

A Systematic Reconstruction of W.B. Yeats's *A Vision*: The Geometry of Human History and Occult Philosophy

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The publication of **W.B. Yeats's *A Vision*** (in its two primary iterations of 1925 and 1937) represents one of the most ambitious attempts in modern literature to synthesize a totalizing system of human personality, historical progression, and the afterlife. Far from being a mere collection of poems, *A Vision* functions as a complex technical manual for the soul, blending elements of **Hermeticism**, **Platonic geometry**, and **psychological archetypes**. For scholars and technical writers of literary history, understanding *A Vision* requires moving beyond the aesthetic and into the structural mechanics of Yeats's 'Great Wheel' and his interlocking 'Gyres.'

1. The Genesis of a Poetic Cosmology: Automatic Writing and George Yeats

The foundation of *A Vision* was not purely academic but procedural. In October 1917, shortly after marrying Georgie Hyde-Lees, Yeats discovered his wife's capacity for **automatic writing**. Over several years, they conducted more than 450 sessions, resulting in nearly 4,000 pages of manuscript. These sessions were governed by 'Instructors'—esoteric entities that provided the couple with a complex geometric system to explain the 'meaning of all life.'

This system was built upon a **binary logic** where every state of being is defined by its opposite. This technical framework is characterized by the tension between **subjectivity (Antithetical)** and **objectivity (Primary)**. Yeats utilized these sessions to construct a metaphysical map that would inform his most significant later works, including *The Second Coming* and *Sailing to Byzantium*.

2. The Architecture of the System: The Gyres and Double Cones

At the core of Yeats's technical model is the **Gyre**—a three-dimensional conical spiral. Yeats posited that reality is composed of two interlocking gyres, one rotating within the other. As one gyre expands to its maximum width (its 'base'), the other contracts to its minimum point (its 'apex').

2.1. The Mathematical Ratio of Being

The relationship between these two cones represents the fundamental **oscillation of human experience**. Yeats used the terms **Primary** and **Antithetical** to define these movements:

- **Primary (Objective)**: Characterized by the sun, the physical world, democracy, truth, and the 'moral' self. It moves toward a state of complete submission to an external power or reality.
- **Antithetical (Subjective)**: Characterized by the moon, the inner world, aristocracy, beauty, and the 'aesthetic' self. It moves toward a state of self-assertion and individual creative power.

The technical interplay between these two is never static; they are in a constant state of **conflict and flux**. When the Primary gyre is at its widest, the Antithetical is at its narrowest, yet neither can ever fully extinguish the other.

3. The Great Wheel: The 28 Lunar Phases

Yeats organized human personality into a classification system based on the **28 phases of the lunar cycle**. Each phase represents a specific psychological archetype and a stage in the soul's progression through multiple

incarnations.

3.1. Detailed Phase Classification Matrix

The following table provides a technical breakdown of the key phase transitions within the Great Wheel:

Phase Range	Classification	Core Characteristic	Technological/Historical Alignment
Phase 1	The Complete Objective	No human life possible; total passivity and plasticity.	The dissolution of the individual into the Divine or the Collective.
Phases 2 - 7	The Opening of the Eye	The emergence of the individual will from the mass.	Elemental, instinctive behavior.
Phase 8	The First Quarter	The struggle between instinct and emotion.	A period of internal crisis and transition.
Phases 9 - 14	The Subjective Approach	Increasing focus on the self and aesthetic beauty.	The rise of the artist and the individualist.
Phase 15	The Complete Subjective	Full Moon; pure beauty, thought is replaced by image.	A supernatural state; the 'Unity of Being.'
Phases 16 - 21	The Objective Approach	The gradual return of the soul to the external world.	The era of the reformer, the scientist, and the politician.
Phase 22	The Last Quarter	The breakdown of the ego; systemic conflict.	Crisis of the intellect; the ambition of the tool.
Phases 23 - 28	The Hunchback and the Saint	The renunciation of the self.	Preparation for the return to Phase 1.

4. The Four Faculties: The Psychological Mechanics of Being

Within every human incarnation, the 'Instructors' identified **Four Faculties** that determine how the individual interacts with reality. These are not static traits but dynamic forces moving around the Great Wheel.

- Will (The Ego): The basic energy of the soul. It is the 'is' of the personality.
- Mask (The Ideal): The image of what we wish to become. It is the 'should' of the personality. For the antithetical man, the Mask is a form of self-conquest.
- Creative Mind (The Intellect): The capacity for constructive thought and the understanding of external facts.
- Body of Fate (The Environment): The external circumstances imposed upon the individual, including history, physical health, and social standing.

The mechanical interaction of these faculties is governed by a **displacement rule**: The Will and Mask are always opposite each other on the wheel, as are the Creative Mind and the Body of Fate. This ensures that no individual is ever truly balanced, creating the 'friction' required for spiritual growth.

5. Comparative Analysis: The 1925 vs. 1937 Editions

Yeats's system evolved significantly between the two major publications of *A Vision*. The following table highlights the technical and structural differences between the 'Version A' and 'Version B.'

Feature	1925 Edition (Version A)	1937 Edition (Version B)
Narrative Frame	Attributed to fictional characters like Giralduus and Kusta Ben Luka.	Autobiographical; includes 'A Packet for Ezra Pound' and the story of George's mediumship.
Structure	Heavily esoteric, disorganized, and raw.	Systematic, more cohesive, and philosophically rigorous.
Scope of the 'Principles'	Less defined; focused on the mechanics of the wheel.	Introduces a deeper analysis of the soul between lives (The Four Principles).
Tone	Occult and experimental.	Authoritative and visionary.
Primary Focus	Geometric diagrams and automatic writing results.	Historical cycles and the 'Thirteenth Cone.'

6. The Four Principles: The Post-Mortem State

While the **Faculties** govern the soul during physical life, Yeats introduced the **Four Principles** to explain the state of the soul after death. This is the more 'spiritual' or 'technical-metaphysical' aspect of the 1937 edition.

1. Husk: The physical and sensory memory of the past life.
2. Passionate Body: The emotional attachments and desires that bind the soul to the earth.
3. Spirit: The pure intellectual mind that seeks liberation.
4. Celestial Body: The divine or universal context of the soul's experience.

The process of death involves the **Dreaming Back**, where the soul must relive the events of its life until it has completely neutralized the emotions associated with them. This 'cleansing' is a technical requirement before the soul can enter its next incarnation on the Great Wheel.

7. Historical Determinism: The 2,000-Year Cycle

Yeats applied his geometric system not only to individuals but to the entire course of human history. He viewed history as a series of **2,000-year cycles (Annus Magnus)**, each beginning with a 'lunar' or 'solar' revelation that reverses the previous era.

7.1. The Shift of Eras

Yeats identified the birth of Christ as a **Primary (Objective)** revelation that ended the **Antithetical (Subjective)** era of classical Greece and Rome. According to his calculations, the 2,000-year cycle of Christianity was coming to a close in the early 20th century, making way for a new, possibly violent, antithetical era. This is the technical basis for the 'rough beast' described in his poem *The Second Coming*.

7.2. The Thirteenth Cone

To avoid the trap of total determinism, Yeats introduced the **Thirteenth Cone** (or Thirteenth Sphere). This is a dimension that exists outside the interlocking gyres of history. It represents **absolute freedom** and the possibility of intervention from the divine. Without the Thirteenth Cone, the system would be a closed, mechanical loop from which no soul could ever escape.

8. Practical Implementation: A Vision as a Creative Tool

For Yeats, *A Vision* was not merely a philosophical curiosity; it was a **heuristic device** for poetic production. By mapping his thoughts, friends, and historical figures onto the 28 phases, he could generate metaphors with mathematical precision.

- Phase 17 (The Daimonic Man): Yeats placed himself here, along with Dante and Shelley. This phase is characterized by 'Unity of Being' where the imagination is at its most potent.
- Phase 27 (The Saint): Represented by figures who seek to lose their individuality in God, providing a stark contrast to the artist of Phase 17.
- Phase 15 (The Sun-Filled Moon): A phase where no human life is possible because it is a state of pure image and no thought. Yeats used this to describe the 'Sailing to Byzantium'—the transition from the physical world to the world of eternal art.

9. Troubleshooting the System: Scholarly Challenges and Logic Gaps

Despite its detailed nature, *A Vision* presents several operational challenges for the reader and researcher:

- Geometric Complexity: Yeats's descriptions of the 'cones' often shift between two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations, leading to confusion regarding the 'Great Year' calculations.
- Inconsistent Terminology: Terms like 'Daimon' and 'Ghostly Self' sometimes overlap, making a strict technical taxonomy difficult to maintain.
- Subjective Bias: The classification of historical figures into phases often reflects Yeats's personal prejudices rather than a purely objective application of his own rules.

To mitigate these challenges, modern scholars often use a **comparative reading approach**, referencing the original automatic writing notebooks (The Vision Papers) to clarify the more obscure passages in the 1937 text.

10. The Broader Implications of Yeats's Systematic Vision

The legacy of *A Vision* lies in its rejection of the fragmented, secular world of the early 20th century. By creating a rigorous, albeit esoteric, system, Yeats provided a framework for meaning that integrated science, history, and spirituality. While the mathematics of the gyres may seem arcane to the modern reader, the underlying drive—to find a **unified theory of human experience**—remains a central pursuit of both literature and philosophy.

Ultimately, *A Vision* serves as a testament to the power of the human mind to construct order out of chaos. It remains one of the most significant technical achievements of the Modernist era, a bridge between the ancient traditions of occultism and the emerging psychological frameworks of the 20th century. Whether viewed as a literal truth or a 'system of metaphors' for the creative process, it continues to offer a unique lens through which we can analyze the cyclical nature of time and the multifaceted architecture of the human soul.

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