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THE SPACE-MINDED DRAMATURGY OF W. B. YEATS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE: *AT THE HAWK'S WELL* AND THE DANCE PLAYS

Melinda Szűts

Compared to Yeats's popularity and worldwide recognition as a poet, literary genius and public figure, his achievements as a playwright, dramaturge and theater-maker are still relatively unknown to the broader public. Even though there have been several attempts both in criticism and in the professional and amateur theater scene to bring Yeatsian drama closer to readers and spectators, on a more global scale these plays can never really reach the level of popularity they deserve. Whereas the most valuable critical work by such scholars as James Flannery, Karen Dorn, Katharine Worth, Richard Allen Cave, Masaru Sekine, and more recently Alexandra Poulain, Chris Morash, Shaun Richards, Michael McAteer or Yoko Sato, have all contributed to cultivate and revitalise the discourse on Yeats's plays, the relatively slim number of Yeats productions on the world's stages bear witness to misjudgements of their value as performance texts.

As a native Hungarian, I have never had the opportunity to see a Yeats performance in my home country and was only able to get firsthand experience of Yeats's theater by attending Sam McCready's drama workshop at the Yeats Summer School and watching some of the Sligo-based Blue Raincoat Theatre Company's performances in previous years. If we examine the repertoire of European theaters for the past ten years, we can see quite clearly that Yeats is very rarely staged across the continent, and his work is far from being an integral part of the programmes of Irish theaters either. It could be argued that it is exactly this general lack of interest in Yeatsian drama within the professional theater scene that justifies the plays' often-claimed dramaturgical inadequacies. I would like to suggest that some aspects of Yeatsian drama and stage dramaturgy are still undiscovered, and the professional European theater scene is still lacking the experience of exploring these more covert features. The fact that Yeats has been neglected on most of the world's stages hence is not a *consequence* of the plays' dramaturgical disabilities, but a *cause*—a cause which prevents both theater practitioners and their audience from seeing them in their entirety. Based on my experience directing a Hungarian translation of *At the Hawk's Well*, in addition to performing in three Yeats plays, I believe that one of the reasons behind the relative unpopularity of these stage pieces is a mistaken approach with which we, students, literary critics and creative artists, read and interpret them.

This essay looks at Yeatsian dramaturgy from practical perspective by interpreting his dramas as creations of total theater, through mapping the interrelations of text and extra-textual performance elements.¹ This wider dramaturgical stance requires us to take the performance text as the basis of our scrutiny rather than the strictly defined play text.² As for the terminology in the study of Yeats plays, it would generally be much more appropriate to use the term play-text in its extended meaning, which, just like a specific performance text, incorporates all textual and extra-textual performance elements. In my reading, the organic body of the play through which all layers of meaning could be grasped is the composite unity of the spoken word, the three dimensional presence of the actors, movement, sound or music, and space.

In case of such pieces of total theater like Yeats's dance dramas, the written text is inherently incomplete. When we are reading them on paper, the absence of extra-textual elements is obvious and calls for creative interpolations on the interpreters' side. Although it is not required of the literary critic or director to consider and/or follow Yeats's instructions regarding the staging of these texts and fill the above mentioned generic gaps of meaning with the playwright's "original" dramaturgical intentions, my own experience shows that if we read Yeatsian drama thoroughly enough, we cannot really escape doing so.

I believe that in Yeats's plays there is an underlying dramaturgical pattern that is "encoded" in the play texts themselves and can be revealed through textual analysis. This means that even if we consciously try to neglect authorial instructions and concentrate only on the main body of the play text, we will still raise similar questions and probably reach resembling conclusions concerning the extra-textual elements of these stage pieces. The very existence of such an innate, dramaturgical code of course poses serious threats to artistic freedom when it comes to stage adaptation. To see how these underlying, textually induced dramaturgical restrictions affect the process of staging, first I would like to turn to an aspect I consider most important not only among the textual and extra-textual elements of *At the Hawk's Well* and the dance plays but in the whole of Yeats's dramatic oeuvre too, and that is *space*.

FROM THE "PAINTED STAGE" TO A SPACE-MINDED DRAMATURGY

Andrew Parkin described Yeats's works as being influenced by his "dramatic imagination."³ We can add to this the idea of a "spatial imagination"; Yeats was always thinking in shapes, forms and movement, not only in his essays and poems but also, and most expressively, in his plays.⁴ These spatial relations can give us the key to whole dimensions of meaning, which would otherwise remain hidden. Yeats's plays operate with a space-minded dramaturgy, which is manifested on every possible level of the play text. This space-mindedness is

obviously detectable in the choice of the very subject matter in most of Yeats's plays; it is there in the language of their written text, and it becomes clearly visible in stage movement when the plays are acted out.

The naturalist-realist style of the theater space and its set designs in the Abbey Theatre,⁵ which were regarded as the norm by the turn of the century, gradually became insufficient for Yeats mainly because of the restrictions realism required in stage representation. The circumscribed spatial relations of the realist box set (the tradition of frontal staging which separated the audience and the players; the fixed perspective of the stage; the difficulty of visualising location-changes and parallel spatial dimensions because of the application of naturalistic scenery) would have been highly problematic for a symbolist playwright in itself, but they seemed even more inappropriate in an Irish context. Yeats's beliefs about the spirituality of the people, their firm belief in the existence of another, parallel plane of reality and the possibility of transcendence of our earth-bound life made some of the Irish dramatists reluctant to accept the stage space⁶ as it is, being totally deprived of the potential for the visual representation of the otherworld. In Irish drama the "evocation of another spatial dimension" thus has always been a central issue both on a textual and a practical level, which generated a tangible misbalance between the presented and the absent realms of dramatic space (the abstract spatial map of the play), as "there would always be more on the stage than could be seen."⁷ Yeats believed that the dimensions of the natural and the supernatural can merge in a shared space that is neither domestic, nor distant. His stage-world was a mythical space, uniting the defining features of space and place, accommodating figures of the past—of myth and history—and characters of the present continuous of the theater performance, to create a synthesis of the timed and the timeless, the finite and the eternal.⁸

This idea about the heterogeneity of the dramatic space might relate to or even stem from Yeats's own theory about the "Great Memory" of mankind. 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."⁹ It is this shared, yet individually accessible myth that is given dramatic substance in Yeats's mythical dramatic space, which is called to life through poetry.¹⁰ For Yeats then, the ultimate aim in the theater was to visualise what the realist stage set was not able to show, and he saw the possibility of this "spatial revolution" in making the stage space totally fluid and ambiguous, that is, devoid of any kind of visual restriction.

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. In his early productions Yeats tried to map the possible uses of stage space and scenic design by focusing on the visible elements of the stage space only, but he could not find the way to fully exploit its facilities.¹¹ 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.¹²

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 the set design: “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.”¹³ In actual fact, these semi-realistic stage sets of the 1890s were very far from the theater 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, mythical 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. As Flannery argues: “In the December 1904 edition of *Samhain* he [Yeats] vehemently attacked the development of the proscenium theater in England because it coincided with realism and a proportional ‘decline in dramatic energy.’”¹⁵ “Ever since the last remnant of the old platform disappeared,” Yeats 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.”¹⁶

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.¹⁷ Following the practices of highly symbolic, non-representational theater, Yeats reconsidered his idea of the 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 the scenic design, but on those signifiers that are most capable of evoking a sense of motion and change in space: words themselves.

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.¹⁸ This is probably the most important trait of this form of Japanese theater, which Yeats incorporated into his own theatrical vision. By almost completely removing the set from the stage space, Yeats could not only solve the problem of “inappropriate” scenic design but could drastically change the means of handling and appropriating space on the stage. 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. (*VPI* 415–416)

The visibility of a fixed set could no longer hinder the evocation of a totally flexible and changeable stage world, making it possible to set these new, space-minded plays everywhere (in a small room, on the summit of a hill, on the seashore or in a character’s memory—i.e., in a private mind-space) and to make sudden changes in the locations or points of view of the scenes.

Beside creating this unique transformability of the dramatic space, the priority of words in place-making had another important effect on the overall design of these plays: instead of relying on elements of visible scenery, it has now become the task of the actors to create the spatial map of every scene through their movement and stage positions. It is exactly the reason why the priority of words make the dance plays so space-minded, and why extra-textual elements as the placement, proximity and movement of actors gain much greater significance than they would with a visible and definite scenery. Thus, in a theater performance, the prime importance of these extra-textual elements in the formation of the stage space demands a clear and meaningful choreography of stage movement, which, just like in the Japanese Noh, can (or should) become meaningful in itself, even without the words which induce and give context to them.

Closely related to their particular focus on the imaginative power of words, Noh plays had another important feature that left its trace on Yeatsian stage dramaturgy and that can also be regarded as a fundamental trait of a space-minded play-structure. 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. Pronko defines the essence of Noh plays as follows: "The *waki* converses with the *shite* and asks him to relate the tale for which the locale is famous."¹⁹ Yeats felt that the Irish had the same attitude with regard to either domestic or mythical places, and had always been struggling to find the most composite way to stage a play whose substance did 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.²⁰

Peter Ure argues that these place-minded plays are 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 happen."²¹

With regard to the actual shape, form and size of the stage, the Noh brought drastic changes in Yeats's technical spatial arrangements too. The Japanese handling of stage space was spectacularly different from the major contemporary trends in European stage dramaturgy. To fit the internalised, subjective space 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.²² Breaking with the tradition of composing performances for an exclusively fixed perspective helped Yeats to make much better use of the variety of points of view the different movement patterns could create on the platform stage.

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 theater: "what Yeats took from the Noh was its fundamental principles of stylization to achieve a union of myth, dream and psychological symbolism," a traditional representational technique he used in his most personal way.²³

To see how this planned space-mindedness works in practice, I would like to sketch the map of spatial relations in *At the Hawk's Well*, relying both on

its theoretical background and my personal experience while working on this challenging material.

AT THE HAWK'S WELL ON THE STAGE

The first Hungarian production of *At the Hawk's Well* (*A sólyom kútjánál*) came to life as collaboration between actors, musicians, a composer, a dramaturge, a dancer, a choreographer and myself (student of English, drama and theater), and premiered on 30 April 2015, as the closing event of the first conference of the Hungarian Yeats Society in the Petőfi Literary Museum, Budapest.²⁴ After one month of thorough research, translation work, and several interviews with different creative artists, I started a two-month period of rehearsals with a cast of ten (Máté Czakó, choreographer, Young Man; Tamás Varga, Old Man; Eszter Rembeczki, The Guardian of the Well; Adrienn Illés, Aliz Kiss, Gergő Simon, singers; Ákos Lustyik, composer, drums and gong; Barbara Kriesch, harp; Máté Pálhegyi, flute; Júlia Sándor, dramaturge). All performers had experience in the professional theater, and some of them were still students of the Franz Liszt University of Music and the University of Film and Theatre Studies. The fact that these artists came from very different backgrounds (classical musical training for all musicians and singers, physical theater training for the choreographer, jazz dance, classical ballet and oriental dance for the dancer, prose acting training for the Old Man) proved very helpful in creating a synthesis of styles, which we gave a homogeneous form by the end of the rehearsal period. The material, being a piece of total theater composed for all arts, fundamentally required a workshop-like rehearsal process which allowed us to teach and inspire each other. The music and the choreography were motivated by the natural movement of the actors which they brought with themselves as the result of their training; the Hungarian translation was fitted to the music and to the actors' stage movement, and the whole substance of the production was shaped and re-shaped from week to week as we experimented with improvisations and different stylistic approaches.

This long, multi-dimensional process of interpretation firmly justified the need for a space-minded analysis of the written text, as it became obvious after the first couple of meetings that we could only grasp the essence of the play through clarifying and visualising its inherent spatial design. Everyone in the creative team agreed that *At the Hawk's Well* should be interpreted and handled as an extremely formal piece, where the content is substantially transmitted through pattern, rhythm, style and structure, and all its formalities are held together by a well-constructed spatial arrangement. Yet, the most revealing experience was not the fact that we had to pay unusually great attention to stage placement and movement during rehearsals but that we felt we had no total

freedom in planning the composition of these extra-textual elements. After a while it seemed we were not *constructing* the space-map of the performance but rather *reconstructing* it, according to the invisible guidelines Yeats encoded in the play text when he imagined it for stage performance. Here I will only mention a few of those essential questions to which we tried to find possible answers on the basis of these underlying spatial principles.

We agreed with the choreographer at the very first meeting that we would stick to Yeats's idea of the bare stage space. The absence of visualised scenery was extremely important, as the emptiness of the stage space was able to ensure the desired ambiguity of the play's dramatic space. This way, the audience could focus more on the spoken word and the different layers of realities they evoked.

We also adapted the production to the principle of the shared theater space, which, as opposed to the frontal divisions of the box set, carries a multitude of possibilities in establishing different space-relations between the players and the spectators. In a three-dimensional, three-sided or circular arrangement of the playing area the audience is invited to share the stage space (and thus the dramatic space) with the actors, which, paired with the strong alienating effect of the masks and the stylised movement of the players, creates a constant tension of inclusion and exclusion, identification with and detachment from the story and its characters. This impressive physical dialecticism of in and out, and the close presence of the actors, helped create a feeling of a shared ritual, which corresponded with Yeats's original intention to give theater performances back their ritualistic quality.

The open and bare playing area has another great advantage over any kind of fixed set: placement, movement patterns, gestures, and the very rhythm of the performance can gain more attention than they would within a visualised setting in a fixed perspective. This way, the place-making quality of the stage set is given over to the actors themselves. Just like in Noh plays, everything depends on the placement and movement of the players alone, which is always determined by the context the spoken words create for them.

Within this very flexible stage-world, however, the spatial design of places and movement patterns is (or should be) strictly calculated. The text strongly requires visual support for drawing the dramaturgical relation-map of the characters, which can be done by applying the Noh method of assigning fixed places to them. In our production, the Young Man, the Old Man, the Woman of the Sidhe and all three Musicians had their own places within the playing area that were used as spatial references whenever they moved. The whole spatial design of the play was built upon these determined places and on the web of movement patterns that were drawn to connect them. We tried to picture this space-map according to the written material, and thus formulate a strict framework for the play's place-making choreography.

This choreography turned out to be a geometrical one. The Yeatsian geometry of *At the Hawk's Well* is basically symbolic, but as in the theater every form has a very strong place-making quality as well, they can become perfect visual signifiers of the abstract notions they represent. In the text, I found two geometrical forms which were deeply rooted in the play's underlying spatial syntax, and which I believed were essential to use as spatial coordinates in the production. These forms were the circle and the triangle.

I consider the circle the most important symbol here, as in its compound simplicity it can give palpable form to the monotony of the otherwise invisible, imagined setting of the play. The play's location, the well, is a place made timeless by being subject to time: it is "long choked up and dry" with "long stripped" boughs surrounding—a "place" that the "salt sea wind has swept bare" (*VPl* 399). Time adverbials refer to 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. 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 (*VPl* 400). This timeless constancy of the location's status quo can be effectively underlined by the clear visual image of a circular playing area.

The circle also gives symbolic shape to the futility of the Old Man's life, whose never-ending quest for the water of eternity is also always turning back to itself. In a way, the very theme of this play can also be determined as the personal tragedy of the Old Man, who can never cross the self-induced limitations of his own life-circle. It would be a valid interpretation to consider the whole dramatic space, that is the area of the Hawk's well, to be the personal, subjective mind-space of the Old Man, which, through the circular rendering of the stage space, can be tangibly presented.

It is very trivial, yet still very important from a practical point of view that if we want to emphasise the well's significance in the story and make it an absolute point of reference both symbolically and visually, then we should place it to a most "weighty" position within the playing area, for example at the center of the stage space. In agreement with my creative team, we did not really want anything else than to make this point absolutely clear for our audience: this story describes the slowly changing personal relations of characters with the well itself. Both the Old Man and the Young Man want to get closer and closer to the core to occupy it and make it solely their own. If we keep the governing idea of the circular arrangement of the stage space, all lines of force will point towards the center, making every step inwards a symbolic attempt to gain authority over the Well.

This simple but effective spatial design not only helps the audience understand the basic structure of the story and the motivation of characters better,

but also makes the visual similarity between the well and the playing space more obvious. As all of Yeats's dance plays and most of his other stage pieces, this particular story is also fundamentally *about* its location, which means that if we formulate a stage design which resembles the usual circular shape of a well, we immediately highlight the latter's metaphoric and symbolic significance.

The other geometrical form that we used as a general compositional pattern in the production's spatial setting was the triangle. The triangle is a recurring form in all of Yeats's dance plays, both on textual and extra-textual levels. The relationships of characters are often rendered in triangles.²⁵ The numbers of players on the stage are also uneven in most plays, so it is hard (and also unwise) to neglect this very overt spatial topos in their stage placement.

The most obvious manifestation of the Yeatsian threefold division is in the cloth-folding ritual, which opens the dance plays and remains an important compositional element in later stage pieces as well. According to Yeats's instructions, the three Musicians form a triangle "with the First Musician at the apex supporting the centre of the cloth," which they slowly unfold while they sing the lines of the opening chorus (*VPI* 399). I felt that in stage production this cloth-folding ritual is one of those elements that might be substituted with any other activity that serves the purpose of initiating the main story of the play. It has no other function than to be a ritual—a ritual which does exactly the opposite of what the shared space of the open playing area aims at: it defines and locates the dramatic space where the story of the play unfolds.

The opening ritual makes it clear that despite the proximity and the inclusion of the spectators into the world of the play, the circular playing area *becomes* much more than an allocated bare space which the audience has access to. The word "becomes" is of prime importance here, as it is the opening ritual that evokes this initial spatio-temporal change: the dramatic space of the ordinary empty stage gathers new shape according to the poetic description of the Musicians. This ritual and the very presence of the Musicians, similarly to the use of masks, is a means of alienation, which aims at distancing the spectators from the inner story of the play. However, without this frame of the abstract meta-characters the performance would lose its most challenging quality of being inclusive and exclusive at the same time. It is the mediation of the Musicians that gives Yeats's play the compositional duality that enables it to become a shared ritual *and* a distanced narrative.

Despite the fact that I believed the actual choreography of the opening ritual was not of prime importance regarding the play's overall interpretation, I realised that keeping the triangular cloth-folding pattern would help the general understanding of the complicated structure of multiple realities within which this play worked. Just as I assigned a single geometrical form to the well, to the main plot and to the two masked players (the circle), I also attributed one

to the abstract meta-characters. The triangle was an obvious choice because of the number of the Musicians, and although the geometrical form was already implied in the original choreography of the cloth-folding ritual, we made it even more obvious in our production.

Figure 1. The musicians perform the cloth-folding ritual.

Photo credit: Alan Place/FusionShooters

We kept the cloth and cut it to a triangular shape, and used its measurements as spatial boundaries throughout the play to define the parameters of the Musicians' stage movement.²⁶ With this spatial restriction I had two intentions. First, I wanted to make it absolutely clear that the Musicians are on a different layer of reality than the players, and that they do not share the audience's spatio-temporal domain either. They are neither here nor there; they are the abstract yet anthropomorphic representations of liminality itself. They cannot move freely within the playing area as if they were ordinary members of the audience, but they cannot follow the circular pattern of the players either, as they can never enter the world of the dramatic action. I wanted them to become mirrors: spatial and temporal mediators who narrate and comment on the happenings within the dramatic space, who give voice to the feelings and otherwise unexpressed reactions of the players and the audience, and who are generally responsible for determining the point of view from which the whole action is presented. This triangular rendering of their movement positioned them in a separate layer of reality and also created an exciting contrast with the circle and the cyclical movement of the masked players. I also felt that this dialecticism of the circle and the triangle could become a very effective visual match on the stage, as these two forms inherently carried antithetical dramatic energies.

Yet, it was not only the contrast of these forms, and of the different layers of reality which they stood for, which convinced me to use the triangular cloth as the only prop. I did not only want to separate the Musicians from the players but also to suggest some kind of a connection between them. The cloth, which the Musicians unfolded in the opening ritual, remained within the playing space as the cloak of the Woman of the Sidhe with which she covered herself throughout the play. Thus, the triangle as a compositional pattern not only surfaced in the movement of the Musicians but also in the costume of the Guardian of the Well.

Figure 2. The cloth as the cloak of the Guardian of the Well. Rehearsal picture.

Photo credit: Melinda Szűts

It was relatively easy to see how characters should be moved on stage in order to match their initial and later positions within the play's dramaturgical structure. This clarity of possible representation stems from the fact that in all of Yeats's dance plays the space-minded dramaturgy works on a textual level as well. His characters and their initial position in the dramas' relation-map are described with spatial references, which mean that they are defined according to their relationship with the location where the dramatic action takes place.²⁷ *At the Hawk's Well* is a perfect example for this: The Young Man is described as somebody who "has an ancient house beyond the sea" (*VPl* 403), which defines his position as an outsider, a real intruder to the place of the well. Contrarily, the Old Man is introduced as someone who must be "native" to the well, "for

that rough tongue / Matches the barbarous spot" (VPl 404), and as he "has been watching by his well / These fifty years" (VPl 401). He has become an organic part of the place—which he rightfully defends and claims as his own. The slowly evolving conflict between these two characters builds upon and revolves around the question of authority over the spatial center of the action.

There is no real conflict in the play until these spatial relations are disturbed. It is only when the Young Man decides to stay at the desolate place of the Sidhe that his old counterpart sets the action in motion: "No! Go from this accursed place! This place / Belongs to me, that girl there, and those others, / Deceivers of men" (VPl 405). After his place has been occupied he turns against the Young man quite openly. He desperately wants the other to "leave the well" to him, "for it belongs / To all that's old and withered" (VPl 406).

The second most important dramatic change comes about when the Guardian is forced to give up her place, the well, to let the intruder occupy it. "Do what you will," says the Young Man, "I shall not leave this place / Till I have grown immortal like yourself" (VPl 409). This is the very move that forces the Guardian to start her dance, which will eventually determine Cuchulain's fate.

In our production we tried to highlight the significance of these place-changes by making use of the fixed places of the three characters. The rhythm of the action had to be rendered in a way that when the Young Man uttered the sentence "I will stand here and wait" (VPl 405), he was stepping into the place of the Old Man, making the act of occupation clear by visual means as well. In the circular playing space this meant that the Young Man got one step closer to the center. He remained there ("No, I stay" [VPl 406]) until the first cry of the Hawk called his attention to the well and made him move slowly towards it. We tried to design these stations of stage movement clear enough for the audience to let them *see* how the relationship of the two masked players changed towards the Hawk-Woman and the well itself. The formation of these stations also gave nicely shaped triangles within the big circle of the stage space, which made the overall geometry of the performance even more obvious. In the final place-change of the Young Man he stepped into the very core of the playing area, letting the Guardian free from her place-bound stillness in which she had crouched during the first part of the play. After breaking up the strict geometry of the series of place-changes, the playing space was rearranged according to another kind of choreography: the dance of the Hawk-Woman.

The limitation the underlying spatial code imposes upon most parts of any performance of this play doesn't mean of course that every move and every turn of the head is encoded in the dance plays' texts. There are always variable elements, less in *At the Hawk's Well* than in the later dance plays. There is one element in the dance plays' space dramaturgy that is completely free, and that is the dance itself. Yeats could not possibly have encoded any kind of spatial

reference into the dance part, as he himself was not really sure what he wanted to see on the stage. His collaborations with different choreographers resulted in a variety of performance texts, depending on the individual interpretations of the creative artist Yeats worked with.²⁸ As there are no textual guidelines and no overt spatial signifiers in the written material in the dance sections, it has always been and will always be the task, or rather the challenge, of the choreographer to break with or keep the geometry of Yeats's space-compositions, and to imagine these free scenes according to his or her own vision.

Figure 3. Scene from the final dance of the Hawk-Woman.

Photo credit: Alan Place/FusionShooters

Our performance tried to make use of this particular freedom of the dance section. We wanted to emphasise the contrast between the strictly drawn movement patterns of the masked players, which were composed for the space-bound rhythm of the first part of the play, and the released power of the Woman of the Sidhe in the final dance. After the unbound freedom of the dance sequence, we again returned to the visual concept of the players' urge to occupy the center of the stage, but this time it was only the Old Man who remained focused on the geometrical midpoint. When he could finally reach it, it was totally empty. The Guardian of the Well, and with her the hope of drinking from the miraculous

water, has already left the playing space, leaving only the Old Man behind. The performance was concluded with the re-enactment of the cloth-folding ritual in a reversed choreography. The imagined dramatic space of the Hawk's Well was turned back to the empty space shared by the players, the Musicians and the audience.

I do not say that the way we approached Yeats's dance play in this particular production is the only possible path creative artists or readers can tread when it comes to staging or any other means of interpretation. What I do suggest is that both literary critics and theater practitioners should remember that these pieces were composed for the stage and imagined for visual presentation. If we—readers, interpreters or creative artists—want to discover these stage materials in their full complexity and appreciate Yeats's genius as a dramaturge, we should put the plays on stage and let their essence be unfolded in real time and space. Whenever we feel the need for some advice where to begin and how to proceed—space is a good place to start.

Notes

1. I use this term to describe Yeats's intention to create a composite unity of many forms of artistic expression in his theater performances. Here I follow Katharine Worth's line of thought, where she describes Yeatsian theater as follows: "Yeats's evolution of a modern technique of total theatre and his use of it to construct a 'drama of the interior' makes him one of the great masters of twentieth-century theatre"; see Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), 1.
2. Described as "The relationship of all the signifying systems used in a performance, whose arrangement and interaction constitute the *mise-en-scène*. The notion of performance text is therefore an abstract and theoretical one, not an empirical and practical one. It considers the performance as a scale model in which the production of meaning may be observed"; see Patrice Pavis and Christine Shantz, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 261.
3. Andrew Parkin, *The Dramatic Imagination of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Gill and Macmillan, 1978).
4. I agree with Morash and Richards who claim that Yeats was an innovator in his use of theater space and that the "Yeatsian revolution" of space dramaturgy influenced later dramatists and theater practitioners of the Irish theater scene; Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 63.
5. Typical realist-naturalist representations of Irish kitchen sets designed for the proscenium stage include Lady Gregory's *Twenty-Five* in 1903 and Yeats and Gregory's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in 1904; see Christopher Fitz-Simon, *The Abbey Theatre* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 23, 25.
6. I differentiate between theater space, stage space and dramatic space. I use the term dramatic space to describe the abstract, imagined setting of the dramatic action that is visualised in the reader's mind's eye, according to the play's written material. The theater space is the concrete, specified location (the theater building, the concert hall, the market place etc.), where the dramatic action of the play is set and designed. The stage space is part of the

theater space. It accommodates the actual, visualised setting the director creates on the basis of his or her interpretation of the dramatic space. The dramatic space and the stage space thus have a referential relationship: the latter is created on the basis of the former, as a result of directorial decisions. It is important to mention that theater space and stage space cannot always be clearly distinguished from each other, as some theater traditions deliberately try merge the dividing lines between actors and spectators, creating a shared, collective space for the action.

7. Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 20.
8. For a more elaborate analysis of the workings of Yeatsian space dramaturgy see Worth's chapter on Yeats's "spatial syntax" in *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), 48–71.
9. W. B. Yeats, "Magic" in *E&I*, 28.
10. Following the same line of thought, in his seminal work on the ontology and the spatial composition of the poetic image, Gaston Bachelard defines poetry as a "shelter for dreams," a mythical space through which the 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." Similarly to Yeats, he considers words mediators that can 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"; Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 17, 198.
11. This and the following paragraph are based on Karen Dorn's book on Yeats's experiments as a theater practitioner, his development in representation techniques and his collaborations with Edward Gordon Craig; Karen Dorn, *Players and the Painted Stage* (Sussex: Harvester, 1984).
12. 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. 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." Quoted in Elizabeth Loizeaux, *Yeats and the Visual Arts* (New York: Syracuse, 2003) 89, 91.
13. *Ibid.* 93.
14. The over-decorated costumes designed by Miss Horniman for Yeats's *The King's Threshold* (1903) were described by Lennox Robinson as "ugly dresses," with which Yeats himself was not at all satisfied; Christopher Fitz-Simon, *The Abbey Theatre* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 24.
15. James Flannery, *W. B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre* (New Haven: Yale, 1976), 257.
16. *Ex*, 177.
17. For a more elaborate analysis on the relationship between Japanese Noh theater and Yeats's dance plays, focusing particularly on *At the Hawk's Well* and its possible Japanese sources see: Yoko Sato, "'At the Hawk's Well': Yeats's Dramatic Art of Visions," *Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 24 (2009), 27–36.
18. Here I rely on Győző Duró's essay "Színház az örökkévalóságnak" (Theater for Eternity) in: Tamacu Kokubu, *A japán színház* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), 89.
19. Leonard C. Pronko, *Theater East and West: Perspectives Toward a Total Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 76.
20. *E&I*, 232.
21. Peter Ure, *Yeats the Playwright* (London: Barnes and Noble, 1963), 29.

22. Masaru Sekine and Christopher Murray, *Yeats and the Noh* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1990), 73–84. Tamacu Kokubu, *A japán színház* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984) 23–24.
23. Richard Allen Cave in his Introduction to the *Selected Plays of W. B. Yeats*, (London: Penguin, 1997), xxviii.
24. The production was later invited to be performed at the conference of the International Yeats Society in Limerick (15–17 October 2015) in Hungarian language, with a reading of the original play in English beforehand.
25. The most obvious example is *The Dreaming of the Bones*, where the Young Man, the Stranger and the Young Girl form the first, the three Musicians the second relationship-triangle. The power relations in former are constantly changing during the play, as the dialogues render the three characters in 2+1 contact-sequences (Stranger and Young Man talking, Young Girl silently following them; Young Girl and Young Man talking, Stranger silently leading etc.). This threefold division of characters is obvious in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (Ghost/Figure of Cuchulain, Emer, Eithne Inguba, Fand) and in *Calvary* (Christ, Lazarus, Judas; three Roman Soldiers) too.
26. See Figure 1: The Musicians perform the cloth-folding ritual. *At the Hawk's Well* (*A sólyom kútjánál*), Irish Academy of Music and Dance, Limerick, 15 October 2015. Director: Melinda Szűts.
27. There is a multitude of examples for this space-minded description of characters in the other dance plays as well. To pick just one: in the *Dreaming of the Bones* the Young Man is defined as somebody who “was in the Post Office”—meaning that he has taken part in the Easter Rising, whereas the Ghosts whom he meets during the night are described as lingering souls who “have not come from the Abbey graveyard.” Again, characters’ power relations are defined by their spatial attributes: the ghosts are in a superior dramaturgical position, because they are familiar with the location: they “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 were left alone in the dark. *Ibid.* 127–130.
28. For detailed descriptions of Yeats’s collaborations see Mary Fleischer, *Embodied Texts: Symbolist Playwright-Dancer Collaborations* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007) and Richard Allen Cave, *Collaborations: Ninette de Valois and William Butler Yeats* (Alton: Dance Books, 2011).