

January 2022

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### Recommended Citation

Higgins, Sørina (2022) "Spirits on Stage Rosicrucian Magic in *The Countless Children*," *International Yeats Studies*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34068/IYS.6.1.3>

Available at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/iys/vol6/iss1/3>

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# SPIRITS ON STAGE

## ROSICRUCIAN MAGIC IN *THE COUNTLESS CHILDREN*

*Sorina Higgins*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Although Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen*,<sup>1</sup> originally published in 1892 and first performed in 1899, is normally associated with the early stages of his career, the play's textual history spans at least a thirty-five-year period, with manuscript fragments and proof corrections existing from 1889 to 1934.<sup>2</sup> It is thus not surprising to find that critical discussions of the play often focus on connections between Yeats's revisions and key transitional moments in his personal and professional life, including everything from his tumultuous relationship with Maud Gonne, to his disillusionment over the nationalist response to the 1899 production, to his forays into more experimental forms of theater. What is surprising, given this extensive body of scholarship, is that critics have heretofore failed to address the relationship between this haunting play and a particular magical ritual that Yeats experienced in 1893—a Golden Dawn initiation rite called the “Ceremony of the Grade 5° = 6° of Adeptus Minor.”<sup>3</sup> That experience fundamentally shaped many of the revisions he made to stage choreography, symbolic tableaux, emblems, and characters, as he wrote into *The Countess Cathleen* doctrines and performances lifted directly from the high drama of this secret society.

At a basic level, these changes highlight the degree to which Yeats believed, quite literally, in the magical power of the dramatist. The Adeptus Minor or 5° = 6° initiation teaches the value of humility, enacts self-sacrifice, and dramatizes death and resurrection. The goal of this rite is for the initiate to “apply myself to the Great Work—which is, to purify and exalt my spiritual nature so that with the divine aid I may at length attain to be more than human, and thus gradually raise and unite myself to my higher and divine genius.”<sup>4</sup> By illuminating and attending to the direct correspondence between this ritual and the spiritual teachings in *The Countess Cathleen*, I will demonstrate that the play was carefully revised to teach syncretistic doctrines of resurrection, purification, and divinization; to enact the evocative power of the poetic imagination; and to offer enlightenment to the audience. I begin by providing an overview of Yeats's magical interests from the late 1890s through the early 1900s, focusing on several short prose works from the period. I then present a description of

the relevant ritual, followed by a substantial analysis of corresponding major revisions to the play. These comparisons reveal that Cathleen is an adept on the road to divinization, that Aleel is an enlightened poet-seer, and that the audience is meant to access their higher selves by participation in this theatrical performance.

## II. YEATS AND MAGIC

Magic was of the utmost importance to Yeats. Before joining the Golden Dawn, he had already studied and practiced magic on his own and in various groups, including the Dublin Hermetic Society, the Theosophical Society, and the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society. He was initiated into the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn (G.:D.:) in 1890. The G.:D.: was a secret society structured on a system of hierarchical grades through which initiates moved towards enlightenment and divinization via study, examination, and ritual practices.<sup>5</sup> Its core idea is that everything in the universe has evolved from primal light and that all beings can return to their divine source, becoming one with it.<sup>6</sup> To achieve that divine goal, members studied “the basics of occult science” and “*practical magic*.”<sup>7</sup> Initiates travelled through an orderly system of Grades, each marked by high ceremonial rituals, designed to train the aspirant in achieving altered levels of consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

Yeats remained in various permutations of the G.:D.: longer than nearly any other member.<sup>9</sup> Although he would later turn to his own spiritual visions, Yeats dedicated a great deal of time and energy in the 1890s and early 1900s to mastering the G.:D.:’s system of magic, participating vigorously in a leadership crisis throughout 1900 and 1901, and emerging as a high-level adept with lecturing and leadership responsibilities. He found the G.:D.:’s teachings and practices in harmony with his own beliefs that humans are essentially divine, that there exists a kind of universal memory or collective mind called the *Anima Mundi*, that a trained adept can achieve altered states of consciousness to tap into this higher self, and that poets can use literary symbols to communicate spiritual truths to the initiated and uninitiated alike.<sup>10</sup>

Yeats’s dedication to magic deepened further in 1893 when he joined the more magical Rosicrucian Inner Order of the Ruby Rose and Golden Cross, which members referred to as the R.R. & A.C. after its Latin name, *Roseae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis*. Rosicrucianism traces its legendary beginnings to a putative founder called Christian Rosenkreutz, who discovered secret wisdom and whose body lay preserved in its tomb for a hundred and twenty years. Combining religion and philosophy, its main tenets include magic, spiritual alchemy, and Qabalah.<sup>11</sup> The Rosicrucian inner order in the G.:D.: was a new development; before its birth in 1891, the G.:D.: had been “without magic,”

but after its introduction, magic quickly became the heart of the Order, at least in part because of Yeats's efforts.<sup>12</sup>

After joining this inner order, Yeats progressed to a high level of adeptship as a practical magician. The lofty rank of Adeptus Minor could not be attained until after several years of intense study and practice of the system of "Outer" rituals, which were "intended as a preparation for the practical work to be performed in the Inner or Second Order."<sup>13</sup> Once through the Portal into the R.R. et A.C., an adept would dedicate a great deal of time to study, meditation on systems of symbolism, visualization techniques, and other internal or psychological disciplines, all designed to achieve unity with the higher, divine self. Many of the ritual practices were intended to give insight into the essence of reality.<sup>14</sup> Magic granted vision into timeless planes of being, which the trained magus could manipulate to create real effects here in the material world.

However, as Yeats progressed in his studies, his primary interest was not in power over external nature. Instead, as Mary Catherine Flannery notes, "magic began to mean [. . .] a kind of control over self which makes possible a control over events."<sup>15</sup> The R.R. et A.C.'s ritual practices were mostly visualization techniques that trained the mind to achieve higher forms of consciousness. Aren Roukema explains that modern "occultists often saw 'magic' as an effect of imagination that produced psychological effects within the self so that magicians themselves, rather than their surroundings, were affected."<sup>16</sup> "The entire object of all magical and alchemical processes," writes Regardie, "is the purification of the natural man, and by working upon his nature to extract the pure gold of spiritual attainment."<sup>17</sup> Modern ceremonial magic was inward-focused and aimed at the spiritual transformation of the practitioner: "the abnegation of the lower self and the union with the higher."<sup>18</sup> In short, modern magic aimed at putting the practitioner in touch with his or her higher, divine self.

### III. THE EVOCATION OF SPIRITS

One distinctive feature of the G.:D.:s theories of spiritual evolution that Yeats heartily adopted was the evocation of otherworldly beings. Neophytes (aspirants in the lowest grade) learned "how to attract and come into communication with spiritual and invisible things."<sup>19</sup> Adepts in higher grades were given detailed rituals for making spirits "fully and clearly visible" and compelling them to do the magician's will.<sup>20</sup> The belief in communication with the spirit world is fundamental to Yeats's varieties of religious experience and to his concept of the poet-seer. For example, he often called upon "the spirit of the moon," and he and Maud Gonne regularly "evoke[d] a druid for help on the rites for the Celtic Mystical Order."<sup>21</sup> He frequently invoked Aengus, Lug, or Midir (characters from the Celtic pantheon), sometimes alone, and

sometimes together with Gonne or with his uncle George Pollexfen.<sup>22</sup> Later, of course, his wife George performed automatic writing, taking dictation “purporting to be from disembodied communicators from realms of spirit,” and that material formed the basis of *A Vision*.<sup>23</sup> He also attended séances, recorded communications with a putative spirit called Leo Africanus, and wrote essays on spiritualism and clairvoyance. He describes a realistic séance in *Words Upon the Window-Pane*, and evocations appear in *Rosa Alchemica*. The existence, immortality, and transformation of souls, as well as ongoing dialogue with them after death, were crucial to him.

The theme of spirit evocation runs through four prose works that Yeats composed between 1895 and 1901, the same period when he was actively revising *The Countess Cathleen* following his admission into the R.R. & A.C. The first, a brief essay entitled “The Moods” that appeared in *The Bookman*,<sup>24</sup> makes no mention of magic *per se*, but it does make bold claims about the revelatory power of poetry and drama. Yeats describes literature as “wrought about a mood... as the body is wrought about an invisible soul,”<sup>25</sup> and he further asserts that these moods “are the labourers and messengers of the Ruler of All”; they are “gods” or “angels.”<sup>26</sup> The feeling invoked by a literary work is an otherworldly entity, making its presence or nature felt via the symbols the author has assembled. Yeats’s “moods” are thus more than mere conveyors of emotion, atmosphere, or tone. They are revelations that enable the individual to have a “part in eternity.”<sup>27</sup> The poet-mage has a particular responsibility in relation to these revelatory moods: “the imaginative artist [. . .] belongs to the invisible life, and delivers its ever new and ever ancient revelation.”<sup>28</sup> The artist, Yeats believed, was a kind of prophet-seer, communicating salvific revelation.

His next essay on the theme of evocation, “The Symbolism of Poetry,” was published in *The Dome* in April 1900, and it expands the messenger motif.<sup>29</sup> This piece is a rejoinder to those readers who think that poetry does not need to be theorized. On the contrary, Yeats writes, all writers and artists “have had some philosophy,” and it “has evoked their most startling inspiration, calling into outer life some portion of the divine life.”<sup>30</sup> The words “evoked” and “calling” are clearly intentional, for he literally means the evocation of spirits. The phrase “divine life” refers to unity with the higher self, which was the goal of all modern magic. By referencing the “outer life,” he reminds artists of their obligation to share revelations with their audiences. Later in the essay, he makes this claim explicit: “All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, *evoke* indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers”—certain moods, gods, or angels—“whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions.”<sup>31</sup> The word “evoke” here is precise. Yeats, the magical practitioner who recently learned to evoke spirits as part of his R.R. &

A.C. training, believes that the symbolic arrangement of words and images in poetry actually calls down—or calls up—divine spirits. Poetry and drama are magical: they are efficacious for invoking spiritual beings.

The third prose work on this topic is the essay “Magic,” written in 1900–01 when the R.R. & A.C. was in the throes of its leadership crisis.<sup>32</sup> He delivered this material as a lecture on May 4, 1901, and it was published in *The Monthly Review* in September 1901, and then again in *Ideas of Good and Evil*.<sup>33</sup> This is his public expression to the uninitiated world at large of his spiritual beliefs. Its opening is designed to startle readers: “I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic,” and, he further declares, “in what I must call the evocation of spirits.”<sup>34</sup> He goes on to say that, while he does not know what these spirits are, he believes in “the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed.”<sup>35</sup> He contends that human minds flow in and out of one another, sharing memories and archetypes in a great *Anima Mundi*, the vast collective unconscious which “can be evoked by symbols.”<sup>36</sup> Taken in context with “The Symbolism of Poetry,” it becomes clear that this is a reiteration of the doctrine that divine spirits can be called up by words and images—symbols—written on a page, spoken aloud, or performed on a stage.

Yeats’s belief in the artistic evocation of spirits is reinforced throughout the essay, suggesting that its real subject is not the initiated magician but the poet. When, for example, he wants to stress that spiritual power resides in the sequence of phonemes—the very vibrations of sound waves—he asks rhetorically, “Have not poetry and music arisen, as it seems, out of the sounds the enchanters made to help their imagination to enchant, to charm, to bind with a spell themselves and the passers-by?”<sup>37</sup> Invocation relies heavily on acoustics, for it is “operated through the harmonious combination of the forces of sound, Colour, Number and Form.”<sup>38</sup> Further emphasizing the magical power of the poet, he suggests that “Men who are imaginative writers to-day may well have preferred to influence the imagination of others more directly in past times.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, both magicians and writers use their imaginations to influence other people’s imaginations: both use symbols to invoke and evoke “invisible beings, far-flung influences.”<sup>40</sup> Both the magician and the creative writer can use “spoken words” or “unspoken thought” to call spirits “up, as it were, out of Hell or down out of Heaven.”<sup>41</sup> These three essays together make clear that Yeats believed in the literal existence of supernatural beings who could be evoked by words and symbols, either in magical ritual or in creative writing, to share eternal truths with an audience.

While Yeats’s public essays on moods, symbolism, and magic contain startling revelations about his occult beliefs, a privately printed pamphlet divulges much more. Written in March 1901 and given to the Adepti in

April 1901 “to warn his colleagues against the danger of fragmentation,”<sup>42</sup> this pamphlet, entitled *Is the Order R.R. & A.C. to remain a Magical Order?*, reveals Yeats’s beliefs in the invisible masters of the “Third Order,” in the organic vitality of the Order, and in the dangers of calling up evil spirits unintentionally. After a schism divided the G.:D.:’s leadership, splinter groups had begun to form among the remaining Inner Order members. Yeats believed that such divisions were extremely dangerous, and he wrote this pamphlet to urge unity. Yet it is no dry committee report. According to Margaret Mills Harper, this document “represents an early attempt to meld matter with presentation, to speak not as a solitary genius but as a personality joined to the minds of others and linked by correspondence to higher authors on the chain.”<sup>43</sup> Its diction, underlying assumptions, obscure references, and goals all assume a like-minded community of adepts highly versed in magical theory and practice. It has far-reaching implications for understanding his work from this period and beyond, as it “represents his most thoughtful philosophical observation about the nature of the universe and of man’s relationship to everything outside himself.”<sup>44</sup> It is the bridge between his magical endeavors and his theatrical turn.

Yeats begins this essay by reminding his fellow Adepts that they have to decide whether they intend the R.R. & A.C. “to remain a Magical Order at all, in the true sense of the word.”<sup>45</sup> But what does “magical” mean here? According to Yeats in 1901, “The central principle of all the Magic of power is that everything we formulate in the imagination, if we formulate it strongly enough, realises itself in the circumstances of life, acting either through our own souls, or through the spirits of nature.”<sup>46</sup> Magic, then, is the act of imagining something and, through deep concentration, making it real. It is a process of controlled meditation and visualization that can have an effect either inside the magical practitioner or outside in the phenomenal universe. It is, he states, “a discipline that is essentially symbolic and evocative.”<sup>47</sup> Given what we have already seen in the essays on moods, symbolism, and magic, we know that “symbolic” and “evocative” are equivalent for Yeats. The use of words—whether in ritual, poetry, or dramatic performance—to evoke symbols results in the invocation of spirits. Magic, poetry, and drama all involve a master of words conjuring symbols in another’s imagination, which activates spiritual forces and effects real change in that person’s consciousness.

This pamphlet “in effect concluded the episode” of the Order’s leadership crisis, but Yeats’s warnings were not heeded.<sup>48</sup> The R.R. & A.C. only lasted another two years. In 1903, the Order split in two: Yeats and the more magically inclined adepts went one way, forming the Amoun Temple of the Stella Matutina branch of the G.:D.:, while the more mystically inclined Christian members went another. He had written that separating into groups creates “centres of

death, to this greater life [of the Order]; astral disease sapping up, as it were, its vital fluids.”<sup>49</sup> Yeats’s pamphlet proved prophetic, and he turned to drama to express his spiritual beliefs.

Many scholars agree that the turn of the century saw Yeats increasingly directing his energies toward the theater. “After 1897–98,” writes Flannery, “Yeats turned away from active revolutionary politics and toward the theatre.”<sup>50</sup> Terence Brown agrees that “it was upon the enabling powers of drama and mythology, which he had already begun to exploit as an artist in the 1890s, that his imaginative survival would increasingly come to depend in the new century.”<sup>51</sup> Yeats himself saw this happening: “His own view, at this juncture,” claims R. F. Foster, “was that his future lay in poetic drama” (*Life 1* 218).

His turn toward drama, however, did not mean that he was repudiating magic; rather, he brought his experience with staging magic ritual to his work in theater. He did not decide to be an author instead of a magician, for he saw the two vocations as coterminous, writing in 1900: “I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist.”<sup>52</sup> Artists are not merely the successors of magicians: they *are* magicians, working their spells in public rather than in private and on the audience’s imagination rather than on the forces of nature. Indeed, the artist-poet-playwright is the greater of the two, for it is “the function of the chosen spirit, the seer, to project his visions in the concrete imagery and symbolism of art [. . .]. The artist has a higher function than the ‘magician.’ The artist, in effect, goes one step further,” bringing salvific eternal knowledge to an audience.<sup>53</sup>

Theater and ritual have long been associated, but in Yeats’s plays, they are fused. “Occultism, or [. . .] spiritual ideas, underlie all his early plays” writes Richard Ellmann, while Michael Sidnell and Wayne Chapman observe that magic “pervades” *The Countess Cathleen*; these observations are perfectly true, but do not go far enough to explain the specificity of his occult dramaturgy.<sup>54</sup> Foster comes closer when notes that Yeats believed “the function of art was to invoke spiritual realities” (*Life 1* 210). As we have seen, Yeats quite literally believed that his poetry and plays invoked spiritual realities, even spiritual beings. But it is not merely that Yeats was involved in occult rituals, enjoyed the theatricality of those rites, and used what he learned as an initiate to color his own plays and heighten their drama. He goes much farther than that. Yeats actually *stages* occult rituals in *The Countess Cathleen*, performing before the public the ceremonies he learned in secret.



**IV. THE PLAY & THE RITE**

In particular, *The Countess Cathleen* stages elements of the initiation ceremony into the Grade of Adeptus Minor. Roukema writes that it is “one of the most impactful occultist rituals.”<sup>55</sup> Regardie describes it as “the jewel in the crown of the Order ceremonial system” and “the most important as well as the most beautiful of the grade rituals employed by the Golden Dawn.”<sup>56</sup> This rite was “an extremely complex ritual in four parts [. . .] quite unlike anything that the candidate had experienced before. It was a second initiation, not a mere progression, and it involved the symbolic death and resurrection of the candidate.”<sup>57</sup> The imagery and choreography of this ritual were theatrical, visually impressive, “startling and spectacular,” emotionally effecting, and “awe-inspiring.”<sup>58</sup> R. A. Gilbert writes that “the effect on candidates must have been overwhelming.”<sup>59</sup> Brown writes that it “fed the poet’s imagination with a richly profuse symbolism,” turned him into a symbolist, and led him to “expect poetry to serve as a handmaiden to magic.”<sup>60</sup> An examination of the play Yeats was revising after this time reveals how true these claims are.

*The Countess Cathleen* is the story of a noblewoman who sells her soul to two demons in exchange for money to feed her starving tenants. She dies of a broken heart, but her soul goes to heaven because her motives were pure. As Yeats revised the text many times, its enactment of Rosicrucian beliefs became less analogical and more literal. *The Countess Cathleen* is “Yeats’s most revised work,” both in the number of changes and the length of revision period (over thirty years); consequently, it is “the most complex to collate” of all his plays.<sup>61</sup> Five versions were published between 1892 and 1913, and other variations exist in manuscript form and in notes from performances.<sup>62</sup> For the purposes of this article, I am interested in all revisions that occurred after 1893, regardless of when they enter the manuscript record or publication history. I do not pursue the chronology of revision beyond noting whether a variant was present before Yeats’s Adeptus Minor initiation or introduced afterwards.<sup>63</sup> The play evolved significantly even in just those first three years. By 1895, “the mood was utterly transformed.”<sup>64</sup> The new version had a more lofty, spiritual atmosphere, “an elaborate mythological imagery,” and profound “new meanings.” Specifically, I assert that those “new meanings”<sup>65</sup> reveal the influence of the Adeptus Minor initiation ceremony in their emphasis on the soul’s Christ-like nature and the poet’s role as seer. There are eight important revisions Yeats made after his inner-order initiation, which I shall detail below.

## 1. Cathleen's Charity

The first lesson taught by the Adeptus Minor ritual is the importance of humility and self-sacrifice. At the beginning of the ceremony, the candidate is “warned that not in any vainglorious spirit are the mysteries to be approached.”<sup>66</sup> Because the candidate has entered, symbolically at least, in an attitude of pride, the officiant issues a rebuke:

O Aspirant! It is written that he<sup>67</sup> who exalteth himself shall be abased, but that he who humbleth himself shall be exalted, and that blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not by proclamation of honours and dignities, great though they may be, that thou canst gain admission to the Tomb of the Adepti of the Rose of Ruby and the Cross of Gold, but only by that humility and purity of spirit that befitteth the aspirant unto higher things.<sup>68</sup>

As an enactment of the aspirant's humility, the leaders strip off his fancy ornaments, “clothe him in the black robe of mourning,” and proclaim: “Let his hands be bound behind his back, symbolic of the binding force of his obligations, and put a chain about his neck, the emblem of repentance and humility.”<sup>69</sup> The physical enactment of self-deprecation was designed to make a deep impression upon an imaginative candidate.

Although the Countess Cathleen is a model of the virtues of humility, purity of spirit, and selflessness in all versions of the play, the memory of Yeats's own symbolic mortification was likely a key factor in his decision to alter the opening scene so that her charitable spirit is rendered even more obvious. Originally, the setting was a public inn, and Cathleen did not appear. In the revised version, Cathleen, Oona (her old nurse), and the poet Aleel visit the Rua family in their poor cottage, a setting which emphasizes their poverty and thus lends greater force to Cathleen's charity when, in response to their hungry lamentations, she “empties her purse upon the table.”<sup>70</sup> The fact that she wishes she had more money to give, having already dispensed the rest to others in need, further highlights her charitable spirit, but, more importantly, it speaks to the primary force of Yeats's revisions—the establishment of Cathleen's role as a humble, self-sacrificial figure and symbolic aspirant.

## 2. Ceremonial Crucifixion and Burial

In the next part of the Adeptus Minor ritual, there are two scenes enacting death, burial, and resurrection. First, there is a mock crucifixion. An officiant commands: “Let the Aspirant be bound to the Cross of Suffering.”<sup>71</sup> The stage directions indicate: “*The aspirant is led to the Cross, and his hands are put*

*through the running nooses and cords are bound about his waist and feet.*<sup>72</sup> Regardie interprets this mock crucifixion as an example of the “Dying God” formula about which in *The Golden Bough* Frazer has written so eloquently.<sup>73</sup> While he admits that “examples of this are to be found in every mythology and every mystical religion that our world has ever known,” Regardie boasts: “I doubt that it has ever attained to a more clarified and definite expression than in this ceremony of the Adeptus Minor grade.”<sup>74</sup> Be that as it may, having the aspirant enact the crucifixion is certainly a dramatic means of encountering the “dying god” myth.

After the initiate undergoes the mock crucifixion, an oath of secrecy is administered, and then the ceremony proceeds to burial:

the candidate is now removed from the cross, and the officers then narrate to him the principal facts in the history of the founder of the Order—Christian Rosenkreutz. [. . .] When the history lecture mentions the discovery of the vault wherein the tomb and body of the illustrious Father were discovered, one of the initiating adepts draws aside a curtain, admitting the candidate to a chamber erected in the midst of the temple.<sup>75</sup>

There is a vault built in an inner room of the space where the ritual is being enacted: an elaborate structure covered with significant symbols. Regardie writes that the revelation of the vault was meaningful and memorable: “As a climax to the very simple temple furniture of the Outer grades, it comes as a psychological spasm and as a highly significant symbol.”<sup>76</sup> It appears that in the case of Yeats-as-aspirant, this was certainly true.

A more dramatic moment was yet to come. The ceremony of “the Second Point” is the most theatrical section. The initiate is taken inside the Vault or Tomb, where an altar stands in the middle of the space. At the appropriate moment in the ritual, two of the presiding adepts roll the altar off to one side—revealing a coffin underneath it. The adepts open the lid, and “the candidate, no doubt to his great surprise, beholds the head of the Chief Adept, who is lying with his eyes closed.”<sup>77</sup> As the stage directions indicate: “*Chief Adept lies in Pastos on his back to represent C.R.C. [Christian Rosenkreutz]*” and then (quite a while later, so the altar and coffin must have had good ventilation), the Second and Third Adepts “*open lid, disclosing Chief Adept within.*”<sup>78</sup> The revelation of the body of their Chief in a coffin is a theatrical, emotionally impressive moment.

### 3. Staging Cathleen’s Body

Yeats revised the ending to imitate the choreography of the buried Chief Adept. At first (in 1892), the stage directions after line 810 read: “*A row of spirits carrying the lifeless body of the COUNTESS KATHLEEN descend slowly*

from the oratory. [. . .] *The spirits lay the body upon the ground with the head upon the knee[s] of OONA.*"<sup>79</sup> Cathleen is dead. Her corpse is carried on stage, her head laid upon the lap of her friend. At first, Yeats had Cathleen die offstage soon after signing away her soul and did not show her on stage again until the presentation of her lifeless body.

However, he later changed the stage directions to these: "*The peasants return. They carry the COUNTESS CATHLEEN and lay her upon the ground before OONA and ALEEL. She lies there as if dead.*"<sup>80</sup> The most important change here is that Cathleen is not dead: "*She lies there as if dead*" (emphasis mine)—but she is still alive. The audience might think she is dead when she is carried in, but then she speaks. This modification enacts the shock an aspirant must have felt when the altar was rolled away, the coffin lid was opened, and the body of the Chief Adept was revealed inside, lying motionless, eyes closed; but then, with relief, the aspirant realized his chief was still alive. Yeats also altered the staging of Cathleen's (still-living) body. It is laid out upon the ground, positioned as if for burial. Her head is not put into Oona's lap; she is at a little distance from the people who love her, her body carefully arranged upon the earth. In other words, her body is choreographed to correspond to that of the Chief Adept's, buried in the earth beneath the altar.

These two changes—keeping Cathleen alive and staging her body as if for burial—are designed to convey the meaning Yeats believed he found in the Adeptus Minor ritual. As is usual in modern magical systems, one symbol represents many things: the entombed Chief represents simultaneously the candidate's higher genius, the legendary founder Christian Rosenkreutz, Osiris, Christ, and all other dying-and-rising-god archetypes—which in turn are all metaphors for the individual soul's potential godhood. The buried body represents "the aspirant's higher Self which is hidden and confined within the personality, itself wandering blindly, lost in the dark wilderness."<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Cathleen has been wandering in a dark wood at the beginning of the play—another post-initiation addition. In the added scene at the Rua family's cottage, she tells them: "I was bid fly the terror of the times," but "I have lost my way."<sup>82</sup> She is in great distress, wandering and lost. But at the end of the play, after she has submitted to a kind of crucifixion—the sacrifice of her soul for the sake of others—she receives a ritual choreography that associates her body with the higher self.

#### 4. Sermon from the Grave

In the Rosicrucian ritual, after the revelation of the Chief Adept's body, the aspirant is treated to a sermon. Lying there in the "pastos" or coffin, "without

moving or opening his eyes, the Chief Adept utters a brief discourse” as if from beyond the grave.<sup>83</sup> The aspirant is declared to be:

Buried with that Light in a mystical death, rising again in a mystical resurrection, cleansed and purified through Him our Master, O brother of the Cross and the Rose. Like Him, O adepts of all ages, have ye toiled. Like Him have ye suffered tribulation. Poverty, torture and death have ye passed through. They have been but the purification of the Gold.<sup>84</sup>

The Chief continues in that alchemical vein: “In the alembic of thine heart, through the athanor of affliction, seek thou the true stone of the Wise.”<sup>85</sup> Although the death and resurrection imagery are obvious in this alchemically inflected speech, the dramatic visual presentation would likely have made this point in the ritual especially memorable for the aspirant.

### 5. Cathleen’s Deathbed Speech

That may well have been the case for Yeats, as he revised the ending of *The Countess Cathleen* to include a speech issued from a grave. Lying on the ground as if arrayed for burial, Cathleen, “half-rising,” enjoins her attendants:

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel:  
 I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes  
 Upon the nest under the eave, before  
 He wanders the loud waters: do not weep  
 Too great a while, for there is many a candle  
 On the high altar though one fall. Aleel  
 Who sang about the people of the raths,  
 That know not the hard burden of the world,  
 Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell!  
 And farewell Oona, who spun flax with me  
 Soft as their sleep when every dance is done:  
 The storm is in my hair and I must go. [*She dies*]<sup>86</sup>

There are many aspects of this speech that are performative of the Adeptus Minor ceremony. The high altar on which the candle-souls are burning is taken directly from the staging of the ritual’s Second Point, which includes an altar in the middle of the many-sided vault.<sup>87</sup> Cathleen’s command to Oona and Aleel to “bend down” puts them in the posture of the aspirant—standing over the Pastos—and positions her in the role of the apparently dead Chief Adept lying in the Tomb.<sup>88</sup> Her injunction not to “weep / Too great a while” echoes the sermon’s statement that tribulation, poverty, torture, and death are all only “the purification of the Gold”: in both cases, grief will give way to something

better. Both talks promise that sorrow and suffering only last for a short time because of the offered hope of resurrection. In the Rosicrucian sermon, this hope is made explicit. The speech begins with a claim that the aspirant's higher self, like the Chief in the coffin, is "Buried with that Light in a mystical death" and will "ris[e] again in a mystical resurrection."<sup>89</sup> In Cathleen's speech, the only hope of a glorious future is in the subtle hint provided by the little light of candle flames: "there is many a candle / On the high altar though one fall."<sup>90</sup> She does not know, of course, that her soul will be accepted by God and go to heaven; the audience must wait a few more moments to receive the vision that brings such a promise. Peter Ure writes that the new ending "is undoubtedly more effective than the final scene was in the 1892 version" because it "gratifies expectation by giving the Countess a death-bed and not just a funeral,"<sup>91</sup> but equally important, Yeats's revision deepens the spiritual impact of the play by infusing it with Rosicrucian doctrine.

## 6. Serpent and Lightning/Sword

The next sizable revision is the inclusion of an important symbol that serves as a framing device at the beginning and end of the ceremony: the dual image of the Serpent and the Lightning/Sword. These represent various modes of enlightenment available to the aspirant. At the beginning of the ceremony of the First Point, when the aspirant is told to humble himself, he is stripped of all his ornaments and given a diagram to hold. This diagram depicts "sword and serpent," because—as the Second Adept informs him—"the flaming sword and the serpent of wisdom shall be the symbol which shall procure thee admission" to the vault.<sup>92</sup> According to the Kabbalistic system adapted by modern occultists, there are many paths towards enlightenment. The first, the way of the Serpent, is the most difficult, the slowest, and the most common. As summarized by Kathleen Raine, this first path is "the 'gyring, spiring' way of the Serpent, by which the wandering Fool makes his journey."<sup>93</sup> It is the long, slow path of study, examinations, initiations, and rituals that most aspirants take years to complete.

But the path of the Sword or the Lightning is rare and precious: Raine explains that it occurs when "the descending lightning-flash [. . .] comes down from heaven to earth. It is the descent of inspiration."<sup>94</sup> It is a sudden moment of direct revelation. In that instant, the goal of magical meditation is achieved, "symbolised by the Lightning Flash among the sacred leaves" and by a searing sword-light that "flows downward continually."<sup>95</sup> This rare, direct revelation is sometimes compared to lightning, sometimes to a flaming sword, and sometimes to both at once: "We receive power," writes Yeats, "from those who are above us by permitting the Lightning of the Supreme to

descend through our souls and own bodies. The power [. . .] comes to a soul and consumes its mortality because the soul has arisen into the path of the Lightning, among the sacred leaves."<sup>96</sup> A few special persons could be blessed by this instantaneous flash of enlightenment.

In the Third Point of the Adeptus Minor ceremony, one of the officiants goes into more detail about the symbolism of the winding serpent and the sword/lightning. Referring to the aspirant's "Admission Badge of the Sword and Serpent," the officiant explains: "The one is ascending, the other is descending; the one is fixed, the other is volatile; the one unites the Sephiroth, the other the Paths. Furthermore, in the Serpent of Wisdom is shown the ascending Spiral, and in the Sword the rush of the descending White Brilliance [. . .]."<sup>97</sup> Although both serpent and sword represent paths to enlightenment, the sword of lightening, given only to the blessed few, is the most direct. At this moment, the Chief Adept attempts to call upon this rare inspiration on behalf of the initiate. The stage directions state: "*Chief Adept raises his hands, invoking the Divine White Brilliance.*"<sup>98</sup> He pauses. This pause is dramatically designed to give the aspirant time to visualize the flash of white lightning and to give a chance for enlightenment to perhaps occur. After the theatrical, pregnant pause, he says to the Aspirant: "Arise now as an Adeptus Minor of the Rose of Ruby and the Cross of Gold in the sign of Osiris slain."<sup>99</sup> In order to complete the initiation, "*All rise. Second and Third Adepts raise aspirant, and extend his arms in a cross.*" Then they receive him as a full Adeptus Minor.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the ritual ends where it began: with the desire for a direct, descending lightning-bolt of inspiration.

## 7. The Storm

The same can be said of play's revised conclusion, in which that flash of enlightenment is symbolized, fittingly enough, by lightening. Whereas the 1892 version contains no mention of a thunderstorm, the version that first appears in the 1895 edition of *Poems* closes in more operatic fashion, as a wild lightning storm bursts into the play.<sup>101</sup> After Cathleen utters her last words, "The storm is in my hair and I must go,"<sup>102</sup> Aleel, in his grief, stands and shrieks a curse against "Time and Fate and Change." The heavens respond with "*A flash of lightning followed by immediate thunder.*"<sup>103</sup> Then, suddenly, Aleel sees the air full of spirits:

Angels and devils clash in the middle air,  
 And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms:  
 [*A flash of lightning followed by immediate thunder*]  
 Yonder a spear, cast out of a sling,  
 Has torn through Balor's eye, and the dark clans  
 Fly screaming as they fled Moytura of old.<sup>104</sup>

In his moment of wild anguish, Aleel is granted enlightenment: he is allowed to see the angels with their swords, the spear tearing through the air. But Cathleen had it first, because the storm was in her very hair. And then the *audience*, too, sees the vision of armed angels. The stage directions read:

*The darkness is broken by a visionary light. [. . .] Half in the light, half in the shadow, stand armed angels. Their armour is old and worn, and their drawn swords dim and dented. They stand as if upon the air in formation of battle and look downward with stern faces. The peasants cast themselves on the ground.*<sup>105</sup>

Yeats has done something utterly astonishing here. Not only does he claim that Cathleen is an inspired adept with enlightenment in her own body, and not only does he show the poet-bard gaining inspiration at the last, but he also reveals the sword of divine brilliance to the uninitiated audience.

Unfortunately, these hosts of supernatural spirits proved too difficult to stage. One manuscript (a copy of the version that appeared in the 1899 edition of *Poems*) has a typed note with handwritten corrections added in ink by Yeats himself, stating:

*Owing* [sic] to the limited stage resources of the Irish Literary Theatre the vision [. . .] had to be omitted. Instead a single angel in white armour and with thin white/~~white~~ hair came to the door of the cottage Aleel on seeing him said 'An armoured child of God stands by the door, / 'His face all worn/~~pale~~, ~~and~~ his hair all silver pale / With beating down the darkness and by age' / He then continued as before [. . .]<sup>106</sup>

One angel walking on the ground is certainly easier to stage than heavenly hosts floating in the air. In both cases, however, Aleel has a vision in which he can see "Angels and devils clash in the middle air, / And brazen swords clang upon brazen helmets."<sup>107</sup> In the simplified staging, the angel still appears and wears armor as metonym for the sword of divine brilliance. In a draft preface for the 1901 *Poems*, Yeats wrote:

The present version of 'The Countess Cathleen' is not quite the version adopted by the Irish Literary Theatre, a couple of years ago, for our stage and scenery were capable of little, and it may differ still more from any stage version I make in future, for it seems that my people of the waters and my unhappy dead, in the Third Act, cannot keep their supernatural essence but put on too much of our mortality in any ordinary theatre.<sup>108</sup>

These comments reveal that Yeats desired to keep the supernatural essence of these mysterious, semi-divine figures (angels? "people of the waters"? the "unhappy dead"?) and struggled with how to stage something paranormal. But



he refused to eliminate the possibility of audience enlightenment. In the 1911 stage version, Yeats made sure to put the sword back on stage, indicating: “A winged angel, carrying a torch and a sword, enters from the Right with eyes fixed upon some distant thing.”<sup>109</sup> In other words, he worked hard to stage the sword of enlightenment in a way that would work practically in the theater and still reveal to the audience as much divine truth as they could handle, not being initiates themselves. Aleel compels the angel to speak and learns that God has accepted Cathleen’s soul into heaven, which provides the audience with confirmation that her enlightenment was true and real.<sup>110</sup> She is a Rosicrucian adept who has enacted sacrifice and death; the hope of her resurrection lingers after the curtain descends.

### 8. The Poet-Mage

The last significant revision I will address is the addition of Aleel, the visionary lover and bard. This figure adds a personal dimension to the Rosicrucian revisions of *The Countess Cathleen*, giving Yeats a stand-in who explores the role of the poet-mage.

The 1892 version featured a minor character named Kevin, “a young bard,” who was played by Yeats himself.<sup>111</sup> When Kevin tries to sell his soul to the demons, having grown tired of it “because her face, / The face of Countess Kathleen dwells with me. / The sadness of the world upon her brow,”<sup>112</sup> they refuse, knowing that his soul already belongs to another. Yeats’s decision to replace Kevin with Aleel in 1895<sup>113</sup> is generally regarded as a crucial change. Ure thinks that “The enlargement of Aleel’s role is of course the most striking feature common to all the revised versions,”<sup>114</sup> while Foster writes: “By 1899 the character Aleel had come into focus as a hopeless poet-minstrel attached to a self-sacrificing goddess-figure” (*Life I* 209). Much of this is true, yet the specific additions involving Aleel also show how Yeats was expanding his concept of the poet/playwright-as-mage in relation to the self-sacrificial adept figure. These additions include: Aleel’s presence during a scene that highlights Cathleen’s charity; his role as a singer; his status as a lover who idealizes Cathleen as his beloved; and his part in the play’s concluding visionary scene.

In the added scene of Cathleen’s charity, which I discussed above, Cathleen is lost in the forest, and laments:

[. . .] the bard Aleel who should know these woods  
 For we met him upon their ~~edge~~ border but now  
 Wandering & singing like a wave the foam of the sea  
 Is so wrapped up in dreams of terrors to come  
 That he can give no help.<sup>115</sup>

He too, like Cathleen, is “wandering blindly, lost in the dark wilderness” at the beginning of the play.<sup>116</sup> Yet he tells the cottagers to close the door and keep out the evil things that are haunting the woods. He trusts to the power of music to keep himself and Cathleen safe, “For though the world drift from us like a sigh / Music is master under all the moon.”<sup>117</sup> Thus he introduces the power of music, a creative art, against the forces of evil.

The Rua family’s squalid cottage is the setting for Aeel’s first song. It is addressed to his own “impetuous heart,” which he bids to “be still” and never speak about its “sorrowful love.” He hides his love underneath his “lonely” music. But then the song shifts in tone and speaks about someone—presumably God—“who could bend all things to hHis will.” This divine being has hidden the door to heaven behind the moon and stars.<sup>118</sup> Aeel is also given two other new songs, “Lift up the white knee” and “Were I but crazy for love’s sake,” which serve to increase and emphasize his role as a poet. He is hopelessly in love with a woman he cannot have; is wandering in spiritual darkness; is a visionary poet-bard; and believes in spiritual realities that he cannot yet see. In other words, he is like Yeats: a young poet-initiate, in love with Maud Gonne, climbing the ranks of a magical secret society, still spiritually unsatisfied.

The love-theme is greatly expanded in revisions. Kevin only mentions briefly that he feels sad when he looks at Cathleen and that he does not want to live any longer, merely hinting at unrequited love. But then Yeats gives Aeel and Cathleen a love scene—added after Yeats’s renewed attempts to woo Gonne—in which their talk is rife with spiritual significance.<sup>119</sup> The Countess welcomes him into her presence, saying that it is only music that can now make her happy. He has come to warn her that she is in danger, claiming divine authority: “They who have sent me walk invisible,” and “When I slept at twilight [. . .] / my sleep became a fire. / One walked among in the fire with birds about his head.”<sup>120</sup> Cathleen identifies this figure as the Celtic god Aengus, while Aeel is more ambivalent, suggesting that it may be Aengus or perhaps an angel. Moments later, Aeel notes that this figure in the flames “was angelical,” but Cathleen contradicts him: “No, not angelical, but of the old gods.”<sup>121</sup> This ambiguity recalls Yeats’s speculation in “Moods” when he ponders what it is that poetry evokes. Like this dream-apparition, poetry might call either “the gods of ancient days still dwelling on their secret Olympus” or “the angels of more modern days ascending and descending upon their shining ladder.”<sup>122</sup> Thus Aeel, the poet-mage, is visited by a mysterious supernatural figure, whether god or angel, that speaks truth.

It is interesting that Aeel, who appears to be a pagan bard, holds the Christian interpretation—angels—while the Countess Cathleen, representative of a presumably Christian landed gentry, insists upon the older, pagan

interpretation of this figure. And as Nicholas Meihuizen points out, Cathleen blends Christian and occult imagery in this syncretistic passage:<sup>123</sup>

This heart shall never waken on earth—I have sworn  
By her whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced  
To pray before this Altar until my heart  
Has grown to Heaven like a tree And there  
Rustled its leaves till Heaven has saved my people.<sup>124</sup>

The woman who was pierced by seven sorrows is the Virgin Mary in Roman Catholic teaching, and, as Meihuizen observes, the tree-and-leaf imagery Cathleen uses is reminiscent of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life or Sephiroic Tree, which was a core image in modern occultism.<sup>125</sup> Such syncretism is characteristic of orders like the G.·D.·., which freely blended ancient Egyptian religion, medieval Christianity, Jewish mysticism, and neo-paganism. Therefore, Aleel and Cathleen together present the religious mixture Yeats had encountered in the R.R. & A.C.

The scene's evocation of a spiritual blending between a man and woman may well call to mind Yeats's relationship with Maud Gonne, but I want to suggest that Aleel's hopeless love for Cathleen is more than a mere autobiographical allusion to Yeats's infatuation with his ideal beloved. When Cathleen refuses Aleel, she rejects the idea that it is their differing class status that keeps them apart, pointing instead to his spiritual superiority:

If the old tales are true  
Queens have wed shepherds and kings beggar maids,  
Gods [sic] procreant waters flowing about your mind  
Have made you more than kings or queens; and not you  
But I am the empty pitcher.<sup>126</sup>

It is Aleel's identity as a poet, Cathleen claims, that gives him the higher status. And she specifically calls his artistic ability "God[']s procreant waters flowing about your mind." To Cathleen, as to Yeats, poetic inspiration is divine revelation.

Finally, as we have already seen, Aleel is added to the ending, where he is given a vision of supernatural beings whom he dares to confront. As Ure describes the altered ending: "Scene v in 1892 concludes with Oona's vision of the angelic spirits. In 1895 this was transformed into the far more elaborate war-in-heaven and apotheosis, and these are mediated to us not by Oona but by Aleel."<sup>127</sup> In these alterations, Aleel is the kind of poet-mage Yeats calls for in "The Moods," written in the same year. As we have seen, Yeats believed that the mood at the heart of any work of imaginative literature is a divine messenger

and that the imaginative artist's job as a citizen of "the invisible life" is to communicate "ever new and ever ancient revelation."<sup>128</sup> Given this context, it is clear that Aleel's communication of his angelic vision, followed by the *staging* of an angel carrying the symbol of enlightenment, is designed to call down actual spirits into the theater, thereby illuminating the audience and enabling them to have a "part in eternity."<sup>129</sup> Aleel is a microcosm of Yeats's ideas at that time. Giving him some of Yeats's own characteristics emphasizes the important role the poet-mage has to communicate eternal truth. Aleel is a poet, a lover, and a seer, communicating salvific revelation.

## V. Conclusion

The question remains as to *why* Yeats staged elements of the Adeptus Minor ritual. This question becomes especially urgent given the fact that he swore an oath never to reveal the Order's secrets to anyone outside the R.R. & A.C. In the "Obligation" section of the Adeptus Minor ritual, the aspirant vows "That I will keep secret all things connected with the Order, and its secret knowledge, from the whole world, equally from him who is a member of the First Order of the Stella Matutina, as from an uninitiated person, and that I will maintain the veil of strict secrecy between the First and Second Orders."<sup>130</sup> Later, the aspirant is warned: "Let thy tongue keep silence on our mysteries."<sup>131</sup> The bold nature of his occult revelations on stage means that he may well have worried, as he does in his essay "Magic," that "I look at what I have written with some alarm, for I have told more of the ancient secret than many among my fellow-students think it right to tell."<sup>132</sup> This raises the question of why he would take the risk of violating his vows and introducing potentially dangerous spiritual forces into the playhouse.

Yeats, I suggest, was willing to take this risk because he believed the potential spiritual benefits outweighed the risks and that mediating hidden truths through symbolism rendered them safe for the uninitiated. Both the play and the ritual teach the same spiritual doctrines: the importance of humility, the necessity of self-sacrifice, the inevitability of suffering, the cycle of death and resurrection, the possibility of enlightenment, the divinity of the soul, and the importance of symbolism for communicating truth. We have seen that Cathleen is an example of the aspiring adept, who in turn is represented by the Chief Adept in the tomb of Osiris/Christ, identifying Cathleen with the feminine soul or anima that will rise again and know its true divine nature. We have seen that Aleel develops from a wandering, confused young bard to a powerful, visionary prophet-poet-seer. "In a real way," writes Brown, Yeats's plays of the 1890s and early 1900s were "transposing the beliefs of the Golden Dawn to a wider arena."<sup>133</sup> This is literally true: Yeats carefully revised the play to teach doctrines of resurrection,

purification, divinization, and enlightenment—and to offer a taste of these truths to the audience.

Some hermetic traditions include a requirement that high-level adepts find acceptable ways of spreading truth to the uninitiated public. Later Rosicrucian groups, such as A. E. Waite's Fellowship of the Rosy Cross (FRC), required their high-ranking members to find ways to “communicate the mystical philosophy expressed by the Secret Tradition” to the uninitiated via systems of symbolism; once initiates “absorbed the symbolism of the Secret Tradition,” they were “expected to generate it.”<sup>134</sup> The creative arts, especially writing, were particularly well suited to the task of creating systems of symbolism in order to convey to an uninitiated audience as much truth as they could safely handle.

While the G.·D.·. of which Yeats was a member appears to have been stricter about secrecy than the later FRC, it still taught that truth existed throughout all creation and that it was valuable for all humankind. Regardie finds parallels between magical systems and modern psychology, writing: “the Golden Dawn magic, the technique of initiation, is of supreme and inestimable importance to mankind at large. In it the work of academic psychology may find a logical conclusion and fruition, so that it may develop further its own particular contribution to modern life and culture.”<sup>135</sup> Whether or not Yeats ever received a command to generate systems of symbolism that could be used to subtly communicate truths to those outside the Order, he at least encountered the principle that initiates were meant to spread the light to the whole world. Like members of the FRC after him, then, he had to maintain a balance between strict secrecy and the dissemination of truth.

The R.R. & A.C. also taught that illumination may sometimes occur even without the recipient's intention. There are moments throughout the Adeptus Minor initiation that speak of the awesome enlightening power of the ceremony above and beyond the aspirant's own efforts. When the initiate swears the Oath of Obligation, “because of the symbolism attached to it and because of the active aspiration which is induced at this juncture, illumination may quite easily occur” writes Regardie.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, the theatrical nature of ceremonial magic may have an impact all on its own: “Through the admittedly artificial or conventional means of a dramatic projection of these personified principles in a well-ordered ceremony a reaction is induced in consciousness.”<sup>137</sup> Theatrical performances and ceremonial magic share conventional means of deploying symbolism, staging, costumes, choreography, lighting, spoken lines, colors, and perhaps music to impact those who observe the spectacle:

Without the least conscious effort on the part of the aspirant, an involuntary current of sympathy is produced [. . .]. The aesthetic appeal to the imagination [. . .] stirs to renewed activity the life of the inner domain. And the entire

action of this type of dramatic ritual is that the soul may discover itself exalted to the heights, and during that mystical elevation receive the rushing forth of the Light.<sup>138</sup>

Yeats and Florence Farr (the actress who played Aleel and was an occult playwright herself) shared a belief “that the sound of words can enter into the innermost being” and give, via their very acoustical properties, intimations of “the great truth that heaven and hell and God can be with us here and now.”<sup>139</sup> This means that the sheer phonetics and acoustics of spoken language, according to Farr and Yeats, can communicate spiritual truths to a listening audience, whether they know it or not, whether they want it or not. Plays, then, were one of Yeats’s chief means of subtly communicating esoteric truth to the wider public. The Countess Cathleen, which is “marked by a ritualistic element” in which actors “declaim elevated verse and [. . .] chant their lines in a sacerdotal manner,” is a quintessential example of this kind of teaching.<sup>140</sup> In this play as he revised it after his 1893 deeper initiation, Yeats used symbolism, the sounds of words, and staging to call down spirits into the souls of his audience.

## NOTES

- 1 The Countess’s name is variously spelled as *Kathleen* or *Cathleen* in different versions; I use the latter throughout for simplicity.
- 2 See Michael J. Sidnell and Wayne K. Chapman, eds., *The Countess Cathleen: Manuscript Materials* [hereafter *CCMSS*], The Cornell Yeats (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
- 3 Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn: The Original Account of the Teachings, Rites, and Ceremonies of the Hermetic Order* [hereafter *GD*], 7th edn, revised and corrected by John Michael Greer (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2015), 3:288.
- 4 *GD* 3:301.
- 5 The use of the “therefore” symbol instead of a period is a Masonic tradition carried on by modern occultists: “Frequently, among English and always among French authors, a Masonic abbreviation is distinguished by three points, ∴, *Albert Gallatin Mackey and William James Hughan, An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences: Comprising the Whole Range of Arts, Sciences and Literature as Connected with the Institution* (New York and London: Masonic History Company, 1913), 2.
- 6 *GD* 6–7.
- 7 Chic Cicero and Sandra Tabatha Cicero, “Preface to the Seventh Edition,” in *GD*, xxix. Italics original.
- 8 *GD* 12.
- 9 R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn Scrapbook: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1997), 179.

- 10 George Mills Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn* [hereafter YGD] (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1974), 69.
- 11 There are many variant transliterations of 'Qabalah.' There seems to be some consensus that, "generally speaking, the original Jewish tradition is Kabbalah with a 'K'; Christian Cabala [. . .] starting with a 'C,' while the Western Hermetic tradition spells Qabalah with a 'Q.'" See Mark Horn, "Kabbalah, Cabala or Qabalah: What's up with These Different Spellings?" January 11, 2018, Gates of Light Tarot, <https://www.gatesoflighttarot.com/blog/2017/9/3/kabbalah-cabala-or-qabalah-whats-up-with-all-these-different-spellings>; cf. Anthony J. Elia, "An Historical Assessment of the Narrative Uses of the Words 'Kabbalah,' 'Cabala,' and 'Qabala/h': Discerning the Differences for Theological Libraries," *Theological Librarianship: An Online Journal of the American Theological Library Association* 2, no. 2 (December 2009): 11–23. I retain whichever spelling an author uses when relevant and use the more hermetically oriented 'Qabalah' myself.
- 12 R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (San Bernardino, CA: R. Reginald/Borgo Press, 1988), 35.
- 13 *GD* 39.
- 14 *YGD* 104.
- 15 Mary Catherine Flannery, *Yeats and Magic: The Earlier Works* (Gerrards Cross, UK: Colin Smythe, 1977), 53.
- 16 Aren Roukema, *Esotericism and Narrative: The Occult Fiction of Charles Williams* (Boston: Brill, 2018), 11.
- 17 *GD* 13.
- 18 *GD* 38.
- 19 *GD* 22.
- 20 *GD* 5:489.
- 21 Kathleen Raine, *Yeats the Initiate: Essays on Certain Themes in the Work of W. B. Yeats* (Savage, MD: Barnes & Noble Books, 1990), 218–19; John Kelly, *A W. B. Yeats Chronology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 67.
- 22 Kelly, *Chronology*, 54–55.
- 23 Margaret Mills Harper, *Wisdom of Two: The Spiritual and Literary Collaboration of George and W. B. Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.
- 24 Allan Wade, *A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1951), 62.
- 25 W. B. Yeats, "The Moods," in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 195.
- 26 Yeats, "The Moods," 195.
- 27 Yeats, "The Moods," 195.
- 28 Yeats, "The Moods," 195.
- 29 CL II:478 n3; Wade, *Bibliography*, 62. Kelly states that "The Symbolism of Poetry" was published on April 2, 1900; see *Chronology*, 66. That must be an error, as Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory on April 10: "I will send it you when it comes out"; *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: 1886–1900*, ed. Warwick Gould, John Kelly, and Deirdre Toomey, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 512. Perhaps it had already been released, and Yeats was unaware of that fact?
- 30 W. B. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry" [hereafter SP], in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 153–64; 154.
- 31 SP 156–57, emphasis added.
- 32 Kelly, *Chronology*, 70, 72, 74.
- 33 *Life* 1 244; Wade, *Bibliography*, 61; Kelly, *Chronology*, 76.
- 34 W. B. Yeats, "Magic," in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 28–52; 28.
- 35 Yeats, "Magic," 28.

- 36 Yeats, "Magic," 28.
- 37 Yeats, "Magic," 43.
- 38 "Flying Rolls of the Golden Dawn" (Scribd), 96, accessed December 8, 2020, <https://www.scribd.com/document/26946230/6629823-All-the-Flying-Rolls-of-the-Golden-Dawn>.
- 39 Yeats, "Magic," 43.
- 40 Yeats, "Magic," 41.
- 41 Yeats, "Magic," 36, 40.
- 42 YGD 76.
- 43 Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, 71.
- 44 YGD 70.
- 45 W. B. Yeats, "Is the Order of R. R. & A. C. to Remain a Magical Order?" [hereafter ItO], in YGD 259–68; 259.
- 46 ItO 265.
- 47 ItO 260.
- 48 YGD 47.
- 49 ItO 262.
- 50 Flannery, *Yeats and Magic*, 94.
- 51 Terence Brown, *The Life of W. B. Yeats* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 104.
- 52 Yeats, "Magic," 49.
- 53 YGD 104.
- 54 CCMSS xlvi; Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (New York: Dutton, 1958), 131, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015054028686>.
- 55 Roukema, *Esotericism* 52.
- 56 GD, 26, 1:115; MRA 26; Israel Regardie, *My Rosicrucian Adventure: A Contribution to a Recent Phase of the History of Magic, and a Study in the Technique of Theurgy* (Las Vegas: New Falcon Publications, 2017).
- 57 Gilbert, *Scrapbook*, 64–65.
- 58 Gilbert, *Twilight*, 36; Gilbert, *Scrapbook*, 66.
- 59 Gilbert, *Twilight*, 36.
- 60 Brown, *Life*, 70.
- 61 CCMSS ix; VPI 1; Peter Ure, "The Evolution of Yeats's 'The Countess Cathleen,'" *The Modern Language Review* 57, no. 1 (1962): 12–24; 12–13, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3721967>.
- 62 CCMSS xxxiii–xxxiv.
- 63 For readers who are curious about the exact details of precisely when a change entered the manuscript record or publication history, I recommend VPI 1–179 and CCMSS, especially xxix–xxxii (Chronology of Manuscripts), xxxiii – xxxiv (Published Versions), and xxxv–xxxvi (a summary of major changes in each version).
- 64 CCMSS l.
- 65 CCMSS lii.
- 66 GD 31.
- 67 Some *Golden Dawn* rituals use masculine pronouns; however, men and women were equally eligible for all roles and ranks in the Order.
- 68 GD 3:295.
- 69 GD 3:296.
- 70 CCMSS 383; VPI 19.
- 71 GD 3:298.
- 72 GD 3:299.
- 73 GD 32.
- 74 GD 32.
- 75 GD 32–3.



- 76 *GD* 33.
- 77 Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887–1923* (Wellingborough, UK: Aquarian Press, 1985), 88.
- 78 *GD* 3:306, 309.
- 79 *CCMSS* 354; *VPI* 160–62.
- 80 *CCMS*, 499; *VPI* 159.
- 81 *GD* 33. Regardie writes that the Adeptus Minor ritual “identifies [the candidate] with the chief officer,” so that symbolically the candidate “is slain as though by the destructive force of his lower self. After being symbolically buried, triumphantly he rises from the tomb of Osiris in a glorious resurrection through the descent of the white light of the spirit”; *GD* 14.
- 82 *CCMSS* 385; *VPI* 21.
- 83 Howe, *Magicians*, 88.
- 84 *GD* 3:309.
- 85 *GD* 3:309.
- 86 *CCMSS* 501–02; *VPI* 163.
- 87 *GD* 3:305.
- 88 The Chief Adept in the tomb simultaneously symbolizes Christian Rosenkreutz, Osiris, Jesus, and “the aspirant’s higher self”; both Christian Rosenkreutz and Osiris “may be considered as the type and symbol of the higher and divine genius” (*GD* 3:303). This burial ceremony, then, “depicts the spiritual rebirth or redemption of the candidate, his resurrection from the dark tomb of mortality through the power of the Holy Spirit” (*GD* 3:303).
- 89 *GD* 3:309.
- 90 *CCMSS* 501; *VPI* 163.
- 91 Ure, “Evolution,” 20.
- 92 *GD* 3:296.
- 93 Raine, *Yeats the Initiate*, 245. The phrase ‘gyring, spiring’ comes from Yeats’s poem “Blood and the Moon,” which Raine is discussing in connection with Golden Dawn rituals.
- 94 Raine, *Yeats the Initiate*, 245.
- 95 *ItO* 261, 260.
- 96 *ItO* 266.
- 97 *GD* 3:316.
- 98 *GD* 3:313.
- 99 *GD* 3:313.
- 100 *GD* 3:313.
- 101 W. B. Yeats, *Poems* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), 153, <http://archive.org/details/poemswilliambutl00yeatrich>.
- 102 *CCMSS* 502; *VPI* 163.
- 103 *CCMSS* 503; *VPI* 165.
- 104 *CCMSS* 504; *VPI* 165.
- 105 *CCMSS* 504–05; *VPI* 167.
- 106 *CCMSS* 505.
- 107 *CCMSS* 504; *VPI* 165.
- 108 *CCMSS* 751.
- 109 *CCMSS* 738.
- 110 *CCMSS* 505, 738; *VPI* 167.
- 111 *CCMSS* 282.
- 112 *CCMSS* 342; *VPI* 134–36.
- 113 See *CCMSS* 359.
- 114 Ure, “Evolution,” 20.
- 115 *CCMSS* 385; *VPI* 21.

- 116 *GD* 33.
- 117 *CCMSS* 387; *VPI* 23.
- 118 *CCMSS* 387; *VPI* 23.
- 119 *CCMSS* 442–52; *VPI* 81–91; cf. *Life* 1 230.
- 120 *CCMSS* 443; *VPI* 83.
- 121 *CCMSS* 448; *VPI* 87.
- 122 Yeats, “The Moods,” 195.
- 123 Nicholas Meihuizen, *Yeats and the Drama of Sacred Space* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 44.
- 124 *CCMSS* 449; *VPI* 87.
- 125 Meihuizen, *Yeats*, 44.
- 126 *CCMSS* 450; *VPI* 89.
- 127 Ure, “Evolution,” 19.
- 128 Yeats, “The Moods,” 195.
- 129 Yeats, “The Moods,” 195.
- 130 *GD* 3:300.
- 131 *GD* 3:306.
- 132 Yeats, “Magic,” 51.
- 133 Brown, *Life*, 125.
- 134 Aren Roukema, “A Veil That Reveals: Charles Williams and the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross,” *Journal of Inklings Studies* 5, no. 1 (2015): 71, 48.
- 135 *GD* 30.
- 136 *GD* 32.
- 137 *GD* 18.
- 138 *GD* 18.
- 139 Brown, *Life*, 125; Florence Farr, *The Music of Speech, Containing the Words of Some Poets, Thinkers and Musicmakers Regarding the Practice of the Bardic Art, Together with Fragments of Verse Set to Its Own Melody by F. Farr* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1909), 18.
- 140 Terence Brown, “W. B. Yeats and Rituals of Performance,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, ed. Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (Oxford University Press, 2016), 5.