

The Scarlet Letter

Volume IV, Number 1 | March 1997

The Magical Diaries of Ethel Archer

By Mrs. E.J. Wieland

Ethel Archer was a poet and novelist born during the 1880's. She was a student of magick and a member of the A.'. A.'. and was married to Eugene J. Wieland, the publisher of the Equinox. Many of her poems appeared initially in the Equinox, and in 1911 her first book of poetry, The Whirlpool, was published with a forward by Aleister Crowley, in which he describes her effort as "the bell of sterile passion glowing in the heart of the bell of desolation." We guess that he meant that as a complement. She and Victor Neuberg were friends, each dedicating poetry to the other. After observing that many of her poems concerned a female beloved, he dubbed her "Sappho" an honorific she embraced, even while explaining that she was addressing the female beloved within. Archer and Crowley stayed in touch throughout his lifetime; she died in 1961.

This is the first installment of that which survives of her magical diary circa 1912, from the collection of Gerald J. Yorke, who transcribed these entries from loose pages in E.A.'s hand. Thanks to H.B. for making me aware of, and providing me with this material.

N. V. Continuity P.

February 24, 1912

I had a rather curious and decidedly pleasant experience this morning; it must, I think, have been about 5 p.m. [sic]. I experienced the, to me, somewhat familiar sensation of being borne through the air upwards at a terrific speed, so that the wind rushing past my ears excluded all other sounds. I remember a very faint suspicion of fear at first, but this was quickly overpowered by the exhilarating feeling of lightness and pleasant curiosity.

I shot upwards far above the earth, up, up, up, until the air seemed so rarified that its elastic sparkling buoyancy seemed very light itself.

I saw what appeared to be the birds eye view of an immense town of red-roofed houses nestling amongst green fields and pleasant valleys and to the right of the town was a mountain so large and high that beside it the houses seemed as little red specks of dust.

I sped upwards beyond the mountain, still up and up, —and then I was in some flat open country like an immense moorland. There were no trees, but great fields of corn or it may have been stubble. A little lane went past one of the fields and coming towards me I saw a little girl with intelligent dark eyes in a red frock like the child of a peasant. I felt strangely drawn towards her, somehow she reminded me of my earlier self. I took her hands and she drew me to (a) small house surrounded by creepers. The roof was

composed of a species of rafter bound round with dark green turf. I peeped through a small window and saw someone walking about inside in a white gown.

Then, thinking I was intruding, I returned to the lane.

Three strange looking black dogs came slowly out of the garden, rather like fantastic french poodles, and thinking that they were elementals I banished them with the pentagram of earth.

Turning, I saw three red bulls coming leisurely towards me, and from the opposite direction beside the stubble field. Though not exactly afraid I thought they might turn nasty; almost immediately I returned to my body.

February 24

I dreamed that there were several new moons in the sky; this also was overlooking a river.

February 25

I remember hearing a voice from somewhere say “goodnight, Ethel” or goodbye. I forget precisely which, but I know that I felt it was final, and thought perhaps the grandmother is dead. I remarked on it to Bunco (Weiland, her husband —G.J.Y.) but he didn't take much notice. Sometime afterwards I felt a flash of vivid yellow light, so distinct was it that a storm was brewing I imagined and asked Bunco if he saw the lightning, he said “No.” When this happened I was fully awake; afterwards I slept. It was a curious dream I had. I remember looking out of the window and admiring the jagged stormy looking clouds and the deep indigo sky, then to my astonishment I perceived an immense full moon coming up above the horizon, much after the manner of the targets at a rifle-range, that's strange, I mused, because there is a moon in the sky already, perhaps it's the sun, but it doesn't look like her. Bunco and I both looked at it without much astonishment, rather curiosity, then the dream changed.

I was on the top of a bus going to Victoria, it was very late at night and it was practically the last conveyance, suddenly I found that I was going completely wrong and got down in a great hurry I asked a policeman the right direction and whilst he was goodnaturedly chaffing me at not knowing London better, I suddenly saw an immense golden shooting star; as it fell to the earth it changed to a crystal globe about the size of a large tennisball, while we were exclaiming numbers of stars appeared in the sky many of them were meteors (? —G.J.Y.) but they were all as crystal globes, and they looked strangely beautiful. Some moved in a sort of sinuous chain and I remember likening them to an opal necklace, lit by the fire of the moon. By this time there was collected a small crowd of persons—unlike ourselves they seemed somewhat frightened at the phenomena and were speculating on the probability of one of these falling globes setting fire to their barges! By the way by this time I was by the side of a canal or it may have been the Thames in the reign of Charles II or thereabouts; also there was snow and ice on the ground and in a vague manner I knew that it was the fire of the stars.

Then by the side of the river I saw what at first appeared to be two immense grey cats fighting and playing. I subsequently discovered that they were small panthers and belonged to a lady, one of the owners of the barges. Afterward the dream became more or less incomprehensible.

February 28, 1912

11:20 a.m. Asana in God position. Tried to go on an astral visit to that mountain. No success. Found sentences such as “One is She, the Elohim, the spirit of Life” constantly recurring as a species of mantra. Easily lost bodily sensation, but, just as I felt something pleasant was about to happen became all at once conscious of my breathing, which seemed as that of another person. It was very forceful and regular and ceased as suddenly as it commenced. Then I seemed surrounded by some magnetic influence, also I longed infinitely to fling myself into the arms of some glorious being that I felt was just within reach. I found myself formulating passionate prayers in an ecstasy of adoration to Adonai; repeating them 'till I almost swooned, —and always, just as I was about to rise with my lover some gravitating force compelled me to earth. Now I was conscious of an exhilarating coldness which seemed to bathe me in a sparkling yellow light. On opening my eyes to see if it were caused by the sun, it appeared to be streaming from my own eyes; also I found that my hands had raised themselves from my knees and were about ten inches above them almost on a level with my chest! The strenuous breathing had again commenced, when I couldn't say, but it seemed that at each breath my body grew lighter and imperceptibly my hands and arms were raising themselves, though speaking correctly, I didn't feel them do so.

I identified each breath with the propelling of a [?] and closing my eyes exerted all will power to get out of myself again and rise. Then I knew that my feet were quivering and the heels of my shoes had left the ground. My hands were on a level with my shoulders in the position of the swimming stroke, elbows out.

Again with closed eyes I tried yet harder to forget all, then I knew that my arms had moved backwards in a wide circular sweep to the shoulders, and were coming forward again, just as a man swimming. My feet and legs were vibrating at a terrific rate and quite automatically, I felt that if prolonged sufficiently I should have eventually risen, but thought “this can't be right” so stopped the experiment.

Query

(1) Would anything have occurred if I had been properly robed, instead of being in my ordinary clothes (boots, stays, etc.)

(2) Is this supposed to happen? Personally, I should think not. I started with the idea of going on an astral journey, instead of which I find my physical body trying to rise.

After writing this I looked at the clock. It was 2:25! It had seemed scarcely an hour.

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Volume IV, Number 2 | June 1997

The Magical Diaries of Ethel Archer, Part II

Edited by N. V. Continuity P.

Continued from our last issue; more entries from the journal of Ethel Archer. A student of Crowley's, and member of the A.'A.', she was a frequent contributor to the Equinox and appears in several numbers of the first volume. She was married to its editor, E.G. Weiland, and together they participated in the rich blend of magical, artistic, and social activity that emanated from its offices. These notes were copied from loose pages by Gerald Yorke, and come from his private collection. It's worth it to note that these astral journeys took place 85 years ago—and we have no way of knowing whether E.A. was an infrequent diarist, or if there were other pages, now lost to time. —N.V.C.P., editor

March 2nd

Asana in God position. Time 12:15 pm till 1:30 pm.

Concentrating on a golden ankh. Great difficulty in keeping mind fixed at first. Then strange automatic breathing just as I was about to be absorbed into an immense ankh. This continued some little time; also my throat got dry. The strange breathing ceased as I was doing pranayama quite noiselessly and regularly. Then I seemed to expand or rather a nebulous form of myself that surrounded me seemed to do so—I was a powerful Egyptian god; at the same time I was an ankh, which expanded and contracted as I breathed. The breath seemed as a golden light travelling round the ankh (much as an electric sign does, it is difficult to describe) but the ankh (that was myself) was formed as the breath or the light travelled round it and was contracted and expanded like this

(drawing, not copied by Gerald Yorke)

June 4, 1912 Between 2 am and 4 am

Astral journey. Rather curious. Had a lot of trouble to get away but very little to get 'out of myself'. E. G. [her husband –ed.] was enveloped in golden smoke, then was surrounded by a glowing red mist which burnt as a furnace: then saw odd pictures, viz—'a man seated at a table leaning his head on his hands, dressed in a brown costume, Jacobean or Cromwellian,' then a looking glass flashed at the end of a long room, etc. etc. Finally I was at the head of a staircase facing east, where was an open window. Doing 'the enterer' I projected myself with great force and shot like an arrow from a bow far out of the window and across a beautiful country. Very green it was, with many trees and meadows but no hills. I came to a wall, it was perpendicular and built of reddish looking bricks: with some difficulty I rose upwards and presently arrived at the top. There was a species of tablet let into it. Somewhat like a coat of arms. It was very distinct and I tried to understand it, it may have been some strange language, but my present memory makes it something like this

(and once again, <small> drawing, not copied by Gerald Yorke)

The squares were black and white and there was a species of fleur de lys. I stayed a long while trying to decipher it and then realising that I ought not to remain stationary I rose above the wall. Apparently it surrounded a city which was enveloped in a dark grey shadow. A hill loomed through the darkness and dimly silhouetted at its base were two black calvary crosses, a third was in the center at its summit, the three forming a triangle. As I looked the cross which formed the apex of the triangle seemed to come downwards and the others to go upwards, so that it formed some symbol but I couldn't be quite sure.

At the foot of the hill were many white stones some with inscriptions and I realised that it was the cemetery and remembered Golgatha.

I returned to earth and came to a room where were Bunco [her husband] and Rosher (later was in the Golden Dawn, I think—Gerald Yorke) and a man named Mueller. I tried to explain the coat of arms I had seen on the wall and Rosher said he knew it well, but where had I seen it. I told him. The rest was muddled and I woke feeling very tired.

June 21, 1912

Had a rather curious experience last night; at first it was rather pleasant. I seemed to be tingling all over as though electrified, this seemed to go on for hours. I got very restless: finally decided to go on an astral journey. The tingling got very much more violent till it approached a burning irritation and skin seemed all prickling. I tried to push back the bedclothes when suddenly my hand came in contact with another hand and arm. It was horrible, like soft india-rubber, but very strong; I tried in vain to tear the thing away and finally got rid of it by assuming the God Horus. Invoking Thoum-ash-neith and doing 'the Enterer' I got away. I didn't know where to go but I thought vaguely of one of the planets; either Jupiter, Mars, or Venus. My memory seemed to have gone completely, even as it has now. I did not know a single name or sigil or even the correct pentagrams. It was raining. I went a long way through a damp cloudy atmosphere till I got to what seemed a strange building with an arched iron roof, it was very grey and shadowy, several signs and sigils seemed to float past, but I could not recognise them. Then I remember distinctly it was a Black Tau inverted, also the sigil of Venus.

I decided to go to Venus and journeying out of the iron domed roof I went through more and more clouds, till I finally stopped in the midst of darkness—and I realised that I should not be able to meet any challenge or even make a sign, all I could remember in regard to Venus was the name AHA which I repeated boldly several times. A dark cloud slowly parted and before me appeared what at first seemed a wonderful ivory statue of the most perfect athlete, the muscles rippling down the magnificent limbs; I could not see the face but it was very terrible and the whole figure seemed literally bristling with wrath. The left arm was raised in a menacing manner and carried what I suppose was a specus [sic - spear? — G.J.Y.] or scimitar. but it seemed at first more like a large quill. Behind the white figure a little to the left was a black angel equally beautiful in demoniac fashion; and vaguely seen were several other heads, all very frightful. The white figure literally scorched my eyes to look at and whilst I was gazing in blasphemous defiance and ignorance suddenly lunged forward and brought his arm down. A streak of

lightning seemed to strike my eyes and for several seconds I felt as if blinded. Then I was back again, but not before I had seen an immense figure standing with its arms out in cruciform fashion. The black angel remained for several seconds (?) after I had been struck and the demon heads were the last to go.

Strangely enough I did not feel fear, merely annoyance that I did not know the signs.

The clock struck 2 just as I fully woke up.