

“The Labyrinths of the Mind” – Uses of Dramatic Space in W.B. Yeats’s *Four Plays for Dancers*

Yeats’s plays are often considered too theoretical and predominantly textual and are thus usually analysed merely on the basis of their literary value and indubitable merits in dramatic verse. Although the text-centred approach that focuses primarily on the plot, character-relations and stylistic registers might provide us with a better understanding of the written material and Yeatsian thought in general, it disregards the fact that the playwright viewed his plays not as mere literary texts but material written for performance whose true essence is called to life through stage representation. Yeats was a man of the theatre actively engaged in the making of productions, writing and re-writing his plays with the attitude of a producer, taking audience needs and responses into consideration, re-shaping his written material according to the varying facilities and changing circumstances of the actual stage practice.¹ Yeats’s global, performance-based approach that regards the living body of the spoken, spatially presented material as the base of his work of art requires a more practical and contextual analysis that tries to extend the boundaries of an orthodox, intrinsic close reading of the play texts.² This paper is an attempt to place Yeats’s plays into the stage space; that is to look at the written text from a perspective that investigates the possibilities of the staged performance, its semantic layers and manifold relations to the audience.

The main argument of the paper is that Yeats’s innovation in the theatre practice and stage dramaturgy of his time lies in a completely new perspective of spatial relations, which is in strong correlation with his performance-based attitude. The complex dramaturgical constructions of Yeats’s plays that make them so exciting and challenging to stage can thus be most effectively unfolded by discovering the unique uses of dramatic space and its functions that draw the relation-map of the presented characters, the players and the audience. However, Yeats’s understanding of dramatic space and his on-stage spatial constructions are far from

¹ “This is the very opposite of the over-literary approach to drama which some of Yeats’s critics in the past have attributed to him. His feeling for the visual side of theatre was, in fact, sensitive beyond anything found in the playwrights writing for the English theatre of his time. He was in this respect a European even before he encountered the experimental Continental theatre in action” (Worth 27).

² In my analysis, I mostly rely on secondary material that take a more practical approach to Yeats’s plays and analyse them from a dramaturgical point of view. The merits of the critical texts written by Andrew Parkin, Reg Skene, Richard Taylor, Leonard Pronko or Peter Ure that focus primarily on the textual aspects of the plays are indisputable, yet analyses reflecting on the stage practice of these plays – such as the works of James Flannery, Karen Dorn, Katharine Worth, Richard Allen Cave, Masaru Sekine, Alexandra Poulain, Mary Felischer, Chris Morash and Shaun Richards – let the reader see a fuller and truer picture of Yeatsian theatre.

being homogeneous, and varied from time to time, depending on the theoretical influences and practical circumstances he was working under. His collaborations with other artists, his essential spiritualism and interest in Oriental thought, and the technical facilities of the Abbey stage all worked as determinative factors in creating his original “spatial syntax”³ through which he could finally find his true voice as a dramatist in his Noh-inspired dance plays. The heterogeneity of his dramatic visions thus requires us to narrow down the focus of our attention to this particular stage in the development of Yeats’s stage dramaturgy, which, being a unified, organic system of its own, might count as an ultimate point of reference within the Yeatsian dramatic oeuvre, and invites analyses reflecting on the creative process that paved the way for its actual manifestation. I believe that the “Yeatsian revolution” in the use of theatre space can be most fully presented through his *Four Plays for Dancers*, which, thanks to their performance-based nature, primarily rely on, and are thus determined by, spatial relations (Morash and Richards 63). The first part of the analysis tries to trace the most important steps in the development of Yeatsian stage dramaturgy that lead to the formation of a most unique world of stage-space culminating in his dance plays, while the second part attempts to discover the “topography” of *Four Plays for Dancers* by means of a closer inspection of the play texts and their possibilities for stage performance.

To see the peculiarity of the Yeatsian use of stage space and to trace its marked differences from the realist-naturalist tradition of theatrical representation on the Irish stage, first we should turn to the inherently ambiguous notion of dramatic space in general.

When discussing on- and offstage spaces, we should apply some of the terminology suggested by Tuan and Casey in the context of the philosophy of space.⁴ They distinguish *space* from *place*, claiming the former to be more abstract and less determinable than the latter. Space is a “zone of danger” that can be best described as a transitional, ever-changing context constantly in “the state of becoming” without identifiable points of reference, set boundaries or a clearly defined end (Morash and Richards 35). Space can be transformed into place through human mediation and a process of domestication,⁵ creating thus a personalised,

³ I use Worth’s more general term “syntax” in relation to Yeats’s use of dramatic space, as it describes most aptly the definitive role of the dance plays within the whole of Yeats’s dramatic works. See Worth 48–71.

⁴ In *Space and Place*, Tuan elaborates on our understanding and relation to “place” and “space” that he claims the “basic components of the lived world” (Tuan 3).

In *Getting Back into Place*, Casey provides a theoretical interpretation of the notion of place and its prime importance in our lived experience. He claims that “the increased mobility” and “incessant motion” of modern and postmodern times have resulted in “the loss of places that can serve as lasting scenes of experience and reflection and memory”. To fight the latent “place-panic” of our abstracted, “speed-bound” world, “each of us attempts to move from the discomfort of disorientation [...] to find our way in place” (Casey ix–xviii; 3–39).

⁵ “When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place” (Tuan 73).

homely environment filled up with our own, time-bound existence of marked spatio-temporal boundaries.

Following Casey's argument that we are constantly searching for locations for shared experiences to domesticate space, the theatre might be regarded as an ultimately fitting context for place-making, as the performance itself gives players and spectators a potential to create a collective, familiar place traced and confined with memory.⁶ From this follows that the essential spatiality of the theatre performance does not only derive from its obvious demand for the three-dimensional presence of the actor and the audience, but is rooted in its place-making qualities. As Blau phrases it: the place, the on-stage location of the performance "does not exist before the play but is *initiated* or *precipitated* by it" (Morash and Richards 8). However, despite its definiteness, the on-stage place that comes to life during the performance cannot be described as truly stable and familiar, since the dramatic action itself by nature requires abstraction and displacement: the stage scenery and the set is only a spatially determined trace of a remote or even non-existent wider space which is out of our reach.

Anne Ubersfeld described this dichotomy of on-stage place and off-stage space by defining them, within the theoretical framework of theatre semiotics, as signifier and signified, the playing place and its visualised scenery counting as a mere point of reference to its assigned, invisible dramaturgical space. Naming the signifier stage place *zone A* and its signified space *zone non-A*,⁷ she defined one by its relation with the other, making them mutually dependent on each other with "opposing values attached to them, with one being privileged both textually and in terms of staging" (Morash and Richards 37).

The realist-naturalist tradition of stage practice predominantly privileges place over space, as the unknown, variable domains of indefinite spaces are not only excluded from direct on-stage presence but remain very rarely referred to even as off-stage spaces. These circumscribed spatial relations of realism were highly problematic for the Irish stage from the very beginning of the country's theatre life.⁸ Their spirituality, their firm belief in the existence of another, parallel plane of reality and the possibility of its transcendence to the domains of our earth-bound life made some of the Irish dramatists reluctant to accept the on-stage zone A as it is, deprived of the potential for visual representation of the otherworld. In Irish drama the "evocation of another spatial dimension" thus has always been a central issue

⁶ I rely on Gellért's interpretation of the theatre as a habitable yet spiritually infinite place-making context, which might provide us with a location to regain the losses suffered from being lost in the abstracted space-world. He takes the argument one step further by defining theatre space as bearing the quality of "Plato's khora", which, due to its inherent liminality, is capable of evoking place and space at the same time (Gellért 4–6).

⁷ See Plate 1. All plates are in the Appendix.

⁸ See Morash and Richards 6–27.

both on a textual and a practical level, which generated a tangible misbalance between the presented and the absent realms of dramatic space, as “there would always be more on the stage than could be seen.”⁹ The only way to grasp something from the remote and unbound spatial territories of the unknown was then, in accordance with the usual tradition of the realist use of stage space, to make it reachable through direct, visualised spatial references, and bring the domains of the supernatural closer to the familiar place of the playing area by showing the threshold that connects them. This was one of the main reasons why liminal places capable of spatial mediation such as doors or thresholds gained extra attention on the Irish stage.¹⁰ However, the objective representative style of the nineteenth century Irish theatre was unable to solve the problem of the on-stage visualisation of parallel spatial dimensions, so there was a growing need for a change of perspective that would make this dialecticism of double spaces accessible in performance.¹¹

The paradigm shift in the use of theatre space in Ireland was triggered by the changing attitude towards the (in)capability of representation outlined by the symbolist movement in the late nineteenth century, which was in strong correspondence with Yeats’s very own visions about the accessibility of parallel spatial dimensions. Due to a global striving for the internalisation of perspective in artistic expression in general, as the imitative image-making of life by trying to mirror it objectively proved impossible, the focus of artistic creation shifted to the otherwise unreachable realms of impressions and the workings of the human psyche (Fleischer 3–4). Instead of visualising the outer domains of everyday human interactions it became more important to show feelings by giving shape to “moments of intense life”, “passionate action or somnambulistic reverie” (Cave, *Selected Plays* xvi; *Autobiographies* 65). For the representative artists of the time¹² striving to represent things subjectively, the internalising movement of reaching to the inner realms of the mind – i.e. to create “an art of the interior” – was combined with an external movement that aimed to reach the otherwise intangible spheres of life (Worth 21). As Worth phrases it: “For them all going

⁹ As Morash and Richards claim, “one of the defining features of Irish theatre space in the first half of the twentieth century would be a tension between this utopian offstage place and the constraints of a visible onstage space” (20).

¹⁰ “Yeats [...] made liminality a working principle in many of his plays where doorways and what they may or may not frame became the focus of the stage action” (Cave 97).

¹¹ See Plates 2–3.

¹² Maurice Maeterlinck, Arthur Symonds, Villiers de L’Isle Adam and their contemporaries of the symbolist movement in drama tried to explore the stage-space “to create a drama of the interior [...] to define the intricate movements of their characters’ subconscious” (Cave, *SP* xix). Their strivings to internalise stage action was closely related to the general excitement about collaborations in different fields of art and the idea of a total theatre. As Fleischer claims, “for both theatre and dance artists, the problem of how to visualise and reveal inner life and spiritual states was a challenge that gave rise to new experiments in staging and choreography” (4).

down into the deep of the mind meant also reaching out, making contact with the mystery of the universe, galvanising into active life the part of the mind that dreams and is passive and has intuitive knowledge the conscious mind is blind to” (11). This double movement that connected the internal with the external gradually manifested itself spatially on the Irish stage, as the Yeatsian approach to the accessibility of the supernatural through human mediation became a valid means of interpretation in performance practice.

Yeats’s visions of the parallel space, as opposed to that of the place-bound restrictions of the realist tradition, were not exclusive with regard to on-stage representation, as he believed that the dimensions of the natural and the supernatural can merge in a shared space that is neither domestic, nor distant. Yeats’s stage-world was a mythical space, uniting the defining features of space and place, accommodating figures of the past – of myth and/or of history – and characters of the present continuous of the theatre performance, to create a synthesis of the timed and the timeless, the finite and the eternal.¹³ For Yeats, the ultimate aim was to make the playing space capable of visualising what the realist stage set was not able to show, and he saw the possibility of this “spatial revolution” in internalising stage space through focusing on the small worlds of characters’ mind-spaces that could open up the shared myth of the stage-world.

From the Painted Stage to Mind-Plays

Although The Abbey Theatre under Yeats’s direction had been “trying to escape the inability to accommodate the subjective path”, the technical facilities and the lack of a completely new, unified “spatial syntax” prevented productions from reaching the effect Yeats wanted concerning the presentation of the multi-layered reality structure which he believed our world existed in (Morash and Richards 50). Throughout the long decades of producing plays on the Abbey stage, Yeats reconsidered his approach to the relationship both of the actors and the scenery, and the space of the playing area and that of the audience to finally reach the mode of representation that allowed him to stage spatial transcendence.

¹³ This idea about the heterogeneity of stage space might relate to Yeats’s theory about the “Great Memory”. He believed “that the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy [...] and that our memories are a part of one great memory”. It is this shared, yet individually accessible myth that is given dramatic substance in Yeats’s mythical stage space, which is called to life through poetry (“Magic”; *Essays and Introductions* 28). In his seminal work on the ontology and the spatial composition of the poetic image (*The Poetics of Space*), Bachelard defines poetry as a “shelter for dreams”, a mythical space through which our and other’s past can be revealed: “there exists for each one of us an oneiric house, a house of dream-memory, that is lost in the shadow of a beyond of the real past [...] and that these dream values communicate poetically from soul to soul” (17).

In his early productions Yeats tried to map the possible uses of stage space and scenic design by focusing on zone A only, but could not find the way to fully exploit its facilities. He was unable to transcend the limitations of the proscenium stage and thought about the stage-space as unalterably two-dimensional, keeping the painted scenery and its semi-realistic design, trying to accommodate his stage-world to the Pre-Raphaelite imagery that was so popular at the time. According to Loizeaux, Yeats associated his early stage pictures with the works he admired, as he saw Pre-Raphaelite paintings as “frozen moments of drama”, and sometimes worked from favourite paintings when writing plays (Loizeaux 89). He thus claimed that the “art of the stage is the art of making a succession of pictures” and suggested that in stage productions “we should be content to suggest a scene upon a canvas, whose vertical flatness we accept and use, as the decorator of pottery accepts the roundness of a bowl or a jug.” (qtd. in Loizeaux 91). At the same time, his endeavours to visualise the otherworld was obvious, which he first attempted by “appealing to the eye” with the exaggerated embellishment of zone A: “I have noticed that the more obviously decorative is the scene and costuming of any play, the more it is lifted out of time and place and the nearer to fairyland we carry it.” (qtd. in Loizeaux 93). In actual fact, these semi-realistic stage sets of the 1890s were very far from the theatrical space Yeats wanted to create on the Abbey stage, and after several disappointing productions the playwright felt the need for a change in the spatial arrangement of the scenic design and accepted the fact that the representation of the remote, mythic spaces of “faeryland” cannot be made possible by means of colour and decoration.¹⁴ The tableaux of the “painted stage” required stillness or very little movement of the actors, making them mere objects within the overall image of the stage set, which, as Yeats later realised, was a direct consequence of the realist use of the proscenium stage.¹⁵ “Ever since the last remnant of the old platform disappeared,” he writes in his essay *The Play, the Player, and the Scene*, “and the proscenium grew into a frame of a picture, the actors have been turned into a picturesque group in the foreground of a meretricious landscape painting” (*Explorations* 177).

In his later productions in the first decade of the twentieth century, Yeats considered some spatial modifications in zone A to help evoking a sense of otherness on the otherwise objectively presented stage setting. In his production of *Deirdre* in 1906, Yeats already started to think about the possibilities of representing the “outside”, offstage spaces within zone A,

¹⁴ See Plate 4.

¹⁵ As Flannery argues: “In the December 1904 edition of *Samhain* he vehemently attacked the development of the proscenium theatre in England because it coincided with realism and a proportional ‘decline in dramatic energy’” (257).

rather than just showing the threshold or door connecting the two spheres as it was natural on the Irish realist stage. Robert Gregory's design and a picture of the staged production of *Deirdre* show that Yeats divided the zone A to an on-stage inside and on on-stage outside with a patterned curtain whose symbolic qualities were far from the naturalistic sets of the time, and indicate the growing need for the use of symbolic references within zone A to the outer realms of the dramatic action.¹⁶

The biggest change in Yeats's dramaturgy of theatre space before his encounters with the Japanese Noh, however, came about during his collaboration with the stage designer/director Edward Gordon Craig. Craig's ideas about the visualisation of on- and off-stage dramatic space and his set designs for the Abbey influenced Yeats in two most important aspects regarding stage dramaturgy: "Craig cut Yeats free from the picture frame", opening up zone A for movement and for changeable and extendable on-stage spaces, and helped him create his "drama of the interior", moving away from the objective representational style to a subjective point of view that focused on the internalised spaces of characters (Worth 51). His invention of moveable screens was the first step to think of zone A as a space of motion.¹⁷ "He wanted a 'scene' so mobile, which (within rules) might move in all directions", which was in strong correspondence with Yeats's own views on the ideal stage space as changeable and transferable (Dorn 17). Craig's screens allowed the director to get rid of almost all scenery in zone A, which consequently resulted in a growing dramaturgical emphasis on the invisible zone non-A which the remaining elements of zone A – that is the screens and the players – were referring to by purely symbolic means.¹⁸ The gradual change towards the creation of a symbolic zone A that started with such smaller scale stylisations in the stage set as the curtain in *Deirdre* concluded in Yeats's productions designed by Craig, which the playwright considered most important in the overall staging technique of the Abbey. As he wrote on the importance of screens in his letter to Lady Gregory: "out of his invention may grow a completely new method even for our naturalistic plays" (qtd. in Dorn 17).

¹⁶ "As a visual representation of *Deirdre*'s final choice, Yeats used a stage setting that takes on an increasingly symbolic quality as the stage properties are drawn into the action of the play. Robert Gregory's watercolour design for the original production suggests the degree of stylization: a large travelling tent set in a pattern of trees, a pre-Raphaelite secret rendez-vous. On the small Abbey stage, a cottage set was adapted to suggest an Irish landscape, a mysterious outer world glimpsed through the familiar house" (Dorn 5). See Plates 5–6.

¹⁷ See Plate 7–8.

¹⁸ As a reviewer of *The Irish Times* wrote on the new designs: "There is in the first place a reduction of the stage furniture to its simplest elements, so that the figures of the players stand out more prominently against the primitive background and attention is concentrated on the human and truly expressive elements of drama" (Flannery 271).

During the years working in collaboration with Craig between 1910 and 1913, Yeats revised several of his plays, and as these changes bear great importance in relation to his later modification in stage dramaturgy and his ideas about stage space in general, it is important to highlight the major points according to which Yeats altered these texts by commenting more elaborately on one representative play in the context of spatial relations.

The revised version of *The Hour Glass* (1914) shows how Craig's space-modifications contributed to the employment of a multi-layered reality structure and to the play's most complex player-audience relations. "The stage is brought out into the orchestra so as to leave a wide space in front of the stage curtain. Pupils come in and stand before the stage curtain", writes Yeats in his stage directions: an important change, which, by its meta-theatrical means, added another layer of reality to the play's narrative, and reached out directly to the audience, requiring a certain mental participation in the action. The extra terrain of the stage divided zone A into two distinct spheres, the outer one being the self-reflective meta-layer of the Pupils and the inner one presenting the isolated and enclosed place of the Wise Man's room. Craig's setting for the "inner zone A" suggested a subjective focus; an internalised stage space that Yeats had long wanted to create. As Cave describes, Craig created the effect "less of a logician's study than a dark, private sanctum, withdrawn down a curving passageway from a door that admits radiant daylight. It is a setting that can be read realistically and metaphorically: as a deliberately chosen, lonely retreat and a spatial representation of the state of mind of a benighted soul needing the light of redemption" (Cave, *SP* 283).¹⁹ The double movement in the three-dimensional arrangement of the set was justified and further strengthened by the inherent spatial quality of the text through references to stage movement and mime, putting a greater emphasis on the mobility of actors. Beside the changes in the use of stage space, there was another important element added to the syntax of Yeatsian stage dramaturgy in Craig's version of the *The Hour Glass* that later became one of the fundamental constituents of Yeats's more mature theatrical form: the use of masks. Here the application of masks for the Fool and the Angel strengthened the spatial division between the two on-stage reality spheres, asserting the visible otherness of the two quasi allegorical characters. This opened up stage-world of *The Hour Glass* with its self-assertive and reflexive stage division together with the subjective representation of one character's internal "mind-space" was a direct forerunner of the stage space of *Four Plays for Dancers*.

¹⁹ See Plate 9.

“The Labyrinth of Conscience” – Yeats’s *Four Plays for Dancers*

Although the gradual move towards a predominantly symbolic representation in Yeats’s stage dramaturgy in the early 1910s fundamentally changed the traditional space relations of the Irish realist stage set of the Abbey, the “Yeatsian revolution” was brought about in its fullest sense by the playwright’s first (indirect) encounters with the Japanese Noh. In the unique stage practice of the traditional Oriental form of art Yeats found a theoretical framework for his previous endeavours to create a fluid, ever-changeable stage space bearing the potential for spatio-temporal transcendence, from which he could create his very own dramatic vision. As he states in his notes to the plays: “I have found my first model – and in literature if we would not be parvenus we must have a model – in the ‘Noh’ stage of aristocratic Japan” (*Four Plays for Dancers* 86). Following the Japanese tradition of highly symbolic, non-representational theatre, Yeats reconsidered his idea of stage space, and imagined it as a context where the transition between the different layers of reality would no longer depend on the mobility of the set or the different modifications of zone A, but on those signifiers that are most capable of evoking a sense of motion and change in space: words themselves.²⁰

The Noh, avoided direct, on-stage representation, used very little or almost no scenery, and relied primarily on the imaginative, place-making power of poetry.²¹ By adapting to the Noh tradition and almost completely removing the set in zone A, Yeats could finally solve the problem of “inappropriate” scenic design and could lay a greater emphasis on the players themselves. As he writes in his notes to the first performance of *At the Hawk’s Well* in *Four Play for Dancers*:

It has been a great gain to get rid of scenery, to substitute for a crude landscape painted upon canvas three performers who, sitting before the wall or a patterned screen, describe landscape or event, and accompany movement with drum and gong, or deepen the emotion of the words with zither or flute. Painted scenery after all is unnecessary to my friends and to myself, for our imagination kept living by the arts can imagine a mountain covered with thorn-trees in a drawing-room without any great trouble, and we have many quarrels with even good scene-painting. (*FPD* 86)

²⁰ Bachelard claims words as mediators that open up worlds inside and outside us: “all important words, all the words marked for grandeur by a poet, are keys to the universe, to the dual universe of the Cosmos and the depths of the human spirit” (198).

²¹ See Győző Duro’s essay “Színház az örökkévalóságnak” (Theatre for Eternity) in Kokubu 89.

Closely related to their particular focus on the imaginative power of words, Noh plays had another important feature which Yeats could immediately connect with and which thus left its trace on Yeatsian stage dramaturgy. Japanese plays were always highly dependent on the location where their dramatic action took place, as the Japanese regarded the actual place of the narrative one of the most important factors, and oftentimes the prime mover, of a story.²² Yeats felt that the Irish had the same attitude with regard to either domestic or mythical spaces, and had always been struggling to find the most composite way to stage a play whose substance does not necessarily lie in its plot but in its location. “These Japanese poets,” says Yeats in his essay, *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*,

too feel for tomb and wood the emotion, the sense of awe that our Gaelic-speaking countrypeople will sometimes show when you speak to them of Castle Hackett or of some holy well; and that is why perhaps it pleases them to begin so many plays by a traveller asking his way with many questions, a convention agreeable to me, for when I first began to write poetical plays for an Irish theatre I had to put away an ambition of helping to bring again to certain places their old sanctity or romance. I could lay the scene of a play on Baile's Strand, but I found no pause in the hurried action for descriptions of strand or sea or the great yew-tree that once stood there; and I could not in The King's Threshold find room, before I began the ancient story, to call up the shallow river and the few trees and rocky fields of modern Gort. (*Essays and Introductions* 232)

In the Noh stage practice, Yeats finally found the way to devote enough time and attention to *spatiality* in its most complex sense; he could bring stories to life where the dramatic action was induced by the very location they took place, and with the verbal evocation of the stage-space could draw the audience's attention to their multi-layered, semi-transcendental qualities. Peter Ure claims these, “place-minded” plays the most successful manifestations of Yeats's dramatic visions: “one method of distinguishing his more successful plays from the others is that in them the story is about the place, or, to put it another way, that the characters have to come to just this place, and no other anywhere in the world, so that this story might

²² “The *waki* converses with the *shite* and asks him to relate the tale for which the locale is famous” (Pronko 76).

happen” (Ure 29). The dramatic action of Yeats’s dance plays, just as the majority of Noh plays, all revolve around the mythical qualities of the actual places where they are to be imagined; Cuchulain’s dream could not happen anywhere else than *at* the Hawk’s Well, Christ’s crucifixion had to take place on Calvary, and the transcendence of Emer and the Young Man into the “other world” could only occur in their specific yet ever-changing personal environment.

As far as the actual shape, form and size of the stage is concerned, the Noh brought drastic changes in Yeats’s spatial arrangements. The Japanese handling of stage space was spectacularly different from the traditional, European stage dramaturgy: to fit the internalised, subjective spaces evoked by the players, beside the minimalistic scenery (with only a painted tree behind the actors to suggest the eternal, universal nature of the narratives unfolded on stage) and lack of specific sets and props, the Noh employed a three-sided platform stage that enabled the stage space to be opened up and brought closer to the spectators (Sekine 73–84; Kokubu 23–24).²³ The double movement that turned the space of the dramatic action inwards by eliminating the visual elements in zone A, and at the same time expanded it outwards by sharing it with the audience through the open space of the platform stage helped Yeats to manifest his previous attempts to create a stage-world that is subjectively presented and is yet capable of showing more layers of reality.

Thanks to their subjectivity and independence from a fixed stage set, the Noh plays proved ultimate examples of the performance-based theatre Yeats had been trying to stage. On the Noh stage, everything depended on the actor alone: the evocation of the mythic space of the action through movement and the rich poetic language of the play, and the quintessential moment of spatio-temporal transcendence between the parallel planes of reality.²⁴ Yeats writes vividly on the prime importance of the player in *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, commemorating an unforgettable performance of his later actor, the Japanese Michio Ito:

There, where no studied lighting, no stage-picture made an artificial world, he was able, as he rose from the floor, where he had been sitting cross-legged, or as he threw out an arm, to recede from us into some more powerful life. Because that separation was achieved by human means alone, he receded but to inhabit as it were the deeps of the mind. (*EI* 224)

²³ See Plate 10.

²⁴ See Plate 11.

In the true art of theatre, with the mediation of the actor we can thus turn inside to see the outside in a more familiar form: “the arts which interest me [...] enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation. As a deep of the mind can only be approached through what is most human” (*EI* 225).

The crucial moment of stepping out from one plane of reality to another happens in a most complex way in the Noh; one character (the *waki*, the one who dreams) “dreams back” certain moments of the other character’s life (the *shite*, the one who acts), who, being folded in the dream-world of shadows, lives through the re-dreamed action that originally happened in the past in his “private theatre of memory and imagination” (Cave, *SP* xxvii). Thus, the dramaturgical structure of the Noh inherently requires a change in time and space and the transformation of one character at a certain moment, which might be one of the reasons why these plays employed a purely symbolic means of expression. The idea of the dream as a mediating context was completely in accordance with Yeats’s theory about the accessibility of the otherworld: he believed that the “shades” of the parallel dimension can “visit us in dreams”, and only through dreams are we able to mingle with the timeless bodies of the supernatural.

Beside its practical and theoretical peculiarities in the use of dramatic space, the Noh had another important feature Yeats adapted to his own dramaturgical syntax and even took it one step further to develop an immensely complicated relationship-structure that gave way for a more distanced, self-reflective tonality. This feature was the alienating, meta-theatrical framework in which the Noh plays were embedded and beautifully balanced the otherwise highly subjective focus of the narrative. The depersonalising, reflective layer of the Noh drama manifested itself in two ways on the stage; through the presence of the chorus and the use of masks. In Noh performances, “there is a chorus which describes the scene and interprets their [the players’] thought and never becomes as in the Greek theatre a part of the action” (*EI* 230), and which functions as a commentator on what is being staged. The voice of the “outsiders”, however, was much more in Yeatsian drama than a simple external body of the narrative: it became a verbalised manifestation of the bridge created between the different points of view of the players and the audience. In this sense, the chorus also functioned as a spatial mediator, distancing or bringing closer the different spheres of reality and their inhabitants. Masks had the same alienating yet personalising function: they helped “neglecting character which seems to us essential in drama” and through their clearly visible otherness distanced the players from the world of the audience (*EI* 235). On the other hand,

they were the perfect means to help spectators engage in the on-stage action by letting them share the playing space without losing the “sense of art” evoked by the performance:

A mask will enable me [...] to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice. A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no matter how close you go is yet a work of art; nor shall we lose by stilling the movement of the features, for deep feeling is expressed by a movement of the whole body. (EI 226)

Although Yeats used the Noh form as a powerful source of inspiration to create his own dramaturgical syntax, he had never had the intention to copy Japanese theatre as it was: “what Yeats took from the Noh was its fundamental principles of stylization to achieve a union of myth, dream and psychological symbolism” (Cave, *SP* xxviii) – which he used in his most personal way. The inventive, unorthodox space-relations he had experimented with since his first attempts to transpose the visible on-stage place of zone A to the changeable, mythical space of the subjective mind, gained their true, dramatic form in *Four Plays for Dancers*. Although these four plays share the basic principles in the theoretical aspects and practical uses of dramatic space, their actual utilisation in each play shows the variety of possibilities these spatial constructions can create. To see how Yeats’s space-world is constructed and, if staged, how it contributes to the overall dramatic effect evoked by the performance, we should turn to the plays themselves.

At the Hawk's Well “was performed for the first time in April 1916, in a friend's drawing-room, and only those who cared for poetry were invited. It was played upon the floor, and the players came in by the same door as the audience, and the audience and the players and I myself were pleased”, writes Yeats in his notes to *Four Plays for Dancers* about the first performance of his new play (87). This was the first ever play of Yeats that completely abandoned stage scenery and only left traces of it in zone A. If we stick to Ubersfeld’s terminology, we can say that the baseness of the opening scene here served the purpose of finally breaking up the “traditional” binary division of the two representational categories of zone A and zone non-A to give way to a more complex and transmutable reality-structure. The zone A of the first dance play retained only a patterned screen as a mere referential background to the to-be-evoked playing space, and accommodated the Yeatsian chorus, the three Musicians to introduce the play. With the opening ritual – the folding and unfolding of a

cloth, which is a reference to spatial and temporal change itself – it becomes obvious that the playing space of *At the Hawks Well* immediately changes, and gathers new shape according to the poetic description of the players. The space evoked by their textual mediation is markedly different from the “empty space” of the Musicians: it is specific and precisely described to the smallest detail, yet at the same time lacks almost all visible, on-stage signifiers. As Ubersfeld’s terms are no longer appropriate to describe these altered dramatic spaces, a different concept of spatial division should be introduced. The often self-reflective meta-layer of the opening scene can be called layer 1 (L1), which functions as a mere base on which the second layer (L2) of the playing space is projected.

The L2 of *At the Hawk’s Well* is a mythical space. It merges the characteristics of both space and place, synthesising time’s domain with the metaphysical dimension of eternity. The well is a place made timeless by being timed: it is “*long* choked up and dry” with “*long* stripped” boughs surrounding – a “*place*” that the “salt sea wind has swept *bare*”.²⁵ Time adverbials talk about an unchangeable, age-ridden place whose unbreakable bonds to time were tied by the constantly changing elements of “sea” and “wind”, the well known dwelling places of supernatural beings. The opening song clearly observes that the well is a place owned by the Sidhe, who have full authority over it. When time changes – when “night falls” and “the mountain-side grows dark” –, it changes cyclically, turning back to itself with its circles drawn by the invisible power that possesses it. The Musicians are “afraid of this place”, as they can never access and have authority over its territory. It is the Guardian of the Well who inhabits the place of the action; in fact, she is even strictly bound to it, almost becoming a stilled yet living part of her surroundings. We can even regard “her shapeless, unmoving form beside the representation of the well [...] an embodiment of the rocky, barren landscape.” (Cave, *SP* 317). Yet, the Guardian “knows nothing” of the place, being a mere puppet moved by the same supernatural power that keeps the place in its timed eternity.

The arrival of the Old Man to this small world of the Sidhe generates a justified demand in the audience to see a change in the frightening uncertainty of the location and its authorial relations. They can easily associate the newcomer with the archetypal character of the “intruder”²⁶ who comes to the place of the action from some remote, outside space to “colonize and transform the setting which the play has until that moment defined as the

²⁵ Emphasis mine. I consequently italicise adjectives and adverbials from the primary source that refer to time and space to highlight their relevance regarding the plays’ spatiality.

²⁶ In its “traditional” employment in Irish drama, the intruder is the “stranger in the house”; “the representative of an uncanny [...] Other, the *unheimlich* which contrasts with the home entered” (Greene 52).

central character's own" (Cave 99). However, to fit the peculiarities of the play's dramatic space, Yeats uses the common dramaturgical turn of the intrusion in a most unique way: his pseudo-intruder "enters through the audience", suggesting that even though he is outside the stage action, he does not belong to some outer, unfamiliar realm, but shares the familiar space of the spectators. By making use of the platform stage, Yeats thus subverts the traditional stage directions of in and out completely: the stage, i.e. the centre of the dramatic action, becomes the outer, the space of the audience the inner plane of reality, which further strengthens the idea of the Well being a place of ultimate uncertainty.²⁷ The narration that guides the steps of the Old Man to the centre also underlines the uniqueness of Yeats's spatial and character-relations, as it clarifies that the would-be intruder cannot possibly bring a change to the *status quo* of the opening scene. It turns out that like the Guardian, the Old Man too belongs to the Well, and has literally become an organic part of the place. He "has been watching by *his* well these fifteen years", and just as his "neighbour" in the spatially determined place of the unknown, he is directed by some unknown force and "knows nothing".²⁸

After the Old Man's entrance, another character arrives from among the audience, whom the spectators again might regard as a possible evoker of a major change. The idea of the Young Man being the real intruder figure, however, seems justified by spatial means right after his first steps: when he appears and is still off-stage, the Old Man "goes nearer" to the centre and is slowly approaching the well. The distance created between the two underlines their contrastive relations to the "barbarous spot" of the action, and shows the Young Man's obvious detachment from it. Textual references also highlight this opposition: whereas the Young Man is introduced as someone who "has an ancient house beyond the sea" the Old Man is described as a character that "should be native" in the surroundings of the Well.

Yeats not only uses spatiality to express his characters' relatedness to each other and to the play's setting, but lets it function as a major evoker of dramatic change. We might even claim that it is the characters' spatial determination and the shift in their assigned locations that generate the conflict between them; it is only when the Young Man decides to stay at the desolate place of the Sidhe when his place-bound counterpart sets the action in motion: "No!

²⁷ This spatial engagement of the audience with the dramatic action opens up the playing space right at the beginning of the play, and, if facilities allow, calls for a three-dimensional, circular arrangement of the stage space. See Plates 12–15.

²⁸ This determination of characters is also emphasised by their moves that "suggest a marionette". This type of movement bears the obvious marks of Craig's influence (and his theory of the Übermarionette) and some analogies with the Japanese puppet theatre (bunraku), but most of all might evoke a strong sense of characters lacking free will.

Go from this accursed place! This place belongs to me, that girl there, and those others, deceivers of men” (*SP* 117). He desperately wants the Young Man to “leave the well” to him, for “it belongs to all that’s old and withered.” The Young Man’s space-change also clarifies the already suggested power relations of the two major characters: the latter realises the Old Man’s weakness and lack of free movement, and that he only has been “*set down there*” as though he had “no part in life”, but also that his closeness to the heart of the place has given him a clearer insight into what is happening in the core. The Old Man, despite his weakness in his actions, knows that the Guardian is “possessed” by a shadow” whose “terrible life is slipping through her veins”, and that she is actually not there, being rounded with a dream. She is already dwelling in another spatio-temporal dimension, into which at this point the audience and the players cannot enter.

However, this new dream-world of the supernatural is soon opened up through the Guardian’s mediation, as she is forced to give up her central position to let the intruder occupy it.²⁹ (“Do what you will, I shall not leave this place till I have grown immortal like yourself” [*SP* 120]). When the Guardian “throws off her cloak and rises” and starts to dance, she ceases to be a mere constituent of the setting, and becomes the key to the most important dramaturgical change in the play. Through her dance she lets the Young Man enter the third, dream-layer of the supernatural (L3) and thus evokes another plane of reality to our minds’ eye. It is of prime importance that the transcendence between these layers happens through movement: the Guardian’s dance around the Young Man visualises the circular motion in which (infinite) time gains dramatic body on the Yeatsian stage.

In this play, the subjective threshold-crossing of the intruder between L2 and L3 is shown objectively, from an outer point of view, as the audience cannot enter or even see into the dream-world of the *Sidhe*, but can only observe the characters’ “dream-trance” from outside. This objectivity of the focalisation is made obvious in the clear visual contrast between the stillness of the sleeping Old Man, who remains in the time-bound territories of L2, and the dynamic yet recurring movement of the dance, with which the dreamers are rounded. When the dance stops and the Guardian goes out, the Young Man follows her “as if in a dream.” After the dancer is displaced from the stage, further access to L3 becomes impossible. The Old Man “creeps up to the well” again, trying to feel something from the potential the well carried for transcendence to eternity, but without the mediation of the Guardian, his hopes have to be renounced forever. Lastly he calls the Young Man to stay with

²⁹ See Plates 14–16.

him to keep the chance for “intrusion” awake, but it is of no use: the “accursed dancers” have already “stolen his life away.” With the closing song, the playing space is brought back to its base, as the Musicians and their cloth-folding ritual alter the mythical space of L2 back to the “bare space” of L1.

In the threefold space-structure of his first dance play, Yeats found the way to show the complexity of space relations he imagined in his dramatic visions, and through the subjective spatial and temporal threshold-crossing of one character and the exploitation of the possibilities of the platform stage, he managed to manifest his endeavours to draw his audience into “the deeps of the mind.”

The Only Jealousy of Emer is even more focused on the workings of the human psyche than its predecessor. It is a “mind-play” in its truest sense: it attempts to discover the inner realms of one character’s personality, which, following the technique of spatially presented character-relations, requires a very special handling of stage space. This inner focus is expressively stated not only by the title itself but in the very first lines of the opening chorus; the abstract notions of “the jealousy of Emer” and “the woman’s beauty” being addressed as major topics of the play foreshadow an action that is “imagined within the labyrinth of the mind.”

After the cloth-folding ritual, the primary space of L1 is transposed into the imagined location of L2, which differs notably from the open space called to life in *At the Hawk’s Well*.³⁰ The poor fisher’s house with its “wooden roof” and “cross-beams”, as opposed to the three dimensional, open space of the hills and the sea in the previous play, is an enclosed place, described to resemble the traditional tetragonal Irish “kitchen set” composed for the realist stage. With its fundamental attributes such as the upstage front door that opens to the “shining, bitter sea” and the rural furnishing of the room, Yeats deliberately calls to the associative memory of his audience and makes them identify the imagined stage set of *Emer* with the homely environment of the Irish peasant plays. This is a conscious choice, and even though the fixed point of view of the room-set obviously takes away from the freedom of the performance’s spatial arrangements, it reinforces the dramatic focus of the play: it makes the protagonist (Emer) associated with her immediate surroundings (the room), and lets the playing space function as a visualised metaphor for “the labyrinth of her mind”.³¹

³⁰ Compare the scenery in Plate 17 with production photos of *Emer* in Plates 18–21.

³¹ “All great, simple images reveal a psychic state. The house, even more than a landscape, is a psychic state, and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy” (Bachelard 72).

Emer becomes the fully fledged, bodily manifestation of “home” as it is; a character that personifies the familiarity and comfort of *place*, which, being the ultimate domain of time, is traced with memory.

Despite its determined location, within L2 there is only one element of the set that is truly presented on stage: the curtained bed on one side of the playing area.³² The fact that it is actually visualised demonstrates its prime importance both regarding the plot and stage dramaturgy. The opening scene already operates with an unusual spatial arrangement, as its characters exist in two different planes of reality, one of them being a mere ghost who had to leave his body in a parallel spatial dimension.³³ While Emer, Eithne Inguba and the Figure of Cuchulain inhabit the domesticated space of the living (L2), the Ghost is somewhere in between the latter and the “true” dream-world of the supernatural (L3), dwelling in the “darkness” of a dream but still “loitering amid the scenery of his life.”

The arrangement of spatial relations in *Emer*, as opposed to the circular dramaturgical structure of *At the Hawk's Well*, yet following the “inside-outside” binary opposition, is primarily based on dualities. Within the domestic space of L2 there is a suggested division between the time-bound domain of the house and the changeable space of the supernatural forces, which are located on two sides of the playing area and to which certain characters are assigned.³⁴ This dual space structure of the stage can be exploited truly when Emer steps away from Cuchulain's bed, and after covering his face “to hide the sea”, goes to the other side of the platform to make a fire, then “having finished she stands beside the imaginary fire at a distance from Cuchulain and Eithne Inguba” (SP 149). The distance created by this move between the hearth-fire and the bed emphasises the contrast of the two poles of the timed and the eternal, and draws extra attention to the already highlighted area around the bed, it being the only place on stage where spatio-temporal transcendence might become possible.

The space change from L2 to L3 takes place in the “mediating area” of the bed, and requires the “intruder” (Emer) to step closer to it in order to be given “sight” into the parallel dimension. Stage directions highlight the importance of movement in this scene: Bricriu asks Emer to “Come closer to the bed” that he “may touch her eyes and give them sight”, and while she is “going up to the bed”, Eithne Inguba, unable to step into the otherworld, is

³² See Plate 19.

³³ Poulain argues that it is this multi-layered reality structure with its “successive embeddings” that gives the play a tragic tone, which is contrastingly highlighted by making its core, the “arch-hero” Cuchulain, absent. I think this is only partly true, as Cuchulain is present, and actively takes part in the action, in the mind-spaces of Emer. (Poulain, “Westward ho!” 96).

³⁴ See Plate 20.

“going further off.” She has to leave the stage altogether, as she cannot but remain in the realms of physical existence (L2) and can’t face the naked soul of the changeling Bricriu.³⁵ Emer is allowed to see and hear him and enter the dream-world (L3) through his mediation. Emer’s movement on stage – leaving the place of memory to approach the space of timelessness – is beautifully supported by textual references to the later relationship-change between herself and Cuchulain: “He’ll never sit *beside* you at the hearth / Or make old bones, but die of wounds and toil / On some *far* shore or mountain” (SP 151).

Already in the dream-space of L3, Emer notices her husband, who is still lingering in the liminal state between the physical world and the shared dream of the supernatural, “being shut off” and unaware of his surroundings. He, paradoxically, “awakes” *into* a dream, during the dance of Fand. With her circular moves, Yeats again tries to evoke a sense of timelessness to create an atmosphere of a drifting dream that is now shared by all on-stage characters. The subjective focus of Emer’s vision yet should somehow be suggested on the stage, as the whole scene is shown through her very own perception; she is placed into a superior position, able to enter the world of supernatural creatures, who – except for the mediator Bricriu – cannot see her. It is important to mention that although she is not visible, Cuchulain can certainly *feel* her presence. Emer is “time spatialised” (Morash and Richards 63): she makes the territories of eternity contaminated with temporality. “My memories weigh down my hands, abash my shoulders”, says the Ghost, who is still drawn back to his wife who has made him “impure with memory.” The Emer-house metaphor is highlighted in the “old memory” of Cuchulain that, through Emer’s presence, could enter the world of forgetting: “O Emer, Emer, there we stand; / side by side and hand in hand / Tread the *threshold of the house* / As when our parents married us”(SP 154).

When Emer renounces Cuchulain’s love forever, we leave the dream-space of L3, and go back to the poor fisher house of L2; the space of bodily forms and of temporality. The shadows disappear, and Eithne Inguba can again enter the stage, since it is the domestic space of L2 she inhabits. The transcendence to the otherworld that happened in that very room within Emer’s mind was totally unseen and unheard by Eithne Inguba, whose personal time lacked the dream-sequence the other characters – and the audience – lived through. When Cuchulain wakes, he too is unaware of Emer’s “journey”, but has vague memories about it, which he expresses, tellingly, by referring to the changeable space of the dream-world: “O Eithne Inguba, / I have been in some strange place and I am afraid” (SP 155). With the cloth-

³⁵ See Plate 21.

folding ritual, we return to the bare space of L1 and let ourselves be drawn by the “airy music” of the closing song, to take us back to the allegorical tonality of the opening sequence, which frames the whole play nicely into the subjectivity of the human mind.

The Dreaming of the Bones is a play of mobility. As its title suggests, Yeats placed the dramatic focus directly on the innermost domains of the dance plays’ space-relations, the dream itself, whose essence lies in its variable, relative qualities. The act of dreaming that we have seen presented objectively in *At the Hawk’s Well*, and as a parallel space bodied forth as the projections of the mind in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, is here opened up and shown from the inside, leaving space for multiple interpretations and placing its audience in a spatial and temporal confusion.

Movement is an organising principle that not only serves to visualise the spatial turmoil of dreams, but also defines the audience’s position within the whole of the dramaturgical structure. A strong sense of motion is already evoked in the opening song, where the Musicians describe the turbulent upward movement of dreams, spinning up from the still centre of “the dry bones of the dead”, filling the valley to “overflow the hills” in their circular, spiral stream. The “widening gyre” of dreams that flows up in the cup-shaped setting embodies an ever-recurring pattern of movement we are immediately drawn into: the Musician-commentators from the very beginning take up the position of the audience to generate a feeling of shared consciousness in the theatre space. The fact that we see how lonely birds “wheel about *our* heads” from an internal point of view is of prime importance, and is in strong relation to the play’s historical focus. *The Dreaming of the Bones* actually is a Yeatsian history play, composed right after the Easter Rising (Cave, *SP* 322), which touches upon the questions of individual and shared, communal and national responsibilities, but does it in a beautifully composed, reversed dramaturgy by giving dramaturgical agency to the audience, and at the same time focusing on the personal, inner realms of one character. It is this duality of the plural and the personal that gives the play its most complex dramaturgical structure, and whose interplay is presented primarily in its spatial arrangements.

The dramatic space of L2 is called to life as specified for place and time; we are in 1916, just after the rising, in the typically Irish setting of County Clare. We “should not be afraid” in the concrete, familiar location of the opening scene that is described aptly enough to give us enough points of reference for orientation, yet there is a strong sense of spatial confusion in the dramatic space – the whole imagined setting being “covered up” in the misty darkness of the late “hour before dawn”. It is stressed in the opening song that despite its

three-dimensional spatial extensions, the place of the action is a spatialised metaphor for loneliness, where even “sunlight can be lonely.” The lone figure of the Young Man enters the obscure place with a lantern, which is soon blown out by the Young Girl, making him totally dependent on the two Ghosts that appeared right after his entrance. Being lost in the dark, he has no other choice than to put himself “into the hands” of the two shadows, who soon gain dramaturgical superiority by having a more reliable knowledge of the dramatic space.

Following closely the Noh tradition of space-minded dramaturgy, Yeats gives his characters dramatic weight by supplying them with manifold space-relations and locational attributes, and describes them according to their assigned places. Power relations in the first part of the play are in favour of the otherworldly creatures, who “know the pathways where the sheep tread out and all the hiding places of the hills”, whereas the Young Man “would break his neck” if he was left on his own. The place names which he and his past are identified with, however, bear common historical and cultural connotations for an Irish audience, as the fact that he was “in the Post Office” and that he is seeking a hiding place to sail the western seas the following day tell everything about his identity, his political views and personal background. The same stands for the ghosts in the second part of the play; their spatially induced characterisation gives full account of their position and relationships.

Character-relations that are set in the first sequence of the play draw a nicely shaped triangular form,³⁶ which serves as an ultimate compositional pattern in the whole of the play, alternating with the circular movement of the gyre-like motion of the dream-set. The relation-map of the triangle visualises the dramaturgical stance between the Ghosts and the Young Man, but also expresses the dual nature of the supernatural characters’ relationship to each other. The Ghosts are masked, which is a strong visual means of distancing them from the unmasked figure of the Young Man, whose point of view and plane of reality the audience can thus easily identify with. However, the Young Man and the Young Girl formulate another pair within the triangle not only by their names but through their physical and verbal engagement in the second part of the play. The Ghosts’ internal relations are also presented through the space-game within the triangle by consciously rendering one player on the active side and leaving the other in total passivity on the other. The first sequence of the play is wholly conducted by the Stranger, with the Young girl silenced on his side.³⁷ In the play’s dual structure of shared and personal relations, the Stranger represents the pluralised,

³⁶ The triangle is a general compositional pattern in all of Yeats’s dance plays, which is most overtly manifested in the cloth-folding ritual. The three Musicians form a triangle “with the first Musician at the apex supporting the centre of the cloth” (SP 114).

³⁷ See Plate 22.

historical aspect that is repeatedly brought to the fore by referring to specific Irish place names and figures in history. The ruined Abbey of Corcomroe, Aughanish or Bailevelehan, the grey Aughtmana together with Donough O'Brien and the King of Thomond are all parts of the Irish cultural heritage, presented here to make the audience feel the personal story of the accursed, dwelling souls firmly bound to the whole of the Irish national past.

After the first sequence led by the dialogue of the two men, the stage is again set to motion by returning to the gyre-like cycles of the dream. The nature of this dream sequence in *The Dreaming of the Bones* is interesting both regarding its evocation and spatial representation, as the transcendence from L2 to L3 does not happen as abruptly as in the previous plays, which would make it absolutely obvious that it has actually happened. Here the border-crossing takes place in slow motion, without any overt sign to mark the act of trespassing. We might even claim that in the very first scene, with the appearance of the Ghosts, we are already placed into L3, the two creatures being only the embodied projections of the Young Man's mind. The fact that the dreaming process is so emphasised in the title, directly evoked in the opening song, and further referred to by the Stranger – "In a dream [...] some live through their old lives again" (SP 128) – strengthens the idea that we are in the Young Man's dream from the very beginning.

The true engagement with the dreaming process, however, is brought about by the "interlude" of stage motion accompanied by music. The cyclical movement around the stage evokes the same substance of dramatic space as the opening song; its fluid, changeable material draws the same map by its spiral turns. We learn from the Musicians' song that the three characters are slowly ascending; the owl being a point of reference for their gyre-like upward movement: first it is still "crying above their heads", then it is seen "at the foot level" to finally leave it "far below them." As opposed to the dream sequences in the previous plays, here the dreamer himself is moving; the smaller dance-circles are magnified and opened up to the whole of the playing area. This intensified representation might serve the purpose of drawing the audience into the heart of the process and letting them feel that they too are part of the action. "The impact is like the sealing of a magic spell", says Cave: "For the first time in his career as a dramatist, Yeats has discovered how a process of stylisation can transform the entire stage-action into powerfully allusive metaphor. The process requires an audience to enter imaginatively the meanings and interpretation that they draw from the experience" (SP 325). As the audience "enter" the stage-world, they not only become part of the dream but of the cycles of history as well, whose ever-recurring pattern can be very effective on stage even if the spectators are not familiar with Yeats's theory of the gyres.

After the two rounds, the relation-map of the triangle is drawn again in another, more vivid variation: the active part is taken up by the Young Girl, who, in contrast to the Stranger's cultural-historical approach, presents their story in most personal terms, employing mostly references to physicality and sexuality. Spatiality here is expressed not by mere references to Irish place names but through the Ghosts' personal relation to these locations: their very selves are defined by not coming "from the Abbey graveyard" and thus being shut off from physical encounters with other lingering souls, who, "being but common sinners [...] can *mix* in a brief dream battle above their bones, or make one *drove* or *drift* in amity, or in the *hurry* of the heavenly *round* forget their earthly names" (SP 130). The lone lovers can only *wander* side by side [...] *hovering* between a thorn tree and a stone", until each time when they try to connect, "the memory of their crime *flows up between* and *drives them apart*" (SP 313).

The triangle is broken for another circle around the stage, which takes the characters to the summit, and breaks the gyre-motion. When reaching the mountain top, the Young Man steps out of the shared dream, and by rejecting to help the pleading Ghosts, dooms them to eternal dwelling in their never-ending double-dream. Slowly, "the horizon to the east is growing bright" and the unknown space of the dream-world is breaking up to let the familiar places of the Irish scenery be seen by the Young Man – and through his poetic evocation, by the audience. The two lonely figures cannot see "The Aran Islands, Connemara hills, and Galway in the breaking light" as they remain in the shadowy dream-space of L3.³⁸ Their dance is shown again from the Young Man's point of view, who is watching them as they are being "swept away", having "lost themselves in a [...]self-created winding of the labyrinth of conscience"(FPD 129).

The ending strengthens the ambiguities generated by the shared dream-space and the subjective focus of the play, as Yeats leaves the interpretation of the Ghosts being mere visions of the Young Man's mind open. The protagonist only "half believed" what he had seen was true, lifting or at least easing the heavy burden of moral judgement that was put on the shoulders of the spectators through their engagement with the action. It is not necessarily their (i.e. our) task to draw conclusions from the "terrible beauty" of the Ghosts' treachery or the Easter Rising, as, according to Yeats's dramatic interpretation, personal and plural motives and responsibilities are too tightly woven, highly relative and ambiguous to build clean-cut conclusions on them.

³⁸ See Plate 23.

The Young Man closes down the sequence played in L2 by referring back to the dark and uncanny dream-dimension of L3: “Terrible the temptation and the place!”, giving way for the Musicians to turn the dramatic space back to its base.

In *Calvary*, Yeats managed to synthesise the subjective representation of the dramatic action with an objective, self-reflective tonality.³⁹ It is the first ever Yeats play that unambiguously aims to make use of the open spatial arrangement of the dance plays’ platform stage and relies on the three-dimensional presence of the audience as integral part of the dramatic action and the playing space. As in *The Dreaming of the Bones*, after the opening song, spectators are called to share the dramatic space of the players by the Musicians’ integrative point of view; in their description of the evoked stage space they again imagine themselves as actually being there – “the road to Calvary, and I beside it” – and comment on the action as members of the “mocking crowd” that surrounds the players. However, as seen in the other dance plays, the chorus never truly enters the playing space of L2 or L3 but serves a mediating function to set the dramatic stance between actors and the audience. Hence here their seeming participation only brings the spectators closer to the players, making them contributors to the action of the play.

The Musicians yet make it clear right at the beginning that the evoked space is that of the dream-world, as the whole story is “dreamed through” by its protagonist.⁴⁰ L2 here is completely missing, letting us enter the relative space of L3 immediately and, as opposed to the presentational ambiguities of the previous play, making the passion of Christ overtly “marked with unreality” (Ubersfeld 24). The fact that we know that we are in a dream highlights the play’s meta-theatrical qualities and calls attention to its Janus-faced attitude towards reality inside and outside the theatre. For the first time in Yeatsian drama, it is not only the play’s visualised setting (the former zone A) which is missing, but some of the players too: the mocking crowd is not presented on stage but only referred to by the Musicians’ narration. This dramaturgical master-stroke of Yeats has an interesting, double-sided effect on the relationship of the spectators and the players, and can be interpreted in two differing yet interrelated ways. Alexandra Poulain claims that by removing the crowd from

³⁹ The interplay of subjectivity and objectivity in representation is strongly related to the play’s subject matter, as the dramatic action revolves around the clash of the different historical eras that are characterised by their inhabitants’ subjective or objective temperaments. As a forerunner of the cycle of objectivity, Christ can be regarded an objective mind who is in constant opposition to the subjective era of his contemporaries (Bertha 144). For a more elaborate analysis on Yeats’s theory about subjective vs. objective temperaments see “Book I: The Great Wheel” in *A Vision*. London: Macmillan, 1937. 67–186.

⁴⁰ See Plate 24.

the stage, Yeats “exhibits the illusory quality of the theatre performance” and alienates the stage action by making it clear that the grotesque crowd, and thus the audience who share their point of view, “cannot exist in the same plane of reality as the sacrificial victim whose death they have assembled to watch” (Poulain 6). However, thanks to the open space Yeats uses to present Christ’s passion, the audience becomes aware of their own presence in the playing space, which, when staged, might evoke a stronger feeling of participation than of alienation, and suggest that the subjective dream-world of Christ is shared with the space of the audience. The self-referential quality of the play, however, cannot be questioned in either approach, as being so visibly in a dream inherently poses us into a position of constant doubt.

Moreover, in *Calvary*, Yeats not only disembodies the mocking crowd from the passion narrative but other players as well, which strengthens the feeling of uncertainty and supports a highly unorthodox interpretation of Christ’s passion and the act of redemption itself. The dramatist uses a technique of stage representation similar to that of in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, which partly relies on the audience’s visual memory and cultural experience. In the dream-space of L3 he evokes the well known location of Christ’s crucifixion and the stations of his passion as they are usually visualised by icons and religious paintings. However, he utilises these orthodox mind-tableaux to present them in a mutilated and highly converted way, using their subjective, (re-)dreamed quality as a possible excuse for their subversion. With the static, picture-like composition of these “stations of the mind”, Yeats returns to the spatial pattern of “the painted stage”, with little on-stage motion, relying more on the visible and imagined images drawn by the spatial relations of the players and the audience.

In the first station, the absence of the crowd magnifies Christ’s humiliation to a great extent, as fearing something that is clearly not there can make a character seem emotionally disturbed or simply ridiculous. The participatory nature and overt meta-theatricality of the first scene has a double effect on the spectators, as they might feel a sense of guilt for taking part in Christ’s humiliation, but at the same time their very presence can be a trigger for perceiving Christ’s death as a mere theatrical performance – “as though God’s death were but a play” (SP 193)–, which is repeatable and has no consequences in real life. Christ, in this respect, is identified with the image of an actor, whose on-stage death, being deprived of his audience (the crowd), is totally futile and ignored (Poulain 8). The second tableau also shows a highly unorthodox interpretation of redemption, visualised by the double portrait of Christ and Lazarus. In the third mind-scene, Christ is again lacking his usual visual attributes, the two Marys, whose absence draws attention to the possibility that they were not actually there

when the “real crucifixion” happened, and only “live but in His love.” Their marked absence is tellingly connected to the missing crowd of spectators: “I felt their hair upon my feet a moment / and they fled away – why have they fled? / Why has the street grown empty of a sudden / As though all fled in terror?” (SP 160). The fourth station is also an embodiment of the reversed picture-making technique of Yeats, placing Judas into Christ’s personal space as an “inhabitant” whose presence is crucial in its overall composition, as “he has been chosen to hold up the cross.” Their togetherness is a perfectly sketched spatial expression of the inseparability and interdependence of the two characters, which supports the play’s overall double construction.

The fifth, final scene differs considerably from the picture-like stillness of the first four stations, as the mobility of the Dice throwers’ dance breaks up the thickened, undisturbed tranquillity of Christ’s icon-sequence. The dance that in the previous plays functioned as a mediator to cross spatial and temporal boundaries here supports the general feeling of futility by *not* evoking any change, and merely attempts to highlight the play’s meta-theatrical quality. Christ, on the Yeatsian stage suffers a “double death”: an actual and a theatrical one (Poulain 9). In his lone suffering the actor-Christ is deprived of spectators – We’ll keep the rest [the audience, the mocking crowd] away [...] there is no one here but Judas and ourselves” (SP 162) –, and is forced into the position of the viewer: he has to watch the ritual dance of the Roman soldiers (Poulain 8). This dance, with its wheeling, circular motion, is a powerful visual embodiment of the same recurring pattern that we have seen in the previous plays, and with the figure of Christ standing in the centre might become an even stronger stage-metaphor for Yeats’s conception of history and time.⁴¹ Finally, with the closing song, *Calvary*’s imagined, heterogeneous dream-space is changed back to the primary layer of the bare stage, and the audience is left with open questions that not only touch upon the ambiguities of the play’s subject matter itself but the matter of dramatic space in general.

Having seen the manifold variations of Yeats’s unique use of dramatic space in *Four Plays for Dancers*, we might conclude that even though these four plays show different facets of the “great code” of Yeatsian syntax, the fabric of their dramatic vision is woven from the same threads. They are all fundamentally space-minded, subjective dream-plays, whose truest meaning can only be accessed and delivered through performance – with the three-dimensional embodiment of the space-relations suggested by the texts themselves. Through

⁴¹ See Plate 25.

his poetic spaces, Yeats's words on stage are able to create worlds; showing us the diverging ways within and without the labyrinths of the mind.

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