



The Book of Yeats's Vision: Romantic Modernism and Antithetical Tradition

Hazard Adams

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William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was one of the greatest poets of his or any age. His odd, eccentric, comic, and finally serious prose work *A Vision* has long exasperated some readers with its occultist connections and strange, pseudo-geometrical diagrams and intrigued others with its odd origins and complex thought.

In this sequel to his critical study of Yeats's poems, Hazard Adams argues that *A Vision* is of extraordinary interest for its literary merit, its place in intellectual history as an example of romanticism's persistence in modernism, and its oblique defense of poetic fiction-making.

Rather than treating the book in terms of its historical and biographical genesis, Adams discusses the finished product as it appeared in 1937, a uniquely woven fictional fabric in which Yeats invents himself as a character. The "technical" sections of *A Vision* are presented as part of this drama and are illustrated by charts that appeared originally in *A Vision* and explanatory ones by the author.

In addition to the careful reading of the text, Adams shows that *A Vision* also presents a theory of poetry, art, and myth that goes under the Yeatsian term "antitheticality." This notion, which governs all the dimensions of *A Vision*-- philosophical, aesthetic, historical, and psychological--is drawn from a tradition stretching back to pre-Socratic ideas of warring opposites, through Giambattista Vico's account of "poetic wisdom," and William Blake's concept of "contraries."

The Book of Yeats's Vision will be essential reading for literary theorists, students and scholars of Irish literature, and admirers of Yeats interested in his creative intellectual life.

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