

琉球大学学術リポジトリ

交感する視線 The Three Poems in A Vision :
“The Phases of the Moon” , “Leda” , “All
Souls' Night”

メタデータ	言語: 出版者: 琉球大学法文学部国際言語文化学科欧米系 公開日: 2007-12-23 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Ishikawa, Ryuji, 石川, 隆士 メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.24564/0002002326

**Corresponding Glances:
The Three Poems in *A Vision*,
“The Phases of the Moon,” “Leda” and “All Souls’ Night”**

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It is unmistakable that main purpose of *A Vision* is to represent Yeats's unique symbolism, and actually most part of the text is dedicated to explaining its system. But this does not mean that all of the text is employed solely for this purpose. In addition to the methodical illustration of the symbolism, the text contains some prose passages and poems. Therefore the text as a whole takes on the feature of omnibus style which is made up of various heterogeneous writings. In such a strange combination, however, the different kinds of writing can never be considered as being independent of or disassociated from each other. Each one of them has its own role in the text, which holds the symbolism in its leading position, and constitutes a self-reflexive structure.

This paper aims to elucidate the structure of the heterogeneous complexity of *A Vision* from the perspective of the act of “seeing” that embodies Yeats's manifold and diverse aesthetic aspirations. Among the different kinds of writings, this survey concentrates on poetry, specifically the three poems because they are introduced in their complete forms in contrast to the other fragmental citations. Their titles are, following the order in which they appear in the text, “The Phases of the Moon,” “Leda” and “All Souls’ Night: An Epilogue.” Indeed they are independent poems contained in other collections which were published separately from *A Vision*, and have been independently reviewed and

criticized. This paper, however, examines them as constituents of *A Vision* as a whole, and elucidates how they correspond, and are related to the symbolism, and what roles they play in the text.

"The Phases of the Moon" (*AV B* 59-64) is originally contained in the collection *The Wild Swans at Coole* which was published in 1919 (*CP* 129-72). And in *A Vision*, it is put in the position that initiates the minute explanation of the symbolism. As its position in the text indicates, the poem plays an introductory role to the symbolism. Indeed, as Harold Bloom remarks, this poem is something like a "text for exposition," and it forms a concise and summarized representation of the symbolism (*Yeats* 204).

In this poem, the twenty-eight phases of the symbolism are alluded to in a song of "the changes of the moon" which is sung by Michael Robartes. It is true that the explanation of the twenty-eight phases in the song is so brief that the characteristics of each phase cannot be fully described. But the correspondence between the song and the symbolism is quite apparent.

To examine the correspondence, an extract from the poem is taken into account. As the most distinguished phase of all, "Phase Fifteen," which corresponds to the moment when the moon is full, is expressed in the song as follows:

ROBARTES

All thought becomes an image and the soul
Becomes a body: that body and that soul
Too perfect at the full to lie in a cradle,
Too lonely for the traffic of the world:
Body and soul cast out and cast away
Beyond the visible world[. . .]. (lines 67-73)

According to the explanation of the characteristics of each phase in

the section "The Twenty-Eight Incarnations," the text says about "Phase Fifteen" that there is "no description except that this is a phase of complete beauty" (AV B 135). It is readily observed that the "complete beauty" of this phase corresponds to its excessively perfect nature described in the song.

Moreover, in another part of the text, "Phase 1 and Phase 15" are described as "[. . .] not human incarnations because human life is impossible without strife between the *tinctures*" (AV B 79). This passage also tells a correspondence to the song in the sense that it explains the state of "Phase Fifteen" which cannot be attained in the incarnated world but "beyond the visible world."

Concerning other phases, fairly short expressions are applied to them, and about some phases there is no specific mention. This is because the song in the poem emphasizes the transition of the nature of the phases in keeping with the changes of the moon. Therefore the song sufficiently carries out the brief representation of the cyclical movement in the twenty-eight phases. In this way, the poem plays an introductory role to the symbolism itself by exposing it in the song of "the changes of the moon."

There is no doubt that this introductory role is the main purpose of setting "The Phases of the Moon" in the initiating part to the symbolism. Its positioning itself, however, causes a crucial problem to the text. This problem is deeply related to an aspect of *A Vision* which is pointed out by Harold Bloom. Concerning this aspect, Bloom remarks as follows:

A Vision disappoints for many reasons,[. . .] but one frustration it provides is particularly acute. Yeats so elaborately disguises its self-referential aspects, that we are left to find the meaning for the

poet's life and art by various sleights of translation.

(Yeats 205)

What Bloom implies in this passage is that Yeats--of course the real author of *A Vision*--does not directly or explicitly declare the relationship between the symbolism which he has developed in *A Vision* and his real life as an artist which includes his works. For this reason, it becomes quite difficult for critics to reveal the relationship.

Indeed what Bloom asserts most is his frustration about this difficulty. But how the symbolism is related to the real activities of the poet is of little concern here. What should be focused on is the point that "Yeats so elaborately disguises its self-referential aspects." As examples of this disguise, Bloom refers to Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne, and asserts, to summarize very roughly, that Yeats reveals his irony toward himself in this poem, employing ventriloquial disguise.

Of course there is no problem if an author declares his/her own thoughts or statements by using the characters he/she has invented. On the contrary, it could be considered as very natural. What the matters in *A Vision*, however, is the fact that besides the "instructors," Michael Robartes, as an explicitly fictional character, is given an authoritative status over the symbolism which can never be attained by Yeats or the protagonist alone. The relation of Michael Robartes to the latter, who is following the mysterious discipline of the symbolism is, described in "The Phases of the Moon" as follows:

ROBARTES

[.]

We are on the bridge; that shadow is the tower, and the
light proves that he is reading still.

He has found, after the manner of his kind,

Mere images; chosen this place to live

[.]

An image of mysterious wisdom won by toil;
And now he seeks in book or manuscript
What he shall never find.

ATHERNE

Why should not you

Who know it all ring at his door, and speak
Just truth enough to show that his whole life
Will scarcely find for him a broken crust
Of all those truths that are your daily bread;

[.]

(lines 10, 13-16, 21-29)

It is obvious from this passage that Robartes retains almost the same authority over the symbolism as the "instructors" do. And it should be questioned why such an authority, which should be foreign to Yeats or the protagonist, is given to the character who might share his ideological views or thoughts.

It cannot be denied that, in the text, Yeats himself insists on the authenticity of the "existence" of the "instructors" and his communication with them through automatic writing. And in his "Introduction," he implicitly but scrupulously affirms that there is a qualitative difference between Michael Robartes and the "instructors:"

[In the first version of *A Vision* (AV A),] I had misinterpreted the geometry, and ignorance of philosophy failed to understand distinctions upon which the whole depended, and as my wife was unwilling that her share [in automatic writing] should be known, and I to seem sole author, I had

invented an unnatural story of an Arabian traveler [Michael Robartes] which I must amend and find a place for some day because I was fool enough to write half a dozen poems that are unintelligible without it. (*AV B 19*)

It is inferred from this passage that there is a distinction between the automatic writing as an actual event in the poet's real life, and Michael Robartes and his story as an outspoken fiction. Moreover, the passage cited above also indicates that the story of Michael Robartes has an almost equal value to the automatic writing or the existence of the instructors in the sense that it gives a meaning or authority to his "half a dozen poems" and to the symbolism at its base.

It may be true that Yeats acquired the symbolism in *A Vision* from the mysterious "instructors" through automatic writing, and it is the freedom of the author whether he introduces them into the text or not. Indeed novelists of the eighteenth century like Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson often asserted that what they are writing is "true history." In "Preface to *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719," Daniel Defoe claims himself to be not the author but "the Editor" of "a just History of Fact" (Defoe 56). Likewise, in "Preface to Volume I of *Clarissa Harlowe*, 1747," Samuel Richardson asserts that he is just an "Editor" who gives "a Narrative Turn" to the letters written principally by actual persons, ad he calls his story "History" (Richardson 116-18). By using the term "history," they mean the events in their stories actually happened and the characters really existed. As a matter of course, however, whether such authors happen to encounter or to be informed about certain events or persons is one thing, and whether they produce stories from such information and publish them is another.

Actually there exist two authorities of the symbolism in *A Vision*:

one is an explicitly fictional character, and the others are ambiguous beings whose actual existence the author firmly insists on. If his symbolism definitely requires a certain authority, either one of them would satisfy the demand. Therefore the coexistence of Michael Robartes and the "instructors" in the text is far from assuring the actual existence of the latter but, on the contrary, puts the authenticity of their existence into question.

The possibility cannot be denied that the "elaborate disguise," which Bloom points out in Michael Robartes, is also employed for the "instructors." Of course, this disguise is more elaborate than that in the case of Robartes. The coexistence of Robartes and the "instructors" surely heightens this possibility and, at the same time, affirms the speculation that the "instructors" may be completely fictional characters who, as scapegoats of the author, give his idiosyncratic symbolism an authority to some extent.

Of course this speculation remains mere speculation. It is of no concern whether the "instructors" are, in fact, real existences or fictional ones, but it is certain that their authorities over the symbolism is diminished by the existence of Michael Robartes and his song. And their coexistence in the text undoubtedly makes the position of the authority over the symbolism a more ambiguous and complex matter than it would be the case if either one were employed.

Putting aside the diminished authority of the symbolism, "The Phases of the Moon" tells a lot about the "distance" between Yeats and the authority. The studious disciple that appears in this poem is identical to Yeats himself. While his tireless toil in the tower burning the midnight oil expresses his diligence in its direct meaning, the candlelight on the tower in the darkest of the night entails that it is to be seen. Indeed his toil is observed by Michael Robartes who, at the

same time, "sees" the arduous labor shall never be rewarded. On the contrary, the diligent disciple can never see that his toil will end up in vain.

Owen Aherne frankly suggests that Robartes visit and tell him about the hopelessness of his hard work to spare further toils. Robartes answers as follows:

He wrote of me in that extravagant style
He had learned from Pater, and to round his tale
Said I was dead; and dead I choose to be.
(lines 32-34)

Robartes intends to leave his being alive unknown to the diligent disciple so that the story about him is to be kept "round."

In the story written by the disciple, Robartes is dead. Of course it is not true, but he chooses to be dead. This means Robartes can get how he looks under control. As discussed above, he also sees how unrewarding the diligent disciple's toil is while he continues his study being caught up in his self-sufficient but incomplete story. In this way, Robartes dominates the whole perspective of the quest of mysterious wisdom.

Robartes's dominance of the perspective parallels the disciple's limits to it. Their asymmetry reveals the boundary Yeats could not transcend, and at the same time, implies the vindication of his disability of attaining the mysterious wisdom.

Yeats's anxiety about the possibility of attaining the mysterious wisdom is temporarily subdued when the argument of his symbolism comes to its climax. What marks the climactic stage is the poem, "Leda" (*AV B* 267). It is also called "Leda and the Swan" and is contained in the collection *The Tower* (*CP* 191-230) which was published in 1928. It can be said that this sonnet is the most controversial of the

three poems which are under discussion. In fact, "Leda and the Swan" has been discussed from a variety of aspects. A. Norman Jeffares examines it in the context of the collection *The Tower* (44); Harold Bloom discusses its intertextuality in relation to other writers, mainly Percy Bysshe Shelley (363-67); Edward Malins is concerned with the relationship between imagery and phonology in the poem (91-92); recently Elizabeth Butler Cullingford has dealt with it in the context of gender along with the social and cultural history of Ireland (Cullingford 140-64).

The reason why this sonnet has been studied from so many aspects mostly rests in the fact that it contains multiple and complex connotations. Not to speak of the Greek mythology to which the poem explicitly alludes, even the swan imagery alone creates resonances with other poems of Yeats like "The Wild Swans at Coole" (*CP* 131-32) in which this imagery offers another connotation. And the Greek myth itself draws many implications. For example, from the coupling of Leda and the swan which Zeus is disguised as, various motifs like the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary, the rape of women, or the antinomy of knowledge against power can be inferred (Ellmann 245-46):

A SUDDEN blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.
[.]

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?
(lines 1-4, 12-15)

As the result of the coupling, moreover, the birth of Helen of Troy and the twins, Castor and Pollux, invokes a universal opposition between love and war.

Such a polymorphic nature of "Leda and the Swan" as a transhistorical and transnational entity gives it a significant meaning in relation to its location in *A Vision*: the poem occupies the head position of "Book V: Dove or Swan" in which the application of symbolism to the real historical events is carried out. Concerning this issue, Barbara Hardy gives a quite suggestive remark as follows:

Like Blake's Zoas, Yeats's images of Leda, swans, and Hellen of Troy are elements in a solid system but are flexibly mutated. Like Joyce, Yeats likes to pluralize his myths, sometimes to emphasize and elaborate system, as when he likes swan and dove as progenitors of cycles, to open, unsettle, and reveal the process of mythical making and remaking. Sometimes he blends myths of various cultures (Greek and Celtic, pagan and Christian); sometimes he is drawn to mythical images and characters, like swans, which belong to several systems and epochs, have a local and regional habitation and name, and can participate, or be imaged as participating, in modern adventures. (23)

From this remark, it can be said that the polymorphic nature of "Leda and the Swan" has a close relation to the complexity of Yeats's symbolism.

This relation between the sonnet and the symbolism is concerned with the relation between the historical events and the symbolism. The historical events cited in the application of the symbolism are mere "simulacra" which represent the characteristics and the current of the point in time in the "historical diagram" of the symbolism, and

therefore, the events or names can be independent from the context of real history, if it ever exists. Being separated from the actual context, the meanings of historical events employed in the symbolism is regulated or even reformed by the symbolism. Eventually there emerges a new history.

“Leda and the Swan” can be considered as a “symbol” of those historical events to which the symbolism is applied. As Hardy remarks, the polyphonic images of the poem are related to a variety of times, cultures and regions, and in each particular context, the poem casts a picture peculiar to the context. Therefore, although the poem functions as an element regulated by a certain aspect of the symbolism, it, at the same time, cannot be exactly identified with one definite event; it is an evasive and immanent historical simulacrum.

Of course, the significance that the poem occupies such a status in the symbolism is asserted in *A Vision*. Although Yeats refers to a Leda only in relation to the foundation of Greece in “Book V: Dove or Swan,” it is certain that he sees some universal implications of historical movements in the mythology:

I imagine the annunciation that founded Greece as made to Leda, remembering that they showed in a Spartan temple, strung up to the roof as a holy relic, an unhatched egg of hers; and that from one of her eggs came Love and from the other war. But all things are from antithesis, and when in my ignorance I try to imagine what older civilization that annunciation rejected I can but see bird and woman blotting out some corner of the Badylonian mathematical starlight. (*AV B* 268)

As this passage shows, in the coupling of a bird and a woman, and the eggs the coupling entailed, he observes both the unification and

separation of antithesis, which is, for him, the universal driving force of historical movements as in the opposing gyres, that is, the principal symbol.

In this way, in *A Vision*, the poem "Leda and the Swan" can be considered as the "symbol" of the symbolism's historicity, which represents the function of the historical events cited in the text and the historical movements of the symbolism themselves.

Jefferson Holdridge points out that what sublimates the rape of Leda, a bluntly violent ravishment, is a detached but never indifferent gaze of the voyeur. Citing from Paul Verlaine's "Cupid Fallen," Jefferson call the gaze "the frivolous eye" (121-22). The detached stance simultaneously brings about dread and ecstasy, and is indispensable to attain the antithetical excellence that can be observed in "a terrible beauty" ("Easter, 1916," CP 180-82). In this sense, the gaze epitomizes the antithetical aesthetics of Yeats and the self-assured perspective makes a sheer contrast with the self-deprecatory vindication observed in "The Phases of the Moon."

The self-deprecation that has been once subdued along with the completion of his symbolism emerges again as the last poem, "All Souls' Night: An Epilogue" is concluding *A Vision*. The poem also appears in the collection *The Tower*, as is "Leda and the Swan," and, as in *A Vision*, it forms an epilogue to the collection. In this poem, his homage to the spiritual world and to its inhabitants is mainly depicted.

Three persons are invoked in the poem; W. H. Horton, Florence Farr Emery and S. L. MacGregor Mathers. They are all occultists with whom Yeats had associations before they died. It means that, in the poem, they are already dead and are living in the spiritual world. In "All Souls' Night," the protagonist of the poem is trying to communicate with them whom he can never see with his physical eyes:

MIDNIGHT has come, and the great Christ Church bell
And many a lesser bell sound through the room;
And it is All Souls' Night,
And two long glasses brimmed with muscatel
Bubble upon the table. A ghost may come;
For it is a ghost's right,
His element is so fine
Being sharpened by his death,
To drink from the wine-breath
While our gross palates drink from the whole wine.
(lines 1-10)

Such spiritual communication with the dead is related to the protagonist's belief in the existence of the period from death to life which is systematically described by the symbolism in "Book III: The Soul in Judgment" (*AV B* 217-40).

As the passage above shows, the protagonist sees in the dead who are living in the spiritual world what T. R. Henn calls "a Donne-like exactness of being" (158). And his evocation of them is expressed in the following lines: "Wound in mind's wandering/As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound." According to P. Th. M. G. Liebrechts remarks, this passage represents not only the evocation of the spirits but also its process (304). This means that in this passage, the protagonist's spiritual voyage into the world of the dead, which is wound in the mummy-cloth, is depicted. And the ultimate purpose of his voyage is to attain what is wound in the mummy-cloth, that is "the mummy-truths," that is both the spiritual world itself and the knowledge of the purest beings, who are living there, about their purest world.

Moreover, Liebrechts points out that this spiritual knowledge is expressed as an enjoyable "wine," as is also indicated in the previously-

cited passage, in order to "translate his visions into more 'common' language and into ideas acceptable to his audience" (326-27). Therefore, the knowledge the protagonists of this poem pursues is undoubtedly identical to what he has strived for through his mysterious communication with the "instructors," that is the symbolism in *A Vision*, where he has been trying to give it a systematical explanation.

Then there arises a question: could he succeed in his enterprise of acquiring such knowledge? According to Ellmann, the answer to this question is probably "yes." In his *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, he quotes the last ten lines of "All Souls' Night" as the exemplum of Yeats's self-confidence in mastering the symbolism (239-40).

Likewise, Harold Bloom agrees with Yeats's mastering of the symbolism, but he does it with a slightly different turn:

To celebrate, not his system, but his personal good fortune in having achieved the system, whatever its status, Yeats hymns the departed who came beyond their parallel systems to the dark, there to demonstrate their triumphal courage in the face of whatever mummy truth.
(370)

In this passage he explicitly admits Yeats's "having achieved the system, but there is undoubtedly a satiric implication. What he really criticizes is the "self-defensive irony" which is contained in "All Souls' Night" (*Yeats* 369-70). Bloom argues that in Yeats's broad admiration of his dead friends, his ironical view toward himself is expressed. The irony is that he did not have enough courage to thoroughly pursue the spiritual quest which might bring death to its practitioners. All the three persons who appear in the poem are such courageous practitioners that giving a systematical explanation of the symbolism is at most substitution for their reckless deed.

Actually Yeats seems to have such a very circumspect nature; he could not devote himself entirely to what he wanted to do, and admired, and the same time envied, those who could do it. Such a complex nature of his is also observed in his admiration of Oscar Wilde who showed "so much courage and who was so loyal to the intellect" (*Mem* 22). But what is interesting about this self-irony is the fact that both Ellmann and Bloom examine the poem as something like the personal confession of the real author, W. B. Yeats.

Through the protagonist of the poem, Yeats exposes his assesment of his own symbolism. Of course, he is superficially very confident in his mastery of the symbolism, but along with this confidence, a sort of anxiety, that is, the anxiety about whether his "common" audience can ever sincerely accept the symbolism which only devoted occultists can enjoy:

But names are nothing. What matter who it be,
So that his elements have grown so fine
The fume of muscatel
Can give his sharpened palate ecstasy
No living man can drink from the whole wine.
I have mummy truths to tell
Whereat the living mock,
Though not for sober ear,
For maybe all that hear
Should laugh and weep an hour upon the clock.
(lines 81-90)

In this way, as "An Epilogue" to *A Vision*, "All Souls' Night" can be considered as a personal confession about Yeats's symbolism, his experiences of occultism as a whole and his personality through these experiences. It might not be an accident that Bloom regards this self-

irony of Yeats as being similar in method to the self-irony projected through Michael Robartes in "The Phases of the Moon" (369-70). Concerning "All Souls' Night," however, there is no disguise.

After the completion of his symbolism, Yeats is caught again by anxiety. And the anxiety makes his glance "wander":

Such thought-such thought have I that hold it tight
Till meditation master all its parts,
Nothing can stay my glance
Until that glance run in the world's despite
To where the damned have howled away their hearts,
And where the blessed dance;
Such thought, that in it bound
I need no other thing,
Wound in mind's wandering
As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound.
(lines 91-100)

As this stanza shows, Yeats is put back in the midst of the quest.

Examining the three poems in *A Vision*, a dialectical transition of Yeats's attitude toward his own symbolism is observed. Along with the completion of his symbolism, his anxiety about his ability of attaining the mysterious wisdom is subdued, but he becomes conscious of the anxiety again on closing the whole text of *A Vision*. This transition is cyclical as Michael J. Sidnell observes in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" (121-22). And the cyclical movement is also the principal figure of Yeats's aesthetics. The ending is not the same as the beginning. His anxiety proceeds to another stage with self-confidence.

List of Abbreviations

- AV A* *A Vision: An Explanation of Life Founded upon the Writings of Giraldus and upon certain Doctrines attributed to Kusta Ben Luka.* London: privately printed for subscribers only by T. Werner Laurie, 1925.
- AV B* *A Vision.* 1937. London: Macmillan, 1962.
- CP* The Collected poems of W. B. Yeats. Ed. Richard J. Finneran. 2nd ed. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989.
- Mem* Memoirs. Ed. Denis Donoghue. 1972. London: Papermac, 1988.

Except *CP*, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats: A New Edition*, the abbreviations which are used in this paper follow the abbreviations which appear in *Yeats Annual No. 14* edited by Warwick Gould (ix-xiv). Concerning *CP*, it follows the abbreviation which appears in *W. B. Yeats and the Creation of a Tragic Universe* edited by Maeve Good (ix).

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交感する視線

The Three Poems in *A Vision*: “The Phases of the Moon”, “Leda”, “All Souls’ Night”

石川 隆士

本論はW.B. Yeatsの*A Vision*における、3つの詩篇、“The Phases of the Moon”, “Leda”, “All Souls’ Night”を「視線」という観点から分析することを目的とする。*A Vision*はYeatsの特異な神秘主義的記号体系が収められた問題作である。当然のことながらその主たる目的はその記号体系を詳らかにする事であるが、そこには散文による平易な説明あるいは論証は存在せず、謎に満ちた図表、シンボル、物語等、様々なタイプのテキストが混在している。

この異種混交テキストの中でも本論で取り上げる3つの詩は特別な位置を与えられており、それはそのままこれらが*A Vision*において重要な機能を果たしていることの証と言える。それぞれ独立した形で別の詩集に収められているものであるが、いずれの詩集においても*A Vision*における神秘主義的記号体系の文脈とは切り離せない関係にある。

本論で取り扱う「視線」は、それぞれの詩においてその主体が異なる。“The Phases of the Moon”においては、架空の神秘主義者 Michael Robartes がその主体であり、彼の視線を介することによって主張される秘儀探求者としてのYeatsの立場が論じられる。“Leda”においては、Yeats自身がその主体であり、官能的崩壊の中に歴史のダイナミズムを見取る隠された視線が彼の審美主義との関係において考察される。“All Souls’ Night”においても、その視線の主体はYeatsであるが、彼自身の神秘主義的記号体系の論述を締めくくるにあたっての自己矛盾した心境が論じられる。

これら3つの詩における視線は、主体、客体そのいずれかにYeats自身が関わっている。いずれの場合も、その視線を介した相手との関係が、主体ある

いは客体としての役割を決定し、意味づけを行っている。この視線を媒介とした他者との交換関係を辿ることで、*A Vision* における Yeats の意識の変遷を明らかにする。