imaginary, and about going to Mass. Martyn had only invited him on
the understanding that he went to Mass and he disliked this greatly,
especially as he had to go a long drive to a distant church. He was
afraid to go to the neighbouring church, for years before the parish
priest, because Moore had put him into a novel, had promised to
have him ducked if they ever got within reach. Moore tried over-
sleeping himself, forgetting the hour, and plain refusal, all in vain.
‘Yeats does not go to church,’ I remember his saying, and the answer,
‘No, Moore, you must go. I am not responsible for Yeats; he is a
Protestant.’ ‘But I am not a Catholic.’ ‘Yes, you are.’ ‘My God, is
there no way of leaving that Church?’ ‘Turn Protestant.’ ‘Is there
no other way?’ ‘None.’ These conversations, reported by the old
butler, were known in the cottages for miles round.

The theatre has found its own record, and I am little concerned
with it here. I remember meditating during a dress rehearsal of
Diarmuid and Grania,¹ by Moore and myself, on the life-wasting
folly of it all, and I had just said to myself that an unperturbed goat
waiting to take its place in some pastoral scene was the only sensible
creature among us when I heard an actor say, ‘Look at that goat
eating the property ivy.’²

On a visit to Dr Hyde I had seen the Castle Rock, as it was called,
in Lough Key.³ There is this small island entirely covered by what
was a still habitable but empty castle. The last man who had lived
there had been Dr Hyde’s father who, when a young man, lived
there for a few weeks. All round were the wooded and hilly shores, a
place of great beauty. I believed that the castle could be hired for
little money, and had long been dreaming of making it an Irish
Eleusis or Samothrace. An obsession more constant than anything
but my love itself was the need of mystical rites – a ritual system
of evocation and meditation – to reunite the perception of the spirit,
of the divine, with natural beauty. I believed that instead of thinking
of Judea as holy we should [think] our own land holy, and most holy

¹ First performed on 21 October 1901 by the F. R. Benson Company at the Gaiety
Theatre, Dublin.
³ Yeats stayed at Frenchpark from 13 April to 1 May 1895.
where most beautiful. Commerce and manufacture had made the world ugly; the death of pagan nature-worship had robbed visible beauty of its inviolable sanctity. I was convinced that all lonely and lovely places were crowded with invisible beings and that it would be possible to communicate with them. I meant to initiate young men and women in this worship, which would unite the radical truths of Christianity to those of a more ancient world, and to use the Castle Rock for their occasional retirement from the world.

For years to come it was in my thought, as in much of my writing, to seek also to bring again into imaginative life the old sacred places – Slievefannan, Knocknarea – all that old reverence that hung above all – about conspicuous hills. But I wished by my writings and those of the school I hoped to found to have a secret symbolical relation to these mysteries, for in that way, I thought, there will be a greater richness, a greater claim upon the love of the soul, doctrine without exhortation and rhetoric. Should not religion hide within the work of art as God is within His world, and how can the interpreter do more than whisper? I did not wish to compose rites as if for the theatre. They must in their main outline be the work of invisible hands.

My own seership was, I thought, inadequate; it was to be Maud Gonne's work and mine. Perhaps that was why we had been thrown together. Were there not strange harmonies amid discord? My outer nature was passive – but for her I should never perhaps have left my desk – but I knew my spiritual nature was passionate, even violent. In her all this was reversed, for it was her spirit only that was gentle and passive and full of charming fantasy, as though it touched the world only with the point of its finger. When I had first met her I had used as a test the death symbol, imagining it in my own mind, but not wishing to alarm her had asked that it should take the form not of a human but of a dog’s skull. She said, 'I see a figure holding out its hand with a skull on it. No, there is a bruise on the hand, but I was compelled to say it was a skull.' I, who could not influence her actions, could dominate her inner being. I could therefore use her clairvoyance to produce forms that would arise from both minds, though mainly seen by one, and escape therefore from what is mere[ly] personal. There would be, as it were, a spiritual birth from the soul of a man and a woman. I knew that the incomprehensible life could select from our memories and, I believed, from the memory of the race itself; could realize of ourselves, beyond personal predilection, all it required, of symbol and of myth. I believed we were about to attain a revelation.

Maud Gonne entirely shared these ideas, and I did not doubt that in carrying them out I should win her for myself. Politics were merely a means of meeting, but this was a link so perfect that it would restore at once, even after a quarrel, the sense of intimacy. At every moment of leisure we obtained in vision long lists of symbols. Various trees corresponded to cardinal points, and the old gods and heroes took their places gradually in a symbolic fabric that had for its centre the four talismans of the Tuatha de Danaan, the sword, the stone, the spear and the cauldron, which related themselves in my mind with the suits of the Tarot. George Pollexfen, though already an old man, shared my plans, and his slow and difficult clairvoyance added certain symbols. He and Maud Gonne only met once – in politics he was an extreme Unionist – but he and she worked with each other's symbols and I did much of the work in his house. The forms became very continuous in my thoughts, and when AE came to stay at Coole he asked who was the white jester he had seen the corridors. It was a form I associated with the god Aengus.

It was a time of great personal strain and sorrow. Since my mistress had left me, no other woman had come into my life, and for nearly seven years none did. I was tortured by sexual desire and disappointed love. Often as I walked in the woods at Coole it would have been a relief to have screamed aloud. When desire became an unendurable torture, I would masturbate, and that, no matter how moderate I was, would make me ill. It never occurred to me to seek another love. I would repeat to myself again and again the last confession of Lancelot, and indeed it was my greatest pride, 'I have loved a queen beyond measure and exceeding long.' I was never before or since so miserable as in those years that followed my first visit to Coole. In the second as during the first visit my nervous

1 Doubtful reading.

It was the most miserable time of my life,” deleted.
system was worn out. The toil of dressing in the morning exhausted me, and Lady Gregory began to send me cups of soup when I was called.

Instead of the work which I could not make myself do, I began with her that great collection of fairy belief which is now passing through the press. I lived amid mystery. It seemed as if these people possessed an ancient knowledge. Ah, if we could but speak face to face with those they spoke to. ‘That old man,’ Lady Gregory said to me of an old man who passed us in the wood, ‘may have the mystery of the ages.’ I began to have visions and dreams full of wisdom or beauty. Much of my thought since is founded upon certain sentences that came in this way. Once I asked when going to sleep what was the explanation of those curious tales of people ‘away’, of which Lady Gregory [and] I had so many. In all these tales some man, woman, or child was believed to be carried off bodily by the fairy world, a changeling, some old man or woman perhaps, or perhaps [a] mere heap of shavings bewitched into their likeness, being left instead. I awoke enough to know that I lay in bed and had the familiar objects round, but to hear a strange voice speaking through my lips: ‘We make an image of him who sleeps, and it is not him who sleeps but it is like him who sleeps, and we call it Emmanuel.’

I was crossing one afternoon a little stream, and as I leaped I felt an emotion very strange to me — for all my thoughts were pagan — a sense of utter dependence on the divine will. It was over in an instant, and I said to myself, ‘That is the way Christians feel.’ That night I seemed to wake in my bed to hear a voice saying, ‘The love of God for every soul is infinite, for every soul is unique; no other soul can satisfy the same need in God.’ At other times I received fragments of poems, partly hearing and partly seeing. I saw in a dream a young shepherdess among many goats and sheep.

1 *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* was not published until September 1923. Lady Gregory’s Preface is dated February 1916. Of Yeats’s contributions to the book, ‘Witches and Wizards and Irish Folk-Lore’ is dated 1914, and ‘Swedenborg, Meditans and the Desolate Places’ 14 October 1914.

2 I awoke one night when a young man to find my body rigid and to hear a voice that came from my lips and yet did not seem my voice saying, ‘We make an image of him who sleeps, and it is not he who sleeps, and we call it Emmanuel.’ ‘*A Vision* (1937; 1960), p. 333 n.
body and into a world of light, and while in this light, which was also complete happiness, I was told I would now be shown the passage of the soul at its incarnation. I saw the mystic elements gather about my soul in a certain order, a whole elaborate process, but the details vanished as I awoke. Little remained but a sentence I seemed to have spoken to myself: 'Beauty is becoming beautiful objects, and truth is becoming truths.'

I found I could call dreams by my symbols, though I think the most profound came unsought, and I would go to sleep, say with a spray of apple blossoms¹ on my pillow. Sometimes, when I had gone to sleep with the endeavour to send my soul to that of Maud Gonne, using some symbol, which I forget, I would wake dreaming of a shower of precious stones. Sometimes she would have some corresponding experience in Paris and upon the same night, but always with more detail. I thought we became one in a world of emotion eternalized by its own intensity and purity, and that this world had for its symbol precious stones. No physical, sexual sensation ever accompanied these dreams and I noticed that once the excitement of the genital ceased, a visionary form, that of Aedain, approached.

I tried to describe some vision to Lady Gregory, and to my great surprise could not. I felt a difficulty in articulation and became confused. I had wanted to tell her of some beautiful sight, and could see no reason for this. I remembered then what I had read of mystics not being always [able] to speak, and remembered some tale of a lecturer on mysticism having to stop in the middle of a sentence. Even to this moment, though I can sometimes speak without difficulty, I am more often unable to. I am a little surprised that I can write what I please.

XLI

William Sharp came to Tulira.² I feel that I never properly used or valued this man, through whom the fluidic world seemed to flow, disturbing all; I allowed the sense of comedy, taken by contagion

¹ Yeats associated Maud Gonne with apple blossoms; as in 'The Shadowy Waters' and several early poems. Cf. p. 40.
² In the late summer of 1897.