The Body-Soul Interaction in

W. B. Yeats’s Poetry: A Spiritual Way to

Abstract

In his early poetry, Yeats adapted the Indian philosophy on the renunciation of body desires, but he also strove to cope with normal life activities, so as not to take on monasticism as a lifestyle. He was influenced by certain Indian sages, but he never surrendered his poetry to their thinking only. However, he could not rid himself of all their thinking either, as some of it certainly did infiltrate certain of his poems. As a solution, he sought out a second Indian mystical philosophy that did deal with both body and soul. It was called Tantrism. A body-soul duality then did inhabit Yeats’s poetry and indeed constituted the major part of his esoteric system. His belief in the doctrine of the Unity of Being reflects this duality, and further still, it opened the door for him to develop his own specific ideas in that dual context.

This paper explores the body-soul duality found in certain of Yeats’s poems, particularly, his Indian poems, “Adam’s Curse”, “Vacillation”, “The Phases of the Moon”, “Blood and the Moon”, “Oil and Blood”, the Byzantine poems, “A Dialogue of Self and Soul”, and “Among School Children”. The discussion also sheds light on how
Yeats dealt personally with the body-soul interaction and devised his own reaction to the spiritual life, human behaviour, and the human destiny. Yeats’s quest for salvation is also discussed in this paper, as much of it related to his spiritual system and his personal philosophy about the body-soul relationship.

**Keywords:** W. B. Yeats, Mysticism, Unity of Being, Tantrism, Body-soul duality, Tower, Mystical Marriage, Sweetness, Salvation.

In his essay “Interaction of the Soul and Body”, Emanuel Swedenborg presents three hypotheses for the relationship between body and soul and the interactions between them. The first hypothesis, called “Physical Influx”, presumes that matter or body affects spirit or soul; however, the second hypothesis, called “Spiritual Influx” presumes the reverse. The third hypothesis is called “Pre-established Harmony”, and it reconciles the two previous hypotheses and presumes there are simultaneous and harmonious operations for both the body and the soul. The second hypothesis seems to have been derived from Plato wherein Socrates argues that the soul is invisible and imperceptible and shares the divine in its characteristic of actually leading the body of any mortal. In *Phaedrus*, Plato explains the nature of the soul by distinguishing between the soul of the noble breed and that of the ignoble breed, on the one hand, and the major difference between mortals and immortals, on the other hand. The noble soul is identified with a white horse, and consigned to it are all such virtues of white, and the ignoble soul is identified with a black wild horse and all its vices. Mortals are composed of both body and soul, while immortals have a soul only, with the exemption of God who bears both an immortal body and a soul. In this context, Plato refers to both the mortal body of the creatures and the immortal body of God, and thus indicates the different materials that form the essential elements of God and His creatures.

However, the Greeks believed that the soul is not purely a spirit, but rather a composition, made of both matter and spirit. Consequently, the soul and the body are not highly different in their content, but they are different in the degree of their properties. Heraclitus thought that the soul was also “bodily”, and its matter as fine as air or fire, while Philolaus, believed that the soul is an “attunement” of the body. Here the interaction between soul and body reaches a climax to the extent that it becomes difficult to differentiate between the two parts. Plato’s forms and to some extent also the Neoplatonic Logos are that ‘by which all things had been made, and looked upon the world of matter and body as a devilish impediment to the virtue and liberation of the imprisoned soul.”
In this respect, the soul and body are different in their nature, and yet Aristotle considered ‘the soul as the "substantial form" of the body.’ As Lee Oser says, Aristotle’s concept of the soul was situated close to the middle of the distance between the materialistic idea of the soul ‘as a subtle arrangement of material parts, such as we find in modern reductivist science, and the idea of the soul as a ghostly substance, such as [what] we find in Plato and Descartes.’\(^7\) In this context, Aristotle’s idea of a body-soul connection was that they are inseparable. Yeats, as a poet and not a thinker, takes positively to Aristotle’s consideration at the end of his poem, ‘‘Among School Children’’:

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul.
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music,
O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

(\text{CP}^* \text{ 219, ll, 57-64})

The form and the content of the dance or the actual dancing are inseparable, much like the composition of the body and soul, matter and the spirit. However, Lee Oser also finds an aesthetic interpretation for the body-soul duality in certain of Yeats’s poems, including ‘‘Among School Children’’:

In some of Yeats’s greatest poems, including “The Second Coming,” “Among School Children,” and “Leda and the Swan,”
the body is an image, an aesthetic body expressing a transcendent
vision. It follows that the aesthetic body’s governing agent
or soul
is a vision, which has its source outside the body.\(^9\)

Although this vision comes from outside the body, the sacred body here is very close to the soul in her spirituality to the extent that is impossible to differentiate between them. The ‘‘midnight oil’’, which is the syrup of wisdom that flows out of the sacred bodies of the saints, is the immortal essence that results from the interaction between the body and the soul of those saints. The saints are deep-rooted like a chestnut tree whose trunk or ‘‘body’’ is indeed inseparable from its syrup, fruits, or essence. Further, the symbolic deep-rooted chestnut tree may refer to the
Celtic tradition that was ignored by the modern schools when Yeats visited them. The longevity of this tree is essential to the context of the poem, as it speaks to the brevity of the life of the mortal human body when compared to the longevity of trees.

William Blake’s idea of a negation that controls the relationship between body and soul has its roots in Plato’s dichotomy of body and soul. In “Among School Children”, Yeats abolishes this dichotomy, and negation turns to integration: “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” In “oil’s midnight”, the poem recalls the “midnight voice” and “midnight things” found in “The Gift of Harun Al-Rasid” when Kusta bin Luka, the Caliph’s translator and philosopher, says that “his new wisdom was from his young wife’s body, not from beyond”.

All, all those gyres and cubes and midnight things
Are but a new expression of her body
Drunken with the bitter sweetness of her youth.

“The Gift of Harun Al-Rasid” (CP 462, ll, 203-5)

Michael Robartes, Yeats’s fictional character, falls in love with a dancer, and he describes her body in terms of the supernatural:

I went to Rome and there fell violently in love with a ballet-dancer who had not an idea in her head. All might have been well had I been content to take what came; had I understood that her coldness and cruelty became in the transfiguration of the body an inhuman majesty; that I adored in body what I hated in will;

Although Robartes adored the dancer’s body, he also felt her “coldness and cruelty”, and that image suggests a lack of life and human touch, for he describes the dancer’s body as “an inhuman majesty”. This image recalls the “Ledaen body”, which relates to the supernatural and to violence. Therefore, Yeats is biased toward the human body even though he sees it as full of life and vitality. However, if the image “inhuman majesty” is interpreted as merely ‘bestial’, then the context becomes different, and the dancer’s body is glorified for its temporal occurrence and its transient beauty.

Yeats’s configuration of dancing in other poems, particularly, in “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes” tends to be spiritual:

O little did they care who danced between,
And little she by whom her dance was seen
So she had outdanced thought.
Body perfection brought,

(CP 170, ll, 37-40)
“Body perfection” is fulfilled through a unity with the soul via the spiritual energy of dancing. The spiritual dancing in “Byzantium” is also a vehicle that Yeats uses to achieve this unity between body and soul, which then leads to enlightenment or salvation.

Yeats’s early interest in Hinduism led him to comprehend the route to the Divine Self, and that religion led him also to better understand how to join “spirit and matter” or body and soul. The idea of the Divine Self coincides with the gnostic Divine spark of the body. However, there is also a doctrine in Hinduism called Samsara, which refers to the renunciation of body desires in favour of the soul. This doctrine can be seen as being infiltrated into Yeats’s Indian early poems. Nevertheless, while he never believes in the doctrine, he did see it as an alternative with the Unity of Being and Tantrism. For the latter, the interaction between body and soul is functioned or transcended by sexual intercourse to reach a unity with God, while for the former, this interaction can take various routes, including the previous one. The concept of the divine body in Tantrism is the equivalent of the “perfectly proportioned human body” in Yeats’s concept of the Unity of Being. Yeats ascribed his statement on the perfection of body to Dante, but it actually was Yeats’s concept as George Bornstein argued. Yeats might have been influenced by a certain kind of yoga wherein “the hatha yogis held the body in much higher regard than the classical yogis, and even believed in the possibility of transforming the physical body into a ‘divine’ body – the Siddha.”

The phase called “complete beauty” in Yeats’s wheel of time is the fifteenth phase, and it is not human. The divine beauty of this phase is represented by the unity of the body and soul to the extent that both become invisible as mentioned in Yeats’s poem, “The Phases of the Moon”:

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.

“The Phases of the Moon” (CP 162-63, ll, 60-65)

This divine beauty is the ideal model for another kind of beauty, and perhaps it can be compared or related gnostically at least to the beauty available in the phases that are close to the fifteenth, in which the Unity of Being is likely to occur. Leda and Helen’s beauty is divine, and Yeats used that beauty for a comparison of the beauty of his beloved...
Maud Gonne in particular to the latter. However, this comparison no longer occurs in Yeats’s late poetry due to Gonne’s progress in age and the marriage of each of them to a different partner.

The desperate images in “Adam’s Curse”, such as: “one summer’s end”, “the last embers of daylight die”, and “weary-hearted as that hollow moon” suggest the dying of love desire that Yeats strives to sustain, although in vain. Actually, “the high way of love” or the courtly love or mystical marriage proves useless in the Yeats-Gonne relationship, as it lacks the process of finding and having a Unity of Being. Body is not considered in this relationship; however, the labour of Time does undertake the task to subvert one side of the “body-soul” equation. The beauty of woman and that of poetry symbolize the two sides of this equation. We can even use other terms to define this equation via a mortal-immortal balance. However, the poet seems unhappy to have the immortal at the expense of the mortal because the Unity of Being is not fulfilled. Yeats is not in agreement with the mere balance of his antinomies, but he does always prefer one of them, and he thinks it achieves the Unity of Being, for as Brian John states, Yeats “with his antinomies of primary and antithetical, intellect and passion, talks of a harmony of self, Unity of Being, which is arrived at not by truly reconciling the antinomies, but by a preponderance of one of them— passion.”

For Yeats, passion is indeed a significant element in creating the antithetical Mask that is responsible for uniting us with “ourselves” as he asserts in his book, A Vision, on “The Great Wheel”. The role of passion, as in the instance of “heroic ecstatic passion” that transcends the body’s limits and its materialistic state, even exceeds the natural boundaries that Yeats believes in.

Adam, the Primal Man created first by God, is the archetype of beauty as that Man was created with “a perfectly proportioned human body” as Dante noted. In “Adam’s Curse” Maud Gonne starts to see her body as withered, and Yeats awakens just to remind her of this change that shocked him when he saw the reality of the human body as epitomized by his beloved’s body. Dante, who is included in the phase (17) of Unity of Being by Yeats, fixed the time of his beloved’s ideal beauty as eternal, while Yeats in this poem, in contrast to his early poems, sees the changing body as it is in reality. Yeats is always fascinated by the idea of the changeless body as represented by the bodies of Christian Rosencreutz (the founder of the mystical sect, Rosicrucianism), St. Theresa, and St. Catherine of Genoa. Yeats’s personal terror emerges from his observation of his own progress of aging in that the body-soul
duality is based on the mortal body and the immortal soul. His interest in
the “undecayed body” after death, however, tends to eliminate the
technical element of the body.
If soul is identified with gold or precious stones, then body or self is
referred to by cheap metals, as it suffers decay and disintegration:
Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
In glory of changeless metal Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood.

“Byzantium” (CP 252, II, 17-24)

Yeats’s interest in alchemy made him imagine that even passion
could be “changeless” like magical precious stones:
Forgael. [. . . ] I shall find a woman.
One of the Ever-living, as I think —
One of the Laughing People — and she and I
Shall light upon a place in the world’s core,
Where passion grows to be a changeless thing,
Like charmed apples made of chrysoprase,
Or chrysoberyl, or beryl, or chrysolite;

“The Shadowy Waters” (CP 430, II, 247-253)

The changeless golden birds in the Byzantine poems, the
changeless Sato’s sword, and the changeless works of art stand against
the subversive power of time. However, the elements of these symbols
are materialistic. Gold can be excluded, as it is an essential matter in the
alchemy identified with spirit, but iron or any other material, which
constitutes the structure of a piece work of art, is not precious. This idea
means that the body, with its transient elements, cannot resist change for
a long time, but it is still alive, while the immortals are actually dead.

However, the gnostic view of the body-soul duality can also be traced
in some of Yeats’s writings. The gnostic view of the human being is
based on the duality of its physical and spiritual components, and the
latter relates to the divine essence or “divine spark”. Richard Ellmann
narrates a dialogue between a poet and an actress in Yeats’s unpublished
work, “The Poet and the Actress”. The actress refuses to wear the
mask given her by the poet who resembles Leo Africanus, the Moorish
character. Yeats considers him his anti-self. The poet thus tells her:

That the great drama in which she should act expresses,
Not the external battles with which Ibsen and Shaw are
Concerned, but the internal battle in the soul, where
‘one of the antagonists does not wear a shape known to the
World or speak a mortal tongue.’

The antagonist here is the one who speaks an immortal tongue, in other
words, that side of the human being that holds the divine spark in
Gnosticism. Nevertheless, Yeats’s concept of the body is different from
the gnostic view. Gnostics consider the body as a prison for the soul,
while Yeats glorifies body in some of his poems, namely, “Vacillation”,
and “A Dialogue of Self and Soul” as long as body achieves Unity of
Being with soul, and even he can give the body superiority. In these two
poems, the speaker feels that he is blessed as a result of the interaction
between body and soul. In contrast to this conclusion, the speaker in the
Byzantine poems disgusts the body’s desires in conjunction with the
gnostic view of the body. These two contradicting views of the body
reflect Yeats’s philosophical vacillation between body and soul
according to his current mood, case, or situation.

In ‘Vacillation’, flame symbolises soul as in Mithraism, and it
stands against the body or works as a destructive power in the first two
stanzas:

I
BETWEEN extremities Man runs his course;
A brand, or flaming breath.
Comes to destroy
All those antinomies
Of day and night;
The body calls it death,
The heart remorse.
But if these be right
What is joy?
II
A tree there is that from its topmost bough
Is half all glittering flame and half all green
Abounding foliage moistened with the dew;
And half is half and yet is all the scene;
And half and half consume what they renew,
And he that Attis’ image hangs between
That staring fury and the blind lush leaf
May know not what he knows, but knows not grief
“Vacillation” (CP 253-54, II, 1-17)

The half-to-half balance of aridity-greenery duality in the Welsh
Mabingion tree, which is identified with the Cabbalistic Tree of Life,
seems quite mathematically precise. However, although Attis (the god of fertility) stands between “that staring fury” and “the blind lush leaf”, Attis castrated himself, and consequently he became biased toward aridity. Hazard Adams interprets ‘The heart remorse’ in the first stanza according to the mithridatic remorse, which involves a dreaming back process and return after death.²³ It is more appropriate to interpret this phrase within the context of the Attis myth, as used by Yeats. The myth says that the youth, Attis, was about to marry, but the Great Mother of Gods, Agdistis, who had fallen in love with him, struck him furiously and that strike caused him to be castrated and die. Agdistis’s remorse convinced Zeus to keep the body of the youthful Attis without decay.²⁴ This context of the myth illuminates Attis’s position as standing between “that staring fury” and “the blind lush leaf” in the sixteenth line of the poem. The “undecayed” body of Attis resonates with its references to Von Hugel and the miracle of the “undecayed” body of St. Teresa in the third line of the eighth stanza of the poem:

Must we part, Von Hugel, though much alike, for we
Accept the miracles of the saints and honour sanctity?
The body of Saint Teresa lies undecayed in tomb,
Bathed in miraculous oil, sweet odours from it come,
Healing from its lettered slab. Those self-same
hands perchance
Eternalised the body of a modern saint that once
Had scooped out pharaoh’s mummy. I — though heart
might find relief
Did I become a Christian man and choose for my belief
What seems most welcome in the tomb — play
a predestined part.
Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.
The lion and the honeycomb, what has Scripture said?
So get you gone, Von Hugel, though with blessings on your head.
“Vacillation” (CP 257, ll, 78-90)

Yeats’s belief in the unity of culture obliged him to accept the ancient miracles of the pharaohs and Attis or Zeus as being equal to the miracles of the modern saints, such as St. Teresa. Moreover, he preferred Homer and “his unchristened heart” to the Catholic mystic, Von Hugel, who argues that “the Christian vision as the artist’s” as Unterecker says.²⁵ However, he was predestined to be Christian as a result of chance or fate “Did I become a Christian man and choose for my belief”. In Yeats’s esoteric system, the Body of Fate Faculty is allocated versus Will, and the
Will is the Faculty, which determines the location of a person or the soul on the Wheel of Time or within either subjective or objective halves. However, in this poem, Yeats is inclined more toward the objectivity of history or the Body of Fate Faculty when describing both the state of the undecayed body of St. Teresa and his own being as a Christian. Nevertheless, he still activates his own will and choice to join the pagan side. In general, according to Yeats, the reaction between choice and chance determines the destiny of man. Yeats’s choice not to be aligned with the Christian side emerges basically as a reaction against the renunciation of body as is found in Hinduism and Zen Buddhism. He believes also that Christianity did contribute to the vanishing of his own Celtic culture.

The sweetness and holiness of the undecayed body of St. Teresa is symbolised by Samson’s riddle in the Scriptures in such a way as to show that there is no difference between Christian sanctity and non-Christian or pagan rituality. Teresa’s body “scooped out” the sweetness and immortality of “pharaoh’s mummy”, as Samson scooped out the honey cultivated in the body of a lion. In this poem, the lion symbolises a pagan strength, and out of this strength comes sweetness. In a letter to Mrs Shakespear on June 30, 1932, Yeats asserts his preference for strength as opposed to the ‘weakness’ of the saint when he is talking about Oisin, as a swordsman, and St. Patrick in his long poem, The Wandering of Oisin: “‘The swordsman throughout repudiates the saint, but not without vacillation’.” Here, Oisin, the Celtic hero, although defeated, insists on his belief and does not submit to Christianity. In this sense, Yeats’s concept of the perfect man, or as he calls him “the finished man”, is not the saint, but he is close to Ibn Arabi’s “the insan-il-kamil”. In the following text, Yeats compares the “finished” and “unfinished” man:

My Self. A living man is blind and drinks his drop.
What matter if the ditches are impure?
The ignominy of boyhood; the distress
Of boyhood changing into man;
The unfinished man and his pain
Brought face to face with his own clumsiness;
The finished man among his enemies? —
How in the name of Heaven can he escape
That defiling and disfigured shape
The mirror of malicious eyes
Casts upon his eyes until at last
He thinks that shape must be his shape?
And what’s the good of an escape
If honour find him in the wintry blast?
“A Dialogue of Self and Soul” (CP 239, ll, 37-50)

According to Ibn Arabi, man is created by God with a resemblance to His shape, and “for Ibn ‘Ara
bi, the essential dignity of humankind resides in the fact that God, out of His love to be known, created man in His image.”28 In his pursuit to be “the finished man”, “the unfinished man” struggles or escapes his “defiling and disfigured shape”, but at the last, he should accept his reality. The man of dignity and honour is usually accomplished at the “wintry blast” of his age when man is near his end, so there is no use for his escape because his body has already corrupted or withered. Consequently, the “finished man” in a godly shape no longer exists; otherwise, the “finished man,” as Yeats becomes in his own old age, is meant to be an example of the self-made man of celebrity:

I am content to live it all again
And yet again, if it be life to pitch
Into the frog-spawn of a blind man’s ditch,
A blind man battering blind men;
Or into that most fecund ditch of all,
The folly that man does
Or must suffer, if he woos
A proud woman not kindred of his soul.
“A Dialogue of Self and Soul” (CP 239, ll, 59-66)

The last line of the text above may refer hostilely to Maud Gonne, who actually was proud, but she was still the “kindred of his soul.” He suffered too much, as she rejected him proudly even though he became a celebrated public man. The irony here is that Yeats preferred Nietzsche’s “eternal return” to living life again with all its atrocities:

I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.
“A Dialogue of Self and Soul” (CP 239, ll, 59-66)

The last stanza of this poem speaks to the sweetness of a body. However, sweetness emerges not from strength, as in the previous texts, but rather from weakness. The body is free from remorse, which is related to the
soul; consequently, body is separated from soul, and in this case, body is blessed by nature and vice versa. Otherwise, the cast-off remorse cannot be perceived without the interaction between body and soul. The gnostic view of body as a prison is not available here as it is in Andrew Marvell’s “A Dialogue Between the Soul and the Body”:

SOUL
O who shall, from this dungeon, raise
A soul enslave’d so many ways?
(PF*, ll, 1-3)

Both Marvell and Yeats’s poems start with soul, but the title of the former starts with soul, while the latter starts with self. This means that the self is Yeats’s priority, which is clear at the end of the poem. However, Yeats’s poem seeks the achievement of the Unity of Being, as he hints in these lines: “That quarter where all thought is done” (CP 238, ll, 7) and “Such fullness in that quarter overflows/ And falls into the basin of the mind” (CP 238, ll, 33-34). The poet refers to the quarter of the wheel of time in his esoteric system where the Unity of Being is likely to be attained between the twelfth and eighteenth phases.29 The precise or specific phases are the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth, while Yeats located himself in the middle of these phases. The fullness of thought (integration) or the harmony between the physical and the spiritual elements in existence is the major question that defines the Unity of Being.

The spiritual element in this poem is the tower, which is introduced as an emblematical image of the soul. According to Yeats’s spiritual system, ascending and winding stairs represent the gyration movement of the soul toward God to fulfil the unity of the soul. Unterecker interprets the first speech of Soul in this poem as a summons to achieve Nirvana, and the last stanza of the poem is understood as saying that the Self or body is to have insight.30 The physical element in the poem is Sato’s sword, introduced by the Self as an emblem of strength or power. This sword is consecrated, and that identification suggests the sword’s concern for Celtic culture:

My Self. The consecrated blade upon my knees
Is Sato’s ancient blade, still as it was,
Still razor-keen, still like a looking-glass
Unspotted by the centuries
“A Dialogue of Self and Soul” (CP 237-38, ll, 9-12)

The line “The consecrated blade upon my knees” is echoed in Yeats’s early poem, “He Remembers Forgotten Beauty” (1896):

I hear white Beauty sighing, too,
For hours when all must fade like dew.
But flame on flame, and deep on deep,
Throne over throne where in half sleep,
Their swords upon their iron knees,
Brood her high lonely mysteries.

(CP 57, ll. 19-24)

In Celtic culture, the sword actually represents mystical knowledge, while the stone represents power, as it is the centre of the Celtic religion, particularly in Druidism. The stone, as a symbol, is available in the speech of Soul, which talks about “fullness” in the quarter of Unity of Being: “my tongue’s a stone”. Although the speaker talks about the soul when she “ascends to Heaven” or the afterlife, the symbol of the stone as a Celtic element lurks behind. However, Sato’s sword is Japanese and not Celtic, but it still can be understood in the light of Yeats’s interest in Zen Buddhism and his idea of the Unity of Culture. The doctrine of eternal reincarnation is stated here as the “crime of death and birth”, and both the Buddhists and the Celts believe in this doctrine.

The sword in this poem can even be understood in the Rosicrucian context, the mystical marriage between the sword and the rose: “That flowering, silken, old embroidery, torn /From some court-lady’s dress and round” (CP 238, ll. 13-14). The sword is wrapped in the flowering dress of the lady, and this dress represents that rose. If the dress is considered as a “symbol of the body” as Unterecker suggests, then the sword can be taken as a symbol of soul or mystical knowledge as perceived by the Celts. In this context, ascending to Heaven through the winding stairs of the tower is seen as an interaction between the spiritual and the physical.

However, the tower in “Blood and the Moon” (1929) is “Half dead at the top”, and the metaphor of “half dead” reflects a body-soul dichotomy if the body is regarded as secular and the soul is conceived as an after-life. In the second stanza of the poem, Yeats summons the towers of the ancient civilisations, namely, Alexandria and Babylon, and Shelley’s tower. If Yeats’s tower is compared to these towers, nothing can be concluded other than the alignment of traditions versus modernity. Yeats, however, believes that these ancient civilisations achieved a Unity of Being by inventing writing:

At Phase 4 or 5 or perhaps a little later may have emerged
the Sacred Legend of the sun’s annual journey, symbol of
all history and of individual life, foundation of all the earliest
civilisations; and at the phases where Unity of Being became
possible began perhaps those civilisations, Egypt or Sumer,
which had made a progressive, conscious, intellectual life possible by the discovery of writing.\textsuperscript{32}

In his poem, “Blood and the Moon”, Yeats’s admiration of certain writers, namely, Goldsmith, Swift, Berkley, and Burke, is revealed. Goldsmith is described by his sweetness: “Goldsmith deliberately sipping at the honey-pot of his mind,” and this description suggests “the richness of the unembittered mind, the mind free of intellectual hatred.”\textsuperscript{33}

This “intellectual hatred” and violence are represented by “Blood” versus the purity of the “Moon”. This symbolism can be also understood by a body-soul duality if the Body is represented by “Blood” and the “Moon” by soul. In another poem, “Oil and Blood”, Yeats compares the “Bodies of holy men and women”, which exude the sacred oil to the “bodies of the vampires full of blood”, to show the striking difference between sacred and damned bodies. However, Yeats in “Blood and the Moon” and many other poems presents a purifying by fire or flame as the way to salvation. Here “intellectual fire” is the solution: “Everything that is not God consumed with intellectual fire.” This fire, as in the Byzantine poems, is symbolic because it is “intellectual” and that suggests not the purge of the body, but rather the purging of the mind or even the soul.

To conclude, Plato’s dichotomy between body and soul that was considering body as earthly and soul as divine is no longer acceptable for most writers, including Yeats. Instead, Aristotle’s concept that the soul is the form of the body, and the body-soul relationship is inseparable, appeals more to Yeats because he dealt with body and soul as a unity. This unity is exemplified in his poem, “Among School Children” when the dancer unites with her dance. However, in terms of immortality, Yeats is obliged to differentiate between the bodies of the saints, such as Rosencreutz, Theresa, Catherine of Genoa, and those of regular persons where the former are immortal while the latter are mortal. The sacred body is not confined to Christian saints; it also includes characters from other faiths or cults, namely, the Greek Leda in Yeats’s poem, “Leda and the Swan” who is pagan, and Kusta’s bride in “The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid” who is presumably Muslim. The element of wisdom and the supernatural is the shared characteristic of these characters or their related cults. According to Yeats, “Body perfection” is achieved through a spiritual dancing that leads to a state of enlightenment or salvation.

The doctrine of the Unity of Being, which Yeats believed in, relates body and soul to a kind of transcendental unity that is produced out of the interaction of this duality. In Yeats’s esoteric system, the phase “fifteenth”, which represents “complete beauty”, is Divine. In this phase,
body and soul are united, and they become invisible. Passion, or love in terms of the Unity of Being, takes on the major role in this process to transcend the body’s limits to reach ecstasy. However, Yeats’s esoteric system is the production of his middle age, and his point of view changes later, regarding body-soul duality at the least, when Yeats and his beloved Maud Gonne grow older. By this time of old age, body-soul duality is no longer acting because it suggests including the mortal body and the immortal soul. Yeats’s interest of the changeless body arises from his fear of the progressive losing of his body’s energy. The withered body of his beloved was one of the elements that caused a waning love, and it was exemplified in his poem, “Adam’s Curse”.

Yeats’s concept of the body is different from the Indian and Gnostic views in that he did not consider the body as evil or as a prison for the soul as in Gnosticism, or the renunciation of body desire as in Hinduism, but he consecrated the body, and blessedness comes from the interaction between body and soul as in “Vacillation” and “A Dialogue of Self and Soul”. However, he submitted sometimes to Hinduism and Gnosticism and their concepts in the Byzantine poems in particular. Yeats’s vacillation between these two contrasting points of view toward a body-soul interaction reflects the influence of these trends in religions and philosophies during his own poetic experience and the struggle that he had to suffer through to hold his own thoughts.

According to Yeats, there are two ways to attain salvation. The first is achieved by the “intellectual fire” which is symbolic of a purge of the soul or mind, but not the body as in “Blood and the Moon”, and the second which is fulfilled by spiritual dancing through “body perfection” as seen in “Byzantium” and other poems.

1 Emanuel Swedenborg, “Interaction of the Soul and Body”, tr. by John Whitehead at sacred-texts.com
3 Plato, PHAEDRUS, tr. by Benjamin Jowett, The Internet Classics, classics.mit.edu [Accessed 2 September 2016]
4 ‘Ancient Theories of Soul’.
5 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p. 1224.

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