George Yeats and Athanasius Kircher

Neil Mann

... Which book spak muchel of the operaciouns
Touchynge the eighete and twenty mansiouns
That longen to the moone, and swich folye
As in oure dayes is nat worth a flye... . . .
Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Franklin’s Tale'.

In an appendix to The Making of Yeats’s ‘A Vision’ George Mills Harper transcribes a document, found filed with the Automatic Script of 27 June 1918, a list in George Yeats’s handwriting headed ‘28 Mansions of нце’ and ‘560. Athanasius Kircher’, which gives a brief catalogue of twenty-eight sectors of the Zodiac with corresponding epithets in English.¹ Although it is only a single sheet of paper, it gives rise to a number of questions concerning traditional systems of the Mansions of the Moon and their relevance to the Yeatses’ system, the research they carried out in this and in related areas, and the reasons for George’s consultation of Kircher. More fundamental questions inevitably arise as well: if similarity indicates influence, and if influence, how much of it was known to both participants in the Automatic Script. Given such a slender point of departure, some of the lines of enquiry remain conjectural, but there are compelling reasons for considering them seriously, not least because of the light they shed on the complex web of reading, research, and re-imagining that lies behind the Automatic Script and A Vision.

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I

When Yeats introduces the diagram of the lunar phases in the first version of A Vision he comments somewhat parenthetically that: ‘Their number is that of the Arabic Mansions of the Moon but they are used merely as a method of classification and for simplicity of classification their symbols are composed in an entirely arbitrary way’ (AVA 12). Even within the specialised context of A Vision, however, the Moon and its phases bring with them such an atavistic range of association that the symbol has an independent life, which overwhelms any strictures about arbitrary notation. On a more technical level, the Moon’s synodic cycle with the Sun, which dominates Yeats symbolism, takes 29½ days and covers some 390º, going beyond the circle, yet Yeats still seeks ways to fit it to the circle of the Zodiac, of which the twenty-eight Mansions are simply a lunar version. Yeats does

¹ ‘Appendix C’ MYV2 419. Harper did not trace the reference and it remained unsourced when he and his team published Yeats’s ‘Vision’ Papers in 1992. For Harper’s discussion of the sheet’s contents, see MYV2 81–82, 426n and YVP2 541n.

² 2011: I have since been able to see microfilms of the pages in question and there are four sides of notes rather than the single page mentioned here.

not appear to have been overly concerned with the distinction, but he avoids the kind of statement that appears in the typescript of ‘The Discoveries of Michael Robartes’, which refers to ‘twenty-eight incarnations corresponding to the 28 lunar mansions’ \( (YVP4 \ 17) \), as if these were the same as the phases.

Both Yeatses would have been aware of the Arabian system of the Mansions of the Moon,\(^2\) though probably only as a general term, from their familiarity with astrology, their preparation in the Golden Dawn or from reading Chaucer.\(^3\) As the schema of the twenty-eight Phases \([165]\) of the Moon first began to emerge at the end of November 1917 \( (YVP1 \ 100 \ ff.) \) the Yeatses were clearly intrigued by the possibility that they bore some relation to the twenty-eight Mansions: only three days after the first appearance of the ‘28 days of \( \mathbb{D} \)’, the ‘28 mansions’ feature in one of George’s answers and later that day Yeats was seeking clarification that one solar day ‘which equals one mansion of moon would represent one incarnation & time after’, or from birth to the end of the after-life \( (YVP1 \ 119–120; \ 25 \ November \ 1917) \). On the 30 November George’s part of the Script contains another name, ‘the stations 28 of moon’, and Yeats’s next question was whether these days ‘correspond to the lunar mansions’ to which the answer was apparently ‘Yes’ \( (YVP1 \ 126) \). This not only indicates knowledge of the terms but also that an obvious initial line of enquiry would have been to examine the Mansions of the Moon in astrological usage. However, these Mansions had not been dealt with in any detail since mediaeval times, so that in order to consult a comprehensive list of the Mansions George Yeats would have had to go back to older works.\(^4\)

The Yeatses almost certainly followed up the references given for the Mansions in Chaucer’s ‘The Franklin’s Tale’ at some stage, since George copied out both the text and an edited

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\(^3\) W. W. Westcott, for instance, in \textit{Numbers: Their Occult Power and Mystic Virtue} (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1890) comments that ‘A division of the Zodiac into 28 mansions of the moon, was probably earlier than the solar division into 12 parts’ (49), but gives no further explanation. Jeffares states that Yeats read Chaucer in 1910, and in 1917 ‘asked Mrs Yeats to type out’ a passage on the Mansions from ‘The Franklin’s Tale’ along with Skeat’s note \( (W. \ B. \ Yeats: \ Man \ and \ Poet \ [1949; \ Dublin: \ Gill \ & \ Macmillan, \ 1996], \ 174) \); viz \textit{CVA} notes 10.

\(^4\) Apart from Francis Barrett’s plagiarism of Agrippa, \textit{The Magus, or Celestial Intelligencer} (London: Lackington, Allen & Co., 1801), the Mansions were largely ignored except by scholars of the history of astronomy. The Yeatses’ library contained one work, unavailable in 1918, Vivian Robson’s \textit{The Fixed Stars and Constellations in Astrology} (London: Cecil Palmer, 1923 \([YL \ 1772]\)). O’Shea notes that their copy is marked on the pages which cover the Arabic Mansions and Hindu \textit{Nakshatras} (70–80). The Mansions’ boundaries retained importance for Sepharial (Walter Gorn Old) relating to a child’s sex \( (The \ New \ Manual \ of \ Astrology \ [1898; \ 2nd \ ed. \ rev. \ London: \ Rider, \ 1912], \ 4) \) (c.f. \textit{YL} 1866–69).

version of the notes.\(^5\) Here they were referred to the *Epitome Totius Astrologiae* of the [166] Spanish translator Joannes Hispalensis (fl.1140), published in printed form in 1548 but dated internally to 1142, and summarising astrological teaching, particularly from Arab tradition. He gives only the Latin names, and treatment of the Mansions’ significance in deciding whether the time was suitable for an undertaking or in weather prediction but not for human character. While there are no distinctive traces of his astrology in *A Vision*, a secondary factor may have contributed to the surrounding fictions, since, if they had consulted *Epitome Totius Astrologiae* in the British Museum or Bodleian, under the heading of Joannes Hispalensis the catalogues also listed an edition of his translation *De Differentia Animae et Spiritus* (‘On the Difference between Soul and Spirit’) by Costa ben Luca (Kusta ben Luka).\(^6\)

The Yeatses would also have consulted H. C. Agrippa’s *De Occulta Philosophia* (1533), which Yeats knew and had used in English and which they may already have owned in Latin.\(^7\) This gives a list of the Mansions with garbled forms of the Arabic names, their meaning, their positions and a brief summary of their significance. He also gives images for making a talisman for each of the Mansions, very similar to the icons used later by Giordano Bruno in his *Ars Memoriae* (1582); though only one of these has more than a passing resemblance to the emblems which the Yeatses created for the Phases (*YVP* 3400–401), a Janus-like figure, their general style is certainly closer than that of the Tarot or other forms of occult imagery.

There are many other possible sources concerning the Mansions both printed and in manuscript, though none that is necessarily a more obvious candidate than another, for the Yeatses’ researches.\(^*\) Even if the Yeatses did not research the Mansions of the Moon themselves, they were

\(^5\) Harper and Hood refer to hand-written copies that George made; see also T. R. Henn, *The Lonely Tower* (1950; London: Methuen 1965) 173–74. She highlighted the following passage: ‘For the influence of the moon in these mansions [located by Ideler in *Untersuchungen über die Bedeutung der Sternnamen*], we must look elsewhere, viz. in lib.i. cap. 11, and lib. iv. cap. 18 of the Epitome Astrologiae of Johannes Hispalensis.’ (*The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1894], Vol. 5, 392). The full title of *Epitome Totius Astrologiae* (Nuremburg: Montanus & Neuber, 1548) translates as: ‘A summary of all astrology composed by the renowned Spanish astrologer, John of Seville, four hundred years ago, and now published for the first time’.


\(^7\) In ‘Swedenborg, Mediums and Desolate Places’ (1914), Yeats cites J F’s translation, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (London: G. Moule, 1651), including the reference (Ex 63) used for the title of Book IV of *A Vision A*. Agrippa’s *Opera* (YL 24) does not appear in the 1920s library catalogue.

\(^*\) 2011: Among a folder of the Yeatses’ papers related to the Golden Dawn, there is a list of the mansions drawn from Guido Bonatus’s *De Astronomia Tractatus X* (Basle, 1550), 832, though the handwriting is not that of either George or her husband. Identifying the source is possible because of the idiosyncratic version of Arabic names (virtually all mediaeval and renaissance versions mangle the Arabic in different ways), but the page is headed in brackets ‘Gazar’, no doubt for ‘Gafar’, whose work on weather prediction is one of Bonatus’s Arabic sources.
offered plenty of information by Frank [167] Pearce Sturm, and could no doubt have drawn on far more. In October 1924 Sturm wrote to Yeats with a wide range of scholarly references mainly concerning Arabian material, including the Mansions, but Yeats seems to have taken little interest.\(^8\)

In fact, the Yeatses’ papers show surprisingly little evidence of researches into connections between the Script’s Phases of the Moon and traditional lunar systems. This is explained, in part, by the Instructors’ general discouragement from wider reading and also their relatively early statement that the phasic divisions were ‘symbolic & arbitrary only’ (\textit{YVP1} 275). Certainly they bear no relation to the phase of the Moon at the time of a person’s birth, as in an astrological system, and this would have been immediately apparent to Yeats from the charts he knew well. Eventually, in the published versions of the System, they married up the Zodiac with the Phases by assigning the phases to complete Zodiac signs, allotting a whole 30° to the crucial Phases 1, 8, 15 and 22, while allocating the others in triads, dismissing it as ‘classification not symbolism’ (\textit{AVB} 196).

Despite the references with which Sturm regaled him, late in the production of \textit{A Vision A}, Yeats appears to have abandoned all but the broadest attempts at identifying the Phases with the stars of the ecliptic. The Yeatses probably recognised that researches concerning the Mansions were unlikely to be fruitful with respect to the System, since the Moon’s phases and Mansions are two separate cycles, so that the combination of Arab wisdom and mediaeval European adaptation found a more creative expression in the fictions of the Judwalis and Giraldus. In the end, among all the preparatory papers, they appear to have left only one document that deals with the Mansions; however, this list comes from an unexpected source and gives a catalogue that is different from all of the major variants available elsewhere.

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\section{II}

The list that George drew up, headed ‘560. Athanasius Kircher’ and ‘28 Mansions of \(\mathbb{D}\)’, was noted, probably translating from the Latin as she went and with some haste, from Athanasius Kircher’s \textit{Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta}.\(^9\) In this work Kircher (1602–1680) sought to shed light on the world of Ancient Egypt, through the elements, which he surmised, survived in the Coptic language. In the first part of the work Kircher edited and translated an Arabic compilation, called the \textit{Scalae} (ladders or scales), to produce trilingual grammars and word lists for Coptic, and in the second part he offers more thematic examinations of aspects of Egyptian thought, contextualising


\(^9\) \textit{Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta} (Rome: Scheus, 1643): ‘The Egyptian Language Reconstructed: A Three-part Work in which is contained a full Restoration of the Coptic Language or of the Idiom of the Egyptians of the Ancient Pharaohs, almost fallen into ruins through the long passage of time, drawn from the hidden records of the Arabs’. Very few of Kircher’s works have been translated out of Latin; all translations here are mine and are as literal as possible.

the raw material of the word-lists and serving as an appendix to his earlier work, *Prodromus Coptus*.10 George Yeats’s list comes from the chapter on the Egyptians’ star names in this supplement. She could have found *Lingua Aegyptiaca Resituta* in the British Museum, the Bodleian, or at Trinity College, Dublin, since they all have copies, which gives no further clue to dating. Although the sheet was placed with the Script of 27 June 1918, this date is probably irrelevant to when it was compiled, since the Yeatses were at various addresses in Galway from early April until the end of August and the library at Coole Park, the most probable source in Galway, did not contain any of Kircher’s works.11

If George was looking for a list of the Mansions of the Moon, any of Kircher’s writings would have been an idiosyncratic choice, but several do contain astrological information. His works are varied and encyclopaedic, ranging from studies of magnetism to vulcanology, from musicology to the causes of plague, and from optics to [169] ancient Egypt. His influence was most lasting in these last two areas and he is credited with pioneering the magic lantern and founding modern Egyptology.12 During the nineteenth century his reputation was at its lowest, however, since Champollion’s work on the decipherment of hieroglyphs had exploded most of Kircher’s ideas on Egypt and his scientific thinking had been superseded, but he remained of interest and value to occultists. Though a Jesuit priest, Kircher shows a strongly Hermetic turn of mind in surprising areas and his combination of scientific investigation and mystic sensibility was particularly appealing; Madame Blavatsky, for instance, quotes his original and wayward theories of magnetism in *Isis Unveiled*. However, the work that occultists had plundered most extensively for information had been *Œdipus Ægyptiacus*, the culmination of his studies of Egyptian antiquity.13 It is a compendious examination of the wisdom of ancient Egypt as it appeared in the mid-seventeenth century to a man still steeped in the Hermetic-Platonist awe of Egypt, and before the Rosetta Stone

10 *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus* (Rome: Typis S. Cong. de propag: Fide, 1636), ‘The Coptic or Egyptian Herald’.

11 Communication from Colin Smythe, who plans to publish the library contents in the last volume of the Coole Edition, with a bibliography.


*originally published in Yeats Annual 16, ed. W. Gould (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 163–193*
revealed the true nature of hieroglyphics.14

William Wynn Westcott recommended *Œdipus Aegyptiacus* to Rosicrucians,15 and used it in his writings associated with the Golden Dawn, as did A. E. Waite.16 Westcott also followed a line of thought suggested by Eliphas Lévi, who claimed that: ‘The most curious and complete key to the Tarot is found in the monumental work of Kircher on Egypt’, in the form of the Bembine Table of Isis, since Lévi, like others, treated the Tarot cards as corruptions of hieroglyphic symbols.17 Westcott published a short book on this Table in 1887, *The Isiac Tablet of Cardinal Bembo: Its History and Occult Significance* and a large proportion is devoted to Kircher’s reading.18 Yeats refers to it in an account of trance sessions in 1890, when he and a colleague had, among other feats, ‘made the invisible powers interpret for us the mystic tablet of Cardinal Bembo’, and it is probably through Westcott’s work that Yeats knew of the Table and the mystery of its meaning, so that he would have come across Kircher in this context even if he did not consult *Œdipus Aegyptiacus*.19

Kircher’s researches about Egypt were based upon his reconstruction of Hermetic wisdom but also on philology. He was one of the pioneers of the idea that Coptic was an authentic Egyptian tongue, preserving elements of the speech of the Pharaohs, a surmise that was later vindicated. It was in fact the Coptic form of Egyptian that the Golden Dawn required their neophytes to study, since its Hellenistic alphabet is more readily readable than hieroglyphs. The syllabus for the Zelator Adeptus Minor expected the ability ‘To build up any God-form required, using the correct Coptic Name’, and knowledge of the ‘Coptic Alphabet’ is also mentioned for the symbolical part of the examination to pass from Zelator to Theoricus, which Yeats finally did in 1912.20

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There are, therefore, clear reasons why the Yeatses might have been drawn to Kircher’s Egyptian works, and *Œdipus Âgyptiaca* also contains two distinct lists of the Mansions of the Moon: the first is entirely based on Arabic tradition or the ‘Saracen Cabala’; the second is a more discursive survey in the context of Coptic and Arabic astronomy. 21 This latter treatment is a slightly embellished version of the list that appears in *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta*. Though *Œdipus Âgyptiaca* would have been the more natural choice, if George were actually looking for information on the Mansions, given its Cabalistic material and its currency in Hermetic circles, it was not the work she noted. 22 It is definite that *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta* is the source and that ‘560. Athanasius Kircher’ is not just a cross-reference: it has to be from either *Œdipus Âgyptiaca* or *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta*, since it is clearly based on Kircher’s slightly haphazard Latin translations of the lists of Coptic names, which are significantly different from any other catalogue; ‘560’ refers simply to the page on which the list starts in *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta*; and finally, certain anomalies in the starting and finishing degrees of the Mansions indicate that it is the direct source, since the errors in *Lingua* are distinct from those in *Œdipus*.

The Coptic version of the Mansions is a borrowing from the Arabian tradition, and not its source, as Kircher assumed and intended to demonstrate; moreover, the translations and explanations given by Kircher are possibly as much a creation of his imagination as of documentary evidence. He sought evidence of Egyptian ideas where he could, bringing in mythology and the cycle of the Nile to elucidate the terms he met, and his explanations can be somewhat fanciful. Such considerations are, however, largely extraneous to George Yeats’s copying of the information: she noted the degree values and names given by Kircher, either translating as she went, or while transferring rough notes to a fair copy, and left out those terms which are only given in Greek or Arabic; she also added a few errors which further enrich the picture.

The table below gives a brief conspectus of the notes George Yeats made, as transcribed by Harper, and some of the salient details from Kircher’s chapter ‘On the Egyptian Names of the Stars’. Although George Yeats’s English list is clearly derived from Kircher’s Latin one and remains close in most particulars, there are some inconsistencies and errors. Kircher’s own

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22. Harper does not mention *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta* in his footnotes in *MYV*; he refers to *Œdipus Âgyptiaca*, though apparently without having been able to examine it, since it does contain the same list of the Mansions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>George Yeats's Notes</th>
<th>De Aegyptiacis Stellarum appellatibus, from Linguæ Aegyptiæ Restituta, 560-67</th>
<th>Concerning the Egyptian names of the stars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 Mansions of Ω</td>
<td>560. Athanasius Kircher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from 0 Aries - 12° 24' Aries</td>
<td>Coptic name</td>
<td>transcription and translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 H</td>
<td></td>
<td>Latin translation and comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Τ (see Abenragel)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ african fish] the belly of the whale, or the fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 from 5th degree of Τ to 9th Τ</td>
<td>The mansions of this joining together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Τ The Mansion of Hours. (also the Hen of the skies with her sons) joining Τ to 21</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ aries] station of Horus the ben of the skies with her daughters (also chicks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 from 21 Τ to 4 Π</td>
<td>The eye of Τ</td>
<td>[ πρό-όν] greater station of Horus the eye of Taurus / the bull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 The Head of Π, 4 Π to 17 Π (The Gate)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ χίτος] barrier / gate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 17 of Π to 30 Π (The shoulder blade of the Twin)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ κλασμ] Gemini's / the Twins' shoulder blades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (The bed of the Lion) 1 of Σ to 13</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ πιμαθ] cubit of the Nile (Nilemeter) forepaws of Leo / the lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (The descent) 13 of Σ to 21 Σ</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ τρίπτυχα] station of descent or influence / influx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (The partition of self) from 21 Σ to 9 Σ</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ πτωτος] giving birth to itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (The Tree in leaf) 9 Σ to 21 Σ</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ τρεβη] fronds of Leo / the lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 21 Σ to 4 θ</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ ψυφόρ] / Brow of Leo / the lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 (Mansion of love 4 θ to 18 θ)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ ψυφάζ] : station of Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 (Mansion of acclamation) 18 θ to 30 θ</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ ἀποκλίμα] : station at Latamantis foresam to Cunicula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 (Mansion of Light &amp; depth) 0 Ω to 13 Ω</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ κύριος] station of height and / or depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 (Mansion of propitiation) 13 Ω to 26 Ω</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ χάμβαλ] : station of propitiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 26 Ω to 1 ι</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ πρασινι] (no Latin, even Arabic not translated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 (The crown) 1 ι to 21 ι</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ θέση] : Corona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 (The Heart of Scorpio) 21 ι to 4 Κ</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ καρδια] the heart of the heart of Scorpio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 (Mansion of chastity)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ αγγια / αγγία] sacred, inimitable, chaste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 (Mansion of delight &amp; favour (influence)) 17 Κ to 30 Κ</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ αινιαφρ] : station of favour and delight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

boundary degrees are sometimes anomalous and in some instances George corrects these, while in others leaves them. More significant are the textual errors and gaps. The gaps are largely because of Kircher’s habit of interspersing his Latin text with other languages, sometimes leaving Mansions without a Latin translation, and in these cases George left a blank. The real errors derive from George’s misreading of the Latin, though further misreadings may have been introduced in the transcription, so that ‘Hours’ for ‘Horus’ for the fourth Mansion is probably Harper’s choice of a common reading over the far rarer one, while ‘generation’ for the final Mansion could be either George Yeats’s translation or a mistranscription of ‘germination’.

*[In Coptic Egyptian, the definite article is m ‘pi’ for the masculine, f ‘it’ for the feminine and m m ‘ni’ for the common plural.]*

2011: Having now seen microfilm of George Yeats’s notes, I can confirm that, for Mansion 4, ‘The Mansion of Horus’ is the correct reading, as also is ‘The Hen of the Sky’, singular. Among other things, the presence or absence of a final ‘s’ is often unclear, but I would also amend the following readings: for Mansion 3, ‘The mansion of the joining together’; for Mansion 7, ‘shoulder blades of the Twins’; for Mansion 8, ‘The bed of the Lion’ appears to be followed by a question mark; for Mansion 14, ‘latrantis’ is the correct reading, Harper’s reading apparently influenced by the critic Lactantius; for Mansion 15, ‘Mansion of Hight & depth’. For Mansion 28, however, ‘The final generation’ is correct. One further detail is the presence of a ‘Seal of Solomon’ or ‘Star of David’ alongside Mansion 10, and a larger sketch of interpenetrating triangles alongside Mansion 12.
entry, ‘elbow, forearm, cubit’; Kircher moreover explicitly gives his opinion that this name is wrongly given in Arabic as ‘of the lion’ and correctly as ‘of the Nile’, linking it to the measurements found on the Nilometer to gauge the river’s rise. Similarly, for Mansion 11 she identifies ‘frons’ as the first entry, ‘frons, frondis’, meaning ‘a leafy branch, green bough’, rather than the second, ‘frons, frontis’, ‘forehead’; again Kircher’s further comment clarifies the context, linking it positively to Leo, and using the inflected form ‘fronte’ which shows the appropriate root. Other translations are slightly incorrect, such as ‘sons’ for ‘daughters’, ‘sacrifice of arm’ for ‘arm of sacrifice’, and ‘absorption of arm’ for ‘arm swallowed’, and two instances show a desire to make sense of the Latin by interpreting it in a slightly strange manner. The epithet ‘latrantis’ (‘of the Barker or dog’) is taken very metaphorically to mean ‘acclamation’, though with a question mark: ‘latrare’ has a subsidiary meaning of to ‘rant, roar, bluster’, but the reference to ‘Canicula’, the Dog Star or Sirius, shows that it is linked to dogs, even if Kircher himself appears rather bemused by the name, since Sirius is some 90º away. Her translation of ‘Sancta’ as ‘chastity’ is again perplexing since this is possible in an appropriate context, but an unusual rendering of the adjective in isolation; ironically, although the sense is not changed greatly, it is the least understandable of her translations. However, the list as George Yeats wrote it out is the one which the Yeatses would have used in considering the usefulness of Kircher’s version of the Mansions.

The term ‘beatitude’ linked to Mansions 24 and 25, for instance, raises possible links with the fourth stage of the after-life (AVA 235; AVB 232); however, though the following Mansions of ‘first budding’ and ‘final generation’ or germination could feasibly relate to the Purification and Foreknowledge preparatory to rebirth, the preceding Mansions have no clear affinities with the exhaustion of experience and reversal of values undergone in the main stages of the afterlife, the Return and the Shiftings. More likely the word prompted the choice of terminology here, since it appears to have entered the Script for the first time in one of George’s answers on 12 June 1918 (YVP1 499), shortly before the date of the Automatic Script with which the Kircher list was filed, which may indicate that they were consulting it then; it could also have influenced the later term ‘Beatific Vision’ which entered the Script in March 1919 (YVP2 216).

If they had been searching for correspondences with the Phases themselves, the three names of ‘absorption of arm’ – ‘beatitude of beatitudes’ – ‘concealed arm’, could have echoed the triad of ‘hunch-back’ – ‘saint’ – ‘fool’ which ends the cycle of incarnation. The first of the triad certainly seems to have affinities with Bricriu of the Sidhe, the anti-self of Cuchulain, whose ‘arm

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24 Yeats also labels these stages with the signs from Aries to Virgo (AVB 223) and the Mansions here are in the opposite half of the Zodiac. See Colin McDowell, ‘The Six Discarnate States of A Vision (1937)’, YAACTS4 (1986), 87–98.

is withered to the socket’ in the *Only Jealousy of Emer* (*VPl* 543).\(^{25}\) As *The Making of Yeats’s ‘A Vision’* shows, this play was intimately associated with the script in its earliest stages, forming a complex interplay of mythic dramatis personae, real-life counterparts and embodiments of the schematic Phases that were emerging. With Cuchulain placed at Phase 12, Bricriu derives part of his appearance from the Phase of Cuchulain’s *Mask*, the Hunchback at 26, with ‘the physical deformity which is, we are told, first among this phase’s inhibitions of personality’ (*AVB* 177) appearing as an absorbed or withered arm. The following Mansion, ‘beatitude of beatitudes’, certainly has resonances with Phase 27 of the Saint, where ‘the total life has displayed its source’ and his ‘joy is... but to permit the total life, expressed in its humanity, to flow in upon him and to express itself through his acts and thoughts’ (*AVB* 180). Less conclusively, the Mansion of the ‘concealed arm’ could have been tied to the Phase of the Fool, 28, whose soul has withdrawn, so that at ‘his worst his hands and feet and eyes, his will and his feelings, obey obscure subconscious fantasies’ (*AVB* 182).

A case can be made for continuing the correspondences between Kircher’s Mansions and the Phases, but it would be tendentious to stretch a few similarities too far, particularly with phrases that are at best only a few words. More importantly, however, the Mansions offer a sense of order and progression, which might have influenced the Yeatses’ thinking about how the Phases fitted into a sequence. For instance, the grouping of ‘love’ – ‘acclamation’ – ‘height/depth’ – ‘propitiation’ hints at a rise to favour and a fall to regret, too general a pattern to be linked to any particular poem or play, but reflecting the emotional trajectory of a number of Yeats’s couples. Even more suggestive is the triad of ‘descent’ – ‘parturition of self’ – ‘tree in leaf’, which recalls two poems about the [178] birth of children, their descent from the spirit world to birth, their growth into selfhood, both of which end with the image of a tree in leaf: ‘the spreading laurel tree’ of ‘A Prayer for my Daughter’ (*VP* 406; 1919) and the ‘chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer’ of ‘Among School Children’ (*VP* 446; 1926).

Yeats also uses the image of self-birth to express a preternatural completeness and isolation in ‘Among School Children’, referring to the idealised ‘Presences’ worshipped by nuns and mothers as ‘self-born mockers of man’s enterprise’, idols of impossible perfection (*VP* 445; 1926). The intriguing compound ‘self-born’ also appears in ‘The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid’ to describe the abstract truths that have arrived through the young bride’s mediumship (*VP* 467; 1923), while in ‘Stream and Sun at Glendalough’ the phrase expresses the elemental purity of a moment of beatitude (*VP* 507; 1932). It certainly seems possible that in George’s version of Kircher’s Latin,

\(^{25}\) In an early Script Yeats was told ‘Remember the withered hand that represents the primary – It is the mutilation by the antithetical self – the result of too great absorption in the antithetical self to the detriment of the primary’ (YVP1 72). Strictly, Bricriu is associated with Cuchulain’s *Evil Genius*, later *False Creative Mind*.
Yeats found the germ of some of the images which fed into the System, and even more importantly into his poetry.

III

We know that George looked at *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta* at some stage, but Kircher’s works provide some striking parallels with the System of *A Vision*, specifically the dualism of the *primary* and *antithetical Tinctures*, the associated imagery of light and dark, the intersecting cones and spiral gyres, and the characterisation of the Moon’s phases. Also in the Egyptian works one of the most important themes is that of *Anima Mundi* and indeed the Yeatses could have been directed to Kircher on this account: one of the stranger books in their library, *Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters Explained,* refers the reader vaguely to Kircher’s ‘work on the [Hieroglyphics] concerning an icon of *Anima Mundi*, identified with the Templars’ Baphomet.27

Like Ralph Cudworth, the Cambridge Platonist, Kircher was certain ‘that according to the ancient Egyptian Theology, (from whence the Greekish and European was derived) there was One Intellectual Deity, One Mind or Wisdom, which as it did produce all things from it self, so doth . . . contain and comprehend the whole, and is it self in a manner All things’.28 Egyptian thought had fed into the Greek Mysteries and was the source of the Platonic idea of *Anima Mundi*, a pagan trope for God. By tracing back the various ideas and forms of thought which had passed into the later civilisations of the eastern Mediterranean, Kircher was confident that he could reconstruct the wisdom of ancient Egypt, using the broad outline given by the accounts of classical antiquity and the Hermetic Corpus, supplemented by the work of writers in Arabic and his researches in Coptic. As for hieroglyphic inscriptions, Erik Iversen notes that: ‘there was no doubt in Kircher’s mind that he knew what the hieroglyphic inscriptions contained’, so that the decipherment was a process of confirmation and working out how the hieroglyphs expressed these ideas rather than what was written. The Hermetic Corpus showed that these ideas were in fundamental sympathy with Christianity, so that he also shared the absolutist faith of the early humanists in the ‘universality of the Christian truth, which they considered a timeless cosmic force’.29 The ancient pagans were born

26 Ahmad bin Abubekr bin Wahshih [Ibn Wahshiyah], *Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters Explained*, translated, edited and introduced by Joseph Hammer (London: G. & W. Nicol, 1806; *YL* 832). This work was also in the Westcott Hermetic Library (*Yeats’s Golden Dawn*, 297). Ibn Wahshiyah was important in Theosophical circles as the translator/author of *The Nabatean Agriculture*, thought to convey the pre-Adamite secret doctrine of the Chaldeans of Babylon.

27 *Ancient Alphabets*, xvi. The icon (p. 22) is strikingly similar to Kircher’s image of the scarab-man holding the tablet, illustrated and discussed below. The passage in question comes from *Obeliscus Pamphilius* (Rome: Grignan, 1650). [See end of article for image, not included in printed version.]

28 Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: Royston, 1678; *YL* 453), 346. Cudworth rejected Casaubon’s blanket dismissal of the Corpus but excluded three books (see *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 427–31), and censured Kircher’s uncritical acceptance.

too early to receive the final complete revelation in Christ but, since they lived in God’s world, they could not fail to gain knowledge of the truth, recognising ‘either by natural law or by the guiding light of right thinking, some single origin of all things, namely Godhead, holding universal government over nature’.

Their polytheism was extremely unfortunate but understandable, explicable as a vulgar, exoteric form of religion, a travesty of the original symbolism created by ‘Hermes, the founder of this Theosophy’, for whom the deities’ names and attributes ‘in no way signified individual gods, but the ineffable virtues of the supramundane and archetypal Godhead’. Kircher therefore saw all pagan deities as embodiments of divine principles, specifically of the active and passive aspects of *Anima Mundi* working in the natural world and symbolised by the Sun and Moon; he elaborated a wheel of manifestations, linked with the Zodiac, to give a ‘a mirror of the gods’ origins or the Hermetic invention of gods’. The Sun is identified with the active principle of nature or *Anima Mundi*, while the Moon is the passive or receptive principle in accordance with

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31 *Turris Babel*, 142.

traditional symbolism, and [181] these two archetypes are in turn expressed in a variety of aspects, corresponding to the pagan pantheons.

Kircher followed Biblical chronology and the fragmentation of divine unity into multiple facets was linked to the linguistic confusion after Babel, as understanding of the primal truth, which had survived the Flood with Noah, was corrupted over time. As languages and religions had diverged, so had their systems of writing, which had originally been the vehicles of sacred thought but had later descended into banality. Like the deities, the symbols had expressed ideas concerning *Anima Mundi*, and this was as true for the Coptic alphabet as for the hieroglyphs, though the latter had been preserved relatively unpolluted through its restriction to the priestly caste. Kircher’s authorities told him that the Egyptians had used three or four different writing systems, according to their purposes: a vulgar script, a scientific, a symbolic and a sacred or hieroglyphic. Kircher had very few specimens from which to work except for the obelisks erected in Imperial Rome, ‘the mystic tablet of Cardinal Bembo’, and the Vatican’s Coptic codices. The ancient writers were describing the writing systems now generally referred to as demotic, hieratic and hieroglyphic, but to Kircher it seemed reasonable to assume that the Coptic documents showed the vulgar form of writing, and further, following his authorities, that the Coptic alphabet derived from the forms of Egypt’s sacred [182] animals and had symbolic dimensions beyond mere sound.

Kircher’s earliest interpretation of the sacred writing, ‘A Specimen of Hieroglyphic Interpretation to be demonstrated in the proposed System’ (*Prodromus Coptus*, 238–77), offers a pregnant example from the Table of Isis, a human-headed scarab, holding an engraved tablet in its claws. He identifies that ‘this mystical diagram is made up of six distinct symbols, any one of which

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34 Yeats’s phrase, *UPI* 245 (see above). The Table, now in Turin’s Museo Egizio, was discovered in Rome in the 1520s and sold to Pietro Bembo. Dating from at least the first century CE, and ‘a genuine cult-object’, it is now ‘obvious that the individual signs of these “inscriptions” have been copied from genuine hieroglyphs, but it is equally obvious that they are devoid of any meaning, and have no graphic significance whatsoever’ (Iversen, 55–56). Cudworth comments: ‘And for our parts we doubt not but that the *Mensa Isiaca* lately published, containing so many strange and uncouth Hieroglyphicks in it, was something of . . . this Arcane Theology of the Egyptians, and not meer History, as some imagine: Though the late confident Oedipus [Kircher] seem to arrogate too much to himself, in pretending to such a certain and exact Interpretation of it’ (*The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 317). It merited its own entry in Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* (Vol. 8, 912–13), and consideration in the article *Ecriture des Egyptiens* (Vol. 5, 438).
points to remarkable mysteries and highest powers’: the scarab, the human head, the concentric circles, the crescent Moon, the cross, the tablet inscribed $\Phi \Upsilon \Lambda \Omega$, along with a seventh separate symbol, the winged globe. Citing a wide variety of authorities, he interprets the self-born scarab as the frame of the world or firmament and the human head as Horus or the Sun, the two together intimating the universe. The concentric circles, between the scarab and the head, signify the celestial orbits of the planets, the horned diadem which crowns the head, the Moon’s movements, and the cross within it, the four sublunary elements. The tablet between the scarab’s claws is inscribed with the word ‘Love’, the chain of the universe, and each individual character in the Coptic script expresses part of its mystery. In $\Phi \Upsilon \Lambda \Omega$ (phulo; for Kircher, cognate with Greek φιλος, philos), $\Phi$ represents the dispersal of rays from the central world to the perimeter, $\Upsilon$ showing the upward movement from nature to the divine, and $\Lambda$ the downward movement from ‘God or, Platonically speaking, Anima Mundi’, with $\Omega$ expressing the universe: ‘To the Egyptians this was simply the soul of the world [anima mundi], the cause and origin of all in the world, which they expressed so succinctly and truly in this hieroglyphic diagram’.\textsuperscript{35}

For Kircher the pagan intimation of true deity had passed from the Egyptians’ Hemphta to the Platonists’ and Stoics’ Anima Mundi \textsuperscript{183} to become Virgil’s Spiritus intus. He therefore feels entirely justified in using two lines from Virgil’s Aeneid at the head and foot of his diagrammatic reconstruction of the world system according to the Egyptians, where the winged globe,\textsuperscript{36} outside the boundaries of the universe, sends down its nourishing stream to the Earth at the centre, receiving from it in return, while the scarab-man and his attributes embody the operations of Nature. In effect therefore Kircher follows the Neo-Platonic tradition of dividing Anima Mundi into a superior and inferior expression, the first, symbolised by the winged globe and variously called Hemphta, Anima Mundi, or ‘triforme Numen’ (triple godhead) which acts as the vivifying influence, which Henry More terms the divine Soul of

\textsuperscript{35} Prodromus Coptus, 253–54.

\textsuperscript{36} Le Comte Goblet d’Alviella examines the winged globe in The Migration of Symbols (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1894) 204–26 (1920s library; YA4 283), and the Rose can be seen as a variant solar disc (VP 811).
the World; the second, symbolised by the scarab-man, represents its active and material manifestation in the world, More’s ‘Universal Soul of the World or Spirit of Nature’, also styled the ‘Inferiour Soul of the World’, ‘that Promus-Condus of the Universe’ (its steward), ‘the immediate Instrument of God’, and ‘the Vicarious power of God’.37

The letters of his mystic word PHI close are superimposed with those [184] of the Latin Amor and frame the whole; the scarab is identified with the first, unmoving circle of the stars, as well as the motive force of the element of earth; the moving planets occupy the next circle, identified with the motive force of air, followed by the Sun with fire’s, and the Moon with water’s; at the centre stands the Earth, with the admixture of all the elements, receiving and returning the fountain from the superior Anima Mundi.

As the concepts become less cosmological the symbolism becomes more geometric, and he identifies in the Isiac Table an abstract composite symbol which encompasses the cross of the four elements, together with all the letters of PHI close are superimposed in a monogram, thus showing the world and its elemental mixture bound together in the chain of concord.38 A slightly more developed diagram appeared in Edipus Ægyptiacus where it is entitled Sphaera Amoris or Sphaera Ameris, coupled with an abstract image of light and dark pyramids intersecting. The Egyptians supposedly ‘compared the soul to the light pyramid and the body to the dark one’; the base of the light one is placed ‘in the supra-[185] mundane Zodiac’ and in it are those beings ‘most remote from partaking in corruption’ and their world ‘touches the orbit of bodily things’ only at a point; conversely those who are mired in earthly forms ‘have their pyramid’s base in the centre of corruption’ which only ‘touches the orbit of immortal things at a point’. In the other design, a circle represents the universe, which ‘the soul of the world or triform godhead’ broods over; the light pyramid, ‘V’, ‘denotes the descent of anima Mundi from the heights to the depths’ and ‘Λ’, the dark pyramid, ‘shows the ascent or

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37 Henry More, The Immortality of the Soul, in A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings (London: Wm. Morden, 1662 [YL 1377]), 195; 196; 183; 184; 203 respectively.  
38 The monogram is not evident without wishful thinking. Though in this case Kircher appears to have tidied the symbolism to suit his purposes, otherwise his engraving of the Table itself is almost identical to earlier engravings, which were purely descriptive, notably Lorenzo Pignoria’s Characteres Ægyptii (Frankfurt: de Bry, 1608).
motion from the depths and mess [miscella] of material things’ returning to it. The dualism is made
more ambiguous, if not reversed, in the following comments that ‘the pyramidal letter Λ, refers so
aptly to the descent or outpouring’ of God or Anima Mundi, while the ‘radiant or inverted pyramid
form of the letter V’ shows ‘ascent to the limits of the vastest heavens through the World’s spaces
from the centre of the Universe’ or Earth and ‘that magic chain of love connecting things above
with those below’. 39 Furthermore, because of the construction of the word ΦΥΛΟ, Kircher’s
formula effectively gives priority, if not primacy, to the phenomenal world and its movement
upward and, although the dark pyramid is based in the material world, since he views each pyramid
as emanating from its vertex, the confusion is rich in possibilities for the heretical mind.

Kircher had taken the figure of the intersecting pyramids from De Conjecturis by Cardinal
Nicolaus Cusanus (Nicholas of Cusa; ca.1400–1464), possibly via the work of Robert Fludd (1574–
1637), the English Rosicrucian writer.40 Cusanus uses the two pyramids as his fundamental
paradigm: the pyramid of light is based in Unity and that of darkness is based in Alterity, Otherness
or Difference, and these two poles also stand for the One and Multiplicity, or God and
nothingness.41 This form of duality is Pythagorean, having passed into Platonism as [186] the
‘antinomy of the One and the Many that Plato thought in his Parmenides insoluble’ (VPl 935).
These strands are present in Cusanus’ concept,42 and in line with Greek philosophy’s love of triads,
he divides the regions of the dual figure into three worlds, the region where light predominates, that
where dark predominates, and the intermediate zone of mixture. Fludd adapts this tripartite division
of the two pyramids extensively, applying it to the human body and the universe, to demonstrate the
constitutions of the two cosmoi, macrocosm and microcosm.43 In a further development of the
image, these two intersecting pyramids are also portrayed as comprehending steps on a ladder or
scale, with a pyramid based on Earth ‘emanating’ from the Empyrean, showing the soul’s descent
from the perfection of divine unity towards multiplicity, while the converse pyramid shows the
soul’s return towards perfection in unity.

40 Cusanus’ influence on Kircher was significant; see Thomas Leinkauf, Mundus Combinatus: Studien zur
Struktur der barocken Universalwissenschaft am Beispiel Athanasius Kircher SJ (1602–1680) (Berlin:
Akademie Verlag, 1993) esp. 84–91, 143–49. Leinkauf shows Kircher’s close following of De Conjecturis,
195ff.
41 [Nicolaus Khrypffs or Cryfts], D. Nicolai de Cusa Cardinalis, utriusque Iuris Doctoris, in omnique
Philosophia incomparabilis viri Opera, (Basel: H. Petrus, 1565). Virginia Moore, in The Unicorn: Wil-
liam Butler Yeats’ Search for Reality (NY: Macmillan, 1954), 339–344, considers that, of all philosophers,
Cusanus ‘seems to come closest in the matter of contrarieties . . . to Yeats’ own thought’ (341).
42 Girardus Ruffus uses Cusanus’ figures in his commentary on Boethius’ Arithmetica (Paris: de Collines,
1521) 13 verso, expanding the list of dualities into a Pythagorean Table of Opposites. Concerning Cusanus’
mathematical analogies and the Table of Opposites, see James Olney, The Rhizome and the Flower: The

Kircher’s fundamental conception is more fully dualistic than that of Cusanus and Fludd, and he almost balances the roles of the two pyramids and, by placing the idea within a pagan construction, he [187] makes the two-fold interchange more neutral. By summarising the complex of ideas in his formulation of ΦVΛO, Kircher gives the mundane world priority and he arranges the pyramids within the full circle of the cosmos and across the equator of his universe rather than along its axis, effectively portraying a lateral interchange rather than a vertical ladder for man to ascend to God.

The interchange is also represented by a spiral knot in a symbol of the scarab beetle: ‘A Hieroglyphic Idea explained, indicating the movement of Anima mundi’, showing the concept within ‘the hieroglyphic idea of the scarab’s ball’. The spiral efflux of Anima Mundi is measured by the insect’s progress within the universe, indicating ‘the diffusion of spirit from the insensible to the sensible world’ in a double loop or hourglass from the emanating point of the higher manifestation which then passes through the planetary courses in the material cosmos until it reaches the lowest point at Earth to return to the origin, where the process begins again. The upper coil is labelled ‘the helical progress of the world-Spirit [Spiritus mundanus]’, while the path that returns from Earth is labelled ‘the Spirit’s return to the centre of its unity’.

To illustrate the lineage of this concept in ancient thought, Kircher finds traces in Orphic writing and in the Hermetic Corpus, where Hermes Trismegistus says, ‘God is moreover full of Ideas, the father implanting the qualities for all things in the sphere, and encompassing every quality as if in a circular course [gyrum]’. The themes of circularity and omnipresence lead Kircher to postulate: ‘From these words it is apparent that He is the green line’, the placeless cosmic equator which separates the created universe from the uncreated and ‘which, according to

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45 Obeliscus Pamphilius, [342]. Cf. Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which contain Religious or Philosophic Teaching ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus, trans. and ed. Walter Scott (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924 [YL 881]), Libellus VIII. Scott gives: ‘. . . shut them up in [the sphere], as in a cave’.

Pico’s *Conclusiones* 29, the Cabalists say, turns [gyrat] the whole universe’.\(^{46}\) Kircher also asks if, since the circle is the symbolic expression of both God and intellect, ‘that form of \(188\) thought, which the philosophers call syllogism, is anything other than the spiral of the motion of the rational soul \(animus\)’.\(^{47}\)

Yeats’s gyre emanates ultimately from the whirling of a sphere which leaves behind it ‘an empty coil’ as vestige of its progress between the ‘unexpanded gyre’ of *Anima Hominis* and the ‘expanded gyre, *Anima Mundi*’ (*AVA* 129), while the twin cones are formed by the separation of a sphere from unity into duality, each creating its spiral (*AVA* 133; *YVP3* 394). Within the present, the Sphere of totality or *Thirteenth Cone* operates in a dimension higher than those of mundane reality, and so symbolically moves in an incomprehensible plane ‘at right angles to a circumference which includes all movements known to us’ (*AVA* 175), a plane analogous to the green line of Binah, separating the Sephiroth of the Supernal triad from the rest of the Tree of Life. Yeats’s Sphere is not, however, a sphere of love, but one which transcends love and strife, which are expressed only when ‘the ultimate reality, symbolised by the Sphere, falls in human consciousness, as Nicholas of Cusa was the first to demonstrate, into a series of antinomies’ (*AVB* 187). Cusanus’ famous definition of God is as *coincidentia oppositorum*, both infinite and infinitesimal, epitomising and resolving all the contradictions that are irresolvable to man; to Yeats the reconciliation is far less interesting than the conflict.\(^{48}\)

\[\text{IV}\]

It is tempting to see the opposition of the antinomies and the double cones of Yeats’s *A Vision* in these constructs, particularly the less hierarchical conception of the pyramids that Kircher proposed to provide the image of *Anima Mundi*. Kircher’s conception is fundamentally Christian, whereas *A*
Vision is humanistic and like the ‘script has its origin in human life – all religious systems have their origin in God & descend to man – this ascends’ (YVP2 269). What Kircher might have found dangerous was the vital alteration which the [189] Yeatses proposed, though it is implicit in recirculation of the scarab’s helix: the gyres of A Vision adapt the pyramids of light and dark opposed across the diameter of a circle into a pattern of movement away from unity toward multiplicity and then back to unity, but which then repeats. Yeats claims the sanction of antiquity and modern thought for his adaptation: ‘It seems that ancient men except the Persian and the Jew who looked to an upward progression, held Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal return, but if religion and mathematics are right, and time an illusion, it makes no difference except in the moral effect’ (AVA 176), but for the Christian Kircher the upward progression was essential and the moral effect very significant.

How much the Yeatses were conscious of these forebears’ versions is uncertain, since Yeats would long have known of Fludd as a key figure in Rosicrucianism, and he was evidently aware of Cusanus, though at a late date. He acknowledges in A Vision B that Nicholas of Cusa ‘was the first to demonstrate’ the antinomies (AVB 187; 247). However, this passage had appeared in a draft without the reference to Cusanus, and it seems that Yeats came across his writings at a stage when his rewriting of A Vision was all but completed in 1931. He writes to Mario Rossi in October 1931 to thank him for his ‘long and valuable quotations from Nicolas of Cusa, which I hope to understand better in a few days’ and tells him that he has also been reading a book by Ludwig Fischer: ‘It deals with the problem of the universe as “an opposition in unity” and has a long historical section which gives a page or so to Nicolas of Cusa, speaks of him as of great importance’ (L 783–84). Though there is much that Yeats would have found consonant with his own thoughts, it would have been confirmation rather than any real contribution to his thinking and, learning about Cusanus at second hand, it seems unlikely that he knew of the paradigm.

[190] More tantalising is the possibility that George knew of these formulations from her reading, whether prior to marriage or afterwards, or that the pictures from Kircher’s works might have lingered in her memory. She had studied Pico’s work in considerable depth, including his ‘Cabalistic Conclusions’, and Kircher is in many ways an heir to Pico’s Cabalistic Christian Hermetism. The intersecting pyramids have a strong resemblance to the double cone in its most

49 The typescript ‘Genealogical Tree of Revolution’ (see Jeffares, W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet, Appendix, 325–26) also posits Cusanus as the originator of the antinomies: ‘Nicholas of Cusa. / Kant restates the antinomies. / Hegel believes that he has solved them with his Dialectic.’
50 See NLI MS 30,840.
52 See Ann Saddlemeyer, Becoming George: The Life of Mrs W. B. Yeats (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 60, 66, 70, 121, 136 & esp. 679 n110. She owned a copy of Pico’s Opera Omnia (2 vols. 1572, 1573) and listed the ‘47 Cabbalistic Conclusions’ in a notebook.

widely known form, with the two cones intersecting along the same axis, which first appeared in print in the notes to *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (VP 824), and then in *A Vision A* 130–39, but this figure entered the Script at a relatively advanced stage, and initially in the doubled form of the hourglass and diamond rather than the simple one.

The Yeatses’ light cone of *antithetical* subjectivity and dark cone of *primary* objectivity have powerful, albeit transvalued, affinities with those of Cusanus, Fludd and Kircher, which go beyond superficial resemblance. Yeats explains the reason for attributing light to the lunar rather than the solar cone was that the symbolism is lunar, with light at full Moon and dark at full Sun, since the light of ‘the mind comes from the *Will itself*’ (*AVA* 135). From a human perspective, this is the more valid symbolism, although from the *Daimon*’s viewpoint and ours in terms of the *Principles*, it is reversed (*AVB* 190). What earlier writers had inevitably viewed from a theological perspective becomes in the Yeatses’ version only one of two possible angles, and since the System is written from the human standpoint the values are inverted. Similarly the traditional scale of descent away from God into the exile of matter is changed to a gradual escape from the absorption in undifferentiated unity at the New Moon towards multiplicity, individuality and subjective freedom at the Full Moon, followed by progressive reabsorption into unity.

Yeats portrays the interrelationship of *Daimon* and human, as the coincidence of two opposing cones: ‘These two minds (one always light and one always dark [like the cones], when considered by one [191] mind alone), make up man and *Daimon*’ (*AVA* 27) and the *Daimon* ‘is in possession of the entire dark of the mind’ (*AVA* 28). On a universal level, the opposing cone to the human or mundane is seen as the *Thirteenth Cone*, the illusory form of the Sphere, and ‘our expanding cone seems to cut through its gyre’ creating the illusion, so that also ‘spiritual influx is from its circumference, animate life from its centre’ (*AVB* 211). This last comment is more readily comprehensible within the framework of Kircher’s symbolism than any of the diagrams in *A Vision*; and it seems to be accurate, with regards to the rest of Yeats’s conception, that the spiritual influx originates in Hemptha or *Anima Mundi* at the circumference, while the reciprocal impulse, from the terrestrial state of power which in turn feeds it, originates at the centre, the Λ and Ω of Kircher’s ΦVΛΩ. Which is light and which is dark depends on viewpoint, since the divine is dark to the human and vice versa, so that it might seem that Yeats’s version clarifies Kircher’s confusion.

While there may be an ultimate Godhead, Yeatss’s System has nothing to say about it, leaving the role of the divine to the *Thirteenth Cone*. In 1930 he states, ‘I substitute for God the Thirteenth Cone’ (*Ex* 320), but substitution is not identity, and the *Thirteenth Cone* should not be seen as God, rather *Anima Mundi*. More accurate still might be the twofold form of *Anima Mundi*, Sphere and *Thirteenth Cone*, the latter as inferior *Anima Mundi*, the ‘*Promus-Condus* of the Universe’ or ‘the *Vicarious power of God*’. Yeats entertained the possibility in *Per Amica Silentia*.

*originally published in Yeats Annual 16, ed. W. Gould (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 163–193*
Lunae: ‘Shelley, a good Platonist, seems in his earliest work to set this general soul in place of God, an opinion, one may find from More’s friend Cudworth, now affirmed, now combated by classic authority’ (Myth 351).

There are also significant differences between the Yeatses and Kircher. While the Sun and Moon for Kircher represent the differentiation of Anima Mundi into its active and passive aspects, in Yeats’s symbolism the two antinomies are both active, if anything the lunar more active than the solar, since the antithetical or lunar force is creative and individual rather than receptive and communal as in traditional symbolism.\(^\text{53}\) Similarly Kircher’s chain of Love is [192] replaced by the constant dynamic equality of ‘Concord or Love’ and ‘Discord’ (AVB 68), and the tension between the two is the motive force of the universe, which means that nothing is ever complete, driving the soul onwards in pursuit of the whole, though this wholeness only exists in a mythic past or vague future (c.f. AVA 149). The cyclical nature of the process might seem to stem from Yeats’s belief in reincarnation, but is actually more idiosyncratic and deeply rooted, since traditional systems based upon reincarnation tend to see gradual ascent from materialistic existence towards realisation of Godhead over a series of lives, the cycle serving a generally linear purpose. Yeats’s System makes realisation of the divine presence part of every cycle of incarnations at the Saint’s Phase 27, yet this is followed by a spiritual dementia at Phase 28, while the return to unity at Phase 1 is not an end since, as the term itself implies, it is a new start and the pilgrim soul is sent forth again to repeat the round, albeit at a more evolved level, and therefore in a spiral rather than a pure circle.

V

In his poem, ‘On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac’, Yeats contrasts his earlier obsessive gathering of ‘old mummy wheat / In the mad abstract dark’ and his painstaking toil over books, with the new Dionysian method of bringing ancient ideas to the light, through psychic contact: ‘but now / I bring full-flavoured wine out of a barrel found / Where seven Ephesian topers slept and never knew / When Alexander’s empire passed, they slept so sound’ (VP 442). Truths come ‘Out of a medium’s mouth / Out of nothing’, though what appears to be nothing is actually a rich loam, and ‘dark night where lay / The crowns of Nineveh’ (VP 439), linked to the Anima Mundi. If the artist’s inspiration can draw on Anima Mundi and create truths of the imagination, then they may be ‘part of the one history, and that the soul’s’ (AVA xi).

There is, however, much in both the Automatic Script and the associated papers, as well as in the final versions of A Vision, to show that the Yeatses researched and studied widely beyond what was directly involved with the immediate requirements of the Script. Although the Instructors

\(^{53}\) He contrasts his own introduction to Gods and Fighting Men (Ex 24; P&I 131) with the System’s symbolism in a notebook entry from April 1921 (YVP3 88).

were initially reluctant for Yeats to pursue researches too actively, by the time that he came to write *A Packet for Ezra Pound* in 1928, he noted with pride that Lady Gregory had told him: ‘You are a much better educated man than you were ten years ago and much more powerful in argument’ (*AVB* 8). The education came not just from the interventions of ‘George’s ghosts’ (*L* 781), but from George herself, and their various researches in many of the byways into which the Script led them. Indeed the spirits indicated that they could only work with what was already in the minds of the two people engaged and, though the formulation of the ideas might be strange and new to them, the elements of which the System was composed were already amongst their mental furniture. They added to this further through reading and discussion, this latter the most vital and easily overlooked aspect of the whole process.

Exactly why George was looking at Athanasius Kircher’s *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta* we shall probably never know and, if we did not have the sheet of notes she made, we would have no reason for even [193] imagining that she ever had looked at it. Many more such sheets have no doubt been lost, and this one is indicative of a far more widely ranging and unpredictable path of investigation and discovery than is betrayed in the final pages of *A Vision* and those show a wide range. Even if the list of the Mansions was a blind alley with respect to *A Vision*, details from it may well have had unexpected poetic consequences. It is certainly possible that coincidence or some echo in *Anima Mundi* could have provided the Yeatses with forms that recall Cusanus’ paradigm and Kircher’s symbol of love. It is also possible, as Yeats himself speculated, that ‘if I were to judge by accepted psychology I would describe this system as an elaboration by my wife’s subconsciousness of those few crude sentences’ on opposition in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, to which he should also have added her knowledge of many other recondite areas.54 Whatever approach readers take to the question of George’s mediumship, it is evident that her reading could have provided some fascinating and useful images to store in her memory for later use, whether by her conscious mind, by her unconscious or by external spirits.

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See note 27; image not included in published article. Ahmad bin Abubekr bin Wahshih [Ibn Wahshiyah], *Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters Explained*, translated, edited and introduced by Joseph Hammer (London: G. & W. Nicol, 1806; *YL* 832), p. 22. The image, a symbol of ‘*anima mundi*’, is referred to as Bahumed or ‘the calf’, and Hammer speculates that it was the origin of the ‘Baphomet’ of the Templars.