

# The Life of Words

Andrea Hayes, a Dubliner, is a regular contributor to the *The Messenger*.

A recent visit to the National Library of Ireland to see the W. B. Yeats exhibition reminded me of something I have long felt as a lover of words and books. The strange, almost mystical power that words hold reveals itself not only when we speak them but also when we encounter them on the page. Walking among Yeats's manuscripts, letters and poetry, I reflected on how we create, receive and sometimes recover words and how words, once written, seem to take on a life beyond ourselves.

As a young child with hearing loss and a slow learner, I recently found my little green library card for the mobile library in Donnycarney. It was in 1987 that I began borrowing books, and a new world opened to me. As someone who has now written books, I see it as a lifelong love affair with words, letters, and meaning. That small card and those borrowed books gave me access to the power of language and the possibility that words could transform life itself.

From that early experience, I developed the habit of journaling, which has stayed with me into adulthood. For as long as I can remember, putting pen to paper has been a way to listen to my own mind, to clarify thoughts



and sometimes to encounter messages I had not consciously known. Over the years, this practice has occasionally spilled over into what could be called automatic writing. Like Yeats, who I discovered also did this practice, this type of writing can sometimes feel as if it is coming through me rather than from me. Ideas or insights arrive unbidden, as if another intelligence is speaking through my writing.

I have also explored practices inspired by the book *The Artist's Way*, which encourages the morning pages: three pages of uncensored writing first thing in the morning when consciousness is still awakening. In this space between sleep and full wakefulness, special messages often surface. Thoughts that have been



Photo: Brendan McCarthy

buried, inspirations that seem almost mystical and connections between ideas that were invisible the day before can reveal themselves. It is a daily practice of reception, of listening and of letting words arrive before the ego takes control. This approach has a resonance in spiritual traditions as well. The Spiritual Exercises developed by St Ignatius of Loyola invite reflection, discernment and attentive journaling of thoughts, feelings and inspirations. He encourages writing and reflection as a way to notice the movement of God in daily life, to become attuned to deeper truths. Just as with the morning pages or automatic writing, the practice of keeping attentive, honest records of our interior life allows messages and insights to surface in a space where

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consciousness and spirit meet.

This experience resonates with the insights of thinkers across history. The ancient concept of theurgy invites sacred rituals in which words, symbols and gestures allow the divine to descend. Prayer, in this framework, is not asking. It is participating in a pre-existing, living language. Centuries later, author Florence Scovel Shinn offered a practical version of this principle. In *The Game of Life and How to Play It*, she teaches that affirmations can shape reality but only when aligned with the divine mind and not repeated from ego alone. Words become potent when the speaker surrenders authorship, becoming a channel for ideas and forces beyond themselves. Across these threads, from ancient theurgy to modernist new thought to Ignatian spiritual practice, the same insight emerges. Words are instruments, not possessions.

Reflecting in the National Library, I was reminded of my own journeys with words, from the mobile library in Donnycarney to my journal and morning pages today. The deepest magic of language lies in its ability to live independently, to speak when we are listening but not forcing. The invitation is simple. Pick up a pen. Write without censoring, without expectation. Listen as much as you write, and see what emerges.