

FROM *THE HOUR-GLASS* TO *AT THE HAWK'S WELL*: REVISIONS
TOWARD AN IDEALIZED THEATER

by Shelley Sharp Dirst

Yeats entered the world of theater with a partially formed poet's vision of what he called the "theater of beauty."¹ This revolutionary concept, clearly unconventional in the context of Victorian drama and still puzzling to many readers by its ritualized, highly symbolic nature, gradually evolved as Yeats gained practical experience in writing, staging, and revising his plays. From the beginning, his concern was not only in writing lyric drama but also in creating a performance that would be strangely beautiful in its simplicity while returning the theater to the author and the actors. Rebellious against the naturalistic setting of traditional theater since the Renaissance, Yeats advocated "a non-realistic poet's theater in which art was to reign supreme in a reconciliation of poetry, gesture, and scene" (Chapman, "Theater of Beauty" 42). Through continual revision and implementation of new design concepts, Yeats experimented with the craft of the theater, specifically honing the technical details of performance.² In time, gradual development and experiment with language, movement, and stagecraft culminated in his Noh-influenced dramas, works expressing his unique ideal.

There was much practical rationale for Yeats to devise his revolutionary theater. His early plays had been unsuccessful, he felt, because had not yet found the right language and the right aesthetic to communicate: "From the start, Yeats's relationship with audiences was ambiguous at best and often downright antagonistic. . . . Yeats declared a war on the 'popular audience'" (Putzel 107). After 1899, Yeats acknowledged his dissatisfaction with *The Countess Cathleen* and, until rewriting it for its revival in 1911 and 1912, remained unhappy with the dramaturgy of much of his dramatic work. His criticism reflects such concerns, and he began lecturing his views to the public, thereby hoping to create a more sympathetic audience for his experiments.³ Such problems prompted him to write for an elite audience. Furthermore, as a founder of the Abbey Theatre, Yeats had attempted to implement innovations to place the Abbey at the forefront of the theatrical world, despite the particular problems of stagecraft he encountered there. The proscenium stage at the Abbey was small and ill-equipped to handle the extreme demands placed by traditional, naturalistic stage design. Therefore, such problems certainly urged Yeats toward a minimalist, economical and symbolic design for his plays. In fact, continual experimentation with innovative design concepts was to be the agent that helped Yeats to develop his poet's theater.

Implicit in his theory was his insistence on immediacy. Rather than creating an on-stage production within an ornate theater for a large public audience, Yeats eventually devised an esoteric art to be set in a friend's drawing room. Unlike the more popular drama of his Abbey Theatre counterparts, Lady Augusta Gregory and John Synge, Yeats envisioned an aristocratic drama for the select few who would be able to comprehend his intentions. For such comprehension, as he explains in his introduction to Ezra Pound's and Ernest Fenollosa's *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1916), such intimacy is important. "As a deep of the mind can only be approached through what is most human, most delicate," he said,

“we should distrust bodily distance, mechanism and loud noise” (*E&I*225).⁴ Closely related to this idea of immediacy was Yeats’s desire to simplify the theater, especially rejecting all unnecessary movement that might detract from the sounds of the lines being spoken. Yeats strived toward “creating a ritual that touched on the depths of human experience. In order to do so, he needed to remove his plays from the everyday without sacrificing their drama” (Morrow 171).⁵ Toward that end, the poet’s theater necessarily involved a ritualistic quality as it tended to downplay the actors’ expression of emotion in favor of the more poetic possibilities of stage pictures and language. The real beginnings of his movement to turn drama into pure poetry are clear in his first experimental drama to reach the stage, *The Hour-Glass: A Morality*, which, through continual revisions responsive to insights of performance and innovations in set design, informed and shaped the first of his “plays for dancers,” *At the Hawk’s Well*, where we see his vision achieved.

The Hour-Glass, based on the Irish tale “The Priest’s Soul,” is the story of a priest and teacher whose reason has usurped his faith and corrupted the faith of others. At the moment of reckoning, he must find one remaining believer to plead for his soul. Though this morality tale parallels the allegory of *Everyman* in the use of abstract symbolism and simplicity of characters that represent ideas, Yeats’s adaptation eventually moved in another direction. A chief difference between Yeats’s play and its medieval forbear is in its incongruity, explained by C. L. Phillips as “the presence in *The Hour-Glass* of irony, derived from play on the meanings of wisdom and folly.”⁶ As Yeats continued to revise his play during the course of a decade or more, he wrote less a treatise on the dangers of religious skepticism and more an investigation of the question of the nature of truth and the best way to seek it. Though on one level it seems the Wise Man’s wisdom is upstaged by the Fool’s simplicity, the effect is to examine the learned man’s path to faith. Yeats asks us “to explore the old Romantic debate of the two types of wisdom—an active, learned knowledge and a passive, unreasoning faith” (Phillips 86), making us return to one of his most prevalent themes—the struggle between action and contemplation, between blind faith and active discovery—that is at the heart of his masterwork *At the Hawk’s Well*, as well as in much of his poetry. As such, *The Hour-Glass*, with its metaphysical struggles expressed through ever-more-symbolic means, is a clear precursor to the Noh-influenced dramas in which Yeats achieves his “theater of beauty.”

A key influence in Yeats’s development of this theatrical vision was the involvement of set designer and artist Gordon Craig, who greatly influenced the theater world with the publication of his theatrical magazine, *The Mask*. In this journal, Craig advocated his highly original staging concepts and acting theory, both of which seemed to fit perfectly into Yeats’s vision. Most notable is Craig’s concept of the *übermarionette*, a type of acting first explained in Craig’s famous essay “The Actor and the Übermarionette” (*The Mask*, 1908) and made necessary by the new theater that his three-dimensional set had created. Craig believed that scenery should serve as more than a background and that the actor should be less an exhibition of the personality of the individual than traditionally thought. This premise, combined with his staging experiments with mannequins, led to his idea of the *übermarionette*.⁷ Reminiscent of a Greek statue, this actor “would not suffer from or be affected by personal emotions” (Flannery 263). In addition, this actor was moved farther toward Symbolist ideals by the use of a mask to cover the face. These unconventional attempts to emphasize abstraction and limit realism later worked their way into Yeats’s experimental drama.

Yeats’s connection with Craig began around 1902, when he introduced the already

influential Craig to *The Hour-Glass*. However, their friendship did not immediately lead to collaboration, and Yeats first produced *The Hour-Glass*, without Craig's assistance, on 14 March 1903, at Molesworth Hall in Dublin, and the play was first published that year in *The North American Review*. Also in 1903, Yeats was a member, with Craig and others, of an organization called "The Masquers," a society organized for the purpose of "fulfilling Yeats's dream of a 'Theater of Beauty'" (Chapman, "Yeats's Theater of Beauty" 47).⁸ While continuing to revise and perform *The Hour-Glass* throughout the next few years, Yeats renewed his friendship with Craig and, eager to implement his artistic innovations, employed him in 1909 to create a set and costumes for that play. By this time, Yeats had obtained much practical experience at the Abbey Theatre, which had opened on 27 December 1904; consequently, the innovations that the two men brought with them were introduced in Dublin before they were seen by audiences elsewhere in Europe.

Craig's designs were introduced to Abbey audiences on 12 January 1911, with the revival of *The Hour-Glass*. (This was nearly a year before the revival of *The Countess Cathleen*, using similar devices, under the direction of Nugent Monck.) Working on the 1911 production, Craig introduced Yeats to the idea of using masks and to Craig's own innovative monochromatic folding screens—two devices that would prove crucial to Yeats's future poetic drama. In fact, Yeats clarified his reliance on the screens by assuring Craig that all of Yeats's future plays would be written to use them (Miller 180). Originally created for Craig's Shakespeare productions at the Art Theatre of Moscow, these folding screens were revolutionary in their ability to change stage space and to alter the style of the production—and to meet both objectives economically. Both objectives were achieved with the implementation of masks and screens in *The Hour-Glass* production of 1911.

The alteration in method influenced the language and eventually the meaning of the play as Yeats began to discover the verse that expressed his dramatic intent and began composing the "New Version" that Craig first published in his magazine *The Mask* in April 1913. Much later, Yeats explained in "A General Introduction for my Work" that unlike the "vaguely mediaeval *Countess Cathleen*," written in blank verse, heroic subjects such as Deirdre and Cuchulain went better, or so he fancied, in ballad meter (*E&I* 523-25). This discovery, he said,

was a principal reason why I created in dance plays the form that varies blank verse with lyric metres. When I speak blank verse and analyse my feelings, I stand at a moment of history when instinct, its traditional songs and dances, its general agreement, is of the past. (*E&I* 524)

Moreover, Dorn argues that, due to Craig's scenery, *The Hour-Glass* had changed not only from one style of theater to another, but from one kind of language to another.⁹ As Yeats became influenced by Craig's designs, the play's imagery began to parallel the design concept. Many critics have discussed the impact of the Wise Man's first speech as it was revised to include the kind of "imagery of perception" (Dorn 124) that foreshadows that of Yeats's apocalyptic poem "The Second Coming." The newly metaphoric nature of the speech is evident, especially the image of the hawk, which "also foreshadows the dance-plays in which actual dances were to replace the description of one" (Phillips 94).¹⁰ Dorn describes Craig's scenery as follows:

The Wise Man's study is only part of the set. The desk, now in profile, is in

an alcove at the right from corner, in shadow. From the study, a corridor of screens curves round to the left, disappearing back centre stage into light. This arrangement suggests that the Wise Man's place is at one point of a circular pathway, that his domain of learning is at the dark end of a path moving towards light. (125)

Since Craig's screens were arranged in a circle moving from darkness into light with the Wise Man placed in the darkness, the metaphor for the place his learning holds is made clear.

In addition to such influential set design, Craig created the costumes, of which those of the Fool and the Angel proved to be most problematic. Craig's distinctive mask for the Fool was created early but was not implemented until the 1925 production because Craig insisted on overseeing its creation. Several of his sketches for the Fool's costume demonstrate the revised vision of the Fool's character. Craig explained that this mask was intended to convey "a hint of clown, a hint of Death, and of sphinx and of boy" (Miller 163). Suggesting an all-inclusive icon, this mask was typical of the turn toward the symbolic and universal that was to characterize later productions. In fact, Craig's collaboration with Yeats was to prove significant in Yeats's later drama, as Dorn suggests: "His decision to revise some plays (1910-1913) was prompted by the chance to restage them in Craig's new scenery, and this new use of stage space anticipated Yeats's adaptations, several years later, of the Japanese Noh drama" (109).

As performance informs concept, the influence of Craig's ideas can often be found in Yeats's frequent revisions of the play. Several minor and major revisions were made as Yeats gradually rewrote it into verse. One such revision of the original prose version was printed in 1911 in *Plays for an Irish Theatre*, giving the play a new ending, practical from a performance standpoint. Yeats had revised from the 1903 *North American Review* version, making the changes in a copy owned by Lady Augusta Gregory.¹¹ He deleted the Fool's last lines and added lines 497a-506:

FOOL.

Do not stir! He asked for a sign that you might be saved. (All are silent for a moment) . . . Look what has come from his mouth . . . a little winged thing . . . a little shining thing . . . It is gone to the door (The Angel appears in the doorway, stretches her hands and closes them again). The angel has taken it in her hands. . . . She will open her hands in the garden of Paradise. (They all kneel)

CURTAIN

This new ending was a major step toward writing the verse play (although it occurred in the prose version from 1904–1911), for it provided a clearer image than before of the soul's salvation. Also, it is important to note, this change was responsive to performance needs. In revision, the butterfly, symbol of the Wise Man's soul, is described fully, and its journey toward salvation is specified by stage directions that designate the Angel's retrieval of the butterfly. This new ending provides some idea of Yeats's intentions (although the prose ending was later recast again, adding a pupil's denial that the angel existed) because it indicates a reversal of the Wise Man's subordination to the Fool.

Once realized in the “New Version” of 1913,¹² the transformation led afterward, mainly, to cosmetic changes. Yeats was content to retain two forms of the play to circulate in print for different audiences. “I made a new play of it,” Yeats wrote, “and when I had finished discovered how I might have taken the offense out of the old by a change of action so slight that a reader would hardly have noticed it” (*VP*/646). A later revision of this new verse version, worked out in 1916, appears to be relatively minor and is not even discussed in Bushrui’s “*The Hour-Glass: Yeats’s Revisions, 1903-1922*.”¹³ Yet its significance lies in its connection with *At the Hawk’s Well*, the first of his Noh-influenced “plays for dancers.” Found in Yeats’s copy text of the 1914 printing of *Responsibilities: Poems and a Play* (Dublin: Cuala Press),¹⁴ the convergence between these two relatively dissimilar plays helps to illustrate how his concept of drama, the poet’s theater, gradually developed responding crucially to the necessities of performance.

In 1916, Yeats used this marked copy to provide partial copy text for *Responsibilities and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1916), including revisions within the verse version of *The Hour-Glass*. At this time, Yeats altered two of the Wise Man’s and one of the Fool’s final speeches. First, he changed the Wise Man’s lines (*VP*/633: 563-4a) – “Are you the one I seek? Do you believe / In God and the soul; in the undying stuff / That all things have been made of from the first?” – revising them as follows: “I half remember something. What is it? / Do you believe in God & in the soul?” Bushrui has noted that revisions in the prose version are unusually stylistic and often attempt greater verbal economy. In this verse version, the alterations just cited also seem to work toward such an objective.

However, Yeats made more significant revisions. In the Wise Man’s speech at lines 590-2, for example, the lines “(seizing him) I kneel to you – you are the man I / have sought. / You alone can save me” become “Yes, I remember now. You spoke of angels. / You said but now that you had seen an angel. / You are the one I seek and I am saved.” In addition, the Fool’s lines (*VP*/635: 593-5) – “No, no, what should poor Teigue know, Teigue / that is out in all weathers, Teigue that sleeps in the / fishers’ loft, poor Teigue the Fool” – are revised as follows: “Oh no. How could poor Teigue see angels. Oh Teigue tells / one Tale here another there & everybody gives him pennies [.] / If Teigue had not his tales he would starve” (cf. *VP*/635: 593-6).

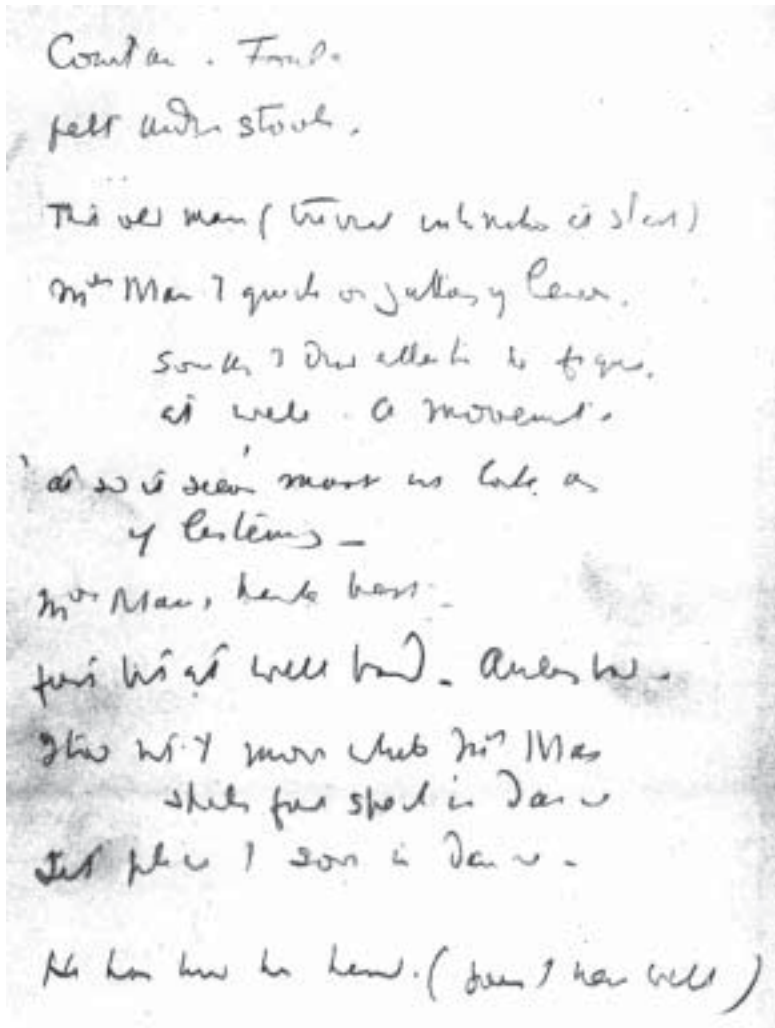
The major significance of this revision is the shift in the dynamics of the relationship between the two characters; the effect is a greater balance between the two, lessening the humility of the Wise Man before the Fool. Yeats admitted that the Wise Man’s kneeling to the Fool was “embarrassing,” a failure for the Wise Man that he did not wish to project.

[W]hen the Wise Man abused himself before the Fool I was always ashamed. My own meanings had vanished and I saw before me a cowardly person who seemed to cry out “the wisdom of this world is foolishness” and to understand the words not as may a scholar and a gentleman but as do ignorant preachers. (*VP*/645-6)¹⁵

Apparently, Yeats was unwilling to empower his Fool in a way that would reflect the literary tradition of the “holy fool.” Instead of embarrassment and failure, Yeats gave the Wise Man, in revision, a more heroic role, and eliminated some of the seriousness from the Fool’s wisdom. The effect is to control the audience’s sympathies, transferring dignity to the Wise Man. Although the playwright had revised these lines before, without satisfaction, the elimination

of the Wise Man's kneeling was the solution to this dramatic problem. He explained, "no revision of words could change the effect of the Wise Man down on his knees before the Fool; so last year I changed action and all" (VP/ 646). Again, the emphasis on staging is significant, especially as we recall the intimate, if exclusive, audience Yeats had in mind for the essentially "new play" he had fashioned from old material.

There is clear evidence that Yeats was further conceptualizing his poet's theater as he made these changes. Following these revisions, Yeats wrote some hastily jotted notes on two blank pages at the back of a copy of his *Responsibilities: Poems and a Play* (1914; see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).



Countess - Fool
 felt under stool.
 The old man (the one who looks at the
 Wise Man & goes on Julius & Caesar.
 Some & the other is to go.
 of words - a movement.
 as if seen most as late as
 of listening -
 Wise Man, he is best -
 for his of well he - and he -
 This is the man who Wise Man
 who has stood in the
 just like I saw in the -
 He has been he heard. (been I have well)

Fig. 1: Leaf 2 (recto), back free endpapers, *Responsibilities* (1914), PR5904R3 Copy 2, Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. Reproduced with permissions from The Libraries and A. P. Watt, Ltd., on behalf of the W. B. Yeats Estate.

These jottings concern his play *At the Hawk's Well*, which was just being composed and only existed in manuscript at that time, although it had advanced to production during the time he revised works within the volume.¹⁶ The notes in the endpapers refer specifically to players who were acting in the first production of *At the Hawk's Well*, an event that took place in Lady Cunard's London drawing-room on 2 April 1916. Evidently, this play was constantly being revised during rehearsals, since Curtis Bradford, in *Yeats at Work*, produces transcriptions of five manuscripts and two typescripts of the play at various stages over a period of years.¹⁷ Bradford claims that *At the Hawk's Well* must have been completely planned even before Yeats had undertaken the first prose draft, called "The Well of Immortality," and Bradford argues that the prose draft was succeeded by a draft in blank verse, followed by one that extended the climax, then by a typed draft which served as his prompt text for rehearsals (176).

However, the point of interest here is that the notations in the back of the Cuala Press *Responsibilities* volume at Emory University show that Yeats was simultaneously working on these two plays, *The Hour-Glass* (revised) and *At the Hawk's Well*; hence, there was evidently some correlation in his mind between the two works, as if revising one sparked ideas for the performance of the other. In short, the major connection between them is a performative one: the chief news offered us by the endpapers of Yeats's personal copy of *Responsibilities* (1914) pertains to a crucial moment of theatrical experimentation. His handwritten notations (in pencil) show his concern for the exact method by which his first dance play, *At the Hawk's Well*, was choreographed. A literatim transcription follows in the account of the back fly leaves 2r and lv, respectively, given in the logical order of the reconstructed sequence:

[2r:]

Courtai[n]. Foul[d]s.
felt under stools.

That old man (trivial inter[a]ction at start)
Mrs. Man[n] t[o] guide or gather up leaves [cf. *VPI* 408:193]
something t[o] draw attention to figure
at well. A movem[en]t –
'and so it seems' [cf. *VPI* 405:115] must not look as
if listening –
Mrs. Man[n], hawk nest –
first bit at well band. Ainley in [? or "on"]
Itow not t[o] move while Mrs. Man[n]
speaks first speech in dance. [cf. *VPI* 409: 213-15]
Set place t[o] com[e] in dance

He has turned his head. (goes to haw[k] well) [cf. *VPI* line 223; Mr. Ito plays
Sidhe woman]

[1v:]

Old man next under light [/ controlled by First Musician – see *VPI* 398-9]
made up
Old ma[n] to com[e] up [cf. *VPI* 411: 229, after the climax of the dance: "The
Old Man creeps up to the well."] ¹⁸

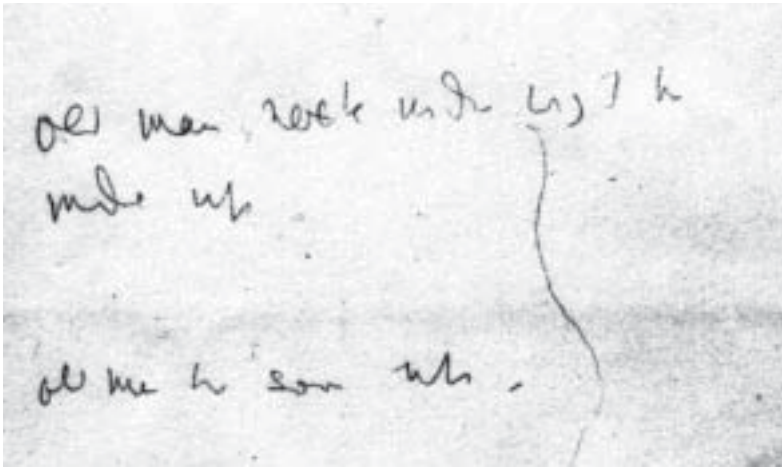


Fig. 2: Leaf 1 (verso), back free endpapers, *Responsibilities* (1914), PR5904R3 Copy 2, Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. Reproduced with permissions from The Libraries and A. P. Watt, Ltd., on behalf of the W. B. Yeats Estate.

These jottings amount to stage directions that apply to five specific players in *At the Hawk's Well*. In the 1917 preface to the play published in *Harper's Bazaar*¹⁹ (with the play's first printing), Yeats named the cast of the first production at Lady Cunard's drawing-room, designating "Mrs. Mann" and "Mr. Foulds" as two of the three musicians (along with Edmund Dulac), Mr. Michio Ito as the guardian of the well, and Mr. Henry Ainley as the Young Man (Cuchulain). Also taking part in the production was Allan Wade as the Old Man. Yeats's stage directions jotted in the endpapers of *Responsibilities* refer to the play's opening and to events leading toward the play's climax, its dance. The play's inaugural performance was a significant event although intimate, as Yeats said:

[O]nly those who cared for poetry were invited. It was played upon the floor [the reason for felt-tipping the legs of the stools], and the players came in by the same door as the audience, and the audience and the players and I myself were pleased. (*VP* 416)

T.S. Eliot was in the audience, at the invitation of Ezra Pound, who of course was also there.²⁰ "A few days later" (on 4 April 1916)²¹ the same cast presented the play, which they performed this time on a platform for "war charity" in "Lady Islington's large drawing-room at Chesterfield Gardens," London, to "three-hundred fashionable people including Queen Alexandra" (*VP* 416). This second production was less satisfying than the first because its audience was only socially, rather than poetically, elite. ("Once more my muses were but half welcome," Yeats observed, though pleased that the play was a charitable success, when only "fifty people" were required to "pay our expenses.")

According to Yeats, the performance at Lady Cunard's was intended to be a mere "dress rehearsal," as he wrote to John Quinn, his friend in New York, on the same day, 2 April 1916; while still unfinished, the play sparked an optimism in him:

I hope I am not incoherent but I am tired out with the excitement of rehearsing my new play – *The Hawk's Well* in which masks are being used for the first time in serious drama in the modern world. Ainley, who is the hero, wears a mask like an archaic Greek statue The play can be played in the middle of a room. It is quite short—30 or 40 minutes. I am not satisfied with the production and shall create a form of drama which may delight the best minds of my time, and all the more because it can pay its expenses without the others. (L 15)

Following the second performance of Tuesday, 4 April 1916, Yeats wrote Lady Gregory to report (much as he later noted in his preface in *Harper's Bazaar*):

I think *At the Hawk's Well* was a real success though a charity audience is a bad one. [The play was given to aid the Social Institution Union.] We refused to admit the press The form is a discovery and the dancing and masks wonderful. Nobody seemed to know who was masked and who was not on Tuesday. Those who were not masked were made up to look as if they were. It was all very strange. (L 611)

Obviously, production of this play was a significant moment for the playwright. Equally significant, Yeats's unpublished notes for both productions (as jotted in the Emory *Responsibilities*) show the playwright's concern with minute details of staging. As there was no physical "curtain," the play began with directions for music by Mr. Foulds (on endpaper 2r): "Courtai[n]. Foul[d]s." Presumably, at this stage of the blocking, Yeats designated Mrs. Mann (who had written the rest of the music), as the guide to direct the audience's attention to the next focal point. Although this specific direction (" . . . t[o] guide or gather up leaves. / Something to draw attention to figure/ at well") was not carried into the printed text, the role of the First Musician remained separate and distinguishable from the other musicians, perhaps as a result of Yeats's conception of Mrs. Mann as leader. In addition, the line "Look, he has turned his head" (*VPI* 410: 223), spoken by the First Musician, clarifies this role as the audience's guide to the action of the play—a role established as early as these notes for the 1916 performance. This role in the text is not only anticipated by the notations in *Responsibilities*; it persisted despite actual problems Yeats had with his Cuchulain (Ainley) and, seemingly, with the score and the individual musicians:

We shall not do it [perform the play] again until June in order to get rid of Ainley and the musicians. The music [Sir Thomas] Beecham says is good but one cannot discuss anything with a feud between Dulac and a stupid musician at every rehearsal. It seems better to get very simple music that can be kept under control. I may even repeat the lyrics myself and have no singing and no music but gong and drum played by Dulac and perhaps a dulcimer or flute. (L 611)

Another important element in the directions set out in the *Responsibilities* volume is the

evidence of Yeats's difficulty in transforming his actors into marionettes, as he designates all characters in the final version (*VPI* 401). Working with actors unused to the artifice he envisioned, "he often voiced his frustration with the limitations of his actors and their inability to translate his vision of a performance into an actual performance" (Putzel 113). Given this problem, it is evident in the early notations that the playwright is attempting to control physical characteristics ("a movement," "must not look as if listening," "Itow not to move")—a task essential to transforming traditional actors into Noh actors. Because the timing and range of movements are crucial to Noh performers, Yeats's concerns here are quite understandable.

The last line jotted on the second free end-paper—"He has turned his head. [goes to haw[k] well]"—corresponds to the action immediately following the hawk's dance, and it comes just before the Guardian of the Well exits. The departure of this significant character marks the end of the first act of traditional Noh action (although in Noh, the climactic dance occurs in the second act, near the play's end); thus, the notes cover what we may call the "first act" of *At the Hawk's Well* although there are no divisions as such. In any case, these notes serve as a guide to Yeats's intentions for this seminal play, the first in which he would adapt many Noh techniques in addition to those techniques he had learned from Gordon Craig.

However, artistic disagreements between Yeats and Craig kept them from a permanent partnership and caused Yeats to employ Dulac instead for the production of *At the Hawk's Well* in 1916. Ezra Pound served as the connection between Yeats and Dulac since Pound, a close friend of Yeats, had previously met Dulac, an illustrator, painter, and musician. His influence, much like Craig's contributions to *The Hour Glass*, enhanced the artifice Yeats considered essential for his Noh plays. He created "racially indeterminate masks (part Japanese, part Greek, part Egyptian) [to] gradually draw the audience out of its own historicity, away from familiar themes and into the 'strange' world of the play" (Putzel 113). In addition, Dulac designed the costumes (although Ricketts had made the costumes in previous Cuchulain plays), played one of the musicians, and later wrote the musical score for Yeats's *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921).

Dulac's influence was, however, not the only force molding Yeats's vision of the Noh. Although Yeats had been introduced previously to the Noh through Pound's work with the Fenollosa manuscripts of Japanese plays (work done while Pound was serving as Yeats's secretary at Stone Cottage, Sussex) and although Yeats sought to replicate the form, he did not exactly imitate it. Partly because of the necessity of adapting his material to a Western audience and partially due to his definite conception of an ideal form based on Western masked entertainments, he infused characteristics of the Noh into his own already-advanced dramatic vision (*Ex*244-59; see, for example, "A People's Theatre: A Letter to Lady Gregory"). He had used an unchanging backdrop as early as *The Hour-Glass* while in collaboration with Craig, and his art had become purposely esoteric long before his contact with the aristocratic theater of Japan. Though he followed Noh tradition by, among other things, incorporating supernatural characters and utilizing the dance as dramatic climax, his "plays for dancers" were not strictly imitations of the Noh tradition.

Rather, Yeats relied on a variety of sources. Loosely based on the Noh play *Yoro*,²² *At the Hawk's Well* was also inspired by Celtic folklore, particularly the story "The Well of Connla," an Irish legend about nine magic hazel trees of knowledge, the fruit of which annually falls into a well. Connla, the guardian of this well, fascinated Yeats and was often invoked by the Golden Dawn.²³ Though he looked to both Eastern and Western folklore for archetypal source materials for all of his "plays for dancers," thereby uniting opposite cultures in his portrayal

of the spiritual journey, Yeats's own stage contribution in *At the Hawk's Well*—"his primary concession in adapting the Noh theater to his own purpose" (Miller 223)—was the ritualized folding and unfolding of the cloth. In conjunction with his abstraction and simplification of what would have been more elaborate props in the Noh (for instance, he transformed the well into a simple piece of blue cloth), such ritual made these plays unique.

Dulac's productions of *At the Hawk's Well*, first performed for the select drawing-room audience, were *avant-garde* and not wholly accepted or understood even by the sophisticated audience Yeats had assembled. Such audience reaction to Yeats's attempt at bringing Eastern ritual drama into the West is evident in a letter James Stephens wrote (on 7 July 1917) regarding a private performance of a play very like the early performances of *At the Hawk's Well*. According to Stephens's editor, he describes Yeats's *The Dreaming of the Bones*, which he had seen at the home of Yeats's good friend, Oliver St. John Gogarty:

Dear Gogarty,

Here is a copy of the verses you asked for. The play Yeats read us last night is marvelous. I can't help thinking it a pity he should put so much artifice between the play and the audience. The drum, that is, & the unwinding cloth & the little journeys round the stage. The play is so beautiful that these first aids to the feeble are not needed—when a convention is native and belongs to a country it is understood & takes its proper subordinate position, but in these cases it can easily be the play which is subordinate. Of course this play is such that it requires to be elongated from the world of the audience. Maybe he is right. It was good last night in your house, but it always is.

Mise

James Stephens²⁴

Stephens's analysis is indicative of the thinking process by which Yeats's new drama was assimilated by the Western aristocratic consciousness. Interestingly, Stephens's primary objection is that "the play" (perhaps Stephens means "the text") seems subordinate to the ritual contained within it. It is striking that Stephens does intuit Yeats's intentions for poetry in his "theater of beauty" to take precedence over all else. Unfortunately, from this viewer's standpoint, the artifice Yeats had hoped would, through its strangeness, channel thought into poetic form, was precisely what obscured his verse, creating the opposite effect. As Stephens's remarks about the unfamiliar conventions suggest, the play must have seemed odd to the audience:

however prepared they were for the new form, they were still, in the London of 1916, conditioned by realistic theatre which, although artificial or "theatrical" in its style of presentation, was more nearly a reflection of the taste of the age than was Yeats's involved investigation of a deep and exotic inner concept of beauty which had little, if any, relationship to everyday life. (Miller 228)

Further evidence of the audience's difficulty in assimilating Yeats's new drama is suggested by

Stephens's critical attitude toward the musicians, whose drum beats, cloth folding, and ritualistic movements only created confusion. Clearly, Yeats's musicians, his most original contribution, were also the most problematic aspect of the performance.

Yeats's preoccupation with correcting this problem is demonstrated by his notations in the endpapers of the Emory *Responsibilities* volume. Perhaps comments like Stephens's reached the playwright and prompted him to revise the stage directions for the musicians. Since *At the Hawk's Well* was constantly revised during performance, such experimentation would have been possible. Indeed, it was usual for Yeats to rehearse textual alterations in productions before he published them. The notations in *Responsibilities* are significant, aiding us in visualizing the earliest performance of *At the Hawk's Well*—one that shaped his later “plays for dancers.” His notes—virtually a prompt copy for the play's moment of climax—focus on the period leading up to and succeeding the essential supernatural incident of the drama, the dance of the hawk by Mr. Michio Ito.

In Yeats's iconography, the dancer symbolizes the process a soul goes through in attempting to reach a state of “Unity of Being,” a mystical marriage of two extremes. The stylized dance in each of his “plays for dancers” is performed by a representative of the supernatural world and represents the intermingling of that world with our mortal existence.²⁵ This dance-as-climax, taken from the Noh tradition, “becomes a wordless culmination of the dignity, symbolism, and remoteness already foreshadowed by the ceremonial movements, the songs, and the symbolic actions which precede it” (Gorsky 169-70). As such, it is the ultimate expression of the archetypal message inherent in Yeats's “theater of beauty.” In *At the Hawk's Well*, the dance of the hawk sets fate in motion so that Cuchulain's heroic destiny is sealed. Still, the waters of immortality thwart the hero's quest for immortality of the soul. Deceived by the woman of the Sidhe, the Guardian of the Well, this man of action is resolved to resign himself to the forces of the supernatural. And if, as Gill has suggested, the Old Man and Cuchulain represent Yeats's reason and instinct, respectively,²⁶ then this play portrays the failure of both methods as a means of reaching beyond human limits—neither man is able to overcome his human limitations in order to find the waters of immortality. The Old Man is weary and disillusioned, as the reasoning man becomes through experience. The Young Man is foolish and easily swayed by blind passion, following the deceptive woman of the Sidhe. As reason and instinct both fail, Yeats creates a finally bleak vision. Their defeat suggests that “life itself is a deception” (Gill 47), an ever-elusive enigma.

As the first of Yeats's dance plays and the first Noh-influenced Cuchulain drama, *At the Hawk's Well* marked a key moment in the development of Yeats's dramatic progression. Specifically, Ito's dance makes explicit the metaphysical struggle that had been implicit in his earlier experimental work, *The Hour-Glass*, where the skeptical Wise Man in conjunction with his foil, the Fool, presents the conflict between reason and instinct. Further, Yeats's preoccupation with this struggle is evident in much of his poetry of the period. The dance of the hawk in *At the Hawk's Well* anticipates the young, female dancer who reconciles body and mind, Sphinx and Buddha, in “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes,” and the gaze of the Sidhe woman “that unmoistened eye” parallels the image of the Robartes's dancer's emotionally detached “dead” face amidst the turbulence of her frenzied movement.²⁷ Similarly, within the play, the dance marks a stage in the progress of Cuchulain's soul along the Great Wheel, one continued in his dance-like scene with Fand in the subsequent drama, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. In both of these dance plays, Yeats uses the supernatural dance from the Noh tradition to

represent the progress of man's soul toward perfection.

As represented in these plays and in Yeats's later male/female dialogue poetry, Yeats envisioned the woman's role in the hero/poet's spiritual progress to be that of a medium. In the context of ritual, such as that embodied by the Noh, a woman is the primary means through which Cuchulain (and Yeats) may find his anti-self and therefore progress spiritually. In some way, perhaps the woman's role resembles that of the Fool in *The Hour-Glass*, as the only means to salvation and to immortality. Although the woman of the Sidhe in *At the Hawk's Well* actually works to deter Cuchulain from the waters of immortality, she does lead him in a more significant direction—toward his fate as hero. Although his attraction to her marks the beginning of a difficult, discordant future with the Sidhe, this process is a necessary one in terms of his spiritual struggle and regeneration.

In a letter to T. Sturge Moore, written in 1929, Yeats explained the motivation underlying his dramatic experimentation: "I always feel my work is not drama but the ritual of a lost faith" (*VPI*526). This often-quoted statement makes explicit the connection between ritual ceremony and spirituality in his dramatic work and suggests the virtue of necessity Yeats found in the communion of the two in Japanese Noh drama. By the time Yeats had experimented enough to realize the reasons for his failures in popular drama, he had come to understand what he needed to do. As he gradually incorporated minimalist staging fit for an intimate setting, distancing devices such as masks, methodical movement, stylized music, and the culminating in symbolic dance, he elevated his incantatory verse and archetypal themes, turning drama into poetry. The result was at once abstract and intimate, the spiritual experience he had envisioned.

Notes

1. See Wayne K. Chapman, "Yeats's 'Theatre of Beauty' and the Masque Tradition," *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* 7, ed. Richard J. Finneran (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 42-56, and *Yeats and English Renaissance Literature* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 110-20. Hereafter, abbreviations used for the works of W.B. Yeats are defined as follows: *E&I* for *Essays and Introductions* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1961); *Ex* for *Explorations*, sel. Mrs. W. B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1962; New York: Macmillan, 1963); *L* for *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (London Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954; New York: Macmillan, 1955); *UPI* for *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, vol. 1, eds. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (London: Macmillan; New York: Columbia University Press, 1970); and *VPI* for *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Russell K. Alspach assisted by Catherine C. Alspach (London and New York: Macmillan, 1966 [corrected, 2nd printing]). For permission to quote from Yeats's unpublished manuscripts, I am grateful to A.P. Watt, Ltd., for the W.B. Yeats Estate, and to the Woodruff Library (Special Collections), Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.
2. Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press; and Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1977), 225.
3. See, for example, W.B. Yeats, "The Theatre of Beauty," *Harper's Weekly* 11 Nov. 1911; rpt. in *UP2*: 397-401—a speech delivered at Harvard on an American lecture tour. See also Wayne K. Chapman, "The 'Countess Cathleen Row' of 1899 and the Revisions of 1901 and 1911" *Yeats Annual* No. 11, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Macmillan, 1995), 105-23; Michael J. Sidnell, "The Countess Cathleen as a Study of Theatrical Genre," *Ireland in the Arts and Humanities, 1899-1999: The South Carolina Review* 32.1 (fall 1999), 38-48; and Ronald Schuchard, "The Countess Cathleen and the Chanting of Verse, 1892-1912," *Yeats's Collaborations: Yeats Annual* No. 15, eds. Wayne K. Chapman and Warwick Gould (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 36-68.
4. See also Steven Putzell, "Poetic Ritual and Audience Response: Yeats and the No," *Yeats and Postmodernism* (New York: Syracuse UP, 1991), 105-25.

5. Morrow, Melinda. "Ritual Strangeness: Elements of Noh in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*," *Ireland in the Arts and Humanities, 1899-1999: The South Carolina Review* 32.1 (fall 1999), 170-9.
6. C. L. Phillips, "The Writing and Performance of *The Hour-Glass*," *Yeats Annual* No.5, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Macmillan, 1986), 89.
7. James W. Flannery, "W. B. Yeats, Gordon Craig and the Visual Arts of the Theatre," *Yeats and the Theatre*, eds. Robert O' Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds (Toronto: Maclean-Hunter Press, 1975), 192.
8. See also Ronald Schuchard, "W. B. Yeats and the London Theatre Collaboration with Gordon Craig," *Review of English Studies* ns 29.116 (1978): 430-46.
9. Imagery and manner seem anticipated, too, by the production of *The Shrine of the Golden Hawk*, a pretty piece of Egyptology written by Florence Farr and Olivia Shakespear, reviewed by Yeats, and acted on the same stage with his *The Shadowy Waters* in 1906. See *UPI*, 266.
10. Karen Dorn, "Dialogue into Movement: W. B. Yeats's Theatre Collaboration with Gordon Craig," *Yeats and the Theatre*, eds. Robert O'Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds (Toronto: Maclean-Hunter Press, 1975), 122.
11. Cited as "PH Emory (1) PR5904/H59 [THE HOUR-GLASS/ A MORALITY.]" by Catherine Phillips in her edition of the manuscripts of *The Hour-Glass* for Cornell University Press. The document is listed as "The Hour-Glass," detached from *The North American Review*, vol. 177, no. 562 (1903), pp. 445-6, with deletions and including a revised ending (a typescript) mounted on p. 456. Box 1, Folder 36, W. B. Yeats Collection, Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University.
12. See the "New Version" of *The Hour-Glass* from *Responsibilities: Poems and a Play* (1914). Box 1, Folder 50, W. B. Yeats Collection, Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. See also n. 14 below.
13. S. B. Bushrui, "The Hour-Glass: Yeats's Revisions, 1903-1922," *W. B. Yeats, 1865-1965: Centenary Essays of the Art of W. B. Yeats*. Ed. D. E. S. Maxwell and S. B. Bushrui (Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 1965), 192.
14. Cited as "VP Emory (2) PR5904 R3 [THE HOUR-GLASS/ NEW VERSION]" by Catherine Phillips in her edition of the manuscripts of *The Hour-Glass* for Cornell University Press. This copy of *Responsibilities* was purchased by Emory University from Senator Michael Yeats. *Responsibilities: Poems and a Play* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1914), PR5904.R3 at Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University.
15. The word "abused" may be an overlooked typographical error for "abased," though it is in all the printings of the note.
16. The poems in this volume were not significantly revised at that time, although several of these poems were collated by Mrs. Yeats in the 1940's and bear her marginal annotations. The poems and the play, *The Hour-Glass*, were joined with the lyrics of *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1912) when Macmillan produced in 1916 the compound volume called *Responsibilities and Other Poems*. For a detailed account of the evolution of this book, see Wayne K. Chapman, "The Annotated *Responsibilities* . . ." and "A *Descriptive Catalog of W. B. Yeats's Library: Notes Supplementary*," both of which appear in *Yeats Annual* No. 6, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Macmillan, 1988).
17. See Curtis B. Bradford, *Yeats at Work* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1965), 174-216.
18. The fragmentary notation on the Old Man (on leaf lv) includes a long vertical stroke that seems to indicate that it should join the facing page (2r). An equally plausible reading of the last jotting might be "Old ma[n] to sum up."
19. See *At the Hawk's Well*, "Preface," with revisions and deletions, dated 1916 October 24, in Box 1, Folder 33, W. B. Yeats Collection, Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. This manuscript of the "Preface" contains a list of actors taking part in the first production, names which obviously match those jotted in the blank pages of the *Responsibilities* volume.
20. See Michael Butler Yeats, "Eliot and Yeats: A Personal View," *The Placing of T. S. Eliot* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 169-84. Eliot recalled the play simply: "I remember well the first performance of *The Hawk's Well*, in a London drawing room, with a celebrated Japanese dancer in the role of the hawk, to which Pound took me" (171). W. B. Yeats recalled to John Quinn that he expected Arthur Balfour, John Singer Sargent, Charles Ricketts, Sturge Moore, Augustus John, the Prime Minister, and "a few pretty ladies [to] come to see it" when (and if) "the play is perfectly performed" (L 610).
21. According to Curtis B. Bradford, the play was produced on April 2 and April 4, 1916. See *Yeats at Work* 174. See also L 611, where Allan Wade gives the date of the second performance as Tuesday,

April 4. The public performance was preceded by a concert arranged and conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham, who came to support Yeats.

22. See Richard Taylor, "Assimilation and Accomplishment: Noh Drama and an Unpublished Source for *At the Hawk's Well*," *Yeats and the Theatre*, eds. Robert O'Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds (Toronto: Maclean-Hunter Press, 1975), 137-58.
23. Reg Skene, *The Cuchulain Plays of W. B. Yeats: A Study* (New York: Columbia UP, 1974), 8.
24. Quoted in Richard J. Finneran, ed. *Letters of James Stephens* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1974), 219. Recently, Wayne K. Chapman casts doubt on Stephens's letter being about *The Dreaming of the Bones*, speculating that the private performance was again of *At the Hawk's Well*. See Chapman's introduction to W.B. Yeats, "*The Dreaming of the Bones*" and "*Calvary*" : *Manuscript Materials*, ed. Wayne K. Chapman (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2003), xxvii.
25. See Susan R. Gorsky, "Ritual Drama: Yeats's Plays for Dancers," *Modern Drama* 17.2 (June 1974), 165-78.
26. Stephen M. Gill, *Six Symbolist Plays of Yeats* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1971).
27. For further commentary on this poem, see also Elizabeth Cullingford, "Yeats and Women: Michael Robartes and the Dancer," *Yeats Annual* No. 4, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Macmillan, 1985), 29-52.

LYN LIFSHIN

BECAUSE OF THIS WE WERE LATE, EVERYTHING GOT MIXED UP. LATER I BROKE THE DOOR. OR, THE LEAVING.

I thought it was
odd at first. *Take*
off your clothes you
said, unbuttoning yours,
putting the Polaroid
on a timer

we laughed about what
would turn up. One

caught us
moving. But the other,

my hand touching you
lightly, chilled

we didn't expect any
thing so haunting

strangely like Masaccio's
Adam and Eve