

William Butler Yeats's 'The Symbolic System' of William Blake

Arianna Antonielli
University of Florence

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Abstract. The theosophical systems formulated by great poets, such as William Blake and William Butler Yeats, represent a personal idiosyncratic actualization of an ancient *repertoire* of magical symbols and occult visions. This study wants to focus the attention on the philosophical, mythical, and esoteric syncretism that W. B. Yeats drew from William Blake's symbolical system. A fundamental step of Yeats's deep investigation into the Blakean 'vision' was given by his monumental work, written together with Edwin John Ellis, on Blake's poetic and pictorial production, completed in 1893 with a three-volume edition entitled *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*. This work, published in London by Bernard Quaritch, deeply influenced Yeats's symbolical and imaginary system, determining its subsequent development up to its codification in the volume of *A Vision*. With *WWB*, Yeats was able to systematize for the first time his own thought, giving unity to his *Weltanschauung* and his poetry. Following this hypothesis, I concentrated on Yeats's and Ellis's numerous analyses dedicated to Blake's mythological and symbolical *corpus* and, in particular, I examined the last chapter of the first volume of the Quaritch edition. This chapter, entitled "The Symbolic System", constitutes an unquestionable link between Yeats the reader and scholar of Blake, and Yeats the poet and follower of Blake.

Keywords. Cosmology, fall, mysticism, mythology, magic, occultism, symbolism, vision

Resumen. Los sistemas teosóficos formulados por grandes poetas, tales como William Blake y William Butler Yeats, representan una personal e idiosincrásica actualización de un antiguo *repertoire* de símbolos mágicos y visiones ocultas. Este estudio centra su atención en el sincretismo filosófico, mítico y esotérico que W. B. Yeats concibió partiendo del sistema simbólico de William Blake. La profunda investigación llevada a cabo por Yeats sobre la 'visión' de Blake avanzó crucialmente con el monumental trabajo, escrito conjuntamente con Edwin John Ellis, que fue completado en 1893 tras la edición de tres volúmenes bajo el título: *La obra poética, simbólica y crítica de William Blake*. Este estudio, publicado en Londres por Bernard Quaritch, influyó profundamente en el sistema simbólico e imaginario de Yeats, determinando el desarrollo posterior del mismo hasta llegar a su codificación en el volumen *Una Visión*. Con *Las obras de William Blake*, Yeats logró sistematizar por primera vez su propio pensamiento, y dio unidad a su *Weltanschauung* y a su poesía. Basándome en esta hipótesis, me he concentrado en los numerosos análisis de Yeats y Ellis dedicados al corpus mitológico y simbólico de Blake y, en particular, he analizado el último capítulo del primer volumen de la edición de Quaritch. Este capítulo, titulado "El sistema simbólico", constituye la incuestionable conexión entre el Yeats lector e investigador de Blake, y el Yeats poeta y seguidor de Blake.

Palabras clave. Cosmología, la caída, misticismo, mitología, magia, ocultismo, simbolismo, visión

Grant me an old man's frenzy.
 Myself must I remake
 Till I am [...] William Blake
 Who beat upon the wall
 Till Truth obeyed his call;
 (W. B. Yeats, *An Acre of Grass*)

The theosophical, philosophical, mythical and symbolic system created by William Butler Yeats certainly represents a personal idiosyncratic actualization of an ancient repertoire of magical symbols and occult visions. A fundamental step in Yeats's formulation of his own system was his first¹ deep investigation into the Blakean 'vision', culminating in 1893 with a three-volume work on Blake's poetic and pictorial production, written together with Edwin John Ellis and published in London by Bernard Quaritch:² *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical. Edited with Lithographs of the Illustrated "Prophetic Books" and a Memoir and Interpretation by Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats.*³ This title immediately

exemplifies the complex structure in which the whole work is grounded, anticipating Ellis's and Yeats's 'poetic', 'symbolic' and 'critical' approach to Blake's *opus*. *The Works of William Blake* reveals, in its critical depth, in its symbolic survey and in its poetical content, a conspicuous work, which is both cognitive and analytic. It is the fruit of a particular knowledge defined by Raine as "learning of the imagination" (1986: 87), a kind of imagination Yeats attributed to Blake and which he also aspired to reach. Actually, after plunging for four years into Blake's art,⁴

1. In "Code Breaking and Myth Making: the Ellis-Yeats Edition of Blake's *Works*" (1985), Donald Masterson and Edward O'Shea rightly observe that "Yeats's interest in Blake was life-long, and the themes and aesthetics of both poets are clearly compatible, ...". *Yeats's Annual No. 3*. 1.

2. Their work on Blake concretely started when Ellis gave Yeats his interpretation of Blake's *The fields from Islington to Marylebone* (from *Jerusalem* 27. 1966. *The Complete Writings of William Blake*. Ed. by Geoffrey Keynes. London: Oxford University Press. 649. This edition will be referred to as *K*), after whose reading Yeats was to write: "The four quartets of London represented Blake's four great mythological personages, the Zoas, and also the four elements. These few sentences were the foundation of all study of the philosophy of William Blake that requires an exact knowledge for its pursuit and that traces the connection between his system and that of Swedenborg or of Boehme. I recognized certain attributions from what it sometimes called the Christian Cabbala, of which Ellis had never heard, and with this proof that his interpretation was more than fantasy he and I began our four years' work ..." (1916. *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats*. New York: The Macmillan Company. 108. In the text, references to this edition will appear hereafter as *A*).

3. In this text referred to as *WWB*. The first publication of *The Works of William Blake* dates back to February 1893. It was received by major London reviews with a moderate enthusiasm and several objections (see *Letters*, 355 and 355, n. 2). "[...] a work of enthusiasm rather than of accurate scholarship" is Keynes's evaluation of the Quaritch edition reported in his letter to Joseph Hone on 17 July 1938 (from Hazard Adams. 1968. *Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision*. New York: Russell & Russell: 47), a work full of "textual inaccuracies and such wild assumptions", argues Adams in his more moderate evaluation (*ibid.*, 7), up to Frye's most negative comment, alleging that Ellis and Yeats "approached Blake [...] from the wrong side of Blavatsky" (1947. "Yeats and the language of Symbolism". *University of Toronto Quarterly* XVII. 12).

4. Following Yeats's *Autobiography* and *Letters* (W. B. Yeats. 1986-1997. *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*. Ed. by J. S. Kelly. Oxford: Clarendon Press. This edition will be referred to as *L*), it is possible to date the two editors' collaboration back to 1889 and follow the alternate process concerning the volume composition. As Ian Fletcher points out, "In October 1889 Yeats reports to Katharine Tynan that the work is going well and might be finished in the following January," but he adds that "in December 1889 progress was complicated by the discovery at the Linnells's of a lengthy unknown fragment of a 'Prophetic Book' and in February 1890 he was still copying the new work" (Fletcher, 90). In another letter Yeats wrote to Katharine

Yeats appeared to re-emerge with a new *furor poeticus* and a deep understanding of Blake's system. This work was "passionately conceived" (Fletcher 1972: 72) by its authors and mainly by the young Yeats, influencing his own system and partly determining its subsequent development up to its codification in the volume of *A Vision*.⁵ Through *The*

Tynan in May 1890, *WWB* is still supposed to be composed of two rather than three volumes: "the first containing the text of the prophetic books the second an interpretation of the philosophy contained in them" (L 218); while the thematic array appears to be already delineated, as proved by another letter Yeats addressed to Ellis in 1890 that plainly reveals Yeats's manifest interest in Blake's numerical symbolism, emerging from his very system and mainly deriving from the Christian tradition of the Bible, the mystical postulates of Jacob Boehme and Emmanuel Swedenborg, and the great esoteric traditions, such as alchemy and cabbala. In a note "inscribed in Lady Gregory's copy of *The Works of Blake* (Berg)" (L 226, n 4), dated 14 November 1899, Yeats specifies and explains their partition of the work, attributing to Ellis the greater part of the writing. After reading Boehme's works and having copied Linnell's manuscript of *The Four Zoas* in Red Hill, as already mentioned, Yeats started writing his own part, 'The Symbolic System' and the 'Memoir', both of them subsequently enlarged by Ellis who, in the meantime, was probably working on the other chapters.

5. It is worth noticing that Yeats and Ellis concluded their three-year study on Blake in 1893. As a consequence, Yeats's vision and analysis of Blake's *corpus* in *WWB* was already affected by the occult experiences he had carried out up to then. Blake's portrait emerging from *WWB* is indeed deeply related and due to Yeats's esoteric experiences, studies and research. Actually, we have to consider at least three of the fundamental steps of Yeats's deep investigation into esotericism: first, his juvenile adventure in the 'Dublin Hermetic Society', which he co-founded and entered in 1885; second, his meeting with the great Russian theosophist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a medium, writer and creator of the well known 'Theosophical Society', which Yeats joined in 1887; and, last but not least, his admission in 1890 into a new organization "more in tune with his real needs" (Richard Ellman. 1954. *The Identity of Yeats*. New York: Oxford University Press. 41), 'The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn'. Yeats's occult 'Hodos Chameliontos' deeply determined not only his *vision* of Blake's works in 1893, but also his own.

Works of William Blake, Yeats was able to systematize his thought for the first time, giving unity to his *Weltanschauung* and poetry, as mostly comes out from the last chapter of the first volume of the Quaritch edition, the 'Symbolic System'. Fundamental in its

later *Vision*. For any in-depth investigation of this topic, see Helena P. Blavatsky. 1889. *The Key to Theosophy, being a clear exposition, in the form of question and answer, of the Ethics, Science, and Philosophy for the study of which the Theosophical Society has been founded*. London: The Theosophical Publishing Co. Ltd.; William Butler Yeats, 1961. "Magic". *Ideas of Good and Evil. Essays and Introductions*. London: Macmillan and Co Ltd; D. Dorfman. 1969. *Blake in the nineteenth century: his reputation as a poet from Gilchrist to Yeats*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press; Kathleen Raine. 1969. *Blake and Tradition*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; ead.. 1972. *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn*. Dublin: The Dolmen Press; Ian Fletcher. 1972. "The Ellis-Yeats-Blake Manuscript Cluster". *The Book Collector* 21. 72-94; Frances A. Yates. 1972. *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Richard J. Finneran, 1973. *The Prose Fiction of W. B. Yeats: The Search for 'Those Simple Forms'* Dublin: Dolmen Press; George Mills Harper. 1974. *Yeats's Golden Dawn: The Influence of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn on the Life and Art of W.B. Yeats*. London: Macmillan; Mircea Eliade. 1976. *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Fernando Picchi. 1977. *Esoterismo e magia nelle poesie di W. B. Yeats*. Firenze: Nardini Editore; W. B. Yeats, 1980. *Autobiographies*. Hong Kong: The Macmillan Press Ltd; Graham Hough. 1984. *The Mystery Religion of W.B. Yeats*. Brighton: The Harvester Press; Paul F. Case. 1985. *The True and Invisible Rosicrucian Order*. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser Publishing; Stephen Putzel. 1986. *Reconstructing Yeats: The Secret Rose and The Wind Among the Reeds*. Totowa, N. J.: Barnes and Noble; A. Norman Jeffares. 1988. *W. B. Yeats: A New Biography*. London: Hutchinson; A. Norman Jeffares (ed.). 1989. *Yeats the European*. Savage, Maryland: Barnes and Noble; Israel Regardie. 1995. *The Golden Dawn: A Complete Course in Practical Ceremonial Magic*. St. Paul: Llewellyn; Cornelio Agrippa. 1998. *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. Ed. By Donald Tyson. St. Paul: Llewellyn; A. Antonielli. "Il simbolismo teosofico nella *Visione yeatsiana*". *Rivista italiana di teosofia* 3. 27-32; 4. 24-30; 5. 26-32; ead., 2007. "L'esoterismo colto di W Butler Yeats dalla Società Teosofica all'Aurora Dorata". *Il confronto letterario* 45. Forthcoming; ead.. 2007. *Da Blake a Yeats: sistemi simbolici e costruzioni poetiche*. Firenze: CSFM-FUP.

presentation of Blake's system explained by Yeats and the conspicuous part of Yeats's system borrowed by Blake, this chapter constitutes, as I am going to illustrate here, an unquestionable link between Yeats the reader and scholar of Blake, and Yeats the poet and follower of Blake.

The first volume of the Quaritch edition is composed of four sections – 'Preface', 'Memoir' (the latter made up of 14 chapters tracing Blake's life), 'The Literary Period' and 'The Symbolic System' – and aims to examine Blake's system in its wholeness from a perspective that is in no way introductory, since it assumes a certain familiarity with Blake's poems and thought.⁶ Masterson and O'Shea, specifically referring to 'The Symbolic System', define this chapter as "overly-schematized and needlessly complex" but, they add, with some "valuable insights into the cosmogony of the prophetic books" (1985: 64); a cosmogony Yeats tirelessly tries to understand and elucidate by a concordance

6. "Any student unfamiliar with Blake and with the esoteric tradition and hoping to find in the Ellis and Yeats commentaries an easy introduction, will find only explanations of the obscure by the more obscure", Raine 1986: 112. This edition focuses on the most important semantic and symbolic *nuclei* of Blake's poems, pointing out how Yeats's and Ellis's critical interpretation is either the cause or the consequence of an epistemological research that managed to dig into the semantic, symbolic, and imaginary universe created by Blake. The second volume is composed of three chapters. The former represents an 'Interpretation and paraphrased Commentary' of more than twenty Blake's works, excluding the *Poetical Sketches*, *Island in the Moon* and a few less famous lyrics; the second, entitled 'Blake the Artist', is mainly centred on Blake's pictorial production; and the latter, 'Some References', presents a concordance of the characters of the four zoas in *The Prophetic Books*. The third part is a compendium of Blake's poetic and pictorial works. The *Poetical Sketches*, *Songs*, *Gates of Paradise*, the handwritten poems got by the *Pickering MS*, the *Note-book*, the *Notes* to the first poems, *Tiriel* and *Vala* are published in this volume; and also the *Lambeth prophecies*, the *Marriage*, *Thel*, *Jerusalem*, and *Milton*, are here lithographed.

of Blake's, Boehme's and Swedenborg's symbols, as well as of the rich symbolism coming from the most ancient occult traditions. Actually, as clearly confirmed by the title of the first section of this chapter, 'The Necessity of Symbolism', the symbolism of William Blake's poetic production represents, for Yeats, a necessary step for those 'questers' willing to find "a profound answer to the riddle of the world" (235). With this consciousness in mind, Yeats turns to the analysis of "There is no Natural Religion", the treatise where he finds his mentor's mystical and poetical⁷ postulates and the analogy 'in kind' between natural and spiritual things, because "[...] if they do so differ, no mere analysis of nature as it exists outside our minds can solve the problems of mental life" (236). Nature cannot be thought of as unknown to the mental context, inasmuch as it is contained and enclosed in that context. Actually, Blake's *quest* towards a mystical vision of reality reveals his constant attempt to overcome the material world and, by means of his spiritual existence, to reach and observe the immanence of the Eternal One:

All that we See is Vision, from Generated
Organs gone as soon as come, Permanent in
The Imagination, Consider'd as Nothing by the
Natural Man. (K 358)

Only Vision is able to open the secrets of the ultra-sensible world to the fallen man; it becomes concrete in the human imagination and reveals itself in nature. Blake's Vision lives within metaphysical reality, that is the only infinite and eternal space made of thought and imagination. Empiric reality is just an illusion perceived as real by the common man through "his senses five": "What is call'd Corporeal, Nobody knows of its Dwelling Place: it is in Fallacy, & its Existence an Imposture. Where is the Existence Out of Mind

7. Yeats adopts the term 'mysticism' even though it would be probably more correct to speak about poetical symbolism: "To call any poet who develops a pattern of symbolism in his work a mystic is to purge the term of any useful meaning. Yeats's treatment of the term 'mysticism' is itself vague and misleading. By his use of the term he seems to imply that mysticism follows from putting into practice a certain kind of theory of knowledge. ...", (Hazard Adams 1968: 49).

or Thought? Where is it but in the Mind of a Fool?" (K 162). By the way, material reality has not to be rejected but observed by men, so that they can be driven by the wings of imagination. In Yeats's opinion, "[...] Nature, — or creation — is a result of the shrinkage of consciousness [...]" (xii), that is in its turn the extreme consequence of the *sparagmos* of the universal Mind.

It is necessary at this point to focus attention on Blake's theories of contraction and expansion. Blake's cosmos is indeed characterized by two opposite movements, which recall the systolic and diastolic phases of the heart. The material world that Blake calls Ulro is given by contraction of the infinite into the finite, while the spiritual abode of Eden is characterized by a contrary act of expansion. The contraction movement corresponds to Blake's act of *Selfhood*, that is to the condition faced by the fallen man who is contracted in himself. On the other hand, the phase of expansion occurs when man recovers his imaginative eyes and understands that empiric reality is just an illusory deformation of the ultra-sensible one. The movement of contraction allows all the members of the Divine Council to hold the universe in its multiplicity; by contrast, their act of expansion reduce them to a single unit. As Los tells Albion in *Jerusalem*, "[...] Contracting our infinite senses we behold multitude, or expanding, we behold as one [...]" (K 221). For this reason, nature becomes for Blake an immaterial symbol, says Yeats, as well as man, who is a natural being with a physical body and a material existence symbolically representable: "the highest ideal, 'the human form divine,' as he calls it, and not the extrinsic body" (242).

In *WWB*, Yeats understands and relates the Blakean relationship between the material world of creation and the spiritual one of imagination to Emmanuel Swedenborg's⁸ theory of discrete and continuous degrees. Discrete degrees, different from each other, are connected by a 'correspondence', as Blake himself explained in his own *Annotations to Swedenborg's Wisdom of Angels Concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*:

Is it not also evident that one degree will not open the other, & that science will not open

intellect, but that they are discrete & not continuous so as to explain each other except by correspondence, which has nothing to do with demonstration; for you cannot demonstrate one degree by the other; for how can science be brought to demonstrate intellect without making them continuous & not discrete? (K 93)

In Yeats's opinion, every kind of correspondence or signature – as Boehme calls it, – like the Blakean one between sensory and mental qualities, "[...] says far more than a syllogism or a scientific observation" (238). In Swedenborg and in Blake, he perceives the presence of both continuous and discrete degrees, the ones distinct from the others by a "perpendicular and longitudinal motion" (238-39). While discrete degrees of cause-effect imply a perpendicular motion, continuous degrees require a longitudinal one.

According to the theory of correspondence, every human being has a sensible body shaped by those thoughts sent by the mind and created by the "growing genius". Thus, it follows that every man has a physical body different from every other one. It is his own intellectual and emotional nature to determine that unlikeness or, in Blake's/Yeats's words, it is the nature of symbols — "known as the physical body" — the real cause of that difference "in essence or genius". For this reason, the common man will receive a sensible body different from that assigned to the man of culture.

8. "The Blake-related materials found in Yeats's private library in Dalkey include a copy of Emmanuel Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* presented to Yeats by Ellis. Yeats carefully transcribed into this copy Blake's own annotations as found in the volume in the British Museum. But from the evidence of Yeats's library the most important source books for Ellis's and Yeats's understanding of Swedenborg were the first volume of his *Arcana Coelestia* (London, 1891) and the first three volumes of *The Spiritual Diary* (London, 1883), all heavily annotated by Yeats", Masterson, O'Shea 1985: 54. Actually, as Masterson and O'Shea clearly demonstrate, "Ellis and Yeats [...] discovered Swedenborg and Boehmen" not before starting working on the Quaritch edition, but "as they unravelled Blake", since "Ellis's and Yeats's reading of the two writers (along with a general knowledge of the Cabala) provided them with a necessary point of entry into Blake's system" (55).

Yeats and Ellis thoroughly enhance in their work Blake's concern with symbols, his ability to translate each aspect of the human existence into Christian and mystical symbols, deriving them from an arcane pantheon of magic beliefs, mythological traditions and occult visions. They imply that, as "the different nature of [...] symbol[s]" may produce infinite and different physical personalities, observing a man while he is talking, means to study his symbolism, just because the material body of every living being is influenced by the spiritual or mental reality of his own thoughts: "To hear a man talking, or to watch his gestures, is to study symbolism, and when we restate our impressions in what are thought to be straightforward and scientific sentences, we are in reality giving a more limited, and therefore more graspable, symbolic statement of this impalpable reality" (*WWB*, I, 239).⁹

The scientific reformulation of the impressions perceived during such activity of vigilant observation, entails an unavoidable limitation of thought itself; accordingly, Yeats adds that poetry and all the other creative arts do not aim at giving explanations. As stated by this logic of correspondences, the universe, being a physical entity of one creative mind, contains the symbol of the "infinite thought which is in turn symbolic of the universal mood we name God" (239). For this reason, "the perception of the senses apart from symbol, limits us down to the narrow circle of personal experience" (328), inhibiting the understanding of everything that is not centripetal to such experience and so to surrounding reality.

Again with *In Ideas of Good and Evil*, Yeats explains Blake's necessity to use symbols "because he [Blake] spoke of things for whose speaking he could find no models in the world about him" (Yeats 1961: 117) immediately identifying and annihilating the problem related to the understanding of Blake's symbolism since, as Masterson and O'Shea rightly emphasise, "To Ellis and Yeats, [...], it

9. According to Adams "Here the editors suggest perhaps too strongly the spiritual existence of nature as a positive force rather than as a negative creation in the mind of divided man, but the important point of nature's delusory power is emphatically made throughout the volumes" (1968: 51).

must have seemed reassuring that Blake spoke in the 'universal language' of symbols, a language that could be substantiated in a long, continuing though 'esoteric' theosophical tradition" (1985: 60).

Blake's system is rich in symbolic and imaginary elements, often perceived by the 'natural reader' as nonsense. Actually, as the two editors never fail to illustrate, every contradiction or paradox may only be overcome through symbolism.¹⁰ Discrete degrees determine, in their view, the difference between natural and intellectual things and between intellectual and emotional ones. The natural level is external and has a physical form; the second level has a mental form, and the third one has "neither form nor substance — dwelling not in space but in time only" (240). While the emotional level is related to evil by the church (as revealed in Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*), the second degree or intellect degree represents the *Summum Bonum*. This triad, created by the intellectual, emotional and natural qualities, derives from mystical philosophy, where it "corresponds to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit". In Swedenborg's doctrine, it is called "celestial, spiritual and natural degrees"; in cabala, it goes under the names of "Neschamah, Ruach and Nesphesch, or universal, particular and concrete life"; and, in theosophy, it is associated with the "triple logos — the unmanifest eternal, the manifest eternal, and the manifest temporal". Finally, in Yeats's opinion, the triad can also be found in Blake's system "under many names, and trace[s] the histories of the many symbolic rulers who govern its various subdivisions" (241). The 'central mood' of each human being, that is his emotional degree, comes from Blake's so-called *poetic genius*,¹¹ while the

10. This concept of expansion as contraction within the infinite boundaries of mind anticipates Yeats's *gyres* symbolism.

11. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1792), *Plates 12-13*, it is possible to find one of Blake's most significant definitions of the Poetic Genius: "The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert that God spoke to them; and whether they did not think at the time that they would be misunderstood, & so be the cause of imposition. /

intellectual and physical qualities implicitly derive from it. Obviously, as Yeats makes clear with this interpretation, the genius or central part of man, aims at becoming one thing with the poetic genius, or ‘universal mood’ (243). Through a motion of expansion, the human genius enlarges up to include the poetic genius:

The apparent contradiction disappears when looked at in the light of Blake’s religious belief in the essential brotherliness of Imagination, and the essential egotism and isolation of Reason. The one being Christ, the other Satan. [...] Each is endowed with a centre and a circumference. The centre of brotherhood, or its essence, is its quality of expansiveness. But this is an inner expansiveness. Each man opens his own mind inwards into the field of Vision and there, in this infinite realm, meets his brother-man. [...] The paradox turns out to be a symbol, not a contradiction. (*WWB*, I, 404-5)

This process does not occur if man disclaims his central genius and concentrates only on “his own bodily life, neglecting to regard it as a symbol” (243). On the contrary, the visionary man’s ‘central mood’ turns to spiritual reality, crossing his own physical and mental boundaries so as to enter other minds:

The mood of the seer, no longer bound in by the particular experiences of his body, spreads out and enters into the particular experiences of an ever-widening circle of other lives and beings, for it will more and more grow one with that portion of the mood essence which is common to all that lives. The circle of individuality will widen out until other individualities are contained within it, and their thoughts, and the persistent thought-symbols which are their spiritual or mental bodies, will grow visible to it. He who has thus passed into the impersonal portion of his own mind perceives that it is not a mind but all minds. (*WWB*, I, 244)

With these words, Yeats infers that the form of madness attributed to Blake for his self styled friendship with spiritual entities, is a

... / Then Ezekiel said: ‘The philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception: some nations held one principle for the origin, & some another: we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all the others merely derivative, ...’ (*K* 153).

form of insanity with which only those men able to see reality in God’s eyes are charged.¹²

By reaching such a level of *Entfremdung* from his own material body, “Blake perceived those spiritual forms with which, as Tatham tells us, he talked and argued as with old friends” (*WWB*, I, 244). Actually, Blake’s expansion does not imply an enlargement of the circle; by contrast, “[...] it corrects the inside-outness of the circle which came about in the fall. To correct the circle’s inside-outness is to free the mind from any boundaries whatever instead of simply enlarging the area within the boundaries” (Adams 1968: 52). This capability to free one’s mind from all sensible boundaries determines its constant flow towards other minds and from them to the primary mind. This is a very important concept later reformulated by Yeats in the essay entitled “Magic” (1901), where the seeds of his own mythical and philosophical system appeared for the first time:

- (1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.
- (2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.
- (3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.¹³

12. “The Prophets describe what they saw in Vision as real and existing men, whom they saw with their imaginative and immortal organs; the Apostles the same; the clearer the organ the more distinct the object. A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour, or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing and mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all” (*A Descriptive Catalogue*, K 76).

13. (Yeats, 1961: 21). Yeats wrote this essay in a crucial moment of the history of the Golden Dawn. After the first most brilliant years, Mathers’s chairmanship caused the first problems. In 1892, Mathers definitely moved to Paris to be as close as possible to the secret masters. During this period, he started his collaboration with Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), who entered the Golden Dawn in 1898

Yeats observes that Swedeborgian degrees are also identifiable in the last chapter of *Vala*,¹⁴ where he discovers both the intellectual degree comparable to the Father, the emotional degree corresponding to the Son and the third degree,

and soon reached the high level of Philosophus (the highest of the First Order). Mathers and Crowley wanted to give birth to the well known Third Order, but Mathers's autocracy started facing initial resistance and a number of his adepts, looking for power, took decisions totally independent or opposite to Mathers's principles. Overpowered by his adepts, the hermetic order underwent an irreparable dismembering that saw Mathers and his followers on the one side, and the traitors on the other. On March 1900, Mathers was turned away together with Crowley and forced to change the name of the order from 'Golden Dawn' to 'Alpha Et Omega,' while Robert William Felkin (1858-1922) and John William Brodie-Innes (1848-1923), leaders of the rebels, created the new order of the 'Stella Matutina.' Yeats decided to adhere the latter temple (see George Mills Harper. 1974. *Yeats's Golden Dawn: The Influence of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn on the Life and Art of W.B. Yeats*. London: Macmillan), which was probably active until 1922. Appointed first 'Instructor in Mystical Philosophy,' in 1901 Yeats became 'Emperor of the London Temple of Isis-Urania.' Yet, after two years, even this new order broke and in 1903, the year that saw the appearance of this essay, the poet had to face a diatribe to protect his leadership. Arthur Edward Waite (1857-1942) and some of his followers thwarted Yeats, "objecting to occultism and saying that they must work on purely mystical lines" (Raine 1972: 10). To the several parties that threatened his position, Yeats answered with two essays: one private, read aloud only to the initiates of the Stella Matutina as Emperor of the Order, entitled 'Is the Order of R.R. et A.C. to Remain a Magical Order?' (March 1901); and a 'public' one: 'Magic'. The thematic nucleus of this essay is based on Yeats's faith in magic, that is in the capability to evoke spirits and to have visions by means of imagination. However, differently from Blake who managed to become the receiver of his own visions only by indulging his own power of imagination, Yeats admitted the need for special instruments that enable the induction of these very visions in men. These instruments from the evocative power, largely adopted by the initiates of the Golden Dawn to reach this target, are the symbols. The Sephirothic Tree, Gematria, the four alchemic elements, the Indian Tattva, the pentagram, the six-pointed star, the tarots and the astrological signs are only a part of the symbolic elements adopted by the initiates.

the natural one, to the Holy Spirit. The third degree would indeed represent God's sensible manifestation, the first the 'Divine Energy', that is the Father, and the second the 'Divine Imagination', or the Son. But the natural degree, according to Yeats, does not only express a correspondence for the Holy Spirit, but it also represents "the fallen substance of the mirror" (249). He claims that "Like Boehmen and the occultists generally, [Blake] postulates besides the Trinity, a fourth principle, a universal matrix or heaven or abode, from which, and in which all have life" (246), defined as the 'looking-glass' or 'mirror'. It is worth mentioning that Yeats connects Blake's quaternary system, represented by the symbolical *personae* of the four zoas, with Boehme's¹⁵ three principles of the Divine Essence, that correspond to the Christian Trinity, and the fourth principle, the mirror ("for all things are fourfold, and repeat in miniature the great fourfold of the universe", 250). The union between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit produces the androgynous symbol of the Trinity, which is visible since it is reflected in the mirror of *Sophia*, or wisdom, i.e. the female principle or the Trinity's emanation (fourth principle): "[God] reveals the Word in the mirror of Wisdom, so that the three-fold nature of the Deity becomes manifest in Wisdom" (Stoudt 1957: 213). The mirror is

14. Yeats referred to this poem in a letter to John O'Leary dated December 1889: "We found the other day a long mystical poem of his that had never been published or even read. ... " (L 201). In a note to this letter, the editor adds "The poem (actually more than 4,000 lines long) was *Vala, or the Four Zoas* (c. 1797), the MS of which was given by Blake to this friend and patron John Linnell (1792-1882); it was eventually included in vol. III of Ellis's and WBY's *Works of William Blake*" (*ibid.*, n. 5). Actually, the Quaritch Edition was the first to print Blake's *Four Zoas*, a most important poem in the very development of Yeats's own system and *vision*, as noticeably perceivable in the sections Yeats devoted to Blake's symbolic system, that "still illuminate Blake despite dense, obscure, and dubious mystical doctrine", Dorfman 1969: 192.

15. "For an understanding of Boehme, Ellis and Yeats turned to Franz Hartmann's compendium *The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme* (London, 1891). The copy in Yeats's library is fully annotated almost throughout in pen and pencil of various colours by both men", Masterson, O'Shea 1985: 54.

given by the union between Imagination (the Father) and Divine Energy (the Son). From this last principle – representable as a “circle containing the triangle of the ancient mystics” (246) – life itself originated.¹⁶ It is indicative that, in his ‘Table of Correspondences’ (*WWB*, I, 249), Yeats reproduces in the Divine Macrocosm three of Blake’s four zoas by means of the Christian Trinity and the fourth with the symbol of the mirror, while in the Human Microcosm, he calls them emotional, intellectual and spiritual degrees.

In ‘The Four Zoas’, that is in the third part of the ‘Symbolic System’, Yeats carries out a further ‘linguistic-symbolical translation’, turning the quaternary system given by the Christian Trinity plus Boehme’s mirror into the quaternary symbolical system adopted by Blake in *Vala*. Thus, the four zoas or, as Yeats calls them, the four “spirits” or “mental states”, have to be sorted under four divisions that correspond to the “division of the Divine Nature into Father, Son, Spirit and, what we have called with Boehmen, ‘mirror.’ [...] They are identical with the wheels of Ezekiel and with the four beasts of the Apocalypse, and resemble closely [...] the Kabalistic regents of the cardinal points, and like them preside over psychic and bodily affairs” (251). In this perspective, Urizen as father of this world coincides with the Old Testament God (the Father) and with the degree of reason; Luvah is the Son who descends to the world ““in Luvah’s robes of blood”” (253) and symbolizes the degree of emotion; Tharmas represents “[t]he matrix, ‘mirror’ or feminine principle” (253) and the degree of sensation; and, lastly, Urthona is the symbol of the Holy Spirit and reproduces the degree of energy. Since the quaternary division characterizes all of Blake’s system, it is also returned by Yeats to space, mainly to the four cardinal points – “zenith, nadir, centre, and circumference” (255) – that

16. In *The Ellis-Yeats Edition of William Blake’s Works*, Masterson and O’Shea state that “At about the time that Ellis and Yeats were making the *Works*, Yeats had concluded that Blake’s notion of the imagination as the primary creative faculty originated in Boehme, and even more specifically in a commentary added by Boehme’s English disciple, William Law, to Boehme’s *The Way to Christ Discovered and Described* (Bath, 1775)”, 57.

Blake was presumed to have borrowed from the medieval cabalistic tradition:

Four Universes round the Mundane Egg remain
Chaotic,
One to the North, named Urthona: One to the
South, named Urizen:
One to the East, named Luvah: One to the West,
named Tharmas:
They are the four Zoas that stood around the
Throne Divine. (K 500)

By representing “the unlimited translucence of free spirit or imagination”, the zenith corresponds to the south as regards geographical space; to the dimension of depth at a perspective spatial level; and to Urizen at a symbolical level. The nadir, standing for the “limit of opaque matter in the outer, and of unimaginativeness in the inner world”, is the material north, or Urthona’s realm whose perspective dimension is height; the cardinal point of the centre, as the “gathering point of physical existence”, represents Luvah, King of the East; and, finally, the circumference or west, being “the outward or expansive tendency of vitalizing instinct” (255), symbolizes Tharmas. At this point, Yeats re-creates in another graph the four cardinal points by two straight lines that intersect with each other: the first one crosses the dimensions of height and depth, and the second one those of length and width.

Yeats also associates the four zoas with the four natural elements. Indeed, he identifies Urizen with the tongues of *fire* of his original condition, when he was one with God while, once fallen and changed into the demiurge of the material world, he turns into the personification of cold and rational light. *Air*, on the other hand, is the element symbolized by Luvah, whose essence is fit to describe the emotional universe and reach phenomenological knowledge. Both Luvah and Urizen are properly recognized by their actions. Their movements do not involve the vertical dimension, but the horizontal one. Since Tharmas is the symbol of *water*, Yeats suggests that Luvah, or air, is the median zoa inserted between Urizen and Tharmas, i.e. between fire and water. His central geographical position determines his possible association with the Son, who is in the Trinity between the Father and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, as air is able to transmit fire in terms of light and heat, and

contain water in its aerial form, so Luvah, owing to his semantic and symbolical implications, becomes the reference zoa in the relation between Urizen and Tharmas. Alluding to Cornelius Agrippa's occult tradition, Yeats claims that water is "the universal fructifier" (258) able to create life itself, but it also represents Boehme's mirror. The last zoa, Urthona, is hence the symbol of *earth*, "but earth to Blake is the limit downward of his vision — behind it God and fire begin anew" (258).

According to the mystical-occult vision, the material world is related to the spiritual one by the well-known 'Jacob's Ladder', whose ends respectively touch these two opposite realities. Yeats suggests that the 'atmospheres' to which the zoas belong are the four steps of the 'great ladder'; these atmospheres, often associated by Blake with the realms of Eden, Beulah, Generation and Ulro, would be occasionally defined as "Beulah, Alla, Al-Ulro, and Or-Ulro". Actually, he also claims that the human states in Blake's system are not four but five, considering Jerusalem as the fifth, or "the kingdom of the daughters of inspiration, who are above Beulah" (259) and consequently outside the zoas' power. While Jerusalem represents the imaginative vision, the other four atmospheres constitute the rational vision, as "Blake considers taste and touch to be subdivisions of one sense, the servant of the vegetative impulse — Tharmas" (*ibid.*). Yeats supports this reasoning by the image — found in a copy of *Europe* that belonged to Mr. Linnell — of the five windows that open to the world; he identifies them with the five atmospheres related, the first one, to the divine unity conferred by the imaginative faculty, and the others to the four zoas:

[...] the nadir corresponds to hearing, the centre to the nostrils and to the sense of smell and the power of breathing, the circumference of taste and touch, symbolized by the vine, the zenith to the eyes, and the fifth atmosphere, [...] to the direct apprehension of truth and beauty inherent to the mind, to the power that is of seeing, "not with but through the eye". (*WWB*, I, 259)

Beulah or zenith, from which the 'external life' originates, stands for the eyes, as it represents the first point of encounter between

objective and subjective reality. Alla, or centre, is symbolized by nostrils and, as a result, by the olfactory sense. Al-ulro corresponds to touch and taste, while Or-ulro to hearing: "Beulah, Alla, and Al-ulro are symbolical of the triad of personal life — head, heart, loins, or of thinking, emotional, and instinctive existence. Or-ulro and Jerusalem are respectively below and above the limited life of the personality" (*WWB*, I, 260). The three bodily parts of the head, heart and loins are considered by Yeats as the epitome of Blake's three zoas: the head or thought is Urizen; the heart or emotion is Luvah; the loins or instinctive power is Tharmas. Urthona, whose sensory universe is represented by hearing and his 'atmosphere' by Or-ulro, is symbolized by the stomach and womb (260). Familiar as he was with the western and eastern occult traditions, Yeats does not avoid connecting the four higher atmospheres with the four cabalistic worlds of "Atziloth, Briah, Yetzirah, and Assiah" and, above all, with the "one Arupa (or formless), and three Rupa (or form-possessing) plains of Theosophical Mysticism" (261). Besides, he maintains that the five atmospheres may also be associated with the five "tatwas of Hindu occultism, and with them, as with the tatwas, the lower four correspond to the four elements" (261).¹⁷ The last four *tatwas* — Tajasa-tattwa, Vaju-tattwa, Apas-tattwa, Prithivi-tattwa — correspond to the four elements of air, fire, water and earth.

As O'Shea and Masterson demonstrate, "Ellis and Yeats found the triad on plate thirty-four of Milton where Blake associates head, heart and loins with three of the four states of being" (1985: 70) and, they continue "Once Ellis and Yeats had decided that 'head, heart, loins' was the basic schema for understanding Blake, it required some detailed knowledge of his work and some imaginative contrivance to organise most of his canon into a unified but

17. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in her *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, (1988. Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, "The Tattvas", vol. 3, 498-499), gives an accurate definition of *tatwas* that probably influenced Yeats.

highly schematized plan” (72). Actually Yeats tends to exemplify the relation between macrocosm and microcosm by the correspondence among Beulah, Alla, Al-ulro and Or-ulro with the head, heart, loins and womb. During his fall, man is depicted (mainly by occult iconography, but also by the Christian one: i.e. Dante’s Lucifer) with his head turned downwards, in Or-Ulro, and with the loins in the “luminous world” (262). Nevertheless, Yeats notices that in Blake’s system, evil is not as much the consequence of the ascent of instinct as of the fall of the ratiocinative mind that has abandoned spiritual truth. This is the reason why “the heart is full of water, the head is in the earth, and the loins are in the air and light” (263). But Yeats sees the possibility for the human being to be in other positions too and, as a consequence, to be dominated by the ‘heart’, ‘loins’ and ‘womb’:

As soon as the fall of Los in the second chapter of the book of Los becomes oblique contemplative life begins. A being on the other hand may have head and heart both above Alla, while his loins create merely in the world of emotion, leaving to the feet alone [...] the whole instinctive region, Or-ulro being entirely out of the range of the personality. Such a being may be said to be in the four states of Humanity in action [...]. (*WWB*, I, 263)

When the human being is in the four states at the same time, it follows that Urizen is in the south and corresponds to zenith, Urthona in the north fits in with nadir, Luvah in the east and Tharmas in the west. In this position, the four zoas are still in harmony with each other and all of them with God. Urizen’s pride is the real cause of their division, and brings Luvah to usurp his throne, provoking the zoas’ rotation from their original positions. This geographic mutation is determined only by Urizen and Luvah. Before reaching zenith, Luvah leaves his eastern position, while Urizen first invades Urthona’s position and then the centre or east, left vacant by Luvah. This last movement causes the other zoas’ fall towards the centre. At this point, in Yeats’s vision, “Urizen rises as the sun into the zenith, personal, thinking, destructive” (270) but, “having now grown weary and feeble, through too great success in his contest with those desires and emotions, [...] he sinks westward down into the half-animal life of old age and of sickness [...]”

(270-71). Luvah comes back to zenith “and the feminine powers gain dominion over man” (271), creating the “material and dogmatic form of religion” (272).

Assuming that the zoas’ journey “is a hieroglyphic for human life” (*ibid*), Yeats considers that “[i]t is only when man accepts imagination that he ceases to circle about the wheel of birth. ...” (273). It is worth noticing, once more, Yeats’s reference to oriental religion, where the wheel of birth and process of annihilation are two of its main postulates. The influence of eastern philosophy leads him to explain Blake’s mythical-symbolical system by resorting to some daring interpretations, apparently produced by his enthusiasm rather than by reliable critical processes. For instance, his assumption that “Blake’s doctrine of reincarnation contained in this luminous symbol, divides his teaching from that of Swedenborg and Boehmen, and unites it with that of the Eastern mystics and the medieval Kabalists” (274), is perhaps too audacious.

“James Blake, or, as he was called in childhood, James O’Neil, the father of the poet, was of Irish extraction. A certain John O’Neil, James’s father, had got into debt and difficulties in his own country. He married Ellen Blake, keeper of a sheeben house, at Rathmines, Dublin, and took her name. His young son, James, whose mother is unknown, but who was not the fruit of this union, began at the same time to use the name of Blake. But if the old O’Neil origin was hidden, the wild O’Neil blood showed itself strongly in the next generation. William Blake, as we call him, was before all things, an O’Neil” (*WWB*, I, 2-3). In a letter to John O’Leary (7 May 1889), Yeats claims: “I have evidence by the way to show that he was of Irish extraction — his grandfather was an O’Neal who changed his name for political reasons» (*L* 163-164) and in another letter to Douglas Hyde (23 August 1889), he writes: “Did I ever tell you my good fortune in finding out that William Blake — on whose Mystic System myself and a friend are [...] making a big book [...] was an O’Neil. His grandfather was a Cornelius O’Neil who changed his name to Blake. Ireland makes much noise on his Mystic System & always holds a high ideal place” (*L* 183). And again, in September 1889, he repeats “Blake’s grandfather I have found out by chance was a Cornelius O’Neal who took the name of Blake to dodge his creditors” (*L* 136).

Regarding Blake as a scholar of cabala and Rosicrucian degrees, Yeats and Ellis even maintain that he was a member of an esoteric sect (“It is possible that he received initiation into an order of Christian Kabalists then established in London, and known as ‘The Hermetic Students of the G. D.’ [...] the subject of their study is nothing less than universal magic”, *WWB*, I, 24) and identify in this hypothetic esoteric context, the achievement of Blake’s illumination. Actually, as well as his most improbable Irish origin,¹⁸ it is extremely doubtful that Blake had ever entered a cabalistic and Rosicrucian order whose name so evidently recalls, either for its initials or for the ‘hermetic’ adjective, another sect Yeats had really taken part in: the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.¹⁹

Space and state are *fourfold* for Yeats: the former corresponds to the four cardinal points and the latter to the four zoas. As Dorfman pointedly alleges “Each state is symbolized by a person; their source is Universal Mind as it passed through Blake’s personal consciousness while the poet was in a state approaching trance” (1969: 210). Until the zoas form the Divine Council, their four corresponding spaces constitute their “radiation or garment [...], surrounding and flowing from it and containing it as the emotional nature contains the soul” (275). On the other hand, when they wage war, each state separates from its own space becoming a spectre, while the abandoned space turns into an emanation. But, as Yeats emphasizes, their function can still change, like the cabalistic *Sephiroth* “which appear as masculine when spoken of in reference to those below them, but as feminine when those that are above and full of a higher activity are compared with them” (276). Now Yeats, appealing to the mystical tradition partly deriving from the Gnostic doctrine and partly from cabalistic and theosophical thought, recalls that every living being is composed of two parts, a state and a space, where space is emanated by state. Every spectre and every emanation come from a previous state or space, to which Yeats attributes the name of the Gnostic *eon*. This, in turn, represents an emanation coming from another higher eon,

“and so the endless chain of life goes on, linking highest imagination with lowest matter” (276). This image recalls the other image of the Sephirotic Tree, where each *Sephirah* is related to another, thanks to Divine Energy and is the origin of other *Sephiroth*.

Yeats describes the zoas’ relation by means of a scheme subdivided into five sections corresponding to the five atmospheres. The dialectical tension characteristic of Blake’s system moves from two central concepts: the divine unity or freedom of the spiritual abode, or Jerusalem, and the material disjunction or law of the vegetative world, belonging to Satan. Between these two opposite poles, Yeats identifies four levels referring to the dark ages of earth: Beulah (The Golden Age), Alla (The Silver Age), Al-ulro (The Bronze Age) and Or-ulro (The Iron Age). In the first atmosphere, Jerusalem, we find the “Divine Unity or Freedom” composed of the Father, the Son, the Mirror, and the Holy Spirit; the second atmosphere, Beulah, belongs to the four zoas and their emanations. Before falling, Urizen is defined as “a ploughman, who furrows the earth with the plough made upon the anvil of Urthona, and a sower, who scatters in the furrow human souls and human moods ...” (280); Luvah is represented as a “weaver”, who has to “‘make peace, the human dress’ to hide us from the too constant fires of the sun of inspiration and from the too biting cold of the reason”; Tharmas is the shepherd who “minds the flocks of innocence”, while Urthona is “a blacksmith, like Los, and is compelled to labour at the furnace and the anvil” (*ibid*). Yeats associates each zoa with an emanation — Ahania, Vala, Enion and Enitharmon — adding that these *personae* must not be considered fellows, but “names for classes of human souls” (282). The fall, he explains, occurs at the moment when the zoas assert their own individuality. Afterwards, Mnetha, “the world of the Zoas in its aspect of mother of all individuals” (*ibid*), creates Adam and Eve or, as Yeats calls them adopting the cabalistic terms, Har and Heva. We are now projected into the third atmosphere, the state of Alla, whose populace is composed of the zoas’ sixteen sons, of their sixteen emanations and, lastly, of their respective sons. In *Jerusalem*,

19. Yeats entered the Golden Dawn in 1900.

the universe is revealed as a temple with four entrances that open onto the four cardinal points; Albion's sixteen gates ("For Albion in Eternity has Sixteen Gates among his Pillars", K 711) relate, according to Yeats, to the zoas' sixteen sons. When the western gate is closed, twelve of them fall, or "fly from mental life into corporeal" (285), while Los's four sons remain there. The twelve fallen sons correspond to Israel's twelve tribes: Ruben, Simeon and Levi are driven by Urizen; Judah, Isaac, and Zabulon are lead by Luvah-Orc; Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin are under Tharmas's power and, finally, Dan, Aser and Nephtali under Urthona-Los. Dorfman rightly observes that as Blake's realms prove to be more and more material, the names of their inhabitants undergo the same destiny (1969: 211). In Or-ulro we meet "the Pagan gods, the attributes of man which are in entire revolt and no longer serve even as types of the universal existence. They are the divinities of the nations with whom the Jews contended and of the influences within our own minds which draw us away from imagination" (286). The last state is 'Non-entity', where Albion's sons live under the aegis of the "Mundane Unity or Law", the same law "for the Lion and Ox" (K 158).

The definition "four states of humanity" (262) adopted by Yeats and Ellis with reference to the realms of Eden, Beulah, Generation and Ulro is likely to come from plate 34 of *Milton*.²⁰ From these lines the two editors probably got the idea of inserting Blake's works into the quaternary scheme of *Head, Heart, Loins and Stomach or Womb*. Actually, the numerical symbolism related to the number four is central in their analyses. It

"And the Four States of Humanity in its Repose / Were shewed them. First of Beulah, a most pleasant Sleep / On Couches soft with mild music, tended by Flowers of Beulah, / Sweet Female forms, winged or floating in the air spontaneous: / The Second State is Alla, & the third State Al-Ulro; / But the Fourth State is dreadful; it is named Or-Ulro. / The First State is in the Head, the Second is in the Heart, / The Third in the Loins & Seminal Vessels, & the Fourth / In the Stomach & Intestines terrible, deadly, unutterable. / And he whose Gates are open'd in those Regions of his Body / Can from those Gates view all these wondrous Imaginations" (K 523-24).

represents, in Yeats's opinion, a good field to be probed.

In *Jerusalem* (K 624) and in *Milton* (K 490), Blake introduces another character, the 'Covering Cherub', who symbolizes either Christ descended on earth in 'human clothes' or his opposite, Satan, the great deceiver. The Cherub "is in all created things in some form or other" (289) and is divided into twenty-seven skies or churches represented, in turn, by twenty-seven characters that inhabit each religious era and respectively belong to the *Head, Heart, or Loins*. The twenty-seven churches "are sometimes called 'the three Churches of Beulah,' and are contrasted with a fourth or Christian Church, sometimes called 'the Church,' which contains those who have recognized that the 'eternal body of man is the imagination, [...]' " (299). Yeats asserts that these four churches once formed one church while, after the *fall*, three of them followed Albion into the material world and only one refused to fall down; for this reason, this last was persecuted and its master crucified.

At the beginning of the religious era, that is during the first church, we find nine hermaphroditic *personae*, ruled by the head: "Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselelah, Lamech" (290). The meaning of the term hermaphroditic is ambivalent according to Yeats: it can be positive if it is a pre-creative symbol "[...] for it refers to the days before the division of the sexes" (292), while it is negative when it is a post-creative symbol, that is when it "is used to describe a condition of corporeal or merely natural understanding" (293). Its dialectical opposition is the same, in Yeats's opinion, as that of the cherub. The second church is characterized by the "Male within a female" (291) typology; it is ruled by the heart and inhabited by "Noah, Shem, Arphaxad, Cainan the 2nd, Salah, Heber, Peleg, Reu, Serug" (*ibid*). In the third church and last part of the religious era, there are seven characters belonging to the "Female within a male" type and represented by the loins: "Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Paul, Constantine, Charlemagne, Luther" (*ibid*). The number three occurs not only in the above cited triad, but also in the number of the skies: twenty-seven is given by the multiplication of three by nine, this latter being in turn a multiple of three.

In order to avoid the problem of an irregular subdivision of the three churches into groups of nine, eleven and seven, Yeats separates Nacor and Terach from the second church, to put them into the third one, so that each church is composed of nine characters. Afterwards, he further divides all the churches into three sections, each of them respectively symbolizing both the initial, central and final phase of a religious era and the premise of the fourth phase that indicates the beginning of another era. Adopting this last subdivision, Yeats appears to refer to Swedenborg's vision and, subsequently, to Blake's, since in Yeats's words, he "followed [Swedenborg] to a great extent in his treatment of the churches" (300). Swedenborg speaks about three churches and a fourth one, the Christian Church, which his 'New Church'²¹ was to follow. The quadripartition of the twenty-seven skies adopted by Blake is thus very likely to come from Swedenborg, who also subdivides them according to a temporal logic that goes from the most ancient to the most recent. In the first church, body and spirit are in perfect communion, in the second one the process of separation starts and in the third church the spirit has completely abandoned the body. The third church, driven by the twelve tribes of Israel, reaches its final legislative form at the moment when Moses receives the Law from God on Mount Sinai; by means of the commandments, God or Urizen in Blake's cosmogony, kills Fuzon, hit by a rock. The third church corresponds to the least imaginative and most material and feminine period, and is related to the Tree of Good and Evil. These three churches represent, in Yeats's opinion, "the key to Blake's interpretation of the biblical symbolism" (291).

The last four characters of the third Church have a particular meaning according to Yeats. Paul, Constantine, Charlemagne and Luther do represent the historical counterparts of the four zoas, and summarize the two basic events in the history of Christians, the three days spent

21. Swedenborg's disciples gathered within the so-called Church of the New Jerusalem, the sectary movement created after Swedenborg's death and initially driven by Stephen Penny, Thomas Cookworthy, and by Rev. Thomas Harthley.

by Christ in the sepulchre and his resurrection. The first event can refer to Paul, Constantine and Charlemagne, or head, heart and loins, and the last one to Luther, or womb. Yeats maintains that Blake's Cherub figures the spectre and the emanation, containing both of them in their divided form. But an emanation separated from her own spectre becomes a shadow, and shadows also represent the bodies of human beings, male and female. Therefore, in Yeats's and Ellis's opinion, the Cherub can be divided not only into twenty-seven churches, but also "into nine symbolic 'months of gestation,' three Heavens making one month" (294). After this perspective, the first church goes from Adam to Lamech,²² the second from Noah to Serug, and the third from Nacor to Luther; each of them is ruled by Head, Heart and Loins. In Yeats's scheme, seven names, the so-called "Seven Eyes of God" (295), appear under the three churches. Lucifer, Moloch,²³ Elohim,²⁴ Shadhai,²⁵ Pahad,²⁶ Jehovah and

22. Lamech is Methuselelah's only son and Noah's father.

23. A Canaanite god mentioned in the Bible (whose ritual included human sacrifice), corresponding to the Sun God. It represented the destroying and purifying fire. Its veneration lasted from Solomon (*1 Kings* 11, 5-7, where it is called Milcom) to Josiah (*2 Kings*, 23,10). Sometimes, its name is written Moloch (*Leviticus* 18, 21; 20, 2-5), but also Malcham (*Book of Zephaniah*, 1, 5).

24. Edward Mack, *Bibletools, Definitions*: "The first form of the Divine name in the Bible is Elohim, ordinarily translated 'God' (Genesis 1:1). This is the most frequently used name in the Old Testament, as its equivalent theos, is in the New Testament, occurring in Gen. alone approximately 200 t. [...] Its form is plural, but the construction is uniformly singular, i.e. it governs a singular verb or adjective, unless used of heathen divinities (Psalms 96:5; Psalms 97:7)," <http://bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Def.show/RTD/ISBE/Topic/God%20Names%20Of> (retrieved 14/06/2006).

25. "In the patriarchal literature, and in Job particularly, where it is put into the mouths of the patriarchs, this name appears sometimes in the compound 'el shadday, sometimes alone. While its root meaning also is uncertain, the suggested derivation from shadhadh, 'to destroy,' 'to terrify,' seems most probable, signifying the God who is manifested by the terribleness of His mighty acts. ... " (*ibid*).

Jesus are the characters who symbolically represent the seven eyes of God:

The seven eyes of God corresponding to the seven days of the Mosaic creation, the seven fountain spirits of Boehmen, and the seven Olympian spirits of mediæval magic, then descend to give man 'still perceptions of his sleeping body,' whereby he may learn it and cast it out. By them the senses and organs and races of men and beasts are moulded, in order that chaos may become order, and the reign of Christ begin at last. (*WWB*, I, 295)

While Lucifer coincides with the head, Moloch, the second eye that rules *Night II* of *Vala* when Orc is created, is related to the heart. The third eye, Elohim, sees the birth of Adam. Shadhai, Pahad and Jehovah respectively symbolize the fourth, fifth and sixth eye, because "they are said in the Bible to have been the gods of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (296); the seventh eye is Jesus, who "presides over the new Adam, and rises from the tomb when the reign of law has been 'cast out' by Luther" (*ibid*). The seven eyes of God also correspond to the seven biblical days of creation. It is interesting to note that the creation of man and the animals coincides with the sixth eye, Jehovah, who is immediately before Jesus in Yeats's 'genealogy'. Jesus, 'the new Adam', is clearly the pilgrim who has concluded his worldly exile and can now wear his spiritual clothes again. By means of the following scheme, Yeats enhances the relationship between the names and days of creation:

Darkness and chaos	
Creation of light	Lucifer
The firmament is created to divide the waters above from the waters below	Moloch
The water divided from the dry land and green things created	Elohim
Creation of the sun and moon	Shadhai
Creation of birds and fish	Pahad
Creation of animals and man	Jehovah
God rests	Jesus

Man, created by Jehovah on the sixth day and put into Eden, can "ascend with Christ" or "fall again with Lucifer" (298). If man is able to quit the wheel of births, he will regain, after the Last Judgment, his first condition of unity with God and come back to Heaven, that is "after the fall into reason [...] restrictive, before the fall [...] an abode of peace" (299).

Yeats insists on Blake's use of the twenty-seven skies placed on the trajectory followed by the sun as substitutes of the zodiacal signs. He traces another scheme in order to subdivide the twenty-seven historical characters into three sub-groups from which three main churches derive. The first church, situated between the zenith and the west, includes Luther, Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, and Lamech. This church is circumscribed between two lines, the "Line of Spiritual influx" and the "Horizon Line" (301), and is responsible for the creation of a generic law, synonym and symbol of oppression: "In this Church the external necessity first 'steal' the things of inspiration and makes them subservient to its own needs and claims" (309). For this reason, the fall of those churches before the flood "was into a world of the mind, [...]. They no longer saw all as a symbol of the Highest whose abode was in their own breasts, but as an external universe, having its own laws, 'the female will'" (310). The second church, placed between the west and the nadir, corresponds "to the destruction of all things by 'the flood of the five senses,' and to the sinking of the Atlantic continent or Atlantis" (302). This church starts with Noah and ends with Terach. During this period, the *Mundane Shell* or material world is created, since all living beings are fascinated by worldliness, forgetting spiritual or mental reality. The third or Hebrew Church, situated in the east, starts with Abraham and ends with Luther. In its first part,

26. Pahad is not only one of the names of God in the Old Testament, but it is also the name of the fifth *Sephira*; it means 'fear' and is linked with Gevurah, or judgement. Pahad/Gevurah belong to the left column of the Sefirotic Tree, the side of evil: "The demonic forces manifest themselves in Samael and his hosts; they are the 'serpents' dwelling in the 'hole of the great abyss.' In the context of this doctrine, the Zoharic designation of the sphere of evil as the 'other side' takes on a startlingly novel meaning. It refers to the 'other side' of En Sof itself — that is, to that half of [God] which resists the process of differentiation and organization, and which, by its very resistance to the dramatic process of creation, becomes actually Satanic" (Scholem. 1973. *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 301-302).

the living beings have collapsed into the material world, in darkness and opacity; “they war one with another, and seek to destroy the material identity of the imagination” (311). The path traced by Yeats from the first to the last church, reproduces a spiritual anticlimactic trend that goes on up to the first half of the third church; from its second half on there is an inversion. This descendent and ascendant evolution is also represented by the different moments of the day and by seasons. The first church corresponds to afternoon and summer, the second to sunset and autumn, the first part of the third church to night and winter and the second part of it to morning and spring.

Analyzing the different symbolical hierarchies that occur in the image above, it is worth noticing that the north, being the cardinal point ruled by Satan, is characterized by darkness and winter and it is thus connected to the earth: the Mundane Shell is placed between the west and north. The flood, or death, is in the west. Now Yeats observes that by inserting the different zodiac signs in the wheel of the churches, it is possible to point out some interesting coincidences. The sign of Gemini is for instance in coincidence with Adam’s and Eve’s creation, while Virgo and Scorpio “enclose the flood” (304), the former being one immediately before the straight line that indicates the inundation of Atlantis and the latter after that. Moreover, Scorpio, “the wolf in kabalistic magic, as well as the serpent, both in Blake images of spectral desires”, is situated close to Arpacsad, that is followed by the “creation of the corporeal or opaque external” (304). The sign of Pisces, “which is taken by several mystical astrologers to stand for personal man in the midst of the external universe” (*ibid*), is over the name of Abraham, while Aries coincides with the moment of crucifixion and, as Yeats suggests, it appears to symbolize “the lamb of God sacrificed for men” (305). He tried to put zodiac signs into Blake’s mythical system since he was convinced that the latter could not have ignored astrological symbolism during the creation of his own poetical *corpus*. Actually, there is no proof that Blake was an attentive student of astrology and horoscopes, as well as of his entrance into occult societies, while it is well-known and deeply demonstrated how

these subjects deeply fascinated Yeats and his family.²⁷

While time belongs to the masculine *ensemble*, space is related to the feminine one. At this point Yeats passes on to examine those sound symbols that flow in time, because “The understanding of this symbolic nature of sound [...] is a necessary first step towards any deep sight into mystical philosophy, and towards the experimental proof of its great postulate — the underlying unity of all minds as portions of the one great mind or imagination, ‘the body of God’” (327). Whether our sensory perception of things belonging to the material world and our memory of that perception enable us to enter that world, symbolism is the only way we have to sight the spiritual world: “By symbolism we enter the universality of God, by sensation and the memory of sensation, we enter the world of Satan, which is ‘all nothing’” (328). As a consequence, in Yeats’s opinion, the names assigned by Blake to his characters deserve special consideration since they have a particular sound when pronounced: they are semantically and symbolically expressive of the character to whom they refer. The sound emitted by the word Orc, for instance, “conveys its passionate and violent meaning” (*ibid*). That meaning is sometimes given by Hebrew, Greek and Latin words just as the names of Luvah, “from the Hebrew *Luv*, heart, and *Ah*, a feminine termination” (*ibid*), or Enitharmon, from the Greek *ἐνήπιθος*, that means “friendly, intimate” (329). Yeats acknowledges that the names we find in Blake’s system can be the consequence of three different procedures. He conjectures that they might have been created during Blake’s trances, when the prophet would have seen them already associated with the subjects they correspond to; or through methods of syllabic alteration of well-known terms; and, finally, by means of “the associative style, when certain myths or histories contained personages whom he desired to use as symbols, [...]” (*ibid*). By the way, he appears more willing to choose the first method, assuming that the origin of those names belonging to the characters of the prophetic books primarily depended on Blake’s epiphanies.

27. Astrological symbolism constitutes one of the main frameworks of *A Vision*.

Keeping up this way of reasoning, Yeats associates the letters of some characters' names with certain *topoi* of the *Prophetic Books*. Thus, the letters 'm,' 'n,' 'l' and 'th' are related to the maternal, the feminine, to the material and watery world, as well as to darkness. Hence the names Enitharmon, Tharmas, Mnetha, Theotormon (who, among Los's sons, "is the most feminine", 330), Oothon (considered by Yeats the most feminine and symbolical name of the "watery sphere", 331) and Bromion. Yet, this last also contains the letters 'br', that "belong to dark anger"; as a matter of fact, Bromion represents "the violence of unimagined passion" (*ibid*). Similarly, analyzing Palamabron's name, he enhances the letters 'on', that refer to the feminine and the letters 'br' that imply male strength. The vowel 'a' repeated in this name three times, corresponds to "a letter of light", while the letters 'm' and 'l', always imply the maternal, but also the watery realm. Yeats observes that "Palamabron is doomed to sorrow, like Theotormon, but is not so dark as he" (*ibid*). Theotormon's name is indeed characterized by the 'dark' vowel 'o'.

Tharmas, symbol of water, "in its sound brings to the ear so vividly every wave that breaks on a breezy shore at night" (334), while Urthona "is the word *Earth* with the personage *Ona* added". Luvah's name, as already mentioned, "Prince of Love and usurper of light, tells his story by the suggestion contained in its letters without any help from a Hebrew source", and Urizen, "with the sound of hot iron quenched in water, needs no other excuse for the name of the sun that was blackened in the ice, the enthusiasm that was enslaved to dark regions, [...]" (*ibid*).

Having reached the end of this study and tried to analyze Yeats's interpretation of Blake's symbolical system, two absolutely opposite versions of it might come into the reader's mind. On the one hand, we have the evidence of baseless opinions, of arguments presented without documentation about their truth or possibility;²⁸ we have a magical

approach to the work of a poet who remained outside always confirmed and defended, even by magic all his life since, as Adams rightly points out, "magical and symbolical experimentation is foreign to Blake's whole concept of truth. To him it would have been Baconian experimentation, Lockean materialism, Newtonian sleep" (1968: 55). A magical approach that Yeats admitting in a letter he wrote to John O'Leary "If I had not made magic my constant study I could not have written a single word of my Blake book" (*L* 211).

On the other hand, we have a pointedly although extremely idiosyncratic 'paraphrased commentary' of Blake's symbolism. As in the case of the section entitled "Interpretation and Paraphrased Commentary" (*WWB*, vol. II), where Yeats and Ellis elaborate a comment on Blake's works simply paraphrasing each line of these very works, this same procedure appears to be adopted, to some extent, also in "The Symbolic System". Actually, Yeats analyses his master's symbolism in the light of his mystical, esoteric, eastern and western studies, and of his magical experimentations. The result of this is a kind of 'paraphrased explanation', so that Blake's system appears to be crossed by a symbolical web whose threads belong to other innumerable mystical hierarchies. For this reason, in another letter to Katharine Tynan (dated July 1891), Yeats defines "The Necessity of Symbolism" as a "very important essay" (*L* 170); and it is just that, since in Adams's words, once "[...] the false Yeatsian picture of Blake as mystic and magician [is] dismissed, Blake the symbolist remains" (1968: 56) and, I would like to add, 'Yeats the symbolist' appears for the first time on the stage.

Writing this chapter of the *WWB*, Yeats shows how deeply he had understood the real meaning of Blake's concepts of imagination, nature, art and symbolism: "art and poetry, by constantly using symbolism, continually remind us that nature itself is a symbol" (*WWB*, 'Preface', xiii). This symbolism able to bring

28. "The sources for the many charts and tables that map the circulation of the Zoas or the movement of Albion or mankind through the twenty-seven Churches (divided into Heart, Head, and Loin groups), for the symbols of the Zoas, for the

significance of names, numbers, and colors ranged from Swedenborg to the gossip of practical magicians Yeats happened to know. The only mystical authors mentioned by name are Swedenborg and Behmen" (Dorfman 1969: 213).

poetry and art near to nature, but also to his own mystical-esoteric knowledge, gives him, in a certain way, the authorization to place all these concepts within one whole system, one unitary language, one main *Vision*. Subscribing to Masterson's and O'Shea's view, it is clear that "Yeats's prolonged study of Blake while making the 1893 edition with Ellis inevitably then had a very particular impact on his own creative work. Not only did it spark single

poems [...], but it provided him with an enlarged repertoire of symbols that he would repeat and refine for the rest of his life. In addition, the 'diagrammatic,' systematizing approach, most evident in 'The Symbolic System', was a precedent for his own attempt at an all-encompassing psychological and historical system some thirty years later in *A Vision*" (1985: 75-76).

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