

This essay appeared in Yeats Annual 8 (1991), 157–75. The original pagination has been included in the text here for reference, but the endnotes have been converted to footnotes for easier consultation, so the final pages (172–75) are not accounted for. I have also updated the references to the automatic script to include George Mills Harper's Yeats's 'Vision' Papers, 3 vols. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992) [YVP1, YVP2, and YVP3].

A Vision: Ideas of God and Man

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Writing of *A Vision*¹ to Ezra Pound, Yeats declared:

I will never think any thoughts but these, or some modification or extension of these; when I write prose or verse they must be somewhere present though not it may be in the words; they must affect my judgment of friends and of events; but then there are many symbolisms and none exactly resembles mine.²

To many it seems strange that the abstract geometry and esoteric minutiae of *A Vision* could so deeply affect Yeats's mind and outlook. There appears to be little within the pages of either version that enters into the poetry which he wrote after *A Vision* appeared. The formulations and language of *A Vision* are indeed seldom "present . . . in the words," but the work's deeper implications underlie all of the later poetry. For Yeats had long been seeking, and in *A Vision* finally found "a system of thought that would leave [his] imagination *free to create as it chose* and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the one history and that the soul's" (AVA xi; emphasis added). Through *A Vision* Yeats sought to make his world possible for art, and to ensure that his art was relevant to man. I hope to show, at least in part, how the ideas of *A Vision* offered him this creative freedom.

I

In the introduction of AVB Yeats claims that the "stylistic arrangements of experience" presented in *A Vision* have helped him "to hold in a single thought reality and justice" (AVB 25). He implies

¹ The title "A Vision" refers here in general to the ideas included within both versions of *A Vision*, in as far as the two versions are in many respects complementary and in many places elucidate each other. "AVA" and "AVB" refer to the two versions in as far as they are distinct and separate.

² *A Packet for Ezra Pound* (Dublin: Cuala, 1929), 32–33.

that without the system he would find experienced reality and the ideals of justice far more difficult to reconcile. Like most, he would prefer to believe in a [158] just universe, where balance and harmony can, ultimately, be demonstrated, despite the apparently contradictory evidence of experience. *A Vision* helps him to control the apparent fragmentation and disharmony of experience, to realise “concord”, in the wording of the earlier published version of this paragraph. Yeats writes that:

What Leopardi in Ezra Pound’s translation calls that ‘concord’ wherein ‘the arcane spirit of the whole mankind turns hardy pilot’ . . . persuades me that he has best imagined reality who has best imagined justice.³

Not the perception or even the knowledge of reality reconciles it to justice, but the imagination of it, and Yeats must recreate and restructure perceived reality through the poetic imagination in order to discover an order which is just. Yet, in the phrase “to hold in a single thought”, the verb indicates an effort on Yeats’s part, and in the earlier version too the possible precariousness of such a reconception of experience through the “stylistic arrangements” is indicated by the context of Yeats’s quotation:

Infinite things desired, lofty visions
 ’Got on desirous thought by natural virtue,
 And the wise concord, whence through delicious seas
 The arcane spirit of the whole Mankind
 Turns hardy pilot . . . and if one wrong note
 Strike the tympanum,
 Instantly
 That paradise is hurled to nothingness.⁴

As for Leopardi, for Yeats the “paradise” of a just universe is founded in defiance of the discords, and must assert the necessary supremacy of the “lofty visions” and immortal longings of the artist’s creative imagination, if the world is to have any value. Yeats wrote to Dulac of *A Vision* that: “To

³ Ibid., 33.

⁴ “Her Monument, The Image Cut Thereon”, *The Translations of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1953; 1984), 445.

me it means a last act of defence against the chaos of the world, & I hope for ten years to write out of my renewed security.”⁵ Yeats does not deny the chaos, for “we make a false beauty by a denial of ugliness and . . . if we deny the causes of doubt we make a false faith” (*Ex* 31; & cf. *Myth* 332), but he attempts to impose limits upon it, and to set up bulwarks against it.

In the context of such concerns, belief does not carry the same import as to a devotee of a religion. Yeats may hold the ideas, but he does not attempt to assert any absolute truth for them. They are a symbolism and a personally valid one: “Some will ask if I believe all that this book contains, and I will not know how to answer. Does the [159] word belief, used as they will use it, belong to our age, can I think of the world as there and I here judging it?”⁶ When, therefore, he seeks to demonstrate the kind of commitment he envisages the system as requiring, he uses the arguments not of religion and the one true way, but of art and the prismatic perception: *A Vision* is set up alongside, not in opposition to, other systems, and assumes art’s relativity.⁷ Drama, in particular, offered Yeats a parallel, and he declares with seeming diffidence, in a draft, that “[f]or the present I but ask my reader to accept my dream as he would accept the play of Hamlet when the curtain is up.”⁸ But the “arguments” of drama are, for Yeats, among the most compelling: “Because of the antinomy philosophy is drama as is every individual life—all philosophies are true in the measure of their dramatic intensity.”⁹ Although he cannot prove “that this drama exists” since with “scientific facts lacking a philosophy falls on deaf ears”, he can still “assert that he who accepts it though it be but as a Myth . . . or something thought out upon a painted stage sees the world breaking into life like a hedgerow in spring.”¹⁰ Artistic truth is of a different kind to that of

⁵ Cit. *The Making of Yeats’s ‘A Vision’: A Study of the Automatic Script* (2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1987.) 2: 407–8, dated to 23 April 1925 [MYV hence]; also cit. Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, (2nd Ed. Oxford: OUP, 1979), 291, dated to 1937.

⁶ *A Packet for Ezra Pound*, 32. Harper quotes a TS draft MYV2 414–15, with very minor variants; an early MS draft version was even stronger, viz. MYV2 416; and cf. also *L* 781, and *Ex* 400.

⁷ See the Robartes-Aherne dialogue of 1919, cit. *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, 235; and also a 1922 draft of Owen Aherne’s Introduction to *AVA* (cit. *The Identity of Yeats* [London: Macmillan, 1954; Faber & Faber, 1964], 322).

⁸ Cit. *The Identity of Yeats*, 323. In “Certain Noble Plays of Japan” (1916) Yeats sees drama as one of the most compelling art forms, and attributes the power of the Christian myth to its aesthetic intensity, rather than to any ethical superiority (viz. *E&I* 235). Cf. also *VP* 437: “As though God’s death were but a play.”

⁹ Entry for November 16 on the last page of the diary of 1930 (National Library of Ireland [NLI hence] MS 30,354). Most of the diary was posthumously published in *Pages from a Diary Written in 1930* (Dublin: Cuala, 1944) included in *Ex* 287–340.

¹⁰ Loose unnumbered MS page, NLI MS 30,757. Since the following page is missing Yeats’s substitution for the cancellation is lost.

mathematics or science.¹¹ We need not believe in ghosts to accept the appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father upon the stage; we are not troubled that having seen this ghost Hamlet speaks of the "undiscover'd country from whose bourn / No traveller returns", for such fictions and inconsistencies do not invalidate the play or its "truth".

Yeats would not have died for his system, but happily lived with it, perhaps even by it—"We can (those hard symbolic bones under the skin) substitute for a treatise on logic the *Divine Comedy*, or some little song about a rose, or be content to live our thought" (AVB 24). The hard symbolic bones provide a skeleton, an essential framework, which allows reality to be reconciled artistically with the ideal. The artist needs to know anatomy, but Yeats does not ask us to appreciate the beauty of the skull. To the reader of *A Vision* he offers a personal understanding of how the skull underlies the face of both a Quasimodo and a Helen; those repelled by anatomy (probably the majority) may ignore it and dwell upon the face. Yeats was himself ill at ease with *A Vision*'s geometry, and complained that: "Having the concrete mind of the poet, I am unhappy when I find myself among abstract things, and yet I need them to set my experience in order" (AVA 129). In the diagrams and technicalities Yeats is not holding up a realistic mirror to life, but using a symbolist scrying-glass which reveals deeper truths in the patterns of human existence.

Despite his distaste for abstraction, however, *A Vision* is by no means [160] a transcription of the automatic writing; though this might form the core or framework. The "documents" could be said to have provided the inspiration, the perspiration was Yeats's, and Professor Harper's *The Making of Yeats's 'A Vision'* shows that the perspiration was considerable; if *A Vision* is difficult to understand, its clarity is amazing next to the inchoate fragments of the script.¹² Nor was Yeats ever able entirely to unify the fragments. When confronted with a formulation of his Instructors' which even he considers incongruous, Yeats writes in a resigned tone, "I did not care to ask . . . I did not want another scene, and besides one cannot know everything. I accept his thought . . . being a symbolist and dramatist and not a dialectician";¹³ the whole was not invalidated for Yeats by

¹¹ "Leo Africanus", sharing Yeats's prejudice, had written through Yeats: "Let science build upon obscurities, she has her necessary labour. Wisdom, like all the greater forms of art[,] is founded upon experience" (YA1 [1982] 29).

¹² See MYV passim and also Harper's "Unbelievers in the House': Yeats's Automatic Script," in *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 14:1 (Atlanta: University of Georgia; Spring 1981), 1-15.

¹³ A rejected TS passage on the *Daimon*, cit. H. Adams, *Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1955) 281.

Such comments as this, and an annotation which Harper and Hood cite (to the phrase " 'out of space and

lacunae and inaccuracies. That he had enough confidence in the general scheme to attempt the book is a greater indication of the book's importance to him than any other. But Yeats could still doubt and question the bases of his theory; and he was evidently sensitive about possible criticism of his non-scientific approach. Despite his dismissive attitude to the "opium of the suburbs" (Ex 340), he wished for its sanction; he hoped that "some mathematician some day [will] question and understand, as I cannot, and confirm all" (AVB 213), and wrote that *A Vision* was "a form of science for the study of human nature, as we see it in others" (L 709). For the time, however, he was prepared to state that it was a myth (eg. L 781), but in the way that the story of Hamlet or Oedipus is a myth, not a chimaera.

A Vision therefore embodies several shifting paradoxes: the initial ideas taken up by the Instructors were Yeats's; but the system that evolved was not "his", and he did not always understand its particulars; yet the published books are his edited arrangements of the material, and are his own "creations". Yeats did not feel at liberty to create explanations where he was given none, but he would rename terms and recast interpretations, and most importantly edit his material in such a way that *A Vision* becomes almost as much a Yeatsian polemic as an exposition of his Instructors' ideas.

In spite of the apparently transcendental teleology of the system as it was "given" to him, Yeats does not seek liberation from the cycle of rebirth with any fervour, and the emphasis of *A Vision* remains upon incarnation and reincarnation. *A Vision*, even more than the automatic script, "has its origin in human life—all religious systems have their origin in God & descend to man—this ascends",¹⁴ for the script has been further filtered through the mind of a poet, "who has thought more of the love of woman than of the love of God" (AVA xxi). To [161] Yeats the human is fundamentally *antithetical*, and *antithetical* men therefore approach more closely to the fully humane, so that as the production of man rather than God, and of an *antithetical* man at that, *A Vision* is doubly refracted. In a gesture towards fair-mindedness, Yeats acknowledges his bias through the character of Owen Aherne, who writes: "I notice that if I made too little by the

time' " [AVA 235]) where Yeats writes "I quote the documents without claiming to understand except vaguely . . ." (CVA nn. 74) imply that Yeats was not entirely clear with regard to all aspects of his exposition; but it is evident he had a good enough understanding of them to think them necessary for inclusion.

¹⁴ Automatic Script [AS hence], 26 April 1919, MYV2 267 [YVP2 269], and cit. CVA nn. 7. Viz. also Yeats's notebook summary of three "sleeps" where he writes that his "philosophy is associated with a group [of Spirits] which includes [Phases] 14, 15, 16" (MYV2 180 [YVP3 100]).

antithetical phases [Yeats] has done no better by the *primary*” (AVA xxiii). But although to Aherne “the system itself [makes] the realisation of God one half of life” (AVA xxii), little weight is given to this half of life in Yeats’s version of the system, and the focus lies in the other half: realisation of man.

II

If the philosophy of *A Vision* is a drama, all too often it is submerged under the apparatus of stage machinery and a clutter of props. The details are necessary, but they can obscure the larger and more important implications. The reader must take account of the terms of *A Vision*, examining the nature of Yeats’s constructs, but such a study has value only in the context of the wider meaning which it makes possible. An understanding of how Yeats adapts the system’s transcendent objective to a form of Romantic anthropocentrism, and the consequent anti-religious conception of the divine within the system, must start in the bric-à-brac shop of *Faculties* and cones, but its importance lies in the illumination it provides as to the implications for Yeats as a man and, in particular, as an artist.¹⁵ For, although *A Vision* is not in Helen Vendler’s terms an extended metaphor of *poesis*,¹⁶ its most important implications concern the role and nature of art and the artist.

Yeats had written to “Leo” in 1915: “I do not doubt . . . the existence of God” (YA1 [1982] 22), and there is no reason to think that his attitude changed later. However, the artist, for Yeats, is the man least directed towards God. In 1906 he had written that “[i]f it be true that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, the saint goes to the centre, the poet and artist to the ring where everything comes round again” (*E&I* 287). When he comes to the gyres of *A Vision* he recognises that there is a centre where “all the gyres converge in one . . . all the planets drop in the Sun” (VP 557), but he remains less interested in prime movers than in the moved. Personality concerns him more than spirit, Creation more than Godhead. Nor is his lack of concern entirely a

¹⁵ Much of what is written here must stand alongside Colin McDowell’s “‘The Completed Symbol’: Daimonic Existence and the Great Wheel in *A Vision* (1937)” YA6 (1988) 193–208, which lucidly sets out many of the most important points with relation to the spiritual and the divine in *A Vision B*, particularly in relationship to the *Principles*.

¹⁶ Yeats’s *‘Vision’ and the Later Plays* (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP; London: OUP, 1963).

matter of choice, for Yeats also saw himself as largely unable to [162] experience God in the mystics' way, since such experience is the prerogative of *primary* men such as AE and Owen Aherne, although Yeats seems to envy them little.¹⁷

It is partly therefore in consequence of his personal bias that Yeats's exposition leaves the figure of God in the shadows, but not entirely. The confusion surrounding God in *A Vision* is more than the product of Yeats's lack of interest. Firstly, God does not appear in any recognisable guise in *A Vision*, but is shrouded in one of the most idiosyncratic of all of Yeats's formulations: although he never states it as clearly in *A Vision*, in his diary of 1930 Yeats wrote: "I substitute for God the Thirteenth Cone . . ." (Ex 320). Few terms in *A Vision* have given rise to such concern and bewilderment as this one, and one of the main reasons that the *Thirteenth Cone* proves so elusive a concept is that the bewilderment is also in part Yeats's. A second reason for the confusion, therefore, is that Yeats's own ideas about the *Thirteenth Cone*, and his understanding of both the construct and the terms, were uncertain and evolved, so that there are major differences between the *Thirteenth Cycle* of AVA, and *Thirteenth Cycle / Cone / Sphere* of AVB.¹⁸ Finally, and perhaps in consequence, Yeats's references to the *Thirteenth Cycle* or *Cone* are scattered through his exposition of other aspects of the system rather than being developed specifically in relation to the *Cone* itself, leaving the curious to collate, and then attempt to build up a picture. It is only then that the inconsistencies and difficulties involved in Yeats's treatment of the *Thirteenth Cycle*, which give rise to much of the reader's unease, become fully apparent; some can be resolved on closer examination, but others remain contradictory.

¹⁷ Viz. AVA xxi-xxii. Although the beatific state described in "Vacillation" IV, for instance, (placed in ca. 1915-16 by "My fiftieth year had come and gone"; composition attr. to Nov. 1931 [*The Identity of Yeats*, 292]) appears such a mystical experience, it is not related directly to divine grace, and it is in part the very singularity of this experience that distinguishes Yeats from AE, for example. Cf. also Yeats's claim: "Then too I am *Antithetical* in nature, and find it impossible to see the joy that belongs to *Primary Phases*. . ." cited CVA nn. 63.

¹⁸ The *Thirteenth Cycle* is the main term used in AVA (but see AVA 170; 172), the *Thirteenth Cone* in AVB. The implications of the differences are discussed in the text, where relevant, but they become blurred, especially in connection with the *Thirteenth Cone/Cycle/Sphere*. There are twelve cycles of incarnations, each cycle consisting of a round of 28 incarnations, characterised by the Wheel; since each Wheel or cycle can also be expressed as a single or double cone, a cycle and a cone can correspond to each other, hence their identity in the *Thirteenth Cone/Cycle*. See Graham Hough's *The Mystery Religion of W. B. Yeats* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), 113-15.

It is evident from the script that the *Thirteenth Cycle* originated as the stage beyond the twelve cycles of incarnation, from which it derives its name.¹⁹ The *Thirteenth Cycle* is presented in this form in *AVA*, where it is conceived of as the first of three Cycles, which are preparatory to, but distinct from rebirth into a new state. These three Cycles correspond to the three final states of the soul's existence between death and birth: "the *Beatitude* and the two states that follow correspond to the 13th, 14th and 15th Cycles" (*AVA* 236). Yeats elaborates this correspondence when he writes that after the *Beatitude*:

Were the *Spirit* strong enough, or were its [12] human cycles finished, it would remain, as in the *Beatitude*, permanently united to its *Ghostly Self* [ie. would exist in the 13th Cycle], or would, after two more states [the 14th and 15th cycles], be reborn into a spiritual [163] cycle where the movement of the gyre is opposite to that in our cycles, and incomprehensible to us. . . . (AVA 236)

The *Thirteenth Cycle*, with the *Fourteenth* and *Fifteenth*, embodies a process which prepares the soul for existence on a more spiritual level, analogous to the preparation for mundane rebirth which occurs during the *Beatitude*, the *Going Forth*, and the *Foreknowing* of *AVA*. After it has passed through the three Cycles, the soul is born into a spirit world, which is complementary and runs counter to ours.²⁰ Already however in this passage Yeats betrays uncertainty about his formulations and terms. Although "or would . . ." can be read as an explanatory expansion, the two formulations appear completely different, and a more natural reading would seem to be offering two alternative "after-afterlives", of which the progress through the three Cycles is only one. In the other the soul remains in a state corresponding to the *Thirteenth Cycle* alone. Elsewhere too in *AVA* Yeats refers to a sole *Thirteenth Cycle*,²¹ and this conception came to dominate Yeats's thinking on the subject.

¹⁹ AS 26 August 1918, MYV2 104 [YVP2 26–27]. Yeats was told that a soul cannot "cease to incarnate before the last cycle," the twelfth, and can "only escape when the consciousness of every cycle has accepted" the spiritual objective.

²⁰ This world is also seen variously as that of Faery (e.g., AVB 210n.); that of Angels (e.g., *The Hour-Glass*); and that of the Dead (e.g., AVA 158), that is those dead to our form of rebirth. Those who have completed their twelve cycles of incarnations on earth are also called "Those who wait" (AVA 237), like the souls of the martyrs in Revelation.

²¹ In particular in relation to the *Daimon* (viz. e.g., AVA 220), see below p. 166. As early as 26 August 1918 (MYV2 104 [YVP2 27]), the AS appears to speak of the *Thirteenth Cycle* as a single final stage, analogous to incarnation: "Cycle 13 Final initiation yes".

By AVB all references to the triad of Cycles have disappeared, and Yeats refers only to the *Thirteenth Cycle/Cone*. The *Cone* of AVB retains few of the progressive attributes of AVA's triad, and Yeats appears to have opted for the first alternative offered in AVA 236. However he increases the *Thirteenth Cycle's* significance immensely by conflating it with final goal of the three Cycles' process, "the spiritual cycle where the movement of the gyre is opposite to that in our cycles", described in the other alternative. No longer is it an intermediate form of modified existence, with a limited span, analogous to the incarnate cycles, but is beyond them and appears as a timeless state. For this reason the *Thirteenth Cycle* is a misnomer, although Yeats still uses it, and the retention of the name is to be regretted. It leads by extension to the more frequently used and slightly more satisfactory term the "*Thirteenth Cone*", which had already been used, though obscurely and only in a few instances in AVA.

Since it embraces "the spiritual cycle", the *Thirteenth Cone* of AVB is described as existing "contemporaneously" and complementarily with the cycles of the incarnations in space and time, although outside our continuum. The *Cone* of AVB is viewed as an anti-universe, akin to the angelic world of Swedenborg, where the angels' "light and heat are darkness and cold to us and our light and heat darkness and cold to them" (Ex 40). Yeats ties this opposition more exactly and directly to our temporal, mundane world, when he refers in AVB to the two [164] antinomious cones which are described by the Great Year and "the Thirteenth Cycle or *Thirteenth Cone*", which appears to us always in the complementary "month" to our own. The sum of the two months comes to a constant thirteen, which offers a back derivation to explain the term:²²

Although when we are in the first month of this expanding cone we are in the twelfth month of the other, when we are in the second in the eleventh of the other, and so on, that month of the other which corresponds to ours is always called by my instructors the Thirteenth Cycle or *Thirteenth Cone*, for every month is a cone. It is that cycle which may deliver us from the twelve cycles of time and space. The cone which intersects ours is a cone in so far as we think of it as the antithesis to our thesis, but if the time has come for our deliverance it is the phaseless sphere, sometimes called the Thirteenth Sphere, for every lesser cycle

²² Cf. McDowell "The Completed Symbol' . . ." note 7, YA6 207.

contains within itself a sphere that is, as it were, the reflection or messenger of the final deliverance.

(AVB 210)

In some senses we live permanently both in our own cycle and in the *Thirteenth*, but are largely unconscious of the latter until our final initiation comes and what were dark and cold are revealed as light and heat, when it becomes perceived as the Sphere and we are gathered into it. This revelation of the Sphere will arrive when all twelve cycles of incarnation are complete, yet, as the plant is instinct within the seed, this final liberation is intrinsic within each lesser form. If time is the moving image of eternity, each cone is the moving, antinomious image of the Sphere and therefore contains “the reflection . . . of the final deliverance.” The form of consciousness of the observer, rather than any absolute quality, determines whether the Sphere is perceived as such. We too shall see the Sphere when our consciousness becomes like that of the *Daimon*, which “does not perceive, as does the human mind of man, object following object in a narrow stream, but all at once. . . . not as they are in time and space.”²³ Since the Sphere in fact has no time, or all time contemporaneously, to those in time it appears as the complement; as white will appear green to those who have stared too long at red, it therefore seems to run as a gyre in opposition to our own.

The *Thirteenth Cone* or the Sphere appears not as a divine figure, so much as a total spiritual dimension which includes our own. When Yeats writes: “I *substitute* for God the Thirteenth Cone” (Ex 320)(emphasis added), it is not that the *Thirteenth Cone* actually is [165] his God, so much as that it stands in for an absconded God.²⁴ It is spiritual without being divine, and it appears that Yeats’s universe regulates itself. The *Thirteenth Cone* stands as the natural context for those elements of Yeats’s system within, or associated with, man, which act upon him in the ways which have traditionally been ascribed to an active, interested deity. And it is these elements which are related to the forms of traditional religion rather than the *Thirteenth Cone*.

In AVA the triad of Cycles is related to the Christian Trinity in an “interpolation” where “the 13th, 14th and 15th Cycles” are said to “correspond in their turn to Holy Ghost, Son and Father”

²³ NLI MS 30,359 [xix]. Leather Notebook ca. 1927.

²⁴ See Kathleen Raine’s discussion Plato’s *Politicus* as a source for “The Mental Traveller” and *A Vision*, with its image of a world alternately controlled by a divine ruler, and then left to run down, in *Blake and Antiquity* (1963; London: RKP, 1979) 57–58.

(AVA 236). Although Yeats was obviously uneasy about this statement, attributing it to Owen Aherne, it would appear that in the system of AVA the only area in which Yeats could find an approximation to the traditional Christian constructs surrounding Godhead was the “after-afterlife”, and even here it is related specifically to man and his individual progress towards an spiritual goal. Yeats also identifies the three Cycles, with less embarrassment, as “certainly emanations from the Soul of the World, the Intellectual Principle and the One”, the philosophic Trinity of Plotinus’ Neo-Platonism. Considering the *Principles*, he is further “inclined to discover in the *Celestial Body*, the *Spirit*, the *Passionate Body*, and the *Husk*, emanations from or reflections from his One, his Intellectual Principle, his Soul of the World, and his Nature respectively” (AVA 176). It is clear therefore that in AVA there is some degree of affinity or association in Yeats’s mind between the *Principles* and the Cycles, at the least through a middle term, although it would be a false syllogism to equate the correspondences, if well within the normal practice of occultists, including Yeats. This section, ostensibly discussing “The Four Principles and Neo-Platonic Philosophy”, in fact shows more confidence in its treatment of the Cycles, and betrays the temptation which Yeats felt to establish links between these elements of the system.

While Yeats refined the triad of the *Thirteenth*, *Fourteenth* and *Fifteenth Cycles* out of the system when he re-presented it in AVB, the *Principles* receive far more attention, and it becomes evident that the triad remains implicit, in microcosmic form, in the *Principles*.²⁵ Still “with some hesitation”, in AVB Yeats discards the term “emanation” and actually identifies the Plotinian “Existants” with “the *Four Principles* in the sphere”; but the four-fold attributions of AVA are adapted to a three-fold construct, as if in imitation of the triad of Cycles, by subsuming the *Passionate Body* and the *Husk* as separate reflections of a single form, the *Ghostly Self*.²⁶ If in AVA the Christian Trinity appears transmog- [166] rified into the impersonal, transmundane cycles which

²⁵ See McDowell’s two articles in YA, which are particularly concerned with the Principles “To ‘Beat Upon the Wall’: Reading A Vision” YA4 (1986) 219–227, and “‘The Completed Symbol’ . . .” loc. cit.

²⁶ This term is as unclear as “Thirteenth Cone”, and requires more examination than is possible in the present essay. The least unsatisfactory summary comes at AVA 221 where he writes that it is “neither Man nor *Daimon*” and “the source of that which is unique in every man, understanding by unique that which is one and so cannot be analysed into anything else.” In AVB, writing of the *Thirteenth Cone*, he states that “[w]ithin it live all souls that have been set free and every *Daimon* and *Ghostly Self* . . .” (210–11); this would be quite clear, were it not that it appears to contradict an earlier passage referring to “our *Daimon* (or *Ghostly Self* as it is called when it inhabits the sphere)” (193). One must look to the relationships between the *Principles* and the *Daimons* outlined on AVB 189, for some resolution of this.

lead towards man's spiritual rebirth, in the process of revision to AVB this trinity is absorbed towards man and becomes involved in the *Principles*, forming a very personal trinity. In drawing the associations of the Trinity, the active manifestation of Godhead, to the higher spiritual part of man, Yeats makes the divine more remote, leaving God His ultimate attributes, which are so absolute as to become almost irrelevant to man. It is not as the "good, unlearned books say that He who keeps the distant stars within His fold comes without intermediary" (Myth 335); God may concern himself with stars, be the essence of creation, but His active attributes are left in the hands of men and their accompanying spirits.

When the *Principles* of the perfected spirit, are freed from the strife of the *tinctures*, and resolve into a triune form, as it enters into the Sphere, "it becomes equal with god".²⁷ In the Sphere it joins the *Daimons*, for the *Daimon*²⁸ "remains always in the Thirteenth Cycle",²⁹ and although "after many cycles man also inhabits the Thirteenth Cycle, and has in a certain way a greater power than hers" (AVA 220-21), until then the *Daimon* is a kind of guardian angel with important powers over his life. But it is an "angel" "which knows neither good nor evil" (AVA 220), for however real they may seem to mortal man, good and evil have no place in the ultimate reality of the Sphere. Our *Daimons* are therefore occasionally revealed to us both in what "we call good *and* evil fortune" (AVA 220; emphasis added); "through their dramatic power they bring our souls to crisis" (Au 272), where the trivial, daily self splinters under the pressure, and the truer antithetical self can be expressed.

²⁷ AS, 26 August 1918, MYV2 104 [YVP2 26].

²⁸ The *Daimon* is referred to as "he" in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (as the supposedly sexless personal pronoun, and also since Yeats was at this period thinking partly of Leo Africanus, whom he supposed to be his *Daimon*); "she" in AVA (since Yeats conceived of it as of opposite sex to its charge); and as "it" in AVB and in most manuscripts. "It" is adhered to in the text for sake of consistency, though at the risk of jarring, since the original pronouns are kept in citations. For considerations of the implications of the *Daimon*'s sex, see Daniel A. Harris's "The 'Figured Page': Dramatic Epistle in Browning and Yeats" YA1 (1982) (133-194), 168-69; and Thomas Parkinson's essay "This Extraordinary Book" in the same volume (195-206). Helen Vendler, in *Yeats's 'Vision' and the Later Plays*, writes of "woman and Daimon" becoming "reciprocal symbols" (36). Vendler's approach in particular is, however, ultimately reductive, and robs the symbol of much of its richness. An almost greater danger is identifying the *Daimon* with the Jungian anima. Although there are parallels, the *Daimon* is a very different entity.

²⁹ "All Daimons are in 13th Cone, but there are also perfected men there from whom they differ in form & colour." Sleep 13 August 1920, cit. CVA nn. 68 [YVP3 32]. The *Daimon* was adopted by the Instructors from *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, and appears more clearly therefore in the 1925 *A Vision*, its role becoming shrouded in ellipsis but remaining of vital importance to Yeats. Already in AVA Yeats had conceived of the *Daimon* as permanently "inhabiting" the *Thirteenth Cycle*, as in the "first alternative" offered on AVA 236; see above p. 163. *The Thirteenth Cycle*, as it appears in AVA in relation to the *Daimon*, is very similar to that of AVB outlined above, though obviously less clearly formulated.

The *Daimon*'s crisis is obviously more often tragic than comic, and like the stage manager of the *Commedia dell'Arte* (viz. AVB 84), it gives the actor the most difficult part he can play without despair, which he then must play as best he can if he is to be true to phase.³⁰ The *Daimon*'s Will is our Mask, while its *Creative Mind* is our *Body of Fate* (and *vice versa*), so that what it is will be our goal, and what it constructs in its mind will be our circumstances. Playing with us and testing us to the limits of our courage, the *Daimon* has some of the qualities of the Lady of courtly love tradition, while all *antithetical* men and women are cast in the role of Knight, and are made questers on the *Daimon*'s behalf.³¹ The *Daimon* "so creates a very personal form of heroism or poetry," by summoning the person to a task which will call forth all their mettle; it is an exacting Muse.

Yet the *Daimon*, though it may be as capricious as the classical [167] Muse is not a detached Heliconian, and is bound to its individual charge, unable to desert him. Its obligation is not that of an angel, upwards to God, but downwards towards man. Even the other, apparently more independent, *Spirits of the Thirteenth Cone* are consigned to a curiously contingent existence:

We must . . . avoid attributing to them the pure benevolence our exhausted
Platonism and Christianity attribute to an angelical being. Our actions, lived in
life, or remembered in death, are the food and drink of the *Spirits of the Thirteenth
Cone*, that which gives them separation and solidity. (AVB 230)

Out of the cycles of death and birth, the *Spirits* still assist those suffering the whirling of the gyres, because they need them. They, unlike the Sphere which they inhabit, are not sufficient to themselves. Living vicariously, almost vampirically, through the experiences of an imperfect spirit, Yeats makes the attainment of their "perfect" state peculiarly unattractive. In a similar strain, he had written of the *Daimon* in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* that it "comes not as like to like but seeking its own opposite, for man and *Daimon* feed the hunger in one another's hearts" (*Myth* 335), implying that the *Daimon* too lacks something, which it can only obtain from man. The language surrounding the interaction of man and the *Spirits* frequently returns to the imagery food, as well

³⁰ In as far as the *Daimon* is not concerned with states but crises, Yeats echoes Aristotle's anatomy of tragedy, in which "eudaimonia" and "kakodaimonia" are said to "consist of action, the end of human life being a mode of action, not a quality".

³¹ In the *primary* phases the *Daimon* is the pursuer, viz. AVA 29.

as the more obvious relationship of love and hate: eternity is not just in love with the productions of time, but battens on them.³² Refusal on the part of the *Spirits of the Thirteenth Cone* to involve themselves in the fury and the mire of human veins, which might be understandable were like drawn to like, results in a spiritual starvation called *Victimage*.

In the state which, during the perpetual rounds of incarnation, is often seen as the most attractive in Yeats's Wheel, that of the Full Moon, the spirits fare little better. Terrified of solitude, they rely for their salvation upon some human being, who can help them to attain their goal of pure subjectivity. By expressing objectively the spirit's inspiration through "an action or a work of art," the incarnate person "sets them free" (AVA 241). Not only do the spirits of the Full Moon require therefore incarnate humankind to rid them of their *primary tincture*, but need in particular the poet or man of action, whom Yeats seems almost to equate with one another. All existence is interdependent in Yeats's system, but becomes almost entirely dependent at Phase 15, and dependent upon a particular kind of person. [168] Those who are beyond created mire, however briefly, become almost more involved in it than those who are incarnate. Yet, through this emphasis, Yeats summons to the aid of the poet or man of action a host of muses.

The inspiration of the Phase 15 spirit springs fully formed into the mind of the incarnate man or woman, and is important, but Yeats necessarily values more the *Daimon's* inspiration which is summoned from the mind itself, for only this can lead to the *antithetical* man's Unity of Being, where "struggling with his fate [his *Daimon's Creative Mind*] and his destiny [his *Daimon's Will*] until every energy of his being has been roused, [he] is content that he should so struggle with no final conquest" (AVA 28). Like Heracles, he overcomes, only to find that his achievement must lead to another trial, as the *Daimon* takes the role of an implacable Hera. The nature of the task, whether in words or paint or stone or deeds, has in itself little real importance for there can be no final conquest, it is the full use of energies that matters.

It is no surprise that Unity of Being is most commonly attained at Yeats's own Phase 17, which he calls the Phase of "The *Daimonic Man*", appropriating this special muse to a very select company. Man needs to be heroic in the face of defeat and eternal return, as Nietzsche had

³² Viz. William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Pl.7. Harper summarises that "When joined to the Daimon, we add emotion to it" (MYV2 262), an idea which recurs in an exchange of 4 May 1919 "What is the food of the daimon"—"All intellect dries - all emotion feeds"(MYV2 274 [YVP2 282]).

pointed out, and this heroism is to be found in the *antithetical* man, at its strongest after the Vision of Evil at the Full Moon.³³ Yeats felt for himself that “[t]he one heroic sanction is that of the last battle of the Norse Gods, of a gay struggle without hope”, and claimed to Sturge Moore that, even before the emergence of his system, he had “[l]ong ago . . . used to puzzle Maud Gonne by always avowing ultimate defeat as a test. Our literary movement would be worthless but for its defeat” (LTSM 154). Artists as well as fighters must meet and face their Ragnarok, in a proud assertion of man’s ultimate impotence in the face of objective God and Nature, which amounts to defiance of their power. The subjective life of mankind must fight against the divine levelling, in which souls are counted rather than weighed.³⁴

In the new dispensation, as in the pre-Christian era, secular life will become the *primary* element and religious life the *antithetical* (AVB 263), as they already appear to those of a strongly enough *antithetical* cast of mind, and heroes and artists will again be regarded as the chosen of the gods, not saints and fools. The final section of AVB therefore asks: “Shall we follow the image of Heracles that walks through the darkness bow in hand, or mount to that other Heracles, man, not image, he that has for his bride Hebe, ‘The daughter of Zeus the mighty and Hera shod with gold?’” (AVB 302). The hero is returned to the realm of the divine, [169] rather than consigned to Hell or Purgatory as he was in the Christian cosmography of Dante, who gave Paradise to the saints of Phase 27. In this paragraph Yeats also, however, implies that the ideal Heracles who lives on Olympus is he who is most fully human, contrasting the Hadean shade with not “god” or “demi-god”, as he could quite legitimately have done, but “*man*”. Heracles is a human god, deified

³³ Yeats’s Vision of Evil involves the realisation of the futility of the striving, but at the same time willingness to persist can lead to Unity of Being, which is why the Vision of Evil comes at Phase 15, where the aphelion of human subjectivity is realised, and from where the spirit can only return towards the undifferentiated objectivity of Phase 1. Many find the Vision of Evil, as offered by Yeats, insufficiently wicked, failing to realise Yeats’s radically unChristian conception of evil, as strife and its eternity.

³⁴ See Yeats’s characterisation of AE’s “religious genius” (L 477). See also his copy of Vol. 3 of *The Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (tr. T. Common, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899) (YL 190; item *1444) where Yeats marked the final section of *The Antichrist*, in which Nietzsche rejects and condemns Christianity: “—The ‘equality of souls before God,’ this falsehood, this *pretence* for the *rancunes* of all the base-minded, the explosive material of a concept which has finally become revolution, modern idea, and *décadence* principle of the whole order of society—is Christian dynamite. . . .” But cf. also *Myth* 347–48.

through his own heroism (which he was forced to, by the *Daimon*-like hatred of the goddess Hera) and the poets' myth-making, his life refined by the fires of the artists' mind.³⁵

The world of the *artifex* transcends that of perceived reality, since in it, and perhaps only in it, can the "Infinite things desired, lofty visions / 'Got on desirous thought by natural virtue" be realised, and established as "Monuments of [the soul's] own magnificence" in "the artifice of eternity" (VP 407). The golden nightingale of Byzantium is a changeless form created in imitation and defiance of the mortal; the poetic imagination can declare, in defiance of reality: "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird", and save it from the hungry or dying generations in a "*monumentum aere perennius*".³⁶ Yet, although not "any natural thing", the form of "changeless metal" imitates the natural bird, and even out of time it must sing of "what is past, or passing, or to come" in time, because the ideal towards which art strives depends upon those living in time for its vigour. The poem "Byzantium" returns to focus on the rich welter of "that dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea", and Yeats is never sure how possible it is to be freed from the *tinctures*' conflict and still maintain the vitality necessary to life and art.

Yeats can even doubt one of the essential elements of all Hermetic thought, the desirability of the soul's final liberation:

There is perhaps no final happy state except in so far as men may gradually grow better; escape may be for individuals alone who know how to exhaust their possible lives, to set, as it were, the hands of the clock racing. Perhaps we shall learn to accept even innumerable lives with happy humility—"I have been always an insect in the roots of the grass"—and, putting aside calculating scruples, be ever ready to wager all upon the dice. (VPI 935)³⁷

Though questioning and qualification dominate this speculation, Yeats seems to write "without terror, in exultation almost" (AVA xiii). He appears unconcerned by the almost Calvinistic

³⁵ It is significant that, even of Olympus's few apotheosised man-gods, Yeats chooses one who is not the god of anything, as was, for instance, Dionysus. Cf. "Rosa Alchemica" where Robartes speaks, in contrast, of the divinities who cannot be made or unmade by man, however much it may seem so, VSR 133.

³⁶ Quotations from Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale", and Horace's *Odes* (III:30).

³⁷ Cf. *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, "Anima Hominis" XI (Myth 340). Cf. also Oscar Wilde's ". . .the artist can accept no sphere of life in exchange for life itself. For him there is no escape from the bondage of earth: there is not even the desire of escape." "The English Renaissance of Art", *Essays and Lectures* ed. R. Ross (London: Methuen, 1909), 117.

separation of an elect of God's athletes, "who know how to exhaust their possible lives", from [170] the rest of humanity which is consigned to preterition on the wheel for ever, where he seems to include himself. The temporary differences between *primary* and *antithetical* incarnations are superseded, and a more essential division perpetuating their antinomy is suggested. Yeats has not only given up his "desire to understand superessential reality," he has also given up the "desire to possess it."³⁸ The apparent lack of reason for the intervention of the *Thirteenth Cone* in AVB can be attributed to this more fundamentally *antithetical* lack of interest in liberation. Yeats is ready to win or forgo his final deliverance from the Wheel according to the fall of a die.

In this context there appear therefore two views of God and liberation, and Yeats starts a second offensive against divinity. God, viewed through the antinomious consciousness of mankind, is a God either of Choice or of Chance. Robartes, who is presented as an actual believer in "Kusta ben Luka" and his doctrines, acknowledges that Chance and Choice unite in the absolute God. As an *antithetical* man, however, he responds to the God of infinite Chance:

when God throws He uses dice that have all numbers and all sides. Some worship His Choice; that is easy; to know that He has willed for some unknown purpose all that happens is pleasant; but I have spent my life in worshipping His Chance, and that moment when I understand the immensity of His Chance is the moment when I am nearest Him. (VPI 790-91)

Only Robartes can frame such ideas in terms of worship, but in the *antithetical* view, which will become the religious orthodoxy of the coming age, for all except the "elect" there appears to be nothing but the gamble upon a capricious grace. In such a universe there is no use in living to please a divine being with right belief and right action. If neither the goal of liberation nor the requirements of morality are to guide man in how he lives, he is left with the dictates of his own heart and mind. It is a bleak and potentially terrifying existence for the *primary*-minded who wish for moral norms and the external guidance of the mass. Yeats, however, loves "the gaming-table of Nature where many are ruined but none is judged, and where all is fortuitous, unforeseen" (Ex 280), and appears to be able to accept the idea of such an amoral universe. Unlike Einstein, Yeats can accept the idea a God who plays dice with the universe, and realises that if this is the

³⁸ Rejected MS draft, cit. AVA nn. 4.

case no purpose will be ultimately discernible. Since there is no purpose or teleology, “Why should I think the victorious cause the better? . . . I [171] am satisfied . . . to find but drama. . . . No battle has been finally won or lost” (VPI 935): although there is an “explanation of it all”,³⁹ there is perhaps no end.

Justice is not to be found in God, but in the infinite longings of the mind of man, or rather of the artist, who is the most human of mankind. A *Vision*’s justice is “the unpersuadable justice” of the ideal conceived in man’s poetic imagination, and is to earthly justice as Beatrice of Dante’s creation is to earthly womankind (VP 369). Dante rather than God is the author of the Rose of Paradise. God may exist, but is either too absolute or too unpredictable to be the basis for a credible morality or religion in the traditional sense. Man rather than God is the stable form, and any system must be founded upon stability. This human foundation is not however “the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast”, but man “reborn as an idea, something intended, complete” (E&I 509), in short as an artist. He must remake himself, and have as his ideal not the Christian ascetic, but the Nietzschean aesthetic, where “we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art—for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*”:⁴⁰ the poetic imagination justifies reality, and gives the truest image of it.

A *Vision* seeks to demonstrate a framework of symbolism that offers such “a vision of reality” (VP 369), in which, through the interaction of the *Faculties* and *Principles*, through the “dramatic power” of the *Daimon*, man is potentially brought to a realisation of the aesthetic value of life and to appreciate its tragic joy. The system does not “affirm or legislate”,⁴¹ and without laws it requires no compliance, nor does it sit in judgment: “there are many symbolisms” and their values are relative. Pascal’s wager is reversed, and Yeats presents a view of the world in which art is not only possible, but one of the only valid responses to the human predicament for a man such as himself. “[A]rt, and not morality, is . . . the truly *metaphysical* activity of man”,⁴² and Yeats has therefore

³⁹ See YA5 (1987) esp. pl.9. and W. Gould’s comment in “‘What is the explanation of it all?’: Yeats’s ‘little poem about nothing’ ” 212–13. See also W. B. Yeats’s *Second Puberty* (a lecture delivered at the Library of Congress on April 2, 1984; Washington: Library of Congress, 1985), where the quatrain is quoted (26).

⁴⁰ *The Birth of Tragedy*, Section 5. *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 52. Viz. YL 189, item *1437.

⁴¹ MYV2 397 [YVP3 32].

⁴² Nietzsche, *Attempt at a Self-Criticism*, Section 5. *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (Kaufmann), 22.

“prepared [his] peace” with, not God, since he has no need to, but “All those things whereof /
Man makes a superhuman / Mirror-resembling dream” (VP 415).