Polyhymnia - 'Channelled Writing' in the Christian Tradition

The first words inspired by Polyhymnia, the muse whose name translates from ancient Greek as 'many songs of praise', are recorded in stone. English Literature sets the Ruthwell Cross, which stood at a preaching place on the edge of the wilderness near Dumfries in Scotland for a thousand years, at the start of a tradition and the heart of a definition of divine inspiration.

Made of sandstone, six metres tall, it tells the story of the crucifixion from the point of view of the cross. Lines from *The Dream of the Rood* are chiselled in runes between biblical scenes. A central panel in deep relief shows Mary Magdalene bending to wash the feet of Christ with her long hair; he blesses her with one hand and in the other holds a book. There are birds visible in the carved branches of this hardy stone tree. Detailed as a parchment page from an illuminated manuscript, it stood outdoors from around the year 700 but was destroyed as an idolatrous monument, by order of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, in 1642 (Alexander, 2000, p. 20).

With its lines of runic verse fragmented, the Ruthwell Cross was left as it had fallen in the churchyard, where ivy re-wrote the story and moss padded it out. It was used as a bench, whether for secret masses or profane lunch breaks we could muse on longer; but in 1818 a new minister, the Reverend Henry Duncan, began to resurrect it. The original crossbeams were never found, and his reading was partial as a translation of the rings in a tree trunk; but by 1823 Rev. Duncan stood by his new altarpiece and re-told the rood's tale.

Once attributed to Caedmon, *The Dream of the Rood* is now considered anonymous. The few lines chiselled on the cross quote a longer verse, preserved on the delicate page of a 10th Century manuscript; but neither version has a named author, nor a definite date of publication. 'The Ruthwell Cross and the Vercilli Book are 1000 miles and 270 years apart' (Alexander, 1983, p. 177); more than one voice had a say in this story.

Though we'll never know who is talking, the plot begins like many other great stories, with its teller falling asleep. An anonymous dreamer (the first visionary figure of Old English poetry) sees 'the lord's tree', gilded and jewel-encrusted, then drenched and dripping with blood; the images alternate quicker till the cross starts to speak. The story it tells goes from roots in the woods to nails on a hill, from gore to glory. It is an eye-witnessing; and the I of the narrative allegedly has a feminine voice and a very physical relationship with Christ:

> 'Then the young hero did disrobe
> that was God Almighty,

… He came to climb upon me.
I dared not break or bend aside
Against God's will, though the ground itself
Shook at my feet. Fast I stood
Who falling could have felled them all…
A cross I became; lifted up with the mighty King.'
(Alexander, 2000, p.20)

As graffiti hewn on the stone cross, the words are a shout of Christian witness; but the opening lines on 10th century parchment make a flourish like the touring minstrel's 'lyth and listen' (Bold, 1979, p.10). His riddling tradition is evoked, too, as we must guess the cross of Christ is talking. *'Hwaet!'* (Alexander, 1983, p.180): there may not be a literal translation for the first word of the poem but it gives a sense of what can be termed 'channelling': 'Listen, I will tell you the best of visions, what came to me in the middle of the night, when voice-hearers dwelled in rest' (Treharne, n.d.).

Though strictly formulaic, *The Dream of the Rood* is less of a technical artifice and more of a true confession. Whoever held the pen or chisel, these words are not the scribe's or the shaman's, the sibyl's or the siren's; not the best-selling author's or the creative writing student's. They seem to come from a higher source. The poem 'what came to me in the middle of the night' is a monument to this I of divine inspiration.

Only one Old English poet signed his work. Cynewulf wove an autograph into the text of four long poems; '[t]he name is hidden in a runic acrostic, unmistakable in Old English, if untranslatable in modern English. Cynewulf's intention was not primarily to claim authorship of the poems, nor fame, but to ask that his readers should pray for him by name' (Alexander, 1983, p.164).

Like the runes on the Ruthwell cross, the signature of Cynewulf reminds us that writing was once synonymous with worship; hieroglyphics were literally 'God's words'. Signs had real power and physical application; in ancient Egypt water was poured over 'stelae' inscribed with magical texts and drunk. A reader's digest; those rocks were roughly the same size as the books we hold now, limestone paperbacks or hardbacks of granite, to be eroded slowly or polished off in a single sitting.

Cynewulf was probably the Bishop of Lindisfarne. His remote Northumbrian island was the literary scene of the eighth century and he wrote with an owl feather pen in a brown ink; the height of clerical chic. But 'the oldest stories in the book' were only told by word of mouth, in the tongues of illiterate story-tellers, and were never written down. The earliest authors never saw text, a plot in neat rows, with the descendants of runes and hieroglyphs

standing in for the live narrative. We can still hear the voice of the traditional oral version, though, in this Old English verse where all vowels assonate. It's 'printed with a mid-line space to point the metre' (Alexander, 2000, p.19); we can almost see the bard taking a breath.

> 'Thus, old and death-bound through this doomed flesh
> I have wondrously gathered and woven this lay [story].
> At times I have pondered and patterned my thought
> In the anxious night-watches. I knew not the truth
> Concerning the Rood …till the King of might
> Through His radiant grace granted me knowledge
> To comfort old age, … gave the gift of song
> Which I've used in the world with gladness and glee.
> Full oft I took thought of the Tree of glory …
> Of the radiant Cross as I read it in books,
> In the fullness of time to set forth in writing.'
> (Alexander, 1983, p.164)

This is from Cynewulf's *Elene*, which tells how the true cross is found by Empress Helena. Her quest includes converting the pagans, and the Jews who are concealing the rood, and digging it up from where it is eventually 'found by a sweet vapour arising from the ground' (Alexander, 1983, p. 168). [1] Then she turns the nails of the cross into a bit for the bridle of her son Constantine's horse. The unconverted pagan may imagine muse Polyhymnia in place of the inspiring persona of Helena, with Pegasus in attendance; the winged horse for whom the Hippocrene spring of genius was named. (But only the addicted drinker from this classical stream could imagine that loose metaphor helps the argument.)

Scant biography of Cynewulf suggests he was a minstrel who sang 'professionally' until he had a spiritual breakthrough. Becoming a monk, his further song was divinely inspired: these lines from *Christ II* tell unequivocally where Cynewulf got his ideas:

> 'He that shaped the world… soweth varied wisdom of mind and setteth it in the hearts of men. Unto one He sendeth wise skill of tongue through the spirit of his mouth and noble insight in his heart, and richly may he sing and utter all things, whoso hath might of wisdom hidden in his heart. And with his fingers one may fairly sound the harp before the hosts, clearly strike upon the glee-wood. One may read aright all godly law, and one telleth the mysteries of the stars and the wide universe. One may write skilfully the spoken word…'
> (Kennedy, 1952, p.104)

The individual gifts of creativity are listed and, for a moment, even Cynewulf seems to be ticking off the nine Muses; there's Euterpe with the harp, Urania with the stars, Calliope

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1 This evokes Pythia, the priestess of Apollo, whose visionary discourse was induced by vapours arising from the ground, too.

with the epic poetic. But this is the Christian tradition, the count a simpler trinity, and God may equally speak to the Bishop and the cowherd.

Caedmon couldn't write so well, certainly didn't do a runic signature like Cynewulf, yet he is the first English poet whose name we know. He was a farmhand at Whitby Abbey in the time of St. Hilda (657 – 680) and very shy; 'Sometimes when at a party [*convivium*] when it had been decided for joyful entertainment that all in turn must recite verses to the harp's accompaniment, he when he saw the harp getting near to himself would arise from the midst of the feast and go out and walk back to his house' (Kennedy, 1952, p. 98).

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* follows the Caedmon phenomenon to the 'cattle pens'. When the cow-man fell asleep, 'a certain man was standing by him in a dream and, greeting him and calling him by his name, said: 'Caedmon, sing me something. But he in answering said: "I do not know how to sing; for it was just for this reason that I came away from the feast and departed hither, because I could not sing"' (Kennedy, 1952, p. 98).

'A certain man' certainly cannot be mistaken for the outline of Polyhymnia in this vision; but her Grecian curves may be mistranslated in Bede's Latin. 'Yet you *can* sing to me,' he says; an inverse plea to the muse, invoking the man. Caedmon suddenly can sing, and his supernatural poetry makes a point of calling God the author of creation. The next morning, he is taken before Abbess Hilde who listens to him spouting; she and the rest of the religious establishment declare it divine. Mother Hilde 'commanded that [Caedmon] should be taught the whole sequence of sacred Scripture. Now he, taking all that he could learn by hearing, retaining it in his mind, and turning it over like a clean beast ruminating, converted it into the sweetest poetry' (p. 98).

Only nine lines are left of this channelled cud in the literary canon; but Caedmon apparently retold all the stories in the bible, sung prophecies, poetry and praises. Only 'verses belonging to piety', though, nothing 'frivolous or vain'. There is no accounting, beyond Bede, for this most explicit instance of heavenly inspiration in English literature: 'For himself had learned the art of poesy not through men nor taught by a man: but he had received the gift of song freely by divine aid' (Alexander, 1983, p. 97).

Caedmon became a famous monk, people flocked to hear him speak; and at his deathbed scene (perfectly timed for *nocturnes*) he achieved a sort of spontaneous sainthood.

Divine inspiration is defined by this case, like that of minstrel-turned-monk Cynewulf. Another high cross marks this point of the history in stone. On the cliff top at Whitby, in St. Mary's Churchyard, stands the Caedmon Cross. And though Bede's written account, or at

least a translation of it, says the voice of divine inspiration belonged to a man, the panel carved upon the cross itself shows Caedmon visited by a female form. With long hair and flowing drapery she may be muse as much as angel as she hovers above a stable of horses, again; and holds a hand down to Caedmon's harp. So it might not be too fanciful to hear the goddess of sacred song intoning this inscription: THE FATHER OF ENGLISH SACRED SONG FELL ASLEEP HARD BY 680.

The history of English literature so far is a list of religious visions and remembered dreams. Before there were pens and paper, parchment or even papyrus, the magic words were written in the sand with a stick, on rocks or leaves. Poetry was a mnemonic device before there were notebooks; spiral-bound or electronic. Sun, skin, sap and steel, not to mention sweat, went into the making of the first books; the perspiration blending here with my main theme, the inspiration.

> 'I am the scalp of myself, skinned by my foeman
> robbed of my strength, he steeped and soaked me,
> Dipped me in water, whipped me out again,
> Set me in the sun. I soon lost there
> The hairs I had had. The hard edge
> Of a keen-ground knife cuts me now,
> Fingers fold me, and a fowl's pride
> Drives its treasure trail across me,
> Bounds again over the brown rim,
> Sucks the wood-dye, steps again on me,
> Makes his black marks' (Alexander, 2000, p. 25)

This is a Gospel Book, made of calf-skin, cut and folded. The pen is a quill (a fowl's pride); the ink, wood-dye. 'God's words', not translated from any other language but drawn straight from real life are logged in the terms of the lay man. The first writers made organic literature; the first king, Alfred the Great, used organic imagery in this riddle. Not all kings were great poets (Charlemagne was barely literate) but according to his biographer Asser, Alfred followed the tracks of words as closely as his animal quarry:

> 'He …hunted with great assiduity and success; for skill and good fortune in this art, as in all others, are among the gifts of God... On a certain day … his mother was showing him and his brother a Saxon book of poetry… and said, "Whichever of you shall the soonest learn this volume shall have it for his own." Stimulated by these words, or rather by the Divine inspiration, and allured by the beautifully illuminated letter at the beginning of the volume, he spoke before all his brothers, who, though his seniors in age, were not so in grace...' (*The Life of King Alfred*, 2007.)

The sibling rivalry is dignified by this contemporaneous bishop Asser when he decides to say divine inspiration. Then, like in the case of Caedmon, there's an instant transformation into a visionary singer from a cowman or king. When Alfred had saved his kingdom physically, he was able to save its soul, or at least improve its mind. He translated from the Latin 'those books which be most needful for all men to know' (Alexander, 2000, p. 25). From St. Augustine to Bede and Boethius, Alfred turned them into English for the common sons of his soil, masters of practical skill who knew how to skin a cow for parchment or strip a tree for ink.

More than a translation, though, is King Alfred's *Lays of Boethius;* based on *The Consolation of Philosophy*, first written in 524 by Severinus Boethius, while in prison awaiting execution for treason. One moment he was consul to Roman emperor Theodoric then, on the turn of a phrase, he fell out of favour and was sentenced to death. The book is an inspired dialogue with a figure who appears to him in his dismal cell. The 'Queen of Science, Lady Philosophy' is summoned by a poignant invocation: 'To pleasant songs my work was erstwhile given, and bright were all my labours then; but now in tears to sad refrains am I compelled to turn. Thus my maimed Muses guide my pen…' (Golancz, 1902)

But 'Lady Philosophy' is not one of the nine, not Urania, Calliope or Polyhymnia; and in fact, she dismisses the lame goddesses at a stroke. 'When she saw the muses of poesie standing by my bed, dictating the words of my lamentations, she was moved to wrath, her eyes flashed sternly and she addressed to them such words of upbraiding that the whole band dolefully left the chamber' (Golancz, 1902).

Old English expert Michael Alexander likens this Lady Philosophy to the Empress Helena in Cynewulf's *Elene.* The former's conversation with Boethius, and the latter's with Judas, both entail their conversion to Christianity. It takes Alfred's translation of Boethius, perhaps divinely inspired in itself, to change a neoplatonic prison diary that was just beginning to see through the muses, into a full introduction of Christ: 'O, Chieftain', 'Lord', 'Thou Creator' is freely called upon, though the voice of she-wisdom still reverberates in Lady Philosophy. Her outline obscures all nine of the poetic dictators of Boethius' dream, but his vision is broader still; he says 'my eye into each page shall look/ of the elephantine book' (Sedgefield, 1900, p.28).

Like the Ruthwell cross that tells its own story, like 'I am the scalp of myself' in Alfred's riddle, the elephant-sized page has the same self-referential power. But on the scale of literary endeavour, and spiritual achievement, the fiddly paper-folding process described in Alfred the Great's little verse is dwarfed by the book hewn into a mountain landscape.

Borobudur was made by Hindu builders around 775 AD though its name, meaning 'Mountain of accumulation of merits of the ten states of Bodhisattva', places it as a Buddhist monument. From an eastern gateway, the reader spirals upwards, clockwise through nearly five kilometres of open air corridors from the everyday world to Nirvana. On the way they pass 'richly decorated relief panels in which the sculptors have carved a textbook of Buddhist doctrines' (Gray, 2006). So, not a Christian instance; but the pilgrims who trod the pages of this living tome remind us that reading was once synonymous with worship, as well as writing.

This giant narrative is cited in a book that gets a step closer to the 'new age' context of channelled writing. Down that sculptured avenue of discussion I am lead by Polyhymnia, or the Damsel with a Dulcimer, or the Sybil of Cumae, or Dame Julian of Norwich; and, for a time, Kristi Jorde and Adriana Rocha.

In the non-fiction *A Child of Eternity* (1995) American mother and autistic daughter start to communicate using a special typing device. Seemingly sub-normal before this breakthrough, the conversations show Adriana has more than mortal knowledge. She recounts her parents' dreams and unspoken thoughts; gives scientifically viable reasons for the autism she developed in the womb; and tells them things about the world they didn't know and nobody had taught her:

> 'YOU WERE LOOKING FOR ENLIGHTENMENT,' she told her father, 'I TALK TO YOU ABOUT A BOOK. YOU STAND AND YOU READ IT FROM LEFT TO RIGHT…YOU CANNOT SEE THE END UNTIL YOU GET THERE AND REACH ENLIGHTENMENT. SO, YOU HAVE TO READ AND WALK THROUGH ALL THE DIFFERENT STAGES…
> **Kristi:** Is this book literal or metaphorical?
> **Adri:** LITERAL
> **Kristi:** Is it in this dimension?
> **Adri:** YES JOGJAKARTA IN JAVA
> I'd never heard of such a city.
> **Adri:** JOGJAKARTA IS A CITY IN JAVA IN INDONESIA. THE BOOK IS WRITTEN IN STONE.
> **Kristi:** Do people know about this book?
> **Adri:** YES. IT'S WRITTEN IN A GRAVE IN THE MOST SACRED TEMPLE
> OF BOROBUDUR.
> Rodrigo and I were flabbergasted.
> **Kristi:** Is there a reason you're telling us this now?
> **Adri:** DAD WANTED TO FIND TRUE ENLIGHTENMENT SO I SHOW HIM WHERE TO FIND IT.
> **Kristi:** Daddy should go find it?
> **Adri:** BOTH OF YOU.
>
> Stunned but curious, Rodrigo and I went to the library the next afternoon.

> Rodrigo looked up her spelling of the word 'BOROBUDUR' on the Grolier computer encyclopaedia. Not only was Borobudur listed but the first line of text that came up read: Borobudur, located about 40 km from Jogjakarta in central Java, is the ruined site of a major Buddhist monument [with] tiers of terraces… [that] illustrate the progress of the Buddha before his enlightenment …' (Rocha & Jorde, 1995, p. 286-287)

Nine years old, living the cloistered life of the handicapped, she had never read a book, appeared not to pay attention to the TV, didn't go to school. Yet the 'ticker tape' speech that Adriana produced by 'facilitated communication' demonstrates a level of education higher than adults commonly achieve.

Then, as her mother helps Adri to complete a college level math lesson that she doesn't understand herself, Adriana suddenly 'says'; ''JESUS XIT FOR ME.' I couldn't respond – I was too stunned… Why was she talking about Jesus? It wasn't a subject I talked about, that's for sure' (Rocha & Jorde, 1995, p.149-150).

The method isn't scientific, the medium isn't unsullied; as far as this account goes, it seems that the facilitator simply holds Adri's hand over a machine, so the possibility of influence over the written outcome is endless. But when the conversation takes an unexpectedly Christian tone, her liberal-humanist parents take Adriana to a local healer, some suburban shaman, in their quest to find where she's really coming from. Kristi Jorde describes how: 'We all sat down and Tom began to talk. He didn't seem to be in a trance, but he said that he was channelling guides… During the session Adri asked only one question. As she touched the keys I could almost hear the anguish in her voice. 'WERE YOU THERE AT THE CROSS?' Tom said he was… then he turned to Rodrigo and me and told us that Adri had been a disciple during Jesus' time' (Rocha & Jorde, 1995, pp.173-174).

The experience has a transforming effect on Jorde, who becomes a 'channeller' herself. Faster than thought, the way she describes her experience matches how other inspired writers say it feels: 'The words just came into my mind without pauses or spaces of time for me to wonder what was coming next.' Quick and quiet seems to be the divine tone: 'I asked why the voice was not the booming voice of the two messages that I've received before in my life. His answer was that my guides no longer needed to shout to capture my attention' (Rocha & Jorde, 1995, pp. 220-221).

The term 'channelled writing' has no translation in Middle English poetry, but the plots and characters seem to tell of it anyway. *Piers Plowman* was uneducated, visionary; writing what his contemporaries could only dream of, and then might not remember. This poem was penned around 1400 by, scholars currently agree, one William Langland, or Willielmus de

Langlond; but in the sixteenth century people confused the character of Piers with the author himself and by the seventeenth century the poem was deemed anonymous and/or multi-authored. Around fifty manuscripts survive, all slightly different, none of them in the writer's own hand. Everybody and nobody wrote this. Everyman, of *Pilgrim's Progress,* is another example of the same archetype, purer for being less political.

No less a spiritual quest, though, the Plowman's tale is 'evangelical and prophetic, it breathes in theology and breathes out the Latin of the Vulgate and the liturgy' (Alexander, 2000, p.51). Another channelled voice, with more than mortal wisdom; but for all its promise of prophecy the story had already happened, had all been heard before. The climax takes us back again to the crucifixion of Christ. We witness the harassment by a soldier. We are there at the cross:

> 'Ave, rabby,' quod that ribaude, and threw redes at hym,
> Nailed hym witth thre nailles naked on the rode,
> And pouysoun on a pole thei put up to his lippes.' (p. 51)

Reeds, nails and poles; they prod and poke at the painful tale again.

In *The Dream of the Rood* we saw how, despite all this phallic imagery, the Cross seemed to be feminine, sharing an almost sexual relationship with Christ. As Langland's version comes to a climax, it may be happening again: 'Then Scripture scorned me and spoke her reason, And blamed me in Latin and esteemed me lightly' (Wells, 1959, p.129). Piers Plowman personifies 'the word' as female and Latin. The middle-English country boy concurs with the theory of inspiration as a classical muse. That she should speak an ancient tongue is presumed by Robert Burton, too, in his famous *Anatomy of Melancholy* of 1621. "It was not mine intent to prostitute my muse in English," he moaned in the preface; but it was impossible by that point on the literary timeline to publish popular writings in Latin (Burton, 1972, p.ix).

Goddess of parchment scroll or stylus and wax tablet; Polyhymnia still seems to be poring over things that have already happened. The real writings of portent and prediction appear on stones or bark or leaves. Old Testament prophet Moses had words carved in stone; but there was never any suggestion he'd written the Ten Commandments himself, or lifted them from another human source. It was the finger of God that wrote lines on those two slabs: 'They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets' (Exodus 32 15-16).

This is not just divine inspiration, this is heavenly dictation; a voice of higher wisdom

speaks through what could clearly be called a conduit. Its utterances are a response to real questions, and its answers are repeatable; in fact, when Moses smashes the first set of tablets in anger at his peoples' corrupt behaviour, God simply tells him to come back up Mount Sinai, where the commandments are given again. 'The Lord said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. No one is to come with you…' (Exodus 34 1-3) No witnesses, then, as God descends in his cloud to meet his new PR man.

From the Muses to Moses, inspiration strikes the mountainside. In ancient mythology it comes from the depths, as spring water; in the Old Testament it comes from on high. Writing in the air has not figured yet in answers to that question; 'where do you get your ideas'. These writers were from a time of stone and fire; closer to Genesis than to Revelations. In Deuteronomy is a statement once commonplace that now sounds completely out-of-place in a discussion about creativity; 'The Lord said to me: '… I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth and he will tell them everything I command him'' (Deuteronomy 18: 15-18).

Another Old Testament prophet has god's words in a slightly more flexible format; the scroll. In Ezekiel's call, the Lord puts words into his mouth too; '"open your mouth and eat what I give you." Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat … and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. He then said to me: "Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them"' (Ezekiel 2:8 – 3:4).

The scroll is an image of the literate age, when writing had rolled off the stone and onto the page. The honey, though, as a taste of mourning and woe, might be how an author knows when they're in the zone; whether ancient or modern. A pre-literate culture must have heard the same voice, booming from clouds, trickling in water; loud enough not to need the written word. Perhaps a much earlier man heard his thoughts for the first time and thought someone else was speaking; a rustle soft as paper. Maybe it is the same voice that the mad hear? Men might have invented scrolls, to keep lists and promises and memories but God has it all logged in a book: 'So Moses went back to the Lord and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! ... But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of

the book you have written." The Lord replied to Moses. "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book"' (Exodus 32: 31-33).

A hardback in the hands of the creator has inscriptions by other faiths, too. The prophet Mohammad received the words of God through the Angel Gabriel between 610 and his death in 632, according to Islam. His followers wrote down what he said on stones and leaves; picking up on that image of literature growing in nature. The Qur'an was also memorised; it means, in Arabic, recitation. (Memory, practice, song; again we invoke the first three muses, who started art out of religious rituals.) The oral tradition runs like sap though the veins of its holy pages; and an old Qur'an is burned or buried rather than thrown in the wastepaper bin.

The older, Sibylline tradition of prophecy also features writing on leaves. Placed near the entrance to the cave at Cumae, devotees of the sibyl must find her wise words before the wind blows them away. *The Sibylline Leaves* was the name S.T. Coleridge gave a collection of his poetry in 1817; it includes a later version of the more famous 'Abyssinian maid' in the line, 'Meek daughter in the family of Christ' (Yarlott, 1967, p. 96). Both creations may defer to his wife Sara; or refer to Sybil, the legendary seeress whose words are published in foliage instead of folios.

In his critical companion to the poetry, *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge discusses his 'Obligations to the Mystics' too; whose set phrases 'have been mistaken for pretences to immediate inspiration; as for instance, "it was delivered unto me," "I strove not to speak," "I said, I will be silent," "but the word was in my heart as a burning fire," "and I could not forbear"' (Engell and Jackson Bate, 1983, p.150). Those tongues, those flames, like the Muses' eau de source, did not completely convince the man who envisioned the Damsel with a Dulcimer under the influence of opium. Rather, 'In Moses, Coleridge saw his ideal of humanity: the political leader uniting with the inspired writer and prophet' (Beer, 1970 p. 97). If the speech were written on sibylline leaves, the poet probably would have smoked them.

From this catholic mix of middle-English vision quests, Old Testament prophecy, and New-Age channelled writing, we distil the prophet himself. The Lebanese poet and painter, Gibran Kahlil Gibran, transposed from the Cedar groves of Bsherri to an attic studio in New York, became world famous for his esoteric writing, and iconic illustrations, in books such as *The Prophet, The Madman* and *The Forerunner*.

The Prophet was first published in 1926 and has become a timeless spiritual

handbook. Almustafa, 'the chosen and the beloved, who was a dawn unto his own day' (Gibran, 1989, p.1) returns to the island of his birth and is recognised by the seeress Almitra as a source of unearthly wisdom. She asks the prophet to speak to the people of Orphalese and 'give us of your truth' (p.9). He pronounces poetically on love, marriage, children; in speeches oft-quoted today at weddings and Christenings:

> 'Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.
> Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.
> Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone
> Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music…
> And stand together yet not too near together:
> For the pillars of the temple stand apart.
> And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow' (pp.16-19)

In this bible-style rhetoric, with its call-and-response structure, we can hear too all the earlier memories kept by the Muses, the chanting and reciting of a religion that pre-dates even the OT.

In critical thinking Gibran is generally compared with William Blake, because each was equally skilled in visual and verbal craft. It was Auguste Rodin who first made the comparison when he saw Gibran's art work exhibited in Paris, but it's the aphoristic rhythms of their written words which echo here: 'Both Gibran and Blake rebelled against the decayed and rigid laws of church and society. Both rejected Reason in the name of Imagination and read the Bible in its "Diabolical form." Above all, the two poets shared a basic prophetic vision and apocalyptic view of the universe' (El Hage, 2007). Here, I think the comparison goes too far. Gibran is not apocalyptic. He is optimistic, enlightened, euphoric; miles away from the melancholy predictions of Blake, though both believed that the poet was a prophet.

Blake's foretelling of the future involved a retelling of the past. A quasi Old Testament, his parallel creation myths were engraved on metal plates. Against the stone tablets his story looks progressive. Blake's chiselled words in the preface to chapter four of *Jerusalem* tell where he got his ideas from: 'I know of no other Christianity and of no other gospel than the liberty both of body and mind to exercise the divine Arts of Imagination,' he said (Wright, 1972, p. 51). His faith is iconoclastic; Blake could roll every stone-chipped line of *The Dream of the Rood* into one rhyming couplet; 'The Vision of Christ that thou doest see/ Is my Vision's Greatest Enemy' (Beer, 1969, p. 283).

The words from the cross that he hears may be at odds with the book of common prayer. Yet El-Hage manages to conclude, "like Blake, Gibran retained his faith. He believed

that Jesus is the most powerful personality that walked this earth. Throughout his life, Gibran was constantly guided by the example of "our brother Jesus" (2007).

Five years after *The Prophet* was published, Gibran produced a book called *Jesus the Son of Man*. It is narrated by a host of voices resurrected from the time of Christ, as Gibran takes on a series of different roles; those who actually knew Jesus, who saw him, who heard him speak, convey a sense of the man and the Messiah. 'Assaph Called The Orator Of Tyre' comments in an early chapter 'On The Speech Of Jesus';

> 'In my youth I had heard the orators of Rome and Athens and Alexandria. The young Nazarene was unlike them all…He would tell a story or relate a parable, and the like of His stories and parables had never been heard in Syria… He knew the source of our older self, and the persistent thread of which we are woven. [2] He spoke to the crowd as a mountain would speak to the plain. And in His speech there was a power that was not commanded by the orators of Athens or of Rome' (Gibran, 1997, pp. 11-12).

The historical context, the biblical backdrop, with its cultural upheavals and political change, is painted in detail as Gibran's castlist continue to give a bigger picture. 'A Persian Philosopher In Damascus' says, 'Of Ancient Gods And New';

> 'The gods of Greece and Rome are vanishing into their own sunset. The groves in which their magic was born have been cut down by the axes of the Athenians and the Alexandrians… [T]his man Jesus, this Nazarene, He has spoken of a God too vast to be unlike the soul of any man… But my God is the God of Zoroaster … And I … need no other ...' (Gibran, 1997, pp. 34-35)

Along with the gods of Greece and Rome go the Muses; we have already seen the demise of their influence charted in 17th and 18th Century English Literature (in my chapter dedicated to Calliope). Here we see it happening first hand, as BC becomes AD, and the recounting of the centuries begins. With Gibran, we witness the first writing of the myth, by 'David One Of His Followers';

> 'I did not know the meaning of His discourses or His parables until

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2 The persistent imagery of spinning and weaving as a prototype storytelling, from the aboriginal creation myths of Spiderwoman to ancient Greek myths of Arachne, Philomela and Penelope; from fairy tales like Sleeping Beauty and Rumplestiltskin to sci-fi fantasies such as H.G. Wells 'Valley of the Spiders'; is explored in my chapter to Clio, called 'Women, Writing and the (Original) Web'. This in turn connects with my PhD novel in which a web metaphor is used for the computer networking between human author and muse. The two pieces were written in conjunction with each other and share a thesaurus-list of words like 'warp' and 'weft' to hymn the trope of weaving in both story and essay.

> He was no longer among us… On a night as I sat in my house pondering, and remembering His words and His deeds that I might inscribe them in a book, three thieves entered my house. And though I knew they came to rob me of my goods, I was too mindful of what I was doing to meet them with the sword, or even to say, "What do you here?"
> ‘But I continued writing my remembrances of the Master. And when the thieves had gone then I remembered His saying, "He who would take your cloak, let him take your other cloak also." And I understood. As I sat recording His words no man could have stopped me even were he to have carried away all my possessions’ (Gibran, 1997, pp. 36-37).

If his writing process is extraordinary, so was the way Gibran wrote the whole book. The creative act has been documented by Barbara Young in *This Man From Lebanon*. His biographer after death, Young was his scribe while he was alive; a close friend and writer herself, witnessing Gibran’s genius as one who knows enough to know how much she doesn’t know. She details the divine, inspired procedure of Gibran’s literary practice with secretarial care:

> ‘The book *Jesus* had been in Gibran’s intention for a long time. He had said, “Some day, some time we shall write of Our Friend and Brother. In five years, perhaps, or ten…”
> ‘Then without warning, on the evening of the 12th of November, 1926, came the moment that will live in my memory… Gibran had been walking restlessly up and down the room, speaking haltingly of the book the foremost in his thought, *The Garden of the Prophet.* Suddenly he stopped, and a strange dark look came over his face, a curious transformation, the sort of mask that I knew from experience foretold some swift and startling utterance…He bent his head; his face became drawn and old …Then came a voice – not Gibran’s voice – but quavering, thin and broken … The voice began, “It was fifty years ago tonight – the memory … has blackened all my days and desecrated all my dawns...” He paced and said the words again. I wrote them down.…
> ‘Then almost as suddenly as he had become this alien man, Gibran returned to himself, and going to his chair sat down, in silence, and closed his eyes. When he opened them, he looked at me with perfect naturalness and said, “Do you know … who I was?”
> ‘“No,” I said.
> ‘He answered in a voice of musing … “I was Judas. Poor Judas …” Then with an almost blinding illumination of his changeful face he cried out, “I can begin writing That Book tonight!”’ (Young, 1965, pp. 99-100)

Her choice of words harks back to the muses again; and gives us a practical example of their magic in action. As Barbara Young describes the writing process she witnessed in Gibran’s New York apartment in 1926, the term channelled, though not used explicitly, again is implied. She watches it happening, signalled by ‘the light’:

> ‘A radiance would shine upon his countenance, from which one was constrained to turn away. His great soul was laid bare. He was transfigured, and not to be regarded of human eyes.
> ‘Each of the seventy characters came alive in that place. Each voice spoke

> through the lips of this man from Lebanon... Sometimes, a few times, a Light, tenuous but clearly visible, showed above and about him as he walked. Only once I alluded to the Light. He had stopped pacing and stood to speak a low, slow sentence. I looked up and saw the Light. It was almost unbearably clear and dazzling white, and I said, in spite of myself, "Kahlil! The Light!"
>
> 'He started, drew in a great breath, and turned away, beginning his pacing again. And the Light faded' (Young, 1965, p.102).

This conversation, sounding like a script for the Hollywood version of their story, shows Barbara Young acting as a channel for the channel. She portrays the author exhausted by his work, as a medium who has been used as a voice for the dead is drained at the end of a sitting. As Gibran paces, the steps of his story are trodden in the shoes, sandals, bare-feet of biblical characters Young is convinced once were real. The 'orator of Tyre', the 'Persian philosopher' and 'one of His followers' are archetypal; they sound authentic enough, but there is no evidence they actually existed. As the book goes on, though, other voices with scriptural pedigrees speak too, narrators of a lineage long recorded in sand, ash or song:

> 'John The Son Of Zebedee: On The Various Appellations Of Jesus'
>
> 'Many times the Christ has come to the world... And always He has been deemed a stranger and a madman… Have you not heard of Him at the cross-roads of India? And in the land of the Magi, and upon the sands of Egypt? And here in your North Country your bards of old sang of Prometheus, the fire-bringer… and Orpheus, who came with a voice and a lyre to quicken the spirit in beast and man…
>
> 'And the Spirit was the versed hand of the Lord, and Jesus was the harp … In my heart dwells Jesus of Galilee, the Man above men, the Poet who makes poets of us all...' (Gibran, 1997, pp. 45–48)

The frame of reference is still archetypal; ambitious man and a demi-god featuring in the backstory. The muse appears by implication in its line-up of Christ-like figures; Orpheus is the son of Calliope. All these mentions are culturally meaningful; but some of the characters in Gibran's book are historically verifiable too. Could he really be 'channelling' the voice of John The Baptist as 'He Speaks In Prison To One Of His Disciples'; 'I am not silent in this foul hole while the voice of Jesus is heard on the battlefield. I am not to be held nor confined while He is free' (Gibran, 1997, p.55). Or Judas The Cousin Of Jesus as he speaks 'On The Death Of John The Baptist'; 'In truth he was a voice crying in the land of the deaf' (Gibran, 1997, p.91).

The 'big names' of the bible; Joseph of Arimethea, Pontious Pilot, Salome and 'Doubting Thomas' are also given voice, with a style that combines psalm, harp and prophesy with a psychoanalytical skill. For the faithful, what Gibran produced is literally gospel. His trusty scribe, Barbara Young, produced a companion to the sacred text with a

commentary that aims to be scientific. Here, she details how their friendship as two writers turned into a relationship that streamlined the 'channelling' of this unusual work:

> 'On that day the door was ajar, as always. Knocking and entering, I saw him sitting at his table writing. I said nothing, took my accustomed seat and waited. Presently he greeted me, and then said, 'I am making a poem. It is about a blind poet. [3] Then he rose and walked up and down the room for several minutes before he again seated himself at the table and wrote a line or two.
> 'I waited while he repeated his writing and his walking again and again. Then a thought came to me. The next time he walked I went and seated myself at his table and took up his pencil. When he turned he saw me sitting there.
> 'You make the poem and I'll write it,' I said.
> 'No – no. You shall not write for me. You must write you own poems.'
> 'But I would so love to write your words. And see how simple – you walk up and down and talk it – and I'll put it down! It's a game.'
> 'I could never work with anyone – like that,' he said.
> 'Make believe I'm not anyone – just a little mechanical machine' (Young, 1965, pp. 82 – 83).

This echoes the 'Canon Communicator', a device used by Adrianna Rocha to facilitate conversation in *A Child of Eternity*; with poetry and prophesy and revelations of a profound nature appearing on the ticker tape that gives an autistic child her voice (Rocha & Jorde, 1995, pp. 66-67). In Urania's chapter of the current work we will see women writing scientifically, in contrast to their sometime themes of marriage and maternity. The question is whether the 'machines' of their own writing processes establish or extinguish the spark of inspiration. Indeed, there is rarely such a 'plugging in' to divine aid as Gibran gives Phumiah, The High Priestess Of Sidon, in *Jesus the Son of Man;* 'Take your harps and let me sing' (Gibran, 1997, p.120). This summoning of mystical power we've seen in real poets and philosophers, in Calliope and Clio's chapters, is now a post-classical invocation. And although the Christ figure is her object, the speaker herself is the subject; 'let me sing' is very different to Homer and Milton's 'sing heavenly Muse'.

Gibran's characters also include a scientist, Melachi Of Babylon; 'You question me concerning the miracles of Jesus. … They say He raised the dead to life. If you can tell me what is death, then I will tell you what is life. … And I am not one of His followers. I am but an old astronomer who visits the fields of space once a season, and who would be heedful of the law and the miracles thereof' (Gibran, 1997, pp. 97-99). These layers of semi-autobiography may reveal the unconscious source of Gibran's ideas; he surely 'visits the fields of space' and is certainly 'heedful of the law'. Not common law, though, or common

[3] The archetype of eyeless writer has figured in my argument so far, with poets such as Homer and Milton featuring as real visionaries; and the mythical character Thamyris (who boasted that his song was better than the Muses' but was blinded for this crime) following the theme of unseeing seer.

knowledge; as the next excerpt from *This Man from Lebanon* shows. Barbara Young says:

> 'One evening when we were [writing], I piled cushions on the floor and sat upon them instead of occupying my usual chair. Then I had a strange feeling of familiarity about the gesture, and I said, "I feel as if I've sat like this beside you many times – but I really haven't."
> He waited a moment – as he so often did before replying – and I often wondered if he were thinking his reply in Arabic. [4] Then he said, "We have done this a thousand years ago, and we shall do it a thousand years hence."
> And during the writing of *Jesus, The Son of Man*, the drama of some incident… was so overwhelming that I … said, "It is so real. It seems as if I had been there." And his answer came, almost like a cry, "You were there! And so was I!" (Young, 1965, pp. 93-94)

The Mary Magdalene of Gibran's book supports this theory of reincarnation and brings her own passion to it. With familiar musical imagery and second-person address we are called: '… with death Jesus conquered death, and rose from the grave a spirit and a power…He lies not there in that cleft rock behind the stone. I know you who believe not in Him. I was one of you, and you are many; but your number shall be diminished. Must your break your harp and your lyre to find the music therein?' (Gibran, 1997, p.214) Her discipleship and Barbara Young's are not entirely different: Gibran's relationship with Young has the same 'are they or aren't they' quality seen, by some theosophy, as that of Christ and Magdalene. By Gibran's pen, Mary's comments are inscribed with lust; 'That night I beheld Him in my dreaming; and they told me afterward that I screamed in my sleep and was restless upon my bed… And it was all that was sod in me, and all that was sky in me calling unto Him' (Gibran, 1997, pp. 13-16).

Young's commentary on Kahlil Gibran's sexuality, however, is more coy. She describes the 'universal cry for woman comfort' Gibran made, and his unique appeal to many female admirers; but, perhaps in keeping with his own approach, she turns all hints and allusions to sex into euphemisms for art.

> 'At a memorial gathering held soon after Gibran's death, one of the distinguished American writers said… "Of his love-life I know nothing." And indeed, how should he? Majesty neither exhibits nor discusses the communion of its sanctuary. Marriage was not for him… And it may be well affirmed that

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4 This sense of self-translation as Gibran speaks, the translation of a translation even, intersects with the creative component of my PhD, a novel subtitled *The Translation*. It implies an original version before any writing is done. If all stories are translated from the truth, we might be looking at a single author; a singularity of authorship. God.

> whomever he had chosen to share the cup with him would be as reticent as he … Gibran once said, 'when two people, a man and a woman, have… shared the deepest spiritual moment that life brings… they have created an entity as surely as though they had conceived and borne a child …They have made a song, a poem which shall not die" (Young, 1965, pp.130-132).

'A Man from Lebanon – Nineteen Centuries Afterward' is the last voice to speak in Gibran's book *Jesus Son of Man*. This autobiographical character uses the same trope of reincarnation shown in Gibran and Young's relaxed chats;

> 'Master, master singer,
> Master of words unspoken,
> Seven times was I born, and seven times have I died
> Since your hasty visit and our brief welcome.
> And behold I live again…' (1997, p. 217)

So if this writing really is 'channelled' the flow may not be a random fountaining of knowledge but a carefully addressed and controllable trickle of information for certain ears. Gibran implied, in the conversations recorded by his colleague, that he had met Christ in a previous life and was recounting scenes he'd previously seen. 'Remembering a day and a night among the hills', may account for the private tone of this voice; but what of the other seventy men and women, Rabbis and Scribes, Roman Centurions and harlots, who speak in Gibran's text. Surely he couldn't have personal connections with them all? Yet, the voice of Rumanous, a Greek Poet, also seems to be his: 'Once I too deemed myself a poet, but when I stood before Him in Bethany, I knew what it is to hold an instrument with but a single string before one who commands all instruments. And since I have known that … I have put aside my lyre and I shall keep silence. But always at twilight I shall hearken, and I shall listen to the Poet who is the sovereign of all poets' (Gibran, 1997, p.84).

The music, the muse, swells again here to highlight a recurring theme; in the debate of divine inspiration, so far, opposing sides of silence and speech have played against each other. Gibran's argument for the son of man orchestrates the mute and the musical too. In his 'John, the son of Zebedee', we see how Christ 'turns our silence to singing'; whereas 'John the Baptist' says, 'I am not silent in this foul hole while the voice of Jesus is heard on the battlefield'; and a third witness says, of Jesus, 'In truth he was a voice crying in the land of the deaf'. But while vocalisation is seen to be a positive and powerful way of self-expression; knowing when not to speak is also a sign of spiritual advancement. The Greek poet in the

text, humbled by the creative mastery of the Lord, knows enough not to say anything; and Gibran's own disciple, Barbara Young is also sworn to secrecy in her book, *This Man from Lebanon*:

> '… only once in all the seven years, [he] spoke of three mystical experiences, saying from the depth of his human burden and weariness, 'This once in my life I must speak of these things to one other human being. *But you will never speak of them* – not even when I am dead.' I sat as still as a stone and listened, and I knew – for I, too, am not unacquainted with mystic vision and power – that it was eternal truth that he spoke, and that I shall never speak' (Young, 1965, p.95).

The musical instrument is often struck, or strummed, at a point where words are too much or not enough. One of Gibran's characters, 'Sarkis, an old Greek Shepherd', tells of a dream in which he sees his god Pan and Jesus sitting together in the heart of the forest. This would be a conversation wonderful to overhear, like the secret revelations kept by Young, but somehow to hear it would be to discredit the unspeakable truth. Silence might speak louder; but then there would be no book. Instead, Christ and Pan play their instruments together; essentially, they jam. Sarkis says: 'Pan took his reeds and played to Jesus. The trees were shaken and the ferns trembled, and there was a fear upon me. And Jesus said, "Good brother, you have the glade and the rocky height in your reeds." Then Pan gave the reeds to Jesus and said, "You play now. It is your turn." And Jesus said, "These reeds are too many for my mouth..." And He took His flute and He played' (Gibran, 1997, p.188).

Polyhymnia, the many-voiced sister of pagan god Pan, is silenced too by Christ's perfect monotone. Now, the last notes of Kahlil Gibran's hymn are heard. Words carved on leaves may blow away, and chiselled in stone will erode; and even books can be burned. Gibran's 'Andrew, on Prostitutes' leaves a lasting impression of Christ's way with words; written with a finger in the dirt:

> '…as He was speaking the Pharisees brought into the midst of the crowd a woman whom they called a harlot. And they confronted Jesus and said to Him, "She defiled her marriage vow, and she was taken in the act."
> 'And He gazed at her; and He placed His hand upon her forehead and looked deep into her eyes.
> 'Then he turned to the men who had brought her to Him, and He looked long at them; and He leaned down and with His finger He began to write upon the earth.
> 'He wrote the name of every man, and beside the name He wrote the sin that every man had committed.
> 'And as He wrote they escaped in shame into the streets.
> 'And ere He had finished writing only that woman and ourselves stood before Him. 'And again He looked into her eyes, and He said, "You have loved overmuch. They who brought you here loved but little"' (Gibran, 1997, pp.153-154).

This very episode is told in the New Testament gospel of John, but with a crucial difference. It doesn't say what He wrote in the dust. Those details have been edited out, leaving Christ appearing to randomly doodle. [5] It happens in John 7:53 – 8.11 after Jesus spends a night alone on the Mount of Olives: 'At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"'

It was a trap to catch a king. The Jewish establishment and the Roman rules under which they were living made a loophole so there was no right answer, even for a messiah: 'But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."'

This famous scene, known as the *Pericope Adulterae,* does not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts of the gospel. It turns up in St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate of 384, and he claimed to have read it in the manuscripts of Rome. Biblical scholars have noticed anomalies in the verse numbering, which suggests that it was added or edited at some point. Perhaps the woman taken in adultery was cut out of the New Testament early on, kept alive in the oral tradition, and then reinserted into the bible with the most challenging lines wiped away. What does Christ write in the sand? Without these words, the *pericope* is about politics and sexuality. Religion could handle that; but it couldn't face the spirituality.

Kahlil Gibran writes a modern one-man testament which contains the same scene, but in his we witness the supernatural bit. How does Jesus know which sin each man committed? The fact that the Scribes and the Pharisees flee in both versions probably corroborates their shame and fear. How does Jesus know the men and their sins; and how did Gibran know what was listed by Christ's finger in the earth. It's not in the New International Version. Both cases point to divine inspiration. The early church censored much of this from the bible.

So silence may be a useful spiritual lesson, but the teacher must ultimately speak. Our subject is, after all, the Word. Gibran repeatedly describes Jesus as a singer, a poet. It would

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[5] I can't reference this properly, but I heard a priest on a Radio 4 church service talk about Christ's 'absent-minded' doodle in the dust. Surely any Reverend should know that *Christ Consciousness* is the very opposite of absent-mindedness. When Jesus was teaching every word was chosen, like his disciples: anything written with a stick in the sand would have been designed for reading, by those with eyes to see it!

be disingenuous to ask if Kahlil were a bus-driver would he portray Christ that way too; but this has been a return journey to the source of storytelling, driven by his verbal skills; '…the man who once, for a jest, for a prank, dictated to three secretaries at one time, in three languages and on three different subjects – to the amazement of all concerned…' (Young, 1965, p.7)

Polyhymnia conducts us next to an instance of creative writing more extraordinary still. A seminal case in our search for the place where writers get their ideas; this, too, was witnessed by respectable, reliable observers and the process was recorded as well as the final product. The author was 'one of the greatest literary puzzles of this or any other century, the solution of which would cast light on the age-old problem of the source of human inspiration.' This claim is made by Archie Roy, emeritus professor of astronomy in the University of Glasgow and a former president of the Society for Psychical Research:

> 'In 1913, in St. Louis, Missouri, a number of ladies formed the habit of amusing themselves by operating a Ouija board. Among them was Mrs. John H. Curran… On July 8th, 1913, the Ouija board, seemingly more energetic and active than usual, spelled out firmly and clearly: "*Many moons ago I lived. Again I come – Patience Worth my name. Wait, I would speak with thee…*"' (Roy, 1990, p.224)

From then until December 1937 Patience Worth spoke through Pearl Curran, a middle-American matron; prolifically composing poetry and plays even as Mrs Curran caught up with her correspondence and chatted to her friends. Roy compares their two biographies in an attempt to find some link between them; a reason why Curran, like Gibran writing simultaneously, elsewhere in America, was chosen to receive the messages, sometimes prosaic but often poetic, from an alleged higher source.

> 'Mrs. Curran… had a straightforward, ordinary education, leaving school at the age of fourteen. [She was] brighter in intelligence than average but not at all well-educated in poetry, diction, history, Biblical literature and with no opportunity to study such subjects in libraries. It seemed for example that she was under the impression that Henry VIII had been beheaded… Patience Worth was… in total contrast to Pearl Curran. Possessed of a wry, mature sense of humour, she was exceptionally quick-witted and did not suffer fools gladly. She treated Mrs. Curran with affection, much as an elder sister treats a less experience, immature younger sister… On one occasion Patience referred to Pearl as "*Mine ain harp, a whit awry – but mine ain harp withal!*"' (Roy, 1990, pp.224-225)

The author as an instrument; that string is picked again and hums with the same

metaphor used repeatedly by Gibran. It is, of course, a common trick of creative writing and can be seen in the work of many other poets. My chapter to Euterpe explores this musical imagery; the lutes and lyres, the flutes and Aeolian harps; all strummed, plucked and blown in the attempt to describe inspiration in words. But not all poets hold with the idea that they are the mere pipe through which the divine breath blows song.

What is weird about Patience Worth's story is that the 'higher voice', normally unseen and unknown, has an identity of its own; an author with name, dates and a discrete personality, distinct from the wonky harp of flesh it strums upon: 'She claimed… that she was a Dorsetshire girl, had lived on a farm there in 1649 or 1694, and had crossed the Atlantic to America where she had been killed by Indians. This… came in a dialect that was decidedly English, spiced by a brilliant gift for ramming home a point by original epigram or proverb or couthy aphorism' (Roy, 1990, p.225). Here the theory of reincarnation that went, in Gibran's story, hand in scribbling hand with divine inspiration, is raised again.

When a psychiatrist investigating Mrs Curran suggested that Patience was 'the result of her suppressed desires to become a great writer', Patience Worth's voice replied: 'Could she saddle me as a nag to job her to the mart, she might – but ne'er would she jog with me' (p.228). This is reminiscent of Kahlil Gibran's relationship with Barbara Young. Though both were poets, she would never 'jog' with him; there can only be one great writer in the relationship. Curran openly admitted that the thoughts and words of Worth were beyond her intelligence at first; and that she had received an education in the act of channelling. 'Six years ago,' she said, 'I could not have understood the literature of Patience Worth had it been shown to me' (p.226).

It would have been a lot to suppress. The complete works amounted to three million words; four novels, poetry, plays, proverbs; produced by the spinning needle of Mrs Curran's Ouija board, later supplemented by her spoken words. 'Sometimes as many as twenty poems were given in an evening interspersed with her replies to sitter's queries, together with sections of the novel or play she was working on. As her fame grew, people in all walks of life, journalists, academics, medical men … came to meet her and found… her utterances pithy and relevant' (p.226).

Pearl retained her homely tone, though, as shown in a letter said to have been written in short bursts between bouts of dictation from Patience one evening. Instead of the clever aphorisms coined by her 'better half', here we get colloquialisms and slang of the day; 'This is a mess of a letter, honey bug. I'm nuts!' (p.225) Meanwhile she was working on a novel *The Sorry Tale*, set in the time of Christ. Six hundred and forty-four pages long it

mixes real characters (Jesus, Herod, Augustus and Tiberius Caesar) with an invented cast; the plot fixing on one of the thieves crucified alongside Christ on Calvary, his tale set parallel to the New Testament:

'For some weeks before the beginning of the story Mrs. Curran had received intimations of its coming and of its nature: "'Tis a sorry tale I put a-next," Patience said on the fifth of July' (Yost, 1917, p.iv). By the fourteenth, when work on the book began: 'There was a certain solemnity to the occasion, a feeling that something of profound significance was to be inaugurated. … It was for a while a …hesitating, faltering Patience, almost overcome by the task upon which she was entering.
'"Loth, loth I be," she said. "Yea, thy handmaid's hands do tremble. Wait thou! Wait. Yet do I to set"' (p.vi). And the pointer slowly began to circle the Ouija board.

So, the voice of an unseen author, Patience Worth, speaks to a further unseen source, far above her as handmaid. There are increments in the channelling; from Pearl to Patience to a voice that makes even spirit hands shake with fear. This same reluctance to write, or refusal of the call, is evident in Gibran's story, too, as he approaches his own book about Christ. But it seems these authors have no choice what to write, or when. Each word, each paragraph, each page is somehow pre-ordained. Worth uses the musical analogy again to show how she is purely instrumental: 'This lyre singeth the song of Him' (p.vii). This line could have been sung by Gibran too.

In the 1917 preface to *The Sorry Tale* the description of Mrs. Curran's manner of writing is very matter-of-fact; 'She receives the communications with the aid of the mechanical device known as the Ouija board as a recording instrument. There is no trance or any abnormal mental state. She sits down with the Ouija board as she might sit down to a typewriter, and the receipt of the communications begins with no more ceremony than a typist would observe' (Yost, 1917, p.iii). Here again is the 'machine' used by Gibran (in the form of Young's note-taking) and Adrianna Rocha's Canon Communicator. While not bestowing the status of prophetic words carved in stone, or inscribed on Sibylline leaves, it lends the weight of science and proposes some objectivity. Caspar S.Yost, a contemporary authority on the phenomenon of Patience, gives more detail on the working process in his preface:

> 'It mattered not who was present or who sat at the board with Mrs. Curran. Whether the vis-à-vis was man or woman, old or young, learned or unlettered, the speed and the quality of the production were the same. From start to finish some 260 persons contributed in this way to the composition of this strange tale,

> some helping to take but a few hundred words, some many thousands. Parts of the story were taken in New York, Boston and Washington. Each time the story was picked up at the point where work was stopped at the previous sitting, without a break in the continuity of the narrative, without the slightest hesitation and without the necessity of a reference to the closing words of the preceding instalment' (p.iv).

Polyhymnia gives us plurality of voice, uniformity of narrative. The same story is told, whoever is telling it. The unedited nature of *The Sorry Tale* also implies its truth: '…there was never a change of a word, never a pause in the transmission, never a hesitation in the choice of a word or the framing of a sentence. The story seemed literally to pour out, and the amount of her production in an evening appeared to be limited only by the physical powers of Mrs Curran. "Ye see," she said once to a visitor who inquired about this ability to write with such pauseless continuity, "man setteth up his cup and filleth it, but I be as the stream" (Yost, 1917, p.iv).

Even the Muses, who sit at the source of that stream and watch over the Hippocrene spring of inspiration, cannot claim to be the flow itself. In *The Sorry Tale*, the chapter describing the crucifixion, about 5000 words long, was produced in a single evening. This is a high output by many authors' standards; especially when the work is historical, riddled with facts and figures most writers would need to research. But for Worth; '"Ye see, I be at put [writing] as though 'twere me upon thy earth"' (Yost, 1917, p.vii). Then it is automatic, writing like water at the turn of a tap. Pearl Curran portrays a scene stronger than watercolour, original as Eden, in a panorama through which she wanders: 'I am like a child with a magic picture book. Once I look upon it, all I have to do is watch its pages open before me, and revel in their beauty and variety and novelty' (Roy, 1990, p.229). She describes in detail how she stops to smell a flower in a garden where the plot is unfolding, a beautiful exotic bloom that she'd never seen in real life, but was later able to recognise in a botanical book.

This account gives us the clearest witnessing of a disembodied voice since the Bible. Mrs Curran says; 'If the people talk a foreign language … I hear the talk, but over and above is the voice of Patience either interpreting or giving me the part she wishes to use as story' (Roy, 1990, p.230). Simultaneous translation, then; into the idiom of 'thy earth'. Patience Worth is the translator of one genre into another, prophecy into nostalgia; one tense into another, past into present; and one address into another; thee into I. Her way with tongues is pre-Babel!

Gibran was also able to work in two languages, moving between them with

meaningful nuances, self-translating and back again, testing each sentence against the other to make more sense. Arabic was his first language and he wrote many works before his first in the English language. His biography records the pause before he spoke, as if he still thought in Arabic, and carefully turned it into American.

The feel of translation in *The Sorry Tale* is not so literal; but almost every page has an awkward phrase or some clumsy wording that smacks of a crudely rendered précis. This paragraph has plenty of images of biblical cuisine but scant vocabulary to describe it; 'And she brought forth the fire-jug and spread about it the grain's meal, wetted that it bake. And they looked them upon this and waited, for this was the meal cake that Theia … should take upon the ways. And when the finish of the drying had been, Nada took it from off the jug and broke it up unto bits' (Worth, 1917, p.319).

A simple, ancient process should fit a single, articulate word; 'and when the finish of the drying had been' suggests a beginner in the language, groping for a word not yet learnt. It makes this huge 'novel' hard to read. Written (as it came) as a dramatic monologue, the different characters' voices blend into each other, not distinguished by the introduction of a narrator. As the central character refers to herself in the third person it's not always clear who's talking, and the punctuation can be ambiguous too. However, this is certainly not the same voice who declared 'see here honeybug, I'm nuts!" in the letter written at the same time; 'And Panda stood him tall and made words, saying: "Paul, no chain of metal's weld is like unto the weight of Rome! A man may free him of his grains, or yet his mantle, or e'en his flesh, but ne'er of Rome!" (Worth, 1917, p.363)

To 'make words' seems as rude a euphemism as to make water or make love; as rough a translation. If, as Pearl Curran comments, the Aramaic of the original scene is simultaneously interpreted by Patience Worth, then we must add; just because Worth is the 'higher source' she doesn't make words any better. But a close reading of the Curran/Worth text shows richly pictorial plotting behind the opaque language; and the pidgin English adds to its sense of urgent transcription, so bad that you have to believe it:

> 'And this had been at the end of the sea's-way and land's-way that had led from Rome. And she spake of Nadab who wove of cloths there within Rome that the nobled be clothed. And that she was but a serving maid, the handmaid unto a handmaid… And that Nadab had dreamed dreams that he had spoken he would weave into rugs, and that at the weaving of cloth, lo, the dreams beset him' (p.159).

. In my novel, *Translating the Muse's Tale*, the means of ciphering and deciphering is

mechanical; a sort of computer that facilitates communication between muse and human. Its link to weaving, with images of spinning as storytelling, recur in the words of Patience Worth, here prophesying about the reception of her work, Curran's work, the work they spun between them: 'There shall be ones who shall tear at this cloth till it shredeth, yet the shreds shall weave them back unto the whole 'pon love strands. For love be the magic warp… in hearts that sup the words' (Yost, 1917, p. ix).

More fitting this phrase than the worthy intonations of *The Sorry Tale* to be called divine, though the climax of the novel brings us to the cross, where; 'they that looked upon [Him] called out, "Behold, the Son of God and the King of the Jews!" And they brought forth a white script and with the wet blood wrote: "The King of the Jews." And this hath ne'er been wiped whither…' (Worth, 1917, p. 635) This inscription is matched in the parallel scene with the character Hatte, the crucified thief, whose paternity has been an issue: 'Theia arose… and spake: "It is written in blood upon the ages…See!" and she dipped within the blood her finger and wrote upon a bit of her mantle: "The Son of Tiberius"' (Worth, 1917, p. 636).

Indeed, my motif of words cast in stone, or scratched on leaves, as they flow from the Helicon stream, is repeated in this final image of Worth's. They're echoed too in a poem she dictated to Mrs Curran called The Inheritance of Ages;

> 'We, the chalices of His steadfast pledge,
> Stand for a moment cheek to cheek, and lo!
> Crumble once more, letting the wine to flow
> Its scarlet stream across eternity;
> Indelibly writing thee and me,
> And our dusts lie waiting for the Potter's hand
> To turn new chalices for newer loves.'
> (Roy, 1990, p. 232)

And though the style is clumsier, the sentiments of Patience Worth echo Gibran again, in his idea of reincarnation. The prophetic language and archetypal imagery must come from the same divine source of inspiration, the same collective unconscious, the same social conditioning. Whether it's idealistic or ideological, a common thread of thought spins between the words of Worth and Kahlil Gibran.

For all the intricacy of their writings, though, it seems the simplest things are the most difficult to compose. Patience Worth was asked for a child's prayer by a lady visitor at her daily sitting. Despite her usual speed to send a commission, Patience made no response for a

month. What happened next was recorded by Dr Walter Franklin Prince, a respected psychical researcher, who studied the case. The other sitters wonder why Mrs Curran's hand 'aimlessly circled' the Ouija board, and ask her if a certain member of the group was putting her off writing the prayer:

> '"What mattereth it who stirreth a puddin', be it a good un?" answered Patience, and we laughed, as Patience went on talking of the prayer and what it should be… "Let my throat sing a song that shall fall as a dove's coo…" Then, after the longest wait we ever had for something to come, she said: "Aye, I ha'e the singin'." Then another long wait and Patience said: "I may not sing O Lord; for what babe knoweth the words' lilt?"
>
> '"Father," went on Patience, and we thought she had commenced it. But she stopped and said; "It meaneth not a nearness." Then later: "Tis like unto making the first babe's swaddling cloth"' (Roy, 1999, pp.234-235).

Who is she talking to? This is a dialogue; we only hear one voice, but it's clearly a conversation. The credulous would say it is what it seems; Lord, Father; Patience is literally collaborating with God on this work of art. The master of creation Himself is whispering in her ear and she is challenging some of his ideas. How would the incredulous account for what Patience Worth said? Perhaps by analysing the child's prayer, only four lines long;

'I, Thy child forever, play
About Thy knees this close of day;
Within Thy arms I now shall creep
And learn Thy wisdom while I sleep; AMEN.' (Roy, 1999, p. 235)

This can read as 'greetings-card' doggerel. The rhythm and rhyme scheme show a technical mastery of language; but the familiarity of its form makes the message feel trite. It is reminiscent, in tone and structure, of a famous bedtime prayer;

'Now I lay me down to sleep
And pray that God my soul will keep
If I should die before I wake
I pray that God my soul will take.'

Anonymous, of course, this dates from the 18th Century, so Pearl if not Patience would probably have heard it first. Worth's prayer, however, is a gentler version; less 'apocalyptic' again, less alarming for the children of a God who gives rather than takes. According to Dr. Prince, the poem was edited obsessively by Patience; something she never did to any other piece of work. It comes down to a concept which encapsulates my thesis; the artist playing innocently at the feet of the great creator, while the secrets of her art are learned

unconsciously.

The historical atmosphere, the hypnotic voice of the narrator, the heroic turn of events; these are what's best about *The Sorry Tale*. It is, at worst, a retelling of the basic biblical plot in a cod archaic idiom with a cast of half-baked characters. The lack of editing is not so much a coup as a crime. The final line, 'and Theia was no more', sums up its corny tone.

So for all its divine inspiration the book is not exactly bestselling fiction; unlike Ann Rice's 2005 novel about the life of the young Christ. Revered for her vampire literature, American author Rice then published 'the book she was born to write'; *Christ the Lord – Out of Egypt*. Its sales pitch implies that Ann Rice, like Kahlil Gibran and Patience Worth, had a spiritual imperative for telling this tale. Aside from the success of her commercial gothic fiction, Rice too attempts to retell the Christian myth in her own words. In the long author's note to the book she discusses the reasons for doing it this way: 'Anybody could write about a liberal Jesus, a married Jesus, a gay Jesus, a Jesus who was a rebel…' (2005, p. 319)

Her interest began with the boy Christ, described in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, 'who could strike a child dead, bring another to life, turn clay birds into living creatures, and perform other miracles… After all, is Christ Our Lord not the ultimate supernatural hero, the ultimate outsider, the ultimate immortal of them all?' (Rice, 2005, p. 319-321) For her vampire fans, Rice plots this other book against such 'gospel truths', stirring up an exciting potion of fact and fiction. Her blend contrasts strongly with *The Sorry Tale* for here at last are the historical details, a knowledge of the period that could only have come from copious reading and diligent research. The child Messiah is quizzed by religious leaders in Nazareth; a school place and the course of world history depend on his answers:

> '"Look at me, Jesus bar Joseph," said the Rabbi.
> I did as he told me.
> In Hebrew he asked, "Why did the Phoenicians cut the hair of Samson?"
> "I beg the Rabbi to forgive me, but it was not the Phoenicians," I answered in Hebrew. "It was the Philistines. And they cut his hair to make Samson weak."
> He spoke to me in Aramaic,
> "Where is Elisha who was taken up in the chariot?"
> "I beg the Rabbi to forgive me," I said in Aramaic. "It was Elijah who was taken up, and Elijah is with the Lord."
> In Greek he asked,
> "Who is it that resides in the Garden of Eden, writing down all that takes place in this world?"
> I didn't answer for a moment. Then I said in Greek:
> "No one. There is no one in Eden."
> The Rabbi sat back and looked to one side and then the other. The other Rabbis

looked at him and all looked at me.
"No one is in Eden writing down the deeds of the world?" he asked.
I thought for a moment. I knew I had to say what I knew. But how I knew it, I couldn't tell. Was I remembering it? I answered in Greek,
"Men say it is Enoch, but Eden is empty until the Lord should say that all the world will be Eden once again."
The Rabbi spoke in Aramaic,
"Why did the Lord break his covenant with King David?"
"The Lord never broke it," I said. This I had always known as long as I knew any answer. I didn't even have to think about it. "The Lord does not break his covenants. The throne of David is there…"
The Rabbi was quiet and so were the others. The old men didn't even look at each other.
"Why is there no King from the House of David on that throne?" the Rabbi asked, his voice getting louder. "Where is the King?"
"He will come," I said. "And his house will last forever."
His face was even more kind than before. He spoke softly.
"Will a carpenter build it?"
Laughter… My face burned.
"Yes, Rabbi," I said, "a carpenter will build the House of the King. There is always a carpenter. Even the Lord Himself is now and then a carpenter.
The old Rabbi drew back in surprise. I could hear noises all around me. They didn't like this answer.
"Tell me how the Lord is a carpenter," said the Old Rabbi in Aramaic.
I thought of words Joseph had spoken to me many times:
"Did not the Lord Himself say to Noah how many cubits the ark was to be, and of what sort of wood? And that the wood should be pitched, and did the Lord not say how many stories [sic] the ark must be, and did the Lord not say that it should have a window finished to a cubit, and did the Lord not tell Noah where he was to build the door?" I stopped.
A smile came slowly to the face of the oldest man. I didn't look at anyone else. There was quiet again...
"Lord Rabbi," I said, "from the time of Sinai, where there is Israel there is a Carpenter …"
The Rabbi stopped me. He laughed and put up his hand for quiet.
"This is a good child," he said, looking at Joseph above me. "I like this child"' (Rice, 2005 pp. 178-180).

The excerpt is long to show a prodigious flow of words; the prophetic call and response, the Gnostic wisdom, evoke the same thing we've already labelled as evidence of divine inspiration in other works. In between the utterances of the carpenter's son, though, the narrative can be wooden ('…looked to one side and then the other'). Rice's visual perspective is like the close-up, silent eye of the film or TV camera ('…didn't even look at each other') required, perhaps, by her screen-literate vampire audience. The 'first person' Christ does detract from the character's mystery, though, and His voice can sound contrived ('...I knew I had to say what I knew').

This version of the story contrasts with Patience Worth's, with an eye that has never seen TV. Attention to detail is not filmic but cosmic, hallucinogenic, psychotic in Worth;

'And they spake unto Jesus, saying, for there were men of office that listed unto His words for heresy: "Art thou the Son of God?"

> And He answered not, knowing their meaning. And they said: "Make thee a wonderwork, since though can'st do these things."
> And he answered them not, but stood looking far…
> And the Romans harked unto…Him. And lo, they binded up His eyes and smote Him upon His flesh, crying out: "What thing hath smitten thee? Prophecy! Though canst then tell!"
> And he answered not' (Worth, 1917, p. 613).

But the same sorry tale is told in Luke 22:63-64 (King James Version**): '**And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?' Even if Mrs Curran hadn't actually read the bible she would surely have heard readings in church or school. Kahlil Gibran has already embroidered such a truth, in his work on the 'woman taken in adultery'. Is this another example of the same, common practice of 'creative visualisation' around a received statement of religious fact? Merely to extemporise from memory may be what Patience Worth does, then; but she can stem the manic flow of words to show Christ's refusal to answer those who doubt him. Silence is part of the story, as much as speech.

So Worth's Christ retains his mystery though seen at close quarters, through a woman's eye. Rice too, of course, has a woman's perspective, though the I of her narrative is Jesus himself. Spinning the tale around him in this text are mother Mary, cousin Salome, and great aunt Sarah;

> '[M]y mother loved weaving. Her days of weaving the temple veils with the eighty-four young girls chosen for this, housed in Jerusalem, had given her great speed and skill, and she turned out cloth that was of the quality of the best in the marketplace, and she knew how to dye cloth as well, even to work in purple. [6]
>
> 'Old Sarah was too old to do any fancy work with a needle, or anything with a needle for that matter, or a loom, but she taught Little Salome how to make embroidery, and they sat together laughing and telling stories' (Rice, 2005, pp.222-224).

The 'voice of the shuttle', which suggests a feminist message encoded in the wordless protest of spinning and weaving, seen in the myths of Philomela and Penelope [7], is heard in

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6 The final scene of Patience Worth's *The Sorry Tale'* is bathed in this colour, too, after the crucifixion: 'in the light it shewed royal, the purple of the son of a noble. And upon the form of Theia the purple shewed…' (1917, p. 637) It is particularly significant, for me, as the next novel I plan to write, influenced by this research, will be a piece of historical fiction called 'The True Picture', set in the time of Christ, in which the central character is a purple dye seller. So, the indigo seam is struck again as we pull threads of contiguity and coincidence between the various texts. The 'king's colour' is woven into this tapestry of creative writing and critical thinking; but it seems to be a queen of heaven that does the weaving.

7 An early feminism is invoked by Ann Rice's tribute to biblical weaving technology and its social implications for women in her *Christ the Lord – Out of Egypt*: '[W]hat the women liked to do, … was weaving, and when

Gibran's *Jesus* too. '"Woman shall be forever the womb and the cradle but never the tomb. We die that we may give life unto life even as our fingers spin the thread for the raiment that we shall never wear. And we cast the net for the fish that we shall never taste…" Thus spoke Mary to me … Perhaps she knows what I do not know. Would that she might tell me also' (Gibran, 1997, p.174). The feminist loom may remind us of the 'female cross' in the Old English *Dream of the Rood*.

Suzannah of Nazareth, a neighbour of Mary, gives an account of the woman who, like the earliest writing, seems to be inscribed on the landscape, engraved in nature itself: 'her bones were of bronze and her sinews of the ancient elms.' This impression is heightened at the crucifixion: 'I looked at Mary. And her face was not the face of a woman bereaved. It was the countenance of the fertile earth, forever giving birth, forever burying her children. Then … she said aloud, "…I know that every drop of blood that runs down from your hands shall be the well-stream of a nation' (Gibran, 1997, p.171). There again is the spring imagery, first seen at its Helicon source, tended by the feminine, embodied in the muses; channelled by the male principle from Apollo to Christ, written in melted bronze or Hippocrene water.

Of Gibran, Worth and Rice, three modern writers of Jesus, in a genre loosely of fiction, only Ann Rice is contemporary and alive. 'Would that she might tell me also' whether the creation of her novel *Christ the Lord* was divinely inspired. In response to my question (by email) if there is 'any way in which the term 'channelled writing' applies to your work', she gave the following answer:

> 'It certainly feels like it's being channelled. But I think the process is this. I take in all I can through every means, from observing the sky in Israel to reading Philo or Josephus. I think; I feel; I reflect. Then I begin to write and I focus entirely on my characters and their story as if it were happening right around me, and all that I've studied and discovered and experienced feeds into the focused writing so that an enormous power is unleashed. I am attentive throughout to a feeling of 'authenticity'. When a line is written out of fear or feels wrong for any reason I delete that line and go at it again seeking to get the bold, the inevitable. It works that way for me. Of course the work contains a multitude of things I am not controlling, and that is part of the thrill. I discover what the work was about as the years pass. I continue to see things even after ten or twenty years. And the book, ideally, is a feast for others as well.' (Personal correspondence, 16th Feb, 2006)

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they set up their looms in the courtyard … it caused talk from one end of Nazarath to the other. 'It seemed that the women of this place used a loom with one pole to it, and one crosspiece at which they had to stand. But we had brought back from Alexandria bigger looms, with two sliding crosspieces, at which the woman could sit…' (Rice, 2005, pp. 222-224).

The recipe for Rice, then, is reading plus rewriting. She's fluent in a range of disciplines from history and theology to creative writing. But the reflection, the unleashing, the feeding into, the deleting; none of these tricks have been employed by the muse so far. Instead, the perfectly formed utterances of a channelled voice, perhaps with long pauses between the lines, as in Gibran's poetry, or a one-sided debate with the unseen editor of Patience Worth's prayer are used. The prophets and seers we've encountered previously are prefaced with different degrees of reason or rapture: but the introduction to Neale Donald Walsch's 1995 blockbuster combines the two into a singular channelling event.

> 'You are about to have an extraordinary experience. You are about to have a conversation with God. Yes, yes. I know… that's not possible … One can talk *to* God, sure, but not *with* God. I mean, God is not going to *talk back*, right?… That's what I thought, too. Then this book happened to me... This book was not written *by* me, it happened *to* me… Shortly after this material began happening to me I knew I was talking to God. Directly, personally. Irrefutably' (Walsch, 1995, p.1).

Conversations with God isn't literature, it isn't fiction; it is marketed under 'self-help' but the assistance comes from an other. Neale records the opening gambit of that ethereal voice. It came in response to the rhetorical letter he'd written to God in a rage: 'To my surprise, as I scribbled out the last of my bitter, unanswerable questions and prepared to toss my pen aside, my hand remained poised over the paper, as if held there by some invisible force. Abruptly, the pen began *moving on its own*. I had no idea what I was about to write, but an idea seemed to be coming, so I decided to flow with it. Out came … "Do you really want an answer to all these questions, or are you just venting?"

… 'Before I knew it I had begun a conversation… and I was not writing so much as *taking dictation*' (Walsch, 1995, pp.1-2).

Straight from the Muses' spring; the flow of non-fiction, or truth, which trickles into all stories, poems, plays and songs. Can it really be as easy as asking the first question to get endless ideas direct from the source? Neale Walsch couldn't believe it either; the first chapter of *Conversations with God* is full of his refusal to take the voice at its word. Testing, but God is fair; 'I talk to everyone. All the time. The question is not to whom do I talk, but who listens?' (pp.2-3)

Straight from the horse's mouth, the Hippocrene, we hear it; 'divine inspiration' is a constant state. The choice is whether to tune in and listen to the permanent broadcast of the voice of God, or to turn it off. Walsch wonders; 'Why do some people, take Christ for example, seem to hear more of Your communications than others?

‘“…They are willing to hear…and remain open to the communication even when it seems scary, or crazy…”’ (p. 7)

Walsch’s casual reference to Christ as ‘some people’ establishes his informal religious background (his biographical note tells of a minor villain who sees the light of spirituality and turns good). His American-style faith, and familiarity with the popular discourses of psychotherapy, give the book its tone and God’s voice too. ‘I was being answered in ways, and with language, that God knew I would understand. This accounts for much of the colloquial style of the writing and the occasional references to material I’d gathered from other sources…’ (Walsch, 1995, Introduction)

The primary source, the principal narrative, spoken by the voice of God, does not promise that Jesus is his only son. It says He is a master, like the Buddha or Krishna; this is not the messianic language of the party faithful but the impartial overview of the omniscient. In answer to Neale Donald Walsch’s second question (roughly, why is there suffering in the world?) the channelled response makes this point: ‘There are no victims in the universe, only creators. The Masters who have walked this planet all knew this. That is why, no matter which Master you might name, none imagined themselves to be victimized – though many were truly crucified’ (Walsch, 1995, p.33).

As the conversation continues, God outlines how each soul can develop its mastery of the world and arrive at a higher, happier condition, akin to creativity. Again, Christ is not alone in his relationship with the Father; ‘Many Masters have been sent to the Earth, to demonstrate Eternal Truth. Others, such as John the Baptist, have been sent as messengers…gifted with extraordinary insight… plus the ability to communicate complex concepts in ways that can and will be understood by the masses. You are such a messenger.

‘I am?’ (p. 143)

In this particular conversation with God a lot of time is spent on the writer’s paranoias and personal crises. Given the chance of a divine chat, I would rather ask technical questions about birth and death, spirit and flesh; fine details, like how can a deceased relative continue to oversee one’s life on Earth as, say, a guardian angel and also be reincarnated elsewhere in the world.

As well as self-help, Walsch channels a theosophy that has transformed the lives of thousands of people. Everyone is spoken to personally within the book. The tone is loving and the reader finds themselves laughing; but as God replies to Walsch’s rather shocked discovery of His GSOH; ‘I *invented* humour!’ (p.157)

Though Walsch has occasion to refer to Him as a ‘wise guy’, the voice giving the

answers is genuinely clever. During a conversation on the theme of 'unlimited potential', Walsch asks;

'What about the challenges of those born with mental or physical limitations? Is *their* potential unlimited?'

'You have written so in your own scripture – in many ways and in many places.'

'Give me one reference.'

'Look to see what you have written in Genesis, chapter 11, verse 6, of your bible' (p.45).

Not *the* bible, showing again that perfect impartiality to our world religions that perhaps only God could have. If Walsch were, somehow, having a conversation with himself, why bother to cite references. The verse is relevant to the discussion, but as anyone who has opened a copy of their bible and read at random knows, a lot of them are.

Conversations with God is a book of two voices. One is human; the other voice is without any such affectation. It is without repetition, hesitation or deviation. Its answers hit the mark like an arrow, no feathers for decoration, only absolute purpose. If this is God, there is no ego; if this is the creator there is no boast; only the expert plain speaking of a great instruction manual. And if this has been edited, in contrast to *The Sorry Tale*; it has been made stronger.

While its scope is cosmic and its tone beatific, the address is personal, private even. Though published and sold in its millions, the reader, like the author, goes one-to-one with the voice that whispers in the wilderness or shouts from the mountain top:
'You are, as Moses was, an earnest seeker. Moses too, as you do now, stood before Me, begging for answers. "Give me a sign, that I may tell my people!" (p. 95)

Like the work of Patience Worth, this re-tells biblical truths; like Gibran's prose/poem, it uses real characters; like Ann Rice's novel, the Lord speaks in his own terms. It is tempting to believe. We have the word of God. But Walsch is more cynical as the plot unfolds; 'How can I know this communication is from God? How do I know this is not my own imagination?

'*What would be the difference*? Do you not see that I could just as easily work through your imagination as anything else? I will bring you the exact right thoughts, words or feelings, at any given moment, suited precisely to the purpose at hand, using one device, or several. You will know these words are from Me because you, of your own accord, have never spoken so clearly. Had you already spoken so clearly on these questions, you would not be asking them' (Walsch, 1995, p.6).

Disappointingly, Walsch does not ask for an example of God's devices. We're tantalisingly close to His top tips on the use of imagery, metaphor and allusion. Creative Writing Classes with God would be an irresistible sequel to the channelled conversation with Neale Donald Walsch. Instead, his concern is to prove that this inspiration is really divine. God's answer is sociological, scientific, philosophical, therapeutic; and absolutely easy. He propounds the theory – we are all divine, if we did but know it – without awkward wording or roundabout phrases. Walsch is persistent in his quest to prove beyond his own satisfaction that he isn't mad or making it up. How to be sure this is *the* Word. He is advised that; 'Discrimination is a simple matter with the application of a basic rule: *'Mine is always your Highest Thought, your Clearest Word, your Grandest Feeling. Anything less is from another source*' (p.4)

Most writers strive for this, some feel they've achieved it; at the time of writing, if not when re-reading later. Whether an author of fiction or fact, to find the purest, finest, truest voice is the aim of those whose art is the written word. Now if we listen carefully the same tones can be detected in different authors, especially when the work is channelled in the same way. On page 90 of *Conversations With God*, when God says 'All attack is a call for help', Walsch blurts out 'I read that in *A Course in Miracles.*' 'I put it there,' God replies.

All writers strive to sound different from the others, but when two separate books claim to be narrated by the same divine source, it's okay to sound similar; in fact, the similarity seems to endorse both claims.

Helen Schucman and William Thetford, Professors of Medical Psychology at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City, produced *A Course in Miracles* in the mid-1970s, though their names don't appear on the cover. Out of a stressful meeting, in which their boss desperately asked them to find a less aggressive way of working, the partnership that channelled this 669-page text, 488-page workbook for students and 92-page manual for teachers, was founded. Then, Shucman says;

> 'Three startling months preceded the actual writing, during which time Bill suggested that I write down the highly symbolic dreams and descriptions of the strange images that were coming to me. Although I had grown more accustomed to the unexpected by that time, I was still very surprised when I wrote, "This is a course in miracles." That was my introduction to the Voice. It made no sound, but seemed to be giving me a kind of rapid, inner dictation which I took down in a shorthand notebook. The writing was never automatic. It could be interrupted at any time and later picked up again. It made me very uncomfortable, but it never seriously occurred to me to stop. It seemed to be a special assignment I had somehow, somewhere agreed to complete. It represented a truly

> collaborative venture between Bill and myself, and much of its significance, I am sure, lies in that. I would take down what the Voice "said" and read it to him the next day, and he typed it from my dictation. … The whole process took about seven years…' (Foundation for Inner Peace, 1996, pp. vii – viii)

The partnership is familiar; we've seen it in the Gibran/Young, Curran/Worth and even Rocha/Jorde collaborations. The slow prediction of the book as its own premonition, as the story subliminally prepares the author to write it, has also been witnessed in the work of Gibran, Worth and Rice. The thread of narrative that can be 'interrupted at any time and later picked up again,' is evident in Pearl Curran's channelling; and also, with more pauses, in the writing process of Kahlil Gibran. The 'special assignment', the book that she was born to write, echoes in the case of Ann Rice too.

With its biblical layout of chapters and verses, and prophetic tone, *A Course in Miracles* makes a dense, didactic read. That voice was modified, maybe, for *Conversations with God*, as He saw fit to update the divine style and become a bestseller. The language here does not seem to come from 1970s New York: 'Be still and listen. Think not ancient thoughts. Forget the dismal lessons that you learned about this Son of God who calls to you. Christ calls to all with equal tenderness …and hearing but one answer ... Because He hears one Voice...' (Foundation for Inner Peace, 1996, p. 650)

From the Old Testament tablets of Moses to the Old English runes carved on the Ruthwell cross, divine inspiration calls to all with one voice. In New Age channelled writing, it is calling still. The medium may not be stone now, the words not transcribed in earth or sand. The message may be read on an electronic page.

On an internet website called New-Birth.net, on a page of Miscellaneous Celestial Messages, on March 19th 1999 a message from Kahlil Gibran was received. It was channelled by Amada Reza; 'The promise of what we are is not forgotten, it is written in our longing and passion. You are the Star, my God, my blessed One, Who guides my slow steps to the stairway to heaven' (http://www.new-birth.net/contemporary/ar40.htm). Some of this is not dissimilar, in rhythm and image, to Gibran's; but in places the punctuation is too clumsy to be describing a cosmic truth. And while Gibran used archetypes, he surely would steer clear, dead or alive, of such clichés as 'stairway to heaven'! What an extraordinary twist to the argument, though, to have Kahlil Gibran, earlier seen receiving inspiration from dead people, now being the unseen author of a celestial message.

This website builds on the work of James E. Padgett, a lawyer turned medium in 1914, when his beloved wife died young and started writing to him from 'the other side'. One

letter led to another and the ex-district attorney was soon channelling regular missives from higher and higher spirits (famous names like Esau, Socrates, Julius Caesar), ultimately receiving messages by automatic writing from Jesus.

Padgett's authenticity was validated by fellow Washington D.C. professional Dr Leslie Stone, who was present when he scrawled 'complete messages… often received as fast as can be written, and… somewhat hard to read, as there is no punctuation - the pen does not leave the paper to punctuate' (New-Birth.net, 1997, p. http://www.new-birth.net/mediumship.htm).

From the same electronic source, we can quote Jesus Himself, on automatic writing. New-Birth.net continues a tradition of channelling spirit wisdom. Though Padgett died in 1923, the Jesus of Nazareth who spoke through him, poo-pooing the notion of his own virgin birth and giving a bird's-eye view of the crucifixion, goes on talking. On August 31, 1987, he had this conversation with 'D.L.', a latter day disciple of James Padgett, who asks about different methods of channelling :

> '… Mr. Padgett seems to have submitted to such control that you and others had been able to not only use his brain but also his writing hand… Now, with me, I am neither aware of being in a trance nor am I conscious of any control being exerted upon my hand when I receive a message from you. I receive thoughts dictation-style… and I am conscious of my doing my own writing…. In other words, what I write is not "automatic" but purposeful on my part – at least, this is how it seems to me. Can you confirm this or otherwise explain how my own channelling works? Is it really necessary that you or any spirit control a medium's hand in order to get an accurate message through?' (New-Birth.net, 1997)

A technical distinction at the heart of our debate: from poets to playwrights, proper writers may not know where their ideas come from, but at least they have control of their hands. So long as the author does the physical work, what goes on in their head is just mental; there could be Greek goddesses chanting, whispering or singing the words in his ear, but while the author's hands are moving, her name could still go on the book cover. D.L.'s question here implies fear; of a loss of control, perhaps, as the writer slips from genius to madness. Christ comes through to advise:

> 'I am your friend and brother in spirit, Jesus, Master of the Celestial Heavens and the eternal leader of our church on earth. …As to "automatic" writing channelling and how this works in your own particular case, you are correct in your statement that you receive inspirationally from me and, in turn, that you consciously write the thoughts that I am about to successfully transmit through your brain… What is important is not how completely a spirit controls but how effectively and well a medium receives. And, as you know … it is the

> relationship one has with the Father – the amount of Divine Love received from Him in combination with the medium's own soulful aspirations to know the Truth that determines the level of receptivity…' (New-Birth.net, 1997)

Inspiration does not land like junk mail on the doormat of one's mind; it is not the unsolicited attention of a stalker or the 'spam' of electronic communication, cluttering up the in-box of real life. It is always requested. This request can subconscious: that's the difference between imaginative writers, and aesthetes who are working to 'know the Truth.' The 'creatives' we have covered, whose experience is that of making up their poems, stories and plays, have done no more than sit down with blank page and sharpened pencil, by way of an invitation; but even the imperfect reception this gives is enough to channel some verity. Perhaps Literature is really a graph showing how clearly the voice of God is heard in the changing fashion of man's invocations. His pure tones now assure D.L., writing out of style's loop, that 'it is not necessary for a medium to be able to achieve a deep trance or for a spirit to actually do the… writing' of the words that come from divine inspiration:

> 'I do know that you doubt this at times, thinking that perhaps you have lent a bit of your own creativity to these messages. But I can assure you that the thoughts you have received in the very great majority have been our thoughts and not your own. Of course, the language or particular words used are sometimes selected by your own storehouse of words, as contained in the repository of your own brain's learning and storage, but the meaning given to you, which sometimes is translated into words with which you are familiar, comes from us.' (New-Birth.net, 1997)

We may feel wary of this sci-fi sounding 'us', but if the speech isn't scary then it's just woolly, with such wishy-washy thinking as has been debunked by virtually every philosopher since our muse-invoking opener, Plato.

For the ultimate debunking of the myth, there is no beating Nietzsche and his claim that 'God is dead'. This theory stands against all the poets and storytellers thus far seen working with the God or goddesses of divine inspiration. Strangely, though, the form Nietzsche chooses to write in, for *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, is so close to the tradition of prophecy as to invite comparison with Old Testament and New Age channelled writings.

Zarathustra is an archetypal hermit who comes down from the mountaintop to share his wisdom with the world below. Both Mount Sion and Mount Helicon echo in the setting for his journey. The imagery of the divine spring and inspiring stream we have seen in the myth of the Muses of the Hippocrene is there too; 'Bless the cup that is about to overflow, that the water may flow golden out of it, and carry everywhere the reflection of thy bliss! Lo!

This cup is again going to empty itself, and Zarathustra is again going to be a man' (Nietzsche, 2007, p.1).

Nietzsche's words trickle where Patience Worth's gush; "man setteth up his cup and filleth it, but I be as the stream" (Yost, 1917, p.iv). On his way down the mountain, Zarathustra meets a sage and asks what he does: 'The old saint answered: "I make hymns and sing them; and in making hymns I laugh and weep and mumble: thus do I praise God." When Zarathustra was alone, however, he said to his heart: "Could it be possible! This old saint in the forest hath not yet heard of it, that **GOD IS DEAD!**'" **(**Nietzsche, 2007, p.2)

The sacred songs of Polyhymnia, the laughing, weeping and mumbling by which she is invoked, are nowhere less heard, in the history of words, than in this brief clause. However, its concept is expressed in the now familiar style of prophetic writings, with arcane vocabulary (verily) and a recurring phrase 'Thus Spake Zarathustra', to stress the soothsaying tone. One passage drums a ritualistic beat on 'The hour when we say:' each repeat increasing the dramatic pace till it concludes, 'The hour when we say: "What good is my pity! Is not pity the cross on which he is nailed who loveth man? But my pity is not a crucifixion" (Nietzsche, 1997, p.3).

Despite this reference to Christianity, the Iranian prophet Zoroaster, who Nietzsche's semi-fictional character is based on, pre-dates Christ (by between 600 and 6000 years according to various schools of thought). They have some themes in common: a divinely glowing mother, a child visited by angels and able to heal a paralyzed horse, figure in this epic Persian narrative. It sounds like another supernatural literary act; but 'unlike Mohammed's recitation of the Koran, the Gathas of Zarathustra are not "channelled" - that is, the Gathas are regarded as the inspired composition of a poet-prophet rather than a text dictated by a heavenly being. Zarathushtra was inspired by God, through the Bounteous Immortals … but he was not a passive recipient of the divine wisdom. In accordance with Zoroastrian philosophy, he reached God through his own effort simultaneously with God's communication to him' (Crystal, n.d.).

Could those Bounteous Immortals be our own beauteous muses? Zarathustra was invoked by the Greeks and Romans of antiquity, his name loosely translating as 'Bringer of the Golden Dawn'. Although this links him neatly to Yeats, who we will look at too before the golden sunset of this argument, one source states the name can also translate as 'owner of feeble camels' (Crystal, n.d.). Still, the ancient Azerbaijani prophet is singing from a similar hymn sheet, talking the same language as the late nineteenth century German philosopher and the early twentieth century Lebanese poet.

In this chorus of synchronicity, Nietzsche influences Kahlil Gibran and we can hear in passing a likeness between their two voices which again gives the impression that all the prophetic tones are one: ‘Alas! there cometh the time when man will no longer launch the arrow of his longing beyond man--and the string of his bow will have unlearned to whizz!’ (Nietzsche, 2007,p.5) This is from Zarathustra, but could be the voice of Gibran’s Almustafa. Both are in translation. *The Prophet* has the slight accent of Arabic into English done automatically by its author. Our reading of Nietszche is in translation from its original German; but the pidgin quality echoes Patience Worth’s interpretation of a long dead language.

As she and Gibran tell their story of Jesus, so Nietzsche writes his meditation on the Master. *The Son of Man* we’ve met already; *The Anti-Christ* is Nietzsche’s version, published in 1895. But while other instances have had witnesses, from Barbara Young’s detailed observation of Gibran’s writing process, including the mysterious light of inspiration, to the steady stream of sightseers at Pearl Curran’s daily sittings; Nietzsche may have paced, or paused or scrawled ecstatically on bark or leaves, unobserved by fellow scribe or spouse. Nietzsche is singular. He says, "In truth there was only *one* Christian, and he died on the cross” (Kaufmann, 1982, p.612). The stone tablets of divine authority we’ve seen in Judaism, here are smashed by an Aryan muse.

When he writes about writing, though, this anti-prophet says similar things to the others, on the speed of his illumination and the precision of its striking. Here, Nietzsche tells where he got his ideas from: ‘In the summer, on my return to the sacred spot where the first thought of Zarathustra had flashed like lightening across my mind, I conceived the second part… The following winter, beneath the halcyon sky of Nice, which then filled me with its brilliant light, I found the third Zarathustra – and so completed the work’ (Ghiselin, 1952, p.209). With an account like this, who needs witnessing by scribe or spouse or spectator?

Free to experiment, Nietzsche’s philosophy rushes from classical to radical to romantic. In this passage, he has ‘nature herself’ whispering in his ear: ‘all poets believe: that whoever pricketh up his ears when lying in the grass or on lonely slopes, learneth something of the things that are betwixt heaven and earth. And if there come unto them tender emotions, then do the poets always think that nature herself is in love with them: and that she stealeth to their ear to whisper secrets into it’ (Nietzsche, 2007, p. 66). In Keatsian mood, his inspiration is a natural, feminine thing; and we may picture something not too far removed from a classical muse. But Nietzsche has heard her whisper; he has lain in that grass, he has had those tender emotions. The secret things between heaven and earth have been told to him

somehow and Nietzsche knows now; ‘all Gods are poet-symbolisations, poet-sophistications! Verily, ever are we drawn aloft - that is, to the realm of the clouds: on these do we set our gaudy puppets, and then call them Gods and Supermen’ (Nietzsche, 2007, p.67).

If either part of the inspirational partnership has been a puppet, in the story so far, then it is man, not god. We think of the writer’s hand at the end of the string, not the beginning. The twist is that suddenly we see those jerking movements as an act of creation, not just creativity. This, plus the seductive image, for any author, of nature herself in love with their art, makes Nietzsche’s a persuasive argument. Of course, the divine springs from poet-writings; we only know Him through language. Break the stone tablets and God dies.

Zarathustra speaks more on the side of prophets than poets. He says; ‘I have grown weary of the poets, the old and of the new: superficial they all seem to me, and shallow seas. Their thoughts have not penetrated deeply enough; therefore their feeling did not touch bottom… All their harp jingling is to me the breathing and flitting of ghosts… Nor are they clean enough for me: they all muddy their waters to make them appear deep…’ (Kaufmann, 1982, p.240) Then all our current imagery meets in a swirl with Nietzsche’s as he says; ‘Alas, I cast my net into their seas and wanted to catch good fish; but I always pulled up the head of some old god’ (p.241). This watery discourse goes back to the source, where ideas spring from unfathomable depths. And as a classicist, Nietzsche has the mountainside and the pantheon of ecstatic goddesses in the place where words flood from too. He introduces the *Ubermensch* with the same elemental image; ‘Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea, to receive a polluted stream without becoming impure. Lo, I teach you the Superman: he is that sea; in him can your great contempt be submerged’ (Nietzsche, 1987, p.3).

Whether he drank too long or too deep from the poisoned stream, or was too alone in his punch-drunkeness, Nietszche went mad. In 1889, he saw a horse being whipped in the town square, in Turin. He ran up to the horse, threw his arms around its neck, and collapsed; never to publish another philosophical text. From Zoroaster and the paralyzed horse he was said to have healed, to Pegasus, the horse of the Hippocrene spring; the beasts provide a trope of health and wholeness. [8] The end of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is marked, like the end of Nietzsche’s literary life, by an animal. Choosing nature over nurture, he lies down with the lion; just as he hugged a horse.

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8 Hence the advice of Nietszche’s sage; ‘Go not to men, but stay in the forest! Go rather to the animals!" (2007, p.3)

But in another of Nietszche's books, *Human, All Too Human*, we get answers to the question of divine inspiration; as specifically as if he, like Ann Rice, had been emailed in the course of research: '155 *Belief in inspiration.* Artists have an interest in others' believing in sudden ideas, so-called inspirations; as if the idea of a work of art, of poetry, the fundamental thought of a philosophy shines down like a merciful light from heaven.' The flash of light is there again but nothing as simple as a channel is elucidated by it: 'In truth, the good artist's or thinker's imagination is continually producing things good, mediocre, and bad, but his *power of judgment*, highly sharpened and practiced, rejects, selects, joins together; thus we now see from Beethoven's notebooks that he gradually assembled the most glorious melodies …All great men were great workers, untiring not only in invention but also in rejecting, sifting, reforming, arranging…' (Kaufmann, 1982, p. 51)

Written as a rebuke to his friend Wagner, who blatantly fuelled the cult of his own genius, this critique is political as well as musical. With the personal at stake, Nietszche gushes on, drunk on the Hippocrene spring whether he believes in it or not: 'When productive energy has been dammed up for a while and has been hindered in its outflow by an obstacle, there is finally a sudden outpouring, as if a direct inspiration with no previous inner working out, as if a miracle were taking place. This constitutes the well-known illusion which all artists, as we have said, have somewhat too great an interest in preserving. The capital has simply *piled up*; it did not fall suddenly from heaven' (p. 51).

When he aligned himself with a whipped horse, never to write (or at least publish) again, Nietzsche was certified crazy. Who knows how the capital in his head went on to acrue. [9] Perhaps, the poet-puppeteer whose 'gaudy gods' were made to dance by strings of words, discovered that the dance goes on though he is not writing any more.

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[9] Nietzsche's stance as anti-Christ couldn't hold, in the flow of his obvious brilliance; 'The dream - and diction - of a God, did the world then seem to me; coloured vapours before the eyes of a divinely dissatisfied one… The creator wished to look away from himself,--thereupon he created the world' (p. 12).

In *Conversations with God*, the thought is similar but the words are now in the first person; allegedly God's own. 'There is only one way for the Creator to know Itself experientially as the Creator, and that is to create ... My purpose in creating you … was for Me to know Myself as God. I have no way to do that save through you' (Walsch, 1995, pp. 25-26). A correspondence like this, if not proved to be plagiarism, must seem instead a divine sort of coincidence.

Those coloured vapours are the backdrop to my novel, *Where Ideas Come From*, painted prior to reading Nietzsche. I had no reason to choose this wallpaper for the home of my 'Muses', save that when I closed my eyes that's what I envisioned; and though I was always in control of my hands on the keyboard, I couldn't always tell where the ideas were coming from. This narrative synchronicity is a regular contributor to the writing of my PhD.

If this is madness, let me call for a psychoanalyst; but perhaps he will tell the same story in the same terms. C. G. Jung admitted that some of his writings were channeled. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1961) he speaks of meeting the prophet Elijah in visions and carrying on conversations with him and another spirit, Salome. For research purposes, Jung self-induced a trance to access his unconscious mind. Then, he says, 'Elijah and I had a long conversation which, however, I did not understand.

'Naturally I tried to find a plausible explanation for the appearance of Biblical figures in my fantasy by reminding myself that my father had been a clergyman… (Jung; 1983; 206) But over the course of several visions, Elijah mutates into a character called Philemon, with whom Jung is still able to channel conversations that he hadn't consciously planned. This character was named for the mythical homeowner who was poor yet prepared to welcome Zeus and Mercury on a stormy night, not knowing they were gods. The simple do-gooder of the story has more depth as a spirit guide: 'Philemon was a pagan and brought with him an Egypto-Hellenic atmosphere with Gnostic colouration', says Jung (1983, p.207).

The mythemes click. Elijah and Salome, his eroticised muse, his inner sibyl; Philemon and Baucis, the wife he loved too much to let death part them, so got turned into trees where they stood; both examples of Jung's 'divine couple'. His study of archetypes took place at a personal chalk face; the stories inside himself. The Philemon phenomenon, Jung's experience of channelled dialogue, was crucial to the development of his psychoanalytical theories. The rapid diction from within will resonate with other featured writers': 'Philemon… brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life... In my fantasies I held conversations with him, and he said things which I had not consciously thought' (Jung, 1983, p.207).

In Jung's telling of his visions there is also a familiar light; 'My nurse afterwards told me, "it was as if you were surrounded by a bright glow"' (Jung, 1983, p.320). This particular instance followed a heart attack, so can't be strictly comparable; but we do hear an echo of Barbara Young's cry, "the light, Kahlil, the light!" Of more lasting influence on this contrasting than a brief illumination, is the fact that *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung's semi-autobiographical work, was 'recorded and edited' by another woman, a friend and assistant to the great master, in a relationship like those we've seen from Young and Gibran to Abbess Hilde of Whitby and Caedmon. There is often a nurse needed for the process of divine inspiration, but instead of a thermometer Aniela Jaffe held a pen.

On the psychiatric ward of this museum, Jung puts straight. He proves *cryptomnesia*, or 'concealed recollection' is behind the experience of inspiration that many creative writers have had, and most of the cast list of this essay have demonstrated: 'An author may be writing steadily to a preconceived plan, working out an argument or developing the line of a story, when he suddenly runs off at a tangent. Perhaps a fresh idea has occurred to him, or a different image, or a whole new sub-plot. If you ask him what prompted the digression, he will not be able to tell you. He may not even have noticed the change, though he has now produced material that is entirely fresh and apparently unknown to him before. Yet it can sometimes be shown convincingly that what he has written bears a striking similarity to the work of another author – a work that he believes he has never seen' (Jung, 1964, p.37).

A key feature of my argument has been this 'striking similarity' between different writers in a disparate collection of works. Esoteric and aphoristic, with a common prophetic tone and poetic style, the pieces we've examined could have been written by other names in this same chapter. And clearly, all those ancient witnessings or modern gospels of the story of Jesus Christ use existing material to make a newer, truer version. But Jung says we can't assume the omniscient narrator is God talking, when all the visionary storytellers and singers' voices sound the same:

> 'I myself found a fascinating example of this in Nietzsche's book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, where the author reproduces almost word for word an incident reported in a ship's log for the year 1686. By sheer chance I had read this seaman's yarn in a book published about 1835 (half a century before Nietzsche wrote): and when I found the similar passage in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, I was struck by its peculiar style, which was different from Nietzsche's usual language. I was convinced that Nietzsche must also have seen the old book, though he made no reference to it. I wrote to his sister, who was still alive, and she confirmed that she and her brother had in fact read the book together when he was 11 years old... I believe that fifty years later it had unexpectedly slipped into focus in his conscious mind' (Jung, 1964, p.37).

Jung likens this process to the way musicians weave snatches of popular songs or peasant tunes heard in childhood into their compositions. A complex counterpoint of muse and music, but man is the most basic of instruments; a hollow straw or reed, a pipe through which the story blows. Though Jung claims the ideas are just memories selected by the conscious mind from material already read, and the case of Zarathustra concurs, his own experience of inspiration trills a higher note than this neat evidence.

There is a database of everything ever known, according to Jung's theory of the collective unconscious; a full set of universal knowledge that anyone can access. Its earthly

model is the library at Alexandria; seat of the classical world's wisdom, summary of all that had been written in a continuous list since the creation myths. Its heavenly version may be known as the Akashic Records. Religions from Druid to Rosicrucian refer to this etheric library, said to contain the life stories of every one who ever lived. Nostrodamus apparently used it to predict scenes from the world yet to come. The 'readings' of Edgar Cayce and Levi Dowling, amongst other famous esoteric writings, refer to it as their primary source.

These records are mentioned by Adriana Rocha in *A Child of Eternity*; 'God's library' (1995, p. 236) or the 'universal library' (p. 238) are her terms for a body of information shelved out of reach of the conscious mind. She seems to be able to look the answers up to Kristi Jorde's searching questions as the conversation goes along: 'NOT SURE CHECKING INYES SOULS ALWAYS INVARIABLY LAND WITH GOD' (p.280). The speed of this request is evident in the lack of space between in and yes. She literally doesn't stop to think.

Beneath the heavenly bookstacks of the Akashic Records, another mythical library is whispered to exist. Conspiracy theorist Philip Coppens describes the 'metal library'; with shelves of huge metal books and inscribed crystal tablets, housed in a system of caves beneath Ecuador. His account is based on an eye-witnessing:

> 'Jaramillo stated that he had entered the library in 1946, when he was 17 years old… he saw thousands of large, metal books stacked on shelves, each with an average weight of about 20 kilograms, each page impressed from one side with ideographs, geometric designs and written inscriptions. There was a second library, consisting of small, hard, smooth, translucent—what seemed to be crystal—tablets, grooved with parallel encrusted channels, stacked on sloping shelves of trestled units covered in gold leaf… stored away as if hidden in preparation for some upcoming disaster.
>
> On one occasion, Jaramillo took down seven books from the shelves to study them, but their weight prevented him from replacing them. It also meant that they were too heavy to remove from the library and reveal to the world' (Coppens, 2006, p.4).

Whether we can believe without seeing them, this completes a set of metaphors for the way great writers grasp plots, characters and dialogue, storytelling tools to this day, from their slots on these glimmering bookshelves of a golden age. The next excerpt goes back to the library in Alexandria, with exact dates for a bronzed and laurelled author.

In 1916, Carl Jung wrote *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*, or 'The Seven Sermons to the Dead written by Basilides in Alexandria'. He acknowledged this was automatic writing; on the cover it says only "transcribed by Carl Gustav Jung". In no sense did he claim to be the author of this book; instead, he insisted that Basilides was a real person, born in Syria, teaching in Alexandria during the years 133-155 AD.

Jung describes the writing process as a sort of haunting:

> 'My eldest daughter saw a white figure passing through the room. My second daughter, independently of her elder sister, related that twice in the night her blanket had been snatched away; and that same night my nine-year-old son had an anxiety dream… Around five o'clock in the afternoon on Sunday the front doorbell began ringing frantically. It was a bright summer day; the two maids were in the kitchen, from which the open square outside the front door could be seen. Everyone immediately looked to see who was there, but there was no one in sight. I was sitting near the doorbell, and not only heard it but saw it moving… Then I knew that something had to happen. The whole house was filled as if there were a crowd present, crammed full of spirits… I was all a-quiver with the question: "For God's sake, what in the world is this?" Then they cried out in chorus, "We have come back from Jerusalem where we found not what we sought"' (Jung, 1983, pp.215-216).

With these spirits we mix some water, as Jung goes on with his story of how it was begun: 'Then it began to flow out of me, and in the course of three evenings the thing was written. As soon as I took up the pen, the whole ghostly assemblage evaporated. The room quieted and the atmosphere cleared. The haunting was over' (p. 216). The book Jung wrote bears witness to these autobiographical origins, word for word, starting: 'The Dead came back from Jerusalem, where they found not what they sought. They prayed me let them in and besought my word, and thus I began my teaching' (1916, Sermo 1).

It is the meaning of life from the point-of-view of the dead. Jung tells out that first split between something and nothing, the mystic dichotomy of empty and full, naming this sidereal place the Pleroma. [10] In the language of the Tao, the terms of Nirvana are spelt out by the unseen author who, according to Jung, had seen this version of Heaven. In an archaic tone, with the 'thees and thous' of Piers Plowman or Patience Worth, the pieces discuss a being (/non-being) called Abraxas, who we might be tempted to equate with the divinity of Allah, Brahman, Quetzalcoatal, but who yet appears to be above and beyond God. Before him too, in the unimaginably long history of human thinking; Basilides says of Abraxas; 'this is a god whom ye knew not, for mankind forgot it: In the night the dead stood along the wall and cried: "We would have knowledge of god. Where is god? Is god dead? God is not dead. Now, as ever, he liveth"' (1916, Sermo II).

Although in contrast to Nietszche's theory, there is a comparable rhetoric; and

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[10] The Pleroma matches the Real World of my novel; 'It is unreal reality, because it hath no definite effect; no touch, no taste, nothing tangible' (Jung, 1916, Sermo II). The backdrop to *Where Ideas Come From* is this placeless place, where Proper People are not physically separate from each other. This state, based on a range of new age readings by such as Gibran, Rocha, and God in conversation with Neale Donald Walsh; shows a version of us more celestial, less substantial, and joined to our immediate families by a phosphorescent umbilical cord .

although in contradistinction to Gibran's philosophy, there is a similar poetry. Basilides of Alexandria outlines the power of God: '…It is the great Pan himself and also the small one. It is Priapos… It is the hermaphrodite of the earliest beginning…' (1916, Sermo III) This automatic meditation on Abraxas channelled by Carl Jung catches the same rhythm, captures the same binary wordplay we've enjoyed in Gibran and Nietszche, whether or not the claims about God are true:

> 'To look upon it, is blindness.
> To know it, is sickness.
> To worship it, is death.
> To fear it, is wisdom.
> To resist it not, is redemption.' (1916, Sermo III)

The religious context is familiar, the thought essentially Western. But the scope goes way beyond a standard Christian vision. The stance is Gnostic again; the voice of Basilides, who has been 'historically verified' as a teacher from the early second century AD, speaks through Jung of a cosmic hierarchy in which our God is not the ultimate being but a mere 'demiurge'.

This message is not popular. In the text itself: 'The dead now raised a great tumult, for they were Christians' (Jung, 1916, Sermo II). Like *Conversations with God* it suggests that Jesus is not the only way, not the only son. In *Septem Sermones*, God even has to be renamed Helios to distinguish his bright countenance from that of Abraxas.

Each of the seven sermons has a theme, the structure matching Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*, as the speaker is questioned by an inquisitive throng. In Sermo IV 'The dead filled the place murmuring and said; Tell us of gods and devils, accursed one!' And in Sermo V**:** **'**The dead mocked and cried: Teach us, fool, of the Church and the holy Communion.' The channelled voice of Basilides, an early Christian teacher whose syllabus stuck closely to the rubric of St. Peter, gives a surprising polytheist answer; 'The world of the gods is made manifest in spirituality and in sexuality. The celestial ones appear in spirituality, the earthly in sexuality' (1916, Sermo V).

The parables and prophesies of its writing style might suggest the bible; the definition of gospel fits Jung's and Gibran's and Worth's and Neitszche's, though the cast of the latter's story is far from Christian: 'I want to have goblins about me, for I am courageous. The courage which scareth away ghosts, createth for itself goblins' (2007, pp.17-18). Neitszche courts the Shadow of Jung, the romance only on paper. His genius carves a path between

spirit and sex.

Written in blood, written in the sand; inspired by goblins, dictated by fairies; a poem and a story of W.B. Yeats are influenced by Nietzsche in turn. In *The Gift of Harun al-Rashid* (1923) the hero tells of his young bride's unexpected talent for automatic writing. As soon as she arrives in his house, Harun's new wife shows an unusual interest in literature:

'…She had not paced/ The garden paths, nor counted up the rooms,/ Before she had spread a book upon her knees/ And asked about the pictures or the text:/And often those first days I saw her stare/ On old dry writing in a learned tongue/ […] As if that writing or the figured page were some dear cheek…'(Finneran, 1983, P.444)

One night as she is asleep in bed and he, an old dry writer, is working by candle light, he turns to see her sitting bolt upright. 'Was it she that spoke or some great Djinn?/I say that a Djinn spoke…' (p.445) The wisdom from his young wife's lips, he knows, is more than she or he had ever read in books. The case of Patience Worth, an uneducated matron who writes more than she reads, resonates with Yeats' character here. And then on another night:

'When the full moon swam to its greatest heigh
She rose, and with her eyes shut fast in sleep
Walked through the house. Unnoticed and unfelt
I wrapped her in a hooded cloak, and she,
Half running, dropped at the first ridge of the desert
And there marked out those emblems on the sand
That day by day I study and marvel at,
with her white finger...' (p. 445)

That white finger of pure inspiration, a spirit pencil that can carve words in sand or stone, belonged to Yeats' wife. She was a gifted medium and automatic writer; her creative partnership with William Butler more involved than Barbara Young and Kahlil Gibran's. Their co-dependency is akin to the pairing of Pearl Curran and Patience Worth. Together they had the courage to channel goblins, to talk to ghosts.

In a story from *Celtic Twilight,* Yeats visits a fairy haunt, a cave on 'a far western sandy shore', with a young girl who is a seer. They summon the queen of the fairies and the girl channels answers to his many questions about their lifestyle:

> 'No, this was not the greatest faery haunt, for there was a greater one a little further ahead. I then asked her whether it was true that she and her people carried away mortals, and if so, whether they put another soul in the place of the one they had taken? 'We change the bodies,' was her answer. 'Are any of you

> ever born into mortal life?' 'Yes.' 'Do I know any who were among your people before birth?' 'You do.' 'Who are they?' 'It would not be lawful for you to know.' I then asked whether she and her people were not 'dramatizations of our moods'? 'She does not understand' said my friend…I asked her other questions as to her nature, and her purpose in the universe, but only seemed to puzzle her. As last she appeared to lose patience, for she wrote this message for me upon the sands - the sands of vision, not the grating sands under our feet - 'Be careful, and do not seek to know too much about us…' (Yeats, 1902, pp. 95 – 96)

Do not seek to know too much. Written in sand. Seek to know the truth. Written in stone on the Ruthwell Cross. From one end of this chapter to the other; the theme of channeled writing, of words carved in earth or stone, daubed in blood, perspiring with the divine idea. Is there a contradiction, where there should be a harmonious chant, at the heart of its conclusion? The Muses, as my leading image of inspiration, are female and plural; are they muscled out of the Christian story by the phallus, the logos, the pen? [11] Both heavenly bodies need to make the same protest, surely, if either is to prove their words true. But are there any imaginable circumstances under which Jesus and Polyhymnia could work side by side in the same sentence?

As we glimpsed something of that relationship in Gibran and Young, and Mr and Mrs Yeats, so we see it again in Levi H. and Eva S. Dowling, though no biographical information tells whether the 'scribe to the messenger' is his mother or his wife. *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* is billed as 'transcribed from the Akashic records, the book of God's remembrance', so allegedly backed up by the ultimate reference. Scribed and transcribed, it may be a roundabout route but the manuscript does resolve the problem with inconsistent messages from channelled sources; either Jesus is the only son of God, or we're all brothers and sisters. Our answer revolves on that term 'the Christ':

'When we say "Jesus the Christ" we refer to the man and to his office; just as we do when we say Edward, the King, or Lincoln, the President. Edward was not always King, and Lincoln was not always President, and Jesus was not always Christ' (Dowling, 1920, p.10).

The stone tablets on which laws are written and rules are laid down are eroded by time and theories; and both will make them unreadable like graves reworded by ivy. Dumbed-down and PC, curriculum RE teaches Jesus Christ as if it were a surname common as Smith. The new syllabus, though, says Christ is a wreath that can be awarded like laurel. Eva Dowling's tone is of complete familiarity with the Master's life, but as she explains the terminology of the *Aquarian Gospel* channelled by partner Levi it sounds alien: 'Jesus won

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11 There will be a rounder response, in the book-length version of this thesis, using Luce Irigaray's theory of the 'two lips' of representation, and Helene Cixous' 'Laugh of the Medusa', in my chapter to Erato.

his Christship by a strenuous life, and in the Aquarian Gospel, chapter 65, we have a record of the events of his christing, or receiving the degree Christ' (Dowling, 1920, p.10). This religion is more organised, by far, than previously dreamed.

In a manuscript called *The Cusp of the Ages*, Levi Dowling reproduces the commission which he received from Visel, the Goddess of Wisdom:

> '"O Levi, son of man, behold, for you are called to be the message bearer of the coming age… Behold the Akasha. Behold the Record Galleries of Visel where every thought and word and deed of every living thing is written down…Now, Levi, hearken to my words; go forth into these mystic Galleries and read. There you will find a message for the world... Write full the story of The Christ… who men have known as Enoch the Initiate. Write of his works as prophet, priest and seer... And you may write the story of Melchizedec, the Christ who lived when Abram lived... And you may write the story of the Prince of Peace, The Christ who came as a babe in Bethlehem. These stories of The Christ will be enough… They show the spiral journey of the soul…"' (Dowling, 1920, pp.11-12) [12]

This is so radical, it must almost snap the pen, the chalk, the chisel in surprise. Here's a new definition of channelling, in Jesus of Nazareth's invoking of the Christ; a man bringing God down to Earth. But it's still the same Akashic library used by many religious faiths; the same spiral path to enlightenment of the giant book Borobadur; the same Goddess of Wisdom that appeared to Boethius in his cell and Caedmon in his cow pen (at least in the illustration of his story on the Whitby cross if not in Bede's Biographia). Synchronicity had to wait until 1960s west coast American awareness made the *Aquarian Gospel* mainstream. Written nearly a hundred years earlier, its heady notions must have sprung from close to the Helicon source.

In Chapter 44 we see Jesus in Greece, addressing the Athenian masters in the amphitheatre; 'I come not here to speak of science, of philosophy, or art; of these you are the world's best masters now…. I would not stay the flow of your great streams of thought; but I would turn them to the channels of the soul…. Return, O mystic stream of Grecian thought…' (p.16)

Christ was live at the interface with classical civilization. If he was in Greece then he would have met Polyhymnia; or certainly come across the concept of the Muses. The mountain retreat echoes for both him and the nine; our question of where writers get their

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12 Just as Levi prophesied, so he was prophesied. About two thousand years ago Elihu, who conducted a school of the prophets in Zoan Egypt, referred to Levi allegedly: 'This age will comprehend but little of the works of Purity and Love; but not a word is lost, for in the Book of God's Remembrance a registry is made of every thought and word and deed; and when the world is ready to receive, lo, God will send a messenger to open up the book and copy from its sacred pages all the messages of Purity and Love. Then every man of earth will read the words of life in the language of his native land, and men will see the light' (Aquarian Gospel 7:25-28).

ideas from had a practical application there. Jesus discusses the Delphic Oracle with his host in Greece, who says; 'Pray tell me what it is that speaks. Is it an angel, man, or living god? And Jesus said, It is not angel, man, nor god that speaks. It is the matchless wisdom of the master minds of Greece, united in a master mind… But when the master minds of Greece shall perish from the land, this giant master mind will cease to be, and then the Delphic Oracle will speak no more' (p.20).

In the terms of Jung's 'collective unconscious', Christ foretells the oracle's fate; in the terms of Yeats' 'great mind' He predicts God's death. He does, of course, pre-date them both; but if Christ was the source of Jung and Yeat's ideas, where did He get the ideas from in the first place? In the New Testament itself, we never see Him with a book; there were none in Palestine during His life time and all written material was on scrolls [13]. Yet Jesus knew the scriptures intimately, and was able to turn to the right place at the right moment, as Luke records in chapter 4:

> 'On the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue… and he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me, to preach good news to the poor… to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." 'Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"' (Verses 16-21).

Here writing has the same self-referential grace as the rood's dream carved on the Ruthwell cross; that sense of cruci-fiction we started with. In Ann Rice's version, the boy Jesus knows things that nobody taught him ('I didn't know where I'd learned that part' (Rice, 2005, p.180). In Adriana Rocha's story we discover that not being able to read or write doesn't stop one from channelling the word. This is a study of wise, not clever.

A dim child from Christian County, Cleveland, Edgar Cayce was beaten by his father because he couldn't learn his spelling book for school. Late one evening in spring 1889 the rest of the family had gone to bed while 'the squire' struggled to get a little learning into his illiterate son:

> 'At half past ten the answers were again wrong. Again the boy was knocked out of his chair, landing on the floor. Slowly he got to his feet. He was tired…As he sat in the chair he thought he heard something. His ears were ringing from the blow that had floored him, but he heard words, inside him. It was the voice

[13] 'The first book was produced in Byblos - a port in Lebanon where the papyri were folded and stitched together to form bublos, Greek for book and from which we get our word Bible'. (Measey, Dr. L.G., 2007, Personal Correspondence.) The first book in English, by a woman, was written by Dame Julian of Norwich.

> of the lady he had seen the day before. She was saying, “If you can sleep a little, we can help you.”
>
> ‘He begged his father for a rest; just for a few minutes. He would know the lesson then, he was sure.
>
> ‘“I’m going into the kitchen,” the squire said. “When I come back I’m going to ask you that lesson once more. It’s your last chance. You’d better know it.”
>
> ‘He went out of the room. The boy closed his spelling book, put it back of his head, curled up in the chair, and almost immediately was asleep. When the squire returned from the kitchen he snatched the book, waking him up.
>
> ‘“Ask me the lesson. I know it now,” the boy said.
>
> ‘The squire began. The answers came quickly, certainly. They were correct. “Ask me the next day’s lesson. I’ll bet I know that, too,” he said.
>
> ‘The squire asked the next lesson. All the answers were correct.
>
> ‘“Ask me anything in the book,” the boy said’ (Sugrue, 1997, p. 47).

Suddenly, young Cayce could even spell the word synthesis. His father’s investigations into this cerebral miracle led to the discovery of Edgar’s further powers. His naps opened an extraordinary door to higher knowledge for the purposes of healing. So, who was the ‘lady he had seen the day before’? This is how she appears in the account given by Thomas Sugrue, a researcher into psychic phenomena who met Cayce in 1927, interviewing his family, fans and patients, and accessing the transcripts of hundreds of his trance-state pronouncements on the health of their bodies and souls. The young Edgar was reading the bible in his den in the woods, when;

> ‘He looked up. A woman was standing before him. At first he thought she was his mother, come to bring him home for the chores – the sun was bright and his eyes did not see well after staring at the book. But when she spoke he knew it was someone he did not know. Her voice was soft and very clear; it reminded him of music.
>
> ‘“Your prayers have been heard,” she said. “Tell me what you would like most of all, so that I may give it to you.” Then he saw that there was something on her back; something that made shadows behind her that were shaped like wings. He was frightened. She smiled at him, waiting’ (Sugrue, 1997, p. 45).

We would like her to be Polyhymnia, happily concurring with Cayce’s Christian mission to help sick children, at the conclusion of this chapter. She says ‘we can help you’; implying, perhaps, eight more goddesses of creativity waiting in the trees to grant a wish. The strange way in which his prayer is answered puts the ‘reading’ in our theory of channelled writing. From the night he slept on the spelling book, Cayce gave ‘readings’ twice a day; lying on a couch, deeply asleep, witnessed by many different watchers. At first, the focus was physical health; prescribing cures for every complaint, sometimes life-threatening, to clients who Cayce mostly did not know beforehand and who didn’t even have to be present. The anatomical detail and medical description he gave while unconscious was correct; though

none of it made sense to him when awake. Then he progressed to giving 'soul readings', in which people's past lives and the lessons they were to learn in the present one, were recounted in a clear powerful voice while Edgar slept.

The poem of Patience Worth's, the child's prayer she took such pains to compose, explains this very thing: 'Within thy arms I now shall creep/ And learn Thy wisdom while I sleep' (Roy, 1999, p.235). It seems one can read from the Akashic records with the eyes closed. That insistence on reincarnation we've seen in Rocha and Worth and Gibran and Walsch is here, again, as a pre-requisite for the ways of the world, and the book of life, to make sense. Even Christ has past lives; they are cross referenced in the channelled writings of Levi Dowling and Edgar Cayce, who also mentions the names Enoch and Melchizedek as earlier manifestations (Sugrue, 1997, p. 315). There is no evidence that these two deeply religious, late 19th Century middle Americans read one another; though each was examined by countless cynical others.

Observed by Thomas Sugrue, Doctors Ketchum and Munsterberg tested Cayce's case. A preparation called 'oil of smoke' had been prescribed by him in a reading. Neither of the Doctors had heard of it, 'nor had any of our local druggists. It was not listed in the pharmaceutical catalogues. We took another reading and asked where it could be found. The name of a drugstore in Louisville was given. I wired there, asking for the preparation. The manager wired back saying he did not have it and had never heard of it… We took a third reading. This time a shelf in the back of the Louisville drugstore was named. There, behind another preparation – which was named – would be found a bottle of 'Oil of Smoke… I wired the information to the manager of the Louisville store. He wired me back, 'Found it'' (Sugrue, 1997, p.25). [14]

Cayce's omniscience is discussed by the doctors: '"Always he seems to know everything," Dr. Munsterberg said. "You would say that he was… quoting from a universal mind, perhaps?" (Sugrue, 1997, p. 25) The same terms as Jung and Yeats, though it predates them; this 'universal mind' like a library from which Cayce quotes. Has every poet and prophet and philosopher mentioned here been quoting from a perfect platonic page, whether their own scratched words were on parchment, stone or leaves? We've read the testimonies of cowherd, king, handicapped child; and they all tell the same sublime story. And if, as Levi Dowling suggests, Christ was something channelled through Jesus, then why shouldn't some guy on the internet channel it too.

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14 The smoke is significant here, as in previous chapters, as a signpost to divine inspiration; and in my novel, *Where Ideas Come From*, as a source of heavenly ideas.

Polyhymnia could be a case of *cryptomnesia;* Jung's cacophony of quotations remembered from childhood bible reading. The panoply of voices in this chapter all refer to the same scriptural source. In Gibran's *The Son of Man,* moments from the New Testament are augmented to show 'the true picture'.[15] Patience Worth and Ann Rice try the same thing; right back to Caedmon and Cynewulf they retell the tale, attempting with each new telling to recapture its original truth. A primary reading is implied in all these cases; even Caedmon, who was illiterate, knew the bible stories in oral form. Indeed, it seems there may be no channelling without this Word. But it does not hush our argument for divine inspiration, if we find books and libraries, too, in heaven.

Jesus and Polyhymnia meet, if there must finally be a formal introduction, in all of the case studies covered here; but none so closely, I think, as that of Kahlil Gibran and Barbara Young. He was a master, she a minor poet herself and secretary to the many voices which sang from his immortal soul. So it only remains for that listener at the mouth of the Hippocrene spring, Young, to give a muse's Amen:

> 'We hear talk from time to time about writing 'by inspiration.' The discussion has never been of particular interest to me. I have my own explanation of the source of the things that are given to poets to speak to the world. However, it has seemed, and still seems to me that all of the pages that had to be written … came directly from some definite and informed consciousness and were, as Kahlil Gibran has said poetry is, 'the inevitable words in the inevitable place.'
> 'Thus the book was completed. And a peace settled upon my spirit, knowing that Gibran himself had blessed the doing of his work and had sustained the worker to the end' (Young, 1965, pp.123-4).

Last comes my Amen, self-referential, like chalk writing on a cliff face, or wood-dye on bark. As if the whispered messages behind a global narrative, the many hymns of world faith, are all connected by a single, intertextual authorship; a unified plot from subtext to hypertext. Polyhymnia proves it; everyone can speak with the voice of God.

We've heard the full chorus; from divine inspiration, in which the writer has control of their own hand; to automatic writing, in which the writer may be in a trance; to the case of

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15 *The True Picture* will be the second novel I write as a result of this research process. The story of Saint Veronica, it will use the channelled gospels of Dowling, Hafed and Hermes and James Paggett to reconstruct the life of one of Christ's close followers. During the writing, I will experiment with the channelling methods seen in this essay, especially those used by recognised writers such as Gibran Kahlil Gibran; though my research will also involve detailed (re)construction of the life of a Roman business woman in Jerusalem when Jesus was there. The title gives the root of the name Veronica, *Vera Icon*; True Picture. She was the one who wiped Christ's face on his way to the crucifixion; and it made a lasting imprint on her.

Patience and Pearl, in which a writer channels another writer who is channelling a higher source still. Now it is time for the solo. In my autobiographical piece ‘Terpsichore’, I detail how my daily creative writing practice does and doesn’t match those definitions of ‘where ideas come from’, and conclude that I seem to share the common experience of many authors; access to omniscience.

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