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**A REVIEW OF W. B. YEATS'S ROBARTES-AHERNE WRITINGS,
FEATURING THE MAKING OF HIS "STORIES OF MICHAEL
ROBARTES AND HIS FRIENDS"**

Wayne K. Chapman, *W. B. Yeats's Robartes-Aherne Writings, Featuring the Making of his "Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends,"* Modernist Archives (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. xlix + 373, ISBN 9781472595157.

Reviewed by Neil Mann

It is an excellent idea to bring together in one volume all of the writings that W. B. Yeats devoted to the figures of Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne, recalling A. Norman Jeffares's rather different project of bringing together all the published material related to *A Vision*.¹ Robartes and Aherne are protean compound ghosts in Yeats's personal phantasmagoria, familiar enough to be recalled at a distance of twenty years and be picked up more or less where they had left off, despite a minor confusion of names.² In the stories of the 1890s, "Rosa Alchemica" and "The Tables of the Law,"³ the characters do not meet but share contacts, including the narrator—on their reappearance they become a form of double act. Robartes is the more consistent over time, the magian voice of *The Wind Among the Reeds* and hierophant of the Order of the Alchemical Rose who becomes a wanderer in the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. He is the compiler and guardian of the documents that form the basis *A Vision*, finally presiding over a clutch of acolytes at a house in Regent's Park. Owen Aherne is the shadowier figure, defined by inner conflict, "half monk, half soldier of fortune" (RAW 18),⁴ a modern Templar and orthodox heretic who, in finding himself, loses his sense of sin and God. Recast twenty years later as Robartes's straight man and prompter, he encourages the exposition of the lunar system, his greater conventionality making him a foil for Robartes's accounts of the strange doctrines of the Judwalis and their European parallel, Giraldus. In the world of *A Vision A* (1925), Aherne is Robartes's walking companion in Galway and Connemara, the stay-at-home counterpart to Robartes's rover, but in in the *Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends* (1932), and therefore *A Vision B* (1937), he becomes more of an assistant, even a dogsbody, as Robartes takes center stage. The G. R. S. Mead to Robartes's Madame Blavatsky or the William Wynn Westcott to Robartes's MacGregor Mathers, Aherne's surname connects him to another fiction, the unpublished, semi-autobiographical *The Speckled Bird*, where Yeats's alter ego is named Michael Hearne (Robartes takes the Christian name). Though Richard Ellmann is simplistic in viewing the pair as "two sides of a penny"⁵ and two sides of Yeats's own character, there is certainly something in the sense that they are among the masks that project aspects of personality.

Despite this continuity in Yeats's creative work and the rich seam of material, the problems emerge as soon as one starts to consider the practicalities. As a glance at the table of contents shows, the volume risks being a chimeric hybrid, with awkward gaps between parts that come from very different beasts, starting with the jeweled stories of the 1890s at the head, the dialogues and elaborate fictions of 1917 to 1925 in the body, and the absurdist narratives of 1929 to 1937 at the tail. Furthermore, some of the material involved exists in several distinct published versions, and some passages are extracted from the notes to other published works; other parts are the manuscripts of published works, and yet others are manuscripts unpublished by Yeats, some published before and others published here for the first time. Some of the material has been discussed by many critics and presented in a variety of ways, other research is entirely original, and some of the manuscripts are presented for the first time.

So, the question becomes how to bring together this material into a satisfactory and satisfying volume, and Wayne K. Chapman probably comes as close to achieving this as is possible. He takes the problems and turns them to the volume's advantage. Coherent it cannot be, but the jumble itself becomes the point. And it works.

The three magical stories "Rosa Alchemica," "The Tables of the Law," and "The Adoration of the Magi" had a complicated publishing history, published in magazine and book versions in the 1890s, revised versions in 1908 and again in 1925, and the final form that Yeats gave them in the 1932 *Mythologies*, which is how they are usually presented today.⁶ Chapman uses the 1908 version from the Shakespeare Head *Collected Works*—the first time all three were published together—as his text (CWVP 7), including substantial variants of earlier and later versions in endnotes. Yeats's work for this edition, published by A. H. Bullen, shows him reworking the stories a decade after their first appearance, possibly keeping his memories of Robartes and Aherne alive enough to enable their reappearance in his imaginary circle less than a decade later.⁸

The characters make their full return in a group of manuscripts that surround W. B. Yeats's early attempts to provide a context for what was emerging in the automatic script that he and George Yeats were engaged in from the end of 1917.⁹ Chapman has unearthed a manuscript that indicates that Aherne may initially have been revived in a dialogue with "WB Yeats" from late November 1917, looking at the legacy of "Anglo Ireland" and pitting his Catholic sensibility against Mr. Yeats's defense of the ascendancy tradition (RAW 37). Based at Thoor Ballylee, this shifts into being a dialogue between Aherne and Robartes in what would become "The Phases of the Moon." Chapman also gives some of the earliest prose dialogues that were drafted between late 1917 and the first months of 1918.

The end of October 1917 saw the start of the "incredible experience" of the automatic script (AVB 8). Almost immediately, Yeats was confecting fictional frameworks, from the first with a European exponent and an Arabian one, and he visited the Orientalist Edward Denison Ross in December 1917 for some plausible Arabic names, writing to Augusta Gregory in January 1918, "I am

writing it all out in a series of dialogues about a supposed medieval book the 'Speculum Angelorum et Hominum' by Gyraldous & a sect of Arabs called the Judwalis (diagrametists). Ross helped me with the Arabic" (*CL InteLex* 3384; cf. *L* 644).¹⁰ And Robartes and Aherne were on hand to bring these figures and their ideas into modern Ireland and London—in "The Phases of the Moon" they mock Yeats in his tower at Ballylee, while in the fictions of *A Vision A*, they do something of the same at his apartments in Bloomsbury.

Even in the very early material, the fictions center on a Renaissance Latin book by Giraldus and an Arabian tribe (to be named), who have separately arrived at the doctrines that are connected by Michael Robartes. He goes to live with the tribe to learn their secrets and tells the fruits of his research to Aherne. The first manuscripts in "Unpublished 'Discoveries,' 1917–1920" are mainly concerned with setting up the encounter of Aherne and Robartes, Robartes's surprise that Yeats's *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* contains glimpses of his doctrine, and Robartes giving his account of how he discovered the esoteric system in a book in "Crackow" and an Arabian oral tradition (*RAW* 76–79). These precede and therefore complement the drafts that were published in *Yeats's 'Vision' Papers*, volume 4 (*YVP4*), edited by George Mills Harper and Margaret Mills Harper (with Richard W. Stoops Jr.).¹¹ For clarity, I here use Chapman's very helpful stemma (*RAW* 88)—which draws on Catherine Paul's and Margaret Mill Harper's chronology as editors of *A Vision* (1925) (*CW13*)—to indicate in table form (Table 1, overleaf) where the various transcriptions are to be found.

The "Appendix by Michael Robartes," which falls outside the process of redrafting, is a terser and more direct account of the doctrines, presumably intended to follow and support what was being shown more allusively in the dialogues. Based on an exposition of "The Great Diagram from the *Speculum Angelorum et hominis*," the fictional book by Giraldus, it also uses "Arabic names" from "the 'Camel's Back,'" giving diagrams such as "The holy women and the two Kalendars" and "The dance of the Eunuch with the favourite wife" (*RAW* 95), part of the pastiche of *The One Thousand and One Nights* that Yeats uses as his color. While Walter Kelly Hood, who published the transcript in *Yeats and the Occult* in 1975, gave a dating of 1918 to 1920 (*YO* 206), it is clear from this use of language (and the absence of certain terms) that it falls right at the beginning of Hood's timespan; the caution of someone as expert as Hood reminds us how the publication over the last forty-five years of material associated with *A Vision*—which he was pioneering—has made dating a little easier.

Chapman leaves the rest of the manuscripts to *Yeats's 'Vision' Papers* and moves on, in his third section, to the published material related to Robartes and Aherne, most of it exposition of *A Vision's* system couched in Arabian fictions. The first poem is "Ego Dominus Tuus," which contains a reference to a "book / That Michael Robartes left" (*VP* 367); it is dated to late 1915 and was published in magazine form in October 1917 (*RAW* 103, n1), before his marriage and thus also before the preceding manuscript material. It is included here, however, as part of the contents of *The Wild Swans at Coole* (Macmillan, 1919). Indeed dates here can become slightly slippery as Chapman is also forced by

Table 1

Title	Version	Dates	Manuscript Number	Notes	Transcription Location
"Aherne & Robartes Dialogue Etc – imperfect"	Drafts 1 and 2	Nov. 29–Dec. 16, 1917	NLI 36,263/7/1–2	Exercise Books 1 and 2	RAW 64–87
"Untitled Manuscript"	Draft 3	c. Jan. 1–Mar. 1918	NLI 36,263/9		YVP4 119–135
"Appendix by Michael Robartes"		Jan./Feb. 1918	NLI 36,263/7/3		YO 210–15 RAW 95–100
"Discoveries' Manuscript"	Draft 4	c. Mar.– Oct. 3, 1918 (finished for typing). WBY reached p. 30 mid-July	NLI 36,263/4		YVP4 62–118
"Discoveries' Typescript"	Draft 5	c. Oct. 3, 1918–late 1918	NLI 36,263/3		YVP4 11–61
"Version B"		c. late 1918–1920	NLI 30,525 and 36,263/10/1–2	MS of brief headnote of "June 1920," short Robartes-John Aherne dialogue, and Extracts ["The Great Wheel" and "The Twenty-Eight Embodiments"]	YVP4 139–260

coherence to put a note from the *Later Poems* (Macmillan, 1922)—connected with poems from *The Wild Swans at Coole* (Macmillan, 1919)—before the material from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (Cuala, 1921).

The first published expositions of the system—as opposed to the poems, which came out earlier but are, perhaps, "a text for exposition" (note to the *Later Poems* [1922], RAW 114)—are distributed in fragmentary form in notes to *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (Cuala, 1921) and the *Four Plays for Dancers* (Macmillan, 1921). Michael Robartes gives Owen Aherne documents and sends him letters, drawing on what he has found "in the *Speculum* of Gyraldus and in Arabia Deserta among the Judwalis" ("Note on 'The Only Jealousy of Emer,'" RAW 127). In many cases, although the fictions obscure ideas slightly, these notes give a clear and direct account of the ideas that would be expressed more fully and technically in *A Vision*. The "Note on 'The Only Jealousy of

Emer” gives a succinct summary of the Great Wheel, for example, while the account of the afterlife in the “Note on ‘The Dreaming of the Bones’” is lucid and relatively simple, expressed in terms of “Shade” and “Spiritual Being,” but provides a concise version of the more detailed picture that Yeats drew of the *Principles* in *A Vision B*. At the same time, Yeats was also elaborating further the story of the originator of the Judwali doctrines, Kusta ben Luka, within the world of *The One Thousand and One Nights*, creating an epistolary monologue “The Gift of Harun-al-Rashid,” to fictionalize his own relationship with George and the origin of the automatic script. Chapman includes the poem in its entirety for the mentions of Robartes and Aherne in the notes, and there is a quibble here, as his choice of copytext is not signaled entirely clearly—it is in the page header, but no printing history is given—nor are the idiosyncrasies that it brings explained. Using Cuala’s printing from *The Cat and the Moon* (1924) brings in some extraneous apostrophes—“the Caliphs’ hang,” “Caliphs’ to world’s end,” for example—which it would be helpful to indicate are included for fidelity to a particular printing rather than any reason of substance; this also happens with misprints in Bullen’s *Collected Works*.¹²

The formulations of these notes are closer to the myth that Yeats originally thought to create, using a hybrid of pseudo-Arabic and Latin terms with modern reformulations attributed to Robartes, Aherne, and Mr. Yeats, rather than the eventual exposition of *A Vision*. At successive stages the mythical clothing is stripped away a little further, so that by the time of *A Vision A*, Robartes’s researches on Giraldus and studies with the Judwalis provide documents that are the source for two versions: the main one by “Mr. Yeats,” with extra material penned by “Owen Aherne.” Chapman collects all of Aherne’s material into this volume, bringing together Aherne’s “Introduction,” “The Dance of the Four Royal Persons,” and the extended comments included in fourth book of *A Vision A*, “The Gates of Pluto,” fabricated either to include a Christian perspective or to fictionalize the Yeatses’ personal experiences.¹³ Chapman includes references to a 1922 draft of the introduction,¹⁴ and relates “The Dance of the Four Royal Persons” to its typescript drafts.¹⁵ He gives full notes and commentary on this material, which is extremely helpful both textually and in terms of references, though one cavil is that calling Watkins Books in Cecil Court a “famous Mecca for pilgrim readers of the hermetic, esoteric, and Theosophical arts” (RAW 158) risks being quaint or confusing in the context of Robartes’s travels in Arabia.¹⁶

Making up half of the book proper (i.e., without the general introduction), the last two sections are the most significant, and they cover the drafting and publication of *Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends* (Cuala, 1931), and some subsequent additions. Chapman’s Part Four opens with an introductory essay on “The Making of ‘Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends’” (RAW 166–87), followed by a facsimile of the single main manuscript draft (NLI 13,577) facing a transcription (RAW 188–271),¹⁷ then transcriptions of “Related Material in the While Vellum Notebook” (mainly the poem “Huddon, Duddon and Daniel O’Leary”) (RAW 272–78), and finally a lineated variorum

text of the published stories based on the Cuala version with variants from *A Vision B* and the Cuala proofs (RAW 279–310).¹⁸ His Part Five is centered on two texts: the corrected typescript of “Michael Robartes Foretells,” transcribed in Hazard Adams’s *Blake and Yeats* (1956) and in Hood’s *Yeats and the Occult* (1975), and the story given to Denise de l’Isle Adam, an addition to the Stories, interpolated into the version in *A Vision B* (the final form is given as a variant in the variorum text mentioned earlier). An essay on “Michael Robartes Foretells: A Rejected Ending” (RAW 312–21) is followed by photographs of NLI 36,272/33 facing a transcription of the typed text and handwritten corrections (RAW 322–39); “Denise’s Story: W. B. Yeats, Dorothy Wellesley, and the Re-making of ‘Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends: An Extract from a Record Made by His Pupils’” (RAW 340–51) is followed by photographs of NLI 30,390 facing transcription of the manuscript (RAW 351–59). That the texts are given as appendices to essays, rather than as texts with introductions, goes slightly against the previous practice, as does the relatively full head material describing the manuscript. The slight difference of approach in part indicates that Chapman regards these facsimiles/texts as supporting more discursive essays that go beyond just the manuscript, though there is also evidence of different parts of the book being written at different times, with slight variations of conventions and style, as well as in approach.¹⁹

Chapman is largely in agreement with George Mills Harper’s doubts about “the artistic merit of the ‘Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends’ as an organic part of the whole” of *A Vision B*, viewing the stories as “more or less extraneous” to *A Vision* (YAACTS6 [1988], 293, cit. RAW 166). While asserting “the organic integrity of ‘Stories’ in its own right,” he concludes that the fictions were “attached to *A Vision* to assuage fear that the latter might not stand alone” (RAW 166). In fact, it would seem the other way round—the stories hardly seem to stand alone without their connection to *A Vision*, though what precisely that connection is has puzzled many. Chapman certainly does not go as far as William O’Donnell who found the text “incontestably uncraftsmanlike,”²⁰ but there is no clear argument for the value of the stories or for a reading that gives them a coherence and point that they seem to lack. They seem too leaden for comedy and too trivial to bear the weight that Yeats suggests, of presenting “a group of strange disorderly people on whom Michael Robartes confers the wisdom of the east” (to Dorothy Wellesley, July 26 [1936], *CL IntelLex* 6622; cit. RAW 344). Strange the people may be, but there is little character to any of them, and O’Donnell is only slightly unfair when he notes that even the “love-war-art schema fails clumsily when he lists Huddon as the warrior instead of Daniel O’Leary, who is the only character to mention ever having been in a war.”²¹

The stories were certainly born out of the environment of the material surrounding *A Vision* and its system. When Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespeare in September 1929, he had finished *A Packet for Ezra Pound* and was immersed in clearing “up endless errors in my understanding of the script. My conviction of the truth of it all has grown also & that makes one clear” (*CL IntelLex* 5285). Looking forward to *A Vision*’s going to press in spring 1930, he wrote:

I shall begin also I hope the new version of the Robartes stories. Having proved, by undescribed process, the immortality of the soul to a little group of typical followers, he will discuss the deductions with an energy & a dogmatism & a cruelty I am not capable of in my own person. I have a very amusing setting thought out. (*CL IntelLex* 5285; cit. *RAW* 167)

In the following month he would send Frank Pearce Sturm "Six Propositions" (Oct. 9, 1929, *CL IntelLex* 5291),²² formulating his ideas in the form of sutras or Indian "aphorisms," and these broad, generalized Propositions are hardly recognizable as the same system of thought as the technical and detailed descriptions of *A Vision*. In the *Stories*, the few fragments of Michael Robartes's teaching included at the end are far more recognizable and indeed energetic, dogmatic, and cruel, cast in the form of Nietzschean aphorisms, a mixture of shock tactics, paradox, grandiloquence, and classical balance (*AVB* 51–53; *RAW* 304–5).

It is the preceding stories that are less amenable to clear understanding. Narrated by John Duddon, the stories open with him waiting for Owen Aherne with another man and a woman in London. They meet Daniel O'Leary, who gives an account of the moment when he threw his boots at actors speaking verse badly, some aspect of which Robartes has seen in vision, but O'Leary thinks that the other young people "can understand even better than Robartes why that protest must always seem the great event of my life" (*AVB* 35, *RAW* 283). Duddon then moves on to tell of his relationship as a struggling artist with the rich "tall fair young man," Peter Huddon, and a young woman who "insists on calling herself Denise de L'Isle Adam" (*AVB* 35, *RAW* 284). As with O'Leary's failed boot-throwing, Duddon's attempted jealous assault on Huddon is a failure, with Owen Aherne being mistaken for Huddon and falling victim to Duddon's heavy stick, circumstances which have now brought the three of them to meet Michael Robartes and "drink a little wine" (*AVB* 36, *RAW* 284). Robartes and Aherne arrive, and Robartes proceeds to tell the story contained in the introduction of *A Vision A*, with some minor changes. The third section takes place "Some six weeks later [...] round the same fire" and involves the introduction of two further characters, disguised by Robartes under the names John Bond and Mary Bell. Bell is vaguely reminiscent of the young Isabella Augusta Persse, having married an older man who worked for the Foreign Office and is the owner of "a large house on the more peaceable side of the Shannon" (*AVB* 44, *RAW* 294).²³ She has an affair with Bond, which produces a child, but she severs connection for five years and only re-enters Bond's life when she comes to ask his advice as an expert on migratory birds to find out how to construct the nest that a cuckoo might build, as her husband's project is to reform cuckoos from laying their eggs in other birds' nests. This quixotic goal is an ironic commentary on the old man's position as a cuckold, but he dies happy when Bell brings him "a beautiful nest, finished to the last

layer of down" (AVB 49, RAW 300). Bell and Bond are summoned to Robartes and London from the husband's funeral by Aherne,²⁴ but they have specific roles and are not to be his students.

The scene then takes on a ceremonial quality,²⁵ as Robartes cathechizes Duddon and his companions on whether he has "proved by practical demonstration that the soul survives the body" (AVB 50, RAW 301–2)—as Yeats had promised Olivia Shakespear, the process is "undescribed." He proceeds to make sure that they also accept his proof of the cyclical nature of civilizations, before he declares "we are here to consider the terror that is to come" (AVB 50, RAW 302). He then shows them Leda's third egg, "its miraculous life still unquenched," which Bell will bear to the desert "to be hatched by the sun's heat" (AVB 51, RAW 303), recalling perhaps the earlier vision of the "shape with lion body and the head of a man" arising in "sands of the desert" ("The Second Coming" [1919], VP 402).

The account closes with recollected snatches of Robartes's aphorisms, gnomic in their brevity and largely baffling apart from the system's exposition, but actually succinct aphoristic encapsulations of the material in *A Vision*. A letter from John Aherne is appended, further tangling the fiction and metafiction. Along with references to Yeats's actual poems and *A Vision A*, Owen Aherne's brother John mentions the work of Yeats's brother Jack. He also comments that some people find the woodcut of Giralduus resembles Yeats²⁶ and appears to suggest three separate revelations of the material: to Yeats, Giralduus, and the Judwalis, writing, "That you should have found what was lost in the *Speculum* or the inaccessible encampments of the Judwalis, interests me but does not astonish" (AVB 54, RAW 307).

The same young people—Huddon, Duddon, O'Leary, and de L'Isle Adam—gather in "Michael Robartes Foretells" and, in the other fragment that Chapman includes, de L'Isle Adam is able to deliver the story that was cut short in the original version, telling how Duddon is incapable of making love to her until she has slept with Huddon.²⁷ This last element recalls something of the *Spirit's* relation with the *Celestial Body*, its true affinity, and the *Passionate Body*, its necessary affinity for experience, and there are definite hints of allegory or at least parable in the relations described.²⁸ We are told that Art is Duddon's profession, War Huddon's, and Love de L'Isle Adam's (AVB 37, RAW 286), while we are told at the outset that O'Leary works as chauffeur to Robartes and Aherne (AVB 33, RAW 281).²⁹ Taking the driver as the *Will* of *A Vision*, Matthew DeForrest discerns a dance of the four non-royal persons in the interactions of O'Leary (*Will*), Denise (*Mask*), Duddon (*Creative Mind*), and Huddon (*Body of Fate*); this allegory would be attractive if it made greater sense in terms of the system, yet the only man that de L'Isle Adam is not desired by is O'Leary, and the *Mask* must represent the *Will's* object of desire.³⁰ De L'Isle Adam's name, borrowed from the author of *Axël*, may imply that she, like the play's hero, thinks that "as for living, our servants can do that," in some complex of surrogacy and "living each other's death, dying each other's life." Each possible attribution is both provocative and ultimately frustrating and, though

it certainly feels as if these ciphers must have more behind them, the attempt to identify correspondences of characters and elements of *A Vision* ends up being rather reductive. Indeed, any “solution,” however brilliant it may be, points to the failure of the art to embody the myth in any way that readers have found illuminating or helpful. And fascinating though the manuscript evidence is, there is little to clarify these conundrums. Even Robartes and Aherne do not appear to any great advantage in these stories, yet the final vignette of them setting off for the Middle East with Leda’s egg and preparing for “the terror that is to come” seems a fitting close.

As indicated, the transcriptions of “Anglo Ireland,” “The Stories of Michael Robartes,” “Michael Robartes Foretells,” and “Denise’s Story” are accompanied by facsimiles of the manuscripts. These are crucial to a real appreciation of the drafts and a huge help to understanding the difficulties that the transcriber faces; they also offer the possibility for dissent or reappraisal. In most cases the quality of reproduction is high, though Yeats evidently wrote the draft of *The Stories of Michael Robartes* on paper of a fairly large format,³¹ so that the reduction to the book page renders them less easily legible (this combines with curvature of the image, although they seem to be loose pages, and shearing of edges in a couple of places, e.g. RAW 224, 256). In theory the e-book versions—which I have not seen—may enable readers to look more clearly at the manuscripts and zoom in on details, though Bloomsbury’s site mentions that both the E-Pub version and the PDF are watermarked, which raises the dispiriting possibility of shadows in inconvenient places.

In general, the care and detail of Wayne Chapman’s transcriptions, including the attempts to deal with cancelled text and substitutions in Yeats’s notorious hand, are admirable, giving the reader confidence in the transcriptions which are not accompanied by facsimile. It is honest to transcribe the word as it appears without wishing it into something plausible that fits (as was sometimes the case with earlier transcribers), but a few choices seem improbable. A good transcription usually indicates some plausible combination of words and syntax—given time, place, and personal idiolect—though there is often no obvious right answer amid all the false starts and changed paths. Very occasionally a transcription does not read naturally, such as when Chapman gives “in the same little wandering ~~tri~~ tribe one will find, ~~the more they~~ the extreme living to tolerable amounts” (RAW 79), where the latter part makes little sense and there is no convincing phrasing with “amounts.” There is no facsimile to compare, but I would hazard that it should probably be something closer to “the extremes living in tolerable amity” (cf. YVP4 122, cit. RAW 99, n1). Similarly when Robartes is made to comment that “Mr Yeats so far ~~although at~~ ~~the~~ being of the kin of St John of Patmos has but a few ~~dreams~~ broken dreams twenty years ago and may be half forgotten” (RAW 72–73), it seems clear that, with some or other wording, Robartes is denying Yeats the true vision that was granted to St. John as the basis of his Book of Revelations, and it may be that part of the cancelled text includes a “from” to give “far from being” or that the word has been forgotten. But in Chapman’s confusing account, Robartes

is “likening him to St. John of Patmos, said-author of the apocalyptic Book of Revelation, final chapter of the New Testament. With ‘but a few broken dreams’ to go on, Yeats’s revelations are being derided as a come-lately form of false prophecy” (RAW 73). Contrasting is a form of likening, but it is misleading to imply likeness; and, as the final book of the New Testament, Revelations certainly includes the “final chapter,” but it seems a poor choice of word in this context. Furthermore, Apocalypse is simply the Greek version of the name Revelation, so “the apocalyptic Book of Revelation” is something of a redundant doubling, and one that occurs again in “St John’s description of the beast of Apocalypse in Revelations” (RAW 123, n1).

Elsewhere second thoughts do not seem to have been applied to revise earlier readings, so that a note gives “You protestants have no quibbles” (RAW 160), while the transcription facing the facsimile has “You protestants have your quotations but | but I do not see much Platonics about you” (RAW 59) (the repetition of “but” is perfectly natural, but here “Platonic” would make better sense than “Platonics” and the manuscript warrants either reading). On a slight tangent here, one thing that strikes me as a reader is the use of vertical lines for line breaks of poems and plays. It has been a useful convention to use vertical lines for describing title pages and manuscripts where the line breaks may or may not be fully significant, while using a slanted line or slash to separate poetic or dramatic writing where the line breaks are important elements of the form.³² The vertical line may appear more aesthetically elegant, but using it indiscriminately for all line breaks—a shift also seen in the *Collected Letters* and often in the *Yeats Annual*—risks losing a useful distinction, especially in a work such as this, where manuscript transcriptions are found alongside quotations of poetry.

In *Yeats’s Robartes-Aherne Writings*, Wayne Chapman succeeds in giving a full sense of Michael Robartes’s and Owen Aherne’s place in “the phantasmagoria through which alone I can express my convictions about the world” (VP 852, RAW 102),³³ with all the continuities and disjunctures involved, spanning published texts that were heavily reworked and unpublished drafts that never even reached typescript stage. Robartes and Aherne do achieve a form of independence separate from any single presentation, and this collection of all the relevant material strengthens the reader’s sense of their coherence. It would be difficult to see them amid the pantheon of “all that have ever been in your reverie, all that you have met with in books,” such as Lear or Beatrice (RAW 7), but they are more than conveniences or simple mouthpieces. Robartes in particular comes to embody the system that the Yeatses created in *A Vision*, his energy and dogmatism giving him a form of committed belief that Yeats felt himself unable to express. Assigned to the Phase 18 with Giralduis and George Yeats herself,³⁴ the phase of “emotional philosophy,” which comes after the *Daimonic* phase of Yeats and the poets, Robartes has the possibility of attaining the “Wisdom of the Heart” and he certainly has emotional intelligence, his passion matched by learning. Owen Aherne is a more ascetic and more circumspect character, whose phase is never given but would probably be

later in the cycle, where *primary* orthodoxy affects the temperament, possibly at Phase 25 along with figures such as George Russell and George Herbert, as well as the turbulent clerics Luther, Calvin, and Cardinal Newman. The version of the system drawn from Robartes's papers that Aherne half achieved, according to the Introduction to *A Vision A*, in which he "interpreted the system as a form of Christianity" (AVA xxi, RAW 149) and favored its objective aspects, is intrinsically just as valid as the more subjective version created by Mr. Yeats and is arguably a more logical reading, seeing the final phases of the Wheel as a form of goal. Aherne's role is that of the questioner, Robartes's that of affirmer. In this volume, Chapman brings together the many pieces through which we see them in a fine patchwork. Including both crafted wholes and unpolished fragments, part of the charm lies in the disparateness of the elements, and it gives a more complete picture of this aspect of the phantasmagoria than has been possible before.

NOTES

1. W. B. Yeats, *"A Vision" and Related Writings*, sel. and ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Arena, 1990). Chapman indeed fills one of the major oversights in Jeffares's collection, which is the notes to volumes of poetry and plays, where Yeats uses the fictions of Robartes and Aherne to give expositions of *A Vision's* system in different terms.
2. Aherne's name shifts between John and Owen, until the two are separated as brothers.
3. "The Adoration of the Magi" is the last of the stories told by the same narrator, where both Aherne and Robartes are mentioned but do not appear.
4. Throughout the text, RAW is used to refer to the book under review, *W. B. Yeats's Robartes-Aherne Writings*, in order to avoid confusion in the in-text citations.
5. Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and The Masks* 2nd edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979; 1987), especially Chapter 6, "Robartes and Aherne: Two Sides of a Penny," 73–88.
6. The primary texts available are in W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies* (London: Macmillan, 1959); Yeats, *The Secret Rose: A Variorum Edition*, eds. Warwick Gould, Phillip L. Marcus, and Michael J. Sidnell, 1st edn. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1981), 2nd rev. edn. (New York: Macmillan, 1992); and Yeats, *Mythologies*, eds. Warwick Gould and Deirdre Toomey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
7. Robartes appears in the titles of poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds*, alongside Mongan, Hanrahan, and Aedh, the latter two with associated qualities that contrast with Robartes as "the pride of the imagination brooding upon the greatness of its possessions, or the adoration of the Magi." This is examined in the general introduction (RAW xxii–xxvi) rather than included as one of the texts.
8. Yeats had already republished *The Tables of the Law / The Adoration of the Magi* in 1904 with Elkin Mathews, noting that "I do not think I should have reprinted them had I not met a young man the other day who liked them very much and nothing else at all that I have written" (RAW xxxv), the young man in question being James Joyce.
9. Robartes is mentioned in the poem "Ego Dominus Tuus," dated 1915 (see below); the poem is given in full, RAW 103–05.

10. The spelling of the Latin author is variously Giraldus, Geraldus, and Gyraldus in print, and mainly Gyraldus in the letters, as well as Gyraldous, as here.
11. George Mills Harper, Margaret Mills Harper, and Richard W. Stoops, Jr., eds., *Yeats's 'Vision' Papers*, vol. 4 (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
12. It would save possible puzzlement on the part of the reader to explain why misprints such as “hither and hither” (RAW 12, line 397) for *hither and thither* or “and bad it flutter” (RAW 12, line 407) for *and bade it flutter* are retained.
13. One further passage from “The Cones—Higher Dimensions” that refers to “the sentence quoted by Aherne about the great eggs which turn themselves inside out without breaking the shell” is included as a footnote to the Introduction, mainly because it is written in the voice of Yeats/Mr. Yeats—itself a dichotomy worth teasing out.
14. Given the completeness of Chapman’s project, it is perhaps surprising not to see the variants from the Prospectus for *A Vision*; see “T. Werner Laurie’s Prospectus for Subscribers,” *The System of Yeats’s ‘A Vision,’* <http://www.yeatsvision.com/Prospectus.html>.
15. A line or two describing the typescripts would give the reader a little context, though a description of the typescripts can be easily enough checked by those who know to look in Peter Kenny, “Collection List No. 60: The Occult Papers of W. B. Yeats,” National Library of Ireland, accessed September 20, 2019, <http://www.nli.ie/pdfs/mss%20lists/yeatsoccult.pdf>.
16. Islamic distinctions cause problems in the controversial comment that: “Most Sunni and Shia Muslims today disapprove of Wahhabism, nowadays associated with global terrorism” (RAW 132), which raises so many issues in such a short sentence that it is best left.
17. William H. O’Donnell’s rather cursory treatment in *A Guide to the Prose Fiction of W. B. Yeats* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1983) notes that the drafts were not polished in the way that Yeats had reworked his earlier prose fiction, “and almost no significant changes were made between the first draft and the published text” (139).
18. The different approach from the stories of *The Secret Rose* (where only major variants are given as endnotes) is partly justified by the far simpler variants, though Chapman chooses to include proofs alongside the other printing, and partly because there was little point in creating a different variorum of the earlier stories alongside *The Secret Rose: A Variorum Edition* (see n6).
19. In the section “Unpublished Fragment, November 1917,” the essay “Imaginary Conversations, ‘The Phases of the Moon,’ and the Robartes Monologue in *The Wild Swans at Coole*” includes references to the *Variorum Poems, Plays*, or other editions from Macmillan and, in the second part, also Scribner’s *Collected Works*, where the two references are separated by a semi-colon. It is generally written in high academic style, with phrases such as “as a prolusion” (RAW 34, 42) and “the insipient modern age” (RAW 48), without contractions. In the following section, “Unpublished ‘Discoveries,’ 1917–1920,” the essay “Creating Story in ‘The Discoveries of Michael Robartes,’ 1917–1920” separates references to *Variorum Poems* and *Mythologies* by a slash where both are used. The essay is written in a looser style: “It seems pretty clear from this that it is too soon for Robartes and Aherne to confront Yeats, except behind his back” (a paradoxical situation), and “Right away, he plunges into the objections. [...] We hear them; but, supposedly, he doesn’t” (RAW 83). In both essays, letters are sometimes cited from Wade’s *Letters* and elsewhere from *CL InteLex* (even when also in Wade, without cross-referencing to Wade). We once get Yeats’s letter of Jan. 4, 1918, to Lady Gregory in John Kelly’s transcription from *CL InteLex* (RAW 89) and once in Wade’s tidier version (RAW 126, n6). Slightly mystifying too are references to Edward O’Shea’s *Yeats’s Library* without cross-reference to Chapman’s own newer and more accurate *The W. B. and George Yeats Library: A Short Title Catalog* (2006; 3rd rev. edn., Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2019). The essay on the White Vellum Notebook switches halfway through from the declared convention of putting “Overwritings are formalized within large curly

- braces { }" (RAW xii), when the page numbers written into the notebook by Curtis Bradford shift from curly into square brackets on p. 276.
20. O'Donnell, *A Guide to the Prose Fiction*, 140.
 21. O'Donnell, *A Guide to the Prose Fiction*, 140.
 22. A version of the "Seven Propositions"; see Mann, "Seven Propositions," (rev. Sep. 2008, corr. Apr. 2009), *The System of Yeats's "A Vision"*, consulted September 2019, www.yeatvision.com/7Propositions.html.
 23. Whether or not Yeats knew of Augusta Gregory's affairs with Wilfred Scawen Blunt as a young married woman or John Quinn when a widow, he must have been aware of her more passionate side.
 24. Recalling the importance of Hermes in "The Adoration of the Magi," Aherne has an almost psychopompic role, as Robartes says, "I want the right sort of young men and women for pupils. Aherne acts as my messenger" (AVB 37, RAW 286).
 25. There is a change of section in AVB but the change comes slightly later in the Cuala text.
 26. Edmund Dulac had based the woodcut on Yeats, of course, and Yeats said that he doubted "if Laurie would have taken the book but for the amusing deceit that your designs make possible. It saves it from seeming a book for specialists only & gives it a new imaginative existence" (Oct. 14, [1923], *CL InteLex* 4381).
 27. Chapman explains the connection with "an exact transcript from fact" of the goings-on in the Yeatses' sub-let house in Oxford (W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley, July 26, [1936], *CL InteLex* 6622), though it also recalls an earlier anecdote about George Moore: "I hear also that Moore lately made love to a young woman, who belonged to Sickert & that when she would not have anything to do with him Moore remonstrated with the words 'but Sickert & I always share'" (W. B. Yeats to Florence Farr, [Apr. 14, 1908], *CL5* 173).
 28. Compare this with "The Passionate & Celestial Body," where a male *Spirit* moves between two brides; Rapallo Notebook C (NLI 13,580), [59r]; see also Neil Mann, *A Reader's Guide to "A Vision"* (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2019), 138.
 29. His declaration that "I am the chauffeur: I always am on these occasions, it prevents gossip" (AVB 33, RAW 281) indicates that he is just the chauffeur for collecting possible students, though there is no indication of any previous occasion or other students.
 30. Matthew DeForrest is the only writer I am aware of who has seriously tried to work out the possible allegory in these terms. As he notes, "John Bond" and "Mary Bell," together with Robartes and Aherne—make up another group of four, whom he identifies with the *Principles*, and he also traces the course of the stories through the twenty-eight phases that are "every completed movement of thought or life" (AVB 81); DeForrest, "Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 18, no. 2 (Dec. 1992): 48–57.
 31. The dimensions of the manuscript pages are not given in any of the cases.
 32. This is the advice given in the MLA guidelines and *Chicago Manual of Style* 17th edn., 6.111, 13.29, 13.34. A double slash may indicate a stanza break and a double vertical line may be used for a caesura, where relevant.
 33. Yeats repeats the formulation in *Later Poems* (1922), where Robartes and Aherne "take their place in a phantasmagoria in which I endeavour to explain my philosophy of life and death" (VP 821, RAW 114). "Phantasmagoria" was an early-nineteenth-century term for light shows with projected spectral images. Describing a séance in "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places," Yeats notes "All may seem histrionic or a hollow show. We are the spectators of a phantasmagoria that affects the photographic plate [...] Yet we never long escape the phantasmagoria nor can long forget that we are among the shape-changers" (*Ex* 54–55, *CW5* 62–63). Yeats's usage implies a construct that is both voluntary and unconscious, writing of "those strange sights that only show themselves for an instant, when the

attention has been withdrawn; that phantasmagoria of which I had learnt something in London,” presumably in the Golden Dawn (*Au* 243, *CW3* 198).

34. Robartes is assigned to Phase 18 (*YVP1* 149; *YVP4* 150), but also to Phase 19 “where expression is almost too facile” (*YVP4* 31; cf. 86).