
This is the **published version** of the bachelor thesis:

Moschini Izquierdo, Paula; Coral Escolà, Jordi, dir. "An Image of Mysterious Wisdom" : Hermetic Philosophy and Dual Selfhood in Yeats's Poetic Dialogues. 2018. 44 pag. (801 Grau en Estudis Anglesos)

This version is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/196135>

under the terms of the  license



Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona

**“An Image of Mysterious Wisdom”: Hermetic
Philosophy and Dual Selfhood in Yeats’s Poetic
Dialogues**

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

Author: Paula Moschini Izquierdo

Supervisor: Jordi Coral Escolà

Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística

Grau d’Estudis Anglesos

June 2018

CONTENTS

0. Introduction	1
0.1. Methodology and Analysed Concepts	1
0.2. Yeats and Philosophy: The Self and the Antinomies.....	2
0.3. The Hermetic Dialogue.....	7
0.4. The Aesthetics of Artistic Reinterpretation: The Symbol.....	9
1. Ego Dominus Tuus	10
1.1. The Tower as a Symbol for the Self and “the Image”.....	11
1.2. Unity of Being in Artists.....	14
1.3. A Poem about the Necessity of the Intuitive Wisdom in Poetry	16
2. A Dialogue of Self and Soul	18
2.1. Love and War: The Eternal Antinomy.....	20
2.2. Metempsychosis in W.B. Yeats’s ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul’.....	23
2.3. ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul’: A Poem about “beauty and war and wisdom and decay”	24
3. ‘The Man and Echo’: The Rocky Voice	26
3.1. The Opposition of Destiny and Fate: Towards Discarnate Knowledge.....	28
3.2. The Tragic Element in ‘The Man and the Echo’.....	30
4. Conclusions and Further Research	32
Works Cited.....	34

Acknowledgements

Dedication:

To Παλλάς Αθήνα
To Wisdom.

I would like to express my great debt and gratitude to Professor Neil Mann for the guidance, advice as well as careful comments he offered me. I am really thankful to Dr. Jordi Coral Escolà for his wise advice regarding the scope of my work and thoroughly support. I am also grateful to my colleague and friend Cristina Montes for the moral backing and the tea pastries during the long hours writing and editing my dissertation. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my dear sister Alaia for always being agreeable, patient and compassionate in the most important moments.

Per aspera ad astra

Abstract

One of W.B. Yeats's greatest concerns was the search of wisdom through self-knowledge, something reflected in his philosophical and poetical works. I explore, then, the relevant relation between his philosophical beliefs and later poetry. Yeats used the poetical dialogue to discuss the tensions present within the Self. Parting from the current situation of the study of W.B. Yeats's poetry, I aim to explore the role classical thought along with the influence of *A Vision* have in the search of self-wisdom in Yeats's poetic dialogues. I defend, thus, that W.B. Yeats's search of wisdom was centred in matters of the Self being a clear display of different Greek philosophic concepts such as the partition of the human soul, the antinomies of the Self, death, reincarnation and fate. Lastly, this study inspects 'Ego Dominus Tuus', 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul' and 'The Man and the Echo' to demonstrate the important influence of ancient Greek philosophy to confront the tensions and oppositions of the Self to prove the relation between the poetic dialogue and practices of Hermetic tradition as a manner to attain knowledge of the self.

Keywords: W.B. Yeats, ancient Greek philosophy, poetic dialogue, Hermetic tradition, self-wisdom, Ego Dominus Tuus, A Dialogue of Self and Soul, The Man and the Echo, *A Vision*.

0. Introduction

0.1. Methodology and Analysed Concepts

For many years, certain areas of W.B. Yeats's work had been dismissed as inopportune or even embarrassing. Many of this was related to the evidence that Yeats was never a follower of the orthodox Victorian Christian thought, since his interest in alternative manners to achieve wisdom involving Hermeticism has been proved. Yeats's interest in occult schools has recently become central in the academic study of W.B. Yeats's poetical works. What my writing attempts to offer is a deep insight into a poetical form that Yeats used to attain self-knowledge. To do so, I will use ancient Greek philosophy as well as Hermetic beliefs to further explore the relation between philosophy and W.B. Yeats's poetry. During his life, Yeats produced a philosophical treatise, *A Vision*, that has just recently been analysed by a group of academics. Hence, the subsequent academic work parting from *A Vision*'s deciphering is not only relevant but has proven to be key to complete the philosophical insight of his poetical vision. I aim to explore the role Hermetic thought along with the influence of Greek philosophy have in the search of self-wisdom in Yeats's poetry. To prove this, I will inspect three poetic dialogues: 'Ego Dominus Tuus', 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul' and 'The Man and the Echo'.

Firstly, I will briefly analyse Yeats in terms of literary influence to understand the particularities of his interests, poetic themes and imagery to state what motivated his self-knowledge search. Secondly, through the analysis of three different poetic dialogues, a several number of philosophical principles will be explained to suggest how they shaped central concepts in W.B. Yeats's poetry concerning the human soul. For this purpose, I will refer to various ancient Greek philosophers' texts that proved to be essential in

Yeats's philosophical studies, being complemented with various elements of the system of *A Vision*. Finally, I will prove that the self-knowledge theories inherent in Greek philosophy, their influence present in the theories of *A Vision*, are intermingled to produce a philosophical discourse in the three poetic dialogues to be interpreted. To understand the fascinating complexity of W.B. Yeats's poetry, we will first examine different notions that will be disclosed in this work.

0.2. Yeats and Philosophy: The Self and the Antinomies

The discussion around W.B. Yeats as a poet born between late Romanticism and Modernism has positioned him as “the last romantic” or “the first modernist” (Vendler 2006: 79). Of course, as a Romantic he believed in a “subjective wisdom” (O'Brien 1968: 12) that was manifested in the use of traditional forms but he was also a Modernist in infusing them with refreshed originality. Yeats's position between two manners of perceiving poetry was the core of his fascination on amalgamating the new with the ancient, the known with the unknown. In this dissertation I will try to prove that his poetical dialogues are also, formally as well as conceptually, an example of this.

Yeats used philosophy “to find a unifying basis for his poetic self” (Mann 2002: 17), where this basis was to be encountered in *A Vision*'s two versions. *A Vision* is a proof that Yeats's poetry and philosophy informed one another, influenced one another to interpret reality. Even though the concepts of *A Vision* are rarely openly stated in his poetical creation, some of the original philosophical tenets that inspired Yeats are central to the analysis of his late poetical dialogues. Reading philosophy became essential to create profound artistic interpretations or debate spiritual questions in Yeats's poetical works; he also linked the notion of revelation to the Self:

I know now that revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb, that teaches the birds to make their nets; and that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind (Yeats 1980: 272).

Accordingly, this search of wisdom is one of Yeats's most representative themes in his poetry. The discussion around it is represented in his *Autobiographies* (Yeats 1980) where he identifies, as the ancient Greeks proposed, that knowing yourself¹ was one of the highest manners of wisdom. Indeed, Yeats did not aspire to control his own destiny or change exterior reality yet he understood that poetry intermingled with philosophy could change the nature of the Self in an ultimate state of self-wisdom.

To achieve knowledge of the self, Yeats studied meditation with MacGregor Mathers learning that the exterior oppositions of the macrocosm found in Heraclitus of Ephesus and Empedocles (Burnet 1908: 158-9)² correspondingly found its contraposition in the microcosm of the Self. Using the Pre-Socratic tradition, he elaborated the theory of the antinomies in which “[t]he tension maintained by the antinomies is essential to life and to Yeats's art, which dramatizes the tensions (...) and “conceives of the world as a continual conflict”” (Yeats 2008 cited in Mann 2012: 17).

The conflictual element in Yeats's poetry has already been analysed by many but what has been neglected is the manner Yeats dialogues with ancient ideas in order to propose sometimes slightly different points of view or, in some cases, absorbing its significance into his poetry and thus treating it in a more aesthetic way. The constant dialogue with ancient philosophy is particularly strong in his late creation as I aim to

¹ Knowing yourself – in Greek γνῶθι σεαυτόν (*gnóthi seautón*).

² Yeats used Burnet's philosophy volume to elaborate many of the concepts of the opposites within the Self in *A Vision*.

prove, revealing an intense interest in using poetry to conciliate the tensions central in the Pre-Socratic conception of life.



Figure 1. D.E.D.I.³

Truly, to understand Yeats's poetical dialogues is necessary to turn our attention to the notion of the opposites mentioned in his philosophical treatise: *A Vision*. Yeats states that the soul, the Self, is made of a series of antinomies. Furthermore, by maintaining that the world is in constant opposition, "he preserves [the] Platonic opposition in his duality, though expanding it by association to include, the objective and the subjective, Love and Strife or Concord and Discord, the Solar and the Lunar, and asserts the constant conflict of the two opposites" (Mann 2002: 70).

Therefore, for Yeats life's value was the constant strife inside the Self, the battle of oppositions that can move the soul to a change of state. These antinomies that we

³ D.E.D.I. (*Demon est Deus Inversus*), Yeats' alias in the Golden Dawn, often misinterpreted as being demonic but it is related to the maxim of the Hermetic thought: "For the good daemon are called the gods, immortal men, and men mortal gods" (*Corpus Hermeticum*: 88).

perceive while being alive are represented primarily by the two modes of the Self in Yeatsian philosophy, the primary and the antithetical: “The fundamental idea of the primary is unification while that of the antithetical is separation, so that primary forces bring things to unity, sameness, and concord, whereas antithetical forces bring things to individual identity, differentiation, and discord” (Mann 2002). Life in Yeatsian thought is primarily antithetical; our conscience is separated from God while we are alive.

Additionally, much of Yeats’s poetry is marked with a Hermetic sense of fate understood as “[an] analogy between the macrocosmic world of the heavens and nature, with the human as a microcosm, parallel in composition with respect to body, soul and spirit” (Elgersma 2010: 134) – a tenet that creates the imperious need to solve the antinomies to attain conciliation in front of a deeply conflicted reality. The antinomies are reflected throughout Yeats’s poetry projecting as well a double image in the rhetoric of his poetry:

The figure might also need to be double, to give the sense that oppositions or antitheses define Yeats more faithfully than single positions. The power of Yeats’s poetry resides to a large degree in its willingness to make visible its internal struggles and vacillations, between such poles as self-delighting art and political conflict, (...) love and hatred, faith and doubt, natural and supernatural, the interior self and the dramatized mask, detachment and desire. The one always engages with the other, like partners in a dance (Mills Harper 2006: 145).

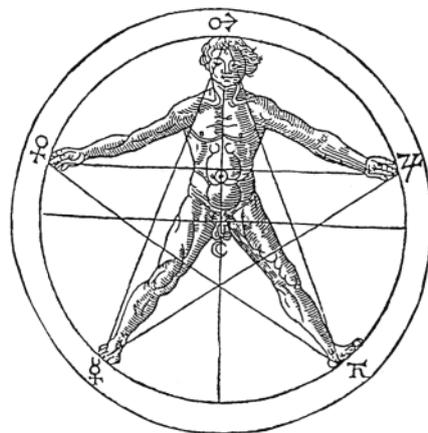


Figure 2. ‘Of the Proportion, Measure and Harmony of Man’s Body’

For Yeats, solving the antinomies and exploring the inner oppositions of the soul was central to attain a certain type of self-wisdom he called Unity of Being:

In “A General Introduction to My Work” (1937), he writes of his beliefs: “I was born into this faith, have lived in it, and shall die in it; my Christ (. . .) is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, Blake’s ‘Imagination,’ what the Upanishads have named ‘Self’ (Yeats 1937 cited in Armstrong 2012: 120).

Unity within the Self was a permanent struggle in a conception of the world that related external antinomy to internal opposition. Closely linked to the previous idea is the Unity of Being seen as central in his struggle for a style “connected with fostering his self-belief and his confidence that, as a poet, he had something to say that was both new and yet part of tradition, that was the expression of himself yet had universal interest and appeal” (Mann 2002: 18).

As it can be expected, the manner chosen to arrive at this type of self-knowledge was through poetry, which links him to the Romantic tradition that saw the poet as a sage, who was believed to attain superior knowledge through artistic revelation. The quest for this unity requires an effort to reconcile opposites creating poetical tension. Actually, it is no coincidence that he thought that poetry was the only way for him to attain Unity of Being because he considered himself an antithetical man only capable of creation subdued to subjectivity.

Hence, Yeats’s notion of unity combines his antinomic conception of the macrocosm against the microcosm with the aesthetic of the subjective wisdom. The artist, by reflecting in their work these tensions, is capable of a profound comprehension of human nature. Yeats perceives the Self as an open battlefield in which the genuine contemplative man finds his bravery⁴.

⁴ “Why should we honour those that die in upon the field of battle? A man may show as reckless a courage in entering into the abyss of himself” (Yeats 1975: 78).

0.3. The Hermetic Dialogue

As stated before, in Yeats's intellectually turbulent times, industrialisation together with hyper-rationalism favoured a contrary response within his generation, producing a renovated interest in alternative beliefs and ancient philosophies fitted to a modern shape. It is well known Yeats's involvement with various spiritual creeds such as Blavatsky's Theosophy or MacGregor Mathers's Golden Dawn (Howe 1984: 51), which used reinterpretations of ancient western philosophical tradition. Since a very young age, Yeats tended to be open to all types of spiritual explanations; in his *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* he explains how he decided to devote his intellectual dotes to become "a sage, a magician or a poet" (Yeats 1980: 64). However, as innocent this declaration may sound, he lately proved to become such, devoting himself as he vigorously declared his commitment to the study of perennial philosophies that later granted him to be the Golden Dawn's expert on mystical philosophy (Howe 1984: 228).

After many years of study, he wrote his two philosophical volumes of *A Vision* which were profoundly influenced by his reading of Hermeticism, Pre-Socratic philosophy and Neoplatonism. In *A Vision* he conceives a cosmic explanation of reality centred on the Self. Besides, it is also remarkable that he firstly conceived *A Vision* as a dialogue in the manner of Hermetic and Platonic tradition (Mills Harper 2006: 160).

Ancient Greek traditions had something in common: the conception of wisdom as being sacred, spiritual and the notion of the soul as central to attain such view: "the virtue of the soul is knowledge" (*Corpus Hermeticum*: 110). The *Corpus Hermeticum* that Yeats cites in *A Vision* (1937) is a symposium of Pre-Socratic philosophy and Neo-Platonic philosophy (Kingsley 2000). In Hermetic tradition the speech is used "to reach unto the truth" (*Corpus Hermeticum*: 35), thence dialectic is – as in Neoplatonism – crucial to attain knowledge within the Self:

Thus, although he embraced the dualism and much of the idealism of Plato and Plotinus, he tempered it with the stress on temporal flux and conflict found in the pre-Socratics (...). Yeats's ancient philosophical sources provided the basis for an invigorating reframing of the concerns endemic to *A Vision* (Gibson 2012: 100).

Yeats also used art to understand himself. Therefore, he intermingled poetical forms with the “jump to awareness” present in the Hermetic dialogue (Kingsley 2000). Furthermore, Hermetic texts contained a practical purpose to influence “not just the mind and intellect but (...) one's whole life and being” (Kingsley 2000: 33), a discourse that Yeats encountered to be what he needed in his spiritual-philosophical enterprise.

Most of Yeats's poetical dialogues are centred on the discussion of the Self in philosophical terms using the Hermetic dialogue-action⁵ framework. Moreover, Platonic and Neoplatonic concepts related to the Soul are discussed. Within these, we can find works of art as a representation of incarnate life articulating the limitations of human existence or the discrepancies between ideal and worldly reality.

Admittedly, Yeats does not use the discourse in the purist Platonic way. Yeats's poetic dialogue does not consist of a master teaching the truth to his student but he rather dramatizes the tensions of the soul by giving voice to its different parts. The notion of the Self as having “low” and high” parts can be found in Platonic tradition⁶ as in Plotinus. Yeats, thus, applies this philosophical theory in a new manner, reinterpreting its uses: “The open-ended form of the Platonic dialogue plays a significant role in Yeats's later poetic output, finding a modern analogue in the dialogue between Owen Aherne and Michael Robartes that appears at the beginning of *A Vision*” (Gibson 2012: 98). We can conclude, then, that it is impossible to fully understand Yeats's poetry without taking into

⁵ Term that will be used to designate the practice of Hermetic tradition, which compels the Self to use dialogue as an action to transform the Self.

⁶ Plato's tripartite theory of the soul.

consideration the philosophical doctrines that he combined with the poetical strength of the symbol.

0.4. The Aesthetics of Artistic Reinterpretation: The Symbol

The dialectics presented in the analysed poems deal with the nature of poetry and art. Yeats understands them to be intimately coalesced to life, therefore one cannot be understood without the other. As we can observe, it is a Romantic manner of seeing the poet's identity, which cannot be conceived apart from his context, intellectual beliefs or spirituality. Therefore, Yeats will proceed in a similar way with his application of the poetical symbol.

In his *Essays and Introductions* (1980), while talking about the usage of symbols in Burns's and Blake's poetry, he discusses how the employment of opposing symbols end up dissolving into one another, creating one emotion. In the same work, Yeats relates his use of symbols to meditative power stating that "[t]he soul moves among symbols and unfolds in symbols when trance, madness, or deep meditation has withdrawn it from every impulse but its own" (Yeats 1980: 162). For Yeats the symbol was an emanation from the subjective intellect, the intuitive reasoning, capable to achieve in poetry a sensation of concord and thus unity. The symbol will serve in Yeats's poetical creation as a tool to create unity within the poem and as a result in the poet's mind:

Artistic tension results from a structural process that parallels the movement of the poet's mind when in meditation (...). [W]hen the process is transferred to the poem, symbols flow one into the other to the point of fusion, whereby the poem, held in tension by recurrent symbols, is seen briefly as one image (Jewett 1978: 5-6).

Subsequently, for Yeats achieving concord with the All/Many through art would be a contradiction. The poet uses intuitive intellect – following a Romantic perception of the artist –, whose aim is self-knowledge and not the unattainable perfect wisdom of the One. Finally, the symbol will become a tenet born from intense meditation to encode and

decode different philosophical concepts. The Yeatsian symbol fulfils a double function, one is to find profound correspondences within the Self and the other is to find its correspondence “following Hermetic teaching (...) between the word and the ideal” (James 2010: 198).

Yeats admitted choosing ancient Greek philosophy, which suited better the ““metaphors for poetry” he needed” (Yeats 1962 cited in Armstrong 2012: 93). Nevertheless, rather than just using Greek philosophical theories he interpreted them, implementing some of their essence to the concepts of *A Vision*: “Yeats’s system (...) follows the long sinuous road of Hermetic tradition and re-asserts some of its fundamental tenets” (Müller 2013: 142).

The antinomic world of the Soul that Yeats conceives is represented in the use of partition inside the self to dramatize conflictual elements in his poetic dialogues. To be more precise, Yeats represents his own philosophical convictions in his poetry using them in the Hermetic manner of the dialogue-action to accomplish what he referred as Unity of Being. These questions will be explored in detail while we unfold the interpretation of the following poetic dialogues.

1. Ego Dominus Tuus

Among Yeats’s numerous poetic dialogues, it can be agreed that ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’⁷ is without a doubt one of the most remarkable ones, both in terms of composition and conceptual terms. It is considered one of the first dialogues to explore the Self in antithetical⁸ terms as well as being the first to “dramatize self-division” (Gould 2013: 38).

⁷ Originally called ‘The Self & the AntiSelf’ (dated ‘Dec 5. 1915’).

⁸ Antithetical: All that it is related to the sublunary world, the subjective and the creative.

Correspondingly, this can be said to be the first poetic dialogue whose modern notions of self-division are approached besides the beginning of the Anti-Self theory. The poem opens presenting the two protagonists that have been successfully identified as being:

Ille, the subjective voice, and *Hic*, the objective voice, [who] present their opposing plans for man's development. *Hic*, as objective voice, merely passes on the commonplaces of the era – the objective side of man fulfils itself in the external activities of life. *Ille*, however, modifies the long subjective tradition of occultists to revitalize dormant imaginative energies (O'Brian 1968: 11).

We are presented with the dramatization of two parts of the Self: the primary⁹ *Hic*, the objective perspective (the apollonian), opposed to the antithetical, the subjective or Dionysian *Ille*. Of course, Yeats is not the first one to dramatize human contradictions in terms of subjectivity against objectivity, but in his poem he argues that they are the core of creative power rather than being just an infructuous debate.

The poem's central theme seems to be the perception of art related with the Self explored through dialectics. Yeats uses the dialogue to confront two viewpoints within the Self in remembrance of the Platonic dialogue adding, though, a symbolic personal touch that will be key to understand its meaning.

1.1. The Tower as a Symbol for the Self and “the Image”

As mentioned before, Yeats believed in the power of dialectics “to influence events or one's own mind” by drawing “attention of that dark portion, to turn it, as it were, into a new direction” (Yeats 1980: 172). This is what possibly explores, among many other questions, ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’.

The final purpose of the poetical dialogue – in Yeatsian terms – is the war against the Self. To put it succinctly, Yeats believed – as Heraclitus did – that Discord or War

⁹ Primary: Subjected to the All, Supralunary, the objective and the intellectual.

were “God of all and Father to all, some it has made gods and some men, some bond and some free” (Heraclitus 1908 cited in Yeats 2015: 49).

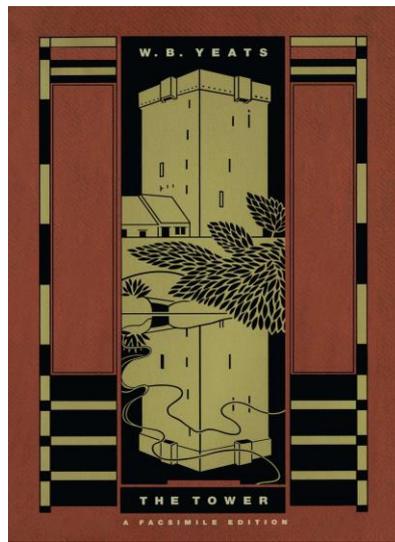


Figure 3. Cover of W.B. Yeats's *The Tower*; a Facsimile Edition

The poem opens by framing symbolically the dialogue that follows, in the vicinities of an “old wind-beaten tower” (l.2). The inclusion of Thoor Ballylee is the beginning of its use as a central poetical image. Yeats himself stated that his purchase was perhaps influenced by Samuel Palmer’s ‘The Lonely Tower’ (Gould 2013: 40-1) where the archetype of the sage living in a “lonely tower” studying Hermeticism and Platonic texts is described. Therefore, for Yeats the tower represents the Self, an entity just as the building linked to the terrene – the corporeal Self – but aspiring to the divine – the daimonic Self.

We soon discover that the enigmatic verse “By the help of an image” (l.8) arises the question of the image, which is also key in the poem. The image in Yeats’s philosophical thought, contrary to the Platonic significance, is “a myth, a woman, a landscape, or anything whatsoever that is an external expression of the Mask” (Yeats 2015: 107).

The image is also “the contrary of truth” (Olney 1980: 58-62), hence it is an expressed desire. Interestingly, Yeats links the “image” of desire to a sense of completion.

To understand why this is related to the Anti-Self we need to look at his description of oppositions where “there is an enforced attraction between Opposites” (Yeats 2015: 69). Opposites were seen to be interdependent, thus the image serves to illustrate necessity for opposite to conciliate what is desired – what is not present or tangible – with the present Self.

The function of the image – which Yeats also called Mask – is explained in *A Vision*: “All unity is from the *Mask*, and the antithetical Mask is described as a form created by passion to unite ourselves, the self so sought is that Unity of Being compared by Dante in the *Convito* to that of “a perfectly proportioned body”” (Yeats 2015: 61). Thence, by searching the external embodiment of the Mask – our opposite – we complete ourselves.

The invocation of the Anti-Self in “I call to my own opposite, summon all/ That I have handled least, least looked upon” (1.9-10) is probably an open theurgic reference following the Hermetic tradition, where words are action linked by a process of sympathy – words being the embodiment of action. In Yeats’s poetic world, words as speech acts were also a making of some kind: “Everything that wills can be desired, resisted or accepted, every creative act can be seen as fact (...)” (Yeats 2015: 54).

Furthermore, Yeats’s search to symbolically as well as dialectically represent the counterpart of his inner impulses is reflected by his conviction that not only the reformation of the Self is possible through the search of opposition but that good poetry also needs this impulse to accomplish genuine unity: “And as I look backward upon my own writing, I take pleasure alone in those verses where it seems to me I have found something hard and cold, some articulation of the Image which is the opposite of all that I am in my daily life” (Yeats 1980: 274).

1.2. Unity of Being in Artists

Hic begins the next stanza by introducing the debate around Unity of Being in Dante's and Keats's poetry. Dante's mention as a complete artist may appear opaque if we ignore that Yeats is using him to point out that Unity of Being is possible after resolving the internal oppositions of the Self through art.

The stanza firstly mentions Dante Alighieri as "the chief imagination of Christendom" (l.20) and even *Hic* in his objective, rational and disenchanted point of view must admit that Dante "utterly found himself" (l.21), something which demonstrates that the poem is centred on the importance of knowledge of the self. *Hic* ends up declaring that Dante:

[M]ade that hollow face of his
More plain to the mind's eye than any face
But that of Christ (l.22-4).

This visibly means that he attained immortality through the creation of his art. Followingly, *Ille* protests that it was not only by contemplation that he achieved his unity:

And did he find himself
Or was the hunger that had made it hollow
A hunger for the apple on the bough
Most out of reach? (l.25-8).

Again, desire or passion are pointed out as the beginning of opposition: "I think he fashioned from his opposite/ An image that might have been a stony face" (l.30-1). Yeats comments that Dante's character was "lecherous" (l.36), a detail that drove him to find the contrary of the pleasures of the flesh:

Derided and deriding, driven out
To climb that stair and eat that bitter bread,
He found the unpersuadable justice, he found
The most exalted lady loved by a man (l.37-40).

Hence, driven by the desire for his opposite he finds concord of Unity of Being in art. Yeats argues that the knowledge of the Self is intrinsically linked to recognising the desire

of opposition and mastering it. Artists are created by the clash between their natural inclinations and attraction to the opposite but also, as we can see in the eighth stanza, the discord against the external fate.

For instance, when *Hic* signals that Keats's "love of the world" was not in contraposition with his agreeable character, *Ille* points out that the source of contradiction in Keats's poetry comes from the contrast between his art and his life:

I see a schoolboy when I think of him,
With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window,
For certainly he sank into his grave
His senses and his heart unsatisfied,
And made—being poor, ailing and ignorant,
Shut out from all the luxury of the world,
The coarse-bred son of a livery—stable keeper—
Luxuriant song (l.60-7).

What precisely created his "luxuriant song" was the discordance between man's harsh destiny and his creation. The recognition of the unlikeness of both creates a profound understanding, a moment of revelation necessary for the Unity of Being that Yeats called the Vision of Evil:

The individual must realise that the goal will always remain unattainable and that it is not the expression of self, but of anti-self; to a lesser extent, each Critical Moment involves a form of the Vision of Evil, Yeats's particular requirement (...) that a person must be able to "conceive of the world as a continual conflict" (Mann 2002: 199).

Unity of Being is not a state that prolongs over the artists' life, that is why it is only found in a permanent manner if the artist is able to portray it in his art. It is stated in *A Vision* that what makes the Genius is the oppositeness of subjectivity against objectivity through the predominance of aesthetics and a cold exposition of sensuality; which is perhaps why Keats, Shelley and Dante are mentioned as poets that have achieved the Genius. In conclusion, Yeats regards the conflict of objectivity and subjectivity presented in the dialogue as beneficial because it represents internal conflictual forces necessary for creation, ergo, unity of self.

While the recognition of contradictions within the Self is necessary to the knowledge of the self, the recognition of otherness is key to creation. In ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’, Yeats uses the Anti-Self “as a projection of the unconscious mind; as such it is comprised of qualities which are opposite, in nature, to those of the personality, or conscious mind. (...) *Ille* summons a personality who is both his opposite and the sum of his (...) yet un-lived potentialities” (Hirschberg 1975: 129).

The theory of the Anti-Self is an auto-exploration exercise that recognises the limitations of the Self and searches the opposite within to achieve some type of “constructive power in man’s fate” (Yeats 2008: 25):

The human needs to summon its own opposite in order to complement those aspects which it most lacks, and through this it can approximate more fully to the total humanity necessary for a living art. Individual artist should not seek to express the limits of their own person but to transcend them through an identification with what is alien (Mann 2002: 100).

Subjective creation is closely connected to the ancient Greek self-analysis need to free the mind: “[T]he Socratic maxim, that an unexamined life is not worth living” (Plato cited in Mann 2002: 198).

1.3. A Poem about the Necessity of the Intuitive Wisdom in Poetry

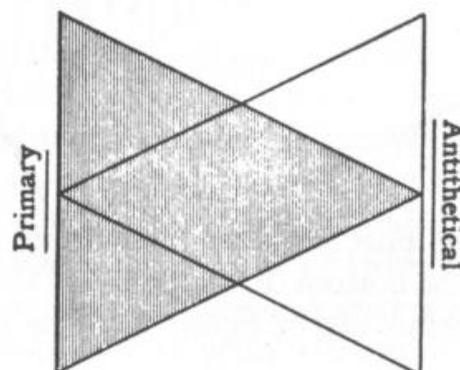


Figure 4. Representation of the two tinctures present in *A Vision*.

At the beginning of the poem, *Hic* describes how *Ille* has left an open book next to a lamp to walk by a shallow stream tracing “magical shapes” (1.7). *Ille*’s unorthodox searching

method by dialogue-action and reasoning about the Unity of Being is mocked by the rational *Hic* and he asks:

Why should you leave the lamp
Burning alone beside an open book,
and trace these characters upon the sands? (l.68-70).

The use of the lamp and the book seem to be a symbol for the rational enlightened manner of understanding knowledge: “A style is found by sedentary toil/ And by the imitation of great masters” (l. 71-2). With this phrase, *Hic* also seems to be talking about movements that worked by imitation of “the great masters”, intellectually based in rationalism such as the Neoclassic movement. In contrast, *Ille*’s search of wisdom is done by intuitiveness, dialectic and creativity – a detail that reminds us to the Romantic rejection of deductive thought processes. At the end of the poem, *Ille* answers *Hic* winning the internal debate:

Because I seek an image, not a book.
Those men that in their writings are most wise
Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts.
I call to the mysterious one who yet
Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
And look most like me, being indeed my double,
And prove of all imaginable things (l.73-9).

Clearly, this works as an exaltation of the Anti-Self. The poem ends at the same space but the conjuring of the opposite seems to become almost embodied in the poet with these suggestive lines:

And standing by these characters disclose
All that I seek; and whisper it as though
He were afraid the birds, who cry aloud
Their momentary cries before it is dawn,
Would carry it away to blasphemous men (l.81-5).

Yeats decides to gratify the subjective position with victory. Visibly, we are witnessing his “antithetical position” appraisal as common in his poetry. Thus, the artistic desire of unity within the self is valued above all.

The struggling of self-division presents two poles in the human intellect: Subjectivity (antithetical impulse) and objectivity (primary impulse) attempting to find

unity within the self. Finally, antithetical wisdom is reaffirmed as the only way for artists to achieve the Genius and Unity of Being.

2. A Dialogue of Self and Soul

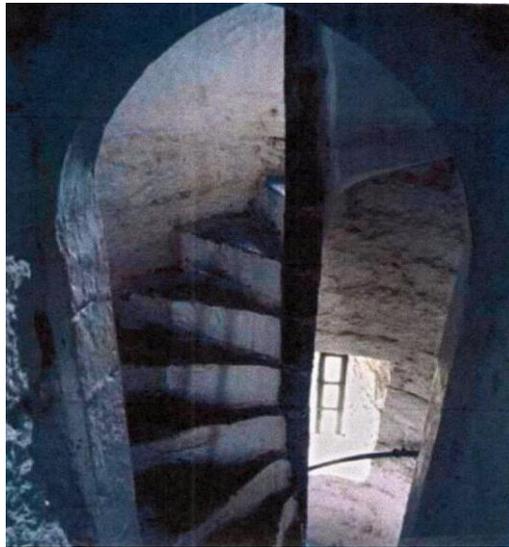


Figure 5. Thoor Ballyle's winding stair.

'A Dialogue of Self and Soul' (July–Dec. 1927) was written before Yeats had survived an illness that almost cost his life (Foster 2003: 353), a factor that is profoundly reflected in this dialogue. Once more, as in 'Ego Dominus Tuus', the dialogue initiates with an invocation:

My Soul. I summon to the winding ancient stair;
Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
Upon the breathless starlit air,
Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;
Fix every wandering thought upon
That quarter where all thought is done:
Who can distinguish darkness from the soul? (l.1-8).

Essentially, we encounter the first symbol, the winding stair, which mirrors the gyres that abounded in both editions of *A Vision*. The gyres symbolise the cyclical movement of the soul, an ascendant movement that goes from incarnate to discarnate state and descendant when it is imprisoned in flesh. The dialogue is performed by two different parts of the

Self, in this case the Soul, which can be read as the solar part associated with the perfection of the discarnate state; and the Self, which is the lunar, the lower Self of the world of the senses connected with incarnate life.

Yeats always identified in his imagery the “cold” and the “night” as symbols of the discarnate experience, therefore the union with the primary. The first verse conveys the philosophical position and the metaphors of the solar principle, which are declared with “the steep ascent” (1.2) and the noteworthy triple use of “upon”. In “Upon the broken, crumbling battlement” (1.3) the Soul ascends over Thoor Ballylee, the broken body, to “the breathless starlit air” (1.4) to arrive to the Fixed Stars at the next verse. This is supported with the next verse when the Soul reaches the point where he is undistinguishable from the All: “Who can distinguish darkness from the soul?” (1.8).

Knowing that the dialogue is between two parts of the soul, it is reasonable to ascribe to each of them two different types of wisdom that the author understands as “knowledge of self in relation to the ideal” and “knowledge of self in relation to God” (Yeats 1992 cited in Dampier 2012: 81). Therefore, the Soul (or in *A Vision*’s terms the Spirit¹⁰) proposes unity with God/Many whereas the Self centres on the analysis of the incarnate oppositions already analysed in ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’: Self-knowledge. The ultimate knowledge is only envisioned when the soul is in discarnate states, when we finally unite with the Many:

What “the spirits know throughout their being” is embodiment rather than separated knowledge since it permeates their being; it can be communicated, but can never properly be understood by us, because it is only “after our death” that we may “share in the experience” (AV A 252), and when he writes that “wisdom is the property of the dead” (Yeats 1925 cited in Mann 2002: 48).

¹⁰ “Spirit is almost abstract mind or Coleridge’s ‘reason’, the active perception of the Divine Ideas”. In traditional symbolism the Sun is usually identified with the spirit or self and the Moon with the soul or psyche” (Yeats 1962 cited in Mann 2002: 96).

This explains the mysterious verses of “Only the dead can be forgiven;/ But when I think of that my tongue’s a stone” (l.39-40). Seemingly, only the dead are purged from all antinomies once they have found unity with God, losing all subjectivity and therefore the living poet cannot state what is “property of the dead”.

Whereas the Soul expresses retreat from the incarnate life – aspiring to spiritual realisation –, the Self focuses on earthly experience with the aesthetics of the opposites. This aesthetics will be exposed using, as it is customary in Yeatsian poetry, a set of complex symbols.

2.1. Love and War: The Eternal Antinomy

After the first introductory stanza articulated by the Soul, the first statement made by the lower part of the Self arrives, the present incarnate part that talks about a sword.

The use of this symbol is inspired by a famous encountering:

A rather wonderful thing happened (...). A very distinguished looking Japanese came to see us. He had read my poetry when in Japan & had now just heard me lecture. He had something in his hand wrapped up in embroidered silk. He said it was a present for me. He untied the silk cord that bound it & brought out a sword which had been for 500 years in his family”. His benefactor was Junzo Sato (...). The sword must have appeared to WBY as both a sign and a symbol (Yeats 1920 cited in Foster 2003: 167).

Allegorical interpretation of symbols is an asset present in both Platonic tradition and Hermeticism. In the case of the sword he used a real one from which he creates a metaphorical, symbolic sword. This weapon “unspotted by the centuries” (l.12) is a material symbol that evokes the real appearance of the ideal. Logically, the work of allegorical symbolism follows the Hermetic tradition of hiding the truth of philosophical mysteries in unanimated objects. The image, again, is always double:

[T]he symbol “embod[ies] a dynamic relationship between external form and intrinsic meaning. They at once express the dialectic of opposites and they are that dialectic. The extremes of the apparent and the real suggest the series of dichotomies of the Platonic-Hermetic dualism (...). They embody the essence of whatever they represent (...). [Their] truth (...) is a dialectical link between external form and essential form (Masters 1969: 18).

Moreover, the sword is not the only symbol that is used in a Hermetic manner; as we already mentioned, the winding stair is another double symbol: “The inner spiral staircase is, of course, part of a unified structure, [which] suggests that the poetic as well as architectural tower and winding stair are ultimately complementary rather than antithetical” (Keane 2015).

As stated before, Yeats’s poetry is full of tensions gained through the repetition of symbols. Yet, he goes beyond juxtaposing contrary symbols and creates unity within them until they are inextricable from one another. The central symbolic tension present in the poem also exemplifies his philosophical perception of reality as we shall disclose in the next section. After describing the symbol of the sword, the Self continues interlacing it with:

That flowering, silken, old embroidery, torn
From some court-lady’s dress and round
The wooden scabbard bound and wound,
Can, tattered, still protect, faded adorn (l. 13-6).

The Soul, then, scorns the fixation of the antithetical incarnate state on the apparent exterior oppositions that do not exist in sameness of the All, which is why it responds with:

My Soul. Why should the imagination of a man
Long past his prime remember things that are
Emblematical of love and war?
Think of the ancestral night that can,
If but imagination scorn the earth
And intellect its wandering
To this and that t’other thing,
Deliver from the crime of death and birth (l.17-24).

The Soul, always looking beyond the constrict of the body, is talking about breaking the wheel of reincarnation to finally obtain unity with the One, God. Despite this, it is interesting to analyse the relation of “crime” in the continuous wheel of incarnate states to the conception of life that Yeats followed in Empedocles and included in *A Vision*.

“Yeats’s two antinomies upon which the whole system is founded: Love (primary) and War (antithetical) are two forces that separate and unite” (Müller 2013: 144). Love unites the elements and Strife separates them, thence they interact together to shape the world (Graham 2006: 160). This symmetric Empedocles’s cosmivision is clearly the inspiration of *A Vision*’s base; these two concepts are personified in the embroidery as an emblem of Love and the sword as an emblem of War. Followingly, in incarnate states we are in opposition, in war or separation by the force of Strife. Death is the union with the All due to the force of unifying Love. Throughout the dialogue the position defended by *the Self* asserts the mechanics of oppositions that made reality “bound and wound” (l.15) to both Love and War.

Empedocles also mentions that Strife and Love are to exist always; in this case, that would explain why they are seen by Yeats as the forces that separate and unite. Yeats cites in *A Vision* that “[a]s it is, the system constantly compels us to consider beauty an accompaniment of war, and wisdom of decay” (Yeats 2008: 113).

Yeats will turn himself repeatedly to the war within the Self to perfectionate the only attainable wisdom during life, rejecting the unifying principle of the primary: “Love (...) fails for it enslaves men and does not make them greater than they are; whereas war understood as war against oneself, interiorized war, is the liberating as well as the aggrandizing principle” (Müller 145). The symbol of Love and War completes itself with these verses:

My Self. Montashigi, third of his family, fashioned it
Five hundred years ago, about it lie
Flowers from I know not what embroidery—
Heart’s purple—and all these I set
For emblems of the day against the tower
Emblematical of the night,
And claim as by a soldier’s right
A charter to commit the crime once more (l.25-31).

The symbols of the embroidered flowers are symbols of the flesh, “emblems of the day” against the tower that progressively becomes more and more primary as a symbol.

2.2. Metempsychosis in W.B. Yeats’s ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul’

The final part of ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul’ appears to be a soliloquy of the Self choosing, once again, the world of the senses and reincarnation over the extinction and night favoured by the Soul. The Self, then, refuses unity with God and prefers to continue the search of Unity of Being, more appropriate for the subjective man.

Certainly, this can be proved with the following verses: “A living man is blind and drinks his drop./ What matter if the ditches are impure?” (1.41-2). Incarnate state always contemplates blindness of some kind, it is impossible to obtain more knowledge than the one acquired by experience: “What matters if I live it all once more?” (1.43). The Self begins to contemplate in meditation what exactly incarnate life is: To endure that “toil of growing up” (1.44), the “ignominy of boyhood/ distress” (1.45) of “changing into a man” (1.46), to the “pain” of the “unfinished man” (1.47) who has to confront “his own clumsiness” (1.48); then “[t]he finished man among his enemies” (1.49) ends in a “wintry blast” (1.56). Yeats seems to follow in his reasoning many of the metempsychosis concepts present in Greek thought¹¹:

[T]he possibility of reincarnation “presents to us the idea of a long succession of lives on earth for the individual, each of them as if it were a day in the school of experience, teaching him new lessons through which he develops the capacities latent in human nature, grows in wisdom, and eventually reaches spiritual maturity” (Ducasse 1961 cited in Hellwig 2014: 2).

Many of the ancient philosophers (Pythagoras and Plato among them) that Yeats followed exposed in their writings the process of Metempsychosis. Similarly, Yeats proposes that

¹¹ Particularly in the Enneads III.4.5, IV.3.8, and IV.8.1 where it is discussed that disembodied souls can choose to reincarnate in a new body.

what someone can learn in incarnate states is limited and only in discarnate states we can remember again the knowledge of God; thereby, the need for dialectics becomes a way of purifying the Soul, to prepare it for death. Yeats also agrees with Plotinus by saying that when the “true awakening is from the body and not with the body, Plotinus says that before it can be awakened the soul must pass from one body to another until it has completely purified itself” (Plotinus 1991 cited in Hellwig 2014).

2.3. ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul’: A Poem about “beauty and war and wisdom and decay”



Figure 6. The Joust of Sol and Luna from *Aurora consurgens*.

The final stanza is relevant as the antithetical man accepts the limitations of his incarnate state and at the same time forgives himself. This is probably related to how Yeats conceived the reincarnation cycles. For him, learning from each different incarnation was essential for the soul’s progress and had a different spiritual goal. Yeats as a self-described Romantic and antithetical subject prefers “the personal Unity of Being (...), not a union with something greater beyond the self, but a unity within the self” (Mann 2013: 188).

The Soul, in this case, seems to point out the dangers of valuing the emanations of the World-Soul over the Intellectual Principle¹². On the contrary, the Romantic subject is acutely aware of its need to understand the processes of life in order to attain perfection.

This is reflected in the last verses:

I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest (l.65-72).

At the end of the dialogue, Yeats positions his own belief in the strife between the union with God and the union within the Self, favouring the later. Yeats has finally accepted his limitations, the delusion of incarnate states. By knowing himself he has attained the freedom to “forgive [him]self the lot” (l.67).

Finally, ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul’ supposes an affirmation of “the labyrinth of human life with all its tangled antinomies of joy and suffering” (Keane 2015). The debate ends with a bittersweet open ending. The Self is given the final stanza, the self-discovery is ongoing.

¹² Yeats suggests that the Intellectual Principle may be seen as the origin of the primary, objective, spiritual while the World Soul may be the origin of the antithetical (Yeats 2015:193–94). The All/One is the symbol of the ended antinomy thus perfection (Yeats 2008: 176)

3. ‘The Man and Echo’: The Rocky Voice



Figure 7. Queen Medb’s tomb.

‘The Man and the Echo’ (July–Oct. 1938), included in *Last Poems*, is a poetic dialogue firmly stroke by the final opposition at the end of human life – which is the resistance of the remaining life against the prospect of death. In my view, Yeats’s ‘The Man and the Echo’ is, again, a poetic dialogue of oppositions between the Self, represented by “the Man” and all mortals’ destiny: Death.

The poem has as a context Knocknarea (Alt), the glen or ravine where a Neolithic passage and grave called Queen Medb’s (Maeve’s) tomb can be found. Here, Yeats unifies in this symbol Ireland’s mythic past with classical antiquity, as the mysterious place openly recalls the crack from which the fumes of the Delphic oracle came. Correspondingly, the rock symbolises the underworld. This “rocky voice” is associated with the translunar, the World-Soul.

The Man can be interpreted as the poet’s voice; he encounters the mystery, the limitations of his own existence in the rocks. Interestingly, Yeats decides to return in this poem to a setting that has been fascinating him since the beginning: To narrate a poetic end. Unarguably, the situation will be a mixture of tragic sense, myth and psychological tension.

[U]nder a broken stone I halt
At the bottom of a pit
That broad noon has never lit (1.2-4).

The bare landscape is also reflected in the use of language, produced in an extremely good economy. Accordingly, Destiny is represented by death, “the Rocky Voice”, and the opposition between the present decay of the body and the “spiritual intellect” are here the principal set of oppositions that the Self must face. Yeats’s ‘The Man and the Echo’ is not a poem about defeat but about meditated acceptance. The first stanza describes the direct confrontation through dialectics, in this case confessing to the stone:

And shout a secret to the stone.
All that I have said and done,
Now that I am old and ill,
Turns into a question till
I lie awake night after night
And never get the answers right.
Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?
Did words of mine put too great strain
On that woman’s reeling brain?
Could my spoken words have checked
That whereby a house lay wrecked?
And all seems evil until I
Sleepless would lie down and die (1.5-18).

Distinctly, this is a statement with a form of purging, a gradual descent to the underworld while being alive known as *katabasis* (Freccero 1988: 108) – Yeats analyses his own life’s remorse, the consequences of his actions. The descent in Greek thought is understood as a proof of the “hero” to achieve a phenomenal type of wisdom. The *katabasis* is always related to the cyclical conception of reality, something that Yeats supported since early years in his writings, implying that nothing perishes but transcends. The use of this epic concept elevates the personal distinctive experience to the universal, making a statement about the condition of humanity towards death. The poem contains an encounter with death, a living man contemplating his past remorse and regrets as he prepares his soul for the processes of the afterlife.

“The spiritual intellect” (1.21) refers to the Spirit, which is the elevated divine part of the Self that corresponds to the discarnate states (present also in ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul’). To access the afterlife, the soul needs to understand and process the emotions and consequences of life. The Spirit is moving from the world of the senses and emotions (psyche) to that unifying presence that expects us in our discarnate state. For Yeats, mystification of the Self is not simply an imaginative exercise but a type of philosophical posture essential for his conception of poetry and life. The question of human wisdom needs this state of evolution: “Yeats creates within the work as a whole, where the theatre of the world is only a part of experience, and the movement from passion to perception, or from suffering to tragic joy, necessitates the insight of the spiritual world and the after-life to complete the arc” (Mann 2002: 29).

3.1. The Opposition of Destiny and Fate: Towards Discarnate Knowledge

Yeats explores in ‘The Man and the Echo’ another classic concept analysed throughout ancient philosophy: The notion of Destiny. This, in Hermeticism, is closely intermingled with the Platonic binary of Body-Soul as Poemander’s discourse points out: “[M]an above all things that live upon earth is double: mortal, because of his body, and immortal, because of the substantial man. For being immortal, and having power of all things, he yet suffers mortal things, and such as are, are also subject to fate or destiny” (*Corpus Hermeticum*: 21). Therefore, human beings’ paradoxical existence, immortal souls in a perishable body, is part of Destiny’s tragic sense. In this sense, the duplicity of the Self is what seems to become an acute problem in Yeats’s poetry at the end of his life, when sickness strikes as in the following verses:

There is no release
In a bodkin or disease,
Nor can there be work so great
As that which cleans man’s dirty slate.
While man can still his body keep
Wine or love drug him to sleep,

Waking he thanks the Lord that he
Has body and its stupidity (1.22-9).

While living, “both intelligible and material things (...) go both of them into bodies; All physical things must exist in this contrary state of dichotomy. And it is impossible it should be otherwise” (*Corpus Hermeticum*: 36). The poem continues saying that:

But body gone he sleeps no more,
And till his intellect grows sure
That all's arranged in one clear view,
pursues the thoughts that I pursue,
Then stands in judgment on his soul,
And, all work done, dismisses all
Out of intellect and sight
And sinks at last into the night (1.30-7).

These lines describe the process of death as the end of the dichotomy where the intellect or the *Nous* is finally separated from the body; thus, the “intellect grows sure” and “all's arranged in one clear view”. We can sense that there is a tension between what the soul wishes during incarnate states, living in dichotomy, and the external force that “sinks [us] at last into the night”. Moreover, we can appreciate a distinction between Destiny and Fate, notions which Yeats saw as clashing forces: “*Destiny* [is] understood to mean all external acts and forms created by the Will itself and out of itself, whereas *Fate*¹³ is all those acts or forms imposed upon the Will from without” (Yeats 2008: 105). Accordingly, Destiny emerges as the product of our behaviour and predisposition as reflected in our actions during life¹⁴ and Fate is all external factors that escape our control. The contrast between our destiny as humans and fate is also an added source of tumult within our lives.

The symbol of the night is related to the discarnate states and, by analogy, to the wisdom of the dead. In addition, Yeats relates the dead to the Fixed Stars in *A Vision* (1925): “[W]hat we call Fate is, as much as our most voluntary acts, a part of a single

¹³ “By Body of Fate is understood the physical and mental environment, the changing human body, the stream of Phenomena as this affects a particular individual” (Yeats 2008: 15).

¹⁴ Similar to the Indian conception of karma.

logical stream; the Fixed Stars being the least changing things are the acts of whatever in that stream changes least, and therefore of all souls that have found an almost changeless rest” (Yeats 2008: 128). The supralunary (the otherworld) is made by the stream of souls that have found union with God. They are not subjected to Fate anymore but become the night, they become Fate.

The repetition of the night’s symbolism creates a tragic intensity that marries the poem’s lyricism. Yeats uses the tragic personal experience, the lyric depth of the mortal situation to question the reader and create a space of reflection:

Yeats (...) use[s] (...) questions to forge an interrogative lyric that presents knowledge as a form of dialogical engagement. For questions do not merely demand an answer, but they posit a relationship between two conscious minds, that of (...) dramatic speaker and interlocutor (...). Just as an unasked question may already be suggested by its answer, a lyric of interrogation calls for a latent dialogic response: the reader must reply to the text (Feldman 2014: 88).

By the same token, for Yeats, to interrogate death (the “rocky voice”) is to interrogate the reader. In doing so, he accomplishes the universalisation of the subjective experience:

What do we know but that we face
One another in this place?
But hush, for I have lost the theme,
Its joy or night-seem but a dream (l.41-4).

The last stanza contains the famous “Joy or Night”, being the sensuous world against the perfect cold world of the Fixed Stars. All “seem[s] but a dream” (l.44), the closer the speaker can get to the unifying death. The abundance of individualism is ending, the plenitude of death is beginning.

3.2. The Tragic Element in ‘The Man and the Echo’

Being a tragic poem with all its implications, the symbols that populate its end are clearly cathartic. Firstly, the hawk’s symbolism seems to represent the inevitability of death. The hawk killing the rabbit and its terror at death is a tragic symbol that arouses “pity and fear” (Aristotle 2000: 10). The end is undoubtedly some type of anagnorisis, a

recognition of the essential nature of fate. While we are in an incarnate state we have our vision obscured by overwhelming passions, tensions and contrasts that we experience – although once that is taken away we gain clarity.

‘The Man and the Echo’ is an obscure poem, not in its difficulty but perhaps in its vision, in its aesthetics. In this bare landscape, the only remaining joy of life is the remaining spiritual effort that the soul is expected to make before entering the last night: “For Yeats, there was something both enviable and exemplary about the enlargement of vision and the consequent histrionic equanimity which Shakespeare’s heroes and heroines attain at the moment of their death” (Heaney 157: 1995). Death’s fatalism is accepted at the end of the poem as nature and its images seem to confirm the inevitability of its power.

Yeats has already confronted the knowledge of the living, the Unity of Being that him, the antithetical man, can conjure in his works and life. Yeats, through a symbolic descension to the underworld, analyses the limits of the soul and attempts to see what lays beyond it. He invokes the knowledge of God, the knowledge of the dead: “He who attains Unity of Being is some man who, while struggling with his fate and his destiny until every energy of his being has been roused, is content that he should so struggle with no final conquest” (Yeats 2008: 28).

However, Yeats understood that wisdom was sometimes linked to tragedy, a knowledge that is acquired thanks to the ascension of the soul at critical moments in life. Likewise, the tragedy of death embodies a profound completeness of experience that may become the catalyst of truth and beauty: “[I]s not always the tragic ecstasy some realisation or fulfilment of the soul in itself, some slow or sudden expansion of it like an overflowing well? Is not that what we mean by beauty?” (Yeats 1972: 152–3).

4. Conclusions and Further Research

The main purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate how Yeats produced his poetic dialogues influenced by Hermeticism, using several ancient Greek philosophical concepts. Yeats considers – influenced by the Pre-Socratics – that existence is an eternal antinomic conflict, antinomies being present in both external and internal reality. Therefore, Yeats decided to use dialectics applied to poetry to confront the tensions within the Self using the Hermetic dialogue-action. I have also analysed how Yeats, being artistically situated between Romanticism and Modernism, understands life and art as being profoundly intermingled. Accordingly, the search of knowledge in poetry becomes the search for self-wisdom in life.

This study also reveals the importance of Yeats's private philosophy on the understanding of his poetry, hence it supports *A Vision's* late studies as profoundly related to his poetic creation. Correspondingly, I have explored the importance of the notion of the opposites to the multiplicity of the Self, the Soul's partition and the types of vicissitudes it encounters while in incarnate states.

Furthermore, Yeats's usage of poetic dialogues serves to disclose two different types of wisdom: one attainable during incarnate states – Unity of Being – and another reserved only to discarnate states, the knowledge of the dead. Yeats interlaces philosophical concepts with poetical procedures using the symbol, conceived to transport the tensions of the Self to the formal opposites of the poem, tying the antinomies of his thought to poetry.

It has not been within the scope of this study to describe all the exact relations between *A Vision's* concepts and ancient Greek philosophy, but just to point out the common influence of Hermeticism and Greek philosophy in both Yeats's poetic dialogues and *A Vision*.

In my own view, Yeats's alluring involvement in philosophy is still a field in need of research. As an example, it would be interesting to establish the different correspondences between Greek concepts and *A Vision* or to further investigate the use of different poetic forms to accommodate his perennial philosophy. It is my wish, then, to dedicate supplementary study to Yeats's philosophy in the future – which is influenced not only by ancient Greek thought but by many other philosophical currents as well. To conclude, Yeats's poetry is attentively entwined with philosophical notions using dialectics to create a unique artistic representation of the Self: “[W]e make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry” (Yeats 1959: 331).

Works Cited

Primary Sources

- Yeats, W.B. *A Vision: An Explanation of Life Founded upon the Writings of Giraldus and upon certain Doctrines Attributed to Kusta Ben Luka*. London: T. Werner Laurie, Ltd., 1925.
- Yeats, W.B. *A General Introduction for my Work*. London: Macmillan, 1937.
- Yeats, W.B. *Mythologies*. London and New York: Macmillan, 1959.
- Yeats, W.B. *A Vision*. London: Macmillan, 1962 [1937].
- Yeats, W.B. *Autobiography – First Draft: Journal*. Denis Donoghue (ed.). London: Macmillan, 1972.
- Yeats, W.B. “Yeats’s Lecture Notes for “Friends of My Youth””. Joseph Ronsley (ed.). Toronto: Maclean-Hunter Press, 1975.
- Yeats, W.B. *Autobiographies*. London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1980 [1955].
- Yeats, W.B. *Essays and Introductions*. London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1980 [1961].
- Yeats, W.B. *Volume 3: Sleep and Dream Notebooks, Vision Notebooks 1 and 2*. Robert Anthony Martinich and Margaret Mills Harper (ed.). London & Iowa: Macmillan & University of Iowa Press, 1992.
- Yeats, W.B. *Yeats’s Poetry, Drama, and Prose*. James Pethica (ed.). London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.
- Yeats, W.B. *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume XIII: A Vision: The Original 1925 Version*. New York: Scribner, 2008 [1925].
- Yeats, W.B. *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume XIV: A Vision: The Revisited 1937 Edition*. New York: Scribner, 2015 [1937].
- Yeats, W.B. *Collected Poems*. London: Macmillan Collector’s Library, 2016 [2010].

Secondary Sources

- Armstrong, Charles. “Ancient Frames: Classical Philosophy in Yeats’s *A Vision*.” Neil Mann, Matthew Gibson, Claire V. Nally (ed.). *W.B. Yeats’s A Vision: Explications and Contexts*. Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2012. 90-102.
- Aristotle. *The Poetics of Aristotle*. Pennsylvania: A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication, 2000.
- Bloom, Alan. *The Republic of Plato*. Warsaw: Basic Books, 1991 (1968).
- Burnet, John. *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908.
- Corpus Hermeticum*. Tarl Warwick (ed.). Lavergne: Tarl Warwick Books, 2015 (2013).
- Dampier, Graham A. “The Spiritual Intellect’s Great Work: A Discussion of the *Principles* and *A Vision*’s Account of Death.” Neil Mann, Matthew Gibson, Claire V. Nally (ed.). *W.B. Yeats’s A Vision: Explications and Contexts*. Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2012. 55-89.
- Elgersma Helleman, Wendy. “Plotinus and Magic.” *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition*, Vol. 1. Issue 4, 2010: 114-46.
- Feldman, Daniel. “Poetry in Question: The Interrogative Lyric of Yeats’s Major Poems.” *Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Vol. 12, Issue 1, 2014: 87-105.
- Foster, Roy F. *W.B. Yeats: A Life, Volume II: The Arch-Poet*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Freccero, John. *The Poetics of Conversion*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

- Gibson, Matthew. "Timeless and Spaceless? Yeats's Search for Models of Interpretation in Post-Enlightenment Philosophy, Contemporary Anthropology and Art History, and the Effects of these Theories on the completed Symbol, The Soul in Judgement and The Great Year of the Ancients." Neil Mann, Matthew Gibson, Claire V. Nally (ed.), *W.B. Yeats's "A Vision": Explications and Contexts*. Clemson: Clemson Digital Press, 2012. 103-36.
- Gould, Warwick. "The Mask before the Mask." Margaret Mills Harper, Warwick Gould (ed.). *Yeats's Mask: Yeats Annual*, No.19, A Special Issue. London: Institute of English Studies University of London, 2013. 3-47.
- Graham, W. Daniel. "Empedocles and Anaxagoras: Responses to Parmenides." In A.A. Long (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*. Berkeley: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 159-80.
- Heaney, Seamus. *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures*. London: Faber & Faber, 1995.
- Hellwig, Henrik. "Theories of Reincarnation in the History of Philosophy: Ancient Perspectives." The Immortality Project, February 2014. <http://www.sptimmortalityproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/ANCIENT-THEORIES-OF-REINCARNATION-2.pdf> (Accessed: March 2018).
- Hirschberg, Stuart. "A Dialogue between Realism and Idealism in Yeats's "Ego Dominus Tuus." *Colby Library Quarterly*, Vol. 11, Issue 2, 1975: 129-32.
- Howe, Ellic. *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order 1887-1923*. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser INC., 1984 [1972].
- James, Jaime. "W.B. Yeats, Magus: For William Butler Yeats, poetry was a kind of magic." *Lapham's Quarterly*, <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/magic-shows/w-b-yeats-magus>, (Accessed 1 February 2018).
- Jewett, Robert M. *Artistic Tension in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats: An Introduction*. Trieste: Università degli Studi, 1978.
- Keane, Patrick J. "A Great Labyrinth: The Winding Stair, Maud Gonne, and a Quest for the Quintessential Yeats." *Numéro Cinq Magazine*, <http://numerocinqmagazine.com/2015/06/13/a-great-labyrinth-the-winding-stair-maud-gonne-and-a-quest-for-the-quintessential-yeats-patrick-j-keane/>, June 2015 (Accessed 11 February 2018).
- Kingsley, Peter. "An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition." Roelof van den Broek and Cis van Heertum (ed.). *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*. Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2000. 18-40.
- Mann, Neil. *Yeats's A Vision: Ideas of Man and God*. Doctoral Thesis, The Faculty of English Language and Literature, University of Oxford, 2002. <http://www.yeatsvision.com/NJMann-Vision-Dissertation-2002.pdf> (Accessed: March 2018).
- Mann, Neil. "Everywhere that antinomy of the One and the Many: The Foundations of A Vision." Neil Mann, Matthew Gibson, Claire V. Nally (ed.). *W.B. Yeats's A Vision: Explications and Contexts*. Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2012. 1-21.
- Mann, Neil. "A Mask of A Vision." Margaret Mills Harper, Warwick Gould (ed.). *Yeats's Mask: Yeats Annual*, No.19, A Special Issue. London: Institute of English Studies University of London, 2013. 167-89.
- Mann, Neil. "The Human Being." *The System of W.B. Yeats's A Vision*, <http://yeatsvision.com/Human.html>, (Accessed 1 February 2018).
- Mann, Neil. "The Tinctures." *The System of W.B. Yeats's A Vision*, <http://yeatsvision.com/Tinctures.html> (Accessed 1 February 2018).

- Masters, George Mallary. *Rabelaisian Dialectic and the Platonic-Hermetic Tradition*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969.
- Mills Harper, Margaret. "Yeats and the Occult." In Majorie Howes and John Kelly (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 144-65.
- Müller, Elisabeth. "The Mask of Derision in Yeats's Prologue to A Vision." Margaret Mills Harper, Warwick Gould (ed.). *Yeats's Mask: Yeats Annual*, No.19, A Special Issue. London: Institute of English Studies University of London, 2013. 121-46.
- O'Brien, James H. "Yeats's Discoveries of Self in The Wild Swans at Coole." *Colby Quarterly*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 1968: 1-13.
- Olney, James. *The Rhizome and the Flower: The Perennial Philosophy – Yeats and Jung*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Plotinus. *The Enneads*. London: Penguin Books, 1991 (1917).
- Vendler, Helen Hennessy. "The Later Poetry." In Marjorie Howes and John Kelly (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 77-100.

Image Credits

- Figure 1. <http://yeatsvision.com/Esoteric.html> (Access date: January 2018)
- Figure 2. <http://yeatsvision.com/Human.html> (Access date: January 2018)
- Figure 3. <http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Tower/William-Butler-Yeats/9780743247283> (Access date: February 2018)
- Figure 4. <http://yeatsvision.com/Tinctures.html> (Access date: January 2018)
- Figure 5. <http://numerocinqmagazine.com/2015/06/13/a-great-labyrinth-the-winding-stair-maud-gonne-and-a-quest-for-the-quintessential-yeats-patrick-j-keane/> (Access date: March 2018)
- Figure 6. <http://yeatsvision.com/Tinctures.html> (Access date: January 2018)
- Figure 7. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/cml/cml16.htm> (Access date: January 2018)