I.

“To be born woman is to know—
Though they do not talk of it at school—
That we must labour to be beautiful.”

I said, “It’s certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam’s fall but needs much labouring.”

—W. B. Yeats, “Adam’s Curse” (19-25)

Yeats sits on a hill with Maud Gonne—who, in his unnamed telling of her, would seem to be the most beautiful woman in Ireland—and her sister Kathleen. They are having a long conversation that Yeats sums up by saying, “and [we] talked of poetry” (3).

Yeats’s chance to show off. I usually imagine a lake in sight, and, next to it, a square tower on the edge of a pond. Yeats lived in that tower. In time it became his emblem. I like to imagine all three leaning back, holding themselves up with their arms, responding to each other’s points but never breaking gaze with approaching evening.

The conversation continues. Yeats speaks of the “labour” of poetry, setting it beside the more respectable but also more banal work of “break[ing] stones” (8); Kathleen says, in a mask of corroboration, “We must labour to be beautiful” (23). Her means of setting Yeats off has, in its very cadence, an age-old pattern of seduction: the dashed aside, a gesture to self as much as a comment on her knowledge of beauty; the invocation of primordial “woman” to explain that beauty; the rejection of “school” talk for the experiential rapture that we are “born” with, a rejection of the knowledge of the mind for the knowledge of the flesh. When Yeats responds with “Adam’s fall,” he surrenders to the precedence of forefathers—but he also makes a rebuttal, an assertion, simply, that the conversation has been had before and will be had many
times again. It is both a conversational dodge and a contextualization in scripture. It puts the quotidian and the mythic in rhythmic alternation.

So Yeats tells it. But Maud Gonne—the poem’s “you”—writes of the occasion with somewhat less gravitas: “I saw Willie Yeats looking critically at me and he told Kathleen he liked her dress and that she was looking younger than ever. It was on that occasion Kathleen remarked that it was hard work being beautiful which Willie turned into his poem ‘Adam’s Curse’” (qtd. in Jeffares 92). Gonne becomes, in Yeats’s poems to come, a second Helen of Troy; here, our Homer becomes “Willie.”

The danger of making poetry out of life, Yeats discovers, is that that transformation can be reversed, just as one can flip on the lights in a candle-lit room. To import the quotidian and risk such deflation is a somewhat new process for Yeats: the collection of which this poem is a part is the first time he hazards it. He has, up to this point, been concerned with Cuchulain and Red Hanrahan, the mythic Irish figures with whom the Sidh, the “people of Faerie,” make regular communion, and whose violent deeds of glory have all of the bravery with none of the mess. But something about this experience, this off-hand remark on beauty, permits it the context of poetry and myth. Something here links Yeats and Adam.

To call that link “masculinity” would be too simple, just as to write a gendered explanation off entirely would be foolish. What is shared has more to do with what is inherited with each birth and shared by all humanity, the knowledge of the flesh; it has also to do with what is learned in “school,” the knowledge of the intellect, the stories passed down in books. This is the counterpoint of mind and body. It is the tension between feeling pain and knowing of pain, the tension familiar to lovers who “sigh and quote with learned looks / Precedents out of beautiful old books” but are still subject to the pangs of love—who feel the pangs all the more strongly for their “precedents” (29-30).

Yeats’s poetry assumes this conflict. He creates, on one hand, the suchness of each image, and, on the other, that image’s universality. He represents a situation clearly and on its own terms, but he will not pass up its precedents. A Yeatsian situation is one whose roots draw sustenance and substance from myth. His are conversations that have happened many times before, are happening now, and will happen many times to come.
Isn’t making love merely an eternal repetition of the same? 
Not at all. There is always the small part that is unimaginable. (199)

... a life which disappears once and for all, which does not return, is like a 
shadow, without weight, dead in advance, and whether it was horrible, 
beautiful, or sublime, its horror, sublimity, and beauty mean nothing. (3)

—Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

That you were beautiful, and that I strove 
To love you in the old high way of love; 
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we’d grown 
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

—W. B. Yeats, “Adam’s Curse” (39-42).

Milan Kundera shows early that he means business, idea-wise, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Nietzsche is introduced before any characters are, and Kundera directs us quickly to the question of heaviness and lightness, the binary that runs through the novel to its end. To Kundera there seems, at first, to be no worth in the lightness of singular occurrences: a single iteration of anything is infinitely small unless it is connected to something else.

Individual *people* appear briefly and flash out of being. Tomas’s hunger to know the idiosyncrasies of as many individual women as possible leads him to go through each like air, and none gives him pause; what ends up mattering is their repetition, the sequence of them, and the few women Kundera lets us meet indicate always something besides themselves. Their own narratives become incidental to Kundera’s larger one. And none of them can matter in any substantive way to Tomas, because his pursuit of women is not, in Kundera’s term, “lyrical”: it is not propelled by a desire for his own “subjective and unchanging dream of a woman in all women” (201). When no ideal or idea backs these shadows of characters, Kundera has no need for us to meet them.

But the characters who stick around, Tomas’s mistresses or no, lead us like footnotes to something deeper. Kundera gives that deeper “something” many names, juggles its different variations and iterations throughout his novel. One of its guises is “poetic memory,” a “special area” of the brain “which records everything that charms or touches us, that makes our lives beautiful”; alternatively, it is “the magic stream that may be entered only with closed eyes,” the place where what is imagined has the weight of what is experienced, and, thus, where we can project weight onto individual occurrences.
That “something” is the gateway to heaviness, which, having been crossed by Tereza, is closed to all others. It is the gateway to the worthiness, the weight, of the individual.

Yeats’s friend Kathleen, on the other hand—who stakes her claim in the outline that she fills, that of primordial “woman”—finds another such gateway. She willfully becomes the whole of which she is a part, indicating whence her knowledge of beauty actually comes and of what sort it is. In so doing, in tracing her knowledge back to its source, she elevates the conversation into one of archetypes, moves beyond the physical example into the concept it exemplifies. Yeats hears the weight she assumes and rushes to fill the role of Adam, as he must to meet her in discussion.

That power, the power to lend weight—that is a matter of seeing what lies beneath and before the literal. Once Kathleen flips the switch of weightiness, no thing can enter the poem unless it bears a load. One might speak of symbols, things with ideas beneath them, things that are more than just themselves. Things that, says Kundera, have weight. Such things come to have significance because they are fully the type as well as the expression, because they are more than just themselves. Yeats-as-speaker comes into his weight as an expression of Man, sharing the symbolic load with Adam. But when Yeats is denied the love narrative he thought appropriate—the “old high way of love”—he turns instead to a narrative of sadness (40). He elevates his disappointment to poetic heights by latching it to “that hollow moon” (42). And because, by unifying the act of writing with the act of living, he has become an archetype, the poet, he cannot any longer be “Willie.” He would say later, “[The poet] is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast” (Intro 204). The poet accesses something deeper, transcends man to become entirely role, function, persona.

Not everyone, however, is “the poet.” Some are left with just “accident and incoherence” (Yeats Intro 204). In Kundera’s world, almost nobody is allowed such weight as Yeats assumes. Franz’s dreams of the worthwhile revolution, for example, are forever bodiless, forever contained to “the magic stream” that is accessible “only with closed eyes,” and when he opens them he can no longer see the beauty of the pattern behind the single action, can no longer see the “Grand March” that undergirds his individual footfalls (208). His revolution, his fantasy, is a soul without a body. He tries to consummate it, constellate it, and fails: he stands on the threshold of grand and violent action, slumps, and turns away, body without soul.

But he becomes, finally, ironically, the expression of this failed wholeness. In a momentary unity of action with fantasy, Franz sets his jaw against one of
three muggers, putting into practice the judo he has rehearsed in training. It is a triumphant moment, one that he pauses over to experience fully. That willful experience of the momentary kills him. Because he watches himself being fulfilled, the other two assailants are allowed to murder him. His moment of glory is finally experienced only once, only by him; never repeated as a story, it blinks out of being, taking him with it.

We can see Yeats reading weariness into the moon simultaneously with Franz reading heroism into his march and fight. This kind of seeing runs deeper than projection, and “truth” is of the wrong set of terms. Franz closes his eyes as he makes love to Sabina, and finally opens them to reenter the world of the lover beneath him, leaving behind the “magic stream.” Yeats, in his tower, sees weariness in the moon; Maud Gonne sees “Willie” turning worthless scraps and the moon into poetry.

To see meaning in the moon is perhaps the business of the poet. But to oscillate between seeing the moon itself and what we project onto it and draw from it is the business of us all.

III.

There is no means of testing which decision is better, because there is no basis for comparison. We live everything as it comes, without warning, like an actor going on cold. And what can life be worth if the first rehearsal for life is life itself? (8)

—Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being

The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever. (34)

—Kurt Vonnegut, Slaughterhouse-Five

Parmenides . . . saw the world divided into pairs of opposites: light/darkness, fineness/coarseness, warmth/cold, being/non-being. One half of the opposition he called positive . . . , the other negative. We might find this childishly simple except for one difficulty: which one is positive, weight or lightness?

Parmenides responded: lightness is positive, weight negative.

Was he correct or not? That is the question. (5-6)

—Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being

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Nietzsche’s *eternal return* presumes what Kurt Vonnegut’s Tralfamadorian time-scheme rejects—namely: sequence, causality. Outside of life there is, to Nietzsche, *more* life on repeat—a movie that has always been looping through its conclusion, scarcely pausing for the credits. One thing leads to another—just as it has before, just as it will to come.

Not so for the Tralfamadorians, to whom “after” is incoherent. It is intensely problematic to think, as they do, that everything is simultaneously *now*, because then *no* thing can lead to another. Without that causality, each event is only ever itself, and itself only. To use Vonnegut’s metaphor: take the string away and the beads fall, and they are all on the same floor together; take Tomas away, and what are his mistresses to Kundera? Beads on the floor with nothing to relate them. Points without a line. Individual lightnesses without the weight of trajectory. So it is with events.

*Always already*—it’s a playful paradox. It cropped up around the times of Marx and Kant to be picked up later by Heidegger, and it refers in almost all cases to symbolic systems: systems which, having been realized, exit time. Because such systems are explanations of everything, they predate the things they explain. (How can anything occur before the rules that govern it?) When did math begin to apply? And Parmenides’s binaries? *Always already.*

But in the Tralfamadorian scheme of things, everything is *always already*. No action predates its reaction, but somehow this does not disrupt causality. That a bullet seems to hit its target at the moment it is fired is an error of human perception; it is, however, the *fact* of Tralfamadorian perception. To the Tralfamadorian, the dominos are all always falling. To the Tralfamadorian, *always already* is no contradiction. There is no such thing as a time paradox.

In Kundera’s and Nietzsche’s sense of things, *always already* also always applies, but in a subtly different way. Instead of synchronous happenings—everything happening at once—everything happens in sequence. Just the same sequence that has occurred before and will occur again, *ad infinitum.*

The difference is the weight of individual events. In Vonnegut’s conception, it is hard to see that any event leads to any other, because the led-to event occurs simultaneously with what leads to it. In Kundera’s understanding, causality remains, but it is pre-determined, merely waiting to be enacted. The reason this difference matters is that sequence underlies effect—and when an action has an effect, it is, in a sense, both itself and what it causes. It assumes the weight, the responsibility, of what it takes as its results.

A friend who read *Slaughterhouse-Five* at the same time that I did became uncharacteristically angry when the topic of the Tralfamadorian time-scheme was brought up in conversation. To reject that conception was, to her, a moral
issue: for when causality goes, so does responsibility for one’s actions. One can shrug in almost all cases and say, as Vonnegut does, “So it goes.” The same moral problem comes up pretty quickly in most fate or free will arguments. Is rejecting free will the same as rejecting moral responsibility?

For that matter, is accepting fate the same as rejecting free will? The Tralfamadorians suggest that their understanding of time is entirely inconsistent with “free will” as a concept. Of all the species they’ve visited, one says to Billy, humanity is the only one that’s come up with it. For free will to “exist” requires that each event is independent, that at every moment there is a unique choice. It requires, in Kundera’s sense, lightness: for how can that which is heavy have any alternative?

And yet Tralfamadorians do not reject the notion; they just say that they don’t understand it. The difference is for them one of scope. Because humanity can only think up to the present moment, the present moment is of constant weight, always the end, never a point in a continuum. And if what comes next has not yet been determined, then the present moment takes on the weight not just of itself, but of what comes after it, and on ad infinitum. The second point in a line determines the third, the fourth—the whole damn line, the weight of all the points that line contains. The individual determines the trajectory. The individual lightnesses of each ephemeral moment determine the collective weight of life entire.

Fate/Free Will seems not to be a binary of preclusion, then. Nor does Lightness/Heaviness. Parmenides’s binaries become matters of perspective. All binaries become, in an instant, the tangling paradoxes that they’ve been the whole time. Each individual man is Man, each individual woman, Woman. Each individual man is some part Man and some part Woman; Tomas’s pursuit is never for the individual woman, but for the clearest expression of what his experiences with them create in toto.

As it is with woman and Woman, so it is with the symbol and what that symbol contains: the symbol is at once the thing and the idea behind it; the moon is itself and its “weariness.” Take value judgements away—take away positive or negative, right or wrong—and either/ors don’t much matter. It is possible for both Yeats and Adam to be Man as well as men. Ask Schrödinger how his cat’s doing: the operative point is both, not which.

Following Jung and the archetypal psychologists after him, this is how the archetypes of the collective unconscious work. Both: the light accentuating shadows, the empty indicating fullness. Patricia Berry, a contemporary archetypal psychologist, reads Demeter as the surface expression of Persephone below; as an archetype, Demeter/Persephone indicates the con-
scious mind expressing the libidinal turmoil of the unconscious. In this understanding there is no binary: it is never *either* Demeter or Persephone. It is never *either* the surface *or* its undercurrents, *either* the over-world *or* the underworld of the psyche. It is always both. Nor do Demeter and Persephone cease to be themselves when we see beneath them the structure of the psyche. Nor do the workings of the mind cease to be themselves when they are explained according to myth. That these archetypal narratives all keep happening makes no instance of them less full: we are at once our lives and the forms those lives fulfill.

Who can look at the moon and not see in it the reflections of all who have seen it before? Such weight is what makes us look at the moon in the first place. In this sense our experiences are *all* always already lived. In this sense are our responses predetermined by our ancestors, the repetitions of whom have determined, over generations, the instincts that have given our archetypes form, have formed *us* by giving us the seeds of thought. The steps to go through, again and always.

The moon is always already looked at, your love is always already loved. And who can say they are not subject to Adam’s curse?

**IV.**

‘Because,’ Adam said excitedly, ‘we are descended from this. This is our father. Some of our guilt is absorbed in our ancestry. What chance did we have? We are the children of our father. It means we aren’t the first.’ (269)

‘Maybe it would be good to give them a high mark to shoot at—a name to live up to. The man I’m named for had his name called clear by the Lord God, and I’ve been listening all my life. And once or twice I’ve thought I heard my name called—but not clear, not clear.’ (264)

‘The American Standard translation orders men to triumph over sin, and you can call sin ignorance. The King James translation makes a promise in ‘Thou shalt,’ meaning that men will surely triumph over sin. But the Hebrew word, the word timshel—“Thou mayest”—that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man.’ (303)

—John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*

She was experiencing the same odd happiness and odd sadness as then. The sadness meant: we are at the last station. The happiness meant: we are together. The sadness was form, the happiness content. Happiness filled the space of sadness. (313-314)

—Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*
Speaking of curses.

To Steinbeck the land is a canvas for vestiges. It is the nourishment of generations, but never, it seems, of the individual. Nothing about the Salinas Valley is virginal: there are ruins where families before have trod, and farmed, and fled.

When Adam Trask steps upon this land, his land, with his wife—Cathy, about whom the less said the better—he sees the edifice he has inherited and begins imagining a life in it. He projects onto the flatness gardens, he makes plans, he dashes lines onto an indifferent plain that will be the shell of his homestead to come. Eventually his best-laid plans do as such plans are wont to; and yet the vestiges of those plans never quite fade.

I have been thinking lately of the frames that pre-fabricated houses draw around the lives they contain. From a train to New Jersey I see identical neighborhoods sprawl as lazily as they want, over tracts that used to be plains and hills, a vast repetition with no variation. I have been thinking of the lives that go on in those houses, wondering if they sprawl as lazily and uniformly.

To say “Yes” would be too easy and would constitute a kind of solipsism. Consider dance-steps, outlines of footprints meant to teach you the tango, literal vestiges of a pedagogy that went out of fashion with fallout shelters. Such footprints, the dances themselves, become frames, pre-fabricated, inherited structures for the enactment of what can actually be singular events. Imagine meeting your husband while doing a dance that both of you learned from a box. Imagine that everyone else in the room learned the same dance from an identical box. Imagine that half of them are meeting their eventual husbands there, too. To deny the richness of those individual moments and the lives that contain them is to deny something fundamental about family and culture.

This is the anxiety of following. Everyone after Adam is subject to it. We might say that the “curse” has nothing to do with Adam—and has nothing to do with only Adam. He established the form that we all fill with content: the sadness of the Fall; the yearning for what is lost; the need to plant flags and the inability to just leave it.

He also gave names to all the animals, the anxiety of which Steinbeck’s Adam seems still to be feeling, an anxiety contained symbolically in his own name. His reluctance to choose—his sons lie nameless for weeks before Samuel comes to force the issue—is a reluctance to bind an infantile happiness with the sadness of narrative form. Having felt the original Adam’s homesteader’s grief, the burden of renewal that comes with every birth, Steinbeck’s Adam is reluctant to see through what he’s started, reluctant to
take the next step of sense-making. For to name is to meaningfully describe, the fundamental act of mind and Man. The moon, by now, is sagging with the weight of all the things we’ve called it, all that we’ve seen behind it.

Adam chooses his curses carefully by choosing carefully the names he gives his children. Or he tries to be so careful—rejecting emphatically the names “Cain” and “Abel” does not prevent the relevance of that tangled binary, that archetypal narrative. It is a dyad that Adam and his brother Charles have almost already enacted, the narrative’s overwhelming conclusion only finally prevented by fortuity. And whether or not such fortuities have any weight (in Kundera’s world, Tomas and Tereza read the fortuities necessary for their meeting in terms of both unbearable weight and unbearable lightness; speaking of dyads) the causality inherent in that moment is what allows Adam’s two sons to be subject to naming in the first place. But how can Adam forget the image of his brother Charles, standing murderous in evening, his weapon hanging from his lazily muscled hand—how can Adam forget this image when he imagines his twin sons as Cain and Abel? How can he not fill in the gap left by the sparse language of the Bible—“Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him”—with the image of what might have been his own very singular death?

And yet, as Samuel points out, we are all Cain’s descendants. Each life is framed by the stories it fulfills, and, following Steinbeck, the sadness of Cain’s story is the frame that we are all living within and working to escape. *East of Eden* is a narrative of characters seeing themselves fulfilling the narratives that precede them, grappling with the ownership of their own stories against the hand or Hand that may already have written the ending.

*Timshel*, “thou mayest,” is Steinbeck’s argument for the weight of the individual and the individual moment, his argument for free will despite fate, his argument for morality and choice no matter what is or is not always already written. God says *timshel* to Cain as he is set to wander, and what was a sentence becomes a bill of rights and responsibilities. *Timshel* frees us from the weight of eternal return, of *always already*, at the same time that it throws the weight of eternity on our shoulders. Samuel’s name is never called by the lord again; his story does not have that ending, is not, as the Tralfamadorians would have it, “structured that way.” But the story itself presents an ever-receding horizon that he will always chase, and that horizon, his awareness of it, gives him a chance to earn his name. The Biblical Samuel is the form, Steinbeck’s Samuel the content.

“Sadness was the form, happiness the content.” A solution, in a way: Kundera’s tragedy of binaries is that binary becomes dyad. One contains the
other and they exist in tangling, complex relation in the same moment. The sadness is what is fated, what has already been written—in a literal sense, by Kundera: when Tomas and Tereza leave their hotel the next day, they will die. But their happiness banks on the richness of the individual life, the suchness of the individual experience that fills the form that contains and defines it.

We might say that choice is the suchness of such individual moments. The infinite possible actions and reactions that spread out over the mind in webs of causal lineation. The infinite iterations of a moment in Nietzsche’s *eternal return*. The always already spark in the Tralfamadorian time-scheme. In all of these senses the individual moment is the happening of what, until that point, *will have* happened. Time is the unraveling of the *will have* into the *have*, and the present moment looks as it does no matter what *will have* happened by book’s end.

Each moment in the lives of *East of Eden*’s characters contains a choice that determines which narrative is to be theirs. Wherever they go, there they are. The narrative is, finally, an aggregation of these choices. To choose which frame to move within, to see those frames clearly enough to know the choice—that is the vexing business of us all.

V.

Billy couldn’t read Tralfamadorian, of course, but he could at least see how the books were laid out—in brief clumps of symbols separated by stars. . . . Each clump of symbols is a brief, urgent message—describing a situation, a scene. We Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other. There isn’t any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time.

—Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (55)

“A line will take us hours maybe
yet if it does not seem but a moment’s thought
All our stitching and unstitching has been nought”

—W. B. Yeats, “Adam’s Curse” (4-6)

“And I here make a rule—a great and lasting story is about everyone or it will not last. The strange and foreign is not interesting—only the deeply personal and familiar.”

—John Steinbeck, *East of Eden* (270)
“We ignore them. We spend eternity looking at pleasant moments—like today at the zoo. Isn’t this a nice moment? . . . That’s one thing Earthlings might learn to do, if they tried hard enough: Ignore the awful times, and concentrate on the good ones.” (150)

—Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (150)

Vonnegut’s Tralfamadorians have a literature that is exactly like ours. Their time-scheme is exactly like that of both of our literatures. Wherever you open the book, there you are. The ending has always already happened.

The Tralfamadorian book is organized on a principle of synchrony. Every diegetic moment is experienced simultaneously, every symbol, image, the sound of every word. But how can this be any different from what happens when we, humans, read? From when we read the final word of a poem, the word that activates the elements that have been already laid out? The last line of Yeats’s poem is “As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.” The last words of *East of Eden* are:

“Timshel!”

His eyes closed and he slept.

Every word so far has built to these moments, and these moments reactivate every word that has come before them. In these moments, the whole book is experienced simultaneously in the present tense of remembering.

This is the principle that governs allusion, but allusion works on a grander, less contained scale. I have a kind of personal lexicon for talking about such things, one entry of which is a hand-me-down that comes originally from George Steiner. This is the word “echo”: an echo of one text with another—it is a particularly evocative expression because of the way the mind sounds when we think, if we choose to listen; something faint and already said, but re-contextualized. Imagine a text with a thousand allusions to things you know, each subtle, achieved through the shapes and phrases of the character’s present moment. This allusive text is a text that is at once itself and everything it draws from—but it is still itself. How can Adam not fill in the gap left by the sparse language of the Bible—“Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him”—with the image of what might have been his own very singular death? (Genesis 4:8) That language, for Steinbeck’s Adam, echoes with experience; and that moment in the life of Adam, for us, echoes with the Bible.
Speaking of weight. We might say that a moment in literature has weight only if it enacts one of the many universal, archetypal stories that reside within us all, within the collective unconscious. A misunderstanding of archetypal psychology is that if you can connect something to Demeter/Persephone you’ve connected it to the collective unconscious. No. Demeter/Persephone constellates an archetype, but it is not itself that archetype. The archetypal relevance of their story has a lot to do with why it keeps getting told; the story has even begun to accrue weight of its own—the weight of the texts that rely on it for their own allusion. To enact other stories, archetypal ones like Demeter and Persephone, is in a way the quickest route to an archetype. Hence the confusion of content for form.

Line this up with intertextuality. Something that echoes in the depths of the unconscious as well as through the conscious memory of what we’ve read before. Echoes of language and image abound, giving us the potential to experience viscerally the universal context they fulfill in toto. In synchrony.

Speaking of weight. This is the Yeatsian moment. But to call it the Yeatsian moment now, at the exclusion of everyone else, seems almost ridiculous. He just lets us see it, sets it up clearly enough to be traced.

This is what he does: compare Maud Gonne’s telling of the incident with his: “It’s hard being beautiful” becomes

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{To be born woman is to know—} \\
\text{Though they do not talk of it at school—} \\
\text{That we must labour to be beautiful. (19-21)}
\end{align*}
\]

Yeats alters this incident to call up primordial woman, intellectual versus sensory knowledge, and the idea of “labour” that he has already made echo through the different contexts of almost every human pursuit. He rounds this out by connecting it to Adam, and, through Adam, to us all. The individual incident comes to echo with, in this telling, every incident imaginable.

There’s a certain comfort in being able to connect ourselves to the species. “The unbearable lightness of being” is the feeling that the individual doesn’t matter worth a damn. The book The Unbearable Lightness of Being is an enactment of the narrative we all experience, of continuing despite and finding some individual worth. To find the happiness in all that sadness.

To find ways to be human, rather than a human, is to connect ourselves with our species—and the species, at least, endures. And to let our experiences echo through the shells of all that has come before is to let the weight of the species bear on us. To recognize the story that you might fulfill is to hear, as
Steinbeck’s Samuel does, the potential of a call from the Lord—that is, to be called to answer for Man, Woman, men, and women; for humanity.

Remember that Adam’s fall comes on the heels of knowledge, of consciousness; see, as he did, from the edge of that garden outside time, the endless iteration of what will always have already happened. To see those patterns—that is the primordial business of us all.

Speaking of curses.

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