discover the psychological nature of the occult and of religion. Following this, all three stories are glossed and annotated with comments on their use of alchemical themes, symbols, and ideals.

## Acknowledgments

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments .....	v
Introduction.....	1
Rosa Alchemica .....	30
The Tables of the Law .....	56
The Adoration of the Magi .....	72
Bibliography .....	81

## Table of Figures

Figure 1 Yeats' 28 Phases of the Moon.....	11
Figure 2 Correspondences in Models of Archetypal Figures (or Metals) in Alchemy.....	17



Introduction

In this introduction I describe how Yeats' alchemical and occult interests and practices were essential to his theories of writing and symbol and how they influenced the alchemical mythology of *A Vision*; second I explain how the three short stories of his early occult triptych – “Rosa Alchemica,” “The Tables of the Law,” and “The Adoration of the Magi” – with their alchemical, occult, and mystical allusions provide insight into Yeats' theories of language, magic, archetype, and spirit, suggesting that these insights are valuable to critics and other readers in understanding Yeats' literature. The insights within the stories provide for readers a look into the ways in which Yeats conceived of spirit and archetype, how he attempts to incorporate – to embody physically or imaginatively – these archetypes in his literature, and how Pythagorean and Paracelsian magic and alchemy inform their embodiment. The alchemical tradition refers to the magical tradition of reshaping the psychology of oneself or another person using literature, symbol, meditation, altered states of consciousness, and other related techniques. For Yeats, poetry and drama were also forms of magic, much like ritual, invocation, or other occult practices in which formless entities are given form. These forms and images of his literature work on the imaginations and psychologies of his readers (and his own psychology), bringing unconscious energies to their awareness.

Yeats was mainly a poet and playwright, but the three stories contained in this volume intrigue and fascinate all the same. The stories are rife with occult and mystical symbolism, allusions, and various obscurities that make them difficult to read and may alienate us as readers. However, the allusions contain value in that they let us see how Yeats traced the alchemical tradition through the Romantics, Elizabethans and medieval alchemists and mystics, and how he applied the tradition to his own mind, his life, and his

work. Having studied in Jungian psychology, occult and esoteric symbolism, and alchemy in general, I aim to show in this volume that all three stories reveal the methodology Yeats used to discover and unfold the archetypal energies deep within his own psyche and the alchemical symbolism contained within them presents much of the mythological framework he uses in *A Vision*.

Early Greek philosophers often spoke of *arche* or *archai* (ἀρχή) in attempting to identify the principle or origin of the universe and man. *Arche* means “ruler,” “origin,” “first principle,” and “beginning” (Liddell 106). This Greek root is used in English words such as *monarch*, *archbishop*, and *archetype* in our own language. Carl Gustav Jung, Swiss psychologist, borrowed the Greek word ἀρχέτυπος (“pattern or model”) to identify the primal energies that have resided in mankind’s psychology since pre-history – archetypes (106). As our conscious awareness develops as we grow older, the archetypal energies lose control and our conscious will gains control. However, not all of these energies are brought to the forefronts of our conscious awareness. Jung and Yeats associated pagan gods and goddesses – called immortals, spirits, etc. – with these energies. People of archaic civilizations felt these energies and embodied them in symbol, literature, and idols and attempted to affect the energies by sacrifice, prayer, or otherwise. With knowledge that the “gods” of the “divine realm” ruling our lives are archetypal energies in our psyches, belief in these gods may not seem as primitive. Those who knew the real nature of the energies led more conscious and full lives because they were able to make these energies conscious; those that submitted themselves powerlessly to or lived in ignorance of the gods endured less conscious, less fulfilling lives.

The interplay of conscious and unconscious energies can be analogized to a charioteer and two horses that pull him (much the way Socrates describes the soul in Plato's *Phaedrus*). Being unaware of unconscious energies of our minds is like thinking that our chariot is being driven by one horse rather than two. When we achieve a connection between conscious energies and unconscious energies, when we realize there is a second horse, we can steer the chariot or at least see where our archetypal energies intend to drive it. For Yeats, religion (or occultism) acts – or should act – as a connection to the unconscious energies, but the conscious connection with them has been lost, as religion fades into simply a thing we do on Sundays and as theology fades into a mere field of study. Religion is a gateway to understanding and forming a relationship with the archetypal energies of the unconscious. As Yeats says in one of his last essays, “An Introduction for my Work,” Christ is something “phenomenal” – something that we experience (*Essays and Introductions* 518).

In the first section of this volume, I describe Yeats' “Great Wheel” from *A Vision* in a Jungian context as an *axis mundi* and the process of maturation or development along the wheel as an alchemical process. I use Jung here because much of Jung's work in the early twentieth century illuminated alchemy into workable, substantive, psychological terms. Much as Yeats did, Jung studied alchemy and alchemical works and interpreted the theories behind their chemical symbols, but Jung put them into psychological (rather than poetic) terms – such as ego (for lead), Self (gold), and archetype (mercury or spirit). In short, without the work of Jung, alchemical doctrines would remain largely unexplained. Despite claims that Yeats received the ideas in *A Vision* during automatic writing sessions with his wife, the system appears to borrow its essence from these same

alchemical doctrines, with whom Yeats was familiar and from whom he appears to have borrowed. Though the alchemical fantasies of Yeats and other various mystics may seem childish or ignorant chemical folly, descriptions of the process are coded in such a way that aspirants familiar with some of the symbols could decode pieces of others' personal psychological undertakings (before Jung and the Jungians translated them for us) and even attempt their own. Through these undertakings, alchemists sought to refashion their identities.

The alchemical process in general is defined in the following section as a symbolical personal process of completely refashioning one's identity; establishing an intentional connection between waking consciousness and the unconscious mind; discovering the archetypal energies within one's unconscious; reorganizing them according to one's personal will circumstances, and expectations; and eventually reintegrating oneself back into the collective psychology and culture of society (as the process necessitates separation from it). Essentially, the alchemical process is a process that unifies and harmonizes the inner psychological and outer material worlds of the aspirant. Israel Regardie, occultist and inheritor and propagator of documents formerly belonging to Yeats' Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, explains that alchemy, which he says is the foundation of hermeticism, primarily concerns itself with "what anciently was known as Theurgy – the divine work" and that the object of alchemy was "a more rapid mode of spiritual development and an acceleration of intellectual evolution" (Regardie 3). Indeed, bringing what is unconscious into one's consciousness intensifies meaning and feeling, sharpens the intellect, and strengthens the spirit. The alchemist

gains control of his life, no longer under the influence of gods and goddesses of which he has little knowledge.

Yeats' sought in his own alchemical process – his “Great Work” – to gain control over unconscious energies themselves. He aimed to unify two modes of conscious awareness that esotericists call “lunar consciousness” and “solar consciousness” (dream consciousness and waking consciousness, respectively). To unify these brings meaning into one's life: archetypal energies embody themselves in symbol during dream consciousness, and unifying the two modes connects one with the primal energies in the universe and in ourselves to be experienced during our waking life. Through his Great Work, Yeats intended to pull the gods of his unconscious out into his material consciousness. We can glimpse Yeats' conception of the process of dissolution and recreation in “Rosa Alchemica,” the common desire of the alchemist for union with the universe and a call for a new spiritual age for all mankind in “Tables of the Law,” and a symbolic invocation of that spiritual age in “The Adoration of the Magi.” Because of their difficulty and esoteric allusions, I have glossed the three stories with informative and interpretive footnotes. I have glossed any alchemical, symbolic, literary, and other miscellaneous allusions, and give the most probable meaning of the images and symbols he evokes. I hope that with glosses and with the following foundation for the stories, readers will receive an enriched understanding of Yeats, psychology, alchemy, religion, literature, the occult, and their intersections. I hope to tread a space in this introduction that unites these fields and that invites lovers of any number of them to cross the gap into any of the others.

In its first section, this introduction will explain to the reader the underlying code of alchemical transformation, defining it in Jungian terms. I will then apply alchemical code and alchemical work in general to Yeats' mythological manifesto in *A Vision*. Then, I will show that the development of Yeats' poetic diction echoed his alchemical goal, the *magnum opus* or Great Work (which for Yeats was a union of Sol, solar consciousness, and Luna, lunar consciousness). Following this, the second section contains descriptive interpretation of Yeats' occult triptych, "Rosa Alchemica," "The Tables of the Law," and "The Adoration of the Magi," meant to provide a solid foundation for these difficult texts.

## I.

From a young age, William Butler Yeats had an interest in the paranormal and occult, much to the dismay of his skeptic father. In 1889, Yeats joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which he called a Mystical Celtic Order, and noted in particular that members held a syncretic worldview and "stressed Cabbalistic magic" (Flannery 25). Celtic polytheists believed in otherworldly spirits, and for Yeats and other hermeticists, magic is a way to invoke and communicate with these spirits. Along with magic, like the alchemists of medieval times, Yeats also sought the philosopher's stone, alchemical gold, and "the Great Work." Veiled in obscure symbolism and terminology, the Great Work is an elusive and great endeavor indeed, and though its exact nature differs from individual to individual, alchemists sought in this work the philosopher's stone, which turns any metal into gold, and the elixir of life, which grants its holder immortality. Yeats' goals early in his life were to transcend material consciousness – a dividing, limiting, and earth-focused mode of thinking – to a purely spiritual or

archetypal realm, where there are no objects but only principles, ideas, spirits, and the soul. According to William T. Gorski's *Yeats and Alchemy*, although Yeats aimed for transcendence early in his life, it is clear that he eventually aimed to instead spiritualize matter (Gorski 199). That is, he eventually brought the archetypal realm "down" (or rather out) to reside in his material consciousness – unifying Sol and Luna. This spiritualization, reconciling the inner spiritual life and the outer material life, marks an invigoration of meaning and feeling into the waking life of the aspirant. The aspirant gains full control over his desires, no longer controlled by archetypes or gods and the ability to, as Auden said, make "his private [spiritual] experiences public and his vision of public events personal," both through the use of symbol ("Yeats as an Example" 191).

Although Yeats' *A Vision* was not published until 1925, clues and fragmentary impressions of this later concept appear in his early poetry and prose work in various forms, especially in his use of alchemy. This volume also aims to partially illuminate the shadowy sketches of Yeats' *A Vision* in three important, yet mostly neglected, works of the mid to late 1890s: the occult triptych. Gorski explains that "Rosa Alchemica" has been "largely ignored" but "contains the seeds of what later followed in *A Vision*" (Gorski xi). Indeed, this introduction aims to show that the mythology in *A Vision* is largely alchemical and that in fact it is Yeats' personal rendition of the alchemical process. As will be seen, Yeats' mythology uses a layout much related to the alchemical tradition and borrows its four faculties from four elements used in the alchemical process.

The goal of the alchemical process is to turn base matter, the *prima decogniz*, into gold. Though some take this goal literally, some even in Yeats' circle of friends (MacGregor Mathers, founding member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, for

example), Yeats used it, as other symbolists and philosophers saw it, as a process for inner, spiritual transformation, and Yeats even denounced the literal interpretation of alchemical doctrine. Though interpretations and realizations of this spiritual process are innumerable, all share the same general goal: the transmutation and perfection of a substance that begins as base matter and becomes gold, symbolic of the human being's soul or psyche. The alchemical process is the refashioning of one's psyche, one's relationship with all else in the universe. Because Yeats refashioned his psyche through alchemical spiritualization, he underwent a necessary change in communication, in his mode of expression, and in the use of image.

In his life's work, psychologist Dr. Carl Gustav Jung illuminated the alchemical process and its archetypal stages. Jung translated the alchemical stages and processes into psychological terms, conceiving a developmental process that he called individuation. He chose the term "individuation" because, he explains, it connotes both an individualization from and an eventual reintegration back into the general, collective psychology (*Man and His Symbols* 164). The individualization part of Jung's process occurs in the first few decades of life, and the reintegration begins in one's thirties (161). Marie-Louise von Franz, a student of Jung, also notes that the process of maturation occurs autonomically, but individuation occurs only when one is consciously aware of the activity of, and the relationship between, the unconscious and conscious aspects of the psyche (164). For the Golden Dawn, alchemists, and for Yeats, dream consciousness (a natural state of mind when symbols appear as aspects of the psyche in narrative form) is called "lunar consciousness" (Gorski 61). Similarly, Jung explains that a center of the unconscious mind produces dream imagery and narrative in the sleeping state, and if we observe our

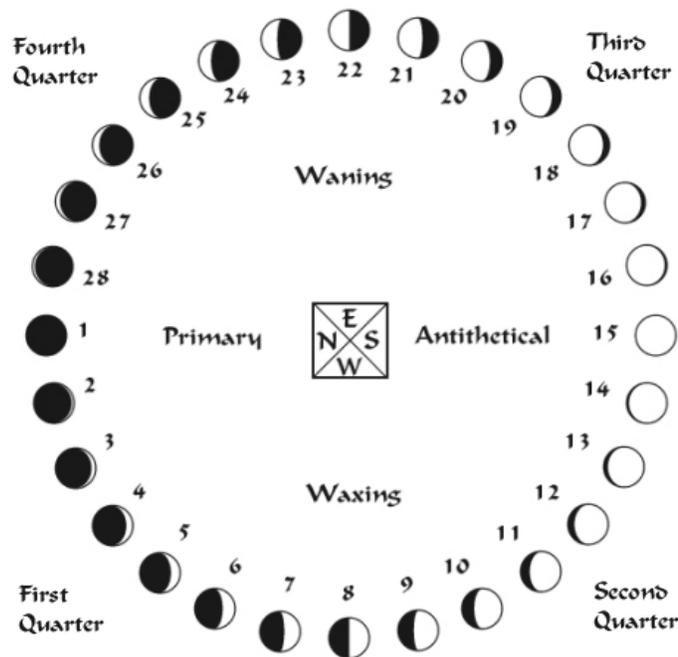
dreams over the course of our lives, we will witness a slow but perceptible process of psychic growth – a natural reformation of archetypes embedded in symbols (*Man and His Symbols* 162). The psychic growth is characterized by sympathy, maturity, aesthetic appreciation, and a fuller understanding of archetypal energies and one’s sense of identity and is symbolized by the growth of a tree, as often it is symbolized in Yeats’ poetry. (See, for example, “The Two Trees,” “The Coming of Wisdom with Time,” “A Prayer for my Daughter” lines 41-56, and “The Tower” lines 17-24.)

Appropriately, Jung and von Franz posit no universal formula for the process, as it is an expression and realization of one’s individuality (161). The symbols portray for individuals their relationships to their unconscious and their identities with respect to all else. However, Jung outlines the themes and foci of the major steps of individuation, and most alchemical treatises or other depictions typically outline seven archetypal stages of the process (though others portray as few as three or as many as fifteen or twenty-two). In *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*, a collection of seminar lectures given in 1932 in Zurich, Switzerland, Jung labels the chakra system of Hindu yogic systems an *axis mundi*, a “world axis.” For Jung, *axes mundi* portray and represent the path of development the devotee or practitioner is supposed to travel during the alchemical or individuation process. The goal of kundalini yoga is to awaken sexual energy at the base chakra (Muladhara) at the bottom of the spinal column and raise it up the spine to meet with the uppermost chakra (Sahasrara) on the crown of the head. The word *kundalini* comes from a Sanskrit word that means “coiled,” and the energy is symbolized by a coiled serpent. The goal of kundalini yoga (and other yogic practices) is to quicken spiritual growth. Jung posits that this raising of the kundalini serpent is symbolic of the individuation

process, and the seven chakras symbolize the seven archetypal stages of the process (*Psychology of Kundalini*).

Yeats' conception of a similar process diverges in that it is cyclical rather than linear and applies to cultures and societies in addition to individuals. In *A Vision*, Yeats outlines this process, signified by the twenty-eight phases of the moon along a circular *axis mundi* (shown in figure 1, below).

Figure 1 Yeats' 28 Phases of the Moon



Source: The 28 Phases of the Moon. *The System of W.B. Yeats's A Vision*. Neil Mann, Web.

In Yeats' psychical philosophy, individuals move through a series of stages that are marked by a move toward individualization – the antithetical stages – and a return to the collective psychology – the primary. Simultaneously, the collective psychology of mankind goes through this same cyclical process but on a much slower scale. Living in a primary age, Yeats often idealizes the phases in his system between the second and third

quarter of the circle, phases 12 through 18, labeling them “Unity of Being.” During these stages, the person is separated from the collective psychology entirely, and his faculties are in harmony with one another. He calls phase 15 the “absolute subjective.” He gives no description of the person in phase 15 in his chart that characterizes each of the four faculties other than “Perfect Beauty,” because no human can live in that phase. The best “human beauty” can be reached at phases 14 and 16 (*A Vision* 131-4). The human personality traverses Yeats’ *axis mundi* throughout a life, though any particular personality will not necessarily traverse all of the phases. Jung similarly notes in *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga* that the average person of the west does not reach the last 3 stages of the alchemical process in the 7 chakra system. The combination of the Hindu chakra system and Yeats’ process echoes a similar seven-stage process familiar to Yeats through the syncretic belief system of the Golden Dawn: the “path of the serpent” along the Tree of Life of the Kabbalah, a system which Dion Fortune calls the “yoga of the west” (Fortune 1).

In Yeats’ mythology, humans are granted four faculties, called the Will, the Mask, the Creative Mind, and the Body of Fate. The Will is an energy that strives toward self-realization, Mask is the image of exaltation that is set before the Will to strive toward, Creative Mind is the storehouse of ideas and the power of thought, and Body of Fate is the material reality, body, and natural circumstances. Throughout a lifetime, the four faculties move along the “Great Wheel” of the phases of the moon. The Will and Mask are always opposite from one another, and the Body of Fate and the Creative Mind are always opposite; that is, the Will constantly pursues the Mask, and the Creative Mind constantly attempts to understand the Body of Fate (Stock 127).

Though the correspondences are not exact, three of these faculties can be applied to three of the four classical elements used in Greek philosophy and alchemy and their corresponding magical tools depicted in the tarot decks used by the Golden Dawn. In the Golden Dawn Tarot, fire and wands are symbolic of the will of the magician, air and swords his thought, water and cups his “creative form-building capacity,” and earth and coins the material realm (Cicero 78). In Yeats’ mythology, fire makes the Will, water conceives of the Creative Mind, and coins become the Body of Fate. Indeed, connections between Yeats’ mythology, the magical tradition, and the alchemical process abound, as they shared many sources for their fundamental ideas. One such connection comes to Yeats and Jung from the classical Greek philosophers.

In a book entitled *The Rhizome and the Flower*, James Olney traces the source of thoughts and ideas in Yeats and Jung back to the classical philosophers. Though Yeats and Dr. Jung knew of one another, and Jung even had a copy of *A Vision* among his shelf of alchemical texts (which was a “curious fact,” according to Franz Jung), Jung probably never read *A Vision* and the two never met (Olney 4-5). However, the “rhizome” – a rootstalk capable of sending up many shoots – of the title of Olney’s book is the thought of the classical Greek philosophers, and the flowers are those of Yeats and Jung: Yeats and Jung are two separate instances of additional emergences of this thought. Olney places side-by-side the many similar ideas in Yeats and Jung, but the most important one to alchemy as Yeats envisioned it in these three occult stories and their relation to his later works is the concept of the *daimon*.

Yeats’ conception of the *daimon* parallels a fifth element in alchemy, called the *quinta 13ecognize* (“fifth essence”) or the spirit. For Yeats, the *daimon* is a spiritual,

tutelary being that resides in the psyche, somewhere between the nonphysical and physical realm, and can exercise influence in the physical realm. It exists in the *Anima Mundi*, or the “world soul,” which is an omnipresent reservoir of mythological images that resonate with all people, and Jung posits in “The Role of the Unconscious” that this *daimon* (though he calls it the *suprapersonal unconscious*) exists “in the very history of the brain structure” (qtd. in Olney 208). Similarly, the spirit or *quinta I4ecognize* is the faculty in humans that allows them to rise into perfection – a sort of “redemption” in mankind. Interestingly, *quinta I4ecognize* is also equated with the philosopher’s stone of the work. Finally, Jung says that Christ is also associated with the philosopher’s stone or the spirit, redemption for mankind, a model for mankind to achieve perfection.

Yeats equates Christ to a *daimon*-like and Mask-like figure in “A General Introduction for My Work,” written only a few years before his death. Yeats believed that in two or three generations

Europeans may find something attractive in a Christ posed against a background not of Judaism but of Druidism, not shut off in dead history, but flowing, concrete, phenomenal[...]. [M]y Christ...is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, Blake’s ‘Imagination,’ what the Upanishads have named ‘Self.’ (*Essays and Introductions* 518)

For Yeats, Christ was a kind of spirit, *quinta I4ecognize*, or philosopher’s stone that guides the aspirant to self-perfection, leading one to the fifteenth phase of the Great Wheel, to be sacrificed (like Christ on the cross) and then to return to serve the collective psychology. “Blake’s Imagination” is needed for this becoming: in order to conceive of a

perfect human being, one must be able to embody it into an image. This image is much like Yeats' Mask, the "image that is set before the Will to strive toward." Therefore, Yeats' Christ, Mask, and the spirit or *quinta 15ecognize* are at times interchangeable. Indeed, Yeats' *A Vision* has a heavy alchemical basis.

As he seeks the philosopher's stone and alchemical gold throughout the stages of the alchemical process, the alchemist utilizes the four classical elements (will, thought, mind, and body), the fifth element spirit, various devices and symbolic apparatuses, and three hypostatical principles – or *tria prima* (salt, sulphur and mercury). The hypostatic principles, explained alchemists, constitute all metals: that is, all metals can be broken down into three basic parts. Paracelsus, an early sixteenth-century physician, philosopher, and distinguished alchemist, and his teachers and followers describe the *tria prima* thusly:

Mercury is a sharpe liquor, passable and penetrating, and a most pure & Aetheriall substantiall body: a substance ayrie, most subtill, 15ecognized, and ful of Spirit, the food of life, and the essence or terme, the next instrument.

Sulphur is that moyst, sweet, oyly, clammy, original, which giveth substance to itself; the nourishment of fire, or of natural heat, endiued with the force of mollifying and of gluing together.

Salt, is the dry body, saltish, 15ecogn earthy, representing the nature of Salt endued with wonderfull vertues of dissolving, congealing, clensing, emptying, and with other infinite faculties which it exerciseth in the

individuals, and separated in other bodyes, from their individuals. (qtd. in Haeffner 225-6)

Mercury and salt are, as Mark Haeffner remarks, the “antithesis of spirit and matter, so vital in alchemy” and sulphur “plays a mediating role, as an oily substance, gluing the solid and spirit together.” Later he notes that “the theory...is profoundly mystical and magical in significance” (226). Paracelsus also says that “[Hermes] calls these three substances spirit, soul, and body...[and] you should know that they mean not other than the three *principia*, that is, mercury, sulphur, and salt, out of which all seven metals originate. Mercury is the spirit, sulphur is the soul, salt the body” (Holmyard 153). From reading “Rosa Alchemica,” it is clear that Yeats also had a similar symbolic arrangement of the spirit, body and soul: spirit or mercury is the “immortal essences,” salt or body is the “mortal body,” and sulphur is the binding agent between the two. This threefold constitution is mirrored in the alchemical interpretation of Hesiod’s poem *Theogony* – “birth of the gods” – and Pythagoras’ alchemical descriptions of the original triad (Gaia, Eros, and Ouranos). Gaia is the earth, Ouranos the sky, and Eros sexual energy. In the *Theogony*, Ouranos mate with Gaia through Eros (the generative force), and Gaia in turn conceives the Greek pantheon (Clay 16). Like Paracelsian alchemy, the sky (the ethereal above) and the earth (the material below) are bound through sexual energy to conceive the metals, which are the gods of the pantheon.

According to David Miller, Professor of Religion at Syracuse University, the gods in various pantheons are “archetypal forces in our lives,” and the “rediscovery of polytheism,” as in the Neopagan movement, is a rediscovery of these forces (qtd. in Adler 28). Gods, goddesses, Immortals, faeries, spirits, or whatever one chooses to call

them, are “real potencies and potentialities deep within the psyche, which, when allowed to flower, permit us to be more fully human” (Adler 29). That is, when we bring into conscious awareness the existence of these archetypes that control our potential actions, desires, and relationships with abstractions of the material world, we can live more fully, more consciously, and more purposefully. The goal of alchemy includes discovering these archetypes and potencies and organizing them into a complete, symphonic, healthy whole; though some alchemists also aimed to help others discover these potencies, as Yeats seems to have done.

The correspondences between the principles of Paracelsian, Pythagorean, Jungian, Hermetic, and Yeatsian alchemy can be seen in figure 2 below (Yeats’ correspondences are in the column on the far right).

Figure 2 Correspondences in Models of Archetypal Figures (or Metals) in Alchemy

The Constitution of Archetypal Figures in Alchemy								
	Mercury	Spirit	Ouranos	Sky	Spirit	Archetype	Above	Immortal Essence
	Sulphur	Soul	Eros	Sexual Energy	Mediator	Connection		Binding Agent
	Salt	Body	Gaia	Earth	Matter	Object of Consciousness	Below	Mortal Body

As mentioned earlier, archetypes appear in dreams in narrative form, showing the interplay between all of the various abstractions in our lives, revealing to our conscious mind our sense of identity. However, it is important to note, if we do not remember our dreams, we are not aware of this interplay, and are thus ignorant of those unconscious energies that drive us to action. Therefore, understanding the interplay of these archetypal energies through dreams (or otherwise) is important in understanding the driving forces in our lives.

One of the most important gods of the Greek pantheon for one to understand in reading the stories in this volume is Hermes. For Yeats, Hermes is the embodiment of our imaginative faculties and is the communicator between the physical and spiritual realms. His role in imagination makes him essential in reading, interpreting symbol, and performing other magical acts. Indeed, Hermes is mentioned in “Rosa Alchemica” and “The Adoration of the Magi,” making an appearance through the mouth of one of the hermits in the latter story. Yeats also alludes to Hermes sometimes by his winged sandals in his poetry, and the “hermetic” of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn manifests the importance of this archetypal figure and the faculties he provides us. As many readers may know, Hermes acts as the messenger god, god of literature, communication, and mediates the divine and mortal realms. He carries a caduceus (a staff with two snakes wrapped around it, as if ascending) and wears winged sandals and a winged cap. In Jungian terms, Hermes allows communication between the conscious and the unconscious aspects of our minds. He is often depicted as a uniter of opposites in alchemical art, conjoining, standing between, or marrying the sun and moon, king and queen, or other alchemical pairs (*Psychology and Alchemy* 229). He performs these feats through language and, as the Golden Dawn would argue, through magic. Indeed, the magician aims to alter or reveal the potentialities and potencies of his or another’s unconscious mind by the use of words, ritual, symbol, or otherwise – a communication with spirits. Though many of the ideas outlined here had not yet been articulated using Jung’s terms during Yeats’ life, we do have more than enough reason to believe that Yeats, borrowing from the systems of magicians and alchemists of the past, felt quite similarly.

Given the studies of the Golden Dawn, Yeats must have been familiar with the alchemical doctrines outlined above. The Cipher Manuscript, the essential founding document for the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, calls for members to study fifteen “necessary studies.” Among these necessary studies are “3 princi[p]les...alchemica[l] King and Queen...[and the] elements” (Runyon 89). In his essay “Magic,” Yeats describes his own magical beliefs in terms much like Jung’s model of analytical psychology. He believed that the “borders of our minds” are “shifting” and that magical acts – words, ritual, and symbol – manipulate these shifting borders (*Essays and Introductions* 28). He talks also of a man invoking and embodying spirits in his presence. He emphasizes the importance of imagination in magical activity, noting in the essay that his companion is incapable of seeing the spirits evoked by the man because his companion does not have the imagination for it; his companion’s imagination “had no will of its own” (31). Imagination – the faculty that constructs images in our minds – allows the embodiment of the archetypes. Imagination creates the visions that Yeats and the others in the room could see. This event appears to have convinced him of the reality of magic through the faculty of imagination (36). In addition to belief in spirits, Yeats believed that symbols evoke the “great mind” and “great memory of Nature” and that symbols are indeed integral to magical and hermetic arts – the communication between the conscious and unconscious.

Jung explains in *Psychology and Alchemy* that alchemists use obscure language and symbolism and, because of this, even struggle to read one another’s works. Yeats is no exception to this, as his borrowings and inventions of alchemical symbolism are both immeasurable and difficult. However, medieval alchemical treatises, artwork, and Yeats’

poetry contain the common symbols of sun and moon. The sun – called Sol, depicted as a King – is symbolic of waking or solar consciousness, and the moon – Luna, depicted as a Queen – of dreaming or lunar consciousness. For Sol, objects are merely material; for Luna, objects embody the archetypal energies, the spirits, or mercury (Haeffner 202-3). In lunar consciousness, as mentioned above in discussion of Jung, archetypal energies appear in symbolic form and reveal their interrelationships. One of the goals of alchemy is to marry these two opposing modes of consciousness, as in Yeats’ poetry and in alchemical manuscripts (Gorski 141). The marriage of these two modes provide a spiritualization of matter and a control over and understanding of the unconscious energies.

In “The Adoration of the Magi,” Yeats alludes to Stéphane Mallarmé, a poet of the French Symbolist movement. “I am always in dread,” Yeats’ narrator explains, “of the illusions which come of that inquietude of the veil of the Temple, which M. Mallarmé considers characteristic of our times.” Yeats often met with Mallarmé’s intellectual group in Paris, France, and Mallarmé, like Yeats and other alchemists, sought completion of his own “Grand Oeuvre,” or Great Work, between the years 1868 and 1885 (Poetry Foundation). The veil of the Temple is a symbol borrowed from the Christian and Judaic traditions. In the tabernacle and the Temple in Jerusalem, it was the veil that covered the Holy of Holies, or Most Holy Place. Only the High Priest of the Temple was able to gaze upon the Holy of Holies, which was God’s dwelling place on Earth. The veil of the Temple covers (or covered) our eyes from seeing what is divine while still on Earth. Yeats’ narrator fears speaking in symbolism in “The Adoration of the Magi” because people so easily mistake the symbolic (lunar) for the literal or material (solar). That is, it

is characteristic of the narrator's and of Mallarme's times for people not to have torn the symbolic veil from their eyes to gaze upon the archetypal through the symbolic. Through symbol, magicians are able to speak to one another about the spiritual, mystical, or archetypal, and poets and other writers are able to play upon their readers' imaginations, bringing unconscious energies into consciousness.

Yeats achieved an imaginative and effective symbolic language through the alchemical union of lunar and solar consciousness. Vernon Watkins explains that Yeats began writing with an "artificial poetic language" that slowly grew into a "purity of diction" (Watkins 475). Watkins continues: "While much of his early poetry seems to strain for a release from conscience, every poem in the late work is a test of conscience" (475-6). Though Yeats in his early poetry desired to escape the duty of conscience that solar consciousness required, the later poems exemplify a union of the two modes of consciousness and embody spiritual and archetypal energies in natural, solar situations. Indeed, Watkins explains that by the time he wrote "Byzantium" (1933), Yeats believed "not only that spirits control art, but that the finished work of art has a power to control spirits" (486). We can see hints of these beliefs – prevalent in later poems like "Byzantium" and "Lapis Lazuli" – throughout these three short stories, which point toward Yeats' desire for mankind's release from the veil of materialism and a personal, poetic, alchemical union of solar and lunar consciousness.

When they unify solar and lunar consciousness, poets are able to pull unconscious energies into consciousness through the use of symbolism. Through the Great Work, or what Jung called individuation, the alchemist or recognized gains effective control over unconscious energies. Yeats believed he could alter the consciousness of mankind

and bring people into a new age of the spirit. He aimed to shift the psychic makeup of his readers through symbolic narrative, by using archetypal images that resonate with all mankind. For Yeats and other Symbolist poets, the unification of lunar and solar conscious meant that the bridge between unconscious energies and the conscious mind is fully restored, and through symbol, the poet could work upon the imagination to help bridge that connection for others. Using his alchemical mythology in *A Vision* and his *axis mundi* as a rhetorical model or framework, Yeats aimed to guide his readers to a more fulfilling, more conscious life through his use of language and support for imagination. This desire for the connection is a “call to Hermes,” one might say, as in the stories of this volume.

## II.

The problems with the three stories that follow are not few: their dense allusions to literary, mythological, mystical, occult, or simply obscure ideas make them difficult to read. Given all this, it is not a surprise that the stories have been panned by critics throughout the twentieth century. Yeats’ editor in the first edition of *Mythologies* left the stories out of the volume, perhaps for fear of their frightening narratives. W. H. Auden calls the ideas explored within them “embarrassing” (“Yeats as an Example” 189). It is clear, however, that Auden did not understand the psychological nature of Yeats’ occult practices, and Auden appears to have had no interest in understanding religion beyond the literal, surface level, explaining that at a young age he “lost interest” in it (*Forewords and Afterwords* 517).

William O'Donnell writes that "Yeats had not made himself into a consistently skillful writer of prose fiction. Its ["The Adoration of the Magi"] flaws help explain why...over thirty years would pass before he again wrote a short story" (O'Donnell 129). The problem with O'Donnell's unfavorable evaluation of "The Adoration of the Magi," however, is that he performs it on the story's own merits, rather than in the context of the three other stories of the triptych. "The Adoration of the Magi," as Gorski points out in *Yeats and Alchemy*, should be read, interpreted, and evaluated in the context of the two other stories, because the other two stories create an indispensable context for reading the final story" (Gorski 111). Indeed, understanding the three stories in the context of one another and in light of the substantive psychological interpretation of alchemy, spirits, gods, and other occult beliefs increases the stories' value for the individual reader and for the critic or aspiring poet in understanding Yeats and the occult. Additionally, the dense allusions contained in the stories are valuable inasmuch as they allow us to trace the alchemical tradition from classical philosophy – the rhizome – through the Middle Ages and into the mind of Yeats. As was shown in the first section of this introduction, echoes of the alchemical themes from "Rosa Alchemica" appear repeatedly in his poetry and in *A Vision*. Indeed, *A Vision* is Yeats' *alchemical* vision of an *alchemical* process. We can see in "Rosa Alchemica" a glimpse of the path he took to "himself remake" and wants to use – however subtly in his poetry – to remake the psychic makeup of mankind, to restore to the west its imagination and encourage the relationship between the unconscious and conscious. (More recently, Laura Swartz attempts a useful and contextual evaluation for Yeats' occult stories, though hers is primary biographical and surface level rather than interpretive and theoretical.)

In 1895, just before the three stories of this volume were published, Yeats wrote in the essay entitled “The Body of the Father Christian Rosencruc,” that he wishes for an age whose imagination is restored and for a return to belief in a “supersensual world.” “I cannot get it out of my mind,” Yeats writes,

that this age of criticism is about to pass, and an age of imagination, of emotion, of moods, of revelation, about to come in its place; for certainly belief in a supersensual world is at hand again. (*Essays and Introductions* 197)

One of Yeats’ chief concerns around this time was the inability of the common mind to escape from what he perceives as a prison of material or solar consciousness, of the fleshly “sensual” world. The narrator personifies this problem, as he admires the aesthetics of his paintings and holds on to his rosary for dear life after an experience with what Yeats calls the “supersensual.” He fears spiritual independence.

William O’Donnell suggests that Yeats “may indicate [with his choice of the epigraph of “Rosa Alchemica” – the cultic hymn to Dionysus] that he wants [a] sexual hint to accompany the nonsexual primary meaning” of the hymn – a sort of immediate, deliberate misdirection to the reader or a hint at the attitude of Yeats’ anonymous narrator (O’Donnell 117). From the narrator’s attitude toward the sexual, Orphic ritual in the Temple of the Alchemical Rose, the excerpt from the essay above, and the particularly sexual epigraphic hymn, Yeats’ concerns about the ignorance to the existence of lunar consciousness are evident. The terror evoked in the narrator is the possible terror of any unprepared initiate who is unaware of lunar consciousness, let alone the archetypal

energies. Although the narrator desires to know the divine realm, he fears the loss of his identity, the channeling of sexual, creative energy, and therefore fails the initiation rite.

The narrator of “Rosa Alchemica” wishes for a world made “wholly of essences.” That is, he wishes, as Yeats himself did early in his life, to dissolve the mortal bodies of the universe to live among archetypal energies. However, the narrator desires to reach this world purely through aesthetic admiration. The narrator gathers paintings, alchemical treatises, and other aesthetic objects to *feel* the essences but does not intend to reorganize and take control of the essences. He does not organize and refashion the immortal essences (the archetypes) to achieve a spiritual independence. During the Orphic ritual at the end of the story, the archetypal energies or Faustian spirits become manifest to him in his ecstatic trance state and he fears them. In his trance, he fears that they are sapping his sexual energy. As noted earlier, the sexual energy, passion or soul are what unify spirit and matter, mercury and salt. The narrator of “Rosa Alchemica” fears his own imagination that embodies the spirits during his ecstatic trance, and returns to a primary mode of thought.

In the second section of the story, the reader is introduced to Michael Robartes. Yeats describes Michael Robartes and other personages, in *The Wind Among the Reeds*, to be taken “more as principles of the mind than as actual personages,” and further explains that “it is probable that only students of the magical tradition will understand me when I say that ‘Michael Robartes’ is fire reflected in water...” (*Variorum* 801). If Michael is fire reflected in water, then Owen Aherne, the counterpart to Michael Robartes and the studious mystic of “The Tables of the Law,” must be some combination of the other elements. In the Rosicrucian tradition, and in Yeats’ *A Vision*, fire and water

are associated with the Will and the Creative Mind – poetry, passion, and the occult – while spirit and earth are associated with the Mask and the physical world – concerns with religion, spirituality, prophecy, and a longing to know God. Aherne may embody the latter two elements, and thus, in this way, “Rosa Alchemica” and “The Tables of the Law” are in complementary elemental opposition to one another: “Rosa Alchemica” is an initiation into a Robartean occult order, and “The Tables of the Law” is an introduction into an Ahernean psychological, spiritual system of history and prophecy.

Aherne’s spiritual-historical system draws mainly upon that of Joachim de Fiore, an Italian abbot and mystical philosopher of the twelfth century, and points toward a new “age of the spirit,” as mentioned above. The narrator in this story is the same narrator that was “half-initiated” into the Order of the Alchemical Rose. Aherne leads our narrator down a long passageway (that contrasts with the hallway through which Michael Robartes takes the narrator) to his private chapel, where he shows the narrator a prized book – the only remaining copy of a book he purports to be by Joachim de Fiore. Throughout the story, the narrator has an aversion to Aherne’s philosophical system, and when the story returns ten years after the conversation in the chapel, Aherne’s beliefs appear more and more sinful to him. Owen Aherne, who at one time aimed to become a clergyman, has moved further away in his thought from conventional religious ideals. “The Tables of the Law” is at its core a religious philosophy that aims to prophesy, as Yeats does in his poem “The Second Coming” and elsewhere, a new age of thought, an age of the spirit that will inject mankind with a dramatically different understanding of language, religion, symbol, and, it appears, psychology. This new age will be characterized, it seems, as an age where mankind has direct contact with the archetypal or

divine realm and can gaze upon the Holy of Holies of the Temple, an antithetical age marked by self-reliance and spiritual (and therefore psychological) independence.

The symbolic occurrences in “The Adoration of the Magi” signify the birth of the new age that Yeats calls for in “The Tables of the Law” in his essay “The Body of the Father Christian Rosencrucx,” and in his apocalyptic poem “The Second Coming.” In this thematic combination of the other two stories, Yeats re-imagines the birth of the aeon Jesus Christ as an Irish story. In this story, the whore in the brothel of Paris acts as an alchemical apparatus that gives birth to the new aeon. Three old men relay this occurrence, which both distances Yeats from the story and echoes the wise men that come bearing gifts to see the infant Jesus in the manger. Just as the innkeepers refuse space for Jesus’ birth in the Gospel, the marginalized brothel signifies a corner of the waking consciousness that gives birth to the divine, spiritual spark in human consciousness that leads to spiritual, imaginative visions and spiritual independence. However, in place of Jesus the Nazarene as the seed, the figure born “in the likeness of a unicorn” has, while retaining its chastity and purity, more force and more virility. The simultaneity of the unicorn’s chastity and virility echo the channeling of sexual energy the narrator has trouble accepting in “Rosa Alchemica.”

Despite the focus on the birth in the brothel, “The Adoration of the Magi” seems to also focus on Hermes: the Fifth Eclogue of Virgil is a song for Hermes, and as the second oldest of the men dozes off while reading it, a voice speaks to him in prophecy, bidding the old men to “set out for Paris, where a dying woman would give them secret names and thereby transform the world.” Later, after the birth, the second oldest man gets possessed by the figure of Hermes again, and tells the other two men to “bow down” to

the Immortals (the spirits and gods, or Jungian archetypal energies), for as Michael Robartes explains to the narrator in “Rosa Alchemica” and to the old men at the beginning of “The Adoration of the Magi,” the Immortals, the gods, the “ancient things” are upon mankind again. The story hearkens to a new golden age of the spirit in which Hermes returns to the imagination to unify the unconscious and consciousness, in opposition to the previous Christian era, a primary age marked by submission and confinement to the collective psychology.

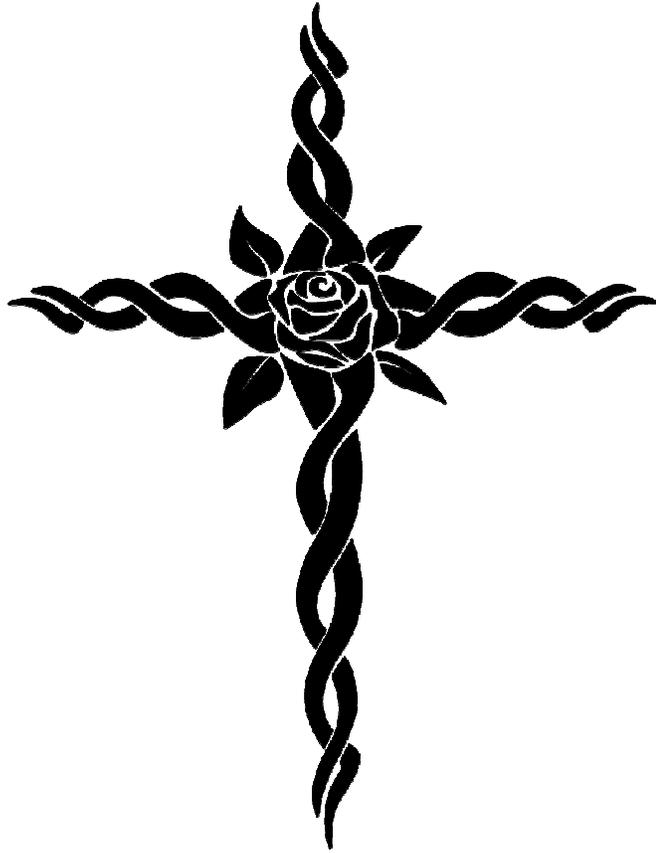
In addition to valuing imagination, Yeats believed that mankind contained more than material substances, and that this spiritual, supersensual revelation was upon us soon. Later in the essay “The Body of the Father Christian Rosencrucx,” Yeats continues: “when the notion that we are ‘phantoms of the earth and water’ has gone down the wind...” – that is, when we realize that we are made of more than material substance –

...we will trust our own being and all it desires to invent; and when the external world is no more the standard of reality, we will learn again that the great Passions are angels of God, and that to embody them ‘uncurbed in their eternal glory,’ even in their labour for the ending of man’s peace and prosperity,

– to embody archetypes into symbol, even if for what appears harmful –

is more than to comment, however wisely, upon the tendencies of our time, or to express the socialistic, or humanitarian, or other forces of our time, or even ‘to sum up’ our time, as the phrase is; for Art is a revelation, and not a criticism... (*Essays and Introductions* 197)

Art is a revelation of archetypes, a revelation of the spirit, and to create “Art” is to do more than comment on or criticize society. For Yeats, Art reveals hidden, archetypal forces of the unconscious mind, or the spirit, as Romantics believed their “poetry of revelation” should. Yeats desired his readers to come to his literary work for revelation – for a union of Sol and Luna – and not for mere description, commentary, or history. Yeats’ prose fiction and poetry should disturb and fascinate his readers, but, most importantly, it should disclose spiritual revelation and bring things unconscious to the forefronts of our consciousness. These three stories, through fascinating and even frightening imagery, do just that, even revealing to the more discerning reader the alchemical method behind Yeats’ ostensible magical madness.



Rosa Alchemica

O blessed and happy he, who knowing the  
 mysteries of the gods, sanctifies his life, and  
 purifies his soul, celebrating orgies in the mountains  
 with holy purifications.

— EURIPIDES<sup>1</sup>

## I

It is now more than ten years since I met, for the last time, Michael Robartes,<sup>2</sup> and for the first time and the last time his friends and fellow students; and witnessed his and their tragic end, and endured those strange experiences, which have changed me so that my writings have grown less popular and less intelligible, and driven me almost to the verge of taking the habit of St. Dominic.<sup>3</sup> I had just published *Rosa Alchemica*, a little work on the Alchemists, somewhat in the manner of Sir Thomas Browne,<sup>4</sup> and had received many letters from believers in the arcane sciences, upbraiding what they called my timidity, for they could not believe so evident sympathy but the sympathy of the artist, which is half pity, for everything which has moved men's hearts in any age. I had discovered, early in my researches, that their doctrine was no merely chemical phantasy,

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<sup>1</sup> This cultic hymn to Dionysus is taken from Euripides' *Bacchae*. The direct translation of *óργια* into "orgy" makes this appear particularly sexual. The hymn signifies a religious lustration (purification) ritual.

<sup>2</sup> A recurring personage in Yeats' prose and poetry and leader of the Order of the Alchemical Rose. Yeats explains that Robartes is a "principle of the mind" –an archetypal energy or potentiality – and his magical elements are "fire reflected in water."

<sup>3</sup> Saint Dominic (1170-1221), founder of the Friars Preachers who popularized the Catholic rosary. He is known now to have been a recluse and declared that "his friars were 'not to learn secular sciences or liberal arts except by dispensation'" (Russell 451).

<sup>4</sup> Idolized by romantic philosophers and poets, and infamous in his own time, Sir Thomas Browne was a seventeenth-century physician who developed his own private, unorthodox opinions on various aspects of religion and the supernatural, published for the public (unbeknownst to Browne) in *Religio Medici* (Religion of a Physician).

but a philosophy they applied to the world, to the elements and to man himself; and that they sought to fashion gold out of common metals merely as part of an universal transmutation of all things into some divine and imperishable substance; and this enabled me to make my little book a fanciful reverie over the transmutation of life into art, and a cry of measureless desire for a world made wholly of essences.

I was sitting dreaming of what I had written, in my house in one of the old parts of Dublin; a house my ancestors had made almost famous through their part in the politics of the city and their friendships with the famous men of their generations; and was feeling an unwonted happiness at having at last accomplished a long-cherished design, and made my rooms an expression of this favourite doctrine. The portraits, of more historical than artistic interest, had gone; and tapestry, full of the blue and bronze of peacocks,<sup>5</sup> fell over the doors, and shut out all history and activity untouched with beauty and peace; and now when I looked at my Crevelli<sup>6</sup> and pondered on the rose in the hand of the Virgin, wherein the form was so delicate and precise that it seemed more like a thought than a flower; or at the grey dawn and rapturous faces of my Francesca,<sup>7</sup> I knew all a Christian's ecstasy without his slavery to rule and custom; when I pondered over the antique bronze gods and goddesses, which I had mortgaged my house to buy, I had all a pagan's delight in various beauty and without his terror at sleepless destiny and his labour with many sacrifices; and I had only to go to my book-shelf, where every book was

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<sup>5</sup> Yeats and the Golden Dawn tradition used elaborate color scales in their practices, blue being associated with the Sephira Chesed in the second world (Heh, whose element is water) in their syncretic symbolic system (Cicero 27). In the alchemical tradition, Luna feeds on the flesh of a peacock before the final stages of the Great Work. The peacock is also the sacred bird of Juno, Roman mother goddess (Greek Hera), and it also appears on the King of Cups (fire of water – which are the elements ascribed to Michael Robartes) of Chic Cicero's recent New Golden Dawn Ritual Tarot.

<sup>6</sup> Carlo Crivelli (1435-1495) was an Italian Renaissance painter and often painted depictions of Madonna and Child.

<sup>7</sup> Piero della Francesca (1415-1492), another early Italian Renaissance painter, most famous for *The Legend of the True Cross* and other depictions of the life of the biblical Jesus.

bound in leather, stamped with intricate ornament, and of a carefully chosen colour; Shakespeare in the orange of the glory of the world, Dante in the dull red of his anger, Milton in the blue grey of his formal calm; and I could experience what I would of human passions without their bitterness and without satiety. I had gathered about me all gods because I believed in none, and experienced every pleasure because I gave myself to none, but held myself apart, individual, indissoluble, a mirror of polished steel: I looked in the triumph of this imagination at the birds of Hera,<sup>8</sup> glowing in the firelight as though they were wrought of jewels; and to my mind, for which symbolism was a necessity, they seemed the door-keepers of my world, shutting out all that was not of as affluent a beauty as their own; and for a moment I thought as I had thought in so many other moments, that it was possible to rob life of every bitterness except the bitterness of death; and then a thought which had followed this thought, time after time, filled me with a passionate sorrow. All those forms, that Madonna with her brooding purity, those rapturous faces singing in the morning light, those bronze divinities with their passionless dignity, those wild shapes rushing from despair to despair, belonged to a divine world wherein I had no part; and every experience, however profound, every perception, however exquisite, would bring me the bitter dream of a limitless energy I could never know, and even in my most perfect moment I would be two selves, the one watching with heavy eyes the other's moment of content. I had heaped about me the gold born in the crucibles of others; but the supreme dream of the alchemist, the transmutation of the weary heart into a weariless spirit, was as far from me as, I doubted not, it had been from him also. I turned to my last

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<sup>8</sup> Greek goddess of women and marriage, and the wife of Zeus. The narrator is looking at the tapestries mentioned above.

purchase, a set of alchemical apparatus which, the dealer in the Rue le Peletier<sup>9</sup> had assured me, once belonged to Raymond Lully,<sup>10</sup> and as I joined the *alembic* to the *athanor* and laid the *lavacrum maris*<sup>11</sup> at their side, I understood the alchemical doctrine, that all beings, divided from the great deep where spirits wander, one and yet a multitude are weary; and sympathized, in the pride of my connoisseurship, with the consuming thirst for destruction which made the alchemist veil under his symbols of lions and dragons, of eagles and ravens, of dew and of nitre, a search for an essence which would dissolve all mortal things. I repeated to myself the ninth key of Basilius Valentinus,<sup>12</sup> in which he compares the fire of the last day to the fire of the alchemist, and the world to the alchemist's furnace, and would have us know that all must be dissolved before the divine substance, material gold or immaterial ecstasy, awake.<sup>13</sup> I had dissolved indeed the mortal world and lived amid immortal essences, but had obtained no miraculous ecstasy. As I thought of these things, I drew aside the curtains and looked out into the darkness, and it seemed to my troubled fancy that all those little points of light filling the sky were the furnaces of innumerable divine alchemists, who labour continually, turning lead into gold, weariness into ecstasy, bodies into souls, the darkness into God; and at their perfect

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<sup>9</sup> A street in the second arrondissement of downtown Paris, France, a significant business district and home of many glazed sidewalks in the nineteenth century.

<sup>10</sup> Or Raymon Lull, thirteenth-century philosopher and rational mystic. A rational mystic pursues experiential validity for fact through altered states of consciousness and other mystical practices in addition to traditionally scientific methods.

<sup>11</sup> *alembic*: a device consisting of two vessels, connected by a tube, in which substances are distilled or heated for purification. *athanor*: an alchemist's furnace (literally means "oven") used to maintain a significant heat over a long period of time, used to "warm the alchemical egg of the philosophers, which nested in sand or ashes" (Haeffner 30). *lavacrum maris*: Latin for "bath of the sea," an alchemical water bath in which alchemical art often depicts Sol and Luna bathing naked.

<sup>12</sup> Called in English Basil Valentine, an alleged fifteenth-century alchemist. Lawrence Principe suggests that this personage was merely a pseudonym for a later philosopher and mystic, Johann Tholde. He also explains that the name is derived from two Latin words, *basileos valens*, a phrase that means "powerful king" (Principe 140).

<sup>13</sup> There are a total of twelve keys in the Valentine publication. Here, the "fires at the end of the world" suggest dissolution of the material consciousness and the leaden ego in order to begin to reform the psyche.

labour, my mortality grew heavy, and I cried out, as so many dreamers and men of letters in our age have cried, for the birth of that elaborate spiritual beauty which could alone uplift souls weighted with so many dreams.

## II

My reverie was broken by a loud knocking at the door, and I wondered the more at this because I had no visitors, and had bid my servants do all things silently, lest they broke the dream of my inner life. Feeling a little curious, I resolved to go to the door myself, and, taking one of the silver candlesticks from the 35ecognized35, began to descend the stairs. The servants appeared to be out, for though the sound poured through every corner and crevice of the house there was no stir in the lower rooms. I remembered that because my needs were so few, my part in life so little, they had begun to come and go as they would, often leaving me alone for hours. The emptiness and silence of a world from which I had driven everything but dreams, suddenly overwhelmed me, and I shuddered as I drew the bolt. I found before me Michael Robartes, whom I had not seen for years, and whose wild red hair, fierce eyes, sensitive, tremulous lips and rough clothes made him look now, just as they used to do fifteen years before, something between a debauchee, a saint, and a peasant. He had recently come to Ireland, he said, and wished to see me on a matter of importance; indeed the only matter of importance for him and for me. His voice brought up before me our student years in Paris, and remembering the magnetic power he had once possessed over me, a little fear mingled with much annoyance at this irrelevant intrusion, as I led the way up the wide staircase where Swift had passed joking and railing, and Curran<sup>14</sup> telling stories and quoting Greek, simpler

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<sup>14</sup> Swift: Jonathan Swift, like Yeats, was an Anglo-Irish poet. Yeats considered Swift the “‘chief representative of the intellect of his epoch’” but also “‘long pondered the ambivalences of Swift’s unstable

days before men's minds, subtilized and complicated by the romantic movement in art and literature, began to tremble on the verge of some unimagined revelation.<sup>15</sup> I felt that my hand shook, and saw that the light of the candle wavered and quivered more than it need have, upon the Mænads<sup>16</sup> on the old French panels, making them look like the first beings slowly shaping in the formless and void darkness. When the door had closed, and the peacock curtain, glimmering like many-coloured flame, fell between us and the world, I felt in a way I could not understand, that some singular and unexpected thing was about to happen. I went over to the 36ecognized36, and finding that a little chainless bronze censer, set, upon the outside, with pieces of painted china by Orazio Fontana,<sup>17</sup> which I had filled with antique amulets, had fallen upon its side and poured out its contents, I began to gather the amulets into the bowl partly to collect my thoughts, and partly with that habitual reverence which seemed to me the due of things so long connected with secret hopes and fears. 'I see,' said Michael Robartes, 'that you are still fond of incense, and I can show you an incense more precious than any you have ever seen,' and as he spoke he took the censer out of my hand and put the amulets in a little heap between the *athanor* and the *alembic*. I sat down, and he sat down at the side of the fire, and sat there for awhile looking into the fire, and holding the censer in his hand. 'I have come to ask you something,' he said, 'and the incense will fill the room, and our thoughts, with its sweet odour while we are talking. I got it from an old man in Syria, who said it was made from flowers, of one kind with the flowers that laid their heavy purple petals upon the

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national loyalties" to Ireland (*Mythologies* 377). Curran: John Philpot Curran (1750-1817), Irish orator, politician, and wit. These two men are for Yeats exemplars of a time marked by sharp intellect and wit.

<sup>15</sup> The Romantics – of which Yeats considered himself the last in his poem "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" – began a spiritual movement and would cause even greater occult, psychological revelations that this volume attempts to illuminate.

<sup>16</sup> Followers of Dionysus, sometimes called Bacchae.

<sup>17</sup> An Italian potter (?-1571).

hands and upon the hair and upon the feet of Christ, in the Garden of Gethsemane, and folded Him in their heavy breath, until He cried against the cross and his destiny.<sup>18</sup> He shook some dust into the censer out of a small silk bag, and set the censer upon the floor and lit the dust which sent up a blue stream of smoke, that spread out over the ceiling, and flowed downwards again until it was like Milton's banyan tree.<sup>19</sup> It filled me, as incense often does, with a faint sleepiness, so that I started when he said, 'I have come to ask you that question which I asked you in Paris, and which you left Paris rather than answer.'

He had turned his eyes towards me, and I saw them glitter in the firelight, and through the incense, as I replied:

'You mean, will I become an initiate of your Order of the Alchemical Rose? I would not consent in Paris, when I was full of unsatisfied desire, and now that I have at last fashioned my life according to my desire, am I likely to consent?'

'You have changed greatly since then,' he answered. 'I have read your books, and now I see you among all these images, and I understand you better than you do yourself, for I have been with many and many dreamers at the same cross-ways. You have shut away the world and gathered the gods about you, and if you do not throw yourself at their feet, you will be always full of lassitude, and of wavering purpose, for a man must forget he is miserable in the bustle and noise of the multitude in this world and in time; or seek a

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<sup>18</sup> *Passiflora*, known also as passion flowers.

<sup>19</sup> "The fig-tree, not that kind for fruit renown'd;  
But such as at this day, to Indians known,  
In Malabar or Deccan spreads her arms  
Branching so broad and long, that in the ground  
The bended twigs take root, And daughters grow  
About the mother-tree, a pillar'd shade  
High over-arch'd, and echoing walks between."

John Milton, *Paradise Lost* IX.1101-7. Yeats evokes Milton's motherly banyan tree to highlight the success of the incense's temptation.

mystical union with the multitude who govern this world and time.’ And then he murmured something I could not hear, and as though to some one I could not see.

For a moment the room appeared to darken, as it used to do when he was about to perform some singular experiment, and in the darkness the peacocks upon the doors seemed to glow with a more intense colour. I cast off the illusion, which was, I believed, merely caused by memory, and by the twilight of incense, for I would not acknowledge that he could overcome my now mature intellect; and said:

‘Even if I grant that I need a spiritual belief and some form of worship, why should I go to Eleusis and not to Calvary?’<sup>20</sup> He leaned forward and began speaking with a slightly rhythmical intonation, and as he spoke I had to struggle again with the shadow, as of some older night than the night of the sun, which began to dim the light of the candles and to blot out the little gleams upon the corner of picture-frames and on the bronze divinities, and to turn the blue of the incense to a heavy purple; while it left the peacocks to glimmer and glow as though each separate colour were a living spirit. I had fallen into a profound dream-like reverie in which I heard him speaking as at a distance. ‘And yet there is no one who communes with only one god,’ he was saying, ‘and the more a man lives in imagination and in a refined understanding, the more gods does he meet with and talk with, and the more does he come under the power of Roland, who sounded in the Valley of Roncesvalles the last trumpet of the body’s will and pleasure;’<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Calvary is the site at which Jesus is crucified in the Gospel. Eleusis is a town in Greece, about ten miles northwest of Athens (from ἐλευσις, “arrival”). Eleusis was the site of the Eleusinian Mysteries, initiation ceremonies promising unification with the gods and gifts and power in the afterlife. The narrator questions Robartes as to why he should be pagan or polytheistic rather than some form of Christian.

<sup>21</sup> Roland was prefect of the Breton March and commander of the rear guard of Charlemagne’s army in the eighth century. The Battle of Roncesvalles is recounted in *The Song of Roland*, the oldest known work of French literature, and in *Orlando Furioso*, an Italian work. Here Yeats uses the Spanish, rather than French and English, spelling of the valley (Roncevaux). In the poem, Roland is rebuked for his pride, and then he blows his horn.

and of Hamlet, who saw them perishing away, and sighed; and of Faust, who looked for them up and down the world and could not find them; and of all those countless divinities who took upon themselves spiritual bodies in the minds of the modern poets and romance writers, and under the power of the old divinities, who since the Renaissance have won everything of their ancient worship except the sacrifice of birds and fishes, the fragrance of garlands and the smoke of incense. The many think humanity made these divinities, and that it can unmake them again; but we who have seen them pass in rattling harness, and in soft robes, and heard them speak with articulate voices while we lay in deathlike trance, know that they are always making and unmaking humanity, which is indeed but the trembling of their lips.<sup>22</sup>

He had stood up and begun to walk to and fro, and had become in my waking dream a shuttle weaving an immense purple web whose folds had begun to fill the room. The room seemed to have become inexplicably silent, as though all but the web and the weaving were at an end in the world. ‘They have come to us; they have come to us,’ the voice began again; ‘all that have ever been in your reverie, all that you have met with in books. There is Lear, his head still wet with the thunder-storm, and he laughs because you thought yourself an existence who are but a shadow, and him a shadow who is an eternal god;<sup>23</sup> and there is Beatrice, with her lips half parted in a smile, as though all the stars were about to pass away in a sigh of love;<sup>24</sup> and there is the mother of the god of humility who cast so great a spell over men that they have tried to unpeople their hearts

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<sup>22</sup> Robartes’ response, which is sound according to Jungian depth psychology, is that we are affected by more than one god, and to communicate with a god is to know its effects better (i.e. to know its archetypal effects on us).

<sup>23</sup> King Lear wanders out into a wild thunderstorm in *King Lear*, 2.4. Robartes compares Lear to a god or archetypal force that enters our unconscious through our reading or watching the play.

<sup>24</sup> Muse of Dante Alighieri. Robartes evokes Beatrice as another god our narrator “met with in books,” a feminine divinity or archetypal energy met through the poetry of Dante.

that he might reign alone, but she holds in her hand the rose whose every petal is a god;<sup>25</sup> and there, O swiftly she comes! Is Aphrodite<sup>26</sup> under a twilight falling from the wings of numberless sparrows, and about her feet are the grey and white doves.’ In the midst of my dream I saw him hold out his left arm and pass his right hand over it as though he stroked the wings of doves. I made a violent effort which seemed almost to tear me in two, and said with forced determination: ‘You would sweep me away into an indefinite world which fills me with terror; and yet a man is a great man just in so far as he can make his mind reflect everything with indifferent precision like a mirror.’ I seemed to be perfectly master of myself, and went on, but more rapidly: ‘I command you to leave me at once, for your ideas and phantasies are but the illusions that creep like maggots into civilizations when they begin to decline, and into minds when they begin to decay.’ I had grown suddenly angry, and seizing the *alembic* from the table, was about to rise and strike him with it, when the peacocks on the door behind him appeared to grow immense; and then the *alembic* fell from my fingers and I was drowned in a tide of green and blue and bronze feathers, and as I struggled hopelessly I heard a distant voice saying: ‘Our master Avicenna<sup>27</sup> has written that all life proceeds out of corruption.’ The glittering feathers had now covered me completely, and I knew that I had struggled for hundreds of years, and was conquered at last. I was sinking in to the depth when the green and blue and bronze that seemed to fill the world became a sea of flame and swept me away, and as I was swirled along I heard a voice over my head cry, ‘The mirror is broken in two pieces,’ and another voice answer, ‘The mirror is broken in four pieces,’ and a more

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<sup>25</sup> Mary, often depicted holding a symbolic rose, which for Yeats and the Golden Dawn symbolizes the unfolding or development of human consciousness.

<sup>26</sup> Greek goddess of love and mother of Eros.

<sup>27</sup> Persian polymath whose name is shortened to Ibn Sina or the Latinized name Avicenna (980-1037). He was an alchemist, but is most famous for *The Book of Healing* and *The Canon of Medicine*.

distant voice cry with an exultant cry, ‘The mirror is broken into numberless pieces;’ and then a multitude of pale hands were reaching towards me, and strange gentle faces bending above me, and half wailing and half caressing voices uttering words that were forgotten the moment they were spoken. I was being lifted out of the tide of flame, and felt my memories, my hopes, my thoughts, my will, everything I held to be myself, melting away; then I seemed to rise through numberless companies of beings who were, I understood, in some way more certain than thought, each wrapped in his eternal moment, in the perfect lifting of an arm, in a little circlet of rhythmical words, in dreaming with dim eyes and half closed eyelids. And then I passed beyond these forms, which were so beautiful they had almost ceased to be, and, having endured strange moods, melancholy, as it seemed, with the weight of many worlds, I passed into that Death which is Beauty herself, and into that Loneliness which all the multitudes desire without ceasing.<sup>28</sup> All things that had ever lived seemed to come and dwell in my heart, and I in theirs; and I had never again known mortality or tears, had I not suddenly fallen from the certainty of vision into the uncertainty of dream, and become a drop of molten gold falling with immense rapidity, through a night elaborate with stars, and all about me a melancholy exultant wailing. I fell and fell and fell, and then the wailing was but the wailing of the wind in the chimney, and I awoke to find myself leaning upon the table and supporting my head with my hands. I saw the *alembic* swaying from side to side in the distant corner it had rolled to, and Michael Robartes watching me and waiting. ‘I will go wherever you will,’ I said, ‘and do whatever you bid me, for I have been with eternal things.’ ‘I knew,’

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<sup>28</sup> Beauty or Tipherath, which is the sixth Sephiroth on the Tree of Life of the Qabalistic system used by Yeats and the Golden Dawn, signifies a death and rebirth and bears a striking relation to the fifteenth phase of Yeats’ Great Wheel, the “Perfection of Beauty” of the antithetical. Tipherath is also associated with Christ; hence the multitudes of a primary age set his image (opposite to them on the Great Wheel) before them.

he replied, ‘you must need answer as you have answered, when I heard the storm begin. You must come to a great distance, for we were commanded to build our temple between the pure multitude by the waves and the impure multitude of men.’

### III

I did not speak as we drove through the deserted streets, for my mind was curiously empty of familiar thoughts and experiences; it seemed to have been plucked out of the definite world and cast naked upon a shoreless sea. There were moments when the vision appeared on the point of returning, and I would half-remember with an ecstasy of joy or sorrow, crimes and heroisms, fortunes and misfortunes, or begin to contemplate with a sudden leaping of the heart, hopes and terrors, desires and ambitions, alien to my orderly and careful life; and then I would awake shuddering at the thought that some great imponderable being had swept through my mind. It was indeed days before this feeling passed perfectly away, and even now, when I have sought refuge in the only definite faith, I feel a great tolerance for those people with incoherent personalities, who gather in the chapels and meeting places of certain obscure sects, because I also have felt fixed habits and principles dissolving before a power, which was *hysterica passio*<sup>29</sup> or sheer madness, if you will, but as so powerful in its melancholy exultation that I tremble lest it wake again and drive me from my new-found peace. When we came in the grey light to the great half-empty terminus, it seemed to me I was so changed that I was no more, as man is, a moment shuddering at eternity, but eternity weeping and laughing over

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<sup>29</sup> King Lear, self-diagnosing his mental condition: ““O, how this mother swells up toward my heart! / *Hysterica passio*, down, thou climbing sorrow, thy element’s below” (2.4.55-7).

a moment;<sup>30</sup> and when we had started and Michael Robartes had fallen asleep, as he soon did, his sleeping face in which there was no sign of all that had so shaken me and that now kept me wakeful, was to my excited mind more like a mask than a face. The fancy possessed me that the man behind it had dissolved away like salt in water, and that it laughed and sighed, appealed and denounced at the bidding of beings greater or less than man. ‘This is not Michael Robartes at all: Michael Robartes is dead; dead for ten, for twenty years perhaps,’ I kept repeating to myself. I fell at last into a feverish sleep, waking up from time to time when we rushed past some little town, its slated roofs shining with wet, or still lake gleaming in the cold morning light. I had been too pre-occupied to ask where we were going, or to notice what tickets Michael Robartes had taken, but I knew now from the direction of the sun that we were going westward; and presently I knew also, but the way in which the trees had grown into the semblance of tattered beggars flying with bent heads towards the east, that we were approaching the western coast. Then immediately I saw the sea between the low hills upon the right, its dull grey broken into white patches and lines.

When we left the train we had still, I found, some way to go, and set out buttoning our coats about us, for the wind was bitter and violent. Michael Robartes was silent seeming anxious to leave me to my thoughts; and as we walked between the sea and the rocky side of a great promontory, I realized with a new perfection what a shock had been given to all my habits of thought and of feelings, if indeed some mysterious change had not taken place in the substance of my mind, for the grey waves, plumed with scudding foam, had grown part of a teeming fantastic inner life; and when Michael Robartes

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<sup>30</sup> This “oneness with eternity” being one of the goals of the hermetic tradition and alchemy before the refashioning of identity. To be one with eternity (to enter a world made “wholly of essences”) is to be overtaken by sheer ecstasy – emotions and archetypal potencies.

pointed to a square ancient-looking house, with a much smaller and newer building under its lee, set out on the very end of a dilapidated and almost deserted pier, and said it was the Temple of the Alchemical Rose, I was possessed with the phantasy that the sea, which kept covering it with showers of white foam, was claiming it as a part of some indefinite and passionate life, which had begun to war upon our orderly and careful days, and was about to plunge the world into a night as obscure as that which followed the downfall of the classical world. One part of my mind mocked this phantastic terror, but the other, the part that still lay half plunged in vision, listened to the clash of unknown armies, and shuddered at unimaginable fanaticisms, that hung in those grey leaping waves.

We had gone but a few paces along the pier when we came upon an old man, who was evidently a watchman, for he sat in an overset barrel, close to a place where masons had been lately working upon a break in the pier, and had in front of him a fire such as one sees slung under tinkers' carts; and I saw that he was also a voteen,<sup>31</sup> as the peasants say, for there was a rosary hanging from a nail on the rim of the barrel, and as I saw I shuddered, and I did not know why I shuddered. We had passed him a few yards when I heard him cry in Gaelic, 'Idolaters, idolaters, go down to Hell with your she devils; go down to Hell that the herrings may come again into the bay;' and for some moments I could hear him half screaming and half muttering behind us. 'Are you not afraid,' I said, 'that these wild fishing people may do some desperate thing against you?'

'I and mine,' he answered, 'are long past human hurt or help, being incorporate with immortal spirits, and when we die it shall be the consummation of the supreme

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<sup>31</sup> *Irish Gaelic*. A very religious person; a devotee.

work.<sup>32</sup> A time will come for these people also, and they will sacrifice a mullet to Artemis, or some other fish to some new divinity, unless indeed their own divinities, the Dagda, with his overflowing cauldron, Lu, with his spear dipped in poppy-juice, lest it rush forth hot for battle, Angus, with the three birds on his shoulder,<sup>33</sup> Bove and his red swine-herd, and all the heroic children of Dana, set up once more their temples of grey stone. Their reign has never ceased, but only waned in power a little, for the Shee still pass in every wind, and dance and play at hurley, and fight their sudden battles in every hollow and on every hill;<sup>34</sup> but they cannot build their temples again till there have been martyrdoms and victories, and perhaps even that long-foretold battle in the Valley of the Black Pig.<sup>35</sup>

Keeping close to the wall that went about the pier on the seaward side, to escape the driving foam and the wind, which threatened every moment to lift us off our feet, we made our way in silence to the door of the square building. Michael Robartes opened it with a key, on which I saw the rust of many salt winds, and led me along a bare passage and up an uncarpeted stair to a little room surrounded with book-shelves. A meal would

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<sup>32</sup> As Yeats explains himself, Michael Robartes is a principle of the mind, or an immortal spirit himself. When he dies, the supreme work (Great Work) will be finished.

<sup>33</sup> Artemis: Greek goddess of animals, the wild, and virginity. Dagda: A father-like god of Irish mythology associated with cauldrons. Lu: Lú (also Lug or Lugh), Irish god, son of Cian and Ethniu. The only way to cure the spear's thirst for blood was to put sleeping potion (poppy-juice) on it. Angus: (also Aengus, Óengus or Aonghus) Son of Dagda, member of Tuatha Dé Danaan, and Irish god of love, youth, and poetry, representative of the archetypal "young man" or "divine youth" (Green 165).

<sup>34</sup> Bove: Bodb Derg, brother of Aengus. His swineherd grapples with that of the king of the Connacht. Dana: Mother goddess of Tuatha Dé Danann, which means literally "people of the goddess Dana." Shee: (also Sidhe) In Irish myth, immortal faery spirits who, after the Sons of Mil (the Gaels) invaded Ireland, dwell underground in the hills.

hurley: or hurling, a traditional Irish game in which two teams use sticks to put a ball in the goal at either side of a field.

<sup>35</sup> Prophesied by St. Columbkille (Columba) (521-597), a battle which Yeats imagines in *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) as "Swine of the Gods" and about which he later writes in "Valley of the Black Pig," a poem published in *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). Yeats used the Black Pig as an early image of the coming "apocalypse" – a tremendous shift in western consciousness (Putzel). Possibilities for the use of the pig include its close association with and ubiquity in Ireland or the casting of the demons into the swine in the Gospel.

be brought, but only of fruit, for I must submit to a tempered fast before the ceremony, he explained, and with it a book on the doctrine and method of the Order, over which I was to spend what remained of the winter daylight. He then left me promising to return an hour before the ceremony. I began searching among the book-shelves, and found one of the most exhaustive alchemical libraries I have ever seen. There were works of Morienus, who hid his immortal body under a shirt of hair-cloth;<sup>36</sup> of Avicenna, who was a drunkard and yet controlled numberless legions of spirits; of Alfarabi, who put so many spirits into his lute that he could make men laugh, or weep, or fall in deadly trance as he would;<sup>37</sup> of Lully, who transformed himself into the likeness of a red cock;<sup>38</sup> of Flamel, who with his wife Parnella achieved the elixir many hundreds of years ago, and is fabled to live still in Arabia among the dervishes; and of many of less fame.<sup>39</sup> There were very few mystics but alchemical mystics, and because, I had little doubt, of the devotion to one god of the greater number and of the limited sense of beauty, which Robartes would hold an inevitable consequence; but I did notice a complete set of facsimiles of the prophetic writings of William Blake, and probably because of the multitudes that thronged his illumination and were ‘like the gay fishes on the wave when the moon sucks up the dew.’<sup>40</sup> I noted also many poets and prose writers of every age, but only those who were a little weary of life, as indeed the greatest have been everywhere, and who cast their

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<sup>36</sup> Shirt of hair-cloth: Hair-cloth was used in the process of mortification, slaying the disease of the soul to restore and invigorate the soul’s true, immortal life. Garments made of goats’ hair were worn by ascetics to resist temptations of the flesh and by ordinary folks as an antidote to the outward luxury they exhibited. Morienus, an ascetic, was a fifth-century Roman alchemist and hermit.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Farabi, known also as Alfarabius (ca. 872-950 or 951), Islamic scientist and philosopher. He was called in his time and after “The Second Teacher,” being second to Aristotle.

<sup>38</sup> Probably symbolic. In Hindu tradition, the red rooster symbolizes a mass spiritual awakening, and the red elixir, according to Lully, grants the alchemist infinite amounts of Sol.

<sup>39</sup> Nicolas Flamel, legendary alchemist. Legends say he was spotted hundreds of years after his death.

<sup>40</sup> Blake’s *Europe a Prophecy* (1794), Plate XIV line 3.

imagination to us, as a something they needed no longer now that they were going up in their fiery chariots.

Presently I heard a tap at the door, and a woman came in and laid a little fruit upon the table. I judged that she had once been handsome, but her cheeks were hollowed by what I would have held, had I seen her anywhere else, an excitement of the flesh and a thirst for pleasure, but was, I doubted not, an excitement of the imagination and a thirst for beauty. I asked her some question concerning the ceremony, but getting no answer except a shake of the head, saw that I must await initiation in silence. When I had eaten, she came again, and having laid a curiously wrought bronze box on the table lighted the candles and took away the plates and the remnants. So soon as I was alone, I turned to the box, and found that the peacocks of Hera spread out their tails over the sides and lid, against a background, on which were wrought great stars, as though to affirm that the heavens were part of their glory. In the box was a book bound in vellum, and having upon the vellum and in very delicate colours, and in gold, the alchemical rose with many spears thrusting against it, but in vain, as was shown by the shattered points of those nearest.<sup>41</sup> The book was written upon vellum, and in beautiful clear letters, interspersed with symbolical pictures and illuminations, after the manner of the *Splendor Solis*.<sup>42</sup>

The first chapter described how six students, of Celtic descent, gave themselves separately to the study of alchemy, and solved, one the mystery of the Pelican,<sup>43</sup> another

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<sup>41</sup> Symbolic, it would seem, of a failed attempt to extinguish or otherwise assault the development of consciousness.

<sup>42</sup> Dated around 1582, *The Splendor Solis* (Splendor of the Sun) by Salomon Trismosin, a colorful set of 22 plates considered among the greatest depictions of the various stages of alchemy.

<sup>43</sup> One of the final stages in the alchemical process, the reddening. The Pelican, associated with Christ whose blood redeems mankind, wounds itself to feed its young. The pelican was also an alchemical apparatus used to “digest substances by long steeping in hot fluid to extract the essence” (Haeffner 178).

the mystery of the green Dragon,<sup>44</sup> another the mystery of the Eagle,<sup>45</sup> another that of Salt and Mercury.<sup>46</sup> What seemed a succession of accidents, but was, the book declared, the contrivance of preternatural powers, brought them together in the garden of an inn in the South of France, and while they talked together the thought came to them that alchemy was the gradual distillation of the contents of the soul, until they were ready to put off the mortal and put on the immortal. An owl passed, rustling among the vine-leaves overhead, and then an old woman came, leaning upon a stick, and, sitting close to them, took up the thought where they had dropped it. Having expounded the whole principle of spiritual alchemy, and bid them found the Order of the Alchemical Rose, she passed from among them, and when they would have followed was nowhere to be seen. They formed themselves into an Order, holding their goods and making their researches in common, and, as they became perfect in the alchemical doctrine, apparitions came and went among them, and taught them more and more marvelous mysteries. 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 sprang. If you imagine, it said, the semblance of a living being, it is at once possessed by a wandering soul, and goes hither and hither working good or evil, until the moment of its death has come; and 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 they would into sleeping minds;<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The third stage, the greening.

<sup>45</sup> The whitening or *albedo* of the alchemical process during which the practitioner purifies the metal being transmuted, a spiritualizing of the body.

<sup>46</sup> Two of the three *prima materia*, Salt is the body, symbol, or image and Mercury the spirit or archetype.

<sup>47</sup> Greek god of love. That is, Eros – sexual energy – allowed the embodiment of archetypal spirits or “divine souls.” See the chart on page *ix* of the introduction. The sleeping minds are figuratively sleeping – i.e. undeveloped.

and Ate, forms from which demonic beings could pour madness, or unquiet dreams, into sleeping blood;<sup>48</sup> 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;<sup>49</sup> and Aphrodite, that if you made, by a strong imagining, a dove crowned with silver and had 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 call the moods; and worked all great changes into 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

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<sup>48</sup> Atë, or Aite, Greek goddess of ruin, folly, and delusion.

<sup>49</sup> For an extensive description and explanation of Hermes and his significance in magic and the works included in this volume, see the introduction, page *x*. In addition to assisting those traverse past the hellhound Cerberus and into the underworld, Hermes is god of the imagination – the connection between unconscious and conscious and thus he and the imagination dictate how powerful the protective hound will be.

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.

#### IV

A couple of hours after sunset Michael Robartes returned and told me that I would have to learn the steps of an exceedingly antique dance, because before my initiation could be perfected I had to join three times in a magical dance, for rhythm was the wheel of Eternity, on which alone the transient and accidental could be broken, and the spirit set free. I found that the steps, which were simple enough, resembled certain antique Greek dances, and having been a good dancer in my youth and the master of many curious Gaelic steps, I soon had them in my memory. He then robed me and himself in a costume which suggested by its shape both Greece and Egypt, but by its crimson colour a more passionate life than theirs; and having put into my hands a little chainless censer of bronze, wrought into the likeness of a rose, by some modern craftsman, he told me to open a small door opposite to the door by which I had entered. I put my hand to the handle, but the moment I did so, the fumes of the incense, helped perhaps by his mysterious glamour, made me fall again into a dream, in which I seemed to be a mask, lying on the counter of a little Eastern shop. Many persons, with eyes so bright and still, that I knew them for more than human, came in and tried me on their faces, but at last flung me into a corner with a little laughter; but all this passed in a moment, for when I

awoke, my hand was still upon the handle. I opened the door, and found myself in a marvelous passage, along whose sides were many divinities wrought in a mosaic, not less beautiful than the mosaic in the Baptistery at Ravenna,<sup>50</sup> but of a less severe beauty; the predominant colour of each divinity, which was surely a symbolic colour, being repeated in the lamps that hung from the ceiling, a curiously-scented lamp before every divinity. I passed on, marveling exceedingly how these enthusiasts could have created all this beauty in so remote a place, and half persuaded to believe in a material alchemy, by the sight of so much hidden wealth; the censer filling the air, as I passed, with smoke of ever-changing colour.

I stopped before a door, on whose bronze panels were wrought great waves in whose shadow were faint suggestions of terrible faces. Those beyond it seemed to have heard our steps, for a voice cried: 'Is the work of the Incorruptible Fire at an end?' and immediately Michael Robartes answered: 'The perfect gold has come from the *athanor*.'<sup>51</sup> The door swung open and we were in a great circular room, and among men and women who were dancing slowly in crimson robes. Upon the ceiling was an immense rose wrought in mosaic; and about the walls, also in mosaic, was a battle of gods and angels, the gods glimmering like rubies and sapphires, and the angels of the one greyness, because, as Michael Robartes whispered, they had renounced their divinity, and turned from the unfolding of their separate hearts, out of love for a God of humility and sorrow. Pillars supported the roof and made a kind of circular cloister, each pillar being a column of confused shapes, divinities, it seemed, of the wind, who rose in a whirling dance of more than human vehemence, and playing upon pipes and cymbals; and from

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<sup>50</sup> The Baptistery of Neon, a religious building in Ravenna, central Italy.

<sup>51</sup> Robartes speaks in symbol: the perfectly transmuted metal has come out of the furnace

among these shapes were thrust out hands, and in these hands were censers. I was bid place my censer also in a hand and take my place and dance, and as I turned from the pillars towards the dancers, I saw that the floor was of a green stone, and that a pale Christ on a pale cross was wrought in the midst. I asked Robartes the meaning of this, and was told that they desired 'To trouble His unity with their multitudinous feet.' The dance wound in and out, tracing upon the floor the shapes of petals that copied the petals in the rose overhead, and to the sound of hidden instruments which were perhaps of an antique pattern, for I have never heard the like; and every moment the dance was more passionate, until all the winds of the world seemed to have awakened under our feet. After a little I had grown weary, and stood under a pillar watching the coming and going of those flame-like figures; until gradually I sank into a half-dream, from which I was awakened by seeing the petals of the great rose, which had no longer the look of mosaic, falling slowly through the incense-heavy air, and as they fell, shaping in to the likeness of living beings of an extraordinary beauty. Still faint and cloud-like, they began to dance, and as they danced took a more and more definite shape, so that I was able to distinguish beautiful Grecian faces and august Egyptian faces, and now and again to name a divinity by the staff in his hand or by a bird fluttering over his head; and soon every mortal foot danced by the white foot of an immortal; and in the troubled eyes that looked into untroubled shadowy eyes, I saw the brightness of uttermost desire as though they had found at length, after unreckonable wandering, the lost love of their youth. Sometimes, but only for a moment, I saw a faint solitary figure with a veiled face, and carrying a faint torch, flit among the dancers, but like a dream within a dream, like a shadow of a shadow, and I knew by an understanding born from a deeper fountain than thought, that it was

Eros himself, and that his face was veiled because no man or woman from the beginning of the world has ever known what love is, or looked into his eyes, for Eros alone of divinities is altogether a spirit, and hides in passions not of his essence if he would commune with a mortal heart. So that if a man love nobly he knows love through infinite pity, unspeakable trust, unending sympathy; and if ignobly through vehement jealousy, sudden hatred, and unappeasable desire; but unveiled love he never knows. While I thought these things, a voice cried to me from the crimson figures; 'Into the dance, there is none that can be spared out of the dance; into the dance, into the dance, that the gods may make them bodies out of the substance of our hearts;' and before I could answer, a mysterious wave of passion, that seemed like the soul of the dance moving within our souls, took hold of me, and I was swept, neither consenting nor refusing, into the midst. I was dancing with an immortal august woman, who had black lilies in her hair,<sup>52</sup> and her dreamy gesture seemed laden with a wisdom more profound than the darkness that is between star and star, and with a love like the love that breathed upon the waters; and as we danced on and on, the incense drifted over us and round us, covering us away, as in the heart of the world, and ages seemed to pass, and tempests to awake and perish in the folds of our robes and in her heavy hair.

Suddenly I remembered that her eyelids had never quivered, and that her lilies had not dropped a black petal, or shaken from their places, and understood with great horror that I danced with one who was more or less than human, and who was drinking up my soul as an ox drinks up a way-side pool; and I fell, and darkness passed over me.

## V

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<sup>52</sup> Black lilies are symbolic of lies and deceit, negative emotions, grace, death, and the resurrection.

I awoke suddenly as though something had awakened me, and saw that I was lying on a roughly painted floor, and that on the ceiling, which was at no great distance, was a roughly painted rose, and about me on the walls half-finished paintings. The pillars and the censers had gone; and near me a score of sleepers lay wrapped in disordered robes, their upturned faces looking to my imagination like hollow masks; and a chill dawn was shining down upon them from a long window I had not noticed before; and outside the sea roared. I saw Michael Robartes lying at a little distance and beside him an overset bowl of wrought-bronze which looked as though it had once held incense. As I sat thus, I heard a sudden tumult of angry men and women's voices mix with the roaring of the sea; and leaping to my feet, I went quickly to Michael Robartes, and tried to shake him out of his sleep. I then seized him by the shoulder and tried to lift him, but he fell backwards, and sighed faintly; and the voices became louder and angrier; and a sound of heavy blows upon the door, which opened on to the pier, began to mingle with the voices. Suddenly I heard a sound of rending wood, and I knew it had begun to give, and I ran to the door of the room. I pushed it open and came out upon a passage whose bare boards clattered under my feet, and found in the passage another door which led into an empty kitchen; and as I passed through the door I heard two crashes in quick succession, and knew by the sudden noise of feet and the shouts that the door which opened on to the pier had fallen inwards. I ran from the kitchen and out into a small yard, and from this down some steps which descended the seaward and sloping side of the pier, and from the steps clambered along the water's edge, with the angry voices ringing in my ears. This part of the pier had been but lately refaced with blocks of granite, so that it was almost clear of seaweed; but when I came to the old part, I found it so slippery with green weed that I

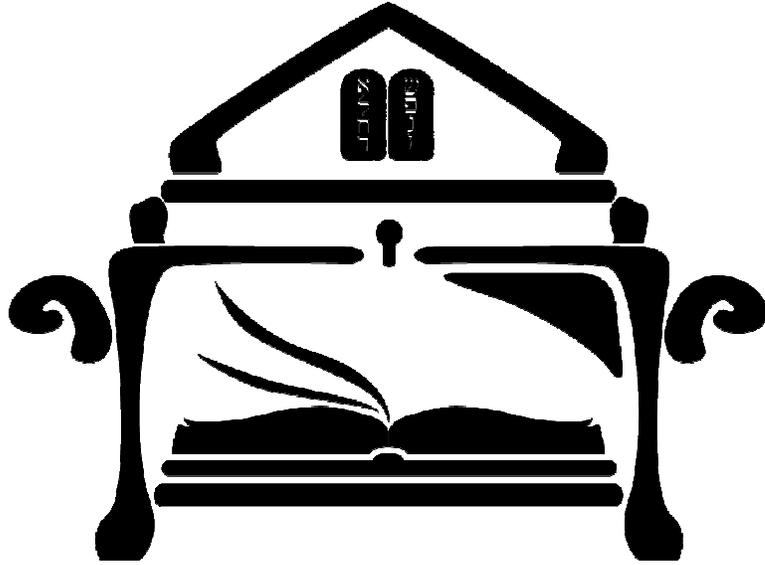
had to climb up on to the roadway. I looked towards the Temple of the Alchemical Rose, where the fishermen and the women were still shouting but somewhat more faintly, and saw that there was no one about the door or upon the pier; but as I looked, a little crowd hurried out of the door and began gathering large stones from where they were heaped up in readiness for the next time a storm shattered the pier, when they would be laid under blocks of granite. While I stood watching the crowd, an old man, who was, I think, the voteen, pointed to me, and screaming out something, and the crowd whitened, for all the faces had turned towards me.<sup>53</sup> I ran, and it was well for me that pullers of the oar are poorer men with their feet than with their arms or their bodies; and yet while I ran I scarcely heard the following feet or the angry voices, for many voices of exultation and lamentation, which were forgotten as a dream is forgotten the moment they were heard, seemed to be ringing in the air over my head.

There are moments even now, when I seem to hear those voices of exultation and lamentation, and when the indefinite world, which has but half lost its mastery over my heart and my intellect, seems about to claim a perfect mastery; but I carry the rosary about my neck, and when I hear, or seem to hear them, I press it to my heart and say: ‘He whose name is Legion is at our doors deceiving our intellects with subtlety and flattering our hearts with beauty, and we have no trust but in Thee;’<sup>54</sup> and then the war that rages within me at other times is still, and I am at peace.

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<sup>53</sup> The mass of people appeared to grow white as their faces at once became visible to him.

<sup>54</sup> For the biblical Legion that is cast into a pig, see Mark 5:9, Luke 8:30 and Matthew 8:28-34. The narrator turns to the rosary (an object used for prayer) of Catholicism, a remarkably primary religion whose central tenets require passivity and repudiation of spiritual independence to clergy and the Papacy – whose First Vatican Council claimed the Pope’s infallibility in 1870 (Brandt 652). This turn appears to mark a fear of spiritual independence.



The Tables of the Law

I<sup>1</sup>

‘Will you permit me, Aherne,’ I said, ‘to ask you a question, which I have wanted to ask you for years, and have not asked because we have grown nearly strangers? Why did you refuse the biretta,<sup>2</sup> and almost at the last moment? When you and I lived together, you cared neither for wine, women, nor money, and had thoughts for nothing but theology and mysticism.’ I had watched through dinner for a moment to put my question, and ventured now, because he had thrown off a little of the reserve and indifference which, ever since his last return from Italy, had taken the place of our once close friendship. He had just questioned me, too, about certain private and almost sacred things, and my frankness had earned, I thought, a like frankness from him.

When I began to speak he was lifting a glass of that wine which he could choose so well and valued so little; and while I spoke, he set it slowly and meditatively upon the table and held it there, its deep red light dyeing his long delicate fingers. The impression of his face and form, as they were then, is still vivid with me, and is inseparable from another and fanciful impression: the impression of a man holding a flame in his naked hand. He was to me, at that moment, the supreme type of our race, which, when it has risen above, or is sunken below, the formalisms of half-education and the rationalisms of conventional affirmation and denial, turns away, unless my hopes for the world and for the Church have made me blind, from practicable desires and intuitions towards desires so unbounded that no human vessel can contain them, intuitions so immaterial that their

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this story, “The Tables of the Law,” alludes to the tables Moses carried from Mount Sinai after God revealed his commandments to him. This story is a rebuke and replacement of these tables and their laws, signifying a new spiritual age marked by spiritual independence and self-reliance.

<sup>2</sup> A square cap worn by clergymen with three or four upright pieces extending from the topmost center to the edge. Owen Aherne, an embodiment of esoteric, theological philosophies and mysticism, refused to be a clergyman.

sudden and far-off fire leaves heavy darkness about hand and foot. He had the nature, which is half monk, half soldier of fortune, and must needs turn action into dreaming, and dreaming into action; and for such there is no order, no finality, no contentment in this world. When he and I had been students in Paris, we had belonged to a little group which devoted itself to speculations about alchemy and mysticism. More orthodox in most of his beliefs than Michael Robartes, he had surpassed him in a fanciful hatred of all life, and this hatred had found expression in the curious paradox—half borrowed from some fanatical monk, half invented by himself—that the beautiful arts were sent into the world to overthrow nations, and finally life herself, by sowing everywhere unlimited desires, like torches thrown into a burning city. This idea was not at the time, I believe, more than a paradox, a plume of the pride of youth; and it was only after his return to Ireland that he endured the fermentation of belief which is coming upon our people with the reawakening of their imaginative life.<sup>3</sup>

Presently he stood up, saying, ‘Come, and I will show you why; you at any rate will understand,’ and taking candles from the table, he lit the way into a long paved passage that led to his private chapel. We passed between the portraits of the Jesuits<sup>4</sup> and priests—some of no little fame—his family had given to the Church; and engravings and photographs of pictures that had especially moved him; and the few paintings his small fortune, eked out by an almost penurious abstinence from the things most men desire, had enabled him to buy in his travels. The photographs and engravings were from the masterpieces of many schools; but in all the beauty, whether it was a beauty of religion,

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<sup>3</sup> Yeats explained that the imagination had been buried within a tomb of criticism (see the final paragraph of the introduction), and the three stories of this volume call for a reinvigoration of the imagination and of spirit.

<sup>4</sup> Members of a religious order of the Roman Catholic Church (Society of Jesus) that works with cultural and intellectual research.

of love, or of some fantastical vision of mountain and wood, was the beauty achieved by temperaments which seek always an absolute emotions, and which have their most continual, though not most perfect, expression in the legends and vigils and music of the Celtic peoples. The certitude of a fierce or gracious recognition in the enraptured faces of the angels of Francesca,<sup>5</sup> and in the august faces of the sibyls of Michaelangelo;<sup>6</sup> and the incertitude, as of souls trembling between the excitement of the spirit and the excitement of the flesh, in wavering faces from frescoes in the churches of Siena,<sup>7</sup> and in the faces like thin flames, imagined by the modern symbolists<sup>8</sup> and Pre-Raphaelites,<sup>9</sup> had often made that long, grey, dim, empty, echoing passage become to my eyes a vestibule of eternity.

Almost every detail of the chapel, which we entered by a narrow Gothic door, whose threshold had been worn smooth by the secret worshippers of the penal times, was vivid in my memory; for it was in this chapel that I had first, and when but a boy, been moved by the mediaevalism which is now, I think, the governing influence in my life. The only thing that seemed new was a square bronze box which stood upon the altar before the six unlighted candles and the ebony crucifix, and was like those made in ancient times of more precious substances to hold the sacred books. Aherne made me sit down on an oak bench, and having bowed very low before the crucifix, took the bronze box from the altar, and sat down beside me with the box upon his knees.

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<sup>5</sup> Piero della Francesca (1415-1492), a painter of the Early Italian Renaissance

<sup>6</sup> Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Italian Renaissance sculptor, painter, architect, poet, etc. Sibyls: From Greek *sibylla*, which means "prophetess." Six Sibyls were painted on the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican.

<sup>7</sup> City in Tuscany, Italy.

<sup>8</sup> The aesthetic of this movement was developed in literature by Stéphane Mallarmé, mentioned in "The Adoration of the Magi." See introduction.

<sup>9</sup> The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, founded in 1848 by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and others, grew to include seven members and aimed to return the composition of art to an aesthetic marked by an abundance of detail, color, and complexity, and which was popular before the artists who succeeded Raphael and Michelangelo.

‘You will perhaps have forgotten,’ he said, ‘most of what you have read about Joachim of Flora,<sup>10</sup> for he is little more than a name to even the well-read. He was an abbot in Cortale<sup>11</sup> in the twelfth century, and is best known for his prophecy, in a book called *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, that the Kingdom of the Father was past, the Kingdom of the Son passing, the Kingdom of the Spirit yet to come.<sup>12</sup> The Kingdom of the Spirit was to be a complete triumph of the Spirit, the *spiritualis intelligentia* he called it, over the dead letter.<sup>13</sup> He had many followers among the more extreme Franciscans, and these were accused of possessing a secret book of his called the *Liber inducens in Evangelium aeternum*.<sup>14</sup> Again and again groups of visionaries were accused of possessing this terrible book, in which the freedom of the Renaissance lay hidden, until at last Pope Alexander IV had it found and cast into the flames. I have here the greatest treasure the world contains. I have a copy of that book; and see what great artists have made the robes in which it is wrapped. This bronze box was made by Benvenuto Cellini,<sup>15</sup> who covered it with gods and demons, whose eyes are closed to signify an absorption in the inner light.’ He lifted the lid and took out a book bound in leather, covered with filigree work of tarnished silver. ‘And this cover was bound by one of the binders that bound for Canevari;<sup>16</sup> while Giluio Clovio, an artist of the later Renaissance, whose work is soft and gentle, took out the beginning page of every chapter of the old copy, and set in its place a

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<sup>10</sup> Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202), Italian mystic and theologian.

<sup>11</sup> In Catanzaro, Calabria, southern Italy.

<sup>12</sup> The Kingdom of the Father preceded the incarnation of Christ, marked by an obedience to the law. The Kingdom of the Son was the period following the incarnation of Christ, marked by Man becoming the son of God. The Kingdom of the Spirit was yet to come for Fiore and would be marked by a direct contact with God and a spreading of universal love preached by Jesus in the gospel.

<sup>13</sup> See 2 Corinthians 3:6: “...for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” *spiritualis intelligentia*: intelligence pertaining to the spirit; spiritual understanding.

<sup>14</sup> *Book Representing the Eternal Gospel*, a book consisting of excerpts of Joachim de Fiore’s work, circulated in 1254, and authored by Gerard of Borgo San Donnino OM (*Mythologies* 406).

<sup>15</sup> Italian sculptor, painter, goldsmith, musician, and soldier (1500-1571).

<sup>16</sup> Demetrio Canevari (1559-1625), a Genoese book collector.

page surmounted by an elaborate letter and a miniature of some one of the great whose example was cited in the chapter;<sup>17</sup> and wherever the writing left a little space elsewhere, he put some delicate emblem or intricate pattern.

I took the book in my hands and began turning over the gilded, many-coloured pages, holding it close to the candle to discover the texture of the paper.<sup>18</sup>

‘Where did you get this amazing book?’ I said. ‘If genuine, and I cannot judge by this light, you have discovered one of the most precious things in the world.’

‘It is certainly genuine,’ he replied. ‘When the original was destroyed, one copy alone remained, and was in the hands of a lute-player of Florence, and from him it passed to his son, and so from generation to generation until it came to the lute-player who was father to Benvenuto Cellini, and from him it passed to Giulio Clovio, and from Giulio Clovio to a Roman engraver; and then from generation to generation, the story of its wandering passing on with it, until it came into the possession of the family of Aretino, and so Giulio Aretino, an artist and worker in metals, and the student of the cabbalistic reveries of Pico della Mirandola.<sup>19</sup> He spent many nights with me at Rome, discussing philosophy; and at last I won his confidence so perfectly that he showed me this, his greater treasure; and, finding how much I valued it, and feeling that he himself was growing old and beyond the help of its teaching, he sold it to me for no great sum, considering its great preciousness.’

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<sup>17</sup> Giorgio Giulio Clovio, (1498-1578) considered to be the greatest illuminator of the Italian High Renaissance and the last in the tradition of illuminating manuscripts. Illuminators produced documents with borders, large lettering, or miniature illustrations. A strict definition of an illuminated manuscript refers to one decorated with gold and silver.

<sup>18</sup> The décor of the book and its container are similar to the very tripartite philosophy of eras expressed within: bronze, associated with eternity and durability, symbolizes the Father; the book’s cover is decorated with silver, symbolizing the Son; and its pages are gilded, symbolizing the Spirit.

<sup>19</sup> Mirandola was an Italian renaissance philosopher (1463-1494), and one of his chief aims was to reconcile religion and philosophy using cabbalistic theories.

‘What is the doctrine?’ I said. ‘Some mediaeval straw-splitting about the nature of the Trinity, which is only useful to-day to show how many things are unimportant to us, which once shook the world?’

‘I could never make you understand,’ he said with a sigh, ‘that nothing is unimportant in belief, but even you will admit that this book goes to the heart. Do you see the tables on which the commandments were written in Latin?’ I looked to the end of the room, opposite to the altar, and saw that the two marble tablets were gone, and that two large empty tablets of ivory, like large copies of the little tablets we set over our desks, had taken their place. ‘It has swept the commandments of the Father away,’ he went on, ‘and displaced the commandments of the Son by the commandments of the Holy Spirit. The first book is called *Fractura Tabularum*.<sup>20</sup> In the first chapter it mentions the names of the great artists who made them graven things and the likeness of many things, and adored them and served them; and the second the names of the great wits who took the name of the Lord their God in vain; and that long third chapter, set with the emblems of sanctified faces, and having wings upon its borders, is the praise of breakers of the seventh day and wasters of the six days, who yet lived comely and pleasant days. Those two chapters tell of men and women who railed upon their parents, remembering that their god was older than the god of their parents; and that which was the sword of Michael for an emblem commends the kings that wrought secret murder and so won for their people a peace that was *amore somnoque gravata et vestibus versicoloribus*, “heavy with love and sleep and many-coloured raiment”;<sup>21</sup> and that with the pale star at the closing has the lives of the noble youths who loved the wives of others and were

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<sup>20</sup> “The Breaking of the Tables,” the tables being those of Moses.

<sup>21</sup> Lionel Johnson translated Aherne’s Latin phrases for Yeats, making him appear quite learned. Here and elsewhere, the Latin is a literal translation of the preceding phrase.

transformed into memories, which have transformed many poorer hearts into sweet flames; and that with the winged head is the history of the robbers who lived upon the sea or in the desert, lives which it compares to the twittering of the string of a bow, *nervi stridentis instar*;<sup>22</sup> and those two last, that are fire and gold, and devoted to the satirists who bore false witness against their neighbours and yet illustrated eternal wrath, and to those that have coveted more than other men wealth and women, and have thereby and therefore mastered and magnified empires.

‘The second book, which is called *Straminis Deflagratio*,<sup>23</sup> recounts the conversations Joachim of Flora held in his monastery at Cortale, and afterwards in his monastery in the mountains of La Sila,<sup>24</sup> with travelers and pilgrims, upon the laws of many countries; how chastity was a virtue and robbery a little thing in such a land, and robbery a crime and unchastity a little thing in such a land; and of the persons who had flung themselves upon these laws and become *decussa veste Dei sidera*, stars shaken out of the raiment of god.

‘The third book, which is the close, is called *Lex Secreta*,<sup>25</sup> and describes the true inspiration of action, the only Eternal Evangel; and ends with a vision, which he saw among the mountains of La Sila, of his disciples sitting throne in the blue deep of the air, and laughing aloud, with a laughter that was like the rustling of the wings of Time: *Coelis in coeruleis ridentes sedebant discipuli mei super thronos: talis erat risus, 63ecogn temporis pennati susurrus*.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Another Latin translation.

<sup>23</sup> Or *Conflagration of the Litter*, “litter” here being a straw bed for animals in a stable.

<sup>24</sup> A mountainous plateau in Calabria, southern Italy, which was occupied by Italo-Normans after the eleventh century.

<sup>25</sup> Or *The Secret Law*. The Latin word *secretata* also carries the connotation of “set apart” or “distinguished.”

<sup>26</sup> Another translation, again by Lionel Johnson, of the previous phrase into Latin.

‘I know little of Joachim of Flora,’ I said, ‘except that Dante set him in Paradise among the great doctors.<sup>27</sup> If he held a heresy so singular, I cannot understand how no rumours of it came to the ears of Dante; and Dante made no peace with the enemies of the Church.’

‘Joachim of Flora acknowledged openly the authority of the Church, and even asked that all his published writings, and those to be published by his desire after his death, should be submitted to the censorship of the Pope. He considered that those whose work was to live and not to reveal were children and that the Pope was their father; but he taught in secret that certain others, and in always increasing numbers, were elected, not to live, but to reveal that hidden substance of God which is colour and music and softness and a sweet odour; and that these have no father but the Holy Spirit. Just as poets and painters and musicians labour at their works, building them with lawless and lawful things alike, so long as they embody the beauty that is beyond the grave, these children of the Holy Spirit labour at their moments with eyes upon the shining substance on which Time has heaped the refuse of creation; for the world only exists to be a tale in the ears of coming generations; and terror and content, birth and death, love and hatred, and the fruit of the Tree, are but instruments for that supreme art which is to win us from life and gather us into eternity like doves into their dove-cots.

‘I shall go away in a little while and travel into many lands, that I may know all accidents and destinies, and when I return, will write my secret law upon those ivory tablets, just as poets and romance-writers have written the principles of their art in

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<sup>27</sup> “il calavrese abate Giovacchino / di spirit profetico dotato” – “Calabria’s abbot, Joachim, / endow’d with soul prophetic” (*Paradiso*, xii.140-1).

prefaces; and will gather pupils about me that they may discover their law in the study of my law, and the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit be more widely and firmly established.’

He was pacing up and down, and I listened to the recognition of his words and watched the excitement of his gestures with not a little concern. I had been accustomed to welcome the most singular speculations, and had always found them as harmless as the Persian cat, who half closes her meditative eyes and stretches out her long claws, before my fire. But now I would battle in the interests of orthodoxy, even of the commonplace; and yet could find nothing better to say than: ‘It is not necessary to judge everyone by the law, for we have also Christ’s commandment of love.’<sup>28</sup>

He turned and said, looking at me with shining eyes:

‘Jonathan Swift made a soul for the gentlemen of this city by hating his neighbor as himself.’<sup>29</sup>

‘At any rate, you cannot deny that to teach so dangerous a doctrine is to accept a terrible responsibility.’

‘Leonardo da Vinci,’ he replied, ‘has this noble sentence: “The hope and desire of returning home to one’s former state is like the moth’s desire for the light; and the man who with constant longing awaits each new month and new year, deeming that the things he longs for are ever too late in coming, does not perceive that he is longing for his own destruction.”’<sup>30</sup> How then can the pathway which will lead us into the heart of God be

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<sup>28</sup> “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” John 13:34.

<sup>29</sup> From Swift’s *Various Thoughts, Moral and Diverting*: “We have just enough Religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.”

<sup>30</sup> “Now you see that the hope and the desire of returning home and to one’s former state is like the moth to the light, and that the man who with constant longing awaits with joy each new spring time, each new summer, each new month and new year – deeming that the things he longs for are ever too late in coming – does not perceive that he is longing for his own destruction. But this desire is the very quintessence, the spirit of the elements, which finding itself imprisoned with the soul is ever longing to return from the

other than dangerous? Why should you, who are no materialist, cherish the continuity and order of the world as those do who have only the world? You do not value the writers who will express nothing unless their reason understands how it will make what is called the right more easy; why, then, will you deny a like freedom to the supreme art, the art which is the foundation of all arts? Yes, I shall send out of this chapel saints, lovers, rebels, and prophets: souls that will surround themselves with peace, as with a nest made with grass; and others over whom I shall weep. The dust shall fall for many years over this little box; and then I shall open it; and the tumults which are, perhaps, the flames of the Last Day shall come from under the lid.'

I did not reason with him that night, because his excitement was great and I feared to make him angry; and when I called at his house a few days later, he was gone and his house was locked up and empty. I have deeply regretted my failure to combat his heresy and to test the genuineness of his strange book. Since my conversion I have indeed done penance for an error which I was only able to measure after some years.

## II

I was walking along one of the Dublin quays, on the side nearest the river, about ten years after our conversation, stopping from time to time to turn over the works upon an old bookstall, and thinking, curiously enough, of the terrible destiny of Michael Robartes, and his brotherhood, when I saw a tall and bent man walking slowly along the other side of the quay. I recognized, with a start, in a lifeless mask with dim eyes, the once resolute and delicate face of Owen Aherne. I crossed the quay quickly, but had not

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human body to its giver. And you must know that this same longing is that quintessence, inseparable from nature, and that man is the image of the world" (*The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, xix. Jean Paul Richter, trans.) This sentiment expressed by da Vinci is at its core alchemical – the spirit for him was the *quinta essentia* and gives the individual a longing for God.

gone many yards before he turned away, as though he had seen me, and hurried down a side street; I followed, but only to lose him among the intricate streets on the north side of the river. During the next few weeks, I inquired of everybody who had once known him, but he had made himself known to nobody; and I knocked, without result, at the door of his old house; and had nearly persuaded myself that I was mistaken, when I saw him again in a narrow street behind the Four Courts,<sup>31</sup> and followed him to the door of his house.

I laid my hand on his arm; he turned quite without surprised; and indeed it is possible that to him, whose inner life had soaked up the outer life, a parting of years was a parting from forenoon to afternoon. He stood holding the door half open, as though he would keep me from entering; and would perhaps have parted from me without further words had I not said: ‘Owen Aherne, you trusted me once, will you not trust me again, and tell me what has come of the ideas we discussed in this house ten years ago?—but perhaps you have already forgotten them.’

‘You have a right to hear,’ he said, ‘for since I have told you the ideas, I should tell you the extreme danger they contain, or rather the boundless wickedness they contain; but when you have heard this we must part, and part for ever, because I am lost, and must be hidden!’<sup>32</sup>

I followed him through the paved passage, and saw that its corners were choked with dust and cobwebs; and that the pictures were grey with dust and shrouded with

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<sup>31</sup> Neoclassical building in Inns Quay, Dublin, location of the Supreme Court, High Court, Dublin Circuit Court, and formerly the Central Criminal Court.

<sup>32</sup> For the tradition of hiding a visionary after his or her vision of the divine, see Moses after the vision on Sinai in Exodus 34:30-5. In the biblical passage, Moses’ face becomes so radiant from looking upon the divine, Aaron and the other Israelites are too afraid to look upon him or come near him. After Moses relays what God told him on Mount Sinai, Moses veils his face. As a direct parallel, Aherne reveals the new tables to our narrator in the conversation that follows.

cobwebs; and that the dust and cobwebs which covered the ruby and sapphire of the saints on the window had made it very dim. He pointed to where the ivory tablets glimmered faintly in the dimness, and I saw that they were covered with small writing, and went up to them and began to read the writing. It was in Latin, and was an elaborate casuistry, illustrated with many examples, but whether from his own life or from the lives of others I do not know. I had read but a few sentences when I imagined that a faint perfume had begun to fill the room, and turning round asked Owen Aherne if he were lighting the incense.

‘No,’ he replied, and pointed where the thurible lay rusty and empty on one of the benches; as he spoke the faint perfume seemed to vanish, and I was persuaded I had imagined it.<sup>33</sup>

‘Has the philosophy of the *Liber inducens in Evangelium aeternum* made you very unhappy?’ I said.

‘At first I was full of happiness,’ he replied, ‘for I felt a divine ecstasy, an immortal fire in every passion, in every hope, in every desire, in every dream; and I saw, in the shadows under leaves, in the hollow waters, in the eyes of men and women, its image, as in a mirror; and it was as though I was about to touch the Heart of God. Then all changed and I was full of misery; and in my misery it was revealed to me that man can only come to that Heart through the sense of separation from it which we call sin, and I understood that I could not sin, because I had discovered the law of my being, and could only express or fail to express my being, and I understood that God has made a simple and an arbitrary law that we may sin and repent!’

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<sup>33</sup> A thurible is a censer, a bowl for burning incense, suspended upon a chain or chains, used in Mass and in ceremonial magic.

He had sat down on one of the wooden benches and now became silent, his bowed head and hanging arms and listless body having more of dejection than any image I have met with in life or in any art. I went and stood leaning against the altar, and watched him, not knowing what I should say; and I noticed his black closely-buttoned coat, his short hair, and shaved head, which preserved a memory of his priestly ambition, and understood how Catholicism had seized him in the midst of the vertigo he called philosophy; and I noticed his lightless eyes and his earth-coloured complexion, and understood how she had failed to do more than hold him on the margin: and I was full of an anguish of pity.

‘It may be,’ he went on, ‘that the angels who have hearts of the Divine Ecstasy, and bodies of the Divine Intellect, need nothing but a thirst for the immortal element, in hop, in desire, in dreams; but we whose hearts perish every moment, and whose bodies melt away like a sigh, must bow and obey!’

I went nearer to him and said, ‘Prayer and repentance will make you like other men.’

‘No, no,’ he said, ‘I am not among those for whom Christ died, and this is why I must be hidden. I have a leprosy that even eternity cannot cure. I have seen the whole, and how can I come again to believe that a part is the whole? I have lost my soul because I have looked out of the eyes of the angels.’

Suddenly I saw, or imagined that I saw, the room darken, and faint figures robed in purple, and lifting faint torches with arms that gleamed like silver, bending above Owen Aherne; and I saw, or imagined that I saw, drops, as of burning gum, fall from the torches, and a heavy purple smoke, as of incense, come pouring from the flames and

sweeping about us. Owen Aherne, more happy than I who have been half initiated into the Order of the Alchemical Rose, or protected perhaps by his great piety, had sunk again into dejection and listlessness, and saw none of these things; but my knees shook under me, for the purple-robed figures were less faint every moment, and now I could hear the hissing of the gum in the torches. They did not appear to see me, for their eyes were upon Owen Aherne; now and again I could hear them sigh as though with sorrow for his sorrow, and presently I heard words which I could not understand except that they were words of sorrow, and sweet as though immortal was talking to immortal. Then one of them waved her torch, and all the torches waved, and for a moment it was as though some great bird made of flames had fluttered its plumage, and a voice cried as from far up in the air, 'He has charged even his angels with folly, and they also bow and obey; but let your heart mingle with our hearts, which are wrought of Divine Ecstasy, and our body with our bodies, which are wrought of Divine Intellect.' And at that cry I understood that the Order of the Alchemical Rose was not of this earth, and that it was still seeking over this earth for whatever souls it could gather within its glittering net; and when all the faces turned towards me, and I saw the mild eyes and the unshaken eyelids, I was full of terror, and thought they were about to fling their torches upon me, so that all I held dear, all that bound me to spiritual and social order, would be burnt up, and my soul left naked and shivering among the winds that blow from beyond this world and from beyond the stars; and then a voice cried, 'Why do you fly from our torches that were made out of the trees under which Christ wept in the Garden of Gethsemane?'<sup>34</sup> Why do you fly from our torches that were made out of the sweet wood, after it had perished from the world?'

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<sup>34</sup> Gethsemane: Hebrew, meaning "oil press," designating an olive orchard on the western slope of the Mount of Olives. Gethsemane is the garden in which Christ spends his time praying and weeping in agony

It was not until the door of the house had closed behind my flight, and the noise of the street was breaking on my ears, that I came back to myself and to a little of my courage; and I have never dared to pass the house of Owen Aherne from that day, even though I believe him to have been driven into some distant country by the spirits whose name is legion, and whose throne is in the indefinite abyss, and whom he obeys and cannot see.

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before his crucifixion. The Greek word *chrīstos* comes from the translation of the Hebrew word *mashiah* (*messiah*), which means “anointed,” to consecrate with oil in a ceremony. According to the Gospel, Jesus’ betrayal occurs right after his agony in Gethsemane. See Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, and Luke 22:39-46. The garden is simply called “garden” in John 18:1.



The Adoration of the Magi

I was sitting reading late into the night a little after my last meeting with Aherne,<sup>1</sup> when I heard a light knocking on my front door; and found upon the doorstep three very old men with stout sticks in their hands, who said they had been told I would be up and about, and that they were to tell me important things. I brought them into my study, and when the peacock curtains had closed behind us, I set their chairs for them close to the fire, for I saw that the frost was on their great-coats of frieze and upon the long beards that flowed almost to their waists. They took off their great-coats, and leaned over the fire warming their hands, and I saw that their clothes had much of the country of our time, but a little also, as it seemed to me, of the town life of a more courtly time. When they had warmed themselves—and they warmed themselves, I thought, less because of the cold of the night than because of a pleasure in warmth for the sake of warmth—they turned towards me, so that the light of the lamp fell full upon their weather-beaten faces, and told the story I am about to tell. Now one talked and now another, and they often interrupted one another, with a desire, like that of countrymen, when they tell a story, to leave no detail untold. When they had finished, they made me take notes of whatever conversation they had quoted, so that I might have the exact words, and got up to go, and when I asked them where they were going, and what they were doing, and by what names I should call them, they would tell me nothing, except that they had been commanded to travel over Ireland continually, and upon foot and at night, that they might live close to the stones and the trees and at the hours when the Immortals are awake.<sup>2</sup>

I have let some years go by before writing out this story, for I am always in dread of the illusions which come of that inquietude of the veil of the Temple, which M.

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<sup>1</sup> This story takes place just after “Tables of the Law.”

<sup>2</sup> At night, when the energies are most active.

Mallarmé considers a characteristic of our times;<sup>3</sup> and only write it now because I have grown to believe that there is no dangerous idea which does not become less dangerous when written out in sincere and careful English.

The three old men were three brothers, who had lived in one of the western islands from their early manhood, and had cared all their lives for nothing except for those classical writers and old Gaelic writers who expounded an heroic and simple life. Night after night in winter, Gaelic story-tellers would chant old poems to them over the poteen;<sup>4</sup> and night after night in summer, when the Gaelic story-tellers were at work in the fields or away at the fishing, they would read to one another Virgil and Homer, for they would not enjoy in solitude, but as the ancients enjoyed. At last a man, who told them he was Michael Robartes, came to them in a fishing-boat, like Saint Brendan drawn by some vision and called by some voice;<sup>5</sup> and told them of the coming again of the gods and the ancient things; and their hearts, which had never endured the body and pressure of our time, but only of distant times, found nothing unlikely in anything he told them, but accepted all simply and were happy. Years passed, and one day, when the oldest of the old men, who had travelled in his youth and thought sometimes of other lands, looked out on the grey waters, on which the people see the dim outline of the Islands of the Young—the Happy Islands where the Gaelic heroes live the lives of Homer’s Phaeacians<sup>6</sup>—a voice came out of the air over the waters and told him of the death of

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<sup>3</sup> Stephane Mallarmé (1842-1898), French symbolist, critic, and poet. This statement is in reference to the veil covering the Holy of Holies, torn after Christ’s death on the cross. See Matthew 27:50-1, Mark 15:37-8, and Luke 23:45-6. See the introduction.

<sup>4</sup> Or poitín, one of the strongest alcoholic beverages in the world, illegal in Ireland from 1661 until 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Saint Brendan the Navigator, legendary Irish abbot and sea traveler who in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* sailed for seven years in search of the Land of Promise of the Saints.

<sup>6</sup> Islanders in the *Odyssey* whose king’s palace had doors of gold and walls of bronze, guarded by gold and silver hounds, marking the same colors used for the precious book and its container in “The Tables of the Law.”

Michael Robartes. While they were still mourning, the next oldest of the old men fell asleep whilst he was reading out the Fifth Eclogue of Virgil,<sup>7</sup> and a strange voice spoke through him, and bid them set out for Paris,<sup>8</sup> where a dying woman would give them secret names and thereby so transform the world that another Leda would open her knees to the swan, another Achilles beleaguer Troy.<sup>9</sup>

They left their Island, and were at first troubled at all they saw in the world, and came to Paris, and there the youngest met a person in a dream, who told him they were to wander about at hazard until those who had been guiding their footsteps had brought them to a street and a house, whose likeness was shown him in the dream. They wandered hither and thither for many days, until one morning they came into some narrow and shabby streets, on the south of the Seine,<sup>10</sup> where women with pale faces and untidy hair looked at them out of the windows; and just as they were about to turn back because Wisdom could not have alighted in so foolish a neighborhood, they came to a street and the house of the dream. The oldest of the old men, who still remembered some of the modern languages he had known in his youth, went up to the door and knocked, and when he had knocked, the next in age to him said it was not a good house, and could not be the house they were looking for, and urged him to ask for somebody who could not be there and go away. The door was opened by an old over-dressed woman, who said, 'O, you are her three kinsmen from Ireland. She has been expecting you all day.' The old

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<sup>7</sup> *Eclogues*, the first of the three major works by the Roman poet Virgil. The fifth eclogue is a dialogue between Mopsus and Menalcas, in which they sing praise to the nymph Daphnis, inventor of pastoral poetry and son of (or sometimes simply well-favored by) the god Hermes. For a description of Hermes, see introduction.

<sup>8</sup> During the middle to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, artists considered Paris a place in which the arts and the intellect had the ability to flourish, and the city birthed a variety of modes of artistic expression during this time. Yeats frequented Paris throughout his life.

<sup>9</sup> These two myths signify for Yeats the births of two respective ages.

<sup>10</sup> A river in France that runs through Paris and into the English Channel.

men looked at one another and followed her upstairs, passing doors from which pale and untidy women thrust out their heads, and into a room where a beautiful woman lay asleep, another woman sitting by her.

The old woman said, 'Yes they have come at last; now she will be able to die in peace,' and went out.

'We have been deceived by devils,' said one of the old men, 'for the Immortals would not speak through a woman like this.'

'Yes,' said another, 'we have been deceived by the devils, and we must go away quickly.'

'Yes,' said the third, 'we have been deceived by devils, but let us kneel down for a little, for we are by the death-bed of one that has been beautiful.' They knelt down, and the woman sitting by the bed whispered, and as though overcome with fear, and with lowered head, 'At the moment when you knocked she was suddenly convulsed and cried out as I have heard a woman in childbirth and fell backward as though in a swoon.' Then they watched for a little the face upon the pillow and wondered at its look, as of unquenchable desire, and at the porcelain-like refinement of the vessel in which so malevolent a flame had burned.<sup>11</sup>

Suddenly the second oldest of them crowed like a cock, till the room seemed to shake with the crowing. The woman in the bed still slept on in here death-like sleep, but the woman who sat by her head crossed herself and grew pale, and the youngest of the old men cried out, 'A devil has gone into him, and we must be-gone or it will go into us

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<sup>11</sup> In alchemical and religious symbolism, fire, the last substance and the highest in the Ladder of Nature, is an energizing and purifying agent, and, according to seventeenth-century alchemist Thomas Vaughan, "the mask and skreen of the almighty" (qtd. in Haeffner 87). Here, Yeats portrays the harlot as the alchemical vessel that gives birth to a new age.

also.’ Before they could rise from their knees, a resonant chanting voice came from the lips that had crowed and said:— ‘I am not a devil, but I am Hermes the Shepherd of the Dead, I run upon the errands of the gods, and you have heard my sign. The woman who lies there has given birth, and that which she bore has the likeness of a unicorn and is most unlike man of all living things, being cold, hard and virginal. It seemed to be born dancing; and was gone from the room wellnigh upon the instant, for it is of the nature of the unicorn to understand the shortness of life. She does not know it has gone, for she fell into a stupor while it danced, but bend down your ears that you may learn the names that it must obey.’ Neither of the other two old men spoke, but doubtless looked at the speaker with perplexity, for the voice began again: ‘When the Immortals would overthrow the things that are to-day and bring the things that were yesterday, they have no one to help them, but one whom the things that are to-day have cast out. Bow down and very low, for they have chosen this woman in whose heart all follies have gathered, and in whose body all desires have awakened; this woman who has been driven out of Time and has lain upon the bosom of Eternity.’<sup>12</sup>

The voice ended with a sigh, and immediately the old man awoke out of sleep, and said, ‘Has a voice spoken through me, as it did when I feel asleep over my Virgil, or have I only been asleep?’

The oldest of them said, ‘A voice has spoken through you. Where has your soul been while the voice was speaking through you?’

‘I do not know where my soul has been, but I dreamed I was under the roof of a manger, and I looked down and I saw an ox and an ass; and I saw a red cock perching on the hay-rack; and a woman hugging a child; and three old men in chain armour kneeling

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<sup>12</sup> The harlot is impure but, like Aherne, has experienced Eternity.

with their heads bowed very low in front of the woman and the child. While I was looking the cock crowed and a man with wings on his heels<sup>13</sup> swept up through the air, and as he passed me, cried out, “Foolish old men, you had once all the wisdom of the stars.” I do not understand my dream or what it would have us do, but you who have heard the voice out of the wisdom of my sleep know what we have to do.’

Then the oldest of the old men told him they were to take the parchments they had brought with them out of their pockets and spread them on the ground. When they had spread them on the ground, they took out of their pockets their pens, made of three feathers which had fallen from the wing of the old eagle that is believed to have talked of wisdom with Saint Patrick.<sup>14</sup>

‘He meant, I think,’ said the youngest, as he put their ink-bottles by the side of the rolls of parchment, ‘that when people are good the world likes them and takes possession of them, and so eternity comes through people who are not good or who have been forgotten. Perhaps Christianity was good and the world liked it, so now it is going away and the Immortals are beginning to awake.’

‘What you say has no wisdom,’ said the oldest, ‘because if there are many Immortals, there cannot be only one Immortal.’<sup>15</sup>

‘Yet it seems,’ said the youngest, ‘that the names we are to take down are the names of one, so it must be that he can take many forms.’

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<sup>13</sup> Hermes.

<sup>14</sup> The source story for this is unknown, but in the early Christian tradition (which Yeats came to understand through Saint Patrick) three feathers symbolized both truth and the three virtues (hope, charity, and faith), perhaps borrowed from the Egyptian symbol of the feather of Ma’at, which weighed the heart’s virtuosity after death as seen used in the Old Testament – Job 31:6 and Daniel 5:27 (Perry). The feathers may be those of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>15</sup> The belief that there are many gods that the one God embodies Himself through is a fundamental belief of “Gnosis” or Gnosticism, a Christian sect. Carl Jung posits that alchemists passed along the beliefs of this sect through treatises, art, and other works in the alchemical tradition.

Then the woman on the bed moved as in a dream, and held out her arms as though to clasp the being that had left her, and murmured names of endearment, and yet strange names, 'Harsh sweetness,' 'Dear bitterness,' 'O solitude,' 'O terror,' and after lay still for a while. Then her voice changed, and she, no longer afraid and happy but seeming like any dying woman, murmured a name so faintly that the woman who sat by the bed bent down and put her ear close to her mouth.

The oldest of the old men said in French, 'There must have been yet one name which she had not given us, for she murmured a name while the spirit was going out of the body,' and the woman said, 'She was merely murmuring over the name of a symbolist painter she was fond of. He used to go to something he called the Black Mass,<sup>16</sup> and it was he who taught her to see visions and to hear voices.'

This is all the old men told me, and when I think of their speech and of their silence, of their coming and of their going, I am almost persuaded that had I followed them out of the house, I would have found no footsteps in the snow. They may, for all I or any man can say, have been themselves Immortals: immortal demons, come to put an untrue story into my mind for some purpose I do not understand. Whatever they were, I have turned into a pathway which will lead me from them and from the Order of the Alchemical Rose. I no longer live an elaborate and haughty life, but seek to lose myself among the prayers and the sorrows of the multitude. I pray best in poor chapels, where frieze coats brush against me as I kneel, and when I pray against the demons I repeat a prayer which was made I know not how many centuries ago to help some poor Gaelic man or woman who had suffered with a suffering like mine:—

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<sup>16</sup> Satanic parody ritual of the Catholic Mass.

Seacht b-paidreacha fo seacht  
 Chuir Muire faoi n-a Mac,  
 Chuir Brighid faoi n-a brat,  
 Chuir Dia faoi n-a neart,  
 Eidir sinn ‘san Sluagh Sidhe,  
 Eidir sinn ‘san Sluagh Gaoith.

Seven paters seven times,  
 Send Mary by her Son,  
 Send Bridget by her mantle,  
 Send God by His strength,  
 Between us and the faery host,  
 Between us and the demons of the air.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> These are the first six lines of a Celtic devotional prayer entitled “Seven Paters Seven Times.” Gould and Toomey remark that, according Yeats, “the distinction between good and evil faery hosts had come in ‘with Christianity, and its belief about the prince of the air...for the host of the Sidhe...are closely associated with the wind’” (*Mythologies* 430). This Christian rendition of the prayer conflates Celtic and Christian beliefs but also shows that the Christian era (by way of establishing fear of the spirits) suppressed spiritual independence and sovereignty of consciousness, as it seems to do for the narrator, paralleling the endings to the two previous stories.

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