

Yeats Considered as the Archetypal Fool: A Tantric Reading of 'The Herne's Egg (1938)'

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Background

This essay considers Yeats's *The Herne's Egg* (1938) as the journey of the archetypal Fool¹ of Tarot from Indian Vedic and Tantric perspectives. In brief, the Tarot² system begins with '0 = The Fool' and ends with '21 = The World'. These twenty-one cards are known as the 'Major Arcana' and are used in combination with four suites of 'Minor Arcana' cards that correspond with the hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades of recreational playing cards. In Tarot, these suites become cups, pentacles, swords and wands, symbolising water, earth, air and fire. The twenty-one Major Arcana (twenty-two including zero) comprise three cycles of seven, the number seven corresponding with the seven inner planets 'Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn'; the Sun is synonymous with the bearing of life and Saturn synonymous with the approach of death. These planets also relate to the Vedic system of chakras, of which there are seven.

Each card represents a stage of the cycle of life; note the repetition of 0 = zero and the 'o' of laurel in *The World* card. This represents the mathematical expression of zero and the symbolic image of the Ouroboros. The first card, *The Fool* (0) progresses to the *Judgement* card (XX), after which the final stage, *The World* is obtained, or not. If *Judgement* falls against the Fool, he returns to zero.

¹ The Fool represents the archetypal beginning as a crossing point within the eternal cycle of life.

² The first known Tarot deck of playing cards arose in the early 15th century between 1420 - 1450. Tarot in its occult use came later around 1540. Israel Regardie, *The Tree of Life* (London: Rider, 1932).

The Rider Wait Tarot: 'The Fool' and 'The World'

The archetypal Fool of Tarot sets out with his dog on a quest for the unknown; he knows not where he heads or why, but nevertheless takes a leap of faith. Through his personal odyssey, the Fool is awakened and matures to a fully enlightened and initiated being; such are the themes of the Indian Vedas and Tantra. Yeats was a user of Tarot and a scholar of the Vedas and Tantra.



The Rider Waite Tarot: The Major Arcana

The Fool's journey commences at zero and concludes with the final Judgement (XX) which enables the Fool to experience Unity of Being (The World).



Introduction

This exploration of Yeats as the archetypal Fool is presented as three related topics of discussion: first is a brief framing of what Tantra is and how its principles are shared across esoteric philosophies and creeds such as Kabbala, Hermeticism, Vedic Vedanta, Buddhist and Christianity; the second section provides a Tantric reading of *The Herne's Egg*, drawing from Yeats's revised 1925 edition of *A Vision* (1937)³. The final section applies the Tantric perspective to Yeats's spiritual approach to his writing practice, touching on the common Tantric-esque ground between Yeats and his literary associate, Ezra Pound, and the subsequent basis of Vorticism. This concludes with an alternative Tantric interpretation of *The Herne's Egg* as the quest for Yeats's *Unity of Being*⁴. In the 'Introduction'⁵ of *The Herne's Egg*. In the 1991 version discussed herein, Alan Parkin acknowledges the Indian, Buddhist (Tibetan) and Christian influences and analyses the play mainly through a Christian and Celtic lens. The focus here is Tantric, which teaches practices that unite the corporeal with the divine.

Yeats's Metaphysics

Yeats's metaphysics correspond with monist Indian Vedic metaphysics, leaning towards Advaita Vedanta, which in the 19th century flourished within the Western esoteric school of Theosophy.⁶ These Vedic roots correspond with the orthodox Indian Brahmanist view of God and (hu)man 'as One'; it is a non-dualist philosophy that renders *everything meaningful* and *nothing meaningless*. Neil Mann similarly

³ W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, (London: Macmillan, 1962, second ed. 1937). The second edition will be referred to throughout.

⁴ Ibid... 'Unity of Being' is discussed throughout as the combining of the human gyre with God's gyre.

⁵ The introduction to 1991 republished Macmillan version was written by Alan Parkin (copyright The Catholic University of America Press, 1991)

⁶ The Theosophical Society was founded in New York in 1875 by occultist Madame Helena Blavatsky. The word 'Theosophy' derives from the Greek 'sophia' (Divine Wisdom). The order was strongly influenced by the Tantric teachings of Tibetan Buddhism and applied across Kabbala, Hermetic, Christian, Buddhist and Vedic cosmic systems. For further reading, see Antoine Faivre's *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, SUNY series in Western esoteric traditions. Tr. by Christine Rhone (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

explains Yeats's monist view, replacing Brahma (God) with Yeats's 'Thirteenth Cone', which in *A Vision* signifies God. 'In some sense we live permanently both in our own cycle and in the Thirteenth [Cone], but are largely unconscious of the latter until our final initiation comes... this final liberation is intrinsic within each lesser form'.⁷ (This 'final liberation' as the Tarot *Judgement* and *The World* will be discussed as part of the analysis of *The Herne's Egg*.)

In Fifth Century BCE India, the incumbent monist Vedic point of view was criticized and rejected by the Buddha who argued the impossibility of a self-created thing within a 'causal' universe. The Buddha went on to reject the concept of a concrete 'self' or 'agent' and any possibility of a 'First Cause' or prime mover. He proposed that lack of freedom is rooted in the conditioned nature of the human senses and brain, concluding that ignorance is eradicated through disciplined training of the physiology (these are the five skandhas [Sanskrit] /khandhas [Pali] which view the senses as 'aggregates'; these include *form, sensation, perception, mental form and consciousness*).⁸

Alternatively, the monist Vedic teachings present a top-down direct form of conditioning that is strongly deterministic and conceivably fatalistic, due to the strength of dependency.⁹ Dependency is a term that applies to strictly causal environments and worlds which in this case means Brahma, as God, who conditions everything because he is a prime mover and signifies the *First Cause*. This means that Vedic ignorance differs from Buddhist in that it refers to the subjective *illusion* of independence or separation from Brahma, hence the terminology of Brahma (God) and Brahmin (expression of God). Both views assign the qualities of ignorance to the archetypal Fool as expressed within the Tarot. This is not to say that the Italian-

⁷ Neil Mann, 'A Vision: Ideas of God and Man', in *Yeats Annual*, 8, ed. by Warwick Gould (London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 1991), p. 164.

⁸ For a succinct introduction to the khandhas, see Chapter Three of Susan Hamilton's *Indian Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁹ Brahmanism divides this top-down triangle or cone into four distinct levels; these are expressed as parts of the human body with the Brahman as the head and the Untouchable as the feet.

created Tarot card system grew directly out of Indian esoteric systems, but that the components of Tantra are universal to most, if not all of ancient the spiritual philosophies, despite their monist and dualist disagreements about causal linearity or quantum cycles. Yeats was conversant with, if not expert in, both monist and dualist theories and leaned towards quantum cycle theories that incorporate reincarnation (Theosophy, Hermeticism, Kabbala, Tantra and Tibetan Buddhism).

To enable communion with God, the archetypal Vedic Fool navigates his way from ignorance via the initiated archetypal Tantric Fool. The Tantric Fool emerges through the cultivation of personal kundalini¹⁰ energy as a cone or gyre, mirroring God's Thirteenth Cone or gyre as stated by Yeats in *A Vision*. (1937)

W. David Soud proposes that Yeats was exposed to the subject of Tantra via Sri Purohit Swami, in particular, chapter one of his teachings in *An Indian Monk* (1932),¹¹² headed 'The Kundalini.' However, Yeats was exposed to these topics as early as 1889 through his involvement with Theosophy and its founder, Madame Blavatsky¹³ and also Mohini Chaterjee. Purohit states "Kundalini is a tantric name for both the Goddess and the liberating spiritual energy within each human being, which is envisioned as coiled like a snake at the base of the spine, dormant until awakened. Spiritual awakening, or saktipat (the descent of power), usually occasioned through initiation by a guru, is said to arouse the kundalini, which then ascends through the

¹⁰ Kashmir Saivism describes kundalini as the Goddess Durga, divine female energy called Shakti, expressed in Tantrism and Shaktism. See Kashmir Saivism, *Vac: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras* (New Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1990), pp. 124–136.

¹¹ Sri Purohit Swami, *Autobiography of an Indian Monk* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996). First edition printed 1932.

¹² Yeats collaborated with Shri Purohit Swami during 1935 and 1936 when he worked with him on a translation of *Ten Principles Upanishads* (1938) and received a copy of *Autobiography of an Indian Monk* in February, 1932, by which time Yeats was already proficient in Indian philosophy and analysis of esoteric texts, having started with Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant in 1889. (see John S. Kelly's *W.B. Yeats Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

¹³ Madame Blavatsky (1831 – 1891) was a Russian occultist and spiritualist who brought the Tantric teachings of Tibetan Buddhism and the Vedas to the West. She described Theosophy as "the synthesis of science, religion and philosophy". See her book *The secret doctrine: The Synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888).

channels of the subtle body, eventually effecting liberation.¹⁴

These themes are systemised as monist metaphysics in Yeats's *A Vision*, in particular in the updated second version of 1937. *A Vision* describes the sacred nature of 'The Great Wheel' in terms of the 28 phases of the Moon,¹⁵ divided into four quadrants of seven, each representing the stages of human development. These are Will, Mask, Creative Mind and Body Fate. Yeats further aligns the cardinal signs of the zodiac as 'Will (Aries/Mars), Mask (Cancer/Moon), Creative Mind (Libra/Venus), Body Fate (Capricorn/Saturn).¹⁶ These descriptions are derived through use of the mythological zodiacal and planetary archetypes; such is also the case with the Tarot system.

For Yeats then, the journey of the Archetypal Fool embodies both the Vedic Fool and the Tantric Fool. The Vedic Fool moves through the respective stations of the twenty-one major arcana Tarot and over time, matures; to do this, the Vedic Fool must master courage, desire, submission to his guru, and free himself from self-deception.

Over time, Yeats's Vedic Fool is educated in the nature of monist universals as the *Unity of Being* (*A Vision*), particularly powers of ecstasy. The ecstasy concept of Tantra applies to most, if not all, esoteric religious orders, but particularly to Vedic-rooted religions and yogic philosophies that hold that the human body possesses seven vortices or cones distributed between the base of the spine and the top of the skull. These vortices or gyres are called 'chakras'.¹⁷ In order for the Vedic Fool to be

¹⁴ Shri Purohit, Swami, *An Indian Monk: His Life and Adventures* (1932; repr. New Delhi: Rupa, 2003) pp. 105-6 sourced from W. David Soud, *Divine Cartographies, God, History And Poiesis in W.B. Yeats, David Jones and T.S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ These are known in Western (Hellenic/Kabbalist) astrology as 'the decanates' which symbolise each degree of a zodiacal sign comprised of 29 degrees. Both the degrees of zero and 29 are viewed as occupying the same place as an oscillating transition point, with zero corresponding with The Kabbalist Fool of the Tarot and 29 corresponding with Saturn (Father/God), the mature or initiated Fool, which necessitates the death of the Fool of ignorance.

¹⁶ For further detail, see chapter 3 of *A Vision*, pp. 66 – 265.

¹⁷ Thomas McEvilley (1993) explains the chakras as follows: 'There is likely to have been some connection between the Indian and the Greek doctrines of the identity of spinal fluid, brain fluid, and the penis; of the chakras when they cross; of the hierarchy of those all the way to the highest chakra, seen as the proper location

worthy of cosmic sex with Yeats's Thirteenth Cone (God/The Great Herne), he must attune all seven of his bodily chakras to God's cosmic song. The Tantric Fool then becomes the Magus and Alchemist (Kabbalist/Christian/Hermetic) and is capable of both hearing and singing God's (The Great Herne's) song. Yeats's odyssey of the Fool in *The Herne's Egg*, then, is a metaphor for the Tantric initiation of the Vedic Fool with the goal of ascending to God's level through sexual intercourse with God's subjective 'mask' as the Goddess or The Priestess Attracta.

Attracta attracts Yeats's Vedic Fool (Congal) and they come together to become the kundalini embodiment of the Herne's egg: i.e. two combined gyres forming a cosmic/corporeal orb. In order for this to be achieved, Congal must marshal his six soldiers to perform as One. The soldiers are: Mike, Pat, Malachi, Mathias, Peter and John who combine with Congal as seven and are proposed here as being symbolic of the seven-cone chakra system, the seven deadly sins, the seven harmonics of Pythagoras, and the seven inner planets of the zodiac. Yoko Sato goes so far as to offer a 'seven dwarfs' reading.¹⁸ *The Herne's Egg* as a Tantric metaphor will be explored next.

A Tantric Reading of 'The Herne's Egg'

The Herne's Egg opens with Yeats's stage directions that present the conflicts of Man as somehow shapely and harmoniously conditioned, thus reflecting the conditioned nature of the cosmos and Earth.

'Many men fighting with swords and shields, but sword and sword, shield and sword, never meet. The men move rhythmically as if in a dance; The battle flows out at one side; two Kings are left fighting for the centre of the stage; the battle returns and flows out at the other side'.¹⁹

of the sperm-marrowsoul; and of the association of the marrow with a serpent.' See 'The Spinal Serpent', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 24 (The President and Fellows of Harvard College and The Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 1993), p. 70.

¹⁸ Yoko Sato, 'The Hero and the Fool' "The Herne's Egg", *The Harp*, 10 (Japan: IASL, 1995) pp. 59-66, see p. 62.

¹⁹ W.B. Yeats, *The Herne's Egg* (London: Macmillan., 1991, first ed. 1938), p 41.

In Scene One, Congal and AEDH (King of Tara) discuss their battle losses in terms of loss and failure being a natural and necessary function within the equilibrium of God. AEDH states, 'Your losses equal mine' to which Congal replies, 'They always have and must'. AEDH goes on to state 'And all [fifty] were perfect battles'. He further refers to the two of them as 'Two rich fleas' that 'retired and bought a dog'. When Congal asks 'What kind of dog they bought,' AEDH replies 'Heaven knows'. When pressed again by Congal with 'You must have thought what kind of dog they bought,' AEDH repeats 'Heaven knows'. When a third time he states 'A fat, square, lazy dog. No sort of scratching dog.'²⁰ This opening exchange between the protagonist, Congal, and his adversary AEDH reveals Yeats's worldview that measured conflict is a necessary expression of cosmic and corporeal harmony. Conflict in this sense is the strife that occurs when one is separated from the truth of *Unity of Being*, which is a state of ignorance. The dog, which is depicted in the Tarot card *The Fool*, may be read as symbolic of ignorance in its 'squareness'; Yeats's divinity is at all times conical and spherical. Further, as the concept of fleas owning a dog that is lazy and ignorant sets them as successful parasites living off a misguided creature who is out of kilter (fleas owning dogs) with how things really are (according to Vedic monism).

In Scene Two, a donkey is introduced as 'a chattel, a taker of blows, not a giver of blows'²¹, which in the end proves not to be the case when Congal finds himself affected by the donkey (via its copulation with another donkey) at the exact same time as his act of reincarnation.

Next, when Corney informs Congal how to summon the priestess *Attracta* by playing a flute that is 'carved out of a herne's thigh', Congal pays to play the flute. *Attracta* appears and Congal orders the eggs to be packed onto the donkey; thus, he is openly disrespectful of *Attracta's* warnings. She states 'There is no reality but the Great

²⁰ Ibid...p 42-3.

²¹ W.B. Yeats, *The Herne's Egg* Ibid, p 43.

Herne' to which Mike replies 'The cure'.

Attracta There is no reality but the Great Herne.

Mike The cure.

Congal Why, that is easy said;
An old campaigner is the cure
For everything that woman dreams –
Even I myself, had I but time.

Mike Seven men.

Congal This man of learning means
That seven men packed into a day
And not a wealth-stained, war-battered
Old campaigner such as I,
Are needed to melt down the snow
That's fallen among these wintry rocks.

Attracta There is no happiness but the Great Herne.

Here, in the second scene of the play Yeats has laid out major symbols and their relations: these are 1) only one reality: The Great Herne / Brahma / God /Thirteenth Cone; 2) The cure is 'the old campaigner': Congal, who has overcome many trials to be on the mountainside in the presence of Attracta, where, as 'seven men' coming together, 'melt down the snow' through the generation of heat as the combustive taking of Attracta. In all Vedic and Buddhist systems, combustive heat and fire are synonymous with kundalini.

On the face of it, this is a moral story that portrays the rape of a woman by seven ignorant men; most guilty is Congal who meets his match when he attempts to steal the encapsulated essence of the universe represented by the eggs. However, Yeats typically avoided moralistic themes, which suggests that Congal is not interested in the arbitrary rape of Attracta or the valueless opportunity of gang sex. To the contrary, Congal, as the Vedic Fool, aspires to be a Tantric Fool and desires all that

the archetypal egg²² of Yeats's Thirteenth Cone God contains: its knowledge, its power and the ecstasy of *Unity of Being* with *The Great Herne* (God). In Tantra such *Unity of Being* can only be achieved via The Priestess, in this case, *Attracta*. In the Tarot system The High Priestess sits between the Magician (I) and Empress (III) and is broadly considered to represent the archetypal bride of God as the Virgin Mary, Isis, The Holy Mother Church and Shiva.

In Freemasonry, which was associated with The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn²³, and therefore Yeats, The High Priestess resides between the two pillars of Boaz and Jachin created by Hiram in the Temple of Solomon. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn also had a spin-off group headed by Yeats call the *Stella Matutina*. Both these Orders operated on systematised degrees of initiation and include ritual systems both mundane and esoteric according to each degree. The esoteric rituals are derived from Egyptian Hermetic teachings and esoteric knowledge within the Jewish Kabbala. This subject is vast and it is sufficient here to acknowledge that Yeats was a high-degree initiate and had access to most corpuses of knowledge involving the metaphysics of spiritualised matter and the necessary steps to obtaining the powers entailed within a 'First Cause' mover (God). The aim at all times is to inch one's way towards the final initiation by the Priestess in order to experience the powers entitled only to God, symbolized here as *The Great Herne*. The pillars of Boaz and Jachin embody such symbolism. What distinguishes (Hu)Man from God is that God *moves* and Man is *moved*. The aim of the archetypal Fool is to be fully receptive and pure in the state of being *moved*. Such is *Unity of Being* and divine Love; everything else is ignorance.

Thomas Troward states

²² The concept of a cosmic egg arose as early as pre-Socratic Orphism, which Pythagoras later embraced, and occurs also as the Hermetic Ouroboros of ancient Egypt. The Ouroboros is symbolised as the snake with its tail in its mouth and corresponds directly with the uncoiled snake of kundalini and the root principle of Tantra.

²³ The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was founded by three Rosicrucian and Freemason members, William Wynn Wescott, William Robert Woodman and Samuel Liddel MacGregor Mathers in 1887.

'[w]ithout pushing the analogy too far we may say, then, that Boaz represents the principle of redemption in the widest sense of reclaiming an estate by right of relationship, while the innermost moving power in its recovery is Love. [...] The word Yak [interchanging J and Y] signifies "one"; and the termination "hi," or "hin," is an intensitive which may be rendered in English by "only." Thus the word "Jachin" resolves itself into the words "one only," the all-embracing Unity.' He also states '[t]he former is *Unity of Being*; the latter, *Unity of Intention*: and the principle of this Dual-Unity is well illustrated by the story of Boaz.'²⁴

Two elementary things are at play in *The Herne's Egg*; first is the issue of fate/free will in context of a First Cause (mover/moved). The second is the Tantric concept of perfection and the attunement of absolute harmony attained through kundalini-mediated intercourse (*Attracta*) with God (the Great Herne), the primary mover of all things. These concepts are expressed within Yeats' 'gyres'. He states:

'The first gyres clearly described in the *Timaeus* which are made by the circuits of 'the Other' (creators of all particular things), of the planets as they ascend or descend above or below the equator. They are the opposing nature to that circle of the fixed stars which constitute 'the Same' and confers upon us the knowledge of Universals. Alcemon, a pupil of Pythagoras, thought that men die because they cannot join their beginning and their end. Their serpent has not its tail in its mouth.'²⁵

In *The Herne's Egg*, Congal finds himself in the presence of a self-created force (The Great Herne), thus a First Cause God, and its power to create and procreate (egg(s)). Yeats's Herne's egg is comprised of two opposite interlocking cones (gyres) that spin in opposite directions such as in the Hermetic symbol of interlocking snakes and the Kabbalist symbol of two-dimensional interlocked triangles: the Star of David²⁶. As they spin together they form the shape of an egg capable of 'turning itself inside out'; thus they manifest subjectively while still existing as a whole, objectively. Yeats states in *A Vision* that Michael Robartes called the universe 'a great egg that turns

²⁴ Thomas Troward, *The Hidden Power* (1921), at sacred-texts.com. See pp.192-4, also published (New York: Tarcher Putnam, 2015).

²⁵ W.B. Yeats, *A Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1962, second ed. 1937), p. 69.

²⁶ The Star of David may also symbolise the coming together of the Two Pillars, Jachin and Boaz.

inside-out perpetually without breaking out of its shell...²⁷ In effect, the subjective (moved) and objective (mover) *oscillate* in such perfection they are *experienced* from both sides at one and being in two places and states, at once (mover/moved). This is the end goal after many arduous lessons and lifetimes as a Fool, each one being an odyssey within an Odyssey, and each journey being initiated into greater God-like powers of being a primary mover. Such motion of moving and being moved occurs in the form of the gyres.

Thus, according to Yeats, all the involuntary acts and facts of life are the effects of the whirling and interlocking of the gyres, but gyres may be interrupted or twisted by greater gyres, divide into two lesser gyres or multiply into four, and so on. The uniformity of nature depends upon the constant return of gyres to the same point, like a vortex with a single locus. This coming together of gyres may not be able to cease 'till exhaustion comes'²⁸. Such exhaustion occurs following post-coital sexual orgasm which, in terms of Tantra, is a coming together of the seven gyres or vortices of the chakras, harnessed and tuned by the unifying upward kundalini spiral that intertwines with God's downward unifying spiral, hence 'as above, so below'. In *coming* together, the subjective *multiplies* combine to experience the objective *One* as *Unity of Being*. Yeats's Herne, then, is God and Attracta is God's subjective mask that 'attracts' the Vedic Fool to the opportunity of being initiated as the Tantric Fool.

ATTRACTA Custom forbids:
 Only the women of these rocks,
 Betrothed or married to the Herne,
 The god or ancestor of hernes,
 Can eat, handle, or look upon those eggs.²⁹

²⁷ W.B. Yeats, *A Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1962, second ed. 1937), p. 33.

²⁸ W.B. Yeats, *ibid*, p. 237. 'Sometimes individuals are primary and antithetical to one another joined by a bond so powerful that they form a common gyre or series of gyres. This gyre or these gyres nor greater gyre may be able to break till exhaustion comes. Sometimes, however, a single relationship will repeat itself, turning its revolving wheel again and again, especially, my instructors say, when there has been strong sexual passion. All such passions, they say, contain 'cruelty and deceit'.'

²⁹ W.B. Yeats, *The Herne's Egg* (London: Macmillan, 1991, first ed. 1938), p. 45.

Further, the opportunity takes place upon the highest mountain, reflecting the highest attainable human state as coming together of gyres - as *One*. When read as a metaphor for the *Unity of Being*, the rape of *Attracta* portrays the coming together of all seven chakras by means of Tantric unified orgasm, initially sexual and eventually leading to the human partaking in the perfection of God, or Yod, if employing the Kabbalistic term. Of further significance for Yeats is that in all Indian yogic systems, the Tantric force of kundalini is also recognised as two interlocking vortices or gyres that spiral upwards from the earth around the human spine, lifting it upwards, and simultaneously downwards from the heavens, grounding the spiritual. The entire process aligns and effectively recalibrates the seven chakras to be 'attuned' to the *Unity of Being*. Such attunement then corresponds to the metaphor of the Herne's thigh, which will be discussed in the next section.

Where Yeats is leading the reader (via Congal's odyssey as the Vedic Fool enacting the ritual of the Tantric Fool through sexual intercourse with *Attracta*) is to the peril of courting power for power's sake, the consequence of which is to be made an ass, precisely what happens to Congal. This lesson is not a moral one, but a reflection of Congal's state of ignorance. In seeking to be a mover, Congal found himself thoroughly *moved*. This occurs in Scene Six when Yeats's Vedic Fool protagonist, Congal, encounters an uninitiated but self-confessed Fool called Tom Fool who unknowingly thwarts the aspirations of Congal, a wannabe Tantric Fool. Yeats is playing here with the illusion of free will, degrees of being as *mover* and as being *moved*. Congal misses the mark because he has been unaware of the significance of 'Other' gyrating cones; he has been aware only of his own gyre within. Thus he has forgotten the essential monist nature of everything despite Scene One where he *appeared* to understand the conflict of opposites as dualist illusion. In Tantric terms, Congal is falsely driven by his own central locus and 'ego'. Thus, he thinks because he is *moving at a certain level* (symbolised by the highest mountain) that he is more of a mover than he actually is (signified by becoming a donkey). The higher one climbs,

the harder every task is.

Tantric Consideration of Language and Lyric

Returning to the subject of the 'Herne's thigh' mentioned earlier, it is of central importance that both Yeats and Pound maintained personal beliefs in the potential attainment of higher powers of agency (mover/moved) that could be experienced directly through the senses, in particular, as the cadence and pitch of language and music through the medium of the ear. In this regard, Pound believed Yeats to be in a league of his own, a natural product of his Irish mythology and folk song heritage, while Yeats regarded Pound as failing to fully understand the essential nature of the cosmic cycles and stages of initiation.

In expounding in *A Vision* his theory of gyres and the Thirteenth Cone, Yeats is providing a metaphysical framework and process of the *why and the how* of engaging the Thirteenth Cone, and he drew his metaphors and lyrics from this source. Yeats then is the Tantric Fool, formally initiated in both the Kabbalist (via *The Golden Dawn*) and Vedic schools (via his Indian studies). He is also a seeker of sacred Tantric knowledge from Tibetan Buddhist sources³⁰ and practitioner of Hermetic ritual in the form of magic (via *The Golden Dawn*), all towards the enablement of his ability to *play God's tunes*. Yeats notably deploys 'flute' symbolism in many of his poems and in *The Herne's Egg*:

CORNEY A flute lies there upon the rock
 Carved out of a herne's thigh³¹.
 Go pick it up and play the tune
 My mother calls 'The Great Herne's Feather' ...

Daniel Albright states 'Attracta has special access to the world beyond the grave, and

³⁰ See again, the works of Madame Blavatsky.

³¹ May also refer to the kangling, a Tibetan flute carved from the thighbone of either a respected teacher or violent criminal, and the quena, the Incan flute made from the similar bone in a condor.

her flute can summon the god; but she conceives the immanence of the Great Herne almost completely in terms of orgasm'.³² Albright goes so far as to link Yeats's gyres with the principles of 'Vorticism'. He states:

'Modernist poets, particularly William Butler Yeats and Ezra Pound, use flutes to depict a complicated interaction between the artificial and the natural; between the celestial and the sexual; between East and West. There is in fact very little of the West in Modernist flute-poetics: it is an orientalizing sort of instrument, as if every Eastern scene came decorated with a flute player providing a soft continuo for the proceedings.'³³ He further states 'According to one of Pound's Vorticist manifestoes of 1914, "The image [i.e., the poet's pigment] is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing. In decency one can only call it a VORTEX"' (EPVA, p. 207).³⁴

He concludes:

'Vorticism pertains to the bringing-to-bear of great resources of energy upon a single point: and the flute-music, and the fragrance of myrrh and olibanum, and the processing banners all lend their strength to this great effort.'³⁵

These three statements bear tremendous synergy with Yeats's theory of gyres (as vortices) and the Tantric ritual of the Vedic Fool (by means of seven chakra vortices) combined with The Thirteenth Cone (God's vortex). Albright refers to the poem as 'an exercise in fugitive [oscillating] harmonies'³⁶ and draws upon Kutsu's³⁷ description of the prose song, referring to the process of writing as assuming 'the role of artificer' [Tantric Fool] while he 'awaits the Emperor's [God/The Great Herne] command to write, the nightingales [Vedic Fools] aimlessly; but when the Emperor

³² Daniel Albright, *Yeats, Pound, Asia, and the Music of the Body. The Meaning of the Flute in Modernist Music and Poetry* (Hong Kong: Guangzhou University, 2010), p. 11.

³³ Daniel Albright *ibid*, p. 5.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7. See Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts, Ed. by Harriet Zinnes (New York: New Directions, 1980) p 207

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 7.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 8.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 9. Original text: 'Kutsu's prose song becomes a physical object, pasted onto the sky, "hung with the sun and moon." While the poet awaits the Emperor's command to write, the nightingales sing aimlessly; but when the Emperor appears, the nightingales' song seems to relocate itself, get enclosed in the flute's pipes: the flute arrests the lovely birdsong, puts it in order, assimilates it into itself. Then, it was aimless; now, it is art.'

[God/The Great Herne] appears, the nightingales' [Vedic Fools'] song seems to relocate itself [as the Tantric Fool], get enclosed in the flute's pipes: the flute arrests the lovely birdsong, puts it in order, assimilates it into itself (The Herne's Egg). Then, it was aimless; now, it is art.'³⁸ ³⁹(Perfection/Harmony as the *Unity of Being*)

Pound, a proponent of Modernist Vorticism, was also a music critic and was equally obsessed with his own mathematical god. He drew heavily upon Eastern sources, in particular the Japanese Noh theatre and Chinese Taoist philosophy which he shared with Yeats. Taoism is also an initiation-based system with its own Tantric teachings. Unlike Yeats, Pound did not subscribe to the magical and spiritual elements of Taoism or Tantrism. In the context of *The Herne's Egg*, Pound would remain an uninitiated Vedic Fool in ignorance of the fruits of labour awarded to the initiated Tantric Fool. That said, Pound openly acknowledged the genius of Yeats as something unique that set him apart from the crowd.

Pound associated this difference with Yeats's Celtic origins and Irish folklore. '[...] To date no one has shown any disposition to supercede him as the best poet in England, or any likelihood of doing so for some time; and that after all, Mr. Yeats has brought a new music upon the harp...'.⁴⁰

Yeats not only was blessed with raw aural talent, but achieved this exalted position because he studied to the fullest degree both monist and dualist esoteric philosophies and their derivative religions. In doing so, he experienced directly the universal nature of Tantra in every conceivable form, especially through ritual-based sexual and non-sexual⁴¹ orgasm. Thus Yeats concluded a monist basis of objective reality that underpins an illusory dualist subjective experience within which agency is a matter of degrees and its movement cyclical/ gyral. To encounters the gyre of God

³⁸ Ibid, p. 9

³⁹ Note, my square brackets throughout.

⁴⁰ Ezra Pound, *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 1968), p. 378.

⁴¹ Advanced meditation practices invoke the Kundalini effect and produce orgasms of the chakras that are not directly sexual but no less physically consuming.

as the Thirteenth Cone (and The Great Herne) the Vedic Fool is first initiated by Attracta to become a Tantric Fool.

Conclusion

A Tantric reading of *The Herne's Egg* enables insight into the supreme monist nature of Yeats's belief system, which, though on the face of it a hotchpotch of different theories synthesized as one (in the form of *A Vision*), Yeats upheld the belief that a conditioned mortal (moved) could eventually become a primary mover and agent of First Cause (mover).

On the Herne's mountain, the governing laws of corporeal existence meet the supreme power of a First Cause mover. How a corporeal moved human engages with a First Cause mover is by means of a dervish-like spin of two opposing interlocked gyres at such a velocity they become an orb of oscillation.

It therefore validates Yeats's claim that his spiritual practices *made possible* his poetry because Yeats truly had command of Tantric practices (meditation and Tantric ritual and chanting) that invoke the seven chakra-gyres to play as One instrument and perform God's song. Yeats not only had a Tantric 'ear'⁴², but was attuned throughout his bodily seven chakras. It is interesting that he claimed he had too busy a mind for meditation; however, music and poetry are classified as *moving* meditations. Yeats's *The Herne's Egg* is possibly the shortest-ever epic odyssey penned, and efficiently conveys the Tantric journey of the Archetypal Fool from being a moved being (Human), to a mover being (God or God-Like).

⁴² The playing of the flute and the gyres of the body (chakras) both require the breath and ear to work as one, therefore how one breathes affects how one plays. Yeats then is speaking of the ecstasy of the alignment of the body to be played as God's instrument. This he also stated happened when his wife Georgie was channeled as a vessel for automatic writing. In effect, she was played, not by God per se, but by non-corporeal masters



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