

Hermetic Garden

A Symbolist's Blog & Podcast

Tag: hermetic order of the golden dawn

Episode 001: Yeats and the Divine Genius, Part 1

38 minutes, 20 seconds

Shownotes:

I started a podcast! This episode revisits [a blog I wrote several years ago](#) but takes the series of poems several steps further. In this episode I analyze the first five of the eleven poems. Part 2 will analyze the rest.

As always, I discuss Kabbalah, mysticism, symbol, language, and much more.



<https://audiosfiles.wordpress.com/2018/03/001-yeats-and-the-holy-guardian-angel-fixed.mp3>

Errors:

- I say that Yeats joined the Golden Dawn in 1889. He actually joined in 1890. He was a part of several Hermetic societies in the 1880s.
- I realize there's an error when I read the first poem—the audio sounds jumbled. I'll fix this tonight and re-upload the audio.

Resources:

Golden Dawn Magical Tarot. [Amazon](#).

Gorski, William T. *Yeats and Alchemy*. Book. [Amazon](#).

MacGregor Mathers, S. L. *The Tarot: Its Occult Significance, use in Fortune Telling, and Method of Play, Etc.* [Book](#).

MacGregor Mathers, S. L. *Kabbalah Unveiled*. Book. [Amazon](#).

Mann, Neil. W.B. Yeats and *A Vision*. Website. <http://www.yeatsvision.com/>

Peneton, Brady. "The Winding Cabbala: Yeats' Use of Cabbalistic Mythology of Spiritualization and Imagination in 'A Woman Young and Old.'" Critical essay. [Blog](#).

Raine, Kathleen. "Yeats, the Tarot, and the Golden Dawn." Critical essay. [Amazon](#).

Regardie, Israel. The Complete System of the Golden Dawn. Book. [Amazon](#).

Yeats, William Butler. "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." [Audio recording on YouTube](#).

Yeats, William Butler. "Per Amica Silentia Lunae." [Essay](#).

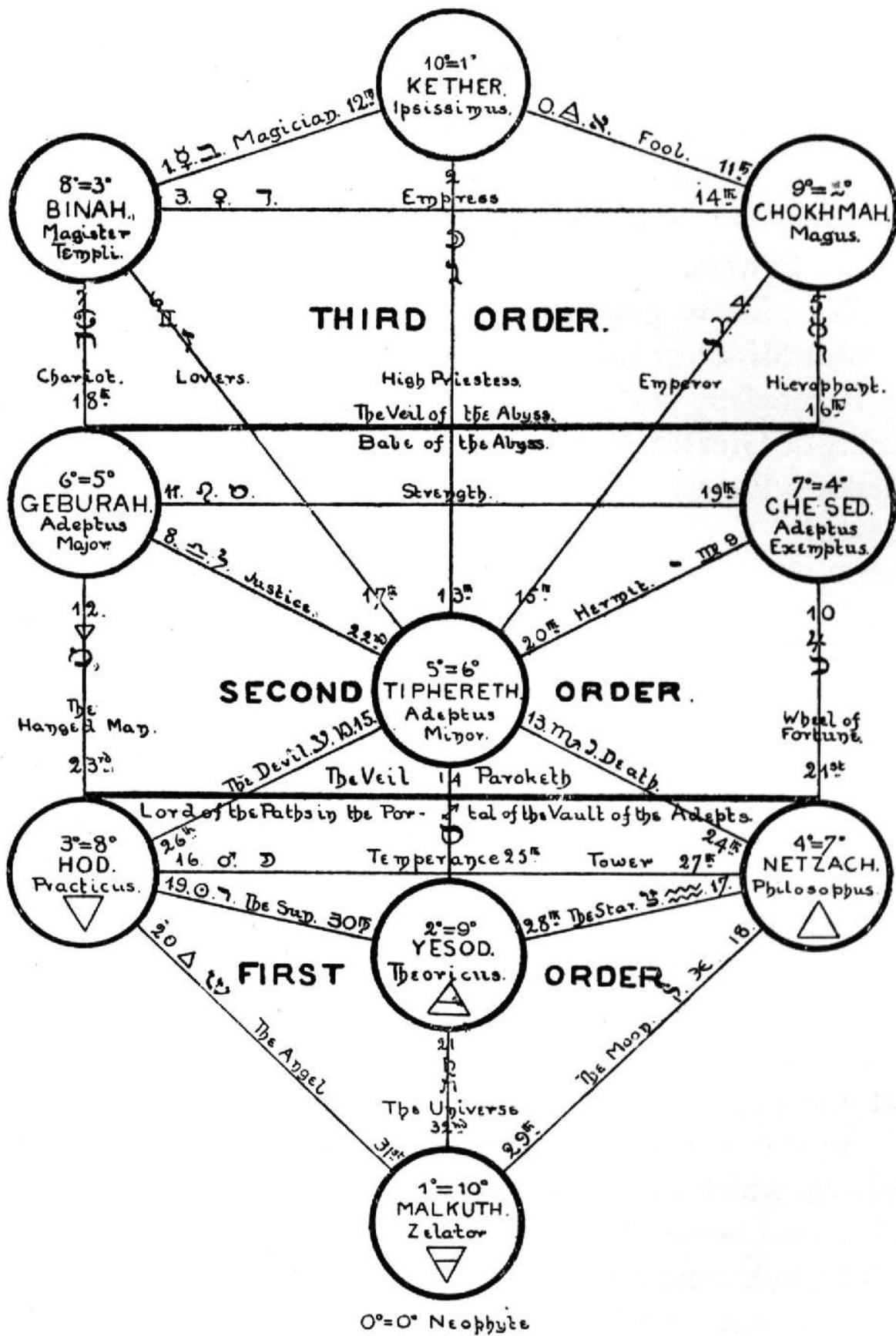
Yeats, William Butler. "Magic." [Essay](#).

Yeats, William Butler. "The Body of the Father Christian Rosencrux." [Essay](#).

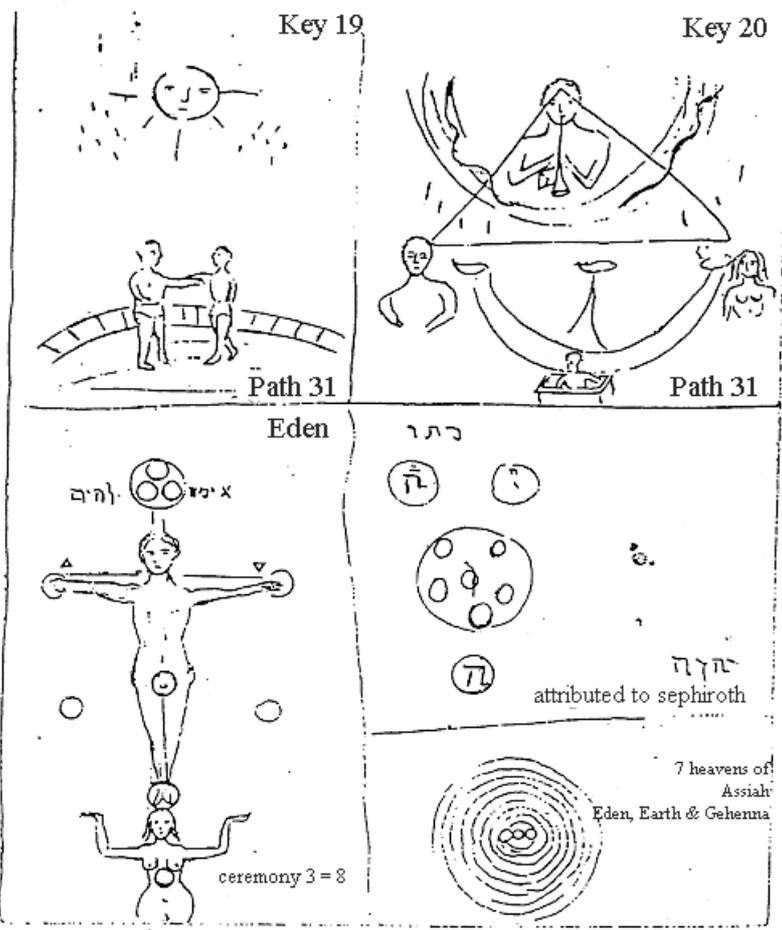
Yeats, William Butler. "The Two Trees." [Poem](#).

Yeats, William Butler. *A Woman Young and Old*. [Poems](#).

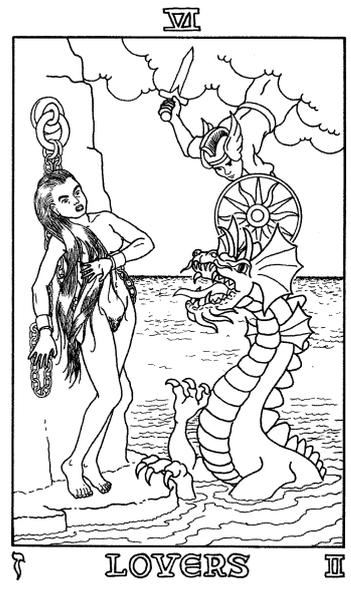
The Tree of Life:



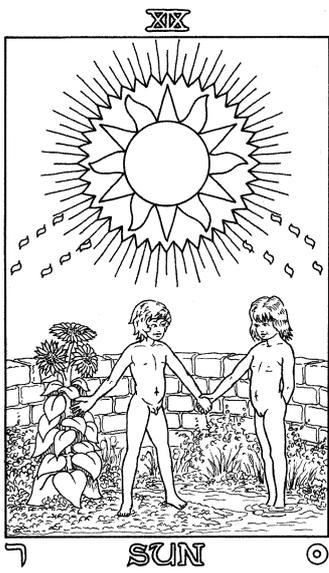
Golden Dawn Cipher Manuscript, Folio 28:



Golden Dawn Classic Tarot. The Lovers:



Golden Dawn Classic Tarot. The Sun:



Golden Dawn Classic Tarot. Judgment:



Credits

Intro Song: Kevin MacLeod – “[Backed Vibes Clean.](#)”

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Brady Peneton

podcast

MARCH 2, 2018

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The Winding Cabbala: Yeats' Use of Cabbalistic Mythology of Spiritualization and Imagination in 'A Woman Young and Old'

Necessary reading for this post:

“The Two Trees” can be found [here](#).

A Woman Young and Old can be found [here](#).

The series *A Woman Young and Old* echoes Yeats' and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn's cabbalist mythology of the Lower Self being rescued by the Higher Self and their interpretations of the myths of the Perseus and Andromeda arc. The Golden Dawn mythology explains that through the imaginative faculty the Higher Self liberates the Lower Self from dogma and strict materialism. The Lower Self is Andromeda, who tends toward lust and materialism, who does the dragon's or serpent's will. The Higher Self is the heroic Perseus, who, using the tools of the Nymphs to whom Hermes and Athena led him, instills inspiration and imagination into the Lower Self, freeing her from the chains of habit and philosophical materialism. Philosophical materialism is defined in this essay as the belief that all that can be known about the world can be known only through sense perception. Philosophical materialism stunts psychological and spiritual growth because the philosophical materialist lacks the imaginative faculty which can lead to such growth. The imaginative faculty is the ability in man's consciousness to consider and perceive images and sensations that are not readily available in everyday experiences through the five senses. This essay aims to show that though most critics believe Yeats gave up on what they perceive as childish magical beliefs of the Golden Dawn after the Celtic Twilight, Yeats dedicates *A Woman Young and Old* to his experience with and knowledge of the mythology of the liberating imaginative faculty in the Golden Dawn system of magic, even borrowing their images and mythological interpretations. The mythology he disguises so easily in his later poetry (or clothes in the mythology of *A Vision*) appears also in his early prose and poetry, including “The Two Trees” – which contrasts the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (of the Garden of Eden myth).

Criticism on the series of poems in question – *A Woman Young and Old* – appears rather sparse, though with such a limited time and such a small scope for this essay, reading all of the available criticism on the series would still be impossible. From my research, however, I have discovered that no one critic has applied the Golden Dawn system of magic and mythology to this series of poems in particular. Carole Vopat authored in 1992 one explicatory article printed on the series of poems, titled “The Darker Vision of W.B. Yeats: ‘A Woman Young and Old,’” which borrows from a plethora of other sources, yet it is a wholly literal and thematic explication and analysis of the series and contains no spiritual or mythological interpretation and

application. I aim to alleviate the lack of a spiritual and psychological interpretation of the series of poems by interpreting them using the Golden Dawn tarot, various primary and secondary Golden Dawn documents, other mythologies, and the structure of the Tree of Life in general.

In “Yeats, the Tarot, and the Fool,” Joan Weatherly poignantly explains that though many critics are quick to mention Yeats’ association with the Golden Dawn and his occult practices, the association is usually drawn to “be dismissed as a youthful dalliance which the mature poet outgrew with the Celtic Twilight” (112). Later, she explains that the tarot and the Golden Dawn were in fact essential to his poetry; especially important, she argues, is the concept of the neophyte Fool’s movement through phases of initiation into the understanding of occult principles. The Fool, Weatherly argues, symbolizes the “‘pure mind’ and the ‘foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart’ in which ‘those masterful images’ grew” and Yeats “employed [forbidden secrets of the Golden Dawn] throughout his career” (119). Illuminating Yeats’ uses of the tarot Fool in his various works in turn supports a mythological interpretation of *A Woman Young and Old* through the Golden Dawn’s cabbalism. The mythological interpretation of this series echoes the neophyte’s initiation – a discovery of imagination, liberation from philosophical materialism, and a climb in consciousness up the cabbalistic Tree of Life.

Another useful critical article pertinent to this essay is Kathleen Raine’s “Yeats, the Tarot, and the Golden Dawn.” I subscribe, as does Raine, to the notion that

merely academic study of magical symbolism may be likened to the analysis of musical scores by a student who does not know that the documents he meticulously annotates are merely indications for the evocation of music from instruments of whose very existence he is ignorant. (Raine 112)

This assumes an ambiguity and abstractness to the study of the symbolic meanings of Yeats and other symbolist poets, though this essay will attempt to be as perspicuous and pragmatic as possible. Raine goes on in her article to highlight the ways in which Yeats makes use of the archetypal images of the tarot in his literature, explaining that these images are like “keys” that “awaken their sleeping counterparts in the mind” (134). Though she analyzes Yeats’ poetry using the tarot and other occult beliefs, there is no mention of the poems of *A Woman Young and Old*. This essay will borrow some of her tarotical and archetypal methodology of reading Yeats. Additionally, a particularly poignant quote from Yeats about the alchemical image of the pelican feeding its young with its own blood on page 145 will be used to illuminate the symbolical meaning of “Her Vision in a Wood” – self-sacrifice of the poet in an attempt to heal mankind.

Yasuko Suzuki in “Yeats’s ‘From the “Antigone”’: Desire and Loss” describes the last poem in the *Woman Young and Old* series in relation to Yeats’ three Oedipus plays. According to Suzuki, Yeats’ desire for a return to a “romantic heroic age” is

reflected in the themes of the Oedipus plays and in the coda poems of both of the *Young and Old* series. Suzuki argues that “Yeats must surely have felt encouraged and hoped...that he might yet, through his poetic drama, elevate the Irish people to embrace the legends, folklore, and literature of their past and thereby recover the heroic Romantic age” (49). If the final poem of *A Woman Young and Old* is a (somewhat morose) call for the heroic age (and it seems it is), then, as will be shown in this essay, the rest of the series is a mythological outline of Yeats’ own experience awakening that mode of thinking, that spiritual and heroic age, in his own consciousness.

Yeats assures of this fact – that poetry is a quarrel with one’s own psyche – in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. To quarrel with one’s psyche in writing is to write poetry: “We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.” Later in the same paragraph he talks of how one awakens the imaginative faculty – a gift from the figure of Hermes – in our minds: “He can create the greatest imaginable beauty who has endured all imaginable pangs, for only when we have seen and foreseen what we dread shall we be rewarded by that dazzling unforeseen wing-footed wanderer” (*Per Amica V*). For Yeats, in order to make inner changes and achieve spiritual growth, we must awaken the imagination and strive for the greatest imaginable empathy. Hermes’ gifts must be the winged sandals and the helmet of Hades (which grants invisibility to Perseus). Here and throughout his work, Yeats alludes to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn’s interpretations and uses of various mythological systems. The systems of Rosicrucian, Egyptian, Greek, medieval and Renaissance magic all find their place in the system of the Golden Dawn, and thus we see that Hermes plays a role in rescuing the materialist human, instilling him with imagination and sympathy.

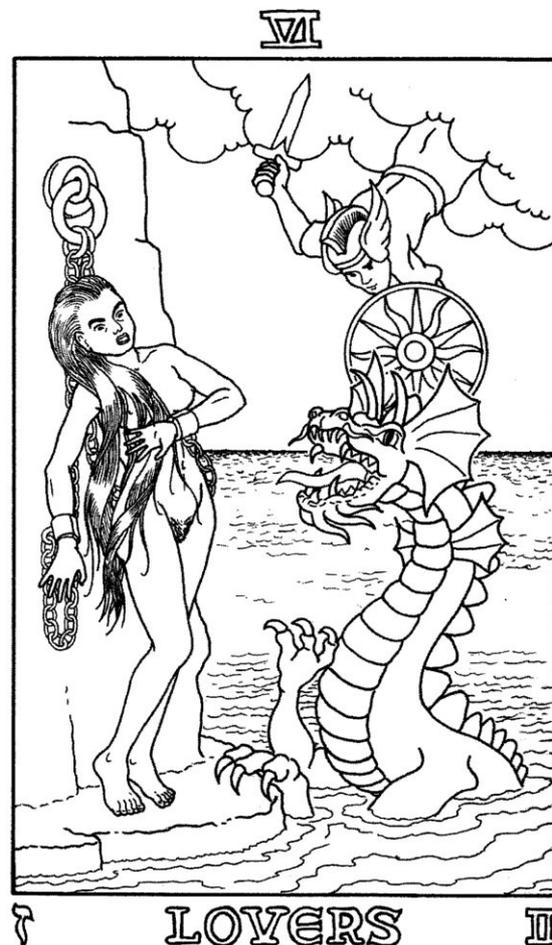
In his book *Yeats and Alchemy*, Gorski analyzes at one point the ways in which Yeats treats imagination and sympathy with regard to the magical and poetic tradition. Gorski explains that

although Yeats thought the previous two centuries were primarily a barren intellectual age cut off from the passionate depths of the unconscious, he found in Blake an anomalous flowering of the symbolic imagination. “He [Blake] had learned from Jacob Boehme and from old alchemist writers that imagination was the first emanation of divinity, ‘the body of God,’ ‘the Divine Members,’ and he drew the deduction, which they did not draw, that the imaginative arts were therefore the greatest of Divine revelations, and that the sympathy with all living things, sinful and righteous alike, which the imaginative arts awaken, is that forgiveness of sin commanded by Christ” (E&I 112). (Gorski 22-3)

For Yeats, the goal of the mythology to which he subscribed (a syncretic, inclusive one) was a development of the imaginative and therefore sympathetic faculty. As one climbs to greater rungs or steps of awareness along the path outlined in many traditions, one achieves a sympathy for all mankind, both sinful and righteous. We

can see this mythology reflected throughout Yeats' work, and especially, as we will see, in *A Woman Young and Old*. The mythological figures in the series can be easily equated to symbolic figures in the Golden Dawn magical tradition, and that is where this argument of this essay begins.

The Lovers card of the Golden Dawn tarot shows a scenario much like the one described in Yeats' "Her Triumph," and, after having seen the card, to not attempt some association between the poem and the various figures in the series and the image on the card and the figures therein (Perseus and Andromeda) would be absurd. The tarot card shows a naked woman with her hands fettered to a large rock on a small rock platform, which rises just above sea level, and a dragon threatens her from nearby in the waters just below. From above, a man, a Perseus figure, descends equipped with helmet, sword, and shield. His helmet bears a pair of wings, and his shield bears the symbol of the sun, from which twelve rays emanate. "Her Triumph" recreates much the same scenario: the title character of the series, the woman, was at one time similarly fettered and under threat of a dragon figure; the woman "did the dragon's will" (1) until her "Saint George or else a pagan Perseus" (10) who "mastered" the dragon—rings came and "broke the chain and set [her] ankles free" (9). Indeed, the tarot trump (with which Yeats was familiar) and "Her Triumph" imagine for their audience the same scenario: Perseus rescuing Andromeda from Poseidon's sea monster. Though both imagine the same scenario, the connection does not end there.

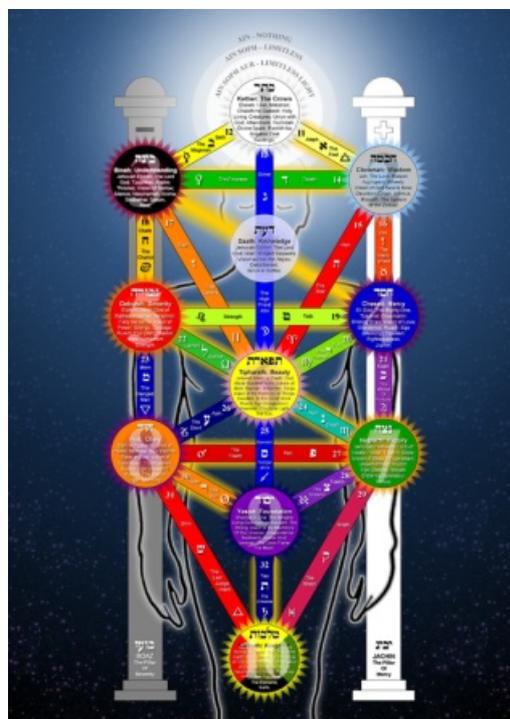


The Lovers (from the Golden Dawn Classic Tarot)

The imagined scenario symbolizes for Golden Dawn members a psychological transformation that is to them magical in nature. In a description of the tarot trumps compiled in Israel Regardie's *The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic*, G. H. Soror Q. L. explains that the card symbolizes the "impact of inspiration on intuition, resulting in illumination and liberation – the sword striking off the fetters of habit and materialism, Perseus rescuing Andromeda from the Dragon of fear and the waters of Stagnation." MacGregor Mathers similarly describes the signification of this image in his short treatise on the tarot:

[The Lovers] is usually described as representing Man between Vice and Virtue, while a winged genius threatens Vice with his dart...[but] I am rather inclined to the opinion that it represents the Qabalistical Microprosopus between Binah and Malkuth, while the figure above shows the Influence descending from Kether. It is usually considered to mean Proof or Trial; but I...suggest Wise Disposition as [the card's] signification. (MacGregor Mathers 7)

MacGregor Mathers and other cabbalists define the Microprosopus (from *mikros* "small" and *prosopon* "face"), equivalent to a symbolic Virgin Mary, as the nine Sephiroth on the Tree of Life below Kether (that is, Chokmah through Malkuth), and thus M. Mathers precludes only one Sephira from his interpretation of the female figure from the scenario. The figure from above is the influence from the topmost Sephira on the Tree of Life, Kether, that doesn't merely conquer the unvirtuous, but conquers the unspiritual, materialistic consciousness. The figure from above, Yeats' Perseus, conquers the dragon's will to liberate the Microprosopus figure – the title figure of Yeats' *A Woman* series – from the earthly fetters to "stare astonished at the sea" ("Her Triumph" 11). With the figures of the series identified as figures of consciousness and imagination in a cabbalistic mythological context, it will be apt to begin interpreting the cabbalistic climb of the Tree from the beginning of the *A Woman Young and Old* series, after a brief summary of the system of the cabbala.

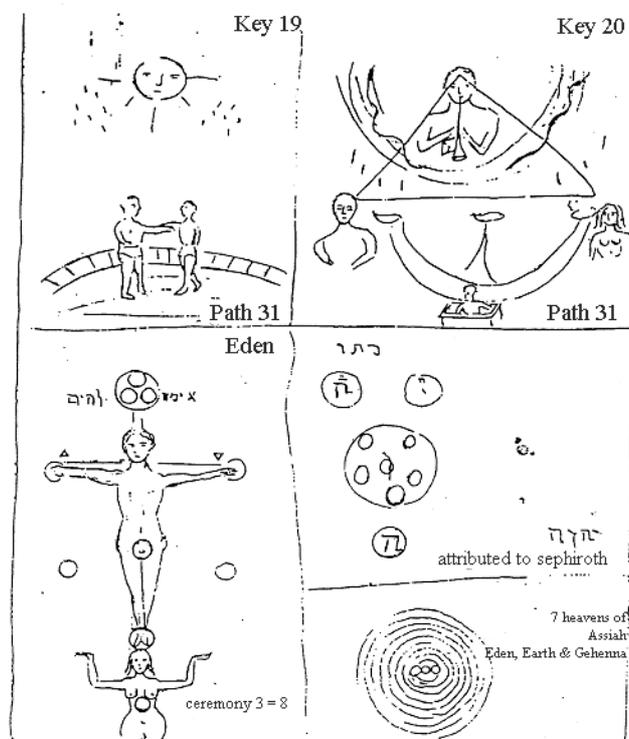


I use the term “cabbala” with a ‘c’ because Yeats uses this spelling throughout his essays and other writings. Though this term traditionally concerns the purely Christian application to the mythology contained in the Tree of Life, I will use this term universally throughout this essay despite the Greek and hermetic mixture of symbols throughout the series here analyzed. The Tree of Life of the cabbala maps or outlines the “potencies and potentialities” of human consciousness, and each of ten Sephiroth, the spheres of these influences, represents steps toward a fuller mastery over consciousness. The Sephiroth are organized in three columns, the first Sephira, Kether (the Macroprosopus – “big face” – or Crown), being placed at the top of the middle pillar. The second Sephira Chokmah (Wisdom) is placed just below on the right-hand pillar, and Binah (Understanding), the third, is placed on the left-hand pillar opposite this one. The fourth, Chesed (Mercy), is placed a row below the second and third on the right-hand side, and the fifth, Geburah (Severity) returns back again to the left pillar. From here, the sixth Sephira Tiphereth (Beauty) rests in the central column in its own row. Netzach (Victory), the seventh, is below on the right-hand side of the Tree in a new row, and the eighth, Hod (Splendor), returns again to the left-hand column. Yesod (Foundation) is placed in the center column below the seventh and eighth spheres of influence, alone in a row directly above the final sphere, Malkuth (Kingdom), where in the mythological system the human consciousness naturally resides. This Tree of Life, this spiritual growth and ascension is reflected in Yeats’ image of the “winding stair” in the collection in which *A Woman* appears. Belief in the cabbalistic Tree of Life can be glimpsed throughout Yeats’ poetry, though reference to it appears most explicitly in “The Two Trees.”

A cabbalistic interpretation of the Judaic Garden of Eden myth lies at the base of “The Two Trees.” The tree in the first stanza is the Tree of Life (the cabbalistic one) and the tree in the second stanza is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, contrasting a “union and separation from the divine source” (Gorski 39). The tree in the first stanza of “The Two Trees” is described as a “holy tree” (2) that we may seek and find if we “gaze in [our] own heart[s]” (1). To gaze in our own hearts is to gaze on our own psyche, our own consciousness, and cabbalism seeks union with the unconscious potencies of our mind. The other tree, however, the Tree of Knowledge, contains the “ravens of unresting thought” (34) and is seen only through the “bitter glass [mirror]” (21) that “the demons, with their subtle guile, / lift up before us when they pass” (22-3). Gazing at the outer, bitter Tree of Knowledge makes our “eyes grow all unkind” (39) while looking within for the tree makes “our eyes grow full of tender care” (19). This bitter glass is the strict materialism to which the dragon’s will in “Her Triumph” refers; it is the outer weariness that contrasts with the inner, divine source that can be known through the ascension of the Tree of Life, an ascension that is portrayed for us through veiled symbolism in *A Woman Young and Old*.

The first poem of the series, "Father and Child," represents the beginning of the cabbalist's mythological journey up the Tree of Life that begins in Malkuth. At the beginning of the cabbalist's journey, a discovery of Mask – a tutelary spiritual being, in spiritual traditions the Holy Guardian Angel, and Christ as the shepherd in the Christian cabbala – appears halfway up the Tree of Life, in Tiphereth. This Mask is symbolized in the series as the woman's "face.../ Before the world was made" (7-8), and guides one to the discovery of the fullness of the self, symbolic of a pull in one's psyche toward individualization, Yeats' One, and away from the collective psychology, Yeats' Many. This is the same figure that descends from the clouds in Yeats' "Her Triumph" and the image on the Lovers of the tarot, the figure MacGregor Mathers called the "Influence descending from Kether" (7). This figure, the Higher Self, comes to save the Lower Self from the dragon or the sea monster in the mythology of the Golden Dawn and represents a finality in liberation from the materialist mindset. When the woman (the Lower Self) achieves this influence, she achieves the imaginative faculty and a more conscious life and, indeed, a voice.

An image of the cabbala appears with a male figure and a female figure laid over the top in the twenty-eighth folio of the Cypher Manuscript, which was used in the founding rituals and mythological beliefs of the Golden Dawn. On either side of the supernal triad (Kether, Chokmah, and Binah contained in a circle above the male's head) appear the Hebrew words "Elohim" on the left – one of the many names of God – and "Aima" on the right – meaning "mother." The man appears with a cross figure behind him, his left hand rests in Chesed, and his right hand rests in Geburah. His genitals are positioned directly in the center of Tiphereth. Netzach and Hod lie on opposite sides of his thighs, and his feet rest in Yesod. The woman's head lies just below Yesod, as if the male figure stands on the crown of her head, and Malkuth rests directly over her stomach. Analogy between this image from the MS. and *A Woman Young and Old* comes easily: the male's genitals residing in the sphere of influence which the Lower Self discovers first explains the sexual nature of the arc of the poetry.



Page 28 of The Cipher Manuscript, one of the foundational documents of the original Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

In “Father and Child” the Microprosopus does not have a voice: she only “hears [her father] strike the board” as he denounces her desires for the Mask figure in this short poem. This signifies that the father disapproves of the use of the Microprosopus’ imagination. The woman is in the first stages of the climb toward spiritual growth in this poem, the first phase of the moon in Yeats’ Great Wheel in *A Vision*. The father figure denies the woman a voice and desires to keep her in the primary phases, the Many, in which she is a product of circumstance. She sets her sights on a male figure, however: the Higher Self or Mask, whose “hair is beautiful” (7) and “Cold as the March wind his eyes” (8). To achieve spiritual growth, she must exercise her imagination, but her father denounces her association with the male figure.

In “Before the World was Made,” the woman looks for her true face in the mirror, symbolizing her search for self-knowledge and her spirit within her. In “mirror after mirror” (5) the woman looks “for the face I had / Before the world was made” (7-8). She escapes from the oppressive captivity of the father and is now able to perform self-reflection and achieve self-knowledge and therefore spiritual growth. In the magical tradition, magicians use a mirror for the practice of scrying. Scryers use mirrors to see spiritual visions, visions that arise from the subconscious and the imagination. Though mirrors, crystals, or other gazing devices are usually used, Bill Whitcomb notes that “anything which one can focus the sight upon, yet does not produce a definite image, may be used as a blank matrix in which the mind may impose its own order” (Whitcomb 536). Literature or scripture may be used, where the imagination is given to wandering toward the spirit, as in George Herbert’s “The Holy Scriptures I”: “Ladies, look here; this is the thankfull glasse, / that mends the lookers eyes: this is the well / That washes what it shows.” This is not to

say that the conscious mind imposes this order – it’s quite the opposite. The magicians set their imaginations loose upon a blank matrix – mirrors, scripture, or other objects of concentration – and give their minds or imaginations a will of their own to discover the true spirit behind their nature. Using her imagination through scrying (or reading), the woman (at this point a symbol for the Microprosopus at its lower aspects) climbs the Tree of Life toward her Higher Self to eventually achieve consummation – Yeats’ Unity of Being – at Tiphereth.

The consummation comes at the fifth poem of the series, “Consolation.” The antimonies of Malkuth (the collective psychology marked by outward, material consciousness) or the early primary phases and Tiphereth (an individualization marked by gazing inward at one’s own true spirit) or the middling antithetical phases, though opposite, console one another. Similarly, in Yeats’ *A Vision*, when the Will reaches the fifteenth phase, the personality’s Mask is then in Phase 0, its complete opposite, which is “where the crime’s committed” (11) and where “[t]he crime can be forgot” (12). When the will of the Microprosopus in the Golden Dawn mythology reaches Tiphereth, there is similarly a “little death” at that point: the Golden Dawn places the tarot card “Death” on one side of Tiphereth and the card “Justice” on the other. On the Justice card, there are scales, symbolizing a balance of chance and choice.

After consummating, after the “little death” of sexual release, a balance comes, portrayed in “Chosen” (named such, perhaps, because of Yeats’ concept of unity of chance and choice). The balance is a realization that the Lower Self – marked by circumstance – and the Higher Self – marked by choice – are one. The woman appears to have been divining, or scrying, on the Zodiac for her love, so that she could imagine and move toward her Higher Self (the male in the stories): “The lot of love is chosen. I learnt that much / Struggling for an image on the track / Of the whirling Zodiac” (1-3). After lying with the male, the woman desires to stay with him in “Parting.”

In “Her Vision in the Wood,” the woman achieves a state of self-sacrifice in attempt to “cover / Whatever could recall the lip of lover” (7-8). This covering is a covering of the written word with one’s spirit, in an attempt to bring others to union with their Higher Self. Yeats discusses this sacrifice in a pamphlet addressed to the Order of R. R. and A. C.:

The great Adept may indeed have to hide much of his deepest life, lest he tell it to the careless and the indifferent, but he will sorrow and not rejoice over this silence, for he will be always seeking ways of giving the purest substance of his soul to fill the emptiness of other souls. It will seem to him better that his soul be weakened, that he be kept wandering on the earth even, than that other souls should lack anything of strength and quiet....He will remember, while he is with them, the old magical image of the pelican feeding its young with its own blood; and when, his sacrifice over, he goes his way to supreme Adeptship, he will go absolutely alone, for men attain to the supreme wisdom in

a loneliness that is like the loneliness of death. (qtd. in Raine 145)

The “magical image of the pelican feeding its young” is an alchemical image which is closely linked to Christ’s sacrifice for mankind on the cross. Adepts act as Christ, in that they sacrifice their perfected human existence in order to fill the souls of others. The woman in “Her Vision in the Wood,” like the alchemical pelican, tears the flesh of her finger off and lets blood, the “wine” that makes us think of the spirit of Christ, drip down. The dark then “changed to red, and torches shone, / And deafening music shook the leaves” (12-3), signifying the creation of poetry. The Adept here (Yeats himself), struck with every imaginable pang, cuts his own figurative flesh to share with mankind through poetry, which music so often signifies in Yeats’ work. For the woman, the blood is a figurative wine, but for the Higher Self, it is real blood, as she cries out: “I stared upon his blood-bedabbled breast / And sang my malediction with the rest” (23-4). The sacrifice is one that attempts to bring others up the mythological Tree of Life through the use of symbol and song. Although the woman wants to lead others to the unfoldment of their consciousness and towards living more fully, the last poem expresses at the same time this same desire but a failure, as Antigone falls into the dust.

The last poem of the series, as Suzuki argues, cries out finally for a spiritual and imaginative reinvigoration in the consciousness of humankind. The poem is a call to the path which Yeats outlines in the previous ten poems of the series. The apocalypse to which Yeats always points is a call to this path: a discovery of Hermes and his gift of the hermetic imaginative faculty; a journey through symbol and scrying upon mirrors, literature, and scripture; of feeling the highest influence from Kether and slaying finally the propensity toward materialist thoughts. In Yeats’ *Antigone*, Suzuki points out, his speaker “celebrates Love and invokes it to unleash its power to ‘overcome’ all things,” the same “terrible” Love which in Sophocles’ play the Chorus says “drives men to frenzy and madness” (Suzuki 112). This Love is a Love for the spiritual or Higher Self whose genitals the author of the Cipher Manuscript placed at the sphere of Beauty, Tiphereth, which Yeats calls phase 15 in his *A Vision*. Yeats calls in the last poem of *A Woman Young and Old* for this love to

Overcome...

...

*The rich man and his affairs,
The fat flocks and the fields’ fatness...*

...

Overcome Gods upon Parnassus. (1-6)

This is indeed an apocalyptic call for spiritual reinvigoration and the discovery and reorganization of the unconscious influences in one’s mind, and to discover the Higher Self upon one’s climb through these influences. The rich man and his affairs is associated with the materialism and desire for power so prevalent in the west. Suzuki goes on to explain that though Yeats desires a cultural renaissance and for

Ireland to achieve again the romantic heroic age, Yeats is “forced to acknowledge sadly the irreversibility of history, and so he chooses to conclude *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* with the finality of Antigone’s death” (58): “Pray I will and sing I must, / And yet I weep – Oedipus’ child / Descends into the loveless dust” (14-6). Though he calls for a spiritualization of humanity, he realizes that in his old age he has not succeeded; Antigone descends into the dust, without frenzy, without the ability to overcome and consummate with the Higher Self as Yeats appears to have done through the cabbalistic Golden Dawn mythology.

As can be seen, Yeats calls throughout his poetry for his readers to ascend the *Winding Stair* which symbolizes spiritual growth. This growth is marked by a reinvigoration of the imaginative faculty, through which we can overthrow the gods and achieve an excellence and perfection of selfhood, free of unconscious influences (which are the gods). The cabbalists’ climb up the Tree of Life in their consciousness allows them to experience life more consciously and more fully as they “Overcome Gods upon Parnassus; Overcome the Emphyrean” (“From the ‘Antigone’” 6-7). The Golden Dawn embodied this hermetic, cabbalistic mythology, and Yeats borrows from it extensively in his poetic symbolism. Despite what critics may say about Yeats’ early involvement with magic, spirits, the Golden Dawn, and other occult practices and strange beliefs, these beliefs are and were essential to his poetry. It is often remarked that “had Yeats produced nothing beyond the nineties he would today be unknown” (Weatherly 119) but without these beliefs from Golden Dawn’s mythology of expansion of consciousness, the tarot, alchemy, and all else, as Weatherly says, “many of the great twentieth-century poems might not have *been*” (Weatherly 119-120). In order for him to build up his own mythological and symbolic system, he had to borrow and conjoin various systems from traditions of Greek mythology, poetry, and drama, Pythagorean and Paracelsian alchemy, astrology, hermetic qabalah, Christian cabbala, Egyptian mythology, and Blake’s poetry to create a syncretic, Yeatsian whole.

The map presented to us in Yeats’ poetry for psychological expansion is difficult to grasp, even ethereal and insubstantial. Yeats’ work does point to *something* though, which can be contemplated and uncovered for individuals in their own individual imaginations. The growth in spirit to which he calls is an interplay and synthesis of many symbolic narratives, like faeries dancing around in our imaginations. If this mythology does affect consciousness, whatever synapses these faeries fire may be powerful indeed. Yeats’ maps and models, taken from the syncretic mythology of the Golden Dawn and other traditions, guide the student of hermeticism in this transformative process, sometimes called the Path of the Serpent of the system of the cabbala.

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