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Collaborative Projects of Symbolist Playwrights and Early Modern Dancers

by

Mary Rita Fleischer

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
the City University of New York

1998

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Illustrations and Photographs.....	vi
Introduction: <i>Theatre and Dance—A Symbolist Dialogue</i>	1
Chapter	
1. <i>W. B. Yeats and Michio Ito</i>	22
I. <i>Yeats and the Resurrection of the Body</i>	22
II. <i>A Certain Noble Dancer of Japan</i>	40
III. <i>At the Hawk's Well</i>	53
2. <i>W. B. Yeats and Ninette de Valois</i>	88
I. <i>Ninette de Valois</i>	91
II. <i>Fighting the Waves</i>	106
3. <i>Gabriele D'Annunzio and Ida Rubinstein</i>	128
I. <i>D'Annunzio and the Sensorial Body</i>	128
II. <i>Ida Rubinstein</i>	137
III. <i>Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien</i>	149
IV. <i>La Pisanelle, ou La Mort parfumée</i>	173
4. <i>Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Grete Wiesenthal</i>	185
I. <i>Hofmannsthal and the Expansion of Language</i>	185
II. <i>Grete Wiesenthal</i>	205
III. <i>The Hofmannsthal-Wiesenthal Pantomimes</i>	220
5. <i>Paul Claudel, Jean Börlin and the Ballets Suédois</i>	236
I. <i>Claudel and the Motion of the Body</i>	236
II. <i>The Ballets Suédois</i>	252
III. <i>L'Homme et son désir</i>	264
Conclusion: <i>Dance-Theatre as a Collaborative Genre</i>	280
Appendix I: List of Collaborations Studied.....	289
Appendix II: Illustrations and Photographs.....	290
Bibliography.....	352

List of Illustrations and Photographs

- Fig. 1: T. Sturge Moore's design for *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921), from Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats*.
- Fig. 2: Caricatures of Michio Ito and Arthur Waley (1915) by Edmund Dulac, from Colin White, *Edmund Dulac*.
- Fig. 3: Michio Ito, photographed by Nickolas Murray, courtesy of George Eastman House.
- Fig. 4: Some of Ito's combinations from "Ten Gestures" as sketched by Ito, from Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*.
- Fig. 5: Michio Ito in Samurai costume (1915), photographed by Alvin Langdon Coburn, courtesy of George Eastman House.
- Fig. 6: Michio Ito in "Fox" Dance (1915), photographed by Alvin Langdon Coburn, courtesy of George Eastman House.
- Fig. 7: Edmund Dulac's mask for the Old Man in *At the Hawk's Well* (1916), from Shotaro Oshima, *W. B. Yeats and Japan*.
- Fig. 8: Michio Ito in Young Man's mask for *At the Hawk's Well* (1916), photographed by Alvin Langdon Coburn, courtesy of George Eastman House.
- Fig. 9: Edmund Dulac's drawing for Hawk costume for *At the Hawk's Well* (1916), from Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, *Yeats and the Visual Arts*.
- Fig. 10: Michio Ito in Hawk's costume for *At the Hawk's Well* (1916), photographed by Alvin Langdon Coburn, courtesy of George Eastman House.
- Fig. 11: Michio Ito in the Hawk's Dance in the New York production of *At the Hawk's Well* (1918), from Shotaro Oshima, *W. B. Yeats and Japan*.
- Fig. 12: *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1926 Amsterdam production), from Karen Dorn, *Players and Painted Stage*.
- Fig. 13: Bronze castings of Hildo Krop's masks for *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1922 Amsterdam), from Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats*.
- Fig. 14: Cambridge Festival Theatre, ground plan, from Kathrine Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions*.
- Fig. 15: *On Baile's Strand* (1927 Cambridge Festival Theatre production), from Kathrine Sorley Walker, "The Festival and the Abbey."
- Fig. 16: *Rout* (1927 *Dance Cameos*, Cambridge Festival Theatre), from Kathrine Sorley Walker, "The Festival and the Abbey."

- Fig. 17: Ninette de Valois in *Pride* (1927 *Dance Cameos*, Cambridge Festival Theatre), from Kathrine Sorley Walker, "The Festival and the Abbey."
- Fig. 18: D. Travers Smith's backcloth for *Fighting the Waves* (1929), from Karen Dorn, *Players and Painted Stage*.
- Fig. 19: Opening Dance, *Fighting the Waves* (1929 Abbey Theatre), from Karen Dorn, *Players and Painted Stage*.
- Fig. 20: *Fighting the Waves* (1929 Abbey Theatre), from Kathrine Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions*.
- Fig. 21: *Fighting the Waves* (1929 Abbey Theatre), from Peter Kavanagh, *The Story of the Abbey Theatre*.
- Fig. 22: Ninette de Valois (center) as the Queen in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* (1934 Abbey Theatre), from Karen Dorn, *Players and Painted Stage*.
- Fig. 23: Eleonora Duse as Anna in *La città morta* (1901), from Pasquale Guadagnolo, *D'Annunzio: La Scena del Vate*.
- Fig. 24: "Sem's" caricature (circa 1911) of Gabriele D'Annunzio and Ida Rubinstein, from Ida Rubinstein clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.
- Fig. 25: Bakst's costume for Ida Rubinstein for *Cléopâtre* (1909), from Charles Spencer, *Léon Bakst*.
- Fig. 26: Ida Rubinstein in her costume for *Cléopâtre* (1909), from Michael de Cossart, "Ida Rubinstein and Diaghilev: A One-Sided Rivalry."
- Fig. 27: Ida Rubinstein in *Salomé* (1912), from Ida Rubinstein clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.
- Fig. 28: Ida Rubinstein in poses from *Hélène de Sparte* (1912), from Théâtre de Châtelet programme, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Theatre Collection.
- Fig. 29: "Saint Sebastian" by Andrea Mantegna, from *Mantegna* by E. Tietze-Conrat.
- Fig. 30: Ida Rubinstein posed from *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* (1911), from Ida Rubinstein clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.
- Fig. 31: Drawing by Bakst of Ida Rubinstein in *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* (1911), from the Théâtre du Châtelet programme, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Theatre Collection.
- Fig. 32: Group of Magicians from the Second Mansion of *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* (1911), from Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*.

- Fig. 33: Bakst's design for Angels in *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* (1911), from Ida Rubinstein clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.
- Fig. 34: Ida Rubinstein (circa 1912), from *Hélène de Sparte* programme, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Theatre Collection.
- Fig. 35: De Max as the Prince of Tyr in *La Pisanelle* (1913), from *Le Théâtre* (1 July 1913).
- Fig. 36: Suzanne Munte as the Queen in *La Pisanelle* (1913), from *Le Théâtre* (1 July 1913).
- Fig. 37: Act I from *La Pisanelle* (1913), from *Le Théâtre* (1 July 1913).
- Fig. 38: Act II from *La Pisanelle* (1913), from *Le Théâtre* (1 July 1913).
- Fig. 39: Act III from *La Pisanelle* (1913), from *Le Théâtre* (1 July 1913).
- Fig. 40: "La danse du Cacique," Paul Claudel and Hélène Hoppenot in Rio, from Gérald Antoine, *Paul Claudel: ou l'Enfer du génie*.
- Fig. 41: Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (1920), from Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet 1920-1925* (top); "La Danse," bas-relief by Maurice Denis from the lobby of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, from *La Danse*, June 1921 (below).
- Fig. 42: Jean Börlin in *Sculpture nègre* (1920), from *Paris Modern: The Swedish Ballet 1920-1925*.
- Fig. 43: *L'Homme et son désir* (1921), from *Paris Modern: The Swedish Ballet 1920-1925*.
- Fig. 44: Jean Börlin in *L'Homme et son désir* (1921), from Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet 1920-1925*.
- Fig. 45: "Pan-Pipes" and "Bells" in *L'Homme et son désir* (1921), from Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet 1920-1925*.
- Fig. 46: Costume design by Audrey Parr for "Moon" in *L'Homme et son désir* (1921), from Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet 1920-1925*.
- Fig. 47: Paul Claudel, circa 1932 in Paris, from Gérald Antoine, *Paul Claudel: ou l'Enfer du génie*.
- Fig. 48: Grete Wiesenthal in 1907, from *Die neue Körpersprache—Grete Wiesenthal und ihr Tanz*.
- Fig. 49: Grete Wiesenthal in *Donauwalzer* (1908), from *Die neue Körpersprache—Grete Wiesenthal und ihr Tanz*.
- Fig. 50: Wiesenthals dancing *Lanner-Schubert Walzer* (1908), from Lang and Fiedler,

Grete Wiesenthal – Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz.

- Fig. 51: Grete Wiesenthal, dancing at the Garden Party (1907), from Lang and Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal – Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz.*
- Fig. 52: Programme for the first performance of the Wiesenthals at Kabarett Fledermaus (14 January 1908), from Lang and Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal – Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz.*
- Fig. 53: Fledermaus auditorium depicted in a postcard designed by the Wiener Werkstätte (1909), from Peter Vergo, *Art in Vienna 1898-1918.*
- Fig. 54: Grete Wiesenthal and Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1910), from *Die neue Körpersprache – Grete Wiesenthal und ihr Tanz.*
- Fig. 55: Grete Wiesenthal in *Sumurûn* (Berlin, 1910), from Lang and Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal – Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz.*
- Fig. 56: *Walzer*, woodcut by Erwin Lang (1910), from Erwin Lang, *Grete Wiesenthal: Holzschnitte von Erwin Lang mit einer Einleitung von Oscar Bie.*
- Fig. 57: *Allegretto*, woodcut by Erwin Lang (1910), from Erwin Lang, *Grete Wiesenthal: Holzschnitte von Erwin Lang mit einer Einleitung von Oscar Bie.*
- Fig. 58: Grete Wiesenthal in *Der Geburtstag der Infantin* in a costume by Erwin Lang (1911), from Lang and Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal – Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz.*
- Fig. 59: Grete Wiesenthal in *Amor und Psyche* (Berlin, 1911), from *Die neue Körpersprache – Grete Wiesenthal und ihr Tanz.*
- Fig. 60: Grete Wiesenthal in *Amor und Psyche* (Berlin, 1911), from Lang and Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal – Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz.*
- Fig. 61: Grete Wiesenthal in *Das fremde Mädchen* (Berlin, 1911), from Lang and Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal – Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz.*
- Fig. 62: Illustration for text of *Die Biene* (1917), from Lang and Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal – Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz.*

Introduction: *Theatre and Dance—A Symbolist Dialogue*

Dance as an art form and as an image was a major preoccupation of the symbolists. The symbolist dancer comprised not one image, but a range of images which were seen to express cultural and artistic ideals, as well as suggesting new ways of creating theatre. Culturally, dancing was at the center of many current themes including the return to nature, the idealization of Greek life and art, and the nature of the psyche and sexuality. Aesthetically, the dancer was seen to embody an ideal unity, a solution to the contradictions between mind and body, form and matter, image and meaning. As Frank Kermode argues, the symbolists highly valued dance as “belong[ing] to a period before the self and the world were divided, and so achieves naturally the ‘original unity’ which...modern poetry can produce only by a great and exhausting effort of fusion.”¹

As a non-verbal art, dance would appear to have the closest affinities with the visual arts and to music. Marianne Martin has observed that the interaction between dance and visual art became particularly intense at the turn-of-the-century.² Degas studied themes of time and movement and explored ideas about art and the artist through depictions of dancers and the expressive gestures of classical ballet. Seurat and Toulouse-Lautrec were drawn to images of dancers from the uninhibited environments of cabarets, musical halls and the circus. As described by Martin, Seurat’s judiciously divided color applied with small pointillist brush strokes constituted a “poetic rhythm” and a “thousand dancing sequins” evoking the movement and vitality

¹Frank Kermode, “Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev,” in *What is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*, edited by Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 148.

²Marianne Martin, “Modern Art and Dance: An Introduction,” in *Art and Dance: Images of the Modern Dialogue 1890-1980* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1982), 11-55.

of these popular dancers.³ In addition to posters depicting Moulin Rouge dancers Jane Avril and La Goulue, Toulouse-Lautrec produced a series of fifty lithographs of Loie Fuller capturing her floating movements and changing lighting effects in various hues. Gustave Moreau, Arnold Böcklin, and Edvard Munch used images of the dance to explore themes of ritual and eroticism. Auguste Rodin viewed sculpture as a kind of continuous motion in space and was a keen observer of Isadora Duncan, Vaslav Nijinsky and Loie Fuller. During the nineteenth century lithography had brought artists and dancers into collaboration to produce ballet prints which were widely circulated and popularized images of dancers;⁴ towards the end of the century photography as an artistic medium was emerging and conveyed in new ways the kinesthetic impact of dancing.

Musicians and dancers have always been close collaborators, but at the turn-of-the-century, composers viewed writing for contemporary dance as a way to escape traditional sonata and symphonic forms and to create scores that emphasized mood and atmosphere over dramatic development. An interest in authentic folk and ethnic dances provided inspiration for new rhythmic patterns and tonalities. Dance production provided an alternative route to the total theatre concept usually sought in opera; instead of strongly uniting drama and music, a dance performance was not primarily bound to tell a story and could freely experiment with movement and more abstract theatrical values. Several early modern dancers regularly commissioned scores from major composers of the period, as did the Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois. Debussy, Bloch, Ravel, Milhaud, Nicholas Tcherepnine and Stravinsky among several other composers embraced writing for dance as an important part of their repertoire.

³Ibid., 14.

⁴See Lynn Garafola, "Introduction," in *Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet*, edited by Lynn Garafola (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 1-3.

An interest in new forms of dancing permeated the theatre as playwrights incorporated dance into their work in a wide range of contexts.⁵ Scenes of social dance were often used for satiric or ironic purposes, as in Andreyev's *Life of Man* (1906) and *Black Maskers* (1908), or in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1901), and brought a heightened theatricality to the works. A traditional form like the medieval dance of death was used to express more modern themes in Przybyszewski's *Visitors* (1901) and Hofmannsthal's *Death and the Fool* (1893), while a "Volkstanz" in which partners are passed serially in a round dance formed the basis of Schnitzler's *La Ronde* (1900). Dance could also be used to express symbolic, impulsive actions that break through societal constraints like Nora's rehearsal of her tarantella in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) or Julie's folk dancing in Strindberg's play (1888). In Wilde's *Salomé* (1894) and Wedekind's *Earth-Spirit* (1894) dance directly expresses the intense sexual and destructive instincts of the plays's *femmes fatales*. At other times a dramatist's interest in dance was the very impetus for writing a play, as in Sologub's *Night Dances* (1908) where twelve princesses find freedom from daytime decorum by secretly dancing each night in the style of Isadora Duncan.

In other works of this period, including those under discussion in this dissertation, the use of dance and movement is not limited to an interlude or several scenes but is rather integral to the structure of the work. Here dialogue and action can be eclipsed by music and choreography, and words are often used primarily for their rhythmic and musical qualities. Moreover, in several works, the shift away from spoken text is complete with the creation of dance scenarios and pantomimes. A dialogue

⁵See Carol Diethe, "The Dance Theme in German Modernism," *German Life and Letters* 44 (#4, July 1991), 330-352; Joan Scanlon and Richard Kerridge, "Spontaneity and Control: The Uses of Dance in Late Romantic Literature," *Dance Research* 6 (#1, Spring 1988), 30-44; and Harold B. Segel, "Moving Toward the Non-Verbal: Dance in Turn-of-the-Century Drama," in *Drama und Theater*, edited by Herta Schmid and Hedwig Král (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1991), 466-477.

between theatre and dance artists began which centered on the creation of pieces which could communicate primarily through rhythmic movement, gesture, image, and music rather than spoken text.

During this period, Isadora Duncan and other early modern dancers rejected the conventions of classical ballet and began to evolve new dance forms based on the natural movements of the human body. Established forms of theatrical dancing were eclipsed by the “barefoot dances” of Maud Allan and the stunning illusions of Loie Fuller. Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes* helped to transform ballet into a modern art and set a new aesthetic standard for collaboration among choreographers, composers, and artists. Moreover, dance made significant contributions to the development of the modern theatre. For example, Gordon Craig and Adolfe Appia were greatly influenced by the work and theories of Duncan and Dalcroze respectively as they evolved concepts of abstract, stylized acting. While symbolist theatre moved away from the depiction of external events and the domination of words and towards the evocation of mood and spiritual states, early modern dance moved away from the strong emphasis that had been placed on the sheer technical ability of the body and rigidly defined dance vocabularies. Thus within a broadly defined symbolist aesthetic, dance and theatre artists at the turn-of-the-century could find a renewed sense of shared ground between their disciplines which became the basis for many interesting collaborations.

For both theatre and dance artists, the problem of how to visualize and reveal inner life and spiritual states was a challenge that gave rise to new experiments in staging and choreography. A major theorist of symbolist aesthetics who gave much thought to the nature of dance and theatre and their potential interactions was Stéphane Mallarmé. His meditations anticipate several key issues inherent in the creation and staging of the works studied in this dissertation and provide a useful theoretical framework. Although Mallarmé often seems to display a distinctly anti-theatrical bias in

his preference for a "theatre of the mind," he was an enthusiastic supporter of both Paul Fort's Théâtre d'Art and Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, and his writings influenced many playwrights including Maeterlinck, Yeats, D'Annunzio, Hofmannsthal and Claudel.

Among writers, Mallarmé gave new importance to dance as an art form and called attention to the contributions dance could make to the theatre. Haskell Block contends that Mallarmé's thoughts about theatre and dance

transcend the limits of the contemporary stage without sacrificing the claims of the physical theatre. His observations on the dance served to impel the movement of the drama toward a more intricate and more complex interplay of the arts: toward a poetization of all the elements of theatrical performance.⁶

Mallarmé's ideal theatre is a nonrepresentational, symbolist theatre, born of the same values that shaped his ideas about poetry: evocation, mystery and ritual. His wish to detheatricalize the stage was partly a reaction to the excessive use of spectacle in the commercial theatre which he felt was at best superfluous. Mallarmé's insistence that the true essence of a play can only be fully expressed in an individual's "theatre of the mind"—the interaction of a printed text and the reader's imagination—is exemplified by his interiorization of *Hamlet* as a monodrama in which all the characters of Shakespeare's play are subsumed by one consciousness. This may appear to be a radical and reactionary solution, but it was also an attempt to embody the all-encompassing scope of a personal vision into a single protagonist and create a fusion of the personal and universal. The paradox inherent in his preference for a dematerialized stage on the one hand and his fascination with the vitality of theatrical performance on the other anticipates questions about the function and relative importance of verbal poetry in several playwright-dancer collaborations in this study.

Dance for Mallarmé was the purest of performing arts and the potential

⁶Haskell M. Block, *Mallarmé and the Symbolist Drama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), 96.

source of a poetry of the theatre:

Dance being chief among [the plastic arts], at least in the perfection of its expression; and, by virtue of the conciseness of its writing, only the Dance can translate the fleeting and the sudden into the Idea. To see this is to see the entire—absolutely the entire—Spectacle of the future.⁷

While drama could be conveyed through the text to the mind and imagination of the reader, dance must be performed and requires materialization through the human body and the physical stage, comprising "la forme théâtrale de poésie par excellence."⁸ Though dance and music require no text, the spectator supplies his own verbal translation of what he experiences. Thus, as Mary Lewis Shaw has succinctly stated, for Mallarmé "as the text creates the impression of a performance, the performance creates the impression of a text."⁹ Theatre performance for Mallarmé therefore implies an often unresolved and problematic relationship between a text (of a libretto or play) and non-verbal physical elements, or in other words, between sometimes completing "texts." In his essay, "Ballets" (1886), Mallarmé discusses the dancing of "La Cornalba" in two romantic ballets and cautions that the arts of drama and the ballet may be "allied, but not confused":

Acting and dancing become suddenly hostile whenever they are forcibly brought together. For example: when the attempt was made just now to show forth the single essence of a bird through twin performers...to pair a mime and a ballerina. But they are too unlike! If one is a dove, why, the other will be...Lord knows! perhaps the breeze. Fortunately at the Eden theater, the exclusive qualities of the two art forms were most judiciously observed...This distinction of each scenic genre in contact or opposition with the other, becomes the controlling feature of the work, and the resulting disparity is used for its very structure. But a

⁷Stéphane Mallarmé, "Richard Wagner, Revery of a French Poet," in *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, translated by Bradford Cook (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press: 1956), 73.

⁸Stéphane Mallarmé, "Autre étude de danse," in *Crayonné au théâtre in Oeuvres complètes*, edited by Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1945), 308. It would be interesting to consider what Mallarmé might have thought about dance notation.

⁹Mary Lewis Shaw, *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 73.

communication between the two still remains to be found.¹⁰

Mallarmé dismisses the libretto of this dance as redundant and “failing to understand that the ballerina expresses herself with steps.”¹¹ As Haskell Block argues, for Mallarmé dance is not to be identified with drama, but with a poetry of the theatre. Narrative and theatrical values may exist side by side and complement each other, but Mallarmé insists that they cannot be completely fused or their distinct qualities dissolved.¹²

Central to symbolist aesthetics was recognition of a series of correspondences among the arts and various sensations. The borrowing of ideas and approaches from one art and applying them to another, or the concept of a fusion of separate arts to create a new “total work of art” as derived from Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* were pervasive ideas during this period and indicated a desire to defy genre categories and rules of form. Though he was greatly influenced by Wagner, Mallarmé sharply disagreed with the composer for granting music a dominant role over other arts, especially poetry. The poet-playwrights under discussion in this dissertation would in spirit side with Mallarmé in their belief that it is the poet (to a greater or lesser extent) who should retain control over the nature of the interplay of the various arts. Early in their careers, Yeats, Claudel, D’Annunzio and Hofmannsthal were all interested in the musicality of poetry and spent time experimenting in different ways with combining music and verse. Later, in their collaborations with dancers, directors and designers, the problem was somewhat redefined as these playwrights sought to retain the use of verse or a libretto as a basis for a work while at the same time trying not to duplicate or overwhelm the contributions from other media. This issue is even relevant

¹⁰Stéphane Mallarmé, “Ballets,” in *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, 64. The two ballets under discussion are *Viviane* (choreographed by Luigi Manzotti in 1884) and *Les Deux Pigeons* (choreographed by Louis Mérante in 1886).

¹¹*Ibid.*, 65.

¹²Haskell M. Block, *Mallarmé and the Symbolist Drama*, 93.

where there are no spoken words, as in pantomime or dance scenarios.

As to the meanings of a dancer's presence and the possible dynamics of casting a dancer as a scripted character, Mallarmé advances a complex theory of the dancer as a metaphorical figure who writes with her body. In this formulation, Mallarmé reveals a basic duality in the use of movement onstage: its poetic and universalizing function versus its corporeal power as attached to a specific human body. To a great degree, Mallarmé denies the physical reality of the dancer by subjugating the ballerina completely to metaphor, writing that

*..she is not a girl, but rather a metaphor which symbolizes some elemental aspect of earthly form...she does not dance but rather, with miraculous lunges and abbreviations, writing with her body, she suggests things which the written work could express only in several paragraphs of dialogue or descriptive prose. Her poem is written without the writer's tools.*¹³

For Mallarmé the dancer must transcend the natural, particular body in order to become something impersonal and metaphorical. This sense of simultaneous absence and presence of the actual dancer can contribute to the perception of an inherent spirituality. She is both real and the symbolic focal point of the piece; she is expressing a symbol and not portraying a character per se. Nor is she aware of her role: as André Levinson points out, the "illiterate" ballerina is the unconscious revealer of something which she symbolizes without needing to understand what it is.¹⁴

The idea that art should be an evocation of a hidden reality through symbolic means was a central belief of the symbolists. In Mallarmé's formulation,

To *name* an object is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem, which derives from the pleasure of step-by-step discovery; to *suggest*, that is the dream. It is the perfect use of this mystery that constitutes the symbol: to evoke an object little by little, so as to bring to light a state of the soul or, inversely, to choose an object and bring out of it a state of the soul through a series of

¹³Stéphane Mallarmé, "Ballets," 64. Italics designate Mallarmé's emphasis.

¹⁴André Levinson, "The Idea of the Dance: From Aristotle to Mallarmé," in *What is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*, edited by Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen, 53.

unravelings.¹⁵

The presence of a live performer in a symbolist work presents a basic contradiction between the desired poetic or spiritual quality and the performer's particular reality. To define character through the actor's technique and personality obviates the kind of poetic revelation Mallarmé and other symbolists valued; instead they wanted to view the actor as a medium rather than an interpreter. For Maurice Maeterlinck, one of the first playwrights and theorists of symbolist drama, the individual attributes of the actor invariably compromise the poetic ideal of a play. To transcend the actor's particularity, Maeterlinck went somewhat further than Mallarmé and recommended that

One should perhaps eliminate the living being from the stage. It is not inconceivable that one would thus return to the art of distant centuries, whose last imprint may well be borne by the masks of Greek tragedians. Will the day come when sculpture...will be used onstage? Will the human being be replaced by a shadow? a reflection? a projection of symbolic forms, or a being who would appear to live without being alive? I do not know; but the absence of man seems essential to me.¹⁶

Masks, sculpture, reflections, shadows and puppets are indeed some of the techniques that were utilized by the playwrights under study in this dissertation to explore ways of depersonalizing the particularity of the dancer or actor and of integrating the human body into a unified stage composition.

Another way to aestheticize or poeticize the body was to reconceptualize acting in terms of dance and music. While Mallarmé theorized about masking the body in the "veil" of dance movement, other theatre artists, notably Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia, experimented with utilizing rhythmic movement and dance to unify a theatre piece. Craig insisted that the theatre needed to eschew impersonation

¹⁵Stéphane Mallarmé, quoted in Jules Huret, "Interview with Stéphane Mallarmé (1891)" in *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*, translated and edited by Henri Dorra (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 141. Italics indicate Mallarmé's emphasis.

¹⁶Maurice Maeterlinck, "Small Talk—the Theater (1890)," in *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*, 145.

and to develop a new language of movement, “a new form of acting, consisting for the main part of symbolic gesture.”¹⁷ Craig’s rejection of the actor’s susceptibility to impulse and emotion evolved into the well-known theory of the Übermarionette. Yet Craig never totally abandoned his fascination with the creative force of the human performer: in the dancing of Isadora Duncan, Craig saw a paradigm for expressive and technically controlled movement without superfluous detail and a provocative use of stasis which he believed was one of the unique virtues of the marionette.¹⁸ Appia believed that music, and especially rhythm, was a direct expression of inner life and a prime regulator and ordering principle for the creation of theatre. As discussed in Chapter One, Appia was greatly influenced by the work of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze whose method of “eurhythmics” trained students to translate music into movement. Hofmannsthal and Yeats directly collaborated with Craig, while Claudel’s play *L’Announce faite à Marie* was produced at the theatre designed for Appia and Dalcroze at Hellerau. A generation of early modern dancers was influenced by Dalcroze’s ideas of generating movement and form from the rhythmic and tonal structures of music; relevant to this study, both Michio Ito and Jean Börlin studied at Hellerau, while Ninette de Valois and Grete Wiesenthal were influenced less directly.

For Mallarmé the movements of the dancer are “emblematic” and not mimetic; he compares the writing of dance to “hieroglyphs” because this kind of writing has a “mysterious and sacred quality” that is difficult to decipher.¹⁹ The spectator completes the formation of the metaphor in his mind, and needs to learn how to “read” the meaning of the dancing:

¹⁷Edward Gordon Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1956), 61.

¹⁸See Irène Eynat-Confino, *Beyond the Mask: Gordon Craig, Movement, and the Actor* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 62-71.

¹⁹Stéphane Mallarmé, *Crayonné au théâtre*, 312.

At those times when we ordinarily watch the Dance with no special object in mind, the only way to lead our imagination on is to stand patiently, calmly watching each of the dancer's steps, each strange pose—toeing, tapping, lunge, or rebound—and then ask ourselves: "What can the meaning of it be?" Or, better still, find inspiration suddenly and interpret it...as you sit hidden some evening in the theater: if, at that sorceress' feet...you will but humbly place the Flower of your poetic instinct...drawing from this alone the true light and revelation of your numberless secret imaginings, then...through her always ultimate veil, she will give you back your concepts in all their nakedness, and silently inscribe your vision as would a Symbol—which she is.²⁰

The "veil" remains intact, but somehow transports the imagination and seems to be a metaphor for the distancing power of the dance medium. Thus while the dancer's movements might embody these "hieroglyphs," they clearly do not constitute a "language" because their meaning is open-ended and dependent upon the viewer's interpretation. The spectator contributes to the meaning of the work and is actively involved through the process of imaginative interpretation.

Whether dance and movement can be said to constitute "languages" of their own is a complicated aesthetic and semiotic problem which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Clearly, dance draws on and refers to a complex network of signs and meanings that act on the spectator simultaneously: our experience of everyday movement, our recognition of cultural and emotional connotations of certain gestures, and specific knowledge of dance conventions. What was probably most resonant for writers of the period was Mallarmé's insistence that what the dancer produces was not simply a whirl of mindless spectacle, but a spiritualized expression which transcended literal and referential values and which had meaning that could be "read" in terms of its own autonomous form. Claudel observed that "Mallarmé was the first to face the outer world as if it were not a spectacle, but a text, and to ask: 'What does this mean?'"²¹

Mallarmé also perceived the possibilities of pantomime as an art form

²⁰Stéphane Mallarmé, "Ballets," 65-66. Italics indicate Mallarmé's emphasis.

²¹Paul Claudel, "Positions et propositions," quoted in Bradford Cook, *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, 143.

which like dance was liberated from the referential duties of spoken language. In his essay "The Mime," he reflects on the performance of Paul Margueritte in Margueritte's pantomime *Pierrot Assassin de sa Femme*. Here Mallarmé carefully maintains a distinction between the written libretto (whose words will never be spoken) and the performance which stands as a "yet unwritten page." He also observes how silence is experienced not as the mere absence of language but as a conduit to imagination and dream. Silence is wedded to the very nature of Pierrot's action which is to mime not the actual murder but his memory of it. Even the words of the libretto cannot be directly translated into movement since the "ever original reappearance" of Pierrot is based on "perpetual allusion" as perceived through the interplay of silence and movement.²² As will be discussed in later chapters, Claudel and Hofmannsthal were particularly fascinated by the non-mimetic potential of pantomime, while Fokine, Meyerhold and Wiesenthal developed new performance styles for mime in which movement is not a substitute for spoken language but a revelation of emotional and psychic states.

The poet-playwrights under discussion in this study were all highly invested in the power of words, and yet were drawn to the use of movement and dance to explore a realm beyond verbal language. As a cultural image, the dancer is characteristically mute, and the dancers in these projects are, with one exception, silent. Mallarmé casts the dancer not only as silent but as "illiterate," implying that the performer does not rely on any intellectual process but on pure instinct and natural talent; in this context, dance is primarily an unconscious and instinctive form of art and the dancer's being is closer to that of animals and the natural world. In Mallarmé's mind (as well as generally in Western culture), the dancer is gendered feminine and her image is intensified as a symbol of humanity's primitive bonds with the creative forces of

²²Stéphane Mallarmé, "The Mime," translated by Barbara Johnson, in *Stéphane Mallarmé: Selected Poetry and Prose*, edited by Mary Ann Caws (New York: New Directions, 1982), 69.

nature. Of the pieces discussed in this dissertation, all the characters who dance are female (with one important exception of the Man in *L'Homme et son désir*); their gender combined with their presence as a dancing figure tends to connote a mysterious and often amoral quality, less bound by artistic convention and history than non-dancing characters.

The duality of language versus the inexpressible was a constant for the symbolists; language was intrinsically tied to reason, while the visual and performing arts, especially music, were connected to emotion. Music was at once concrete and intangible, and yet could communicate through a "syntax" of patterns, rhythms, phrases and tonalities. Symbolist artists often aspired towards a musical method of organizing a composition where images served a similar purpose as Wagner's "leitmotif." The "arabesque" was a fundamental component of both symbolist music and visual art. As art curator Jean Clair explains, arabesques "were considered as transcriptions of forces [and] were...devices for dissolving outlines and abolishing the distinction between the inner world of the mind and the outer world of sense perception."²³ The energy of constant and elaborated movement can also be seen in the dances of Isadora Duncan with their visions of waves and undulations of gesture; and Loie Fuller's curving lines and wave patterns epitomize the organic shapes of Art Nouveau.

Dance offered the symbolist playwright a spatial equivalent to music. Both music and dance share the goal of making something non-material and invisible into something material and perceptible. In a realistic play, and in many forms of opera and musical theatre, dance is experienced as a disruption of the action. But in much symbolist drama, where the emphasis is usually on a musical concept of structure, dance is less an interruption of the action than a means of expressing a continuous emotional

²³Jean Clair, "The Self beyond Recovery," in *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe* (Montreal: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1995), 127.

or psychic state. Qualities of movement, contrasts of tempo and rhythm, and the use of stillness can be employed to build perceptions of time. Since the dancer performs a series of movements which have an aesthetic unity and direction, she can often evoke the transitions between different states of feeling or dreams more convincingly than the speaking, realistically moving actor.

Responding to the fragmented, dehumanized and materialistic qualities of modern societies, the symbolists strove to restore a sense of comprehensive unity to the world, as Jean Clair describes:

Symbolism...was a final and desperate attempt to restore the natural and ancient links that man, as a thinking being, had established with the world. First of all, with Wagner and Nietzsche, it was...a monumental recapitulation of the whole of man's...*mythical heritage*, so rich in tangible proof of the existence of these links. Then, with the great sensualists like Baudelaire and Debussy, it became an exploration of the *correspondences* that...are evidence of the harmony that exists between our senses and the outside world. Finally, it was the search, conducted at the frontiers of the normal and the pathological, for those *border states* of consciousness that offer inklings...of that irreducible heart of our being that we call variously the "spirit," the "mind" and the "imagination."²⁴

For the symbolists, dance became an important paradigm for lost wholeness, expressing through the eternal form of the human body a truth that was inaccessible to the intellect alone. The primitive and ancient roots of dance were celebrated by Wagner, who emphasized the role of dance in the development of Greek culture and religious ritual, and by Nietzsche, who described the ecstatic experience entailed when man danced "to feel himself a god" and became one with his work of art. The influential poet and critic Arthur Symons insisted that "the dance is life, animal life, having its own way passionately," and as the closest of the arts to nature, to the instinctual life of the body, it "idealises these mere acts, gracious or brutal" through movements which are "all pure

²⁴Jean Clair, "Lost Paradise," in *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe*, 21. Italics indicate Clair's emphasis.

symbol.”²⁵ The idea that dance embodied a lost sense of ritual and a purity of expression was pervasive, and in the view of Albert Paris von Gütersloh (an actor, writer and Secessionist artist), even a painted image of dancing could comprise an atavistic form of communication:

For we hardly know what to say about a work of art. People who form themselves into living tableaux in imitation of famous masterworks are closer to the spirit of those works than the gushing critics because they seem instinctively to understand that pictures are the language of gesture and demand a response in kind...Any picture begins to exist only if the initially stimulated pantomime of ideas begins to crystallize within the light and the place where they occur.²⁶

The work of early modern dancers was heralded by a variety of names (“free,” “barefoot,” “interpretive,” “classical”) which connote a sense of liberation from artistic and social constraints and a harkening back to ancient models. Choreographers explored the “natural” movements of the body and tended to seek inspiration from myths, rituals and archetypes. Ruth St. Denis’s *Radha*, Isadora Duncan’s *Mother*, Maud Allan’s *The Vision of Salomé*, Michel Fokine’s orientalist works for the Ballets Russes (*Schéhêrazade*, *Cléopâtre*) and Vaslav Nijinsky’s *Le Sacre du printemps*—although very different works—all utilized myth to suggest images and ideas, mysterious realms of the imagination, the erotic, and alternative spiritual values.

The most prevailing image of dancing in a natural, ritualistic and eternal context was clearly that of Isadora Duncan. In 1908 art critic Mary Fanton Roberts wrote a description of Duncan’s work which the dancer felt best captured the spirit of her dancing at the time:

It is far back, deep down the centuries, that one’s spirit passes when Isadora Duncan dances: back to the very morning of the world, when the greatness of the soul found free expression in the beauty of the body, when rhythm of motion

²⁵Arthur Symons, “The World as Ballet,” in *Studies in Seven Arts* (London: Archibald Constable and Company, Ltd., 1906), 387-391.

²⁶Albert Paris von Gütersloh, “Attempt at an Introduction to Egon Schiele,” quoted in Patrick Werkner, *Austrian Expressionism: The Formative Years*, translated by Nicholas T. Parsons (Palo Alto: The Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 1993), 234.

corresponded with rhythm of sound, when the movements of the human body were one with the wind and the sea, when the gesture of a woman's arm was as the unfolding of a rose petal, the pressure of her foot upon the sod as the drifting of a leaf to earth. When all the fervour of religion, of love, of patriotism, sacrifice or passion expressed itself to the measure of the cythara...when men and women danced before their hearthstones and their gods in religious ecstasy, or out in the forests and by the sea because of the joy of life that was in them...in perfect accord with the rhythm of the Universe.²⁷

Duncan believed that the body was the prime reality, inseparable from mind and soul; the roles of choreographer and dancer were therefore undistinguishable since a truly expressive dancer could not simply imitate another's movement but must generate her own motion to express something larger than herself.²⁸ Dance movement must be flowing, undulating and rhythmic, tied to natural motions of everyday animate movement (running, walking, breathing) of humans and animals, or to inanimate nature, of the motion of waves, currents and wind. Natural movement generates form since each movement will have the seed of a successive movement as part of a natural rhythm.²⁹ Duncan hoped that the audience would have a strong, intuitive connection to her work because it sprang from her spiritual life as reflected in the movements of nature.³⁰

Though Duncan invariably appeared as a soloist, she was inspired by Nietzsche's ideas about the Greek chorus and insisted that she was not merely an individual woman performing for an audience but functioned as a chorus, evoking the variations of a group response to great events. Thus as Deborah Jowitt points out, Duncan distanced herself from direct impersonation and "equat[ed] her own persona

²⁷Mary Fanton Roberts, quoted in Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York: Liveright, 1995) 160.

²⁸Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance*, edited by Sheldon Cheney (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1969), 62-63.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 78, 56.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 143.

with universal human feelings and drives.”³¹ In physical appearance Duncan presented a “natural” body: uncorsetted and loosely draped in her signature form-revealing tunics of floating silk or chiffon, hair freely flowing, and barefoot. Her settings were simple, mostly consisting a backdrop of grey-blue curtains and warm lighting. Her early pieces were usually danced to literary works or were interpretations of the religious and mythological visions of the Pre-Raphaelite painters. In 1900, for example, she gave three “Dance Idylls,” each in turn based on text, music and painting. Held at London’s New Gallery, these “Idylls” were sponsored by Henry James and Mrs. Patrick Campbell and had the participation of major figures in the arts. At the first recital Greek scholar Jane Harrison read from Theocritus while Duncan danced, and poet Andrew Lang spoke about dance in relation to Greek myth; for the second the composer Sir Hubert Parry lectured on the relationship between music and dance, and Duncan performed to Gluck’s *Orfeo*; at the third Duncan’s dances evoked images from several Renaissance paintings including Botticelli’s *Primavera*.³² Throughout her career Duncan, like many of her contemporaries, argued for a basic, underlying unity of the arts, and believed that dance was an especially effective bridge between music and poetry.³³ Later in her career, she shifted direct emphasis away from poetry and music and sought clues to natural sources of motion from vase paintings, bas-reliefs and statues of ancient Greece. While not endeavoring to recreate these ancient dances, she danced her own imagined antiquity to unify her moral and artistic ideas.

The Greek ideal also helped Duncan to forge a link between the perfectibility of the body and the soul, for which she became a symbol. The turn-of-the-

³¹Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 89.

³²Dorée Duncan, Carol Pratl and Cynthia Splatt, editors, *Life into Art: Isadora Duncan and Her World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 36.

³³Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance*, 123, 84.

century was an era which embraced many forms of “body culture”: while early modern dance drew some of its foundation from gymnastics, Delsartian expression and Dalcroze’s eurhythmics, society at large was enthused by a plethora of exercise systems, sports, games, bicycling, hiking, nature retreats and social dancing as a way to improve one’s health, patriotism and spirit.³⁴ As Ann Daly points out, the message of “body culture”—that by changing one’s outward behavior one could improve one’s inner being—was important to Duncan who thought of dance as an art form that could serve as an avenue of social progress.³⁵ In the public arena Duncan positioned herself as an emblem of freedom from restrictions placed against women and conventional ideas about dance; buoyed by the era’s interest in the body, the dancing of Duncan and other modern dancers encouraged audiences to look at the body in new ways. Duncan’s dancing, as Daly describes,

was based on physical release, [and] seemed to materialize her spectators’ inner longings and impulses. This fluid self freely circulating—an image of “becoming”—appealed to a wide variety of spectators, who saw in her the embodiment of their own desire for social, political, and artistic change. She was, for them, a symbol of spontaneity and freedom.³⁶

Furthermore, in the widest context of the symbolists’s hopes for the regeneration of the world through the ritual practice of art, Duncan’s image reigned as a kind of goddess and dance came to rival music as an ideal of artistic form.

Duncan’s emphasis on natural expressiveness had a potent effect on all of the dancers discussed in this dissertation, and her interest in the interrelationship of the arts had a resonance with writers and theatre artists as well. Although she had no use for the strictly imposed techniques of classical ballet, Duncan had an auspicious

³⁴See Judith B. Alter, *Dancing and Mixed Media: Early Twentieth-Century Modern Dance Theory in Text and Photography* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 56.

³⁵Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 26.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 15.

influence on Michel Fokine that helped to move ballet towards embracing more modernist values that would find expression in companies like the Ballets Russes and the Ballets Suédois. "Duncan proved," Fokine observed, "that all the primitive, plain, natural movements...are far better than all the richness of ballet technique, if to this technique must be sacrificed grace, beauty, expressiveness."³⁷

Mallarmé would probably not have been a fan of Duncan's dancing, primarily because her persona was so identified with her dances; she danced her own feelings in response to music and other sources, and her spontaneity at times bordered on improvisation. Although Mallarmé did not make any consistent conceptual distinctions between ballet and more innovative forms, he was a great admirer of Loie Fuller. While Duncan's image encompassed the natural expressiveness of the human form, Fuller's visual technique transcended human shape and behavior and provides another, complementary image of the symbolist dancer. Fuller was less interested in dance in terms of a body technique than she was in visualizing music, creating a unity of her moving body, light and fabric to capture the structure and momentum of the music, as she explains:

Specialists of the dance do not understand that I aim only to give an harmonious impression, trying to express the spirit of music...I try to follow the musical waves in the movements of the body and colors...For this ideal I am drawn most particularly to modern music, where so much pictorial orchestration opens an enormous field to magical lighting...Music is the joy of the ears; I would wish to make it the delight of the eyes, to render it pictorial, to make it visible.³⁸

With her inventive use of long wands, vast quantities of floating fabric, innovative lighting effects, a darkened auditorium and black velour background, she metamorphosed herself into seemingly suspended illusions of flowers, birds, clouds and

³⁷Michel Fokine, *Memoirs of a Ballet Master*, translated by Vitale Fokine, edited by Anatole Chujoy (London: Constable, 1961), 256.

³⁸Loie Fuller, quoted in "Danse, musique, lumière, chez Loie Fuller," *Eclair*, 5 May 1914, cited in and translated by Sally Sommer, "Loie Fuller's Art of Music and Light," *Dance Chronicle* 4 (#4, 1981), 390.

flames. Mallarmé saw Fuller perform at the Folies-Bergères in 1893, and he described the kind of fantastic images she created:

Her performance, *sui generis*, is at once an artistic intoxication and an industrial achievement. In that terrible bath of materials swoons the radiant, cold dancer, illustrating countless themes of gyration...She blends with the rapidly changing colours which vary their limelit phantasmagoria of twilight and grotto, their rapid emotional changes—delight, mourning, anger; and to set these off, prismatic, either violent or dilute as they are, there must be the dizziness of soul made visible by an artifice.³⁹

Mallarmé recognized in Fuller's performance a continual correspondence between sound and sight, fusing herself and the space around her into one evocative object:

The decor lies latent in the orchestra, to come forth like a lightning stroke at the sight of the dancer who represents the idea. And this transition from sonorities to materials...is the one and only skill of Loie Fuller, who does it by instinct...The enchantress makes the ambience, produces it from herself and retracts it into a silence rustling with crêpe de Chine...Here, if ever, is atmosphere, that is nothingness, given back to ballet, visions no sooner known than scattered, limpid evocation. The pure result will be a liberated stage, at the will of fictions, emanating from the play of a veil with attitude or gesture.⁴⁰

Fuller's work was lauded as the fulfillment of symbolist ideas of the relationship between expression and form; her imagistic dances seemed as ephemeral as a dream, but evocative of inner worlds. Huysmans, Toulouse-Lautrec, Rodin, Yeats and Symons were only a few of her symbolist admirers; Yeats probably had her *La Danse de feu* in mind with its virtual flames that enveloped the dancer when he wrote in *Byzantium*: "Dying into a dance,/ An agony of trance,/ An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve."⁴¹ For the symbolists, Fuller's art demonstrated how the dancer's movement alone can theatricalize space and control the perception of time. On this "liberated stage," the dancer's presence can serve to purify the stage space and endow it with the promise of

³⁹Stéphane Mallarmé, "Autre étude de danse," quoted in Frank Kermode, "Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev," 155.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹William Butler Yeats, *Byzantium* in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 244.

transformation.

In the following chapters several collaborative projects realized by symbolist playwrights and early modern dancers will be studied in detail, and the interactions among these figures offers a context to study further the interrelationship of theatre and dance during this period. Since the balance of creative influence in production varies greatly among playwrights, designers, composers, directors, dancers and choreographers, the dynamics of collaborative work to enrich or compromise a project will also be an important component. As collaborative projects each of these pieces is dependant on production to attain its full effect and meaning, and therefore the original performance histories are studied to elucidate the complex and unique nature of these works.

Chapter One: *W. B. Yeats and Michio Ito*

Though they could not know it at the time, Yeats and Ito were astonishingly well-suited to one another as collaborative artists when they began their friendship in 1915. Ito's emphasis on distillation of emotion, inner concentration and the symbolic use of gesture and space were very similar to Yeats's concerns for aesthetic distance and spiritual significance. Each evolved new forms which were based on highly original syntheses of Japanese and Western techniques. For both Ito and Yeats, the development and production of *At the Hawk's Well* became a landmark experience.

I. *Yeats and the Resurrection of the Body*

Images of dance and dancers were central to Yeats over the course of his career. In his poetry and plays, dance can denote visionary and erotic experiences, physical vitality and the generation of life; it is allied with magic and intuition, and it can metaphorically depict the creation of art. Yeats's use of dance as a thematic and poetic image has been studied at length by several critics.¹ More pertinent for this chapter, is Yeats's attraction to dance from the dramaturgical point of view of playwright and director of his own work. The evolution Yeats's sense of what dance is and what it could achieve needs to be seen within a wider definition of dance that includes his experiments with movement, pattern and rhythm. Certainly Yeats's discovery of the Noh was the capstone to his search for a dance-theatre form, but the Noh and his first collaboration with a professional dancer became important to Yeats largely by virtue of their relationship with his previous experiments with acting, movement and design.

¹See especially Irena Janicka-Swidorska, *Dance in Drama* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu, 1992), and John Clinton Vickers, "Image into Symbol: The Evolution of the Dance in the Poetry and Drama of W. B. Yeats," PhD dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1974.

As a writer whose first reputation was made as a poet of intense lyric verse, it is ironic that Yeats in his last play would parody his shift from an almost non-physical theatre to a theatre largely dependent on movement and dance. "I wanted a dance because where there are no words there is less to spoil,"² the Old Man (Yeats's thinly veiled alter-ego) explains, as if the problem had only been to find talented speakers of verse. But indeed, this was partially the case. One of Yeats's first attractions to the theatre was as a place where lovers of poetry could hear verse expertly spoken, as he stated in 1898:

Some day the few among us who care for poetry more than any temporal thing, and who believe that its delights cannot be perfect when we read it alone in our rooms and long for one to share its delights, but that they might be perfect in the theatre, when we share them friend with friend, lover with beloved, will persuade a few idealists to seek out the lost art of speaking, and seek out ourselves the lost art, that is perhaps nearest of all arts to eternity, the subtle art of listening.³

What Yeats soon discovered was the problem of realizing poetic images materially onstage: while poetry projected onto the mind's eye, the theatre had to engage the physical eye, and it did this through an often competing group of media, of which the text was only one element. Hence, Yeats's early experiments tended to revolve around the problem of making the stage a place for poetry and eliminating "unnecessary" visual distractions from conventional scenery and movement.

In Yeats's first published play, *The Island of Statues* (1884), Colin sings of the beauty of his shepherdess, and associates her beauty with dancing:

Oh, more dark thy gleaming hair is
Than the peeping pansy's face,
And thine eyes more bright than faery's,
Dancing in some moony place,

²W.B. Yeats, *The Death of Cuchulain*, in *The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 439.

³W. B. Yeats, "The Return of Ulysses," (1896) in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Collier Books, 1968), 199.

And thy neck's a poised lily,⁴

She is like an image from a Pre-Raphaelite painting, and the dance here is not a stage action but a decorative image alluding to a scene or tableaux. Yeats wrote that while he was studying at the Metropolitan School of Art he "longed for pattern, for pre-Raphaelitism, for an art allied to poetry."⁵ The Pre-Raphaelites often took their subjects from literature and several of the most prominent were poet-artists working in the tradition of William Blake. Asserting that "our art of the stage is the art of making a succession of pictures,"⁶ Yeats began early in his career as a playwright to investigate how poetry could interact with other arts of the theatre. Although the Pre-Raphaelites created paintings and portraits with specific subjects, Yeats was most drawn to the flat, two-dimensional, stylized elements of their work, and the remote and timeless qualities they evoked. About his play *The Shadowy Waters*, Yeats explained that "The whole picture as it were moves together—sky and sea and cloud are as it were actors."⁷ In a letter to Sturge Moore, accompanied by his Yeats's own drawings, he further emphasizes his ideas for pattern and color:

The play is dreamy and dim and the colours should be the same—(say) a blue-green sail against an indigo-blue blackcloth...The persons in blue and green with some copper ornaments...The whole will be kept dim and mysterious, like the waters themselves.⁸

As Elizabeth Loizeaux has pointed out, Yeats imagined his early stage pictures as

⁴W. B. Yeats, *The Island of Statues*, in *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 1226.

⁵W. B. Yeats, *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), 54.

⁶W. B. Yeats, "At Stratford-on-Avon," (1901) in *Essays and Introductions*, 99.

⁷W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, edited by Allan Wade (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 425.

⁸W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore, *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence 1901-1937*, edited by Ursula Bridge (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 7.

paintings and associated them with the works he admired, first those of his father, J. B. Yeats, and later especially those of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and William Morris. He often saw Pre-Raphaelite paintings as frozen moments of drama, and sometimes worked from favorite paintings when writing plays.⁹

From Yeats's point of view, the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite school were a compelling example of a modernist art that acknowledged its conventions, very unlike the current dominant style of realistic illusion in the theatre. One prime goal of realism was to offer the audience a believable extension of their own world, to bridge the distance between the audience's experience and the world of the play. Yeats however wanted to stage a world of dreams and imagination remote from the ills of modern society, where audiences learned "from the life of crowded cities to live upon the surface of life" and, in the theatre, where "managers learned to substitute meretricious landscapes, painted upon wood and canvas, for the descriptions of poetry."¹⁰ Believing that his plays were "not drama, but the ritual of a lost faith,"¹¹ Yeats sought to draw his audience into those "deeps of the mind," the collective, archetypal experiences that give his art a quasi-religious function. In order to maintain the aesthetic distance necessary for his visions, Yeats saw in the Pre-Raphaelites's use of pattern and rhythm a non-mimetic way to create that distance while holding the audience's attention. "Pattern and rhythm are the road to open symbolism," writes Yeats in 1898, "Subject pictures no longer interest us while pictures with patterns and rhythms of colour...interest us extremely."¹² Pattern and rhythm are shared elements of both poetry and the visual arts, as well of music and dance, and this continuity helped Yeats to

⁹Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, *Yeats and the Visual Arts* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 89.

¹⁰W. B. Yeats, "The Theatre," (1899) in *Essays and Introductions*, 166, 169.

¹¹W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: *Their Correspondence 1901-1937*, 156.

¹²W. B. Yeats, *Memoirs*, edited by Denis Donoghue (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 283.

work towards his dream of a poetic theatre.

While he retained an idealism about the amateur, Yeats conceded that “one must get one’s actors, and perhaps one’s scenery, from the theatre of commerce.”¹³ With the founding of the Irish National Theatre, Yeats launched a program of reshaping theatrical conventions to support his ideal of poetic theatre. In several essays of this period, especially “The Reform of the Theatre” (1903) and “The Play, the Player and the Scene” (1904), Yeats comprehensively outlines the basis for his reforms: “I think the theatre must be reformed in its plays, its speaking, its acting, and its scenery. That is to say, I think there is nothing good about it at present.”¹⁴ In order to make the theater “a place of intellectual excitement,” a poetic theatre must “restore words to their sovereignty”¹⁵ and reject work that is meant only to catch the eye while allowing the mind to sleep. What pervades these reforms is his interest in experimenting with patterns and rhythms inherent in the theatre’s constituent media. Rhythm and pattern were especially important for Yeats because they connected the arts to their origin in ritual and spiritual experience:

The purpose of rhythm...is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols.¹⁶

Yeats’s goal in reforming the speaking of verse was to reject all mechanically applied techniques and instead to find ways to make audible the patterns and rhythms particular to a specific text. He urged that

The actor should understand how so to discriminate cadence from cadence, and

¹³W. B. Yeats, “The Theatre,” in *Essays and Introductions*, 170.

¹⁴W. B. Yeats, “The Reform of the Theatre,” (1903) in *Explorations* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 107.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁶W. B. Yeats, “The Symbolism of Poetry,” (1900) in *Essays and Introductions*, 159.

so to cherish the musical lineaments of verse or prose that he delights the ear with a continually varied music.¹⁷

Through his experiments with the musicologist Arnold Dolmetsch and the actress Florence Farr in speaking verse to a standardized scale, Yeats hoped to rediscover methods employed by the bards of ancient Greece and Ireland, and to develop a technique whereby actors could discover the melodic pattern to which a playwright composed a text, instead of applying an "accidental variety" of pitch and rhythm shaped by the actor's mannerisms or personal emotion.¹⁸ In his experiments with speech, rhythm and pitch, Yeats was working in a vein not dissimilar from Dalcroze's attempts to help performers to internalize and visualize musical rhythm.

For scenic reform, Yeats admonished that "You must make the stage a background for your players, but you must get your effects from simple decorative form and decorative colour."¹⁹ This patterning created distance, contends Yeats: "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 faeryland do we carry it."²⁰ Scenery should not be realized in the manner of what Yeats terms realistic "easel painting," but with the stylized backgrounds of "portrait painting," showing "an even or almost even surface whereon the players are outlined clearly that we may see their movements and feel their importance."²¹ Yeats recommends that the actor be contrasted visually from the background, his "outline should be clear and not broken...or lost into the edges of

¹⁷W. B. Yeats, "The Reform of the Theatre," in *Explorations*, 108.

¹⁸James W. Flannery, *W. B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre: The Early Abbey Theatre in Theory and Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 195-204.

¹⁹W. B. Yeats, quoted in Robert O'Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds, eds., *Yeats and the Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 22.

²⁰W. B. Yeats, "Notes [to *The Green Helmet*]," (1908) in *Variorum Plays*, 454.

²¹W. B. Yeats, "Preface to *Plays for an Irish Theatre*," (1911) in *Variorum Plays*, 1300.

colours,"²² and notices that with groups of actors, "one gets much more effect out of concerted movements...when the clothes are the same colour," believing that the "simplicity which gives depth of colour" can make "the movement of the action as important as possible."²³ Although Yeats is at this point still thinking of the stage picture in mostly two-dimensional, painterly terms, he acknowledges the problem presented by the actor "who belongs to a world with depth as well as height and breadth,"²⁴ and who moves. Yeats sought the effect of a frieze in set and artistic concept, and was only beginning to figure out what to do with the three-dimensional, moving actor.

Without depth of field or choreographed stylized movement, there are few ways that the actor can move in Yeats's decorative theatre without destroying aesthetic distance. Yeats therefore had to insist on a style of acting and movement that embraced stillness and pose:

That we may throw emphasis on the words in poetical drama...The actors must move, for the most part, slowly and quietly, and not very much, and there should be something in their movements decorative and rhythmical as if they were paintings in a frieze.²⁵

Yeats only half-facetiously suggested in 1902 that he be allowed

to rehearse actors in barrels that they might forget gesture and have their minds free to think of speech for a while. The barrels, I thought, might be on castors, so that I could shove them about with a pole when the action required it."²⁶

This attitude towards the actor was undoubtedly a reaction against the excesses of nineteenth century acting styles, of Romantic histrionics on the one hand and a surfeit of realistic detail on the other. Yeats needs to employ particular actors, while at the same

²²W. B. Yeats, "The Play, the Player, and the Scene," (1904) in *Explorations*, 177.

²³W. B. Yeats, "Notes [to *The Green Helmet*]," in *Variorum Plays*, 454.

²⁴W. B. Yeats, "The Play, the Player, and the Scene," in *Explorations*, 178.

²⁵*ibid.*, 176-177.

²⁶W. B. Yeats, "*Samhain 1902*," in *Explorations*, 178.

time, he needs to abstract and depersonalize the actors's performances to some degree, thereby subordinating them to the intentions of his text. The issue is partly one of artistic control, as Jonas Barish has articulated as a theme of "revulsion" against nineteenth century actors:

Artists dream of creating something permanent, fixed, and exempt from the ravages of time, well-wrought urns and mosaic saints. Inert matter they can force to do their bidding; they can impose their shaping wills on it, stamp it with their signatures. But how subdue human beings in the same way, who have wills of their own?²⁷

Gordon Craig's answer was his now famous call for the gradual replacement of the actor by an "Über-marionette" which "will not complete with Life—but rather will go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in Trance."²⁸ When Yeats saw Craig's production of *Dido and Aeneas* in 1901, he was impressed with how Craig had simplified settings, utilized lighting and color, incorporated music and dance, in sum, how he had "created an ideal country where everything was possible, even speaking in verse, or speaking to music, or the expression of the whole of life in a dance."²⁹ Yeats asked Craig to dinner to discuss this new art of set design, and Craig wrote of the encounter: "If it had not been a poet, and Yeats that poet, one would have murmured: 'And is it only scenery you saw?'"³⁰ Yeats was remarkable for his ability to learn from others, even from the often irascible Craig who strove to preserve the mystery of his techniques:

I have learned a great deal about the staging of plays from 'the nativity,' indeed I have learned more than Craig likes. His sister has helped me, bringing me to where I could see the way the lights were worked. He was indignant—there was quite an amusing scene. I have seen all the costumes too, and hope to get

²⁷Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 343.

²⁸Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Über-marionette," in *Gordon Craig on Movement and Dance*, ed. Arnold Rood (New York: Dance Horizons, 1977), 52.

²⁹W.B. Yeats, "At Stratford-on-Avon," (1901) in *Essays and Introductions*, 100-101.

³⁰Edward Gordon Craig, *Index to the Story of my Days* (London: Hulton Press, 1957), 85.

patterns. He costumed the whole play—30 or 40 people I should say—for £25.³¹

Craig had produced *Dido and Aeneas* not as an oratorio, but as an opera, thus opening up opportunities for stage movement. Since he was working with a company of sixty, mostly amateurs, Craig chose to avoid complex movement and elaborate dances, and instead created slow, deliberate movements and poses to complement or contrast with the music.³² As reported by the contemporary critic Haldane MacFall, “no posturing actor took the limelight in order to show off his personality or advertise his necessity. The main scheme of the play...was never anything but the main thing.”³³ At this time Yeats was on his way to incorporating many of Craig’s ideas about scenery and costumes, but Craig was much further along in his experiments with the moving actor.

At first a lack of movement was expressive in its novelty and by virtue of allowing the poetry to dominate within a mostly realistic context. Yeats admired these qualities in the Irish National Theatre Society’s production of A.E.’s *Deirdre* (on a double-bill with Yeats’s folk-drama, *The Pot of Broth*) in 1903:

[The company] showed plenty of inexperience, especially in the minor characters, but it was the first performance I had seen since I understood these things in which the actors kept still enough to give poetical writing its full effect upon the stage. I had imagined such acting, though I had not seen it...³⁴

And A. B. Walkley, writing for *The Times* about the company’s performance in London, also commented on their stillness:

As a rule they stand stock-still. The speaker of the moment is the only one who is allowed a little gesture—just as in the familiar convention of the Italian marionette theatre the figure supposed to be speaking is distinguished from the

³¹W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 380.

³²Irène Eynat-Confino, *Beyond the Mask: Gordon Craig, Movement and the Actor* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 37-38.

³³Haldane MacFall, quoted in Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1977), 51.

³⁴W.B. Yeats, “*Samhain: 1902*,” in *Explorations*, 86.

others by a slight vibration. The listeners do not distract one's attention by fussy "stage business," they just stay where they are and listen. When they do move it is without premeditation...as of people who are not conscious of being stared at in public. Hence a delightful effect of spontaneity. And in their demeanour generally they have the artless impulsiveness of children—the very thing which one found so enjoyable in another exotic affair, the performance of Sada Yacco and her Japanese company.³⁵

Walkley apparently did not appreciate the high degree of technique behind Yacco's performances of Kabuki dances in London, but his use of Sada Yacco's dance company for comparison was prescient of the direction of Yeats's future, more stylized experiments with dance.

Yeats's call for stillness had other implications for his ideas about the body and inner life. Influenced by the occult belief that the unconscious could be tapped by keeping the body still, Yeats revered those

who follow the old rule [and] keep their bodies still and their minds awake and clear, dreading especially any confusion between the images of the mind and the objects of sense; they seek to become, as it were, polished mirrors.³⁶

The image of a still body as a mirror to the unconscious has resonance for symbolist aesthetics, connoting a border state of consciousness between waking and dream, living and dead. Stillness is not inert stiffness, but a balance of oppositional movements, heightening a sense of timelessness and expectancy. Even practitioners of the popular performance of Delsartian statue posing at the turn of the century studied "divine lines of opposition" integral to capturing the "universal truth" of the subject. Allied with stillness is the idea of the trance state, where the body serves as a kind of mask pointing to possession by multiple inner selves and forces. Yeats believed that true tragic art would bring his audience to "the intensity of trance."³⁷

³⁵A. B. Walkley, quoted in Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats*, 87.

³⁶W. B. Yeats, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, (1917) in *Mythologies* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 344.

³⁷W. B. Yeats, "The Tragic Theatre," (1910) in *Essays and Introductions*, 245.

Thus stillness does not connote a lack of passion, but actually a way of concentrating emotion and turning a character's focus inward. Yeats was very taken with Sarah Bernhardt and De Max in their performance in *Phèdre* in 1902:

For long periods the performers would merely stand and pose...I noticed, too, that the gestures had a rhythmic progression. Sarah Bernhardt would keep her hands clasped over, let us say, her right breast for some time, and then move them to the other side, perhaps, lowering her chin till it touched her hands, and then, after another long stillness, she would unclasp them and hold one out... until she had exhausted all the gestures of uplifted hands. Through one long scene De Max...never lifted his hand above his elbow...Beyond them stood a crowd of white-robed men who never moved at all, and the whole scene had the nobility of Greek sculpture, and an extraordinary reality and intensity.³⁸

By stylizing gesture and movement, Yeats saw that they could have symbolic meaning and intensity while still supporting the verse. He saw in these actors a realization of his ideas concerning the integration of rhythmic delivery and minimal movement. In addition, Bernhardt was a commanding presence who, as John Stokes observes,³⁹ learned to exploit a symbolist acting style in her middle and late career, taking on notable roles in *The Dead City* and *Pelléas and Mélisande*. Bernhardt's control of gesture and pose theatricalized and ritualized her acting of archetypal roles.

Although Yeats would not have been pleased with Bernhardt's displays of ego in her acting, he was fascinated with how the body could express what he termed, "personality." Starting in childhood, Yeats was preoccupied with heroic figures, and he ardently pursued athletics in hopes of overcoming his shy nature and lack of physical courage. As James Flannery has pointed out, Yeats's heightened response to physical action was to later find expression in the theatre.⁴⁰ By the end of the 1890s, symbolism per se connoted for Yeats an unobtainable spiritual art which could only be achieved

³⁸W. B. Yeats, "Samhain: 1902," in *Explorations*, 87.

³⁹John Stokes, "Sarah Bernhardt," in John Stokes, Michael R. Booth, and Susan Bassnett, *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse: The Actress in her Time* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 30-31.

⁴⁰James Flannery, *W. B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre*, 2-17.

when the real world was abandoned. "As for living, our servants will do that for us," Yeats quotes Axel's "supreme refusal" of everyday life. Instead, Yeats sought a symbolism that was still rooted in bodily life:

I am orthodox and pray for a resurrection of the body, and am certain that a man should find his Holy Land where he first crept upon the floor...Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from...all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories, and sensations of the body.⁴¹

Yeats realized that much of the theatre's power comes from its connection to human bodies and the audience's experience of body; dance only intensifies this dynamic. After his first collaboration with a professional dancer in 1916, Yeats would conclude that "expression is mainly in those moments that are of the entire body."⁴²

As Robert O'Driscoll observes, after the turn of the century Yeats became increasingly concerned with "personality" and the energy that emanates from a total person.⁴³ In 1906, he asserted that

An exciting person, whether the hero of a play or the maker of poems, will display the greatest volume of personal energy, and this energy must seem to come out of the body as out of the mind...I even doubt if any play had ever a great popularity that did not use, or seem to use, the bodily energies of its principal actor to the full.⁴⁴

Yeats's attention was drawn to this energy of the body in life as well as in art. Although he knew little about dance technique, Yeats was quite observant in his analysis of movement:

I noticed in the train, as I came to Queenstown, a silent, fairly well-dressed man, who struck me as vulgar. It was not his face, which was quite normal, but his movements. He moved from his head only. His arm and hand, let us say, moved in direct obedience to the head, had not the instinctive motion that comes from a feeling of weight, of the shape of an object to be touched or grasped. There were

⁴¹W. B. Yeats, "Discoveries," (1906) in *Essays and Introductions*, 297, 292.

⁴²W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 87.

⁴³W. B. Yeats, quoted in Robert O'Driscoll, "Yeats on Personality: Three Unpublished Lectures," in *Yeats and the Theatre*, 5-7.

⁴⁴W. B. Yeats, "Discoveries," (1906) in *Essays and Introductions*, 266.

too many straight lines in gesture and in pose. The result was an impression of vulgar smartness, a defiance of what is profound and old and simple.⁴⁵

The ability to move from instinct in an organic fashion was the key to acting as well:

I am watching Miss Nic Shiubhlaigh to find out if her inanimate movements when on stage come from a lack of experience or if she has them in life. I watched her sinking into a chair the other day to see if her body felt the size and shape of the chair before she reached it. If her body does not so feel she will never be able to act, just as she will never have grace or movement in ordinary life.⁴⁶

Yeats preferred the actor of "passion" who creates a role out of his personality and instincts, to the "character actor" who builds up a role externally through observed details of behavior.⁴⁷ Yeats values an art that comes from within, from "the expression of the individual soul turning itself into a pure fire and imposing its own pattern."⁴⁸ Yet the "fire" cannot be expressed directly but must be expressed through a "mask" or distancing form and technique to render personal emotion objective and dramatic. "All that is personal soon rots; it must be packed in ice or salt," warns Yeats, adding that "ancient salt is best packing."⁴⁹ The forms of myth, song, dance, verse and stage design can provide resistance which help shape personal emotion and create a dialectic between personal and objective reality.

Dance is a particularly profound "mask" for Yeats's concerns, most basically because it presents heightened bodily energies usually more directly than does acting alone, and because it embodies several central paradoxes. Dialectic poles of appearance/disappearance, mind/body, subjective/objective, and nature/art are all potentially inherent in the mask of the dancer. The dancer is continually disappearing

⁴⁵W. B. Yeats, quoted in James W. Flannery, *W. B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre: The Early Abbey Theatre in Theory and Practice*, 210.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷W. B. Yeats, *Collected Letters*, 549.

⁴⁸W. B. Yeats, "Gods and Fighting Men," (1904) in *Explorations*, 26.

⁴⁹W. B. Yeats, "A General Introduction to my Work," (1937) in *Essays and Introductions*, 522.

and reappearing in performance as the body in motion continually changes its shape in space, its motions framed overall by the beginning and end of the dance. Contrasted with this mutability of the body is the constancy of its form and the shared bodily experience of the audience. Hence Yeats's pleasure in finding in dance both "the pulse of life" and "the stillness of death."⁵⁰ The power of dance is inseparable from its physicality, yet perceived qualities of movement can be abstracted in thought and remembered long after the dance has ended, and movement ideas can serve to further enrich the physical effect of a dance. While a human body grounds a dance in a particular physical reality, choreography can create an aesthetic distance which denies the individuality of the performer. And as discussed in the Introduction, linking dance and poetry during this period usually effected a simultaneous embracing and rejection of the body by idealizing its natural, primitive connection to the world.

It would be misleading to schematize Yeats's experiments with dance into a clear line of "development" since his use of dance is inextricably connected to his experiments with stage space, differing levels of reality and abstraction, and the role of the moving actor. In his earliest plays, dance is used as a decorative image alluding to an offstage action, as noted in *The Island of Statues* (1884). In *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), a realistic folk-play with song and dance, the main character, a young peasant wife, is lured away from family responsibilities to Faeryland by a dancing and singing child. The dancer here represents supernatural power and anarchic freedom, but the actual dance is still a decorative elaboration on what has already been narrated; moreover, in Irish legend, fairy children usually dance. Yeats added the dance at the request of Florence Farr, who asked for a part for her nine-year old niece and, perhaps

⁵⁰W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, 87.

as Sylvia Ellis indicates,⁵¹ Yeats had been impressed with John Todhunter's plays which incorporated dances: *Helena in Troas* ("Its sonorous verse, united to the rhythmical motions of the white-robed chorus, and the solemnity of burning incense, produced a semi-religious effect new to the modern stage") and *A Sicilian Idyll* ("...as we watch them moving to and fro, and dancing their shepherd dances, something of their own innocence seems to sink into the heart...It was like a dream").⁵²

In Yeats's *Where There is Nothing* (1902), the dance is not redundant but serves to dramatize a spiritual state beyond words. After an unexplained jump of five years, Act IV abruptly opens its second scene with the main character, Paul Ruttledge, now a Franciscan friar, laid out in deep trance on the altar steps of a crypt under a monastery church, as several dimly lit friars slowly dance before him. This silent ritual is gradually interwoven back into the dialogue as the friars sing psalms in Latin, after which Paul awakes and proceeds to blow out seven candles, representing his visions of "getting out of the body while still alive...away from law and number."⁵³ All we are told of the friars's dance is that it is a form of prayer and a prelude to Paul's "heretical" preaching. Yeats writes that he revised this scene away from "rhetoric" and instead tried "to show Paul's magnetic quality...[his] dreams, mad reverie, and [what] detaches him from the things about which men are passionate."⁵⁴ Gordon Craig was intrigued by *Where There is Nothing* and wanted to produce it with "elaborate scenery" instead of the Maeterlinck play that he had been asked to produce.⁵⁵ Perhaps if Craig had directed the

⁵¹Sylvia C. Ellis, *The Plays of W. B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 268.

⁵²W. B. Yeats, *Letters to the New Island*, edited by Horace Reynolds (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 113-114, 116-117.

⁵³W. B. Yeats, *Where There is Nothing*, in *Variorum Plays*, 1131.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 1166-1167.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

play, the use of movement could have been consistently realized. Still, in both plays, the dances are not integral to the structure of the action, and the effects of the dances are self-limiting given the otherwise realistic style. Even though Yeats had been advancing scenic reform, these two plays were produced on conventional stages with conventional scenery.⁵⁶

More important for Yeats's future work in dance theatre than the inclusion of isolated dances in these early plays are two further experiments to theatricalize the stage as a three-dimensional space. Stephen Kern has well summarized the quest of visual artists of the modernist period to dissolve the division of positive and negative spaces in their work:

Just as in physics space was recognized as both constituent and active with atomic theory and field theory, so in art space was realized in two positive modes. Its constituent function was most explicit in the Cubist representation of the space between objects, and its active function can be seen in Van Gogh, Munch, Cézanne, and the Futurists, who depicted space energized by objects in it.⁵⁷

Space is no longer just a setting against which actors perform, but a potentially dynamic element that can be theatricalized.

As early as 1904, Yeats had the suspicion that he was insisting on "too statuesque a pose, too monotonous a delivery," and began to seek ways to "put vitality in the place of the sleep walking of passion."⁵⁸ Between 1909 and 1912, Yeats revised several of his earlier plays prompted by the chance to restage them using Craig's designs of screens, lights and masks. After meeting with Craig, and being enticed with a sketch

⁵⁶*The Land of Heart's Desire* was directed by Florence Farr, and performed at the Avenue Theatre, London in 1894; *Where There is Nothing* was directed by H. Granville Barker, and performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 1904. See Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats*, 17, 77.

⁵⁷Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 162.

⁵⁸W. B. Yeats, "Preface to *Plays for an Irish Theatre*," (1911) in *Variorum Plays*, 1299.

of how his screens could work, Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory that “we shall have a means of staging everything that is not naturalistic, and that out of his invention may grow a completely new method even for our naturalistic plays.”⁵⁹ He chose three plays (*The Land of Heart’s Desire*, *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Hour Glass*), produced them with Craig’s scenery in 1911, rewrote them, and then staged the revised versions the following year. Karen Dorn has analyzed these revisions with an eye towards Yeats’s changing concept of the use of stage space. She concludes that Yeats “revised towards a language that not only acts with the stage space, but grows from the movement within it.”⁶⁰ Craig provided Yeats with a working model so that he could experiment with the dynamics of the stage space and

‘produce’ my play while I write it, moving hither and thither little figures of cardboard through gay or solemn light and shade, allowing the scene to give the words and the words the scene.⁶¹

For the production of the original prose version of *The Hour Glass* in 1903, the scenery by Robert Gregory and Sturge Moore was symmetrically based on a single central focus, with the Wise Man’s desk and stool center stage, not allowing any movement from left to right, and cutting off any use the depth of the stage space.⁶² Craig’s arrangement of screens placed the desk in profile off in a corner alcove, in shadow, while a corridor of screens provided a pattern of arcs to help define the actors’s journeys through the space. Yeats saw in the movements of the actors the potential for a physical symbolism which connected with his imagery:

⁵⁹W. B. Yeats, *Collected Letters*, 546.

⁶⁰Karen Dorn, *Players and Painted Stage: The Theatre of W. B. Yeats* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984), 20.

⁶¹W. B. Yeats, “Preface to *Plays for an Irish Theatre*,” (1911) in *Variorum Plays*, 1301.

⁶²Considerations of the use of the depth of the stage in most of Yeats’s productions of this period is largely a theoretical issue since the stages he used were shallow: Molesworth Hall, the 1903 site for *The Hour Glass*, had a stage depth of only eleven feet, and the original stage of the Abbey Theatre had a depth of fifteen feet. See James Flannery, *W. B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre*, 256-257.

Motions are also symbolic...Going and returning are the typical eternal motions, they characterize the visionary forms of eternal life. They belong to up and down, to in and out.⁶³

An illusion of depth was further enhanced by Craig's setting of a second, adjustable proscenium arch upstage of the Abbey's permanent frame. In addition, Yeats rewrote the play in verse, and revised it so that the Fool "speaks" more in mime than in dialogue, especially in contrast to the Wise Man's pontifications. Craig suggested putting the Fool and the Angel in masks to direct attention to the allegorical, timeless action of the play. Craig's designs for the masks were not completely realized for the 1912 production, but Yeats used the Fool's mask soon after for his production of *On Baile's Strand*, and hoped that the Abbey would be "the first modern theatre to use the mask."⁶⁴ Most importantly, the use of masks during this period of revisions and restagings moved Yeats's stagecraft closer to dance by challenging the actors to make their whole bodies expressive, and not to rely just on their faces.

One other spatial experiment of this period is important for exploring the three-dimensional quality of stage space and stylizing character movement. Nugent Monck's 1911 production of *The Countess Cathleen* was staged in the style of a medieval pageant, using Craig's screens and also extending the Abbey's stage into the orchestra to create an apron which Yeats had long wanted. As Elizabeth Loizeaux observes, with the actors playing downstage of the proscenium line, entering and exiting the house in procession and dancing through the audience, the idea of a fixed stage picture was no longer paramount, and Monck and Yeats had to re-examine the three-dimensionality of the performers.⁶⁵ Monck, who had stage managed for William Poel at the Elizabeth Stage Society, directed several medieval and medieval-styled plays with the Abbey's

⁶³W. B. Yeats, quoted in Karen Dorn, *Players and Painted Stage*, 25.

⁶⁴W. B. Yeats, *Collected Letters*, 554.

⁶⁵Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, *Yeats and the Visual Arts*, 102-103.

Second Company, and was the director of the Abbey's School of Acting. Yeats had hoped that Monck could mold a younger group of actors whose training would be more attuned to his poetic and stylized theatre than to the realistic folk and peasant drama for which the Abbey had become famous. Monck left the Abbey after only two seasons and soon founded the Maddermarket Theatre, but he helped Yeats to further test and assimilate the ideas he received from Craig.

Yeats wanted to create a theatre of "ideality," one of ritual and poetry. His work at the Abbey had not achieved this and, after the experiment with the Abbey's Second Company ended, he left the Abbey until 1919. During the winter of 1913-14, Ezra Pound introduced him to Noh, and Yeats found in these plays a new set of conventions to work with in order to evolve a new form of poetic dance drama. Yeats's journey towards realizing the power of dance in his plays was one of experiment with the three-dimensional quality of the body in space, to theatricalize the total stage space. Until 1915, Yeats had not worked directly with a professional dancer, and movement was mostly left up to the performer, or minimized. Through his collaborations with Ito, and later de Valois, Yeats finds realization and further development of his ideas.

II. *A Certain Noble Dancer of Japan*

"I [saw] him as the tragic image that stirred my imagination," Yeats wrote of Michio Ito, "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."⁶⁶ Ito captured for Yeats the image of an ideal symbolist dancer who embodies and expresses thoughts through the rhythmic and intimate presence of his body.

Ito's family and early education encouraged him to respect both

⁶⁶W. B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 224.

traditional Japanese culture and newly imported Western ideas and art. Though Ito's grandfather was a samurai who opposed the entrance of the West into Japan,⁶⁷ his father Tamekichi studied architecture in America and was a friend of Frank Lloyd Wright. Ito's mother, Kimiye Iijima, was the daughter of a noted zoologist and a modern woman for her time. She loved to dance and may have provided Ito's first exposure to the art. Ito recalls,

Not only my father but my mother were a modern boy and girl. She was good at dancing especially square dancing. When I was little, my parents used to dance together in the yard...Their influence made me a dandy modern boy.⁶⁸

Michio Ito (1891 or 1892-1961)⁶⁹ was the oldest of nine brothers and sisters, many of whom distinguished themselves in artistic careers as painters, dancers, directors and designers. Senda Ito, aka Koreya Senda, staged and translated Brecht's work in Japan, and founded the Actors' Theatre which pioneered modern actor training and produced the work of new playwrights like Abe Kobo.⁷⁰ Yugi Ito designed masks for *J. B.*, Ingrid Bergman's armor for *Joan of Arc*, and masks and headdresses for *The King and I*, all on Broadway.⁷¹

Michio Ito studied piano and European-style singing, and had training in Kabuki, the traditional form of Japanese drama which combines dance and song, with the company attached to the Imperial Theatre. At eighteen he received the *natori* degree

⁶⁷Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito: The Dancer and his Dances* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), ix.

⁶⁸Michio Ito, "Memories of Things Past: *Hawk's Well*," quoted in Charlotte Ann Cervantes, "The Effects of Eastern and Western Culture on Michio Ito's Choreography," MFA thesis, University of California Irvine, 2.

⁶⁹As Helen Caldwell notes, there is some confusion about Ito's year of birth because of differences in Japanese and Gregorian calendars of the time. See *Michio Ito*, ix.

⁷⁰James R. Brandon, *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 168.

⁷¹Charlotte Ann Cervantes, "The Effects of Eastern and Western Culture on Michio Ito's Choreography," 3.

of the Mizuki School of Japanese Dancing, and started his own theatre group called Toride Company, directing several of its productions.⁷²

In that same year (1911), Western-inspired “modern” dance in Japan was only about to begin as Baku Ishii (1892-1962), credited as the founder of Japanese modern dance, became a member of the first class of the ballet school attached to the Imperial Theatre Opera Company under Giovanni Vittorio Rossi, the choreographer and ballet-master. One of the great revelations of Western-style dance for the Japanese students was that it was performed in time to music that was tonal and measured, unlike traditional Japanese art dance which is without a regulated tempo and never “set” to music. Studies in character dancing were especially popular since its music was more descriptive and its movements closer to mime. Soon after, Ishii rebelled against the rigors of “Danse Classique” and started to perform his own short “dance-poems” which were based on literary or pictorial ideas, and wedded to the form or content of the music. By the 1920s, the writings of Dalcroze, reports of Duncan and Nijinsky, and tours by Western dancers began to establish a modern dance tradition in Japan.⁷³

Thus, before Ito left Japan in 1911 to study opera in Paris, he knew little if nothing of ballet or modern dance. Ito was enthralled with Western music and aspired to become an opera singer as a way to utilize his talents in music, acting and dance, in a genre which appeared closest to what he had known as theatre performance in Japan. In Paris however he was soon disappointed that the study of opera did not include dance and movement:

In Paris, when they had asked me what I wanted to do I told them...I was studying singing and dancing, and they looked upon this as a somewhat crazy idea. They did not understand the Japanese method of approach...At [the Opera] I found the prima donnas hugely fat and the male singers often the same.

⁷²Shotaro Oshima, *W. B. Yeats and Japan* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1965), 45.

⁷³Sumio Kam'bayashi, “Modern Dance in Japan,” *Impulse, Annual of Dance: Dance and Education Now* 15 (1965), 29-33.

It was so out of keeping with the picture. We do not make such mistakes in casting in Japan.⁷⁴

Soon after his arrival in Paris, Ito attended a performance of the Ballets Russes at the Châtelet, and was so excited by Nijinsky's dancing that he remembered "feeling completely drained after the performance...having spent the whole night walking the streets, my head afire with new ideas."⁷⁵ Ito also traveled to Germany that year and, after attending a performance by Isadora Duncan, felt that he had "met human dance for the first time."⁷⁶ Afterwards, Ito presented Duncan with a gift of Japanese cloth and asked if he could study with her. Since she was on tour, Duncan arranged for him to study with her sister Elizabeth, but Ito's family persuaded him to stay in Berlin and learn German, perhaps with the hope of a diplomatic career.⁷⁷

Another major influence of this early period on Ito was his fascination with Egyptian civilization:

During my stay in Paris I constantly went to the Louvre Museum and found myself repeatedly going to the Egyptian room...After all the years of wondering as to what art really was, it came over me when I was in the Egyptian room. Art...was balance—a proper combination of the spiritual and the material. If there is perfect balance, then there is perfect art, which is eternal.⁷⁸

Other ancient civilizations had their hold on Ito, including Greece, China, and India, and

⁷⁴Michio Ito, quoted in Keyes Porter, "As An Oriental Looks at Art," *The Dance* (January 1926), 33-34.

⁷⁵Michio Ito, quoted in Ian Carruthers, "A Translation of Fifteen Pages of Ito Michio's Autobiography 'Utsukushiku Naru Kyoshitsu,'" *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 2 (1976), 32.

⁷⁶Michio Ito, quoted in Charlotte Ann Cervantes, "The Effects of Eastern and Western Culture on Michio Ito's Choreography," 4.

⁷⁷Ian Carruthers, "A Translation of Fifteen Pages of Ito Michio's Autobiography 'Utsukushiku Naru Kyoshitsu,'" 33.

⁷⁸Michio Ito, quoted in "As An Oriental Looks at Art," 33.

he often claimed that he had travelled to these “strange lands” in search of art.⁷⁹ This emphasis on the exotic was certainly part and parcel with current artistic fashion, and alludes to Ito’s occasional need to fulfill expectations of being an “Oriental” artist.

Soon after arriving in Berlin, Ito says that he read about a summer festival to be held at the Dalcroze Institute of Music and Rhythm at Hellerau, and went to visit the school. Dalcroze’s method, combining dance, music and drama, had an affinity to Kabuki that attracted Ito. Moreover, the school spoke to Ito’s pioneering and creative spirit since it gave him membership in an international and utopian community. He enrolled in the school as a full-time student in 1912 or 1913 and stayed until 1914.⁸⁰

Emile Jaques-Dalcroze first devised his method to teach music students about musical structure and rhythm, not only through listening and playing, but by training somatic responses in their bodies. Important for the development of early modern dance was his belief that “the body in motion is a direct interpreter of human emotions.”⁸¹ The study of music, “a great psychic force,”⁸² could help dancers invent their own ways of moving from inner sources, and free their movement from the imperatives of social propriety, imitation, or literary program. Rhythm, for Dalcroze, was a way of linking unconscious impulses with external form, it both embodied the

⁷⁹Recent information puts a major crimp on this itinerary. When Helen Caldwell’s *Michio Ito* was published in Japan in 1985, it included an additional chapter by Ito’s brother, Koreya Senda, who discusses Ito’s tendency to embroider tales of his travels and experiences. According to Senda, Ito never went to Egypt or India as he claimed; instead, he sailed from Japan on 11/6/12, docked in France on 12/23, and proceeded to Berlin by 12/28; thus Senda concludes that many of Ito’s Paris adventures happened in Berlin, or not at all. See Mary-Jean Cowell and Satoru Shimazaki, “East and West in the Work of Michio Ito,” *Dance Research Journal* 26/2 (Fall 1994), 12. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between the accounts of the two brothers.

⁸⁰According to Senda, Ito was enrolled at the Dalcroze Institute for one year from August 1913 to August 1914, about two years after Mary Wigman and Marie Rambert attended.

⁸¹E. Jaques-Dalcroze, *Eurhythmics, Art and Education*, translated by Frederick Rothwell (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 33.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 58.

spiritual and spiritualized the body. The overall purpose of this work was not narrowly pedagogical, but sought to

develop the rhythmic sensitivity of the individual, to develop hearing and tone awareness, and to strengthen the body and the will through control and play. The aim of the entire method is to build an entirely harmonious person, his understanding and his character together.⁸³

In the Dalcroze method, Ito found a structure to study the relationships between music and dance, idea and form, and a vocabulary out of which to create his own choreography.

At Hellerau, Ito would have studied rhythmic gymnastics, solfège, anatomy, and keyboard and dance improvisation. Relevant for the development of his own dance vocabulary, Ito learned a series of physical exercises that applied principles of rhythm, dynamics, breathing and tone to contrasting series of movements of the arms and feet. Dalcroze scholar Selma Landen Odom concisely describes the exercise of “stepping” of rhythmic patterns to connect musical rhythms to body impulses:

[Dalcroze] would play, and after listening carefully, the students would immediately repeat what they heard in movement, matching their steps to the duration and sequence of notes they perceived. Sometimes they would “echo” the pattern, moving in silence, immediately following the example played, or they would move in canon, making one pattern while listening to the music for the next one...The work to develop the sense of measure, or bar time, was formed by enlarging the basic arm motions of conducting...Experienced students could beat regular bar time with their arms while simultaneously stepping rhythms of great complexity; and when such exercises were done with fine musical improvisation, the combination seemed to become an artistic, integrated whole.⁸⁴

Other variations contrasted heavy and light movements, or alternating movement with stillness. Exercises could be conducted in a neutral manner, or with expressive variations which led to “moving plastic” or choreography based on more complex musical forms.

⁸³1910 Prospectus for Dalcroze Institute of Music, quoted in Selma Landen Odom, “Wigman at Hellerau,” *Ballet Review* 14/2 (Summer 1986), 45.

⁸⁴Selma Landen Odom, “Wigman at Hellerau,” 46.

While at the school, Ito could have performed in productions, and was certainly brought into contact with the lighting and stage design concepts of Adolphe Appia. The theatre at Hellerau was built according to his principles as a neutral, rectangular space, to emphasize the movements and three-dimensional form of the human body. No proscenium arch, raised stage, wings or act curtain separated audience and performers, and all stage elements could be moved or modified, stressing the experimental nature of the space. Although audience and performers entered the theatre through common doors, the spectators never intruded onto the formal playing area but, according to Appia and Dalcroze, kinesthetically responded to the proximity of the performer moving rhythmically to music and became virtual participants.⁸⁵ If Ito had seen Appia and Dalcroze's production of *Orpheus and Eurydice* in 1913, he would have witnessed a series of symphonic movement choirs—groups of singers and dancers symbolically organized to move in response to the musical structures of Gluck's opera. The set consisted of a formal arrangement of steps, platforms and drapes, and Appia's lighting was an important compositional element which gave the Greek-inspired poses heightened contrast.⁸⁶

It is impossible to pinpoint exactly when Ito created his own vocabulary of "Ten Gestures," but he probably started to develop it soon after leaving the Dalcroze school with the start of the war. As Ito left Hellerau for Holland and then England in 1914 and began to perform solo pieces, he probably needed to replace the discipline and structure of the Institute with a system of his own devising. He compared his gesture series to the twelve note scale as the basic building material for compositions. According to Virginia Lee, his former student and manager, Ito was teaching his basic

⁸⁵Mary Elizabeth Tallon, "Appia's Theatre at Hellerau," *Theatre Journal* 36 (December 1984), 495-504.

⁸⁶Isa Partsch-Bergsohn, *Modern Dance in Germany and the United States: Crosscurrents and Influences* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 8.

method in New York in 1918,⁸⁷ and Angna Enters concurs that Ito was teaching choreography based on his Ten Gestures when she studied with him in 1920.⁸⁸

Ito's technique concentrated on the arms and upper body. Traditional Japanese dance also emphasizes the head, upper body, and arm movement, and Ito subscribed to the Greek idea that these parts of the body were more expressive than legs and feet.⁸⁹ The basis for Ito's method was two sequences of ten arm gestures called "A" and "B," "masculine" and "feminine." As Mary-Jean Cowell points out, Ito's intent was not to gender restrict the movement, but to build contrasts between elements, and he expected his students to master both sets. Moreover, the majority of Ito's dances were created without specific male or female "characters" and were interchangeably cast with men or women. Cervantes well articulates the difference between the two styles:

In contrast to one another, the feminine creates patterns in space that are arclike and softer suggesting an ambience of lightness whereas the masculine creates an angular pattern in space alluding to the ambience of weightedness.⁹⁰

Satoru Shimazaki, who studied at the Michio Ito School in Japan and learned the repertory from Ito's student, Ryuko Maki, perceives the "A" style to be influenced by Duncan's work, and the "B" by Kabuki movement.⁹¹

Ito developed his system from Dalcroze's series of twenty arm movements, separated into two series, one "with expression" and "without expression." Angna Enters writes that Ito "told [her] of his study with Dalcroze...and how from Dalcroze's basic twenty-two gestures he had evolved a basic ten with which one could

⁸⁷Virginia Lee, Interview by Theresa Bowers, 14 April 1979, Cassette #1. Oral History Archive, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

⁸⁸Angna Enters, *Silly Girl* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1944), 109, 127-128.

⁸⁹Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 29.

⁹⁰Charlotte Ann Cervantes, "The Effects of Eastern and Western Culture on Michio Ito's Choreography," 6.

⁹¹See *Dance On: Satoru Shimazaki*, Interview with Billie Mahoney, 29 June 1989, 28 minutes, videocassette. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

express all the meanings of life.”⁹² Though the context of her remark is somewhat facetious, Ito’s system did provide him with a stylistic unity for his work, and he also used other movement appropriate to the themes of particular dances. Dalcroze encouraged his students to treat his exercises as a guide and to develop their own variations and concepts, and the similarities between the two systems are quite strong.⁹³ One distinctive difference is that Ito tended to use extended hand positions based on configurations resembling Japanese and Hindu dancing, with elongated hand and fingers held closely together.⁹⁴

Mary-Jean Cowell perceives that Ito’s approach to developing continuity of movement “requires the slow transfer of weight through the feet and sustained arm gestures.”⁹⁵ Pauline Koner, who studied and performed with Ito in the 1920s, further describes this quality:

His slow walking step had the dancer touch the floor first with the toe, pressing into the ball of the foot, down to the heel, with a slightly bent knee. He said, “You should feel as though walking in water.” He knew how to cover space with the effortless gliding movement of the Oriental, skimming along the floor without the bouncing and shoulder wagging visible in many dancers.⁹⁶

While watching masterclasses in Ito’s technique conducted by Satoru Shimazaki,⁹⁷ one sees that the students learn to move with a high degree of rhythmic precision. The dancers maintain the basic pulse of the movement strictly in accordance with that of the music while performing different rhythmic patterns with feet and arms, in a manner not

⁹²Angna Enters, *Silly Girl*, 108-109.

⁹³For a detailed analysis, see Cervantes, “The Effects of Eastern and Western Culture on Michio Ito’s Choreography,” 4-12.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁵Mary-Jean Cowell, “East and West in the Work of Michio Ito,” 14.

⁹⁶Pauline Koner, *Solitary Song* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 31.

⁹⁷See Satoru Shimazaki, *Michio Ito Workshop*, videotaped by George Lamboy, 11 May 1980, 110 minutes, videocassette. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

dissimilar from Dalcroze's "stepping" exercises.

This patterning of contrasting rhythms can give the movement a feeling of asymmetry, as Cowell has pointed out.⁹⁸ Ito often used music which had phrases of four or eight measures, and thus an Ito sequence of ten gestures would frequently end in the middle of the accompanying phrase, somewhat "out of sync" and giving the movement, although still tied to the pulse of the music, a separate identity. Ito's movement exhibits a blend of two and three-dimensionality which strongly defines the space it inhabits, as Cowell explains:

Directional variations of the gesture sequences suggest the influence of Egyptian, archaic Greek, and traditional Japanese art in the two-dimensional erectness of the torso movement. The torso twists against the orientation of hips and legs but it curves, arches and tilts very little...While individual positions have a two-dimensional design quality, the path of the feet changes direction as the torso twists. Consequently, both the basic gestures and the entire sequence achieve more three dimensionality, the figure interacting with the surrounding space.⁹⁹

Ito started creating a repertoire of solo pieces, what he called "dance poems," as early as 1912. These were short studies, in which music regulates and controls the movement. As Helen Caldwell explains, dance for Ito "is the music's idea rendered visible."¹⁰⁰ This observation recalls Dalcroze's belief that dance derived directly from music, and also the "music visualizations" of Duncan and later of Ruth St. Denis. As with Duncan, it is hard to know exactly how closely Ito followed the music in his choreography. Ito has said that

When I dance, the music does not accompany me—we become as one. Sometimes the instrument has the melody, sometimes I have it, and sometimes the melodies are intertwined.¹⁰¹

Ito didn't slavishly follow the music, since he often changed tempi and phrasing of the

⁹⁸Mary-Jean Cowell, "East and West in the Work of Michio Ito," 15.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 4.

¹⁰¹Michio Ito quoted in Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 98.

original scores to better serve his choreographic ideas. Still, music was important as a formal element, as Pauline Koner indicates:

Ito also had an exquisite sensitivity for delicate nuance in dynamics and phrasing. Although he usually had a basic idea and an awareness of structure, his dances were mood pieces, never literal. Choreographically he paralleled the musical line rhythmically as well as dynamically. At that time many of us did, since a conscious choreographic form was still in its infancy. The dances were very short, sometimes lasting only two or three minutes. Thematic material was minimal: one or two themes were repeated rather than developed. Some of his works showed a strong Duncan influence in their use of small skips, hops in *attitude*, and simple circular or spiral arm shapes...However, there were certain dynamics, sharp accents, that could only have come from his Japanese background.¹⁰²

Most importantly, music provided for Ito a conceptual framework which he felt identified his work with the artistic freedom he valued in Western art. Ito's comment that "I want to develop a system of composing dances the way a composer does his music,"¹⁰³ is not far from Yeats's yearning for the time when the theatre director "will be as free as a modern painter."¹⁰⁴ According to Ito, Japanese dance was wedded to a literary basis, performed to sung poetry or prose, or occurred within the narrative confines of Noh and Kabuki; while Western dance was free to be more abstract because the accompanying music allowed the spectator's imagination to interpret the movement for himself.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, Ito tried to present even his "ethnically" inspired dances as a blend of Eastern and Western elements to create a new, autonomous work of art:

I do not dance the legendary dances of my country as they are originally done in the East. I take the old legend as it stands. Then I combine what I learned in the East, and what I learned in my studies in Paris, Vienna and other European art centers, and blend them to make what I conceive to be a perfect harmonization. It is necessary for an artist to have...insight into human nature.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰²Pauline Koner, *Solitary Song*, 27-28.

¹⁰³Michio Ito, quoted in "As an Oriental Looks at Art," 62.

¹⁰⁴W. B. Yeats, "Preface to *Plays for an Irish Theatre*," (1911) in *Variorum Plays*, 1300.

¹⁰⁵Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 98.

¹⁰⁶Michio Ito, quoted in Madeleine Gray, "Eastern Art Spiritual, Western Art Material, Says Michio Ito," *Musical America* 27/6 (8 December 1917), 9.

Ito emphasized that gesture, movement, and form all should combine to create a central idea: "Is dancing Art? As long as it expresses an idea—yes. Nothing, however, is art without an idea behind it."¹⁰⁷

The "idea" is not served by imitative pantomime or spectacle, but by symbolic, suggestive use of gesture, and a distillation of the thematic idea of the dance as an image. For his early dance, "Fox" (1915), Ito separates the dance itself from its original idea:

I am a sculptor, for I work, and I work over each pose until it means what I would have it mean. If you cry "Stop!" in any place in my dance, you will find that it is a pose that means something...my fox dance is furtive and [inde]pendent and cunning and staccato. I studied a fox and his ways with a biscuit long before I worked out my dance. Then I went to a great hill in Hampstead and I made my soul into the soul of a fox, and so I evolved my fox dance.¹⁰⁸

In performance for this piece, Ito used traditional Japanese "melodies" played on the piano, and a mask designed by Edmund Dulac. As the critic H. T. Parker observed of a program which included several of Ito's dance poems in 1917, this was hardly a realistic sketch, but an evocative, if not hypnotic performance:

His dance of the fox, his one distinctively Japanese number, disclosed him bare-footed, in the mask aforesaid and in the dress of his country. Beginning in writhings like to the motion of an excited animal it rose to a frenzy of such movement, for the fox of the legend was the Pierrot of beasts, moonstruck into a delirium of the dance until ecstatic death stayed him. There was no questioning the vividness of Mr. Ito's dancing or of the imagination behind it, or yet again of his rare command of singularly rhythmical movement in which head, limbs and body all answer to a mutual beat...It would not be the truth to say that this short acquaintance with Mr. Ito's dancing disclosed it as a thing of beauty; but in kind it is graphic, fantastic, and in the play of poetized grotesquerie and unified rhythm, strange and stimulating.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 3.

¹⁰⁸Michio Ito, quoted in Harriette Underhill, "Michio Itow," *New York Tribune*, (19 August 1917), section IV, 2.

¹⁰⁹H. T. Parker, *Motion Arrested: Dance Reviews of H. T. Parker*, edited by Olive Holmes (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 258-259.

In addition to the "poeticized" and evocative qualities of these early works, Ito also created pieces of rapid and sharply defined abstract movement. *The New York Times* critic wrote in 1916 of "Pizzicati," for example, that

Here the dancer...so delighted the spectators that he was compelled to repeat a part of the quickly and accurately performed manoeuvres...It was most original and diverting and...largely pictorial, but contrived with more than ordinary definiteness to convey the impression intended by the dancer.¹¹⁰

Watching a 1979 reconstruction of the same piece, Anna Kisselgoff wrote:

It comes absolutely as a shock to hear the familiar piquant music from Delibes's ballet "Sylvia" translated visually into the sharp, even violent movements of the torso and arms that Miss Maki performed with such strength and concentration. Wearing a black-trouser costume, standing with feet apart and with a huge shadow of herself projected on a rear wall, Miss Maki twisted and chopped her way through the lilting music with a persuasiveness that shattered all expectations.¹¹¹

Helen Caldwell reports that Ito kept his face immobile in performance "so that personality was further excluded and idea enhanced" though, she adds, his face was "not without expression," but had an internal focus.¹¹² In Yeats's sense, these dance poems became for Ito a "mask" which distills individual expression into symbolic form. Unlike Duncan, Ito did not allow improvisation into his finished dances. Although one senses from photographs and descriptions that Ito was a highly charismatic performer, his choreography was not about personal self-expression. After Ito acquired his own company, he emphasized that he rather see his dances performed by others than dance them himself since for him dance was so strongly a visual art.¹¹³

¹¹⁰*The New York Times* (19 December 1916) in Michio Ito clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

¹¹¹Anna Kisselgoff, "Dance: Michio Ito Salute," in *The New York Times* (4 October 1979), in Michio Ito clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

¹¹²Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 69.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 85.

Sally Banes has termed Ito a "symbolist choreographer"¹¹⁴ which is appropriate given Ito's sense of dance as an evocative meditation. As Ito himself explained,

I try to develop in my pupils the capacity of symbolism...The symbolic dancer compresses into a few symbolic gestures the wor[d]s of a dramatic idea...giving spiritual interpretation to the visible and material significance to the invisible is the task of the artist.¹¹⁵

Ito's focus on inner concentration, and symbolic use of gesture and space make him the perfect dancer for Yeats.

III. *At the Hawk's Well*

In 1913 Ezra Pound began his project of transposing Ernest Fenollosa's translation notes into poetic drama. Fenollosa was a graduate of Harvard, and had gone to Japan in 1878 as a professor of economics at Tokyo Imperial University. He ended his career in Japan as Imperial Commissioner of Arts, having made the Japanese aware of their own heritage. He saved hundreds of artworks from destruction and helped to reinstitute Noh theatre into Japanese cultural life where it was near extinction. As Pound commemorates:

It may be an exaggeration to say that he had saved Japanese art for Japan, but it is certain that he had done as much as any one man could have to set the native art in its rightful pre-eminence and to stop the apeing of Europe. He had endeared himself to the government and laid the basis for a personal tradition. When he died suddenly in England the Japanese government sent a warship for his body, and the priests buried him within the sacred enclosure at Miidera. These facts speak for themselves.¹¹⁶

Moreover, as a scholar and a poet, Fenollosa provided for Pound and Yeats a model for combining Eastern and Western conventions. Although Fenollosa is not known for his

¹¹⁴Sally Banes, "Remembering Michio Ito," *The Village Voice* (15 May 1978), 86.

¹¹⁵Michio Ito, quoted in "As An Oriental Looks at Art," 62.

¹¹⁶Ezra Pound, "Introduction," in Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa, *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan* (New York: New Directions, 1959), 3.

poetry, he renewed a genre for other writers to explore, as did Pound in his *Cantos*. Though he was a respected scholar of Chinese and Japanese art, and the first major translator of Noh into English, Fenollosa was equally admired by Pound for his sense of creative adaptation:

In America and Europe he cannot be looked upon as a mere searcher after exotics. His mind was constantly filled with parallels and comparisons between eastern and western art. To him the exotic was a means of fructification.¹¹⁷

Given this precedent, it is no wonder that Pound called his own Noh translations “re-creations”¹¹⁸ or, as Earl Miner describes, a “poet’s translation,” which “bears not only [Pound’s] personal style, but also a good deal that is different from the original.”¹¹⁹ It is in this spirit that Pound shared Fenollosa’s work with Yeats by reading him his “translations” and talking over their significance for English poetry and drama during the three winters they spent together at Stone Cottage. “Yeats is booming in the next room, re-doing a lyric for his new playlet [*At the Hawk’s Well*],” wrote Pound, “He is doing an introduction for my versions of a few of Fenollosa’s Japanese plays, and I am highly honoured.”¹²⁰ In addition to writing the introduction to *‘Noh’ or Accomplishment*, Yeats proofread Pound’s work and made suggestions and corrections in the language of Pound’s translations.¹²¹

Yeats saw so many echoes in the Noh of his own thinking and

¹¹⁷Ezra Pound, quoted in Earl Miner, *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 23.

¹¹⁸Writing to his editor Pound explains, “I don’t put the work under the general category of translation either. It could scarcely have come before now. The earlier attempts to do Japanese in English are dull and ludicrous...This present stuff ranks as re-creation. You’ll find WBK also very keen on it.” See *The Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907-1941*, edited by D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), 31.

¹¹⁹Earl Miner, *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature*, 139.

¹²⁰Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound to John Quinn 1915-1924*, edited by Timothy Materer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 61.

¹²¹James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 204.

experiments with myth, music and dance. "I believe I have at last found a dramatic form that suits me,"¹²² he wrote to Lady Gregory during rehearsals for *At the Hawk's Well*. Fenollosa's notes on the Noh and its production were invaluable to Yeats, since Fenollosa had studied the form for two decades in Japan, and had been tutored by native actors and scholars. Yeats, who contended that "what attracted [him] to drama...is that it is a moment of intense life...reduced to its simplest form,"¹²³ must have been quite engrossed by Fenollosa's descriptions of the Noh:

The beauty and power of Noh lie in the concentration. All elements—costume, motion, verse, and music—unite to produce a single clarified impression. Each drama embodies some primary human relation or emotion; and the poetic sweetness or poignancy of this is carried to its highest degree by carefully excluding all such obtrusive elements as a mimetic realism or vulgar sensation might demand. The emotion is always fixed upon idea, not upon personality. The solo parts express great types of human character, derived from Japanese history...The drama became a storehouse of history, and a great moral force for the whole social order of the Samurai. After all, the most striking thing about these plays is their marvellously complete grasp of spiritual being. They deal more with heroes, or even we might say ghosts, than with men clothed in the flesh.¹²⁴

Fenollosa was equally suggestive in his descriptions of Noh dance which he saw as "the central feature" of the form:

This dance takes the form of a dignified pantomime. It is not an abstract kicking or whirling, not a mere dervish frenzy, but is full of meaning, representing divine situations and motions, artistically, with restraint and with the chastening of a conventional beauty, which makes every posture of the whole body—head, trunk, hands, and feet—harmonious in line, and all the transitions from posture to posture balanced and graceful in line. A flashlight glimpse across such a dance is like a flashlight of sculpture; but the motion itself, like a picture which moves in colour, is like the art of music.¹²⁵

Fenollosa further elaborates how the solo dance of the god-dancer "sometimes a human being, the hero of a dramatic crisis—sometimes even a woman," embodies the climax of

¹²²*The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 610.

¹²³W. B. Yeats, "Samhain: 1904," in *Explorations*, 153.

¹²⁴Ernest Fenollosa, "Fenollosa on the Noh," in *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan*, 69-70.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 63-64.

the play, and about the closing dance which, with the final choral song, "carries the mind beyond what the action exhibits to the core of the spiritual meaning."¹²⁶ The Noh employed a specific form of choreography which was highly disciplined, evocative and non-exhibitionistic. Fenollosa was also speaking of Noh dancers when he wrote that "the discipline of the actor is a moral one...He yields himself up to a possession by the character. He acts as if he knew himself to be a god."¹²⁷ When the Noh performer is so familiar with the role that he can perform it unthinkingly, it is said to possess him, subsuming his identity to the essence of the play. Yeats had found a form that was based on the total regulation of external expression and which could "mask" the performer.

The Noh was like an "anti-theatre" placed next to the commercial theatre of his day, and Yeats saw the form as a way to escape the "theatre business," as Pound informed his father:

He has done a new play of his own on the Noh model, and is preparing a new dramatic movement, plays which won't need a stage, and which won't need a thousand people for 150 nights to pay the expenses of production. His play and a brief skit of mine will be done in Lady Cunard's big room, in, I suppose, April...Yeats seems to expect the new drama to do something, at least there will be no compromise, actors will wear masks, scenery will be mostly imagined, at most a cloth or a screen, and the dominion of Belasco...will no longer be coterminous with the known and inhabitable world.¹²⁸

The form offered a way to impose new disciplines and at the same time to avoid the mere pursuit of novelty. Yeats yearned for the stability and dignity of tradition, and in the Noh found an unbroken line of some five hundred years of theatre practice. He hoped that he might hand down a new form to succeeding generations, one that could recreate onstage the glories of the Irish past and an aristocratic social order:

¹²⁶Ibid., 68-69.

¹²⁷Ibid., 71.

¹²⁸Ezra Pound, quoted in James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage*, 205.

I thought to create that sensuous, musical vocabulary, and not for myself only, but that I might leave it to later Irish poets, much as a medieval Japanese painter left his style as an inheritance to his family, and I was careful to use a traditional manner and matter.¹²⁹

Synge, Lady Gregory and O'Casey had developed an Irish drama from the prose tradition of the realistic English stage, but Yeats sought more distant models. While rehearsing *At the Hawk's Well*, the first of what were to become his *Plays for Dancers*, Yeats enthusiastically declared that he had "invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect, and symbolic, and having no need of mob or Press to pay its way—an aristocratic form."¹³⁰ That he chose the verb "invented" is salient since Yeats never set out to reproduce the Noh form or its specifically determined choreography anymore than he wanted to cast his retellings of Irish legend into Gaelic. Yeats was quick to perceive the essences of various art forms, and thus the Noh provided a point of departure. Like Ito, Yeats was combining Eastern and Western conventions for his own purposes: he adapted an ancient Japanese form, but his materials and outlook were usually modern and Western.

Both Yeats and Pound were anxious to see something of the Noh before continuing with their respective projects, Yeats's play and Pound's further translations. Pound sought out Michio Ito whom he had first met in 1914 as a patron of the Café Royale in London. At this time, Ito had just arrived in London, and the Café Royal provided him with an artistic community and a place where he did not have to speak English. A friend, the illustrator Richard Nelson, invited Ito to dance at a private party at the home of Lady Ottoline Morrell in November, 1914. At the party, Ito performed what was probably a Dalcroze study to a selection from Delibes's *Lakmé*, "dressed in a

¹²⁹W. B. Yeats, quoted in Earl Miner, *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature*, 240.

¹³⁰W. B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 221.

marvellous eighteenth century velvet jacket.”¹³¹ In addition to Pound, Yeats and his friend, the artist and poet T. Sturge Moore, were in attendance, and Lady Emerald Cunard, who invited Ito to perform at the home of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith the following evening. Ito became the toast of society, and performed at Lady Ottoline Morrell’s Thursday evening parties until April 1915 on a semi-regular basis.¹³² He used these performances as a way to begin building a repertoire of his dance poems, yet one can only wonder what he did with “Yip i Yaddy i Yay” as Lady Morrell describes:

Those who came [to my parties] often dressed themselves up in gay Persian, Turkish, and other oriental clothes, of which I had a store. Philip played tunes of all kinds on the pianola, a new toy...Ito had a long, dark, antique type of face like a monk, and as he danced, his movements were marvelously beautiful. I shall never forget the dance that he invented to “Yip i Yaddy i Yay.” He would ask Philip to play a tune through, then think about it for a few minutes, and then start his interpretation of it, wild and imaginative, with intense passion and form.¹³³

Although Ito’s artistic goals might not have found fulfillment, his party entertaining did draw him into English society and to other venues, such as his “professional debut” at the Coliseum Theatre, then a variety house, in May of 1915. Headlined as “The Famous Male Dancer Michio Ito Who Has Created a Furore in Society with his Repertoire of Harmonized Europo-Japanese Dances,” Ito shared the bill with ballet dancer Adeline Genée and comedienne Miss May Whitty.¹³⁴ For his first performance in London, Ito was, not surprisingly, typed as a Japanese dancer, as he was well aware:

Because I was billed as “The Japanese Dancer,” I had to create a “Japanese” atmosphere. All of my dances were original however. I danced a programme based on a *shojo* [the tipling elf] and a *kitsune* [fox dance], and sometimes [I] even wore *eboshi* [a high black headgear worn by nobles in court dress which is fastened with a purple cord around their chin] and *nagabakama* [a trailing,

¹³¹Michio Ito, quoted in Ian Carruthers, “A Translation of Fifteen Pages of Ito Michio’s Autobiography ‘Utsukushiku Naru Kyoshitsu,’” 37, 42.

¹³²Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 40-41.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 37.

divided skirt for men's formal wear in court] as well.¹³⁵

Ito choreographed these "Oriental" pieces partly because they were familiar and because there was a market for Japonaiserie, but he strongly resisted being so culturally defined and limited. "In my dancing," he affirmed in 1917, "it is my desire to bring together the East and the West. My dancing is not Japanese. It is not anything—only myself."¹³⁶ Still, to Yeats and Pound, Ito must have represented to some degree an irresistible blend of artistic temperament with an exotic, aristocratic and statuesque nobility.

Pound visited Ito in the early summer of 1915 and asked him to help with the translation of the Fenollosa work, and Ito recounts their conversation:

After the performance at the Coliseum Theatre...I had a rest for about a fortnight, when Ezra Pound...asked me to help him with his work..."Just a moment," I interrupted him. "In my childhood, I often went to see Noh plays with my uncle, who was extremely fond of them. And my opinion is that nothing is more dull and tedious than Noh. I could never be your assistant." "You know better about Noh than I," answered Pound, "I want your help badly."¹³⁷

Since Ito had little knowledge of Noh technique, he engaged the help of two Japanese friends who had some training in the Noh style:

Together with my friends, Nijuichi Kayano, dramatist, and Taminosuke Kumé, painter, I visited Pound and Yeats. Both poets still wanted to hear a Noh recitation. And so Kayano and Kumé gave a recitation of Noh. To Yeats the feeling association between Noh and the new symbolic drama was exceedingly strong.¹³⁸

Not much is known about Kayano except that he wrote "new" plays in Noh style; but Kumé began taking lessons in Noh and Kyogen from Minoru Umewaka when he was in primary school, and he grew up in a large Tokyo house that had its own Noh theatre

¹³⁵Michio Ito, quoted in Ian Carruthers, "A Translation of Fifteen Pages of Ito Michio's Autobiography 'Utsukushiku Naru Kyoshitsu,'" 39.

¹³⁶Michio Ito, quoted in Harriette Underhill, "Michio Itow," *New York Tribune* (19 August 1917), section IV, 2.

¹³⁷Michio Ito, quoted in Shotaro Oshima, *W. B. Yeats and Japan*, 43-44.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, 180.

where his family and guests often performed.¹³⁹ Pound writes that

Tami Koumé had danced the *Hagoromo* before the Emperor, taking the tennin part when he was, as I remember, six years old. At twenty he still remembered the part and movements of the tennin's wings, which as she returns to the upper heaven, are the most beautiful movements I have seen on or off any stage. Tami knew something of Noh that no mere philologist can find out from a book.¹⁴⁰

Thus it would appear that this "recitation" could have included both the chanting of text (*utai*) and performance of dance sequences (*shimai*). In any event, Yeats came away from this demonstration with a very perceptive and fairly authentic impression of Noh dance:

I have lately studied certain of these dances, with Japanese players, and I notice that their ideal of beauty, unlike that of Greece and like that of pictures from Japan and China, makes them pause at moments of muscular tension. The interest is not in the human form but in the rhythm to which it moves, and the triumph of their art is to express the rhythm in its intensity. There are few swaying movements of arms or body such as make the beauty of our dancing. They move from the hip, keeping constantly the upper part of their body still, and seem to associate with every gesture or pose some definite thought. They cross the stage with a sliding movement, and one gets the impression not of undulation but of continuous straight lines.¹⁴¹

Yeats's perception of the importance of rhythm as the organizing force behind Noh performance is particularly interesting; he is already seeing what will be most useful to adapt for his work from the conventions of Noh dance. Since his Pre-Raphaelite days, Yeats had experimented with pattern and rhythm in verse, music, speaking and setting as a way to "prolong the moment of contemplation." With his exposure to the Noh and the writing of his dance plays, rhythm takes on more complex meanings and purposes.

Pound and Yeats arranged yet another experiment to see how Noh verse might find realization through dance. Pound wrote to James Joyce on 23 October 1915

¹³⁹Sanehide Kodama, "Pound's Early Contacts with Japan: 1911-23," in Ezra Pound, *Ezra Pound and Japan: Letters and Essays*, edited by Sanehide Kodama (Redding Ridge: Black Swan Books, 1987), 2-3.

¹⁴⁰Ezra Pound, *Ezra Pound and Japan: Letters and Essays*, 156.

¹⁴¹W. B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 230-231.

that

Michio Ito is going to give some performances of Noh dancing, in proper costume, next week...Proper Japanese daimyo dress reconstructed by Du Lac and Ricketts. etc. very precious...There is another pleasant [Japanese] here who plays a huge bamboo flute.¹⁴²

Dulac's biographer, Colin White, corroborates the event, and adds that Dulac used Ito's performance as "an opportunity to start an oil portrait of him in the exotic costume."¹⁴³ Pound translated five "dance-poems" (also Ito's term for his dance pieces) for this private performance in a Kensington studio, based on the notes of Masirni Utchiyama, who also recited the texts. One of them is titled, "In Enemies' Country Just After War":

Beneath the pale crust of the moon
My sleeves are drenched with dew,
Wind rushes against my face, I am cold.
I start aside from the big snake on the pathway,
Startled I draw my sword,
And slash at the old-pine-tree's shadow.¹⁴⁴

From Pound's account, it is clear that Ito did not perform authentic Noh dance, but his own interpretation of the poems's meanings:

Among the finest things Michio Ito showed us...were the sword and spear dances which were seen by only a few people when he performed almost privately in a Kensington studio-theatre. Each dance was in itself a drama in miniature, having within the few lines of its text not only the crux of a play but almost the form and structure of full drama, Mr. Minami accompanying on a weird oriental flute and Mr. Utchiyama's voice booming ominous from behind the curtain. Ito himself, now rigid in some position of action impending, now in a jagged whirl of motions, slashing with the sword-blade, sweeping the air with the long samurai halberd.¹⁴⁵

Pound declared that "Ito's dancing is a great success"¹⁴⁶ and, as James Longenbach

¹⁴²Ezra Pound, *Pound/Joyce*, edited by Forrest Read (New York: New Directions, 1967), 58.

¹⁴³Colin White, *Edmund Dulac* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 81.

¹⁴⁴Ezra Pound, "Sword-Dance and Spear-Dance: Texts of the Poems used with Michio Ito's Dances, from Notes by Masirni Utchiyama," *The Future* 1 #2 (December 1916), 54.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound to Alice Corbin Henderson*, edited by Ira B. Nadel (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 124.

points out, he learned from this performance that Ito's movement could express what would otherwise be explained by a consistent dramatic narrative, that the dance-poems "hold dramatic action within the resonant obscurity of the static Image...without reintroducing the 'prose' part of the drama."¹⁴⁷ Yeats dealt with similar issues as he wrote and re-wrote *At the Hawk's Well* during this same general time period. Curtis Bradford has shown that Yeats went through a process of deleting sections of verse in order to let the dance more fully assert itself.¹⁴⁸

Whenever possible, Yeats wished to see his plays performed before he completed revisions or published them. Perhaps for this reason, and since Michio Ito was available to him, Yeats arranged to have his play presented so quickly. A circle of friends and devotees of Noh plays in London evolved and became the nucleus of an informal production team for *At the Hawk's Well*. It included, in addition to Yeats and Pound, the translator Arthur Waley, and the artist Edmund Dulac, who designed the production, assisted with the staging, and composed the music. Dulac had recently become interested in Eastern art, he had illustrated a celebrated edition of *The Arabian Nights*, and had been commissioned by Maud Allan for costumes and sets for a ballet, *Khamma*, set in ancient Egypt with music by Debussy. His interests in the occult and symbolic dream worlds attracted him to Yeats, and his Pre-Raphaelite style and use of patterns and clear colors (especially blues) greatly interested the playwright.¹⁴⁹ Yeats began writing *At the Hawk's Well*, first titled *The Well of Immortality*, sometime during the winter of 1915, and by 16 February 1916 he and Pound were planning the first performance for early April. Yeats worked on the first of his *Plays for Dancers* from a

¹⁴⁷James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage*, 202-203.

¹⁴⁸Curtis B. Bradford, *Yeats at Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 174-214.

¹⁴⁹Colin White, *Edmund Dulac*, 53, 47.

scenario, then a prose version, and then worked through several verse drafts, overlapping with the three-week rehearsal period in March of 1916.¹⁵⁰

Richard Taylor has determined that Yeats based his scenario on *Yoro* or *The Sustainance of Age*, a play by Zeami which Fenollosa translated but which Pound did not finish for his volume. Taylor surmises that Pound rejected this god play (as he omitted all god plays from *'Noh' or Accomplishment*) because it focused not on a "sympathetic human situation," but on the "intersection of the natural and supernatural world as an archetype of universal order" and, most interestingly, because it depended to a great degree on "choreography and musical composition as paradigms of the emotion to be evoked."¹⁵¹ What Pound evidently regarded as problematical qualities for poetry, Yeats saw as an opportunity for theatre.

As Richard Taylor perceives, Yeats based his own play on *Yoro* only to invert the Japanese myth. *Yoro* centers around an Imperial messenger who travels through pine-covered mountains to question a father and son who have discovered the waterfall of immortality. Their meeting is a celebration of the harmony between supernatural and human realms, accompanied by a strange light from heaven, suspension of thunder, music and a rain of flowers. Where the Noh play is joyous, Yeats's vision is desolate and bleak. He transforms the ever-flowing waterfall into Connla's Well of Celtic legend which is dry; the lush pine trees become the stripped hazel trees. The father is now the Old Man who has given in to his human limitations, waiting fifty years only to fall asleep each time the waters filled the well. The son, now the Young Man or Cuchulain, journeys in search of the well only to be seduced away from the waters and his hopes of gaining their powers by the supernatural Guardian of the Well's dance. The Old Man

¹⁵⁰Curtis B. Bradford, *Yeats at Work*, 174-176.

¹⁵¹Richard Taylor, *The Drama of W. B. Yeats: Irish Myth and the Japanese No* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 120.

and Young Man, who in the Noh play are united as Father and Son and often speak together, are placed in direct conflict with one another in Yeats's play. Their opposition however is overshadowed by the supernatural powers of the mute Guardian of the Well who, when possessed by the god, reveals itself as the Hawk, and displays its seductive mystery and power through its dance.¹⁵²

In his essay "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," Yeats emphasized that each of the Japanese plays was focussed "upon a single metaphor, as deliberate as the echoing rhythm of line in Chinese and Japanese painting."¹⁵³ Yeats structures *At the Hawk's Well* around such a central image, the well of immortality, using a complex layering and patterning of rhythms. Several critics, analyzing this play from a purist Noh viewpoint, fault Yeats for inserting overt conflict or "plot" into this traditionally plotless form.¹⁵⁴ However, the central opposition between Old Man and Young Man in the play is not expressed through linear plot development, but through accumulating and contrasting the multiple rhythms of stylized movement and dance, chanted verse and instrumental music, which only serve to heighten the cyclical structure of the play and its emphasis on the telescoping of all times into an eternal present. On this level, the Old Man and the Young Man can be seen as two aspects of a single soul, sharing a common goal but torn by opposing choices of seeking comfort and security or of following the impulse of passion and heroic action.

In *At the Hawk's Well*, there are several simultaneous patterns of rhythm, the most evident when reading the play are the rhythms of the spoken verse which serve to express the narrative outline of the story and, more importantly, the shifting

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, 121-128.

¹⁵³W. B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 234.

¹⁵⁴See Okifumi Komesu, "At the Hawk's Well and Taka No Izumi in a 'Creative Circle,'" in *Yeats Annual 5*, ed. Warwick Gould (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1987), 103-112.

psychological states of the characters. Yeats's plays in verse written before *The Green Helmet* (1910) were written in blank verse which he "loosened, almost put out of joint" for *The Countess Cathleen*. With this first dance play, Yeats changed his approach, as he described:

When I wrote in blank verse I was dissatisfied; my vaguely mediaeval *Countess Cathleen* fitted the measure, but our Heroic Age went better, or so I fancied, in the ballad metre of *The Green Helmet*. There was something in what I felt about Deirdre, about Cuchulain, that rejected the Renaissance and its characteristic metres, and this was a principal reason why I created in dance plays the form that varies blank verse with lyric metres...What moves me and my hearer is a vivid speech that has no laws except that it must not exorcise the ghostly voice. I am awake and asleep, at my moment of revelation, self-possessed in self-surrender; there is no rhyme, no echo of the beaten drum, the dancing foot, that would upset my balance.¹⁵⁵

Curtis Bradford has analyzed the patterns of the Musicians's verses and notices much variation in the lengths of the lines, suggesting that perhaps under the influence of Pound, Yeats was experimenting with techniques of free verse. Throughout the seven versions the play took and into the rehearsal period, Bradford shows how Yeats experimented with meter, especially with shorter and less regular patterns of line lengths for the Musicians in contrast to the more regular blank verse used in the dialogue between the Old Man and Young Man.¹⁵⁶

The masking of the characters further emphasizes this universalizing and builds a contrast between two different degrees of abstraction: the faces of the Three Musicians and the Guardian of the Well are "made up to resemble masks" in a style similar to Kabuki, while the Old Man and Young Man wear full Noh-like masks and headgear, giving their figures a heightened, three-dimensional, sculptural quality. That the Musicians and the dancer wear make-up masks must also to some degree reflect practical considerations. It probably had some influence on Dulac's designs, since he

¹⁵⁵W. B. Yeats, "A General Introduction for my Work," (1937) in *Essays and Introductions*, 523-524.

¹⁵⁶Curtis Bradford, *Yeats at Work*, 190-191, 211.

had earlier designed masks and costumes for Ito's dances, most notably his "Fox" dance. Not without irony, Ito recalled that Dulac

was a very "Oriental" type; the masks he made looked Indian, and the Hawk's even looked Egyptian...As to the Hawk's costume, I wore red tights, my front was cream-and-black, my back dark brown, wings gold and head velvet. We made this costume at Dulac's house. He had done some research on Noh masks—the Young Man's looking like a Persian Prince.¹⁵⁷

The Young Man was costumed as an idealized warrior with features larger than life, and a helmet decorated with symbolic heads of eagles. His pale mask, as Yeats describes, a "noble, half-Greek, half-Asiatic face, will appear perhaps like an image seen in reverie by some Orphic worshipper."¹⁵⁸ A curved horn arched upwards from the mask's forehead, and his fitted tunic bore a circular motif of Celtic design. In contrast, the Old Man's dark mask portrayed a gaunt skeletal face with bulging forehead and staring eyes, surrounded by a wreath of white hair merging with a very long white rippling beard; his costume of mottled rags was bound together with linen strips, and make-up applied to his limbs traced the outlines of the bones underneath.¹⁵⁹

Yeats had earlier begun to explore the possibilities of masks with Gordon Craig, and credits Dulac with having "taught me the value and beauty of the mask and rediscovered how to design and make it."¹⁶⁰ The mask was already a potent symbol for Yeats of the duality of human personality, and an image for artistic form. With his study of the Noh and its use of masks, Yeats saw the possibility of exploring what he had termed "personality" rather than character. The Noh did not rely on realistic plots or characterizations, but rather on poetry, music and movement to express the essence of an action or emotion. The form subordinates all elements to the leading character or

¹⁵⁷Michio Ito, quoted in Ian Carruthers, "A Translation of Fifteen Pages of Ito Michio's Autobiography 'Utsukushiku Naru Kyoshitsu,'" 35.

¹⁵⁸W. B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 221.

¹⁵⁹Colin White, *Edmund Dulac*, 84.

¹⁶⁰W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, vii.

shite, and allows for much discontinuity of character: a character's speeches can be spoken by another or by the chorus. Yeats saw that he was no longer bound to tell a complete story or to motivate consistent characters:

In neglecting character, which seems to us essential in drama, as do [Japanese] artists in neglecting relief and depth, whether in their paintings or in arranging flowers in a vase in a thin row, they have made possible a hundred lovely intricacies.¹⁶¹

Yet Yeats chose not to take full advantage of the freedom from character that the Noh offered. He maintains two equal, contrasting characters, but not for the conventional purposes of conflict. The Old Man and the Young Man are mostly static figures except when they undergo supernatural possession through the Hawk's metamorphosis and dance. These are not characters who grow in meaning through plot development, but through the total theatricality of the piece, the audience is drawn into the world of these archetypal roles.

In the Noh, the mask is no mere disguise but determines the personality of the character, and Yeats attested to its importance by declaring that "I shall hope for a small number of typical masks, each capable of use in several plays...Perhaps in the end, one would write plays for certain masks."¹⁶² On one level, the mask enabled Yeats to universalize the particular identity and emotions of the actor, and emphasized the three-dimensional quality of the actor's movement:

A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player, or for that face repainted to suit his own vulgar fancy, the fine invention of a sculptor, and 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.¹⁶³

On another level, the mask also helped to integrate the actor's human form and motion

¹⁶¹W. B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan" (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 235.

¹⁶²W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, vi.

¹⁶³W. B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan" (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 226.

into the more abstract visual language of the piece. "The face of the speaker should be as much a work of art as the lines that he speaks or the costume that he wears," writes Yeats, "that all may be as artificial as possible."¹⁶⁴

Physical rhythm, especially contrasts between opposing kinds of movement, can be an even more important controlling power in performance than the verse. Yeats's stage directions, when they are detailed, help to define the kinds, qualities and tempos of movement and comprise a kind of beginning blueprint for the play's production as evidenced in these excerpts:

The First Musician carries with him a folded black cloth and goes to centre of the stage towards the front and stands motionless, the folded cloth hanging from between his hands. The two musicians enter and, after standing a moment at either side of the stage, go towards him and slowly unfold the cloth, singing as they do so.

The Guardian of the Well has entered and is now crouching upon the ground.

A Girl has taken her place by a square blue cloth representing a well. She is motionless.

The Old Man stands for a moment motionless by the side of the stage with bowed head. He lifts his head at the sound of a drum. He goes towards the front of the stage moving to the taps of the drum. He crouches and moves his hands as if making a fire. His movements, like those of the other persons of the play, suggest a marionette.¹⁶⁵

Yeats had earlier advocated a general minimizing of movement that was slow and rhythmical, as he did in *Where There Is Nothing*. But the major difference between a play that contains a dance, and a dance play such as *At the Hawk's Well*, is that the movement of the latter stylizes the stage action and its atmosphere in a more comprehensive and integrated manner. Yeats takes as his basic style of movement that of a "marionette" from what he surmised was the style of movement for the Noh:

The players wear masks and found their movements upon those of puppets...A swift or a slow movement and a long or a short stillness, and then another

¹⁶⁴W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, vi.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 3, 5, 8.

movement...At the climax, instead of the disordered passion of nature, there is a dance, a series of positions and movements which may represent a battle, or a marriage, or the pain of a ghost in the Buddhist Purgatory.¹⁶⁶

It is difficult to know whether Yeats uses the term "marionette" generally to indicate stylized movement (elsewhere he asks his actors to move "a little stiffly and gravely"¹⁶⁷) and to continue the effect of the mask to encompass the total body, or whether he also had in mind a more puppet-like quality of movement. Dulac's drawings show the characters in poses that accentuate the angular positions of their arms and legs, with extended and closed fingers; whether these kinds of positions were actually maintained by the actors in performance is not certain. From the text, Yeats calls for a prevailing physical style that usually separates movement, speaking and stillness, creating a strongly discernable rhythmic punctuation among these elements. Through repetition, several of these movements, like the folding and unfolding of the cloth at the beginning and end of the piece, take on a ritualistic quality and further distances the event from the close proximity of the audience. Most importantly, Yeats builds a continuity of movement through the play which corresponds to shifts in dramatic intensity, from the minimal, percussive movements of the Musicians who stand apart from the action, through to the climactic dance of transformation near the end.

The tempo of the piece is modulated mostly through the music which plays almost continuously. Dulac's music is sparsely scored for flute, harp or zither, and drum and gong. It consists of simple chords with superimposed fourths and fifths, over which a flute melody or a speaking voice is intoned; the Musicians are directed to improvise freely at certain points and to follow the action of the play. The look of the instruments is archaic, and the sound is remote and vaguely Eastern, not unlike the *Gymnopédies* of Erik Satie whom Dulac had known. Ito felt that the music was too

¹⁶⁶W. B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 230.

¹⁶⁷W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, v.

"Oriental" and rapid in tempo,¹⁶⁸ but Yeats believed that it constituted "an exposition of method, for it was written after a number of rehearsals and for instruments that have great pictorial effect."¹⁶⁹

Yeats makes an effort to give the Guardian of the Well a strongly defined physical presence from the start so that the climactic dance, though presented as a surprising transformation, really is prepared for earlier in the piece. A few critics have suggested that Yeats had no choice but to write this role as a non-speaking part because Ito could not speak English;¹⁷⁰ but taking into consideration the intended theatricality of the piece, Yeats only strengthens this role by contrasting it with speaking characters, and embodies the theme of the limits of language. Katharine Worth has aptly stated that

The silence of the dancer is one of the play's most thrilling effects...Yeats has wonderfully arrived here, in his own distinctive fashion, at the Maeterlinckian position where silence is an active and troubling theatrical force.¹⁷¹

Up until the dance, the mute Guardian is motionless and stares with "glassy eyes" at those who would invade her territory. The well and its magic water are connected to the Women of the Sidhe "who dance upon the desolate mountain." The power of the Hawk is first heard from the cry of the Guardian,¹⁷² and its image as expressed in the verse of

¹⁶⁸Ito had new music composed by Kosaku Yamada for his New York production of *At the Hawk's Well* in 1918 which overall is slow in tempo but has many changes of meter that approximate the non-congruent rhythms of Noh recitation. See Shotaro Oshima, *W. B. Yeats and Japan*, 171-172.

¹⁶⁹W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, vi-vii.

¹⁷⁰See Hiro Ishibashi, *Yeats and the Noh: Types of Japanese Beauty and Their Reflection in Yeats's Plays*, Vol. 6, *Yeats Centenary Papers*, ed. Anthony Kerrigan (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1965), 145.

¹⁷¹Katharine Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), 62.

¹⁷²Ito recalls that Dulac and Yeats went with him to the London Zoo in hopes of learning how the bird's cry sounded. To their disappointment, the bird, even when prodded by Dulac's umbrella, was barely vocal, and at feeding time, they couldn't distinguish one type of bird from another given a cacophony of calls. Dulac asked Ito what the Japanese word for hawk was and, this word, "taka," was chosen for the cry of a Hawk in the play. See Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 164.

the Young Man anticipates its imminent appearance:

It sounded like the sudden cry of a hawk,
But there's no wing in sight. As I came hither
A great grey hawk swept down out of the sky,
And though I have good hawks, the best in the world
I had fancied, I have not seen its like. It flew
As though it would have torn me with its beak,
Or blinded me, smiting with that great wing.¹⁷³

The Old Man cautions that battle will never vanquish the Hawk, and warns that "There falls a curse / On all who have gazed in her unmoistened eyes."¹⁷⁴ As the Girl is possessed by the Hawk, she begins to shiver visibly, as "the terrible life/Is slipping through her veins."¹⁷⁵ At the climax of the Old and Young Man's verbal argument over who should be first to drink the water, the Young Man gazes into the Girl's eyes, triggering her final transformation: she rises from her crouched position, throwing off her black cloak to begin her dance as the Hawk. The music sneaks in at the very start of her transformation, underscoring her magical possession and providing a bridge between levels of reality.

Although Yeats was enthralled with dance as an image, actual dancing was quite alien to him. He saw very little dance in performance and relied mostly on the reports of others, especially of Arthur Symons, the poet and critic who was also a close friend. There is no documentation that Yeats ever saw Loie Fuller in performance, but her image constituted for him the poetic ideal.¹⁷⁶ Even after the production of *At the Hawk's Well*, Yeats conceded that in the future

Should I attempt...to arrange and supervise performances, the dancing will give me most trouble, for I know but vaguely what I want. I do not want any existing form of stage dancing, but something with a smaller gamut of expression,

¹⁷³W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, 17.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷⁶See Ian Fletcher, "Explorations and Recoveries—II: Symons, Yeats and the Demonic Dance," *London Magazine* 7 (#6, June 1960), 46-60.

something more reserved, more self-controlled, as befits performers within arm's reach of their audience.¹⁷⁷

Ito's forte was indeed the "smaller gamut of expression," and Pound had observed that "the finer movements" of Ito's "Fox" dance and other pieces "were lost and almost invisible on the Coliseum stage,"¹⁷⁸ though his dancing of Pound's poetry was quite compelling in the studio performance. Ito was also the perfect collaborator for Yeats since he came from a tradition that took movement ideas from literature, and because his dance training had been eclectic and open to experiment.

For the Hawk dance, Ito devised choreography based on the rhythms of the music, the images of the Hawk from the verse, and his studies of Egyptian art. Ito's biographer, Helen Caldwell, studied with him for over a decade and watched as he taught the "Hawk" dance to Lester Horton in 1929. She describes this dance as

a modified Noh dance—tense, continuous movement with subtle variations on its monotony, inducing a trancelike state in both personages and audience—but its increase in tempo was more rapid than in genuine Noh and the arm movement was broad and smoothly dramatic, recalling Egyptian representations of the Hawk with spread wings and giving a feeling of a great bird's gliding and wheeling.¹⁷⁹

Since there was usually a close relationship between Ito's choreography and the music he used, some further clues about the tone and dynamics of this dance may be deduced from Dulac's score.¹⁸⁰ The dance music is structured into essentially three sections. A prelude, which starts from the Young Man's gaze into the Guardian's eyes and underscores the beginning of her shivering and transformation, is based on a four-note fragment of melody played softly by the flute in its lower register, accompanied by drone-like arpeggios in the harp, and repeated several times as a kind of vamp until the

¹⁷⁷Ibid., v.

¹⁷⁸Ezra Pound, "Sword-Dance and Spear-Dance: Texts of the Poems used with Michio Ito's Dances, from Notes by Masirni Utchiyama," 54.

¹⁷⁹Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 45.

¹⁸⁰W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, 93-99.

final transformation of the Hawk is ready to take place. During this first section, the dreamy, slowly rising line of the melody foreshadows the flight of the Hawk and its repetition and incompleteness implies a physical sense of stasis and waiting. In contrast, the gong brashly announces the revelation of the Hawk at the start of the second section and of the dance; here the drum establishes a strong upbeat accent in 3/4 meter, and the flute and harp reprise the melody from the first section, but more fully harmonized and elaborated with trills and "bird-like" accents. The second section becomes progressively faster and louder, though it is interrupted with two bridges which thin out the sound to flute and drum to allow the verse of the Young Man and the Musician to be given focus. The third section reflects the "madness" that takes possession of the Young Man, shifting its meter to a sharply accented 2/4 on the drum, and its melody and dynamics becoming more frenetic until the exit of the Hawk. The rhythms and phrasing of the music overall are simple, and Ito would probably have created his own, more complex variations in his movement.

Watching a reconstruction of his 1918 piece, "The White Peacock" performed by Ryuko Maki who learned it from Ito, one can see how Ito might have abstracted some of the "bird" qualities for the "Hawk" dance. In this somewhat satirical piece, the dancer is costumed in partial mask, headdress, unitard with feathery hands, and a long, trailing tail that elongates the bird's regal form. Travelling the entire space in formal, curved floor patterns, the piece is structured on repeated motifs: gliding and sweeping "wing" movements, and strutting, prancing steps. Yet the dance does not cross-over into mime; the choreography becomes increasingly abstract as the dancer's focus is progressively more internalized. In form, the piece follows closely the rhythms of Charles Griffes's piano music, and does not "develop" or narrate a story, but is a short

study of the peacock's struggle to display its vanity.¹⁸¹

Ito's Hawk costume, with his arms extended into the wing-sleeves with sticks à la Loie Fuller, gave him an expansive wing span; the black, gold and creme feather patterned headdress, and face and eye make-up, gave the impression of a fierce gaze and predatory beak. This is not an attempt to create a realistic-looking Hawk, but is rather more of a Pre-Raphaelite's view of an Egyptian symbol. The movement in this costume was further visually emphasized by a minimal background consisting of a muted patterned screen and plain floor, and the dance probably consumed most of the playing area. During the dance, Yeats positions the Old Man asleep on the ground, and the Young Man at first lying on the ground and then rising, but keeping a distance from the Hawk. Since the simple playing area was relatively small and had no levels, it would be important for Ito's figure of the Hawk to define the height of the space and not be in any way diminished in contrast to other standing actors. Moreover, the patterns and directions of Ito's choreography would need to take into account the three dimensional orientation of the playing space with the audience seated on three sides.

Since a "violence of passion" would seem "indecorous in our sitting-room," dance was Yeats's "mask" for the otherwise "disordered passion of nature."¹⁸² Yet in this first dance play, Yeats does not completely allow the final climactic dance to speak for itself. He estimates that the dance should have a duration of about three and one-half minutes, and during this time, the Hawk's dance is continuous with the reactions of the Musician and the Young Man's exit:

(The Girl has begun to dance, moving like a hawk. The Old Man sleeps. The dance goes

¹⁸¹See Satoru Shimazaki and Dancers, *Dance Poems of Michio Ito*, videotaped by Downtown Community TV during a performance at the Theater of the Open Eye, New York, on 7 October 1979, 100 minutes, videocassette. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

¹⁸²W. B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 221, 230.

on for some time.)

First Musician: (*singing or half-singing*)

O God protect me
From a horrible deathless body
Sliding through the veins of a sudden.

(The dance goes on for some time. The Young Man rises slowly.)

Young Man:

Run where you will,
Grey bird, you shall be perched upon my wrist,
Some were called queens and yet have been perched there.

(The dance goes on.)

First Musician:

I have heard water splash; it comes, it comes;
It glitters among the stones and he has heard the splash;
Look, he has turned his head.

*(The Hawk has gone out. The Young Man drops his spear as if in a dream and goes out.)*¹⁸³

Curtis Bradford has shown how initially Yeats could not quite imagine how the dance would convey the appropriate meanings, and simply noted in his prose draft that the "Chorus describes first part of dance."¹⁸⁴ But during rehearsals, Yeats must have been encouraged by his collaboration with Ito and he made additional cuts including this repeated song:

The horror of unmoistened eyes
Slips by me with side-long head
From stone to stone, or half flies
The unappeasable gray wings spread.¹⁸⁵

All in all, Yeats deleted twenty of twenty-eight of the Musicians's lines that described the dance, including this verse:

Keep me from dancing feet and terrible eyes,
Two feet seeming like two quivering blades,
Eyes long withered and yet seeming young
Keep from me—How should I bear those eyes.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, 20.

¹⁸⁴Curtis Bradford, *Yeats at Work*, 180.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 211.

The images contained in these lyrics are probably suggestive of the effect that Yeats wanted from the dance, and what he communicated to Ito. By overlaying dance, verse, and action, Yeats must in some sense become a director of this piece since the balancing and alternating of these elements in performance is crucial to producing an integrated whole. The verse gives the final dance section of the play a split focus, since the Musicians speak as outsiders to the action, and are closer in allegiance to the audience than to the other characters. At the same time, the abstract patterns of the dance and the music serve to retard the forward pace of the play, to suspend linear time, and to draw the focus away from a sense of plot or conflict, and into a subjective experience of the Hawk's supernatural presence.

Yeats was experimenting with how much of the text he could cut and give over to the dance and the visual aspects of the performance. Writing to Sturge Moore during that winter, he advised

The moment one goes into rehearsal one discovers, among other things, that the stage picture is so much more powerful than the words that there are whole passages which lose their weight. A shifting of the centre of gravity takes place and this involves minor changes. Then, I would secure for you that the words would be heard, and, what is even more important, that they should be attended to.¹⁸⁷

Finding the right balance between the intelligibility of the words and the visual power of the stage became an ongoing problem for Yeats in his dance plays. Parallel with the need for balance between words and other stage elements is the need to negotiate between states of inner life and external conflict. As Una Ellis-Fermor has astutely pointed out, although in a somewhat different context,

there seems to be a deep antagonism between religious emotion and the needs of dramatic art. Nor is this conclusion altogether unexpected, for the essence of religious experience is that union, which all mystics know in greater or less degree, according to their capacity, of man's spirit with a spiritual reality beyond

¹⁸⁷W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: *Their Correspondence 1901-1937*, 24.

yet akin to him. The mood, the condition of spirit, which is the climax of this experience is...a condition free from conflict within the mind and unconcerned by conflict without. And in saying this we have implied the elimination of that very conflict upon whose tension and balance the significant form of drama depends.¹⁸⁸

Yeats and other symbolist playwrights were engaged in creating theatre which substituted other kinds of tensions for conventional conflict, but her remarks still have a bearing on this play. Yeats chose a solitary, predatory bird often associated with death, as the image for the force which transforms the Guardian and possesses the Young Man. By way of rejecting a cover design by Sturge Moore for his volume, *Four Plays for Dancers*, Yeats identifies the hawk as an important and very personal symbol:

I am sorry for it would make a fine design, but don't nail the hawk on the board. The hawk is one of my symbols and you might rather crudely upset the subconsciousness. It might mean nightmare or something of the kind for some of us here. Life when one does my kind of work is rather strange...My main symbols are Sun and Moon (in all phases), Tower, Mask, Tree...¹⁸⁹

The Hawk is positioned as a kind of hieroglyph or secret key to the "meaning" of this play, and as such, it resists analysis; the patterns and rhythms of the Hawk's dance have no "logical" explanation but embody a symbolic power over the other characters. During the Hawk dance, the mystical power of the Hawk is theatrically displayed through Ito's dance, but the effect of the Hawk upon the Young Man, who is thrown into internal conflict with himself, is left mostly unrealized. During the dance, the Young Man rises as in a trance and, when the dance is over, "drops his spear as if in a dream" and exits. For the next few moments, focus is shifted to the Old Man through the Musicians's verses, and then the Young Man strangely re-enters to report that the Hawk escaped his grasp and that he is off to do battle with the "fierce women of the hills." For some reason, Yeats abruptly shifts gears and tries to project the Young Man's reaction to the Hawk's spell through external conflict, ending the scene with realistic sounds of a "clash

¹⁸⁸Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Frontiers of Drama* (London: Methuen & Co., 1964), 5.

¹⁸⁹W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: *Their Correspondence 1901-1937*, 38.

of arms."¹⁹⁰

During the three-week rehearsal period, it seems that several people had a hand in working on the movement for the production. Caldwell reports that Ito not only choreographed the "Hawk" dance and taught it to Yeats, but also helped to develop the movement of the other characters.¹⁹¹ Dulac provided sketches of the actors wearing their costumes, which suggested very definite body positions, two-dimensional and Egyptian in flavor. But not all went smoothly. Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory during rehearsal that

The play goes on well except for Ainley, who waves his arms like a drowning kitten, and the musician, who is in a constant rage. She says 'in the big London theatres the action is stopped from time to time to give the musician his turn.' I am going this afternoon to Dulac's to go on working out gestures for Ainley. They are then to be all drawn by Dulac.¹⁹²

Henry Ainley, a professional actor known for his Shakespeare roles with Frank Benson's company, played the Young Man and seems to have been an incorrigible mugger. Almost a quarter of a century later, Pound was still enjoying a joke with Ito over "Ainley's face behind the mask."¹⁹³ Alan Wade, later the compiler of Yeats's letters and work, played the Old Man, and the Musicians were Dulac (gong and drum), a Mr. Foulds (whose guitar was disguised by Dulac as a dulcimer), and a Mrs. Mann (singer and flute player).¹⁹⁴ "The Musicians are the devil," Yeats exclaimed on the day of his first performance, and he was resolved that

We shall not [perform the play] again until June in order to get rid of Ainley and the musicians. The music Beecham says is good but one cannot discuss anything with a feud between Dulac and a stupid musician at every rehearsal. It seems better to get very simple music that can be kept under control. I may even repeat

¹⁹⁰W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, 20-23.

¹⁹¹Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 48.

¹⁹²W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 609-610.

¹⁹³Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907-1941*, 336.

¹⁹⁴Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats*, 226-227.

the lyrics myself and have no singing and no music but gong and drum played by Dulac and perhaps a dulcimer or flute.¹⁹⁵

Once again, Yeats was caught between his original vision and its actual realization. From an artistic standpoint, *At the Hawk's Well* would probably have benefitted from more complex music, but given the lack of sophistication of his musicians, Yeats's choice was limited to simplifying the music even further to regain control.

Nevertheless, Yeats involved himself intensely in preparing for the performance and appears to have been renewed by the rehearsal process, "tired out with excitement of rehearsing my new play."¹⁹⁶ Ito remembered that "We rehearsed at Lady Cunard's. Yeats was wildly excited and said he'd never spent a more enjoyable week."¹⁹⁷ Pound stood guard prompting the actors during rehearsal and performance, and wrote to John Quinn that

Yeats[']s play has to go on...and I have some undefined managerial function which consists partly in watching W. B. rushing about a studio shouting "Now.....NOW.....Now.....Now you really must.....etc.....etc. I am a *TIGER* when I get to rehearsing." Enough for this afternoon.¹⁹⁸

At one rehearsal, Ainley failed to appear, and Pound stood in for him, playing the part of the Young Man. Yeats recalls that

A man who loves verse and the visible arts has, in a work such as I imagined, the advantage of the professional player. The professional player becomes the amateur, the other has been preparing all his life, and certainly I shall not soon forget the rehearsal of *At the Hawk's Well*, when Mr. Ezra Pound, who never acted on any stage, in the absence of our chief player rehearsed for half an hour.¹⁹⁹

From Yeats's point of view, since Pound was uncorrupted by the prevailing style of

¹⁹⁵W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 611.

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 610.

¹⁹⁷Michio Ito, quoted in Ian Carruthers, "A Translation of Fifteen Pages of Ito Michio's Autobiography 'Utsukushiku Naru Kyoshitsu,'" 42.

¹⁹⁸Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound to John Quinn 1915-1924*, 68.

¹⁹⁹W. B. Yeats, "A People's Theatre," (1919) in *Explorations*, 256.

“subjective” acting, he could realize the patterns and rhythms of the playwright’s verse and movement without inserting his own ideas of “character” into his performance.

The first performance of *At the Hawk’s Well* was intended as a dress rehearsal and given on Sunday, 2 April 1916 in Lady Cunard’s drawing room in London before a small invited audience of those “who cared for poetry”:

At the Hawk’s Well was performed for the first time...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.²⁰⁰

There was no stage lighting, just the general illumination provided by the room’s chandelier, the set was essentially the bare playing space with Dulac’s patterned screen to define the width of the space. The verse assumed the duties of conventional scenery and conjured up the images of the play, as the Musicians set the scene:

I call to the eye of the mind
A well long choked up and dry
And boughs long stripped by the wind,
And I call to the mind’s eye
Pallor of an ivory face,
Its lofty dissolute air,
A man climbing up to a place
The salt sea wind has swept bare.²⁰¹

The lack of scenery was no mere war-time economy; in the context of the intimate drawing room, expectation was placed on the performers to generate and embody the physical life of the play, as dancers are commonly expected to do for choreography. As Elizabeth Loizeaux further points out,

[Yeats] now wanted to exploit the three-dimensionality of the actors. Sculpture, the modeling of three-dimensional form, was the art of Yeats’s new theatre...When he began to use sculpture as an explicit model, he saw that because the stationary audience cannot walk around the sculpture to discover for itself the unfolding of the form, he would have to move the sculpture. The highly ordered pattern of dance maintained the artifice, but allowed the movement necessary to reveal form...The rhythms of painting gave way to the rhythms of

²⁰⁰W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, 87.

²⁰¹*Ibid.*, 4.

sculpture.²⁰²

Yeats was particularly taken with the visual effects of the performance and commented that

The masks have the most wonderful effect. They keep their power when you're quite close...The form is a discovery and the dancing and the masks wonderful. Nobody seemed to know who was masked and who was not...Those who were not masked were made up to look as if they were. It was all very strange.²⁰³

Paradoxically, the close proximity of the masked and stylized moving performers only heightened the aesthetic distance of the play. Yeats theorized that since aesthetic separation "was achieved by human means alone," Ito was able to convey the audience to a world of imaginative action, where he "receded but to inhabit as it were the deeps of the mind. One realised anew, at every separating strangeness, that the measure of all arts' greatness can be but in their intimacy."²⁰⁴

Among those "who cared for poetry" at the first performance was T. S. Eliot who later commented about his appreciation for Yeats's experiment:

I saw him differently. I remember well the impression of the first performance of *The Hawk's Well*, in a London drawing room, with a celebrated Japanese dancer in the role of the hawk, to which Pound took me. And thereafter one saw Yeats rather as a more eminent contemporary than as an elder from whom one could learn.²⁰⁵

Another guest recorded an opinion of this first performance, but not from the viewpoint of a professional writer or artist. Edward Marsh was Churchill's secretary and a patron of the arts, and he was quite perceptive of what was being attempted:

I had to go away in the middle which was wretched, as I was getting quite worked up and impressed. It's the beginning of an attempt to give poetic plays in such an inexpensive way that they can be done for quite small audiences—many of the conventions are taken from the traditional dramas...of the Japanese nobility. I find I can manage quite well without *any* scenery at all—but they had

²⁰²Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, *Yeats and the Visual Arts*, 107, 109.

²⁰³W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 612.

²⁰⁴W. B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 224.

²⁰⁵T. S. Eliot, quoted in Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 50.

been a little too careful not to disturb the room and I couldn't help being disconcerted, just when I had persuaded myself that I had before me a wild mountain tract of semi-historic Ireland, to notice the characters skirting round a Louis XV table covered with French novels. The actors wore masks made by Dulac, awfully good, and I found it quite easy to accept the convention.²⁰⁶

Two days later the play was given a more public performance in Lady Islington's larger drawing room in Chesterfield Gardens for the benefit of the Social Institute Union, a war charity. "All round the platform upon three sides were three hundred fashionable people, including Queen Alexandria,"²⁰⁷ recalled Yeats. In addition to the larger audience, the second performance used a platform to heighten the playing space and the play was preceded by a concert arranged and conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham, the director of the Royal London Philharmonic.²⁰⁸ The second performance certainly had more distractions and Yeats was not as satisfied with it, conceding that with this celebrity audience his "muses were but half welcome."²⁰⁹ Though, he did take particular pleasure in keeping out the publicity hounds:

We found a newspaper photographer planting his camera in a dressing-room and explained to him that as fifty people could pay our expenses, we did not invite the press, and that flashlight photographs were not desirable for their own sake. He was incredulous and persistent—a whole page somewhere or other was at our disposal—and it was nearly ten minutes before we could persuade him to go away. What a relief after directing a theatre for so many years...to think no more of pictures unless Mr. Dulac or some other distinguished man has made them, nor of all those paragraphs written by young men, perhaps themselves intelligent, who must applaud the common taste or starve!²¹⁰

Yeats firmly believed that his new kind of drama would only succeed with those who, through education or natural sensitivity, constituted an aristocracy of the arts. Although

²⁰⁶Edward Marsh, quoted in Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 49.

²⁰⁷W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, 87.

²⁰⁸*The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 611.

²⁰⁹W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, 87.

²¹⁰*Ibid.*, 87-88. Yeats's choice to photograph the first performance of *At the Hawk's Well* was Alvin Langdon Coburn whose work was greatly influenced by symbolism and vorticism. See *Alvin Langdon Coburn: Symbolist Photographer 1882-1966* (New York: Aperture, 1987).

Pound was quick to criticize what he saw as Yeats's confusion of artistic and social aristocracies in an audience comprised "exclusively of crowned heads and divorcées,"²¹¹ he judged the second performance as the better, "a success, Not right as yet, but [it] went much better than could have been expected from the shape it was in on Sunday."²¹²

Yeats was encouraged by the outcome of his production and planned on mounting more performances of *At the Hawk's Well* after he could replace the Musicians and Henry Ainley. However, within two weeks of writing to Lady Gregory about his ideas for his next dance play, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, he would be consumed with the events of the Easter Rising which began on 24 April 1916. In the meantime, Ito was offered a contract to perform in a New York theatre. "The war situation is gradually deteriorating, and you can't expect much of interest to come out of the theatre in Europe right now. America is still neutral, so I imagine it would be best to go there for three years," advised Yeats, "but please come back to London at the end of that time."²¹³ Although Ito wrote to Pound several times about returning, he never did.

Still, the creation of *At the Hawk's Well* marked a process of artistic growth and experimentation for both Yeats and Ito that extended into their future work. Paradoxically, only through working with Yeats and Pound did Ito come to study and fully appreciate the tradition of Noh:

When we started to work through [Fenollosa's] manuscripts it was my turn to be surprised. By that time I was wondering how anything that good could come out of Japan!...I only really understood the Noh after I saw the manuscripts in London."

And recalling his work on the production, Ito humorously adds that "it was lucky for me

²¹¹Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound to John Quinn 1915-1924*, 61.

²¹²Ezra Pound, quoted in James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage*, 218.

²¹³Michio Ito, quoted in Ian Carruthers, "A Translation of Fifteen Pages of Ito Michio's Autobiography 'Utsukushiku Naru Kyoshitsu,'" 39-40.

that I hadn't known anything about the Noh; if I had, it would have been a disaster."²¹⁴ The collaboration with Yeats served Ito as a kind of paradigm for how he could continue to combine Eastern and Western traditions. As Naima Prevots has noticed, Ito created productions of *At the Hawk's Well* each time he found himself in a new place: he staged the play in 1918 shortly after he moved to New York City, when he arrived in Los Angeles in 1929, and upon his return to Japan in 1939 in honor of his parents's fiftieth wedding anniversary.²¹⁵

As Ito embarked on his New York career, many of his dances were based on Noh themes, and through his association with several theatre companies including the Washington Square Players and Neighborhood Playhouse, he directed and designed several Kabuki and Noh plays. In July 1918, he presented *At the Hawk's Well* in New York with Dulac's masks, costumes and decor, but with a new score by Kosaku Yamada who also conducted a short concert of Japanese music. Ito repeated his role of the Hawk and two Japanese actors played the other roles; the American composer Charles Griffes helped Yamada play the music for the production. During August, Ito toured the East coast with a program of short dance pieces and Yeats's play.²¹⁶ In contrast, the Los Angeles production of *At the Hawk's Well* in 1929 was staged outdoors at Eagle Rock with Lester Horton in the role of the Hawk. Helen Caldwell describes the effect of the change in setting and scope of this performance in which she played one of the Musicians:

Although *At the Hawk's Well* was mounted with a far greater sophistication than that of the chandelier-lit drawing room advocated by Yeats, it still had no theatricality in the usual sense; the effect was poetic simplicity...High above the actors one saw in dim outline the jagged peaks of a sierra. All around were dark

²¹⁴Ibid., 35.

²¹⁵Naima Prevots, *Dancing in the Sun: Hollywood Choreographers, 1915-1937* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 181.

²¹⁶Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 65.

trees. And there was a wizard...behind the lights to give the scene the otherworld reality Yeats had sought. This new setting called upon the spectator's imagination, with its black night, the faint suggestion of hills, and light that seemed a part of the verse...Besides the chorus there was a harp and an oboe, and Ito played the drums and cymbals...Yeats would have been pleased.²¹⁷

Ito's work in Los Angeles later took on a larger dimension as he created "symphonic choreographies," large group works accompanied by live orchestra, and no doubt much influenced by his earlier work with Dalcroze, and the theories of Craig and Appia.

In Japan, Ito directed a professional production of Yeats's play at Kanda Military Hall (Tokyo) in December 1939 as part of a family gathering to honor of his parents's anniversary. Ito translated the play into Japanese and played the Old Man; his brother, the actor Koreya Senda, played the Young Man; the Hawk was danced by Teiko Ito, Michio's sister-in-law; the masks and set were designed by Michio and his brother Kisaku; Yuji Ito, another brother, composed the music and made the costumes.²¹⁸ The play was quite popular in Japan, and Ito and the students of his Dance Institute mounted several more productions during the 1950s. Yeats's play came full circle when it was adapted into traditional Noh form by Mario Yokomichi, under the title, *Taka No Izumi*, and performed at the Noh Theatre at Somei (Tokyo) in October 1949; it soon after joined the permanent repertoire.²¹⁹ In the Noh version, the Young Man becomes the *waki* whose function is to draw the story from the Old Man or *shite*, who plays the double role of the once young seeker of the well and the ghost of the Old Man; the Hawk's dance is performed by the *tsure* and occurs in an interlude between the two acts.²²⁰ Additionally, Shotaro Oshima credits these many productions of *At the Hawk's Well* and several other productions of Yeats's plays with influencing the Little Theatre

²¹⁷*Ibid.*, 85.

²¹⁸Shotaro Oshima, *W. B. Yeats and Japan*, 49.

²¹⁹*Ibid.*, 50.

²²⁰See Okifumi Komesu, "At the Hawk's Well and Taka No Izumi in a 'Creative Circle,'" 103-105.

Movement in Japan.²²¹

Yeats had on several occasions acknowledged that his first dance play had been “made possible by Mr. Ito’s genius of movement,”²²² and he understandably expressed misgivings about writing further plays in this form without the collaboration of such a dancer:

Perhaps I shall turn to something else now that our Japanese dancer, Mr. Ito, whose minute intensity of movement in the dance of the hawk so well suited our small room and private art, has been hired by a New York theatre, or perhaps I shall find another dancer. I am certain, however, that whether I grow tired or not—and one does grow tired of always quarrying the stone for one’s statue—I have found out the only way the subtler forms of literature can find dramatic expression.²²³

Through his collaboration with Ito, Yeats came to view writing and directing for the theatre more in the larger, formal terms of music and of dance. Writing in 1919, Yeats called for experiments towards

a stage for the whole wealth of modern lyricism, for an art that is close to pure music, for those energies that would free the arts from imitation, that would ally acting to decoration and to the dance.²²⁴

Ito demonstrated through his work for Yeats how music and dance were natural allies, and how many of the formal devices that music and dance utilize (recapitulations, cadences, transpositions, variations), could also be used to shape the theatricality of his dance plays. The Noh provided Yeats with a tradition and a dramatic reason to incorporate dance and movement in such a thorough fashion, but his theatrical sense and past production experience were also evolving his work in this direction. In some of his earlier plays, Yeats had experimented with patterning various elements, usually one element at a time (for example, of background, musical accompaniment, or movement),

²²¹Shotaro Oshima, *W. B. Yeats and Japan*, 47-51.

²²²W. B. Yeats, “Certain Noble Plays of Japan,” (1916) in *Essays and Introductions*, 222.

²²³W. B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, 88.

²²⁴W. B. Yeats, “A People’s Theatre,” (1919) in *Explorations*, 258.

in tandem with the patterns and rhythms of the verse. For a playwright who was so invested in the power of language, it was indeed risky for him to experiment with patterning almost all of the elements of a production simultaneously. By experimenting with patterning in all the media at his disposal in his dance play—verse, music, dance, movement, costume, mask, space—Yeats began to view language as one element among many, and one that did not always have dominance. In his next collaboration with Ninette de Valois, Yeats experiments with allowing dance and music even more latitude in shaping his work.

Chapter Two: W. B. Yeats and Ninette de Valois

After the first performance of *At the Hawk's Well* in 1916, Yeats continued to work on his dance plays and to serve as an advocate their form. In his major essay of this period, "A People's Theatre," Yeats redefines his concept of an Irish theatre and concedes that his current form of poetic dance plays did not easily accord with the talents and skills of the Abbey, which he had worked so hard to create:

I want to create for myself an unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many...I want so much—an audience of fifty, a room worthy of it (some great dining-room or drawing-room), half a dozen young men and women who can dance and speak verse or play drum and flute and zither...instead of a profession, I but offer them 'an accomplishment'...there are my *Four Plays for Dancers* as a beginning...I desire a mysterious art...doing its work by suggestion, not by direct statement, a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture, not space-pervading like the intellect, but a memory and a prophecy.¹

As Judith Simpson White has charted, at the time of writing this essay in 1919, Yeats had five dance plays in progress, three had been published, but only one had been performed. Instead, Yeats was involved with revivals at the Abbey and securing a subsidy for the theatre. After the Armistice, Lennox Robinson chose to reopen the Abbey with a patriotic favorite written by Yeats in 1902, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. In 1925 the theatre celebrated its silver anniversary with productions of *The Hour Glass*, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, and *Hyacinth Halvey*; it is ironic that after such a fruitful theatrical journey, Yeats would be represented by a work from 1903.²

Yeats therefore sought other venues outside the Abbey proper. When the Mechanic's Institute decided to vacate the house adjacent to the Abbey Theatre in 1926, Yeats was instrumental in having it renovated for a small, experimental theatre, the Peacock Theatre, and establishing the New Players, successors to the Abbey's Second

¹W. B. Yeats, "A People's Theatre," (1919) in *Explorations*, 254-255.

²Judith Simpson White, "William Yeats and the Dancer: A History of Yeats's Work with Dance Theatre," (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 1979), 94-96.

Company which he had organized under Nugent Monck in 1912. He hoped that the new theatre could provide an appropriate setting for his dance plays, and references to the Peacock's stage and its distinctive front steps joining stage to auditorium occur in several of his later dance plays.³ By the summer of 1927, Yeats was planning a season of dance plays at the Peacock and wrote to Sturge Moore that

I have got two fine Japanese Noh Masks and am trying to get some magnificent masks made by the Dutch Sculptor Van Krop for my *Only Jealousy of Emer*. With these masks I shall be able to give a series of Dance Plays here, as we have just added to the Abbey Theatre a small perfectly equipped theatre which holds a hundred people. I am hoping henceforth with the assistance of the Abbey School of Acting to make experiments for which the popular audience of a larger theatre is not ready. As the Young Players of the school will be comparatively inexperienced there will be some advantage to letting them appear before the public in a strange dramatic form, related rather to ritual than to the ordinary form of drama.⁴

Although the season of dance plays never came about, the possibility of new stagings in an "experimental" space, a more public setting than a private drawing room, must have inspired Yeats, since from this time on he began writing and revising plays once again.

An additional spark to re-ignite Yeats's interest in his dance plays came from news of a Dutch production of *The Only Jealousy of Emer* presented in 1922 by Albert van Dalsum; this director's approach was influenced by Gordon Craig especially with regard to the use of masks and movement.⁵ This was an ambitious project which Van Dalsum revived several times, and Yeats only learned of it after a friend sent him photographs of the masks used in a 1926 Amsterdam revival. Yeats was encouraged by the success the play had in Holland, was quite taken with Krop's masks, and would

³Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats*, 267-270.

⁴W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: *Their Correspondence 1901-1937*, 110.

⁵The play, as translated by the poet Hélène Swarth, had a score by Alex Voormolen (who had studied with Ravel), masks by the sculptor Hildo Krop and movement by Lili Green, who also presented a series of dances before the play. See Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats*, 272-275.

eventually dedicate his reworking of *The Only Jealousy of Emer* to the sculptor.⁶

Another inspiration towards producing his dance plays was a revival of *On Baile's Strand* in 1927 at the Festival Theatre in Cambridge. While hard at work on his verse adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonnus* for the Abbey, Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespear of the promising news about the production:

They are playing my *Baile's Strand* at Cambridge from Jan 31 to Feb 5. The fool and blind man masked, and elaborate dancing of the witches and strange lighting. Perhaps I shall insist on your coming to Cambridge with me or meeting me there.⁷

Yeats heard of the production from the verse dramatist Gordon Bottomley, who later sent Yeats photographs of the performance. It is doubtful that Yeats ever saw this production and, perhaps under pressure from other commitments, he talked himself out of attending, as he implied in a post script to Shakespear on the back flap of the envelope: "The Cambridge show will probably be a bore—I think I shall have to go and see and perhaps acquire the masks—but do not leave your gas-fire for it."⁸ If Yeats had attended, he would have seen his play in a production directed by Norman Marshall, with choreography by Ninette de Valois, on a triple bill with Strindberg's *The Stronger* and Dunsany's *The Glittering Gate*, and finishing with a selection of Ninette de Valois's short choreographic works entitled *Dance Cameos*. Yeats did not meet de Valois until May of that year when he traveled to Cambridge to see a production of his play *The Player Queen* and, although de Valois did not choreograph this production, more of her *Dance Cameos* shared the bill.⁹ Yeats asked to meet her and, for the next seven years, he

⁶W. B. Yeats, "Fighting the Waves: Introduction," in *Wheels and Butterflies* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1935), 59.

⁷W. B. Yeats, *Collected Letters*, 721-722.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Richard Cave, *Theatre in Focus: Terence Gray and the Cambridge Festival Theatre* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1980), 55-56.

had found in de Valois a new collaborator who had a keen sense of the dramatic.

I. *Ninette de Valois*

In 1905 in a Georgian manor house in County Wicklow, Ireland, a seven-year old girl named Edris Stannus, daughter of a lieutenant-colonel and his musical wife, stood on a chair to watch a Miss Leggatt Byrne perform a "skirt dance" during a children's party. It is most telling that Edris was not at all impressed by the dance or the lace-edged accordion-pleated skirt. As soon as the dance was over, the girl asked the pianist to play an Irish jig, and in a new-found burst of confidence she performed "by far the better dance" she had been taught by her governess.¹⁰ Fiercely independent and with a flair for the dramatic, Edris created marionette plays for her own home-made miniature stage, and resolutely refused to perform in them because she "had to be free to look after the whole thing."¹¹ Also indicative was her way of escaping the family for a short spells each day by indulging in what she called "a think": this involved fixing her eye upon some object—a tree, chair, bird, picture—and transforming herself into the object, weaving a complete story around it.¹²

Mrs. Stannus decided that Edris, a very intelligent and musically gifted child, was destined to become the English Pavlova. To this end, she started a well-meant but misguided process of de-Irishing her daughter. Since it would have been imprudent to drag a respectable Irish family name into the world of dance, she cast about for a more artistic *nom de ballet* and settled on "de Valois" after having read

¹⁰Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me: A Memoir 1898-1956* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1957), 32-33. The title of this book is taken from Yeats's poem "I am of Ireland," an adaptation of a fourteenth century poem, "The Irish Dancer."

¹¹Ninette de Valois, quoted in John Mortimer, "The Grande Dame of Dance," Ninette de Valois Clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

¹²Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, 19-20.

Dumas's romance, *Marguerite de Valois*; the "Ninette" was "just for fancy."¹³ Ever ambitious for her daughter, Mrs. Stannus soon moved the family out of Ireland to London, where she sought proper training for Ninette. There she was exposed to some of the best dancers of the time, and was especially enthralled by the Ballets Russes at Covent Garden, Adeline Genée at the Empire, and Pavlova at the Palace.¹⁴ In these pre-war years, ballet in Britain was not recognized as an art form with its own integrity or a national tradition; there were no ballet companies and very few qualified teachers:

Coming from an untheatrical background it was impossible for my mother to understand what I really needed and to know whom to turn to for advice. In those days England had no Sadler's Wells, no Arts Council...and no institution such as the Royal Academy of Dancing devoting its work to raising the standard of teaching...the ballet was not recognized as a branch of the English Theatre; dancers were accepted as individuals on their individual merits and they had to search for their own teachers; how they arrived at their eventual state of execution was no one's concern.¹⁵

Dancers had to find training and jobs where they could, adapting their talents to a wide variety of forms including opera, operetta, musical comedy, pantomime, revue and music hall. This eclectic style of training however was invaluable for de Valois's future work since it offered her experience in a wide range of theatre forms and an understanding of their possible inter-relationships.

After studying "fancy" social dancing with a Mrs. Wordsworth, a fashionable children's ballet teacher of the day, she enrolled in the Lila Field Academy which specialized in providing juvenile dancers for pantomimes and sent its pupils, "The Wonder Children," on tour to perform at seaside resorts:

[We] presented an astonishing and rather terrible programme of small ballets and

¹³Mollie Panter-Downes, "Profiles: Madam," *The New Yorker*, 16 September 1950, 34. Later Diaghilev disapproved of her French name and Russianized it, billing her in Ballets Russes programs as Nina Devalois.

¹⁴Kathrine Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), 6.

¹⁵Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, 49.

short plays. I can also remember a precocious effort in the form of a revue—with the children depicting great stars. Needless to say I was doomed to be Pavlova and executed *The Dying Swan*, having laboriously noted this down myself from the upper circle of the Palace Theatre...I can boast of having danced on every old pier theatre in England! We worked very hard; I made ten solo appearances every night and received a salary of £4 per week.¹⁶

By the time she was in her early teens, she was working practically full-time as a dancer. Billed as *première danseuse*, this precocious cygnet expired regularly, though a critic for *The Dancing Times* complained, "I would suggest that when she takes an encore she does not repeat 'The Swan'—there is something incongruous in a swan dying twice in five minutes."¹⁷

Building on the notoriety she enjoyed from Lila Fields, beginning in 1914 and for the next five years, de Valois danced in many Lyceum Theatre pantomimes. These performances served as her debut into the world of West End theatre, and her first experience as part of a large professional company of seasoned artists in spectacular and complicated productions. While at the Lyceum, she trained with Madame Rosa, the Lyceum's ballet mistress and, more influentially, with Edouard Espinosa, ballet master of the Empire Theatre. Espinosa's teaching specialized in pointwork and turns with exacting musicality and rhythm, and his work with Henry Irving's company and other theatrical venues helped to reinforce de Valois's belief in dancing as part of a theatre experience, rather than a separate and narrow art form.¹⁸ While at the Lyceum, de Valois also had a taste of Duncanism, although much removed from its true source. Lady Constance Stewart-Richardson, a socialite who specialized in pseudo-Grecian "free dance," presented a program of her dances and pantomimes at

¹⁶Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, 47.

¹⁷Mollie Panter-Downes, "Profiles: Madam," 36.

¹⁸Kathrine Sorely Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions*, 10.

the Royal Court, and engaged de Valois to dance some classical solos as contrast.¹⁹ These performances were not at all well regarded by de Valois, though she later came to appreciate Duncan's achievements. Strongly believing in the need for a classical foundation, she admired Duncan for showing "the emotional powers that lie hidden in the broader and freer body movements. The influence...on [ballet] has been greatly felt—and the result has been most satisfactory."²⁰

Sir Thomas Beecham staged excerpts from operas with ballets at the Palladium in 1918, giving de Valois her initiation into working with conductors and singers from several different countries and traditions. For one opera, *Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan*, based on a Bach cantata and designed by Dulac, de Valois first choreographed her own solos. This engagement led to her role as *première danseuse* in 1919 for the International Season of Grand Opera at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; renowned singers were hired from all parts of the world, and though her role was usually reserved for a Continental ballerina, she appeared in several productions including *Aïda*, *Louise*, and *Thaïs*. Although these stagings were quite routine, consisting of "a highly efficient but limited series of gestures and static positions for individual singers and set groupings for choristers and supers,"²¹ de Valois received experience in current opera ballet conventions.

In 1918 the Ballets Russes was performing at the Coliseum, and Diaghilev's dancers were taking regular classes from Enrico Cecchetti, who also created several roles with the company. De Valois was invited to join the class and came to study with Cecchetti over the next five years. Where Espinosa had given her an

¹⁹Ibid., 13.

²⁰Ninette de Valois, "The Future of the Ballet," *The Dancing Times*, February 1926, 590-591.

²¹Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, 58-59.

analytical approach to ballet technique from the French school, Cecchetti came from the Italian school as modified by his experience with Russian ballet. From Cecchetti, who had taught Pavlova and Nijinsky, she “learned the meaning of symmetry, the hidden beauty of the studied detail, the harmony that can be achieved in movement, and the meaning of *port-de bras*.”²² And for her future choreography, his influence was also strongly felt:

To really understand space as he taught it...you had to be aware of drawing your body in space...This wonderful sense of pattern was one of the most exciting and interesting things of his work. This incredible symmetry of movement is marvellous for choreographers: to see the balance of the legs, the arms, the head and the body when they are inventing movements is one of the most *important* things they can *possibly* study.²³

When the Ballets Russes left London, de Valois continued with “a series of gruelling but wonderful private lessons” where she started work in mime and further developed her sense of the unity of movement.²⁴

De Valois was also ambitious to have her own group and present her own choreography. At the time she was also studying with Hungarian dancer Derra de Moroda who was a folk-dance recitalist. De Valois had a special love for folk-dancing, especially Morris Dancing, and she and Moroda gathered a group of eight dancers including Margaret Craske and Vivienne Bennett, and arranged dances that combined elements of ballet and folk dance for half-hour performances in various musical halls in and around London. “Ninette’s presentation was ahead of its time and the numbers sat rather uncomfortably within a typical music hall bill,”²⁵ remembers one of her dancers.

²²Ninette de Valois, quoted in Kathrine Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions*, 14.

²³Ninette de Valois, quoted in Richard Glasstone, “Into the Future with Cecchetti,” *The Dancing Times*, April 1990, 695.

²⁴Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, 61.

²⁵Jan Caryll, quoted in Kathrine Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions*, 25.

Concurrently with her appearances in grand opera and her study with Cecchetti, de Valois continued to work for the commercial theatre. Cast as the principal dancer in *Laughing Eyes*, for example, a topical revue at the Lyceum in 1919, de Valois was featured in a section entitled "The Dope Fiend" in which she played an innocent lured into an opium den who is given a cigarette which induces fantastic balletic dreams.²⁶ At the same time, she was continuing her leading role in the pantomime *Cinderella*, and appearing in several musical revues. In 1920 she was cast in *Oh! Julie!* at the Shaftesbury Theatre, and a review in *The Stage* hinted at the mix of styles displayed: "It is difficult to describe her dance. It is partly operatic and partly eccentric. Nevertheless, she is too good for this kind of work."²⁷ Although she had achieved a certain degree of fame by the time she was 21, appearing on covers of *The Dancing Times* and in the pages of *The Sketch* and *The Tatler*, perceptive critics hoped that she would focus her career more appropriately to fit her evident dramatic talents, as this critic observed:

Ninette de Valois has won golden opinions by reason of her work as première danseuse at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. I believe the management were at one time a little dubious as to whether she could undertake the dancing in "Nail," Mr. Isidore de Lara's new opera, but after witnessing her magnificent display in "Aida," all doubts were set at rest. It is, of course, a great feather in her cap, to have secured this very important engagement, and as she has still many dancing years before her she ought to do great things. In "Laughing Eyes," Miss de Valois has shown that she possesses considerable mimetic powers, and so every encouragement is given for some enterprising management to produce her in a proper ballet d'action.²⁸

The "enterprising management" would soon be Diaghilev's. She first came to know members of the Ballets Russes company in Cecchetti's classes, and danced with others in the short-lived Massine-Lopokova Company which performed at Covent

²⁶Kathrine Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions*, 16.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 22.

²⁸*The Dancing Times*, August 1919, 483.

Garden and toured England and Scotland between 1921 and 1923. As Kathrine Sorley Walker points out, the opportunity to work with Diaghilev's dancers was probably more important for de Valois than the specific material she danced. These dancers had a much more sophisticated aesthetic view of their art than anyone she had encountered in pantomime, opera-ballets or musicals; they had experience in extended, fully-produced ballets created by the major choreographers of the day, and their acting skills often equalled their dancing abilities.²⁹

De Valois was invited to join the Ballets Russes in 1923 and danced in the *corps* in each ballet in the repertoire in addition to her solo roles for two years, returning many times thereafter as a guest. Choreographically she had the experience of dancing in ballets by Fokine, Massine, Balanchine and, most importantly, Nijinska. In Bronislava Nijinska, de Valois found a role model for a woman choreographer working in a progressive and established ballet company. Both women had studied with Cecchetti and Legat, were interested in folk dance steps and patterns, and how classical ballet technique could be applied to modern music and design in non-classical ways. Nijinska had first been drawn to choreography by serving as her brother's "pupil and assistant, the human material for his choreographic experiments and research for new forms of dancing and artistic expression."³⁰ Her early plotless dances drew on constructivist ideas of functionality and non-representation, and through her long-standing collaboration with designer Alexandra Exter (who was Tairov's designer at the Kamerny Theatre), worked towards a theatre that fused movement, design and music. Nijinska welcomed the ideas of Duncan and Dalcroze as they could be applied to classical technique, and she sought her own methods for expressing music in a language

²⁹Kathrine Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions*, 27.

³⁰Bronislava Nijinska, *Bronislava Nijinska: Early Memoirs*, translated and edited by Irina Nijinska and Jean Rawlinson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 442.

of pure movement.³¹ De Valois danced in several new works created by Nijinska for the company, including *Les Noces* (1923), about which she particularly admired "the geometrical beauty of the inner structure and relationship between the music and the choreography."³² Nancy Van Norman Baer has concisely described the choreographic style of *Les Noces*:

Its spare, eloquent abstraction was a forerunner of much contemporary ballet...She manipulated masses, not realistically, as in Fokine's crowds, but as an impersonal body, thus symbolizing the weight of custom and the inexorable working of fate...Nijinska stripped embellishment from movement to achieve pure form and expression. She used flattened gesture, parallel stance, and movement in the two-dimensional plane...Nijinska's choreography for *Les Noces* is distinguished by the powerful architectonic configurations of dancers' bodies in space...The kinship [to constructivism] is also seen in Nijinska's use of stillness as well as movement in simple geometric planes.³³

Nijinska selected de Valois as her stand-in on whom she could work out her principal role of The Hostess, an eccentric society lady, in *Les Biches* (1924); here the movement had a "broken line of torso and an angular look created by flexed wrists and bent elbows."³⁴ De Valois also discovered in working with Nijinska and with Massine, how choreography could parallel the spoken play or libretto without following it in a literal fashion. As Nijinska writes, movement can present "a parallel to emotional experiences without imitating the actions which accompany them in real life."³⁵

After two years with the Ballets Russes, de Valois was weary of touring and more interested in making dance a part of English theatre life:

³¹Nancy Van Norman Baer, "Artistic Development in Revolutionary Russia, 1915-1921," in *Bronislava Nijinska: A Dancer's Legacy* (San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986), 18-21.

³²Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, 80.

³³Nancy Van Norman Baer, "Nijinska and Diaghilev: From Dancer to Choreographer for the Ballets Russes, 1909-1914 and 1921-1926," in *Bronislava Nijinska: A Dancer's Legacy*, 34-35.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 38.

³⁵*Ibid.*

The main effect of Diaghilev on my dormant creative mind was to arouse an intense interest in the ballet in relation to the theatre...the same should happen, along the same lines...in England. I wanted to see this achieved with the same passionate feeling of dedication that a little girl once felt about dancing an Irish jig to music. Over twenty years ago a child had once sensed the difference between an exhibition of fancy dancing and an authentic National dance; as a young artist, the former child now sensed the dignity of the dance in the theatre as an art form in unity with many things.³⁶

To this end, she again took up activities in several directions, but this time her performing career took second place to choreography and teaching. In 1926, she opened her own school, the Academy of Choregraphic Art in London, and the following year, she began teaching movement for actors at the Old Vic for Lilian Baylis, and choreographing ballets for operas and Shakespearean productions at the theatre. She also foresaw in Baylis's planned renovation of the Sadler's Wells Theatre, a future non-commercial site where she might begin to build a British ballet company and school.

In 1926 de Valois accepted the position of choreographic director at the Festival Theatre in Cambridge, largely because she was interested in understanding how the repertory theatre movement in England might be persuaded to "show interest in the foundation of a repertory ballet company."³⁷ Moreover, she was acutely aware of how classical dance, notwithstanding Diaghilev's company, had lagged behind innovations in other arts; she wanted to learn new production techniques and evolve a modern ballet form conceived as "a complete theatrical art."³⁸ Terence Gray, the theatre's founder, was de Valois's cousin, though they barely knew each other before this collaboration. A wealthy world-traveled Cambridge graduate and amateur playwright, Gray was an Egyptologist by training, and his taste for stylized art found expression in his ideas about dance and theatre. Gray wished to "sweep away the cobwebs of external reality

³⁶Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, 88-89.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 93.

³⁸Ninette de Valois, "The Future of Ballet," 590.

which were choking the theatre" through formal, stylized productions which gave a "purely aesthetic reaction...unvitiated by emotion, intellectuality, or the actualities of life."³⁹ Harold Ridge, the Festival's co-founder, was soon to become England's leading authority on stage lighting, and between them they had extensive knowledge of current European theatre practice. Gray was especially drawn to the work of Appia, Craig and Jessner as he sought to employ many symbolist and expressionist techniques of staging including simplified scenery, use of screens and masks, expressive lighting design, and stylization of voice and movement. The renovation of the old Theatre Royal Barnwell into the Festival Theatre resulted in a stage space that had a vast playing area (almost 35 feet square) backed by a 40 foot tall cyclorama, with no proscenium arch, a series of broad steps leading from stage to a raked auditorium, and elaborate lighting facilities.⁴⁰ Although the space was designed for experimental theatre, it would also serve as a space for new forms of dance as well.

Realizing that such stylized setting and lighting would require a non-realistic acting technique which utilized dance and mime, Gray looked to Yeats's dance plays as a model for his own "dance-dramas," and in his writings, Yeats's influence is evident:

There are moments in great drama for which words prove an inadequate medium for the expression of emotion...No more in this direction can ever be achieved save in eliminating the redundancy of verbal expression altogether and substituting for it...the new and potent medium of light, colour and mass, that is, of expressive and changing scenic design revealing by means of the atmosphere it creates and reveals and intensifies the emotions that [the character] is experiencing on the stage. At such moments...the character should dance. Dancing...must be taken in its fullest meaning...to include all forms of studied

³⁹Terence Gray, quoted in Billy J. Harbin, "Terence Gray and the Cambridge Festival Theatre: 1926-33," *Educational Theatre Journal* 21 (#4 1969), 392.

⁴⁰Richard Cave, *Theatre in Focus: Terence Gray and the Cambridge Festival Theatre*, 21-23.

movement, not the least of them studied immobility.⁴¹

Although only one of Gray's plays was ever presented at the Festival Theatre, choreographed movement was featured in many productions. For the Festival, de Valois was hired to devise movement for classical, Restoration, expressionist and modern verse plays; to train actors; to supplement choruses with dance students from her school; and to give a performance of her choreography each season as part of a triple-bill.⁴²

The Oresteia was the Festival's debut production and de Valois coached the movement of the actors and devised choreography for the masked choruses that complemented the rhythms of the text. Gray felt that the actors should engage in "interpreting rather than living through one of the most magnificent tragic histories" and should therefore appear "as puppets, majestic mannequins."⁴³ Norman Marshall, the stage manager for the production, writes that de Valois created "harsh and angular movements" for the chorus, and produced "the essential ritualistic quality of the Greek drama" which was "uncompromisingly modernistic in manner" and "reduced one's memories of all other Greek choruses one had ever seen to a series of pretty posturings by comparison."⁴⁴ For the production of *On Baile's Strand* in 1927, Richard Cave notes how the setting marked a new architectural sophistication:

The pillars clustered in groups of three frame a vast doorway entered down in flight of steps that reached across its full width; all was an even neutral grey beyond which the cyclorama was lit with blue and green from beneath, evocative of mist rising from the sea...The overall pictorial effect...had an almost "Attic

⁴¹Terence Gray, "The Tyranny of Words (3)" in *Dance-Drama: Experiments in the Art of the Theatre* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd., 1926), 26-27.

⁴²Richard Cave, *Theatre in Focus: Terence Gray and the Cambridge Festival Theatre*, 32.

⁴³Terence Gray, quoted in Richard Cave, *Theatre in Focus: Terence Gray and the Cambridge Festival Theatre*, 38.

⁴⁴Norman Marshall, *The Other Theatre* (London: John Lehmann, 1947), 62-63. For this production, R. C. Trevelyan created the translation, Donald Tovey composed the music, Herbert Prentice directed, and Maurice Evans played Orestes.

intensity," a barbaric splendour and mystery that owed nothing to the sentimental vagaries of the Celtic twilight.⁴⁵

De Valois's choreography echoed the angularity of the masks and the sculptural quality of the set; she staged the rituals demanded in the text and shaped the movement for the symbolic characters of the Fool and the Blindman.⁴⁶

De Valois's short dance pieces, under the umbrella title *Dance Cameos*, were diverse in their materials and ran the gamut from abstract dance to dramatic scenarios. In a frivolous and comic vein is *A Daughter of Eve*, set to the "Coquette" movement of Arensky's *Silhouette* in which a flirtatious woman conducts a silent encounter with an unseen suitor. At the end she offers him an apple which is refused; she sits on the apron steps and begins to eat the fruit; then reconsiders and, with a provocative smile, leaves it on the step and exits.⁴⁷ In contrast, *Rout*, set to music by Arthur Bliss for two pianos and voice (singing meaningless syllables chosen for their sound) opened with dancer/actress Vivienne Bennett reciting poems by Ernst Toller; the movement began during the poem and continued as the music started. The dance was choreographed for five women, dressed in simple costumes of tights and plum-colored tunics.⁴⁸ *The Dancing Times* commented (when *Rout* was shown in London a year later) that de Valois was "an honest enquirer into the possibilities of the dance as a mode of interpreting modern thought," and described its "expressionist" movement:

A clever attempt was made to portray in a dance built up of decorative groupings and "futuristic" movement, frequently of a contrapuntal nature, the

⁴⁵Richard Cave, *Theatre in Focus: Terence Gray and the Cambridge Festival Theatre*, 55.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Kathrine Sorley Walker, "The Festival and the Abbey: Ninette de Valois' Early Choreography, 1925-1934, Part One," *Dance Chronicle* 7 (#4, 1985), 390-391.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 392.

“revolt” of modern youth against the conventions of an older generation.⁴⁹

De Valois has always been known for a high degree of intellectual inquisitiveness in her choreography, and her interests in literature and the visual arts often sparked ideas for dances; themes for later ballets were drawn from Blake, Cervantes, the Bible, Hogarth, and Manet. “I remember once going round to her dressing room and finding her reading Schopenhauer,” the editor of *The Dancing Times* recalled, “she was *very* unusual.”⁵⁰

Always a great admirer of Yeats’s work, de Valois was caught somewhat off-guard when the poet approached her about collaborating on his *Plays for Dancers* when they met at the Festival Theatre in May 1928:

He asked to meet me as he had been very moved by what he had seen of my work on this occasion. We met the next morning in the dim foyer of the theatre. Always I can recall the great dark figure sitting in profile. Yeats had a curious habit of not looking at his companion during a conversation. He would look down or up or remain, as in this case, in profile. The voice was warm, rich with a mighty resonance of its own. He always conversed with conviction and inspiration, and you remained quite unperturbed that you were not included in his line of vision...I could see before the conversation started that he had come to a decision and that it was for me to listen and accept, and then to be led. The opening was both simple and direct: “I want you to come to Dublin to help me revive my *Plays for Dancers* which must now be restaged and put back into the Dublin scene.”⁵¹

Even though she was already stretched thin with teaching at the Old Vic and her own school, and performing in London, de Valois accepted Yeats’s offer to found a small school of ballet at the Abbey and to visit Dublin every three months to perform in and choreograph his *Plays for Dancers*. Yeats’s urgency to begin this project was partially caused by the imminent opening of the Gate Theatre which was renting space at the Abbey’s Peacock Theatre in Dublin. Yeats felt that the founding of the Gate constituted

⁴⁹*The Dancing Times*, February 1928, 673.

⁵⁰P. J. S. Richardson, quoted in Mollie Panter-Downes, “Profiles: Madam,” 36. Over the decades, de Valois has written her own poetry which was recently collected and published. See Ninette de Valois, *The Cycle* (London: Sadler’s Wells Trust, 1985).

⁵¹Ninette de Valois, *Step by Step: The Formation of an Establishment* (London: W. H. Allen, 1977), 181-182.

a kind of artistic challenge to the Abbey to show that it was still a forward looking company. "They can afford to be wholly experimental," Yeats quipped about the Gate, "for they have no traditions."⁵² De Valois recalls that Yeats was so excited by the prospect of reviving his dance plays that he called on Lennox Robinson the very day he returned from Cambridge: "It was pouring rain, and standing outside in the downpour was Yeats who never moved until he had imparted all the news about his proposed new venture to his bewildered co-director."⁵³

De Valois set-up the Abbey School of Ballet along the same lines she was following for her London school, although in Dublin there were regular day students as well as evening classes for day workers. The curriculum included "operatic" and character dancing classes, studies in composition, plastique movement, and theory. Classes and rehearsals were held in the upstairs rooms of the Peacock Theatre, while performances were mostly given on the small apron stage of the Abbey. For the first recital on 30 January 1928, de Valois needed to rely mostly on her dancers from the London school, with a few local students. The mounting of this program was in some sense premature, but de Valois and Yeats felt that it was important to use the occasion to impress the Abbey audience with the potential of their new venture since the initial idea had been met with a mixed reception. The dance program was ambitious, sharing a bill with a short play, and included a variety of works, though mostly in the narrative vein. De Valois choreographed one new work for the occasion, *Venetian Suite* with music by Respighi, which was structured as several interlocking character studies showing the reactions of a Romantic Lady (danced by de Valois), a Sophisticated Lady, and two

⁵²W. B. Yeats, quoted in Ninette de Valois, *Step by Step: The Formation of an Establishment*, 182.

⁵³*ibid.*, 183.

Unsophisticated Ladies as they each receive love letters sent by a joking Minstrel.⁵⁴ In addition, several pieces from *Dance Cameos* were revived from Cambridge including *Pride, A Daughter of Eve, Pastoral, The Curse of the Aspen Tree, and Beauty and the Beast*.⁵⁵ This first performance was well received as this review in the *Irish Independent* indicates:

What lent a special and particular interest to the programme was the remarkable series of ballets by Ninette de Valois and her pupils. This proved to be in fact an experience far and away beyond what many people anticipated... What amazed one most was the extraordinary intelligence and supreme grace with which every movement was apparently spontaneously developed.⁵⁶

With this initial success, de Valois felt confident to include more abstract pieces and more of her Irish dancers. For the finale of the next concert in April, she choreographed *Rituelle de feu*, to de Falla's music, for herself as the Maiden, and an ensemble of women as Sun Worshippers; the choreography was stylized in a constructivist manner, and costumes were loose ankle-length gowns with short veils in dark reddish hues. For the third concert in September, a competition was held to find music suitable for an Irish ballet; Harold R. White's winning arrangement of old Irish airs was the basis for de Valois's fantasy dance, *The Faun*, which had visual echoes of Nijinsky's similarly named ballet.⁵⁷ Yeats and de Valois had begun to secure a place for dance in Dublin, and their accomplishment found appreciation in an *Irish Statesman* review:

After a year's work at The Abbey, she has produced a group of Irish dancers whose work is a revelation of beauty and she has opened out a new field to Irish musicians... In "The Faun," Mr. White's music joined Miss de Valois' imaginative invention and Miss Patrick's designs in a pure evocation of moonlight and elvish life amongst the trees and rocks. Patches of moonlight took shape and danced,

⁵⁴Kathrine Sorley Walker, "The Festival and the Abbey: Ninette de Valois' Early Choreography, 1925-1934, Part One," 399.

⁵⁵Lennox Robinson, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre: A History 1899-1951* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1951), 215.

⁵⁶*Irish Independent*, 31 January 1928, quoted in Kathrine Sorley Walker, "The Festival and the Abbey: Ninette de Valois' Early Choreography, 1925-1934, Part One," 399.

⁵⁷Kathrine Sorley Walker, "The Festival and the Abbey: Ninette de Valois' Early Choreography, 1925-1934, Part One," 400-401.

combining incessantly in new forms and withdrawing again into still patterns of singular and suggestive beauty.⁵⁸

II. *Fighting the Waves*

Between 1929 and 1934 Yeats and de Valois collaborated on six dance plays, three new works and three revivals; but given Yeats's declining health during the 1930s, their first project, *Fighting the Waves*, was to be their closest collaboration. Yeats had begun writing *The Only Jealousy of Emer* just after the performances of *At the Hawk's Well*; *Emer* had only two performances by the Dublin Drama League in 1926 and the Dutch production. Writing from Cannes in 1928 to Lady Gregory, Yeats described how he saw an opportunity in the material to push his experiments with dance and music even further than in the past to create "a piece for dancers and musicians," and that he had dictated "a vigorous prose version" of the play "arranged for stage dancing"⁵⁹ to better suit de Valois's talents and the Abbey School of Ballet.

In adapting the material, Yeats worked to strengthen the roles of dance and music and to condense the text and simplify the plot, essentially the rescue of Cuchulain from the goddess Fand by the self-sacrificing devotion of his wife Emer, who is offered a tragic choice between her husband's life and his love. Most evident is that Yeats substituted dance sequences for Fand's speeches of the original; and though de Valois made it known that she would not speak onstage, Yeats was clearly more interested in the theatricality the dance could contribute:

I wrote *The Only Jealousy of Emer* for performance in a private house or studio, considering it, for reasons which I have explained, unsuited to a public stage...I rewrote the play not only to fit it for such a stage but to free it from abstraction and confusion. I have retold the story in prose which I have tried to make very

⁵⁸*The Irish Statesman*, 29 November 1928, quoted in Kathrine Sorley Walker, "The Festival and the Abbey: Ninette de Valois' Early Choreography, 1925-1934, Part One," 402.

⁵⁹W. B. Yeats, quoted in A. Norman Jeffares and A. S. Knowland, *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 110.

simple, and left imaginative suggestion to dancers, singers, musicians. I have left the words of the opening and closing lyrics unchanged, for sung to modern music in the modern way they suggest strange patterns to the ear without obtruding upon it their difficult, irrelevant words...I do not say that it is always necessary when one writes for a general audience to make the words of the dialogue so simple and so matter-of-fact; but it is necessary where the appeal is mainly to the eye and to the ear through songs and music. *Fighting the Waves* is in itself nothing, a mere occasion for sculptor and dancer, for the exciting dramatic music of George Antheil.⁶⁰

It is remarkable that Yeats would describe his words as "irrelevant," yet this is not an indication that he had resigned himself to becoming a "mere" librettist, but that he had chosen to write with collaboration more in mind. Throughout *Fighting the Waves*, the language is indeed simpler and less obscure in its references. Compare a typical example, first from *The Only Jealousy of Emer*:

Eithne Inguba:
And is he dead?

Emer:
Although they have dressed him out in his grave-clothes
And stretched his limbs, Cuchulain is not dead;
The very heavens when that day's at hand,
So that his death may not lack ceremony,
Will throw out fires, and the earth grow red with blood.
There shall not be a scullion but foreknows it
Like the world's end.⁶¹

With the same moment from *Fighting the Waves*:

Eithne Inguba: Is he dead?

Emer: The fishermen think him dead, it was they that put the grave-clothes upon him.

Eithne Inguba: He is cold. There is no breath upon his lips.

Emer: Those who win the terrible friendship of the gods sometimes lie a long time as if dead.

Eithne Inguba: I have heard of such things; the very heart stops and yet they live

⁶⁰W. B. Yeats, "Fighting the Waves Introduction," in *Wheels and Butterflies* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 61-62.

⁶¹W. B. Yeats, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, in *Four Plays for Dancers*, 30.

after.⁶²

In both plays, the simultaneity of human and supernatural worlds is at the very essence of the plot, and its origin in Noh form.⁶³ In *Fighting the Waves*, however, the use of dance and the delineation of spiritual and human realms are more clearly and theatrically defined than they were in the earlier work.

In both plays, Emer confronts several spirits who would hold Cuchulain and his affections ransom. Three principal female characters comprise a kind of triangle: Emer, Cuchulain's mortal and loyal wife, is placed in direct opposition to the sea goddess Fand, another incarnation of the Woman of the Sidhe who appeared as the Hawk in Yeats's first dance play; in between them is Eithne Inguba, Cuchulain's present human mistress who, described as "a white sea-bird," is connected to the supernatural beauty and passion of Fand. *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, much more so than *At the Hawk's Well*, is dense with interconnected conflicts which depend on the dialogue for their distinction: Emer is in conflict with Eithne for Cuchulain, though she soon realizes that in their shared humanity, they are "but two women struggling with the sea;"⁶⁴ Emer is in conflict with Bricrui (the demon that possesses Cuchulain's limp body) and with Fand. Fand is fighting for Cuchulain against Bricrui and against Emer's claim as his first wife. Cuchulain must choose between his loyalty to Emer, and Fand's promise of oblivion and release from remorse over the death of his son and betrayal of his wife. In *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, Fand performs one dance of seduction which has a rather narrow focus,

⁶²W. B. Yeats, *Fighting the Waves*, in *Wheels and Butterflies*, 75-76.

⁶³Yeats's sources for *The Only Jealousy of Emer* were the early Irish romance, *Serglige Conculaind* (*The Sick-Bed of Cuchulain*) and Pound's translation of Zeami's Noh play, *Aoi no ue*. See Richard Taylor, *The Drama of W. B. Yeats: Irish Myth and the Japanese No*, 137-143. Liam Miller suggests that *Fighting the Waves* was additionally influenced by the Noh play *Atsumori* from Arthur Waley's book, *The No Plays of Japan* (1921), where the hero meets his death fighting in waves, and reappears in the play to mime the battle. See Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats*, 281.

⁶⁴W. B. Yeats, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, 34.

serving to lure the Ghost of Cuchulain, instead of expressing the emotional climax of the play for all the characters. Moreover, the fact that Fand engages in dialogue throughout the play, even intermittently during her dance, greatly undermines her credibility as an otherworldly goddess.

In *Fighting the Waves*, the text no longer dominates, but is on a more even par with the music and dance. The myriad of character conflicts from the earlier play are still there, but are significantly backgrounded especially by the music to give focus to the play's dominant images, as Yeats explains:

The orchestra brings more elaborate music and I have gone over to the enemy. I say to the musician 'Lose my words in patterns of sound as the name of God is lost in Arabian arabesques. They are a secret between the singers, myself, yourself. The plain fable, the plain prose of the dialogue, Ninette de Valois' dances are there for the audience. They can find my words in the book if they are curious, but we will not thrust our secret upon them. I can be as subtle or metaphysical as I like without endangering the clarity necessary for the dramatic effect. '65

As in *At the Hawk's Well*, where the play was focused on the central image of the well, *Fighting the Waves* was composed around the images of the sea and waves, employing "a mask with the silver glitter of a fish," "a dance with an eddy like that of water," and "music that suggested, not the vagueness, but the rhythm of the sea."⁶⁶ In the play, the sea and its waves comprise the "Country-Under-the-Waves," the supernatural home of the Women of the Sidhe; and thematically, the motion of waves connotes uncontrolled power, and the recurrence and inevitability of fate. "Waves" inherently imply movement, repetition, rhythm and pattern, all theatrical elements with which Yeats was experimenting. Furthermore, Yeats found this convergence of theme and formal elements in the image of "waves" to be particularly modern in temper:

Certain typical books—*Ulysses*, Mrs. Virginia Woolf's *Waves*, Mr. Ezra Pound's

⁶⁵W. B. Yeats, "Commentary on *The Great Clock Tower*," in *The King of the Great Clock Tower, Commentaries and Poems* (Dublin: The Cuala Press, 1934), 19.

⁶⁶W. B. Yeats, "*Fighting the Waves* Introduction," 69.

Draft of XXX Cantos—suggest...a deluge of experience breaking over us and within us, melting limits whether of line or tint; man no hard bright mirror dawdling by the dry sticks of a hedge, but a swimmer, or rather the waves themselves. In this new literature announced with much else by Balzac in *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, as in that which it superseded, man in himself is nothing.⁶⁷

What was most controversial about the production of *Fighting the Waves* was the music by a young American, George Antheil (1900-1959). Ezra Pound met Antheil in Paris in 1923 and saw in his work the musical equivalent of futurism; the poet commissioned several chamber works from him and Pound's "flamboyant" monograph, *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony* (1924), did much to establish quickly the composer's European reputation.⁶⁸ In his twenties, Antheil was the self-proclaimed "bad boy of music," tossing aside a promising career as a concert pianist to pursue composition and Paris salon life. Intrigued by the energy and movement of technology, he used machine sounds and amplifiers in his work, and a love of popular music added jazz and folk elements, together with surrealist and Dadaist influences. Antheil wrote for dance, film, opera and theatre, he had a strong sense of the dramatic and an interest in experimenting with new forms. His score *Ballet mécanique* (1924), for example, was intended as an equal companion to Léger's abstract film and was scored for 16 pianolas, propellers, electric bells and a siren; his score for a long-running production of *Oedipus Rex* (1928) for the Berlin State Theatre was percussively scored for 12 pianos; and in his opera *Flight* (1927), characters sing from the orchestra pit as their actions are

⁶⁷Ibid., 64-65.

⁶⁸In 1923, "Ezra still hovered there in artistic space, apparently fighting for me but in reality fighting for himself...I still do not know why I permitted Ezra to issue his book about myself. Perhaps it was because at that moment I could see no other way of blasting into the otherwise tight-as-a-drum salons...Ezra's flamboyant book, couched in language calculated to antagonize everyone first by its ridiculous praise, then by its vicious criticism of everybody else...Nobody could have been a tenth as good as Ezra made me." See George Antheil, *Bad Boy of Music* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1945), 120.

expressed onstage by dancers.⁶⁹ Antheil collaborated with Mary Wigman and Martha Graham on compositions for dance, and began work with Joyce on an opera based on *Ulysses*.⁷⁰

Pound brought the two together in Rapallo, Italy in March 1929 and Yeats was much taken with Antheil's iconoclastic spirit, and the theatrical quality of his work. "His theories about the relation between music and speech," Yeats stressed to Shotaro Oshima, "very closely resemble my own."⁷¹ Spending several weeks recuperating in the company of Pound, Antheil, and several other writers,⁷² Yeats arrived at the idea of having Antheil create scores for three of his plays, all with Cuchulain as the central character, and producing them as a triple-bill. Writing to Lady Gregory, his enthusiasm for the new project is evident:

The getting away from all distractions has enriched my imagination...Antheil is here and has started on a musical setting for a trilogy consisting of *The Hawk's Well*, *On Baile's Strand* and the new version of *The Only Jealousy* which I call *Fighting the Waves*...He is a revolutionary musician—there was a riot of almost Abbey intensity over some music of his in America. There will be masks and all singing within the range of the speaking voice—for my old theories are dogmas it seems of the new school. His setting of *Fighting the Waves* should be ready for Miss de Valois to do in Dublin in May. He is about 28 and looks 18 and has a face of indescribable innocence. His wife, a first violinist...looks equally young and innocent. Both are persons of impulse and he may or he may not get through his month of toil upon the three plays. He promises to keep the instruments required for *The Fighting of the Waves* within the range of the Abbey. During the fight in *Oedipus at Colonus*...there were twelve pianos played at once.⁷³

Antheil wrote very quickly, and by April, Yeats announced to Lady Gregory that the

⁶⁹Linda Whitesitt, *The Life and Music of George Antheil, 1900-1959* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Research Press, 1983), 125-131.

⁷⁰Henry Gilfond, "Interview with George Antheil," *Dance Observer*, April 1936, 37.

⁷¹Shotaro Oshima, *W. B. Yeats and Japan*, 9.

⁷²As an amusement the regulars at the Hotel Rapallo Café for these several weeks (Antheil, Yeats, Pound, T. S. Eliot, Gerhart Hauptmann and Frank Werfel) collaborated on a detective novel, *Death in the Dark*, which was published by Eliot under the *nom de plume* Stacey Bishop. See Linda Whitesitt, *The Life and Music of George Antheil, 1900-1959*, 45.

⁷³W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 760.

music the composer played him from *Fighting the Waves* “seemed to me the only dramatic music I ever heard—a very strong beat, something heroic and barbaric and strange.”⁷⁴ During the three months he spent in Rapallo, Yeats was revising *Fighting the Waves* and he worked closely with Antheil, in what must have engendered a rather playful exchange of ideas, as Antheil describes:

Yeats was always getting messages from spirits...We would often sit together discussing our project, when suddenly he'd say: "Hello, William," and he'd tip his soft felt sombrero. I'd follow his look and, seeing nobody within fifty feet of our table, I'd ask him, not without astonishment, where William was. "Right in the chair alongside of you; he's the ghost of my indigestion," Yeats would say. Yeats would sometimes talk quite a bit to William, and also other Irish spirits who had been kind enough to come all they way from Dublin to see him...The secret of my success in writing such true Irish music is contained in the fact that Yeats's play is entirely about Irish ghosts. With "William" sitting there alongside of me at the café every day, what else could have happened but that William soon became quite visible and even audible, giving me not only most valuable tips on ancient Irish music, but also singing old Irish melodies (in a rather cracked voice, I admit) while I hastily wrote them down in my notebook.⁷⁵

Antheil's score for *Fighting the Waves* sounds more in the modernist tradition of Stravinsky's rhythms and Berg's dissonant harmonies than in the mode of the "futurist" works for which the American first received notoriety. Inspired by Irish folk melodies, and scored for voice, chorus and chamber orchestra (flute, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, strings, piano and large percussion section including tamtam, gongs and bells), Antheil's music consisted of an Overture, settings of the Musician's songs, dance music, and an Epilogue; as in *At the Hawk's Well*, incidental music also underscored stage action. The score was demanding technically and required some unusual methods, such as asking the offstage actors to wail following the sharply descending chromatic passages of the singing chorus and piano during Fand's dances, marked in the score to be played

⁷⁴Ibid., 761-762.

⁷⁵George Antheil, *Bad Boy of Music*, 228-229.

“massively.”⁷⁶ According to some apocryphal reports, at the first Abbey rehearsal the orchestra involuntarily stopped after the first few bars apologizing for having gotten their parts mixed up, or so they thought.⁷⁷

In early May, Yeats returned to Dublin, eager to produce his new dance play at the Abbey. He engaged Lennox Robinson to direct, acquired Hildo Krop’s masks from the Amsterdam production of *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, and Dolly Travers Smith (Robinson’s wife) started to design the costumes and the front curtain which was painted with a decorative, abstract pattern of waves, the production’s central image. The cast included Hedley Briggs (a dancer who had performed several roles at the Festival Theatre with de Valois) who played the Ghost of Cuchulain, Michael Dolan, a well-known character actor at the Abbey, played Cuchulain, de Valois danced the role of Fand, and six students from the Abbey School of Ballet portrayed the Waves.

After rehearsals had gotten past the preliminary stages, de Valois started to create the dances and movement for the piece, her usual sequence when working with actors:

I wouldn’t very often do any of the movement for a play until I’d seen it and heard it. I wouldn’t come in as a part of the regular actors’ rehearsals. I would say, “Now let me see exactly what you people are doing, and I’ll know what you want me to do.” One simply had to watch and seat oneself in the play first of all...I used movement that was highly stylized. The dances were very abstract—masked you couldn’t be anything else, anything else would have been out of place. One really did use the simplest gestures possible, rather symbolic movements, really; in fact, one avoided the more full-blooded realistic theatre...One had to think about it differently, about the style and the spirit behind it. There was no question of pseudo-Oriental productions. It never entered into W. B.’s head at all, or Lennox Robinson’s and certainly not into mine because I was a trained classical dancer. These were all bare foot dances, of course, but what one did was stylized to bring out the spirit of the thing.⁷⁸

⁷⁶George Antheil, “Music to *Fighting the Waves*,” in W. B. Yeats, *Wheels and Butterflies*, 153.

⁷⁷Kathrine Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions*, 93.

⁷⁸Ninette de Valois, quoted in G. M. Pinciss, “A Dancer for Mr. Yeats,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 21 (#4, 1969), 389.

The opening dance represents the final episode of *On Baile's Strand* where, upon learning that he has killed his son, Cuchulain expressed his horror in a mad fight with the sea until the waves washed his "senseless image" up onto the shore and the door of a "poor fisher's house." In that play, the off-stage action was narrated, but in *Fighting the Waves*, the action is danced, placing it on a more abstract and mythological plane:

There is a curtain with a wave pattern. A man wearing the Cuchulain mask enters from one side with sword and shield. He dances a dance which represents a man fighting the waves. The waves may be represented by other dancers: in his frenzy he supposed the waves to be his enemies: gradually he sinks down as if overcome, then fixes his eyes with a cataleptic stare upon some imaginary distant object. The stage becomes dark, and when the light returns it is empty.⁷⁹

In performance, the reviewer for *The Spectator* gave an unusually vivid account:

In the first passage, before a curtain of huge tumbling seas, six green-veiled figures represented the flowing waters; and against these strove, in a dance that moved through and through their ranks, the figure of the hero, Cuchulain, blade in hand. These unwearying rhythms prevail against his failing strength, and at last he sinks, the proud white mask thrown back in agony, as they rise. The hero has been overcome in his frenzied battle with the waves.⁸⁰

The "unwearying rhythms" of the music for this section refer to a repeated triplet figure, reminiscent of an Irish reel, but which is made much more complex by several treatments connoting the crash of waves and the pull of undertow: at times the figure is syncopated, played against a strong ostinato chords in the bass, and at other points, overwhelmed with percussion and rapid running scales in the strings.

The second dance comes at the climax of the play, as Emer tries to ward-off the advances of Fand to lure the Ghost of Cuchulain back to the sea:

Fand moves round the crouching Ghost of Cuchulain at front of the stage in a dance that grows gradually quicker as he awakes. At moments she may drop her hair upon his head, but she does not kiss him...Her mask and clothes must suggest gold or bronze or brass and silver, so that she seems more an idol than a human being. This suggestion may be repeated in her movements...The object of the dance is that having awakened Cuchulain he will follow Fand out; probably

⁷⁹W. B. Yeats, *Fighting the Waves*, 73.

⁸⁰*The Spectator*, 24 August 1929, 243.

he will seek a kiss and the kiss will be withheld.⁸¹

The reviewer for *The Spectator* described de Valois's Fand as "a wild, metallic creature of frantically rapid gesture" who "whirls noisily in and dances before the wraith, and the hero's ghost, starting up, pursues her in new desire."⁸² Antheil's music for Fand's dance emphasizes the metallic, inhuman quality of her movement, with machine-like running notes in the trumpet and bells played against the nightmarish, falling chromatic line in the piano, chorus, megaphoned trombones, and augmented by trills in the other instruments and wailing actors, as noted earlier. It is curious that Yeats gives this dance to Fand; it is clearly an obvious choice given the theatrical possibilities of supernatural dancing, yet the climax at this point in the play has not been earned by Fand, but more centrally belongs to Emer. Yeats seems divided between his dramaturgical investment in Emer, and his fascination with the direct theatrical power of Fand. Perhaps a more telling choice would have been to give Emer, the most complex character in the play, a dance in response to Fand. The final dance occurs in the Epilogue and echoes the play's opening:

Fand...enters and dances a dance which expresses her despair for the loss of Cuchulain. As before there may be other dancers who represent the waves. It is called, in order to balance the first dance, "Fand mourns among the waves." It is essentially a dance which symbolises, like water in the fortune-telling books, bitterness. As she takes her final pose of despair the Curtain falls.⁸³

Here, Antheil's music for the final dance starts with a rapid section similar to Fand's first dance, and then reprises the languid wave motifs of the opening over which is played the haunting melody of the Musician's first song. Echoing the music, downstage of the drawn wave curtain, de Valois's "lightning movements changed to the slow, dead

⁸¹W. B. Yeats, *Fighting the Waves*, 82.

⁸²*The Spectator*, 24 August 1929, 243.

⁸³W. B. Yeats, *Fighting the Waves*, 85.

motions of despair...this her dance of sorrow among the waves."⁸⁴

Visually, the production aimed for the sparseness of a modern dance concert. The Abbey stage was bare except for the curtains that served as black masking, and the only piece of scenery was Cuchulain's royally curtained sick-bed which itself suggests a kind of proscenium stage. The wave curtain was hung just upstage of the proscenium line, and a significant amount of dancing occurred downstage and on the Abbey's shallow apron. The costumes for the supernatural characters expressed the statuesque and "metallic" qualities Yeats had wanted, and were constructed of materials that enhanced the movement. The wave dancers wore identical short tunics of blues and greens with metallic decorative stripes, and diaphanous sleeves and streamers; their heads were tightly covered with metallic fabric and their faces made up with metallic make-up, all in the effort to create an ensemble of otherworldly, idealized waves. Fand's costume included a long, full, sheer skirt with a metallic top and headdress. All the characters, except the Musicians, appear to have performed barefoot. What was perhaps most visually stunning about the production was Hildo Krop's oversized masks for the principal characters, as Yeats describes:

The masks get much of their power from enclosing the whole head; this makes the head out of proportion to the body, and I found some difference of opinion as to whether this was a disadvantage or not in an art so distant from reality; that it was not a disadvantage in the case of [Fand] all were agreed. She was a strange, noble, unforgettable figure.⁸⁵

Of course, not everyone agreed: the critic for the *Irish Independent* described the masks as making the performers look like "a collection of battered nursery dolls who had by some strange freak begun to discuss life and love and death."⁸⁶ *The Spectator* was troubled

⁸⁴*The Spectator*, 24 August 1929, 243.

⁸⁵W. B. Yeats, "Fighting the Waves Introduction," 61-62.

⁸⁶*Irish Independent*, 14 August 1929, quoted in Kathrine Sorley Walker, "The Festival and the Abbey: Ninette de Valois' Early Choreography, 1925-1934, Part One," 410.

that "the whole drama turned upon Cuchulain as a devourer of women," and that the masks "made this animalism the more brutal, because inhuman...to render animal desire abstract is to make it doubly ugly, as in some inexcusable, outworn *roué*."⁸⁷A more moderate appraisal came from *The Times* which commented that

the play shows that beauty is subjective, and the use of masks helps the symbolic text very much...The perfection of the masks, made by the Dutch sculptor Hildo Krop, who was present last night, will probably induce Mr. Yeats to experiment further in their use in an ordinary theatre. They gave rigidity to the countenances of the actors, but occasional fluffiness of voice tended to remind the audience of unreality.⁸⁸

From photographs, Robinson's staging of the scenes seems to have been very symmetrical, with Cuchulain's bed placed center and characters often lined up left and right of the bed. Considering her other work of this period, especially at the Festival Theatre, and from photographs, de Valois's choreography for *Fighting the Waves* appears to have been "constructivist" in the sense that verticle and horizontal lines predominate, creating sharply defined stage pictures. The masks also gave de Valois a visual quality that informed her choreography and helped her to grasp the essence of Yeats's characters:

We played in masks, both actors and dancers. Here was a nobility of form that added to the remote objective feeling of the whole venture, for the mask was the outward and important symbol of this inner force that was at work. My mask never worried me, for its presence became all-important. They were beautiful masks and caught the spirit of the poet's dream world. I always studied my masks very carefully, and then I knew what I had to express with my movements so as to illustrate both action and meaning. In the end I just felt that my face was a part of the mask's own projection.⁸⁹

Fighting the Waves, subtitled "A Ballet Play" in the program, was premiered at the Abbey Theatre on 13 August 1929; the work ran about a half-hour and appears to have shared the bill with four dances performed by de Valois, Hedley Briggs,

⁸⁷*The Spectator*, 24 August 1929, 243.

⁸⁸*The Times*, 15 August 1929, 11.

⁸⁹Ninette de Valois, *Step by Step: The Formation of an Establishment*, 184.

and the students of the Abbey School of Ballet as part of the regular series of dance performances.⁹⁰ On 28 March 1930, under the auspices of her London school, the Academy of Choregraphic Art, de Valois revived *Fighting the Waves* at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, with the same cast and designs, on a mixed bill with two of her short ballets, and an excerpt from Gordon Bottomley's verse drama, *So Fair a Satrap*.⁹¹ *Fighting the Waves* received a good deal of press coverage; *The New York Times* even devoted an article on the work, announcing that "Yeats, Dutch masks, Russian dancing and American music will constitute a combination without parallel on the Abbey Stage."⁹² Overall, the reactions to *Fighting the Waves* usually praised the ambitiousness of the undertaking, but were mixed in their appraisal of the results. *The Times* (London) was most congratulatory about the Dublin performance:

Fighting the Waves had been eagerly anticipated, and when the final curtain fell thunderous applause announced its immediate success...The audience which expected something novel had all anticipations fulfilled, and the vigorous applause was testimony of complete satisfaction...On the whole it was a memorable performance which suggests new possibilities to the Abbey Theatre directors.⁹³

Most offended was Joseph Holloway who, though hardly a professional reviewer, probably spoke for a significant portion of the conservative Abbey audience:

The masked figures seemed strange to the eye, but there was a certain weirdness in that worn by the demon of the sea who replaces "Cuchullain" in the bed...Those masks suggested the big-head of my early pantomime days, and conveyed nothing to me save a more or less obstruction to the spoken words...The opening ballet of "Cuchullain" fighting the waves was decorative and beautiful to the eye, but the music that accompanied it was like the falling of

⁹⁰Lennox Robinson, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre, A History 1899-1951*, 143, 216.

⁹¹*The Times*, 31 March 1930, 9.

⁹²J. J. Hayes, "Mr. Yeats Plans an Experiment" in *The New York Times*, 25 August 1929, section 8, 2.

⁹³*The Times*, 15 August 1929, 11.

a tin tray on the flags.⁹⁴

Lady Gregory also had reservations, but attests to the theatrical power of the performance:

I went to Dublin and saw *The Fighting of the Waves*—wild, beautiful, the motion of the dancers, the rhythm of the music, the scene. The words lost, the masks hideous—yet added to the strange unreality. We might all have been at the bottom of the sea.⁹⁵

Though Sturge Moore did not care for the costumes and some of the dances, he did appreciate the general problem of keeping all theatrical elements working towards one artistic goal:

I saw your *Fighting with the Waves* at Hammersmith and greatly enjoyed it. The masks though needlessly grotesque were full of imagination and very effective...Though I am not a connoisseur I like the music and felt it was truly dramatic. The only part of it which I felt was unworthy was the song for the first lyric: neither the singer nor the music for that seemed to have the faintest notion how beautiful the words, which they made inaudible, were. But the great moment was the entrance and dance of Fand and her mask; even her costume, though funny, was far the best. The grouping of the waves with her had real invention...This group dancing and the music were the only parts of the performance really on a level with your words. The prejudice against masks is astonishing...Evidently to see a mask is enough to dull some people's ears...I think the form of the whole is good and might serve in other cases. It was far and away the most interesting and *for an artist* instructive item of the afternoon. And I was extremely interested and thrilled.⁹⁶

More to the point of assessing the success of Yeats and de Valois's experiment with creating a "piece for dancer, sculptor and musician," was the issue of whether the various media of the piece coalesced into a whole. *The Times* reviewer for the Hammersmith production observed that

This ambitious attempt to unite five arts on equal terms has too slender a core to make a unity; the plot is too tenuous as plot, and if it is meant to be more than

⁹⁴Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill, eds., *Joseph Holloway's Irish Theatre* (Dixon: Proscenium Press, 1968), I, 50-51.

⁹⁵Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory, *Journals 1916-1930*, ed. Lennox Robinson (London: Putnam, 1946), 333.

⁹⁶T. Sturge Moore, W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: *Their Correspondence 1901-1937*, 161-162.

mere story-telling in action its symbolism is too obscure. Statuesque figures emerging from a Yeatsian twilight fit in very well to the abrupt modern music of George Antheil, but not with lyrics sung inaudibly above the din of percussion or prose recited in a poetic manner; the elements do not fit together...It was undoubtedly thoroughly well performed by executants of all the arts involved, and there was no lack of technical cooperation between them, but their efforts carried no conviction that a number of vaguely poetical elements will add up into a strong and self-sufficient work of art.

Not sure what this mixture of arts was, this reviewer worried that the piece was "neither poetry, drama, ballet, nor music," but hastened to conclude, that "being something of all four, is good theatre."⁹⁷

The director is usually the person who is finally responsible for the overall coherence of a theatre production, and Lennox Robinson did indeed concur that his job as director was to harmonize the various elements of a play; he believed that the director should be unobtrusive rather than dictatorial, that he should work through suggestion and encouragement and, though he directed a wide range of plays including poetic and experimental pieces at the Abbey, he was temperamentally most suited to more realistic work.⁹⁸ Writing more than a decade later about *Fighting the Waves*, Robinson defended his work against the criticism that it might not have been stylized enough:

But, in truth, the new mechanics of non-realism was seldom carried to its extreme; [Yeats] asks for a backcloth painted with waves for *Fighting the Waves* and if Dolly Smith's was not like that which Mr. Harker would have supplied that is only a difference in paint and personality. In the same play a bed had to be used with real curtains which can be drawn...To have carried his invention to its extreme he should have used puppets. Disguise and make artificial as much as you will with mask and stylized movement, human flesh and blood will out, unreality put on reality and call for a real stick to hobble with, a bed to lie on.⁹⁹

Although de Valois found Robinson to be a supportive collaborator, their working styles

⁹⁷*The Times*, 31 March 1930, 9.

⁹⁸Christopher Murray, "Lennox Robinson: The Abbey's Anti-Hero," in Masaru Sekine, ed., *Irish Writers and the Theatre* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble Books, 1986), 127-129.

⁹⁹Lennox Robinson, *Curtain Up: An Autobiography* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1942), 68.

were in direct opposition. John Martin describes de Valois as combining the devotion of Joan of Arc with the procedural methods of the Red Queen,¹⁰⁰ and at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, de Valois was nicknamed "The Games Mistress" given her manner, reminiscent of a hockey coach, of madly dashing about the stage, scolding, goading and exhorting.¹⁰¹ During the rehearsal period for *Fighting the Waves*, de Valois was busily shuttling among her various commitments in London, Cambridge and Dublin, and what she perceived as the working atmosphere at the Abbey was often a frustration for her:

Time, at the Abbey, of course, stood still for the general convenience of everyone. Productions were carried through in an atmosphere of leisurely Celtic twilight. I can recall the flautist who so beautifully rehearsed with us for *The Hawk's Well*. When the rehearsal was finished he remembered that the days chosen for the performances would be out of the question...they were too inconvenient...Faintly was his announcement relayed through the dark empty theatre with more curiosity than consternation; like an echo was the statement handed on, everyone hoping that someone had broad enough shoulders to accept the final impact. A gentle half-sigh eventually dismissed the matter and the waste of time was generously written off.¹⁰²

Yeats however was confident that in *Fighting the Waves* he had "discovered a new form by this combination of dance, speech and music."¹⁰³ Still, it is curious that in the process of describing the work's success in a various letters, Yeats's synopsis of the piece recounts the most theatrically realized moments of the scenario as performed, rather than the most important points of the conflict and plot as written:

My *Fighting the Waves* has been my greatest success on the stage since *Kathleen-ni-Houlihan*, and its production was a great event here...The dancing of the goddess in her abstract almost non-representative mask was extraordinarily exciting. The play begins with a dance which represents Cuchullan fighting the waves, then after some singing by the chorus comes the play which has for its central incident the dance of the goddess and of the ghost of Cuchullan, and then after more singing is the dance of the goddess mourning among the waves. The

¹⁰⁰John Martin, "The Royal Ballet's Most Uncommon Commoner," *Saturday Review*, 27 April 1963, 71.

¹⁰¹Norman Marshall, *The Other Theatre*, 139.

¹⁰²Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance With Me*, 108.

¹⁰³W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 768.

waves are of course dancers. I felt that the sea was eternity and that they were all upon its edge. The theatre was packed night after night, so the play will be revived.¹⁰⁴

Yeats appears to have indeed “gone over to the enemy” in allowing the script to be dominated by Fand and her world as expressed in the dances and music. What seems to have most fascinated Yeats in this transposition from script to danced performance was the ability of de Valois and Briggs to give material and theatrical realization to the experience of existence at the edge of mortality.

For Yeats, *Fighting the Waves* was an ambitious and rewarding experiment, one that moved him further away from the Noh form, and widened his audience in a public venue. “I wished through the drama, through a commingling of verse and dance, through singing that was also speech, through what I called the applied arts of literature,” explained Yeats, “to plunge it back into social life.”¹⁰⁵ Yeats appeared to have outgrown the self-imposed restrictions of his first plays for dancers, and yet after *Fighting the Waves*, he returned to the smaller form. The cost of such a complex production as *Fighting the Waves* was certainly a factor, as was Yeats’s declining health; so too was the decreasing amount of time de Valois could spend in Dublin given her new commitment in London to the Camargo Society, a ballet producing organization modeled after the Stage Society.

In the several years after *Fighting the Waves*, Yeats and de Valois did manage to collaborate where time and energies permitted. In 1931, the Abbey Players went on tour for most of the next four years, giving the Abbey Ballet School more rehearsal and performance time. In September they performed a revival of *The Cat and the Moon* and in December, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, both choreographed by de Valois, but rehearsed by Nesta Brooking, one of de Valois’s London students, who took over the

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵W. B. Yeats, “Pages from a Diary in 1930,” in *Explorations*, 300.

day-to-day operation of the Abbey Ballet School as de Valois was increasingly tethered to London.¹⁰⁶ For the revival of *At the Hawk's Well* in 1933, de Valois wore Michio Ito's original costume and mask and used Dulac's music, but she devised new dances. De Valois described to Richard Taylor the dances she created under Yeats's direction:

She danced barefoot in the modern style then known as abstract expressionism, and the choreography was created to express the emotional content of the mask through stylized forms. Both movement and maintained emotion were determined by the fact of the Hawk's hood, and the dance progressed from an evocation of brooding power, through suggestive seduction, to the violent ecstasy of a wild bird.¹⁰⁷

Interestingly, on the same program, de Valois staged two additional dance plays, *Bluebeard* by Mary Davenport, and *The Drinking Horn* with book and music by Arthur Duff—clearly, the Abbey Ballet had become a venue for dance plays by writers other than Yeats.¹⁰⁸

Yeats and de Valois's final collaboration came in 1934 with *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, a new dance play which he wrote for and dedicated to her:

To Ninette de Valois
asking pardon for covering
her expressive face with a mask¹⁰⁹

The form of this play returned to the style of *At the Hawk's Well*, with choruses to open and close the work and its climax expressed through dance. Despite its title, the play centers around a Queen who descends from a tower to seduce a wandering stranger, an act that leads to his death. Influenced by Wilde's *Salomé*, and based on other versions of the *Salomé* story and the Irish folk-tale, "The Binding of the Hair,"¹¹⁰ Yeats's play is

¹⁰⁶Kathrine Sorley Walker, "The Festival and the Abbey: Ninette de Valois' Early Choreography, 1925-1934, Part II," 61.

¹⁰⁷Richard Taylor, *The Drama of W. B. Yeats: Irish Myth and the Japanese No*, 130.

¹⁰⁸Lennox Robinson, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre*, 217.

¹⁰⁹W. B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower, Commentaries and Poems*, 33.

¹¹⁰Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats*, 296.

complex and often obscure in its references, with which de Valois and the actors had to contend:

Down had come the curtain with a smack of despondency on the last rehearsal...the gloom of the theatre was cut off and also those two whispering figures [Yeats and Robinson]. I arose from my throne and removed my mask, behind which I had sunk for an hour, lulled to peace by the voice of that great actor Peter McCormack. Within the folds of his costume of the heroic age, he looked at me, sighed and shook himself like a dog. "Well, may the spirit of Mr. Yeats be with us tonight, and may it spread itself a bit and give a clue to the audience as to what it all is that we be talkin' about."¹¹¹

Yet by this point in their collaboration, de Valois knew that she needed to focus on the essence of her character, not the complex conflicts of a play:

Yeats in rehearsal was searching for a style to suit his language and his inspiration, and for me it was only a question of understanding what had inspired him and then letting the same feeling and approach inspire me...I don't claim to understand the plays, but one had to feel something, to achieve a quiet approach to them. I would sit on a chair on the stage in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* for the best part of 15 minutes behind a mask but one had to feel something, one had to have a certain reaction to what was happening on the stage. This was what excited me.¹¹²

Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespear that the dance with the severed head, which was represented by de Valois dancing with the mask of the stranger, was "one long expression of horror and fascination."¹¹³

De Valois's work in Dublin came to a close in 1934: the Abbey decided to retrench the Ballet School due to financial problems, and de Valois was increasingly busy in London, laying the foundations for a national ballet company. With the Camargo Society, de Valois created a number of full-length ballets including *La Création du monde* and, what was to be cited as the first major ballet of the British repertory, *Job*. When the Sadler's Wells Theatre was completed in 1931, Lilian Baylis invited de Valois to make the theatre the home of her Academy, and eventually a company formed and

¹¹¹Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance With Me*, 113.

¹¹²Ninette de Valois, quoted in G. M. Pinciss, "A Dancer for Mr. Yeats," 390.

¹¹³W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 827.

took the name of the theatre, the Sadler's Wells Ballet. Building a ballet institution in England took a great deal of vision and talent, and certainly de Valois's work with Diaghilev, Gray and Yeats greatly shaped her understanding of ballet as a theatre art.

Norman Marshall has well observed that

It is an instinct [for acting] that has been highly developed in the company by Ninette de Valois, whose early experience at the Cambridge Festival Theatre and at the Abbey Theatre, working in collaboration with play producers, gave her a knowledge of acting and a sense of the theatre which is obvious in all her work. No choreographer is better at telling a story and creating characters. In her ballets the dancers are seldom types; they are individuals. In her masterpiece, *The Rake's Progress*, the corps de ballet are as carefully characterised as the small parts in a play by a skillful dramatist.¹¹⁴

It is ironic that Yeats, who knew next to nothing of ballet technique, actually had a significant influence on the course of modern British ballet.

Through his brief collaboration with Michio Ito, and then his seven years of working with Ninette de Valois, Yeats developed an understanding of what dance could do that was quite different from what verse could offer. It is interesting to note that several other dramatists of Yeats's social circle also experimented with "dance plays" (Gordon Bottomley, John Masefield, and Terence Gray, for example), but their use of dance remained largely decorative and illustrative.¹¹⁵ Yeats was distinctive in truly struggling with the problem of balancing the demands of a text with the theatrical experience of dance, music and visual staging. By choosing to use dance to theatricalize intense, spiritual and supernatural states of being, Yeats sought to give material reality to ideas and feelings simultaneously through a variety of media. Of course Yeats's experiments in balancing text and dance to create coherent stage experiences resulted in varying degrees of success, which only spurred him on to further rewrites and

¹¹⁴Norman Marshall, *The Other Theatre*, 149.

¹¹⁵See Earl Miner, *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature*, 216-254 for a discussion of British writers who used Noh techniques for poetic novelty or as an escape from the modern world.

experiments. Each dance play presents a specific set of challenges concerning how to direct an audience's focus among theatrical elements, and Yeats's experience as a director of his own work made him acutely aware of the necessity of this task. To this end, Yeats sets up a strong framing device in each of his dance plays, for example, the Musicians's rituals in the Noh influenced plays, or the use of a mimetic dance as in *Fighting the Waves*, which supports the ability of the piece to shift focus from art to art, or to layer them simultaneously.

Several critics have suggested that Yeats was hampered by being essentially torn between two loyalties, as Edna Sharoni has thoughtfully observed:

Yeats's attempts to articulate the inner world of silence were weakened in the *Plays for Dancers* by a fundamental indecision about the primacy of the word versus the primacy of dance. For the *dance* implies pure yielding up of the whole self to emotion on a level where intellect cannot intrude, while the *word*—pristinely imagistic as he sought to render it—is nonetheless thought...Yeats's inability to resolve this paradox leaves the plays enervated by being pulled in opposite directions, their already fragile structure wrenched apart by conflicting forces...though Yeats was as acutely aware as all poets of the ultimate inadequacy of language, he was unable whole-heartedly to abandon his reliance on the strength of his words.¹¹⁶

Given Yeats's many efforts to edit his text to accommodate dance and other theatrical elements, Sharoni's argument has a definite appeal. However, the area of Yeats's experimentation is more complex. As discussed in the Introduction, not only is this dichotomy of dance as emotion and word as cognition not new, it is an almost unavoidable distraction when trying to discuss works created in a dance-theatre genre. Certainly one can find many examples where this dichotomy is true, but what Yeats was attempting to do was to express the "energy of the body" through patterning those theatrical elements that both theatre and dance share. Although Yeats's interdisciplinary approach owes much to the influence of Craig, it most primarily serves his particular vision. Typically in his dance plays, Yeats is most interested in and builds to a

¹¹⁶Edna G. Sharoni, "At the Hawk's Well: Yeats's Unresolved Conflict Between Language and Silence," *Comparative Drama* 7 (#2, 1973), 170.

character's moment of inner confrontation with a supernatural force, often a projection of another version of the self. Though this idea of climax might seem old-fashioned, especially with regard to a plot, its frenzy is an important pathway to a Yeatsian state of stillness and trance. To give his audience an immediate connection to this moment, Yeats creates a theatrical experience that is not always mediated through language, and utilizes music, movement, and visual elements to retard the forward movement of the text, meditating on heightened, spiritualized moments:

We...are certain that nothing can give dignity to human nature but the character and energy of its expression. We do not even ask that it shall have dignity so long as it can burn away all that is not itself.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷W. B. Yeats, "Pages from a Diary in 1930," 339-340.

Chapter Three: *Gabriele D'Annunzio and Ida Rubinstein*

I. *D'Annunzio and the Sensorial Body*

What has always been most significant in the novels and in the plays is the power of rendering sensation, with a directness, an acuteness, almost painful...[D'Annunzio] accepts, as no one else of our times does, the whole physical basis of life, the spirit which can be known only through the body, the body which is but clay in the shaping or destroying hands of the spirit. And so he becomes the idealist of material things, while seeming to materialise spiritual things.¹

As Arthur Symons suggests, the vitality of the body is a wellspring of creative energy which unifies the Italian playwright with the physical world. For D'Annunzio the body could reveal dark animal-like passions while also being capable of generating sublime dreams. As a kind of hieroglyph, the body simultaneously hides and reveals an interior life, and has a dynamic relationship with the world of objects.

In D'Annunzio's novels *Il Piacere* (*The Child of Pleasure*, 1889) and *Il Fuoco* (*The Flame of Life*, 1900), one of the key techniques of realism, the observation of everyday detail, is transposed into the "language of flowers and silent things." In each, the central character is a master artist (and a thinly veiled alter-ego for D'Annunzio) who feels his relationship to things with extraordinary acuteness and takes great pleasure in savoring the correspondences between inner sensibilities and the physical world. "Minds that have the habit of imaginative contemplation and poetic dreaming," reflects D'Annunzio's protagonist, the engraver Andrea Sperelli,

attribute to inanimate objects a soul, sensitive and variable as their own, and recognise in all things—be it form or colour, sound or perfume—a transparent symbol, an emblem of some emotion or thought...At times the vision is so lucid as to produce actual pain in such minds, they feel themselves overwhelmed by the plenitude of life revealed to them and are terrified by the phantom of their own creation.²

¹Arthur Symons, *Eleonora Duse* (London: Elkin Matthews, Ltd., 1926), 120, 135.

²Gabriele D'Annunzio, *The Child of Pleasure*, translated by Georgina Harding (St. Ives: Dedalus, Ltd., 1991), 192.

The sharpened senses of the body become the means to perceive and to communicate with the sensory world and its mysteries, not only by analogical thought, but by a kind of divination through the experience of one's body, as D'Annunzio describes in his *Libro segreto*:

When, at night, I bend over my page in this workshop...with, inside myself, some inexplicable, continuous trembling that is close to me like the beating of my heart, and distant like the twinkling of the stars—sometimes I put down my pen and listen, without turning my head towards the windows. I listen but do not “prick up my ears”: I possess the sense of hearing in my entire body...The edge of my table is delicately light like the contour of my suspended thought, like the border of my unfinished image, like the lashes of my lowered eyelids. I listen.³

This experience of body and world is fluid and ever-changing and consequently, as Ezio Raimondi points out, D'Annunzio like most other symbolists, embraced music as the artistic ideal of form. Similar to Yeats, D'Annunzio experimented with combining music and poetry to find a pattern of rhythm that could “heighten the moment of contemplation.”⁴

Although D'Annunzio first established himself as a literary figure with his poetry and novels, it was inevitable that he would be drawn to the theatre, given his histrionic sensibility, his dream of communicating with a mass audience, and his mission of promoting Italian national culture. But central to his enthusiasm for the theatre was his relationship with Eleonora Duse, which endured from 1897 to 1904. Through his collaborations with Duse, D'Annunzio realized the crucial role that the body could play in conveying emotion and thought; the presence and physicality of the body were expressive in a distinctly different way than were the mimetic and referential functions of spoken language. In his autobiographical novel *The Flame of Life*, D'Annunzio's hero,

³Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in Ezio Raimondi, “D'Annunzio and International Symbolism,” translated by Jon C. Cherubini, in *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*, edited by Anna Balakian (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982), 333.

⁴Ezio Raimondi, “D'Annunzio and International Symbolism,” 317.

the poet-orator Stelio Effrena, describes the talent of the great tragic actress, "La Foscarina" (read Duse), to physicalize a dynamic and powerful interior life:

Although she was motionless, although she was silent, her well-known accents and her memorable gestures seemed to live about her, vibrating indefinitely, like melodies round the chords that repeat them, like its rimes round the closed book where love and pain go in search of them, to find comfort and intoxication. The heroic fidelity of Antigone, the fury of Cassandra, the devouring fever of Phaedra... all were living in her, living in her body... and for no other reason than the motion of a muscle, a sign, a gesture, a line of feature, a tremor of the eyelids, a slight change of color, an almost imperceptible bend of brows, a changing play of light and shade, a lightning-like virtue of expression radiating from that thin, frail body, infinite worlds of undying beauty were continually generated... He loved her for the unexpected visions she brought him, for the mysterious sense of inner events that she communicated to him by her vicissitudes of expression. It astonished him to find that the lines of a face, the movements of a human body could so powerfully touch and fertilize the intellect.⁵

"Hers is a technique of movement," observes Pirandello, "a constant, gentle flowing that has neither time nor possibility of stopping, and certainly not of crystallizing itself into predetermined behaviour."⁶ Other contemporaries noted Duse's ability to distill and express intense emotion through her body. One of her fellow actors, Luigi Rasi, describes her capacity for conveying "hysterical temperaments":

Her eyes were agitated by imperceptible quiverings, they flickered rapidly from side to side; her cheeks went from blush to pallor with incredible rapidity; nostrils and lips trembled; her teeth were clenched violently and every smallest portion of her face was in motion... Then her body... had serpentine shifts of weight or profoundly languorous gestures and moved in perfect accord with the action and counterbalancing action of her arms, hands, fingers, torso and counterpart activity of her face.⁷

"She is, in short, the fin de siècle woman," summed up the actress Adelaide Ristori, "she holds her public in thrall, she communicates her nervous over-excitement to that public,

⁵Gabriele D'Annunzio, *The Flame of Life*, translated by Baron Gustavo Tosti (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1900), 124-125, 344.

⁶Luigi Pirandello, quoted in Susan Bassnett, "Eleonora Duse," in John Stokes, Michael R. Booth and Susan Bassnett, *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse: The Actress in her Time* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 125.

⁷Luigi Rasi, quoted in Susan Bassnett, "Eleonora Duse," 142.

so that even when they have left the theatre they are still aware of it.”⁸ Duse was known for the physical restraint and nuance she brought to her acting especially in the realistic plays she performed before her more stylized work with D’Annunzio. Yet this diminution of scale evidently did not prevent her from communicating a great intensity of emotion and psychological tension through her body. Arthur Symons has written that Duse’s art is “subtle, almost spiritual, a suggestion, an evasion, a secrecy,” but adds that her most memorable acting occurred in “moments of most intense quietness.”⁹

Both Duse and D’Annunzio were dismayed by the condition of the commercial theatre in Italy which was then dominated by actor-manager-led companies financially dependent on touring and popular taste; neither was there a recognizable alternative theatre movement as there was in Paris or London. D’Annunzio’s first professional theatre experience and collaboration with Duse, a Paris production of *Il sogno d’un mattino de primavera* (1897) was, as Laura Richards points out, indicative of the kinds of obstacles the playwright encountered throughout much of his career.¹⁰ At the Théâtre de la Renaissance, D’Annunzio’s experimental, symbolist play was performed by one of the most famous actresses of the time, produced with lavish costumes and scenery, and presented for a mainstream audience; given this unsuitable context, it is not surprising that D’Annunzio wrote of his “inexpressible disgust at seeing his dream of poetry so crudely realized.”¹¹

Between 1895 and 1901 Duse helped D’Annunzio to produce five of his plays commercially, but all the while D’Annunzio dreamed of founding an idealized

⁸Adelaide Ristori, quoted in Susan Bassnett, “Eleonora Duse,” 137.

⁹Arthur Symons, *Eleonora Duse*, 6-7.

¹⁰Laura Richards, “The Theatrical Collaboration of Eleonora Duse and Gabriele D’Annunzio in the 1890s,” *Essays in Theatre/Études théâtrales* 10 (#1, November 1991), 83-85.

¹¹Gabriele d’Annunzio, quoted in Laura Richards, “The Theatrical Collaboration of Eleonora Duse and Gabriele D’Annunzio in the 1890s,” 87.

"temple to the Tragic Muse," a national Festival Theatre, which would

restore to the drama its ancient ceremonial character...We would, thus recall the rural and Dionysiac origin of the Drama...What a distance will separate this Festival Theatre, built upon the serene hillside, from the cramped urban theatres, where, amid a suffocating heat impregnated with all the impurities, before a crowd of stupid imbecility, actors and actresses display their attainments...When the first stone of the temple has been laid here we shall send forth a cry into all Latin countries: "O Poets! Bring us your masterpieces!"¹²

Inspired by the music dramas of Wagner and the writings of Nietzsche, D'Annunzio saw in Greek tragedy an ideal for the kind of ceremonial, spiritual and cathartic theatre he envisioned, but he refused to concede that the German spirit was closest to the Greek, arguing that the great artistic achievements of the Italian Renaissance, especially of Monteverdi, provided more suitable models. Unlike Wagner, D'Annunzio maintained that poetry should have the dominant role, but he sought the power of music and dance to reveal the "inner depths of the action." In *The Flame of Life*, Stelio expounds on the visceral power of this theatre which lives at "the extreme limit of verbal power":

On the ordinary stage [mythic characters] are so distant that any contact with them seems as impossible as contact with mental phantoms... but by making them appear in the rhythmic silence, by making music accompany them to the threshold of the visible world, I draw them marvelously near to the spectator, because I illumine the most secret depth of the will that produces them... their intimate essence is there uncovered and placed in immediate communion with the soul of the crowd... [which] under the ideas signified by voice and gesture, feels the depths...By means of music, of dancing, and of lyric poetry, I create round my heroes an ideal atmosphere in which the whole of Nature vibrates... I would that my creations could be felt throbbing in the torrent of savage forces.¹³

Nietzsche's superman Zarathustra was a dancer, an "enemy of the spirit of gravity," and this concept of Dionysian frenzy and liberation was not lost on D'Annunzio. "La Tanagra," the Isadora Duncan figure (recast with an Italian pedigree) who inspires Stelio, significantly appears to the poet dancing the essence of Beethoven's

¹²Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in William Weaver, *Duse: A Biography* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 198-199.

¹³Gabriele D'Annunzio, *The Flame of Life*, 208-209.

"Ode to Joy":

The silent dancer appeared within a parallelogram traced in the arch of the stage, as within the limits of a strophe; her body, redeemed for a while from the sad laws of gravity, imitating fire and water and the whirlpool and the evolution of stars. "La Tanagra," the flower of Syracuse, made of wings, as a flower is made of petals! Thus he conjured up the image of the already famous Sicilian who had rediscovered the ancient art... The substance of life would no longer be signified by immaterial symbols, but life itself would be manifested in its entirety through the medium of the poet, the Word made flesh, the rhythm quickened in a breathing, living form.¹⁴

Although Duncan did not perform in Italy until 1912, she had long, though quite different friendships with Duse and D'Annunzio. Duncan was twenty years younger than Duse and very early in her dance career was inspired by the actress's sense of stillness and presence, as she described in her impressions of watching Duse's performance in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*:

At the end of the third act, where Mrs. Tanqueray is driven to the wall by her enemies and, overcome with ennui, resolves to commit suicide, there was a moment when the Duse stood quite still, alone on the stage. Suddenly, without any special outward movement, she seemed to grow and grow until her head appeared to touch the roof of the theatre, like the moment when Demeter appeared before the house of Metaneira and disclosed herself as a Goddess. In that supreme gesture Duse was no longer the second Mrs. Tanqueray, but some wonderful goddess of all ages, and her growth before the eyes of the audience into that divine presence was one of the greatest artistic achievements I have ever witnessed. I remember that I went home dazed with the wonder of it. I said to myself, when I come on the stage and stand as still as Eleonora Duse did tonight, and, at the same time, create that tremendous force of dynamic movement, then I shall be the greatest dancer in the world.¹⁵

Duncan's allegiance remained steadfast to Duse, and when D'Annunzio made romantic advances towards the dancer, Duncan took great pleasure in refusing him on numerous occasions: "I thought I would be the only woman in the world who would resist him,"

¹⁴[*ibid.*, 140-142.

¹⁵[Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance*, edited by Sheldon Cheney (New York: Theatre Arts, 1969), 121.

she boasted, "It was a heroic impulse."¹⁶ Still, she spent a good deal of time with the playwright who considered her "the dominating goddess of Nature," while Duncan viewed him as a "being of light and magnetism," and a man of "great histrionic talent" for "improvised pantomime" at her parties.¹⁷

D'Annunzio made three identifiable though unsuccessful efforts to create the theatre of his dreams: first on the shores of the Lago di Albano, a few miles from Rome, second on the stones of a ruined Roman theatre at Fiesole, and the third and most evolved attempt was made during the early spring of 1910 for a "Théâtre de Fête" to be built in the Esplanade des Invalides in Paris. D'Annunzio's close collaborator on this third attempt was Mariano Fortuny and, working together in Countess Béarn's private theatre, they experimented with moving lights and projected images, further refining the designer's methods for reflecting light. D'Annunzio was particularly fascinated by Fortuny's "magic machine" because it could create the illusion of an outdoor vista, leading his audience "out of themselves" and towards the sky; lighting and special effects could help to emphasize the movement of the body and heighten the sensory experience of a performance. A distinguished committee of theatre artists and critics had been assembled and subscription forms printed; Isadora Duncan's dance company

¹⁶Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 1955), 183. Duncan appears to have staged several mock seductions for D'Annunzio which seem like exercises in mutual parody. On one occasion, "We filled [my studio]... with white flowers, with white lilies: all the flowers that one brings to a funeral. And we lit myriads of candles. D'Annunzio was *ébloui* at the sight of this studio, which was like a Gothic chapel, with all those candles burning and all those white flowers. He came in, and we received him and led him to a divan heaped with cushions. First I danced for him. Then I covered him with flowers and put candles all round him, treading softly and rhythmically to the strains of Chopin's Funeral March. Gradually, one by one, I extinguished all the candles, leaving alight only those at his head and feet. But when I advanced solemnly towards the one at his head, with a tremendous effort of will-power he sprang to his feet, and with a loud shriek of terror rushed from the studio, while the pianist and I, helpless with laughter, collapsed in each other's arms." See *My Life*, 184.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 11, 183.

was slated to perform before the opening performance of *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, but the Théâtre de Fête was forgotten by the end of that summer.¹⁸ Though he never realized this theatre, D'Annunzio's plays and productions demonstrate a heightened interest in the body as a source of expression and spectacle through such elements as his use of stage violence, elaborate set and costume design, statues and posing, and dance.

Perhaps the most pervasive emblem for the body in D'Annunzio's work is the statue. The ideal representation of the human body is generally agreed to be antique statuary, and D'Annunzio often appropriates the immobility and plasticity of these classical figures into more modern environments in his work. Introducing statues or statuesque characters into a context where we expect life-like movement, albeit stylized, fascinates and can create a sense of mystery and unease through blurring divisions between divine and human, living and dead, art and life, body and soul. Seemingly frozen into some significant pose, the blindness, immobility and silence of these figures only increases our curiosity about the interior impetus for the gesture, and heightens our search for clues in the outward form the body takes. Statues and statuesque figures also connote a pantheon of classical characters and though D'Annunzio rarely uses specific personages from mythology as characters, the overlay of myth, and the impulse to discover secret analogies and powers is all implied by these ancient figures. The setting of *La città morta* (1899) is "everywhere...crowded with statues, bas reliefs, inscriptions, sculptural fragments: evidences of a remote life, vestiges of a vanished beauty."¹⁹ Anna, the blind and statuesque protagonist, has a highly tactile sensitivity to the physical

¹⁸See Tom Antongini, *D'Annunzio* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 450-452; Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 218; and Giovanni Isgro, *D'Annunzio e la mise en scène* (Palermo: G. B. Palumbo & C., 1993), 152-159, translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Francesca Cristoffanini.

¹⁹Gabriele D'Annunzio, *The Dead City in The Eleonora Duse Series of Plays*, translated by G. Mantellini, edited by Oliver Sayler (New York: Brentano's, 1923), 1.

world and the inner truth of the other characters. As her brother Leonardo unearths the jeweled and masked bodies of the house of Atreus, the ancient sorrows visit new victims. The play has a static quality, a product of long monologues and little physical action; a sense of timelessness is created through grouping the characters sculpturally and posing them, often in relationship to statues, as Bianca's dead body lies by the fountain, guarded by its figures. Anna can only aspire to the peace of these forms:

Through their immovable and lasting beauty circulates an animated life that continually renews itself. They enjoy at one and the same time inertia and fluidity. In solitary gardens they look sometimes as if they were in exile, but they are not, because their liquid souls never cease to communicate with the distant mountains, whence they came, still asleep and enclosed in blocks of shapeless marble. They listen astounded to the words which arise to their lips out of the depths of the earth, but they are not deaf to the conversations of the poets and sages, who like to rest, as in a calm retreat, in the musical shade, where the marble immortalizes classic repose. Do they not seem happy to you?²⁰

Sculptors rank as artistic gods in *The Flame of Life*, their art created through direct physical contact with their material: the father of the ethereal singer whom Stelio pursues throughout the novel is "Lorenzo Arvale, the great sculptor," with allusions to Rodin. "La Foscarina," at the height of her acting powers, is inspired by "immortal statues," seeing "herself sculpted in great silence."²¹ In *La Gioconda* (1898), Sylvia martyrs her beautiful hands to save the falling statue created by her husband, a renowned sculptor, of his mistress. Statues are prominently displayed in the garden, a transitory space between villa and woods in *Il sogno d'un mattino de primavera* (1897), where reality and dream meet. Here Virginio and Isabella, both "petrified" by their passion, attempt to redeem the past, characterized by Virginio as "still dark figures... lighted with a prodigious glare, as unrecognizable as the statues in a burning temple."²²

²⁰Ibid., 66.

²¹Gabriele D'Annunzio, *The Flame of Life*, 48, 345.

²²Gabriele D'Annunzio, *A Spring Morning's Dream*, translated by Anthony Oldcorn, in *Twentieth-Century Italian Drama: An Anthology of the First Fifty Years*, edited by Jane House and Antonio Attisani (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 37.

For D'Annunzio, the dancer can be seen as a kind of animated sculpture—heightening the sensorial life of the body, while idealizing its human form. Dancing and dance-like movement appear in several plays, perhaps most flamboyantly in *La Nave* (1908) where the exotic and sadistic Basiliola dances a deadly seduction, not unlike a Salomé figure. D'Annunzio however, most fully focussed on the possibilities of dance in the two plays he wrote for Ida Rubinstein, *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* (1911) and *La Pisanelle ou la mort parfumée* (1913). Though routinely categorized as a “ballet” dancer, Rubinstein’s particular blend of talents—her commanding stage presence, eccentric beauty and ability to strike expressive poses—was well-suited to D'Annunzio’s work.

II. *Ida Rubinstein*

When Ida Rubinstein made her Ballets Russes debut in 1909 in the title role of *Cléopâtre*, she was an unknown performer sharing the stage with such virtuosic dancers as Nijinsky and Karsavina. From the start, Rubinstein was presented not as a dancer per se, but as a phenomenon, a theatricalized persona and spectacularized body:

The bearers set the casket down in the middle of the temple, opened its double lid, and from within lifted a kind of mummy, a bundle of veils, which they placed upright on its ivory pattens. The four slaves began an astonishing maneuver. They unwound the first veil, which was red, with silver lotuses and crocodiles; then the second veil, which was green, with the history of the dynasties in gold filigree; then the third, which was orange with prismatic stripes; and so on... The twelfth veil, dark blue, Mme. Rubinstein released herself, letting it fall with a sweeping circular gesture. She stood leaning forward, her shoulders slightly hunched like the wings of the ibis; overcome by her long wait, having submitted in her dark coffin, as had we, to the intolerable and sublime music of her cortège... She was wearing a small blue wig, from which a short golden braid hung down on either side of her face. There she stood, unswathed, eyes vacant, cheeks pale, lips parted... and as she confronted the stunned audience, she was too beautiful, like a too potent Oriental fragrance.²³

²³Jean Cocteau, quoted in Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale, *Misia: The Life of Misia Sert* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 136.

This drawn-out and teasing entrance which Cocteau describes was consciously orchestrated by the designer Léon Bakst and choreographer Michel Fokine, who launched her European career, to create an environment to match her particular talents. Rubinstein captivated the Ballets Russes audience not with her dancing ability but with a set of evocative poses. "Her long, youthfully slender, peculiarly angular body seemed to have just descended from an Egyptian bas-relief," writes Prince Peter Lieven, "and her marvellous Eastern profile with narrow almond eyes was very appropriate to the role."²⁴ The Egyptian queen was the first of many exotic characters Rubinstein would play both onstage and off. Dance history has until very recently only given cursory attention to Rubinstein; after all, she never took up choreography, she did not articulate any special philosophy of modern dance, and reviews of her dancing were often negative. In the course of her thirty-year career she alternated between roles that relied on the spoken word and others that depended on dance and mime, confounding efforts to pigeon-hole her art. Writing to his wife, the composer Ferruccio Busoni mused

Now I am going to the Châtelet, to Pisanelle, or "la mort parfumée." I shall see Mlle Rubinstein, of whom it is said by one that she cannot speak but can dance; by another that she has a beautiful body, but cannot dance; by a third, that her body is not womanly, therefore not beautiful. She is just like St. Sebastian, pierced with arrows by all.²⁵

But perhaps Rubinstein was most successful at creating an artistic climate where performance values of acting and of dance could converge.

Rubinstein was evasive about her beginnings, always wishing to control the image she projected, but her upbringing was in fact quite privileged. She was born in Kharkov in 1885; but after the untimely death of her parents to an epidemic, she was

²⁴Prince Peter Lieven, *The Birth of the Ballets Russes* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936), 53.

²⁵Ferruccio Busoni, quoted in Elaine Brody, "The Legacy of Ida Rubinstein: Mata Hari of the Ballets Russes," *The Journal of Musicology* IV (#4, Fall 1985-86), 498, note 30.

brought to St. Petersburg to live with her aunt, Madame Horwitz, in a wealthy and cultured environment, as Michael de Cossart describes:

The capital was a haven of sophistication and comparative tolerance where her aunt and her uncle, Daniel Rubinstein, grouped round themselves leading members of the Russian intelligentsia, musicians, artists and writers...Madame Horwitz's extensive collection of paintings...gave Ida's childhood environment the air of an art gallery. She became used to having beautiful and precious objects around her. And at night she went to sleep lulled by the distant strains of musical masterpieces performed by excellent musicians in her aunt's salon.²⁶

At the time cosmopolitan St. Petersburg was the home of the Maryinsky Theatre and Ballet, and Diaghilev's *World of Art* group of artists including Bakst and Benois; Isadora Duncan danced there in 1904, 1905, 1907 and 1909, and the Moscow Art Theatre presented its first season in 1901.²⁷ Rubinstein was privately tutored, excelling at several languages, Russian literature, and Greek history. As Lynn Garafola points out, the family was socially positioned and assimilated: they identified with Western Europe, had relatives who lived in France, and although the family was Jewish, Ida was baptized into the Russian Orthodox faith. Conscious of creating her identity, at an early age she shortened her given name, Lidia Lvovna Rubinstein, to Ida, also the name of a mountain near Troy, an allusion that was prescient of many of her future roles.²⁸

Rubinstein took lessons in classical ballet, but did not make much progress. Instead, the young Ida was obsessed with her own gestures and poses, as Cossart relates:

²⁶Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1987), 8.

²⁷Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 19, 39. Stanislavsky recounts that Rubinstein managed to meet Duncan (probably in 1905), "only to be chased away." See Lynn Garafola, "Circles of Meaning: The Cultural Contexts of Ida Rubinstein's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*," in *Retooling the Discipline: Research and Teaching Strategies for the 21st Century: Proceedings of the Society of Dance History Scholars Conference* at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, 10-13 February 1994, 33.

²⁸Lynn Garafola, "Circles of Meaning: The Cultural Contexts of Ida Rubinstein's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*," 31.

Domestic storms blew up whenever she was discovered posing in front of her bedroom-mirror and she was expressly forbidden to linger there longer than necessary. Frustration and disappointment at being misunderstood did nothing to stop the girl being fascinated by her own image and by the plasticity of her own body. If anything, it reinforced a narcissistic fixation that motivated her throughout her entire life.²⁹

Her aunt redirected Ida's posturings into an interest in the theatre, taking her to performances and arranging for private drama lessons with Youri Ozarovsky, the director of the Alexandrinsky Theatre.³⁰

Never seeming to be lacking in self-confidence, the nineteen-year-old Rubinstein with governess in tow called on Léon Bakst unannounced early in 1904. Bakst had just designed costumes and sets for a cycle of Greek plays by Sophocles and Euripides for the Alexandrinsky Theatre; Rubinstein admired Bakst's work and asked the artist if he would design costumes and sets for her own production of Sophocles's *Antigone*. Having recently returned from a study tour of Athens with her Greek tutor, Rubinstein had very definite ideas about how she would envision this role based on her study of Greek sculpture and architecture. Bakst agreed to take the job, mostly because he was enthralled by her presence. "This is a fabulous being," he recounted later, "I might love the whole of humanity, every living being like a flower of the Lord, but she I adore like a beautiful tulip, insolent and dazzling, proud of herself and shedding pride around her."³¹ While Bakst was quite taken with Rubinstein's beauty and determination, he was also aware of her inexperience and suggested that she mount only one act of the play and present it in a small private performance.

From the start, Rubinstein generated a pattern for most of her later projects: in tandem with a trusted advisor, usually Bakst, she produced herself in work

²⁹Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 8.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

³¹Léon Bakst, quoted in Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 9.

which reflected her taste and current interests. She hired her drama coach Ozarovsky to direct her, and she rented Lydia Yavorskaia's "New Theatre" which had an elite and literate following. Two months after their initial meeting, *Antigone* was performed on 16 April 1904 for an invited audience which included Sergei Diaghilev.³² The evening was an apparent success, and critics regularly commented on the sculptural quality of Rubinstein's image and movement. "I remember clearly this unique production," remarked ballet critic André Levinson,

And I see again the proud maiden as she is wrapped in the numerous and complicated folds of her black mourning robe. In working out this conception Bakst had drawn his inspiration from a tombstone or else deciphered the clever pattern from a Greek vase.³³

Rubinstein wrote of Bakst that "il conféra à la silhouette humaine l'acuité et le tragique que l'on sent à lire les classiques."³⁴ And Fernand Nozière, rarely a friendly critic towards Rubinstein, still perceived her specific talent for poses:

Le public était nécessairement disposé à se moquer de cette jeune fille audacieuse. Quoi! Elle ne craignait pas d'être l'héroïne d'une pièce et d'avoir pour partenaire des acteurs de grand talent? Elle ne pouvait que paraître ridicule. Mais dès son entrée Mlle. Ida Rubinstein créa l'atmosphère religieuse, sereine. De quel sortilège use-t-elle? Quels secrets a-t-elle ravis à l'antique Hellade? Il ne faut pas chercher un si patient effort de composition. Sans doute, Ida Rubinstein a observé les chefs-d'oeuvre; elle possède la science des attitudes et de la draperie; elle ne recule pas devant un travail méticuleux; elle étudie devant la glace les

³²Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre* (Genève: Editions Slatkine, 1995), 49-50.

³³André Levinson, quoted in Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 10.

³⁴Ida Rubinstein quoted in Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 50. ["He invested the human form with the acuteness and the tragic that one feels when reading the classics."] Unless otherwise credited, the English translations of French in this chapter are by Stéphane Douard.

visions qu'elle offrira, au public.³⁵

Thrilled with her success from *Antigone*, Rubinstein sought out further training over the next three years in order to prepare for her next project, *Salomé*, which was performed in 1908. Rubinstein completed the three-year course given by the Drama Department of the Moscow Theatre School with excellent grades; in addition to academic subjects, she studied diction and declamation, singing, makeup, fencing and "plastique," a combination of mime, gesture and expressive movement that was taught by Vasiliï Gel'tser, a former Bolshoi character dancer and mime. During this time, Rubinstein probably came into contact with Delsarte's theories of gesture and Meyerhold's motion experiments. In her third year, she acted in school productions of *A Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*, *Mary Stuart*, and *Richard III* at the St. Petersburg branch of the Theatre School.³⁶

Upon graduation in 1907, Rubinstein began her study with Michel Fokine, a friend of and recent collaborator with Bakst on a production of *Acis and Galatea* at the Imperial School of Ballet in St. Petersburg. Fokine was just beginning his choreographic career, and believed that movement and gesture were expressive only if they conveyed emotional and psychological truth; mime movements were not substitutes for words, but enlargements of natural gestures that visibly reveal what was not spoken. Concurrently with choreographing her dances for *Salomé* Fokine tutored the tenacious Rubinstein over

³⁵Fernand Nozière, *Ida Rubinstein, Les célébrités de la scène française*, edited by R. Chiberre (Paris: Sansot, 1926), 13-14. ["The public was necessarily disposed to mock this young daring girl. What! Didn't she fear to be the heroine of a play and have for partners actors of great talent? She could only appear ridiculous. But from her entrance Mlle. Ida Rubinstein created a religious atmosphere, serene. What spell did she use? What secrets has she robbed from ancient Greece? One should not look for such a patient effort of composition. Without doubt, Ida Rubinstein has observed masterpieces; she possesses the knowledge of attitudes and drapery; she does not retreat from meticulous work; she studies before the mirror the visions she will offer to the public."]

³⁶Lynn Garafola, "Circles of Meaning: The Cultural Contexts of Ida Rubinstein's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*," 32.

two years in the rudiments of ballet, as he describes:

She was anxious to play the role of Salomé... This resulted in her working daily with me and devoting a great deal of effort to her work. When my wife and I went to Coux for our vacation, she followed us there. One has to give this artist credit. I have seldom seen such energy and persistence. The next summer she followed us still further, to Sorrento, where she worked on other dances. The work on the Salomé dance was unique in my life. I had to teach Rubinstein simultaneously the art of dance and to create for her the Dance of Salomé. Before this, she had studied dancing very little, and showed very little progress in it. Her energy and endurance were of great assistance, as was her appearance. I felt that it would be possible to do something unusual with her in the style of Botticelli. She was tall, thin, and beautiful, and was interesting material from which I had hopes of molding a unique scenic image.³⁷

Rubinstein spent lavish sums of money on her *Salomé* as she continued to pull together her production.³⁸ She commissioned a Russian translation of Wilde's play, and asked Bakst to design costumes and settings. Alexander Glazunov, then the director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, agreed to compose a score, his *Dance of the Seven Veils*, and to conduct the first performance. Rubinstein hired some of the best actors from the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg, and one of the leading staff directors, Vsevolod Meyerhold.³⁹ Vera Komissarzhevskaya, who was then at the height of her career, was also preparing her *Salomé*, and Alexandre Benois describes the intrigue that the two

³⁷Michel Fokine, *Memoirs of a Ballet Master*, translated by Vitale Fokine, edited by Anatole Chujoy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), 137-138.

³⁸Though not without first overcoming several major obstacles. On a visit to Paris in 1908, Rubinstein visited her sister Irene and her husband, a renowned doctor; she also enjoyed the company of the Warshawski sisters, her aunts, known for their salon and their passion for the avant-garde. Upon announcing to her family her intentions of becoming a professional actress, arguments erupted, and Rubinstein was pronounced mentally ill by her brother-in-law and sent to a clinic in Saint-Cloud, later to be shipped back to her family in Russia. Her first priorities were to safeguard her inheritance and to pursue her career; ironically, the only option open to establish her independence was through marriage. Vladimir Horwitz, a cousin, was devoted to her and agreed to marry her in name only, and to let her pursue her career; Rubinstein was able to set-up her own household in St. Petersburg and continue her work. Horwitz remained in the background despite her many affairs until 1918 when, after being denied a divorce by Rubinstein, disappeared. See Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 11, 31, 73.

³⁹Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 55-56 and Edward Braun, *Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 84.

potentially competing productions produced:

Thus St. Petersburg was to see two different versions of the biblical drama at the same time, and the town was full of all sorts of "exciting" rumours. The appearance of St. John the Baptist aroused many discussions, as many people considered it sacrilegious. But still greater excitement was caused by the rumour that in the dance of the Seven Veils, Salomé was gradually to throw off all her coverings and appear completely naked. The news was especially exciting in the case of Ida Rubinstein; it would, after all, be an unusual situation for a young girl belonging to a conventional and well-to-do family. It must be considered that in those days nudity on the stage was quite inadmissible, and that even Isadora Duncan's bare legs were considered extremely indecent by some people.⁴⁰

Both productions were banned by the Russian Orthodox Church, functioning as state censor. Komissarzhevskaya's performance was only seen in a private dress rehearsal; but Bakst realized that the letter of the ban merely prohibited the actors from reciting Wilde's text onstage, and cleverly suggested that given Rubinstein's talents, that she mime the entire play. Rehearsal continued with the new plan in mind, greatly increasing Fokine's work; and copies of the play were widely circulated so that the audience would be as prepared as possible. Hours before the performance, Bakst was confronted backstage by the police who seized the papier-mâché head of St. John the Baptist and left content with the thought that the production had been sufficiently disabled; the show went on, allowing Rubinstein to show off her abilities all the more by evoking a vision of the severed head on an empty platter.⁴¹

Rubinstein's *Salomé* was performed for a private audience on 3 November 1908 at the Mikhailovsky Theatre and her "Dance of the Seven Veils" was later seen on a program of art dances presented at the St. Petersburg Conservatory on 20 December.⁴² Rubinstein's ability to sustain and express Wilde's text through gestures

⁴⁰Alexandre Benois, *Memoirs*, II, translated by Moura Budberg (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), 277-278.

⁴¹Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 12-14.

⁴²Charles S. Mayer, "Ida Rubinstein: A Twentieth-Century Cleopatra," *Dance Research Journal* 20 (#2, Winter 1989), 47, note 18.

and poses appears to have been quite successful. Ballet critic Valerien Svetlov describes her performance:

It is enough for us to have a Salomé such as that of Ida Rubinstein. One feels that in her veins flows the blood of the Edomite who seduced the old Herod. She has the suppleness of a serpent in the physical form of a woman; her dance represents the stereotypical, voluptuous charm of oriental grace full of the indolence and reserve of an impulsive passion. The entrancing languor of her dance, so delicately and artistically composed by Fokine, is permeated with the spirit of the passionate and cajoling dances of the Biblical Jews. This lassitude of passion, expressed by the undulating movements of the body, has been admirably conveyed by Ida Rubinstein.⁴³

Fokine's interest in ethnic dances and Rubinstein's preparatory tour of Palestine would seem to have contributed some "authentic" elements to this performance. Yet given Rubinstein's static approach to movement, combined with Bakst and Fokine's wish to create a "unique scenic image," Rubinstein's Salomé seems to have been mostly an aestheticized figure, as art historian Irina Proujan indicates:

Un voile bleu transparent flotte derrière elle, les rangs de perles qui enlacent son torse et ses jambes suivent le rythme du mouvement. Pâleur du visage, élégance des bras et des jambes, grâce des lignes, tendresse de la palette gris bleu; une telle caractéristique plastique de la fille du roi des Juifs était rien moins que traditionnelle, mais répondait pour beaucoup à la poésie du personnage de Wilde.⁴⁴

But not everyone was enamored of Rubinstein's provocative performance: commenting on the Paris revival of the dance in 1909, Stanislavsky railed, "I have never seen anyone more naked, and vapidly naked. How shameful! The music and Fokin's staging of the Dance of the Seven Veils are very good. But she is without talent, and naked."⁴⁵

⁴³Valerien Svetlov, quoted in Charles S. Mayer, "Ida Rubinstein: A Twentieth-Century Cleopatra," 34.

⁴⁴Irina Proujan, quoted in Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 56. ["A transparent blue veil floats behind her, the strands of pearls that entwine her torso and her legs follow the rhythm of the movement. Pallor of the face, elegance of her arms and legs, gracefulness of the lines, delicateness of the blue gray palette; such a plastique characteristic of the daughter of the King of the Jews was nothing less than traditional, but corresponded greatly to the poetry of Wilde's character."]

⁴⁵Konstantin Stanislavsky, quoted in Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Meyerhold the Director*, translated by George Petrov and edited by Sydney Schultze (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981), 196.

Bakst and Fokine regarded Rubinstein as their “discovery,” and while preparations were under way to bring a company of dancers and singers from the Maryinsky Theatre to Paris for the first season of the Ballets Russes, they positioned Rubinstein to play the title role in *Cléopâtre*. Diaghilev resisted on grounds that she had not been classically trained, but after seeing her *Antigone* and *Salomé* he was convinced of her special talents and box office appeal. Fokine transposed the “Dance of the Seven Veils” to the new ballet, increasing the veils to twelve, and Bakst set-off Rubinstein’s exotic beauty with sumptuous decor. For her second role with the Ballets Russes, Rubinstein played Zobeide, the Shah’s unfaithful wife, in *Schéhérazade* (1910); and Bakst and Fokine surpassed their previous success with *Cléopâtre*. The choreography and Rubinstein’s performance were, according to Fokine,

remarkable for giving powerful impressions accomplished by the most economical means. Everything was expressed with one single pose, with one movement, one turn of the head. Nevertheless everything was outlined and drawn clearly. Every single line was carefully thought out and felt. She is displeased by the departure of her husband and expresses her displeasure with a single movement, turning her head away when he comes to kiss her farewell. She stands in front of a door through which her lover is momentarily due to emerge. She waits for him with her entire body. Then (and to me the most dramatic scene) she sits utterly still while slaughter takes place around her. Death approaches her, but not the horror nor the fear of it. She majestically awaits her fate—in a pose without motion. What powerful expression with no movement!⁴⁶

During her stay with the Ballets Russes, Rubinstein became the icon around which its “Orientalist” productions revolved: “They surrounded the single royal jewel, the Sultana Zobeide, a blue sapphire in a setting of rubies and emeralds.”⁴⁷ Bakst’s decor had brilliant and unexpected combinations of deep jewel-toned color, and the costumes, also deeply colored and of rich fabrics, had gaps showing the body beneath the folds tied by

⁴⁶Michel Fokine, *Memoirs of a Ballet Master*, 155.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 153.

corde and ropes of jewels.⁴⁸ While Fokine in his choreography presented a view of the body which was based in more natural movement than that of his predecessors at the Imperial Ballet, the context of Bakst's designs and Benois's book for *Schéhérazade* presented strong and conflicting ideas about the body. As Peter Wollen observes, "The Russian Ballet was both 'ultra-natural' (wild, untamed, passionate, chaotic, animal) and 'ultra-artificial' (fantastic, androgynous, bejewelled, decorative, decadent)."⁴⁹

Rubinstein's strong gravitation first towards the Salomé figure and then to the many "decadent" *femme fatale* characters she would play (Cleopatra, Zobeide, Pisanelle, Fedra, Basiliola, Hélène de Sparte, etc.) probably had a complex motivation. As Lynn Garafola points out, Rubinstein was initially inspired by Wilde's play, and certainly by the current wave of "Salomania."⁵⁰ But these characters, usually sexually transgressive figures surrounded by lavish decors and adoring men, also provided Rubinstein with a means of self-projection and self-promotion, which became part of her onstage presence. In between Ballets Russes engagements, Rubinstein made a series of music-hall appearances in Paris and London, with dances in an exotic, orientalist style, thus popularizing, if not vulgarizing, her art. "Tell me why, in the Devil's name, does our beautiful idol transform herself into a music-hall caryatid like this, instead of waiting for the realization of your beautiful dream?" demanded the actress Cécile Sorel of Robert Montesquiou, Rubinstein's most loyal fan, "It is a betrayal over which I grieve with your

⁴⁸See Peter Wollen, "Fashion/Orientalism/The Body" in *New Formations* (London: Methuen, 1987), 5-33 for a discussion of the "Orientalism" of Bakst's scenography.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁰Rubinstein had probably seen or was familiar with Loie Fuller's *La Tragédie de Salomé*, Maud Allan's *The Vision of Salome*, and with Natalia Trouhanova's "Dance of the Seven Veils" in Strauss's opera; all these versions were performed in Paris in 1907, and Allan's version was also performed in St. Petersburg. See Lynn Garafola, "Circles of Meaning in Ida Rubinstein's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*," 34.

soul, which communes so divinely with mine.”⁵¹ Critic Elaine Showalter dubs Rubinstein “a kind of fin-de-siècle Cher” (though Madonna would be a closer analogy), and makes broad claims for her as a feminist icon.⁵² Rubinstein’s feminist intentions are difficult to establish since she rarely said anything of substance in interviews, but she clearly ignored gender restrictions by her actions: in the autonomous heroines and male or androgynous characters she chose to play (St. Sébastien, Don Quixote, Orpheus, Jeanne d’Arc, Amphion), and through her life adventures—lion hunting in Africa, solo piloting and sailing, travel to exotic locales, and the many love affairs she pursued, both heterosexual and lesbian—all the while remaining a shrewd business manager of her funds.

“She has only two idols,” proclaimed D’Annunzio, “her art and her body;”⁵³ and the demarcation between art and body was often indistinguishable, both onstage and off. Not unlike a contemporary media star, she capitalized on the notoriety and sensationalism of her performances. She posed nude for several artists including Bakst and Romaine Brooks, and during the run of *Schéhérazaïde*, Rubinstein commissioned from Jacques Emile Blanche a large portrait of herself dressed in her costume. Perhaps the most well-known portrait of Rubinstein from this time is the painting she commissioned from Valentine Serov, in which she is posed reclining nude on a divan, with her head turning right to look over her shoulder, accentuating the boyish angles of her body. Rubinstein also let it be known that she posed for both paintings in a former chapel in the chilly Boulevard des Invalides, which was once a monastery.⁵⁴

⁵¹Cécile Sorel, quoted in Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1969): A Theatrical Life*, 23.

⁵²Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 159-160.

⁵³Gabriele D’Annunzio, quoted in Tom Antongini, *D’Annunzio*, 443.

⁵⁴Prince Peter Lieven, *The Birth of the Ballets Russes*, 119.

Rubinstein's image was quickly carried into the world of high fashion and seemed to aestheticize social life, as Cecil Beaton observed:

Ida Rubinstein's slender height allowed her to wear the most outlandishly remarkable dresses, often with three-tiered skirts that would cut up almost any other figure. In private life she was as spectacular as on the stage, stopping the traffic in Piccadilly or the Place Vendôme when she appeared like an amazon, wearing long, pointed shoes, a train, and very high feathers on her head, feathers that could only augment an already giant frame.⁵⁵

Reports of Rubinstein's excessive and eccentric behavior—the wild pets, the dresses of rare silk worn only once, the diet of biscuits and champagne drunk from Madonna lilies, the transplanting of garden flowers to match the colors of her wardrobe—all heightened the mystique of her image.

III: *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*

It seems inevitable that D'Annunzio would be drawn to Rubinstein. In 1910 D'Annunzio had just settled in Paris, escaping from creditors in Italy, and the poet-aesthete Robert Montesquiou sent him to see *Schéhérazade*. Tom Antongini, then the playwright's secretary, describes D'Annunzio's reaction:

As soon as Ida Rubinstein appeared on the stage he ceased to have eyes for anyone else, and from the moment the performance was over till we returned to the hotel at four o'clock in the morning... he talked to me only of Ida Rubinstein, of the harmony of all her movements, the grace of her attitudes, and, above all, of the plastic perfection of her legs. "Here," he exclaimed, "are the legs of Saint-Sébastien for which I have been searching in vain all these years!"⁵⁶

High drama ensued as the playwright invested great energy in wooing his newfound muse, but Rubinstein was only too happy to be offered a new project. After *Cléopâtre* and *Schéhérazade*, Diaghilev was no longer casting her in his new ballets, and Rubinstein probably realized that her opportunities with the company would always be limited

⁵⁵Cecil Beaton, quoted in Peter Wollen, "Fashion/Orientalism/The Body," 19.

⁵⁶Tom Antongini, *D'Annunzio*, 285-286.

given the extraordinary technique of its principal dancers. Moreover, Rubinstein had harbored the belief that she was meant to be a tragic actress and with D'Annunzio's offer she could regain not only her voice, but artistic control over her work as well. "I danced, I mimed...I can say that he gave me a voice," acknowledged Rubinstein after meeting D'Annunzio, "He led me to a complete discovery of myself, of all that I did not know about myself."⁵⁷

The legend of St. Sébastien, whose martyrdom at the hands of the Emperor Diocletian's archers had inspired countless poets and painters,⁵⁸ had long fascinated D'Annunzio. As Philippe Jullian recognizes, D'Annunzio's early poem *Adonis* (1883) already expresses the essence of his play: "Thus died the Adolescent, in a great mystery of Pain and Beauty as imagined by my Dream and Art."⁵⁹ Overlaying sensuality and spiritualism, D'Annunzio christened Mantegna's rendering of St. Sébastien, "the Athlete of Christ," and even addressed his mistress, Nathalie de Goloubeff, as the ecstatic martyr: "My suffering is like a carnal magic, O St. Sébastien..."⁶⁰ And although they eagerly fanned the flames of gossip in the press about their supposed love affair, in reality Rubinstein and D'Annunzio were for the time otherwise engaged; still, they indulged in a strong sense of mystical self-projection into the creation of *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, D'Annunzio venerating the Saint by always addressing her as "Fratello," while Rubinstein signed her numerous notes to him as "le

⁵⁷Ida Rubinstein, quoted in Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 218-219.

⁵⁸For a thoughtful overview of the figure's literary appearance in the modern period, see Harvey Gross. "The Figure of St. Sebastian," in *The Southern Review* 21 (#4, October 1985), 974-984. T. S. Eliot apparently saw *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* in 1911 and was influenced by it to write "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" (1914).

⁵⁹Philippe Jullian, *D'Annunzio*, translated by Stephen Hardman (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 225.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

Saint."⁶¹

In the summer of 1910 D'Annunzio began work on his play. He asked Montesquiou, an avid collector of reproductions, to send him all his St. Sébastiens, and took Antongini on a "pillaging campaign of all the Paris shops in search of pictures of every epoch or school relating to the saint, picturing him in every possible and imaginable posture and attitude."⁶² D'Annunzio consulted the medieval scholar Gustave Cohen who guided him to sources at the Bibliothèque Nationale including two mystery plays based on the Saint's life and *The Golden Legend*, a popular collection of saints's lives written in the thirteenth century by Jacobus de Voragine.⁶³ Cohen answered many of D'Annunzio's questions about the settings, costumes and language of the genre, including the following:

D'Annunzio: Were people portrayed in the nude in the mysteries, and did women play male parts?

Cohen: Yes, the nude did appear sometimes under some peculiarly daring conditions, but, as to the other problem, one had to invent one's terms of reference. The religious origins of drama meant that on the contrary it was men to whom women's roles were assigned...

D'Annunzio: That doesn't matter: Ida will be Saint Sébastien, even if the Church takes umbrage.⁶⁴

D'Annunzio borrowed from these sources in an eclectic fashion. Since he was modelling

⁶¹Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 99-101. At the time (1910-1911), complications abounded as D'Annunzio was trying to escape the clutches of his former mistress Natalie de Goloubeff (a major patron of the Ballets Russes) and was living with the American painter Romaine Brooks; Rubinstein was in the midst of a long-term liaison with the wealthy Walter Guinness (Baron Moyne) who funded many of her productions, and she was beginning an affair with Romaine Brooks. See Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 31-33.

⁶²Tom Antongini, *D'Annunzio*, 287.

⁶³Elaine Brody, "The Legacy of Ida Rubinstein: Mata Hari of the Ballets Russes," 495.

⁶⁴Gustave Cohen, quoted in Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 35. One wonders if Cohen told D'Annunzio of the early Christian belief that when a martyr reveals himself to those who venerate him, he appears dancing. See Eugène Backman, *Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 37.

his character on Ida Rubinstein's image, the aging and bearded St. Sébastien of the medieval sources held little interest, and D'Annunzio was drawn to the young, androgynous figure he admired in Renaissance paintings.

It is routinely cited that Rubinstein had no knowledge of Italian, and consequently D'Annunzio decided to write his play for her in French. Certainly Wilde's choice to write *Salomé* in French was a kind of precedent, but D'Annunzio also savored the heightened literary stakes, the "rare pleasure I take in my own daring and in the towering risk"⁶⁵ of writing in French. D'Annunzio made a thorough study of the French medieval texts and verse forms and "composed an intensely lyrical work," as the critic Giovanni Gullace describes:

In order to carry out his work in the verse form of the mystery plays, the poet had to engage in serious research. He...acquired complete mastery of the archaic phraseology with surprising rapidity. He created an artificial and stilted language characterized by a certain affected refinement peculiar to himself; archaic and modern expressions are brought together with such delicate musical taste as to result in an unusual orchestration of notes and rhythms.⁶⁶

In the press, D'Annunzio went out of his way to win friends in his new home by explaining that he wrote his play in French out of his love for the culture:

J'ai pensé...qu'un esprit n'atteint au fin fond d'une race que s'il descend au plus mystérieux de ses sanctuaires, celui du langage. Ni les collines, ni les rivières, ni les châteaux, ni les cathédrales, n'en auraient donné la clef comme cette étude du vieux parler. Mériter le droit de haute cité dans la douce France où le voisin de Dante fut appelé Brunet Latin, est une noble tâche à laquelle je me suis efforcé. Puisse mon hommage à ce pays de culture et de lumière n'être point indigne de son génie!⁶⁷

⁶⁵Gabriele D'Annunzio quoted in Tom Antongini, *D'Annunzio*, 293.

⁶⁶Giovanni Gullace, *Gabriele D'Annunzio in France: A Study of Cultural Relations* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), 85.

⁶⁷Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in D. E. Inghelbrecht, *Mouvement Contraire: Souvenirs d'un musicien* (Paris: Éditions Domat, 1947), 217-218. ["I thought... that a mind only reaches the very depth of a race when it goes down the most mysterious of its sanctuaries, that of language. Not the hills, not the rivers, not the castles, nor the cathedrals would have given the key to this sanctuary like the study of the old language. To deserve being accepted in sweet France where the neighbor of Dante was called Brunet Latin, is a noble task for which I strove. May my homage to this country of culture and of lights be worthy of its genius!"]

Of more immediate consequence was the fact that the always-in-debt D'Annunzio had already sold all his future Italian work to his Milan publisher, Emilio Treves, for a large advance; by writing in French, he sidestepped the letter of his contract and could be paid again by a French publisher.⁶⁸

Throughout the summer, D'Annunzio retreated to the chalet Saint-Dominique, a mansion in the medieval-styled town of Le Moulleau near Arcachon, which he decorated with Gothic furniture and plaster copies of classical sculpture from the Louvre, the walls were covered by reproductions of famous paintings of St. Sébastien, and wall tapestries, animal skins, couches "deep as tombs," and oriental perfumes completed the transformation. Saturation of his environment with the emblems, ornaments and scenes connected with his subject led him to complete absorption in his work.⁶⁹ A huge pine forest which began at his doorstep was his favorite place for walks and he even found inspiration in the gashes left by resin collectors: "Each tree had its own martyrdom, as if in each lived a spirit eager to suffer and to bleed like the divine hero chosen by me."⁷⁰ On another occasion, a violent fire caused the bark of some trees to explode in flame, reddening the earth under his horse's hooves, and inspiring the dance of St. Sébastien on live coals.⁷¹ Rubinstein and her entourage made several visits to Le Moulleau where she humored D'Annunzio by taking

⁶⁸Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 104-105.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 136. Characteristically entwining art and life, when D'Annunzio built his grand villa "Il Vittoriale degli Italiani" one of its many rooms was the "Leper's Room" which was dominated by a sixteenth century wooden statue of St. Sébastien, used by D'Annunzio for his "spiritual exercises" and later for his wake. See Lucia Re, "Gabriele D'Annunzio's Theater of Memory: Il Vittoriale degli Italiani," in *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 3 (Winter 1987), 6-51 for a discussion about this fascinating villa and its relationship to D'Annunzio's work.

⁷⁰Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in Philippe Jullian, *D'Annunzio*, 226.

⁷¹Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 106.

up archery with the playwright and spending hours shooting arrows at pine trees.⁷² They also discussed the play and several of D'Annunzio's notebook entries point to the pictorial direction the character was taking:

St. Sebastian against the tree—a Daphne. The unity of beings—the boundaries between species abolished—the leaf and the beak...A kind of corporeal topography—a human body with valleys, hills and plains...The direction of the wind—the fluttering of the garments and the hair...The prodigious invention of the costumes and accoutrements. The art of showing patches of living skin, in the openings—the evocation of the beast by gesture.⁷³

Despite D'Annunzio's period of artistic retreat, by the end of the summer not one line of the play had been written. Impatient with the lack of progress, Rubinstein pushed forward in September as impresario, and engaged the Théâtre du Châtelet for the premiere on 21 May 1911, and Gabriel Astruc⁷⁴ as general producer for their project. Bakst was assumed from the outset to be the designer and, inspired by Rinehardt's production of *The Miracle*, hoped to create a vast cathedral-like set. Montesquiou took Bakst to the Louvre "to inspect Sassanid fabrics, Byzantine enamels and bas-reliefs from the Eastern Roman Empire unearthed in Egypt and Syria...[and to examine] art-books for the various forms in which printers have depicted St. Sebastian, from gaunt Memlings to soft Guido Renis."⁷⁵ Fokine readily agreed to create Rubinstein's dances and the crowd scenes; Armand Bour was hired to direct, though he usually deferred to

⁷²Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 30.

⁷³Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in Philippe Jullian, *D'Annunzio*, 227.

⁷⁴Gabriel Astruc built the Théâtre des Champs Elysées in 1913 and dedicated it to "the glory of Bourdelle [the sculptor who created reliefs for the theatre] and to Debussy." See Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind II 1902-1918* (London: Cassell, 1965), 267. Astruc was the producer for the successful "Grande Saisons de Paris" series at the Châtelet which included performances by the Ballets Russes.

⁷⁵Robert de Montesquiou quoted in Philippe Jullian, *Robert de Montesquiou: A Fin-de-Siècle Prince*, translated by John Haylock and Francis King (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967), 225.

the instructions of D'Annunzio and Fokine.⁷⁶

The more difficult task was to find a composer, especially one willing to write quickly. Roger-Ducasse, who was composing music for *La città morta*, reluctantly turned the offer down because of other commitments; Henri Février and Florent Schmitt were approached, but Montesquiou urged D'Annunzio to ask Debussy; finally on 25 November, D'Annunzio wrote to the composer whom he admiringly called "Claude of France" after Monteverdi:

Far in the past, on the hill at Settignano, the native province of the most lyrical of Tuscan sculptors Gabriel Mourey spoke to me of you and of *Tristan* in moving terms. I already knew and loved your work. I used to frequent a little Florentine group where a few earnest artists had developed a cult for your work and enthusiastically upheld your "reform." Then, as today, I suffered from not being able to write music for my tragedies... This summer, as I was sketching out a Mystery play which I had long been thinking about, a friend would sing to me your most beautiful songs with that inner sense of poetry they require. The play on which I was working was sometimes deeply affected by them... Now I can no longer withhold my request... I wish to tell you of this work and this dream.⁷⁷

Although Debussy quickly accepted the commission, he had mixed feelings; he was already committed to several projects, he was in serious financial trouble and his health was failing. But the material interested him: "In it the cult of Adonis mingles with that of Jesus," Debussy wrote to Robert Godet, "that it is very fine, beyond a doubt; and that in fact, if I'm allowed enough time, there are some opportunities for good music."⁷⁸ Still, the composer complained to Edgar Varèse that "it's two years' work and, of course, I have barely two months!"⁷⁹ D'Annunzio finally sent the first act to Debussy in early

⁷⁶Tom Antongini, *D'Annunzio*, 439. Armand Bour (1868-1945), actor and director.

⁷⁷Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind II*, 158. The writer Gabriel Mourey was a friend of Debussy and they shared an interest in the occult.

⁷⁸Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, selected and edited by François Lesure and Roger Nicols, translated by Roger Nicols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 235. Among the works Debussy had in progress were *Khamma* (a ballet commissioned by Maud Allan), *Siddhartha*, *L'Histoire de Tristan*, and *La Chute de la Maison Usher*.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 238.

January, and then sent him sections out of sequence until the composer at last had a complete draft of the long five-act play on 2 March 1911; rehearsals began in April.⁸⁰ Adding further pressure, Debussy had signed a contract that required him to write the dance sequences separately so that Rubinstein could rehearse earlier to accommodate Fokine's schedule; Debussy protested to D'Annunzio that "it's impossible...to detach the dances from the rest of the work...the dances are intimately bound up with what is spoken simultaneously or else with what is going to be spoken after them...Protect me!"⁸¹ The retiring Debussy was somewhat intimidated by what he termed the "irresistible whirlwind" of the poet and dancer; and D'Annunzio's rich language and the frequent vagueness of his stage directions posed continual difficulties:

Could you tell me, in the way you find easiest, the exact moment when "the dance on the red-hot-coals" begins? There are words to be spoken during this dance, aren't there? Forgive me; when you're there next to me I hear the music suggested by your words, but all the same I need to have some firm reference points. Your notes for the designer and the composer are like an enchanted forest full of images, and at times I feel like Tom Thumb. I like the rhythm of the Seraphs' Chorus enormously...There could be a danger that similar rhythms in the poetry might lead to a too insistent repetition of sounds in the music...I must tell you that [the language is] so lofty and other-worldly, the music is very difficult to find.⁸²

Realizing the enormity of his task, Debussy enlisted the assistance of his friend André Caplet, a conductor and composer, to orchestrate most of the work.⁸³ The music, scored for four solo women's voices (singing the roles of the Virgin Erigone, the Soul of Sébastien, Celestial Voice, and the twins), orchestra and mixed chorus, contributes greatly to the play's other-worldly atmosphere.

Like D'Annunzio, Rubinstein surrounded herself with images of the Saint

⁸⁰Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 220-223.

⁸¹Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, 237.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 236-237.

⁸³Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 223.

as she prepared her role, and combined attitudes and poses from the various depictions. She spent hours studying her attitudes, leaning on her bow, one arm risen, her face focussed, trying to sculpt her poses.⁸⁴ Beginning in November 1910, Rubinstein regularly studied acting first with the actress Julia Bartet, and then with a Madame Leitner, a member of the Comédie Française; Rubinstein also tried to minimize her Russian accent and improve her French through tutoring by a French professor.⁸⁵ In April, she travelled to Monte Carlo to rehearse her dances with Fokine who was in the midst of preparing Diaghilev's 1911 season.⁸⁶ Although Rubinstein worked diligently, she put her faith in a kind of generalized poetic possession:

I do not need to rehearse. For I am Saint Sébastien the moment I step on the stage. I live his life and I know his innermost feeling in that play; every movement and every word comes from me spontaneously. I am, as it were, impregnated with the soul of Saint Sebastian. In that role I am completely master of myself. I can actually see clearly what is going on around me; I experience the most sublime ecstasy, although I remain quite lucid...I live my roles. By a sort of reflex psychological process I adapt myself to my role without being conscious of it... This is the most difficult part of the role. It is this adaptation of one's soul...I always keep strictly to my lines. I do not think any improvisation is possible on stage...My greatest help in my work is music. Often I sit for hours at the piano and I dream. Nights and days I sit like that...I am seeking to rise higher and to exalt my soul.⁸⁷

"The technical part" is only a matter of "light concern" she told the interviewer, though she conceded that

Before the mirror I study my gestures. I rehearse the least movement of my hands a thousand times and in the most minute details. I know exactly how many steps to take at a certain moment in the play. One step more or less would detract

⁸⁴D. E. Inghelbrecht, *Mouvement Contraire: Souvenirs d'un musicien*, 218, and Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 120.

⁸⁵Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 114, 120.

⁸⁶Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 37-38.

⁸⁷Ida Rubinstein, quoted in Pierre Van Tassen, "Something Sacred Is Being Born in America, Is Belief of Mme. Rubinstein, French Actress," *Evening World* [New York], 23 June 1926, in Ida Rubinstein Clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

from the perfection which I try to give to my art.⁸⁸

Portraying a martyr, Rubinstein appeared at times to become one for her “art”: D’Annunzio confided to Antongini that “She is feverish—she thinks, dreams and lives only for her new creation...She is even losing her looks, and that astounds me.”⁸⁹

A rehearsal in the “Italian style,” a full reading of the text with the musical sections sung as a concert, was held on 9 May 1911; scarcely two weeks before the opening everyone was finally brought together. It was also the first time that Debussy had heard his score played through and, even though the orchestra and chorus had been overwhelmed by the complexity of the music, biographers rush to point out that the composer openly wept, unable to contain his emotion.⁹⁰ The play that was heard was huge in scope (almost 4,000 lines of verse, with close to 150 roles and 350 “extras” used in the production) and structured into five acts or “mansions,” after the medieval term connoting both an episode in the narrative and a visual scene.

Set in a Renaissance version of third century Rome, the underlying tension of the play comes from the clash between early Christian mysticism and rival pagan mystery cults. D’Annunzio compared the mansions to stained glass windows;⁹¹ each mansion had a distinctive decor which underlined the static and visual nature of the text. The setting of the First Mansion, “The Court of the Lilies,” is a columned portico with tall sheaves of lilies resembling wheat in their abundance. Here, in front of an altar to pagan idols, twin brothers Marc and Marcellien await their torture for refusing to renounce Christianity while Sébastien, the commander of the Archers of Emèse watches

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Tom Antongini, *D’Annunzio*, 443.

⁹⁰D. E. Inghelbrecht, *Mouvement Contraire: Souvenirs d’un musicien* (Paris: Éditions Domat, 1947), 221. One wonders, given all the personal pressures Debussy was enduring, whether these tears were primarily about the music.

⁹¹Giovanni Isgrò, *D’Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 163.

along with the crowd, which clamors for their death. Sébastien is inspired by their faith, raises his voice to reassure them, and shoots an arrow into the sky which miraculously does not return. As a further sign of his conversion Sébastien sheds his armor and dances a barefoot ecstatic dance on the burning coals intended for the twins; his mystical frenzy reaches the crowd as a woman regains her sight, the twins's family is converted, and seven angels rise up from the lilies. Sébastien destroys the temples of the Second Mansion, "The Magic Chamber," a domed vault of a polished material that reflects every image, housing seven sorceresses and the energy of the planets. Here the Saint with his many disciples depose each sorceress in turn, and with the help of the "Girl Sick with Fevers," a prodigal prostitute who carries across her wounded breasts Christ's shroud, they follow the voice of the entombed Virgin, liberating her to the light of day.

For the Third Mansion, perhaps the most pivotal of the five, a vast columned throne room comprises the "Council of False Gods" with an array of the gods of Asia and a crowd of priests, astrologers, and other sages surrounding the Emperor. Caesar loves Sébastien because of his beauty and attempts to win his favor by tempting him with great wealth and power, and charming him with sensuous words and music. Sébastien breaks the strings of his lyre in protest and silently enacts the Passion of Christ through movements and gestures; at its conclusion the Saint is stretched out on his broken lyre and an unsuccessful attempt is made to suffocate him in lilies, crowns and necklaces. "The Wounded Laurel," the Fourth Mansion, depicts the Grove of Apollo where the pale, scantily-clad Saint is bound to a tall laurel with spiky leaves, his wrists tied over his head; he begs passionately for his martyrdom at the hands of his archers: "Je vous le dis, je vous le dis:/celui qui plus profondément/me blesse, plus

profondément/m'aime."⁹² Sébastien is covered with wounds, but the arrows miraculously remain in the tree as the Saint is untied. Sébastien appears in "Paradise," the last mansion, amidst a beautiful garden of wonders and a crowd of angels and saints.

The plot, taken from several versions of the legend, is only one strata of a dense layering where the words of the text often seem as ornamental as the lavish settings. There are momentous events depicted, but the play "reads" more like a visual and aural pageant than as a dramatic work. As Lucia Re has traced, D'Annunzio freely borrowed motifs from antiquity, Scripture, hagiography, Dante, the Pre-Raphaelites and, most specifically from Flaubert's novels *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* and *Salammbô*, and the paintings of Gustave Moreau and Puvis de Chavannes.⁹³ Re concludes that D'Annunzio's practice of accumulating "literary and figurative models deriving from different contexts and historical periods leads to a saturation of literary 'space' which is duplicated in the visual 'space.'" ⁹⁴ In *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, D'Annunzio uses this saturation of space for theatrical and thematic effect. Against this richly iconographic environment, D'Annunzio foregrounds the highly vulnerable bodies of Sébastien and other Christian martyrs, and through dance and mime gives direct physical expression to these special figures. The shooting of the arrow, the dance on the smoldering coals, the elaborate robing of Sébastien with Christ's shroud, the expression of the Saint's final pain and pleasure, and the display of stigmata—all these movements or dance sequences attempt to theatricalize internal states of religious fervor.

⁹²Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* in *Tragedie, sogni e misteri II* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1940), 577. ["I tell you, I tell you:/ whoever most deeply / wounds me, most deeply / loves me."]

⁹³Lucia Re, "Gabriele D'Annunzio's Theater of Memory: Il Vittoriale degli Italiani," 10, 12.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 12.

In May, D'Annunzio became involved in daily rehearsals at the theatre and had a great influence on the staging of the production. With Bakst's designs and lighting, D'Annunzio was especially interested in creating contrasts between symbolic movement and stillness, and between the single figure against the crowd. The metaphors of the motion picture frame and the stained glass window were important as a means to "capture" and "freeze" moments of intense feeling. D'Annunzio explained that he worked

con la fantasia di un maestro vetraio, seguendo per istinto I procedimenti della credenza popolare...Le vetrate, specialmente nel sec. XIII, non erano se non un racconto visibile. Esse erano composte nel più vivace stile narrativo...Non per imitazione ma per ispirazione, usando della più larga libertà io ho proceduto...ho diviso la mia vetrata drammatica in quattro grandi compartimenti, riempiendo gli spazi di numerose figure; e in cima ho posto l'immagine del Santo trasfigurato. Tutta l'azione sembra svolgersi veramente tra l'ombra della chiesa e il lume del giorno, per trasparenza. Linee nette e forti come i piombi contornano i personaggi; colori franchi e luminosi come quelli dei vetri li distinguono disposti e contrapposti in masse intiere. Il pittore Léon Bakst ha commentato da par suo la mia invenzione, non conosco colorista più animoso.⁹⁵

Through symbolic use of color in his designs of costumes, scenery and lighting, Bakst helped D'Annunzio to theatricalize the emotional states of his principal characters who otherwise might lack sustained intensity since they are static and not developed psychologically. Familiar with Alexander Scriabin's theories about the correspondence between music and color, Bakst felt that he could "orchestrate" changing sequences of

⁹⁵Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in Giovanni Isgrò, *D'Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 163-164. ["D'Annunzio worked with the creativity of a stained glass artist whose creation instinctively develops in accordance with popular sensibility...Particularly in the thirteenth century, stained glass windows were simply forms of visual account...composed according to a decidedly narrative style...In developing this project, I created freely, following my own inspiration rather than trying to imitate...I divided my large dramatic 'window' in four sections, which I then filled with figures; and at the top I placed the image of the transfigured Saint. The result feels as if the whole story were unfolding between the shade of the church and the light of the day, as if by transparency. Hard lines like lead mark the characters's contours; colors bold and bright like those of stained glass windows characterize their variously arranged and juxtaposed volumes. The painter Léon Bakst brilliantly commented on my invention, I have never encountered an artist with a more lively approach to color."] At the time of this interview (3 May 1911), there were four mansions.

color created by bodies in motion:

I have often noticed that in each color of the prism there exists a gradation which sometimes expresses frankness and chastity, sometimes sensuality and even bestiality, sometimes pride, sometimes despair...The painter who knows how to make use of this, the director of the orchestra who can with one movement of his baton pull all this in motion, without crossing them, who can let flow the thousand tones from the end of his stick without making a mistake, can draw from the spectator the exact emotion which he wants him to feel.⁹⁶

Movement of the crowd was important in *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* to express a constant state of tension and impending transformation. As Giovanni Isgrò points out, D'Annunzio wanted to give the effect of an "infinite variety" of people within the crowds, and so designated many subgroups to constantly divert attention.⁹⁷ In the Second Mansion, for example, priests, magicians, disciples, singers, peasant women, and black slaves all witness Sébastien's faith, and Bakst's designs emphasized the energy of these groups through the multicolored variety of the costumes and props, as Charles Spencer describes:

From the designs and photographs of the production it is clear that Bakst was either puzzled by the play or realized that it would only succeed as a visual feast...Thus there are Carpaccio berets and cloaks, mediaeval cowls, Moorish turbans, Greek tunics with concentric patterns, varied orientalia, naked negroes, Roman togas. Bakst's "excessiveness" could be seen in strange accessories—Rubinstein's entrance in a box twice as big as herself, a giant tray carried by dwarfs, enormous headdresses, a white horseman on a white charger against a violently coloured set—all brilliant *coups de théâtre*.⁹⁸

Fokine and Bour devised movement patterns which were complex and often aimed at creating a sense of chaos that mirrored a state of moral confusion. Isgrò describes several of these patterns and techniques, including having crowd members enter a scene little by little so as to produce a sense of progressive escalation; alternating moments of intense

⁹⁶Léon Bakst, quoted in Nancy Van Norman Baer, "Design and Choreography: Cross-Influences in the Theatrical Art of the Ballets Russes," in *The Art of Enchantment: Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, 1909-1929* (San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1988), 64.

⁹⁷Giovanni Isgrò, *D'Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 165.

⁹⁸Charles Spencer, *Leon Bakst* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 143.

and disorderly movement with sudden stillness; inventing wave-like or “shivering” motions in a stationary crowd; establishing schematic facial expressions and attitudes; and ending each crowd scene in tableaux before moving to the next scene. The crowd was also useful for producing cheers, lamentations and other, more atmospheric sounds.⁹⁹

However intriguing the choreography, Fokine and Bakst’s visual concerns were at odds with Debussy’s choral requirements. André Caplet (who conducted the chorus and orchestra) planned to have his chorus masters (D. E. Inghelbrecht, Emile Vuillermoz and Marcel Chadeigne) costumed as chorus members and positioned onstage to bolster intonation and counting for the several vocal ranges traditionally grouped together; singers in the same range need to hear one another in order to blend their voices. But Bakst overruled Caplet, and decided late in the rehearsal period that the relationships among the colors in the various costumes and the lighting plot were more important; he redistributed the chorus, placing a soprano in the midst of basses, or an alto in the midst of non-singing actors, solely for visual effect. For the Fifth “Paradise” Mansion, Bakst placed the *a cappella* chorus upstage of the decor, greatly undermining its ability to be heard. In performance, the design of Debussy’s choral ensembles vanished, and in many passages the singers, unsure of the difficult music, ended up not singing at all.¹⁰⁰

At best this lack of coordination was probably a result of a rushed rehearsal period, and the lack of a clear line of authority. “Rubinstein always retained the habits of a lady,” Lynn Garafola perceives, “paying others to do the dirty work,

⁹⁹Giovanni Isgrò, *D’Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 174-176.

¹⁰⁰Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 226 and D. E. Inghelbrecht, *Mouvement Contraire: Souvenirs d’un musicien*, 221-222.

while she literally and figuratively kept her gloves on.”¹⁰¹ Once the conceptual stage was finished and collaborators chosen, Rubinstein typically became totally engrossed in her own performance and left her collaborators to make the ongoing decisions, often at cross-purposes. The choice of the mild-mannered Armand Bour as stage director seemed intended to give Fokine, D’Annunzio and Bakst free reign, and provide someone who would faithfully implement the details of their instructions, but it must have been quite difficult for Bour to do his job given these personalities. Bakst and D’Annunzio had fundamental differences in the way they approached design and staging: Bakst valued the static, two-dimensional qualities of painting and was greatly influenced by Oriental art, while D’Annunzio was much more interested in the three-dimensional, sculptural quality of the stage space. Bakst usually created sumptuous, if not claustrophobic interiors, but D’Annunzio wanted his audience’s view to extend beyond the stage set to infinity, giving the feeling of an outdoor theatre, a major component of the “Théâtre de Fête.” Giovanni Isgrò cites many occasions when these two approaches clashed during the planning of *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*; in one example, D’Annunzio wanted changes in the colors of the lights to reflect thematic ideas during Sébastien’s dance on the hot coals, but Bakst insisted that lighting color would be used to further saturate the color values of the costumes.¹⁰² Overall, the collaborators seemed to have worked much of the time in isolation. Debussy wrote several letters to Astruc complaining of the “lack of coordination between the action and the music”:

If you require details, I have them ready for you. It is vital to find some other way of arranging the end of Act IV...As things stand, the spectators see the actors leave—with all the pomp of some paltry village funeral—and naturally think they have the right to do so too. I have already asked if, at the assumption of Saint Sebastian’s soul, it could kindly be arranged for the seven seraphim to

¹⁰¹Lynn Garafola, “Circles of Meaning: The Cultural Contexts of Ida Rubinstein’s *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*,” 41.

¹⁰²Giovanni Isgrò, *D’Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 168-170.

reappear as angel musicians. And during the final chorus, wave the golden palms! I wouldn't claim it was an idea of genius, but it is a way of getting some movement into the background which, at the moment, remains resolutely uniform...It isn't enough just to let down a backcloth with rays painted on it—rays which don't even radiate...The departure of Saint Sebastian's body could perhaps be started later; it could then halt at the moment when light fills the scene and resume its funereal progress—with rather more in the way of resources—during the unaccompanied choruses. This is all important, believe me...¹⁰³

Since the finished score was incorporated late into the rehearsal process, Fokine and Bour had more music on their hands than they had initially planned; consequently transitions between scenes and passages of orchestral music had to be quickly restaged.

Adding to the challenges of coordinating this production, D'Annunzio cast actors from a variety of backgrounds and styles. Among the principals was the emphatic style brought to the role of the "Sorrowful Mother" by Adeline Dudley who was a member of the Comédie Française; the naturalistic style of Vera Sergine for the "Girl Sick with Fevers;" and Maxime Desjardins in the role of Caesar acted in a crude, rough manner, emphasizing by contrast the spiritual aura surrounding the Saint.¹⁰⁴ Given the imposing size and richness of the settings, D'Annunzio's wish that his actors provide a "visual translation" of his poetry required considerable physical skills, as did his requirements that they command "extraordinary expressions," "eloquent and expressive bodies" and "harmonious voices."¹⁰⁵ Rubinstein excelled at physical expression, but it was well-known that she had considerable difficulties with her voice, both with regard to vocal projection and her Russian accent. D. E. Inghelbrecht remembered that from her first lines

Pour la plupart des assistants, le charme allait être rompu, dès ces premiers vers. La voix qu'ils "attendaient" du Sébastien statique n'était pas celle qu'ils entendaient. Non pas que l'accent exotique de l'interprète pu choquer.—Le

¹⁰³Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, 240.

¹⁰⁴Giovanni Isgrò, *D'Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 174.

¹⁰⁵Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in Giovanni Isgrò, *D'Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 174.

personnage "idéal" de Mélisande ne devait-il pas rester longtemps "marqué," par l'accent américain de Mary Garden?—Mais chez Mme Ida Rubinstein, la raucité de la voix trop "forcée" était rebutante, comme la monotonie d'une sorte de débit syllabique comparable à celui que l'on emploie malgré soi pour se faire comprendre à l'étranger, au moyen de quelques phrases recueillies dans des manuels de conversation. Cette voix semblait artificielle et inhumaine. On sentait trop que tout cela provenait d'un travail opiniâtre, et ne venait pas de l'âme.¹⁰⁶

D'Annunzio of course heard her differently, and asserted that by going against convention, Rubinstein's voice expressed a sense of "strangeness" to the audience that theatricalized the "extraordinary presence" of the Saint.¹⁰⁷

Rubinstein and D'Annunzio were already international celebrities and the press closely followed the preparations for the production, often hyped as "the French *Parsifal*." Adding to this notoriety was the placing of all of D'Annunzio's work on the Papal Index two weeks before the opening, and the issuing of a pastoral letter in which *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* was specifically condemned, forbidding all French Catholics to attend the work on pain of excommunication.¹⁰⁸ The Church saw as sacrilegious the presentation of martyrdom for entertainment; moreover, that the central role was cast with a woman, who was a dancer and a Jew, only further complicated the issue. Antisemitism in France during this period was no small concern; Bakst was Jewish, as was Astruc, who wrote nervously to D'Annunzio,

¹⁰⁶D. E. Inghelbrecht, *Mouvement Contraire: Souvenirs d'un musicien*, 219. ["For most of the spectators, the spell would be broken, as early as these first verses. The voice which they "expected" from the static Sébastien was not the one they heard. It was not that the exotic accent of the actress shocked.—Isn't it true that the "ideal" character of Mélisande remained marked by the American accent of Mary Garden?—But with Madame Ida Rubinstein, the hoarseness of the too strained voice was tedious, like the monotony of a sort of syllabic delivery comparable to that which one employs despite oneself to be made understood to a foreigner, by means of some sentences collected in conversation manuals. This voice seemed artificial and inhuman. One felt too that all this came from hard work, and not from the soul."]

¹⁰⁷Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in Giovanni Isgrò, *D'Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 173.

¹⁰⁸Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 39. Adding to the controversy, Elisabeth de Gramont relates that news had gotten out about how D'Annunzio had taken advantage of the Archbishop's hospitality and "made himself too much at home in Notre Dame; pretexting an artistic urge, he used to have the organist play for him alone, threw the vestry into turmoil and with his friends...gave garden parties." (p. 40).

I am rather worried because a group of ladies representing the French aristocracy has written me to voice the fear that *Saint-Sébastien*, religiously speaking, may give the impression of a profanation. And I do not want to be accused of having crucified the Saviour for the second time.¹⁰⁹

Debussy and D'Annunzio published a joint protest against the Archbishop's denunciation which described their work as "profoundly religious; the lyrical glorification not only of Christ the wonderful Athlete, but of all Christian heroism."¹¹⁰

But D'Annunzio's official protest seems considerably less than sincere in light of his response to Astruc:

My work... is essentially mystic, and is unassailable from a religious standpoint. Furthermore, my dear Astruc, when Ida Rubinstein makes her appearance almost naked at the moment of supplication, it will be too late to protest. The public will have been conquered by that time.¹¹¹

Rubinstein expressed a complex sexuality onstage as Saint Sébastien. By choosing a tall, slim woman to play an athletic male saint, D'Annunzio overtly emphasized the androgynous and homosexual connotations of the character. Lynn Garafola has written that

In the Middle Ages, Sebastian had become a popular saint, a protector against plagues, and one of the few acceptable subjects for the depiction of the male nude. The Renaissance did away with those earlier popular associations, while significantly transforming the representation of his body. In painting after painting, artists smoothed and softened the contours of his body, adding to the image of idealized male nudity a new ingredient of femininity. By the mid-nineteenth century, Sebastian had become a favorite saint—and even a favored name—among homosexuals.¹¹²

In the play Christianity is feminized as embodied by the beauty and compassion of the Saint in contrast to the violent and crude nature of pagan Rome and its Emperor.

¹⁰⁹Gabriele Astruc, quoted in Tom Antongini, *D'Annunzio*, 440.

¹¹⁰Gabriele D'Annunzio and Claude Debussy, quoted in Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theater*, 226. After *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, the Archbishop's next campaign was against the fox-trot in 1913.

¹¹¹Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in Tom Antongini, *D'Annunzio*, 440.

¹¹²Lynn Garafola, "Circles of Meaning: The Cultural Contexts of Ida Rubinstein's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*," 39.

Sébastien's beauty is constantly remarked upon: "Toi, toi, bel archer..." and "Sébastien, archer du Christ, ô le plus beau entre les enfants des mortels."¹¹³ The retellings of the Passion of Christ and the legend of Adonis are conflated in the Fourth Mansion as Sébastien undergoes his martyrdom ("Il se meurt, le bel Adonis!/ Il est mort, le bel Adonis!/ O Vierges, pleurez Adonis!/ Garçons, pleurez!"¹¹⁴). In the text, D'Annunzio reminds us several times of the sexual ambiguity of the Saint: the Emperor describes him as the "éphèbe" and is beguiled by his "corps ambigu." Further intensifying this mixture of saintly beauty and sexual mystery is the element of masochism which shares the same continuum with martyrdom at several points in this work, most emphatically as Sébastien pleads with his archers, "Encore!" after each arrow is shot:

Béni soit le premier! Bénie
 soit l'étoile première!
 Encore!
 Votre amour! Votre amour!
 Encore!
 Encore!
 Encore!
 Encore!
 Amour éternel!¹¹⁵

In production, D'Annunzio vivified the Saint's corporeality through Rubinstein's theatrical and sculptural poses. The static and pictorial concept of the production set-off the dance and movement sequences as significant, and accentuated Rubinstein/Sébastien's body all the more. Outside the theatre, the press kept alive gossip about Rubinstein's not-so-private life and, combined with images of her past roles, further helped to confuse art and life, only adding to the sexual intrigue

¹¹³Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, 429, 502. ["You, you, beautiful archer..." and "Sébastien, archer of Christ, O the most beautiful among children of mortals."]

¹¹⁴Ibid., 582. ["He is dying, the beautiful Adonis!/He is dead, the beautiful Adonis!/O Virgins, mourn Adonis!/ Boys, mourn!"]

¹¹⁵Ibid., 580-581. ["Blessed is he who is first! Blessed/is the first star!/ Again!/ Your love! Your love!/ Again!/ Again!/ Again!/ Again!/ Love eternal!"]

surrounding Sébastien.

Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien had its premiere on 22 May 1911, postponed one day by the sudden death of France's Minister of War. After so much advance publicity and the Church ban, the run of twelve performances was sold out, and high society and notables in the arts attended, including Isadora Duncan, Marcel Proust, and Henri Bataille.¹¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the first performance lasted well over five hours and the audience "dribbled little by little out of the theatre like water from a cracked vase."¹¹⁷ The press was mixed. D'Annunzio's text was alternately criticized as boring or scandalous: Henri Ghéon, writing in *Nouvelle Revue Française*, called the play "barbarity all the more dangerous as it wears the Mediterranean mask of beauty."¹¹⁸ Marcel Proust wrote to Reynaldo Hahn that

Everything that is foreign in d'Annunzio took refuge in the accent of Mme. Rubinstein. But, as for the style, how can one believe that it is the work of a foreigner? How many Frenchmen write with such precision?... But I found the piece very boring, despite certain moments, and the music pleasant but thin, insubstantial, crushed by the style.¹¹⁹

There was general acclaim for Bakst's designs and disappointment that there wasn't more music (Debussy's score comprised only one hour of playing time). Rubinstein was predictably taken to task for her accent and lack of vocal projection, but garnered more positive notices about her presence and movement. Adolphe Brisson of *Le Temps* found "superior intuition" and "extraordinary sensitivity" in her portrayal of the Passion of

¹¹⁶Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 126.

¹¹⁷Marguerite Long, quoted in Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 40-41. Cuts were made in the Second Mansion for subsequent performances.

¹¹⁸Henri Ghéon, quoted in Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 41.

¹¹⁹Marcel Proust, quoted in Philip Jullian, *D'Annunzio*, 231.

Christ.¹²⁰ Describing Rubinstein as a “weirdly fascinating figure,” the Paris critic for the *Boston Herald* continued,

Exquisitely formed, with the long flowing lines that belong by right to a leading danseuse, Mlle. Rubinstein reveals a remarkably artistic perception of the part. There is symbolism and suggestion, more than a positive saintliness, doubtless, in the presentation, but the play as it stands is more paganly mystic than triumphantly Christian.¹²¹

The stakes were high for Rubinstein in this, her first major speaking role (made more difficult by the verse, and the frequent coordination of text with music) in a full production with celebrated collaborators. She was still only 25 and hardly experienced in sustaining a character over several hours of performance time. Fernand Nozière saw her limitations, but admired her daring:

Le sort de cette oeuvre semble lié à la destinée de Mme Rubinstein. Qui pourrait en effet représenter Saint-Sébastien si elle y devait renoncer? Peut-être un jour se révélera quelque artiste qui pourrait aborder ce rôle; mais, aujourd’hui, qui oserait porter l’armure d’or et s’appuyer sur l’arc, danser sur les flammes, mimer la tragique et religieuse passion, exprimer l’allégresse du corps transpercé? Qui donc rayonnerait comme elle de pure beauté, d’extase mystique, de transfiguration?¹²²

Gabriel Astruc was not alone in wondering why *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* failed to coalesce: “Je n’y comprends rien! J’ai réuni le plus grand musicien, le plus grand poète, le plus grand décorateur, le plus grand choréographe...Et c’est mauvais!”¹²³ Charles Mayer suggests that Bakst’s overwhelmingly opulent designs were

¹²⁰Adolphe Brisson, quoted in Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 41.

¹²¹*Boston Herald*, 12 June 1911. Ida Rubinstein clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

¹²²Fernand Nozière, *Ida Rubinstein*, 27-28. [“This sort of work seems linked to the destiny of Mme. Rubinstein. Indeed, who could portray Saint Sébastien if she were to renounce it? Maybe, one day, some artist will appear who could have approached this role; but, today, who would dare to wear the golden armor and to lean on the bow, to dance on flames, to mime the tragic and religious passion, to express the elation of the pierced body? Who would radiate with pure beauty, mystical ecstasy, transfiguration like she did?”]

¹²³Gabriel Astruc, quoted Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind II*, 163. [“I don’t understand it at all! I’ve united the greatest musician, the greatest poet, the greatest decorative artist and the greatest choreographer...And it is bad!”]

to blame, citing the artist's disregard for the importance of text in an integrated theatrical experience.¹²⁴ Debussy intimated a similar idea: when writing to D'Annunzio, he asked,

Why give the eyes so much work when the ears have so much to take in? For years we've been a prey to influences from the North and from Byzantium which together are stifling our Latin genius, with its grace and clarity. You know it as well as anyone.¹²⁵

Several circumstances obviously worked against the production—the short rehearsal period, the lack of lead time for D'Annunzio and Debussy to coordinate their work, and the inflated expectations touted by the press. There was also the unexamined imperative to mount the most lavish production possible. Partly this was a product of unavoidable competition through proximity with the activities of the Ballets Russes: Rubinstein's projects often alternated with the Paris seasons of the Ballets Russes at the Châtelet. Diaghilev made it known that he felt betrayed not only by Rubinstein's departure (as he did with practically everyone who left the company), but also by her wooing Bakst, Fokine and Debussy away from his troupe. Bakst continued to work for both Diaghilev and Rubinstein: his taste for sumptuous designs evidenced in his Ballets Russes assignments directly carried over into his collaborations with Rubinstein. Astruc quipped that he was constantly arranging for the loading-in or loading-out of a Bakst set from the Châtelet. There is also no doubt that Rubinstein reveled in such spectacle; the quality of the decors and costumes provided a kind of foil for her own weaknesses as a performer. Moreover, there were unlimited funds to finance the lavishness: Rubinstein was heir to her family's fortune, and until the Russian revolution, she spent huge sums on her productions. While this supported spectacular decors, huge casts, full orchestras and favorable contracts for star artists, hard questions about the relative merit or

¹²⁴Charles S. Mayer, "Ida Rubinstein: A Twentieth-Century Cleopatra," 38.

¹²⁵Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, 273.

priority of an expenditure rarely needed to be debated.

After *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* Rubinstein was offered a long list of projects including Strauss's *Salomé*, Hofmannsthal and Strauss's ballets *La Légende de Joseph* and *Les Furies*, and a proposed dramatization of Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* by Henry Bataille.¹²⁶ But she refrained from pursuing all new prospects and continued her trusted collaboration with Léon Bakst. Together they lavishly produced Emile Verhaeren's verse drama *Hélène de Sparte* with Rubinstein in the title role, Bakst's designs and music by Déodat de Séverac at the Théâtre du Châtelet in May 1912. Stefan Zweig, Verhaeren's biographer, describes how the play was more dominated by

the external magnificence of this somewhat sensationally advertised mise-en-scene than by its poetic qualities, smothered as they were by the accessories. A production which shall do justice to the play, leaving its pure lyric line unbedizened with flaring arabesques, is still waiting as a task for some actor-manager of genius who possesses that highest and rarest quality of being able to subordinate himself to the utterance, who is anxious not to ruin a noble simplicity by a spurious plentitude.¹²⁷

A month later at the Châtelet, Rubinstein and Bakst mounted a full production of their St. Petersburg *Salomé*, rumored to cost a half million francs for each of its six performances; the lavishness of the spectacle seemed now to draw more interest than the once scandalous material.

Still, the mixed reviews and increasing costs did not dissuade Bakst and Rubinstein; they were already planning their next collaboration with D'Annunzio, *La Pisanelle*, which he specifically wrote for the dancer.

¹²⁶Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 151-158 and Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885-1960): A Theatrical Life*, 44-49. The proposed casting for *Les Furies* was Nijinsky (Oreste), Rubinstein (Clytemnestre) and Grete Wiesenthal (Electre).

¹²⁷Stefan Zweig, quoted in Charles S. Mayer, "Ida Rubinstein: A Twentieth-Century Cleopatra," 38.

IV. *La Pisanelle, ou La Mort parfumée*

With *La Pisanelle* D'Annunzio intended to write what he termed a "comedy," a very different play than *Le Martyre*, but in fact the two texts are very similar in their use of language and past literary models, and in their themes concerning the clash of Christianity and exotic forms of paganism, resulting in the death of the protagonist. Usually the play and its production are quickly mentioned and dismissed by critics as overwrought examples of D'Annunzio's work in France. These judgements are not without validity, but what should be noted is that the production of *La Pisanelle* marks the first time that D'Annunzio worked with a director of vision, Vsevolod Meyerhold. Rubinstein had been courting Meyerhold for her projects for several years, and *La Pisanelle* marked his well-publicized Paris debut as a director:

"Promettez aux spectateurs de Châtelet les visions les plus extraordinaires et ne craignez pas qu'ils vous reprochent d'avoir exagéré," nous a-t-on dit hier. Musicien, acteur, esthéticien...M. Wsévolode Meyerhold est certainement l'homme qui a tiré du théâtre les plus grandes et aussi les plus belles impressions que puisse donner la scène. Il a voulu que la plastique s'accordât à la musique ou à la déclamation, que chaque geste de chaque figurant concordât avec le mouvement de l'ensemble, tout en restant un geste spontané, personnel.¹²⁸

Meyerhold was an auspicious choice: at the time he had only been directing for about ten years, but probably had more experience in utilizing movement and dance in theatre productions than any of his peers. Meyerhold had an abiding interest in movement, dance and non-verbal theatrical forms; he appeared in several ballets created by Michel Fokine and collaborated on a wide range of productions with the choreographer. In his own training of actors, Meyerhold included elements from ballet, modern dance and

¹²⁸Michel Georges-Michel, "La 'Pisanelle' ou La Mort parfumée," in *Comoedia Illustré*, 25 April 1913, 804. ["Promise the spectators of the Châtelet the most extraordinary visions, and do not fear that they reproach you for having exaggerated," we were told yesterday. Musician, actor, aesthétician...M. Wsévolode Meyerhold is certainly the man who extracted from theatre the greatest and the most beautiful impressions the stage can give. He has desired that plasticity is brought into harmony with music or with declamation, that every gesture of every character coordinates with the movement of the ensemble, while remaining a spontaneous and personal gesture."]

mime.

Although Astruc served as impresario and concerned himself with the theatre and contracts, Rubinstein most closely produced *La Pisanelle*. She hired over two hundred actors, including Edouard de Max for the role of the uncle and Jean Hervé as the young king. Ildebrando Pizzetti, a pupil of Debussy who had written a score for D'Annunzio's play *La Nave* (1908), was engaged to write the music; Fokine agreed to create the dances. D'Annunzio finished his play in March 1913, and Rubinstein promptly circulated the script to her collaborators, but it appears that she decided to keep the playwright at a distance.¹²⁹ D'Annunzio was reportedly out of sorts and obsessed with his finances; Rubinstein confided to Montesquiou, "D'Annunzio est ici. Il est plus terrible que jamais et je crois qu'après la Pisanelle, je ne lui commanderai pas d'autres pièces."¹³⁰ When Meyerhold arrived in Paris in time for the first reading on 24 April, he was rebuffed by D'Annunzio; Meyerhold was Rubinstein's choice with Bakst's enthusiastic support; the unspecified animosity between the playwright and director was smoothed over, but the rehearsal period was dominated by Meyerhold and Bakst, with D'Annunzio in attendance towards the end of the process.¹³¹

D'Annunzio first wrote *La Pisanelle* as a screenplay entitled *La Rosa di Cipro*, and then expanded it into a three-act verse play of some forty-five hundred lines, boasting that the language was "so learned that only consummate philologists will be

¹²⁹Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 171-172. Abel Gance, the future director of great film spectacles, played the role of d'Eudes, an assistant to the Prince of Tyr. See Gérard Abensour, "Meyerhold à Paris," *Cahiers du monde Russe et Soviétique* 5 (#1, January-March 1964), 9, note 2.

¹³⁰Ida Rubinstein, quoted in Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 172. ["D'Annunzio is here. He is more terrible than ever and I think that after *La Pisanelle*, I shall not commission any other plays from him."]

¹³¹Giovanni Isgrò, *D'Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 187-189 and Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 168-172.

able to judge it."¹³² Giovanni Gullace concurs and explains that

The French of the play is even more artificial than that of *Saint Sébastien*, and at times it is more obscure...from medieval and Renaissance writers...he derived a strange language compounded of Latinisms, Italianisms, lofty expressions and idiotisms, archaic and modern forms—the whole resulting in a bizarre linguistic potpourri conspicuous for its inconsistency.¹³³

La Pisanelle can be seen as a romantic flip-side to *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*: while Sébastien was symbolized by the chaste white lily, Pisanelle is the seductive red rose. Pisanelle is a beautiful Italian courtesan who is brought to medieval Cyprus for sale. A young pale king falls fervently in love with her, believing that she is a holy pilgrim whose arrival is the fulfillment of a Christian prophecy, while his lustful uncle desires only to possess her, thinking that she is an incarnation of Venus. In order to protect her from a marauding crowd of mariners, Pisanelle is stowed away in a convent where the nuns revere her as Saint Aléthyse and where she undergoes a kind of conversion. The uncle attempts to abduct her, but the king intervenes and kills him. Back at the palace, the queen mother, not pleased with the impending prospect of ceding her throne to a prostitute, orders the drunken and dancing Pisanelle to be killed by her slaves, who suffocate her with poisoned roses.

D'Annunzio's concept for the production of *La Pisanelle* was based in its film origin. Dominated by a dream-like quality, the work was deemed "il più plastico e il più vario" of his plays.¹³⁴ As Giovanni Isgrò points out, D'Annunzio's fascination with cinema, like dance, stemmed from the medium's ability to render movement expressively and to achieve effects of transformation.¹³⁵ In *La Pisanelle* the title character undergoes a

¹³²Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in Giovanni Gullace, *Gabriele D'Annunzio in France: A Study in Cultural Relations*, 92.

¹³³Giovanni Gullace, *Gabriele D'Annunzio in France: A Study in Cultural Relations*, 92.

¹³⁴Gabriele D'Annunzio, quoted in Giovanni Isgrò, *D'Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 182. ["most plastic and most varied"]

¹³⁵Giovanni Isgrò, *D'Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 182.

series of transformations from prostitute to saint to goddess and back to prostitute, creating a fundamental ambiguity about the character, not dissimilar from Mila in *La Figlia di Iorio*. D'Annunzio favored a style of direction based in realism, with a wide angle focus drawing the audience's attention to a simultaneous and/or overlapping variety of actions, reactions and movements. In contrast, Meyerhold was experimenting with more purely abstract and stylized methods of movement and intonation: as *Comoedia's* critic explained, "Chacun des mouvements des comédiens doit être, selon M. Meyerhold, envisagé à la façon d'une danse...Il veut que tout geste soit stylisé, exprime par une mimique adéquate le propos qui lui correspond."¹³⁶ Of course, D'Annunzio also strongly valued the choreographic and scenic elements of a production but, unlike Meyerhold, in the larger context of a "total theatre" event D'Annunzio always gave primacy to the text. Meyerhold was drawn to the visual qualities of *La Pisanelle* and Bakst's stunning arrangement of the play into five scenic tableaux, but felt hampered by the fact that "d'Annunzio n'a donné aucune unité de style" for the play, and that the playwright "sent mal le théâtre, sa forme."¹³⁷

Consequently, Meyerhold concluded that he needed to give the sprawling piece a strong visual unity. Because the dimensions of the Châtelet stage were quite large (12 meters wide by 23.5 meters deep), and were to be filled with the scores of actors required by the play during any given scene, Meyerhold and Bakst devised the idea of rebuilding the theatre's proscenium arch, boldly covering it with black and gold fabric and illuminating it with intense white light, to provide a strong frame for the action.

¹³⁶Émile Henriot, *Comoedia Illustré*, 8 June 1913, Ida Rubinstein clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection. ["According to Mr. Meyerhold, each of the movements of the actors must be seen as a dance...He wants each gesture to be stylized, expressed by an adequate mimicry that corresponds to its purpose."]

¹³⁷Vsevolod Meyerhold, quoted in Gérard Abensour, "Meyerhold à Paris," 24, 22. ["D'Annunzio has given no unity of style at all" for the play, and the playwright "has an unsatisfactory feeling for theatre, for its form."]

Additionally, they decided to use a different curtain as a “visual prelude” for each act, announcing its emotional climate and creating a sense of distance. The expansive house curtain displayed before the performance began was described by Jean Schlumberger of *Nouvelle Revue Française* as “noir et or, où le monogramme du Christ se mêle à des arabesques persanes et qui exprime fort congruement toute la philosophie du maître italien.”¹³⁸ The other curtains followed: red for the Prologue, blue with silver flowers for Act I, light blue with gilded haloes for Act II, and deep green with golden owls for Act III.¹³⁹ Bakst’s designs for *La Pisanelle* were considered by many critics to be the most spectacular in memory, as Charles Spencer describes:

The prologue and last act are set in a mediaeval chamber with brilliantly patterned vaulting and a magnificent fresco; Act I, set in the Port of Famagusta, shows the Prince arriving on a white horse before a great concourse of helmeted crusaders, priests, courtiers and towns-people; in contrast the second act is a Convent courtyard. The courtiers’s robes in the last scene includes a brilliant array of hats and Bakst’s familiar geometrical patterns. Once again...the sumptuousness of the colours and the costumes surpassing anything one has seen before—raising cries of admiration from the entire first night audience.¹⁴⁰

Utilizing the striking compositions and color schemes of Bakst’s designs, Meyerhold masterfully animated the movements of the crowd and incorporated them into a unified stage picture. “Le plaisir est parfait pour les yeux,” wrote a critic for *Action Française*, “...les mouvements de foule sont réglés avec une harmonieuse intimité dont je ne connais pas de précédents à la scène.”¹⁴¹ Carrying over the “bas-relief” style of his productions with Vera Komissarzhevskaya, Meyerhold staged his groupings for *La*

¹³⁸Jean Schlumberger, quoted in Gérard Abensour, “Meyerhold à Paris,” 14. [“black and gold, the monogram of Christ is mixed with Persian arabesques and strongly expresses the entire philosophy of the Italian artist.”]

¹³⁹Gérard Abensour, “Meyerhold à Paris,” 12-14.

¹⁴⁰Charles Spencer, *Leon Bakst*, 146, 150.

¹⁴¹Lucienne Chandon, quoted in Gérard Abensour, “Meyerhold à Paris,” 15. [“The pleasure for the eyes is perfect...the movements of the groups are set with a harmonious intimacy for which I don’t know any precedents on the stage.”]

Pisanelle far upstage in the Châtelet's deep space. Principal characters were brought far downstage for extended scenes or monologues: with "fresques animées" in the background, a character's journey downstage heightened anticipation and his isolation from the group strengthened his connection with the audience. Louis Schneider saw in this style the influence of opera staging:

Cette disposition scénique est peut-être très ingénieuse, puisqu'elle crée plus d'atmosphère et doit donner plus d'illusion en ménageant une transition entre la brutalité de la rampe et le rêve matérialisé du décor... Le proscenium a forcé M. de Max, par exemple, à venir débiter ses jolis couplets du Prologue devant le public, comme un ténor de l'ancien répertoire qui viendrait débiter une romance ou un aria di bravura."¹⁴²

The reference to music is apt since Meyerhold deftly applied Pizzetti's incidental music to animate transitions between scenes; and his technique of calling the curtain on a scene still in progress was especially impressive to the Parisian audience.¹⁴³

Though Meyerhold curiously remarked that "Les danses réglées par Fokin font beaucoup d'effet, quoique je ne sois pas d'accord avec lui sur leur conception,"¹⁴⁴ the director's staging provided an expressive background which strongly set-off Ida Rubinstein's poses and dances. The image of her body was emphasized throughout the production, starting with her sensational entrance at the beginning of Act I after a long anticipatory Prologue: "Et il y a aussi la rose du butin; car on voit, accroupie au milieu de cet amas de richesses, une jeune femme blanche, presque nue, merveilleusement belle,

¹⁴²Louis Schneider, quoted in Gérard Abensour, "Meyerhold à Paris," 12. ["This setting is probably very clever, because it creates more atmosphere and more illusion by sparing the abrupt transition between the brutality of the footlights and the materialized dream of the decor... The proscenium forced Mr. de Max, for example, to recite his pleasing verses from the Prologue in front of the audience, like a tenor from the old repertoire who would come to declaim a romance or a bravura aria."]

¹⁴³Giovanni Isgrò, *D'Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 190-191. It is remarkable that Meyerhold achieved such a visually complex production since he started rehearsing on the set only five days before opening night. See Gérard Abensour, "Meyerhold à Paris," 22.

¹⁴⁴Vsevolod Meyerhold, quoted in Gérard Abensour, "Meyerhold à Paris," 23. ["The dances set by Fokine are very effective, although I am not in agreement with him about their concept."]

liée avec des cordes de sparte.”¹⁴⁵ For the entire first act which contains much clamor and movement upstage, Pisanelle (“la rose”) is silent and still downstage, constrained by her bondage, but commanding attention. Interestingly, Meyerhold placed a single Knight downstage left, further emphasizing her isolated figure.¹⁴⁶ Her body exposed, vulnerable, the crowd “remuse et gronde autour de la rose,”¹⁴⁷ she silently holds focus until the king releases her like a bird at the end of the act: “Le femme hors des liens, se dresse tout à coup comme si elle allait bondir et s’envoler.”¹⁴⁸ At the start of Act II, a group of young nuns danced silently, moving as if “portate de un vento leggero”¹⁴⁹ in joyous celebration of the anniversary of their Patroness, but in reality providing a saintly atmosphere for the next incarnation of Pisanelle as “La béate.” The climax of Act III is Pisanelle’s dance of death, which again was offset first by the upstage silent dancing of the Queen Mother’s seven black slaves, soon her executioners.¹⁵⁰ Trapped at the start of the play, Pisanelle realizes that she has been ensnared once again by the Queen’s mortal plan. Accompanying her final tirade, Pisanelle performs her drunken dance of defiance around which the slaves encircle: she “rit et s’esquive; d’instant en instant elle se fait plus agile et plus rapide: se plie, se tend, s’insinue, coule, frétille, rampe, se ramasse,

¹⁴⁵Gabriele D’Annunzio, *La Pisanelle ou Le Jeu de la Rose et de la Mort in Tragedie, sogni e misteri II*, 664. [“And there is also the rose of the booty; because one sees, crouched in the midst of this heap of wealth, a white woman, almost naked, marvellously beautiful, tied with the ropes of Sparta.”] Passively presented as beautiful and in bondage, Rubinstein’s entrance here is similar to her first appearance in *Cléopâtre*.

¹⁴⁶Giovanni Isgrò, *D’Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 190.

¹⁴⁷Gabriele D’Annunzio, *La Pisanelle*, 675. [“stirs and growls around the rose”]

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 710. [“The woman, out of bondage, stands suddenly as if she was going to leap and fly.”]

¹⁴⁹C. G. Sarti, quoted in Giovanni Isgrò, *D’Annunzio e la mise en scène*, 191. [“transported by a soft wind”]

¹⁵⁰Raoul Aubry, “Théâtre Municipal du Chatelet: La Pisanelle ou la Mort parfumée,” in *Le Théâtre*, 1 July 1913, 16.

bondit."¹⁵¹ From his study of Bakst's designs, Charles Mayer describes the visual effect of the dance:

She appeared in a tight tunic of Parma violet, glittering with gold threads, worn over long Turkish trousers of vermillion satin richly embroidered in gold. Her long train of black velvet lined with white satin and weighted down with gold and silver embroidery was discarded as she began the "Dance of Perfumed Death." Then, in an unforgettable sado-erotic *coup d'oeil* she was gradually smothered in blood-red roses by slaves dressed in robes of clinging Indian red silks.¹⁵²

Not surprisingly, Meyerhold relates that at the end of the dance there was always an ovation.¹⁵³

There were two major obstacles in rehearsal for Meyerhold: the actors were already cast and came from several different training methods, and the director did not speak or read French, less much Italian. To undercut his actors's tendency to declaim, Meyerhold sought a style of intonation where

Les paroles sont *scandées froidement*, sans aucun trémolo, sans pleurs dans la voix... Le son doit être constamment *étayé*, les paroles tombent comme des gouttes dans un puits profond: on entend nettement leur chute sans vibration du son. Ni flou, ni terminaisons à effet.¹⁵⁴

This attempt at Maeterlinck-inspired intonation met with mixed results. The critic for *Le Journal* was not alone when he remarked that "Un système étrange de déclamation, où alternent le hurlement et le murmure tous deux également inarticulés, nous a empêché de

¹⁵¹Gabriele D'Annunzio, *La Pisanelle*, 839. ["laughs and dodges; moment by moment she is more agile and more rapid: she bends, leads, insinuates, glides, wriggles, crawls, huddles, leaps."]

¹⁵²Charles S. Mayer, "Ida Rubinstein: A Twentieth-Century Cleopatra," 39.

¹⁵³Gérard Abensour, "Meyerhold à Paris," 23.

¹⁵⁴Vsevolod Meyerhold, quoted in Gérard Abensour, "Meyerhold à Paris," 17. ["The words are *scanned coldly*, without any tremolo, without tears in the voice...The sound must be constantly *supported*, the words fall like drops in a deep well: one hears clearly their fall without vibration of sound. Neither blurred nor damped in effect."]

saisir un seul vers, un mot, une syllabe.”¹⁵⁵ After the final dress rehearsal, steps were taken to render the text somewhat more understandable: some scenes were shifted downstage, and D’Annunzio finally made cuts in the play, including deletion of large parts of the Prologue and Act III.¹⁵⁶ Still, given the commitment to this style of speech combined with the fact that the actors were often placed far upstage and were speaking D’Annunzio’s frequently obscure verse, Meyerhold evidently treated the text more as a musical accompaniment to the visual spectacle than as the primary theatrical element.

“C’est une de mes réalisations bien réussies,” insisted Meyerhold about the final outcome of *La Pisanelle*, and the enthusiasm of the audiences “cela me rappelait l’époque du théâtre de Vera Komissarzevskaja.”¹⁵⁷ He cited many examples of what pleased him about the production: the power of de Max’s long monologues, the way music accompanied the discourses of the king, the sharp contrast in colors as the king, dressed in white and riding a white horse, enters in a splendid procession against a deep red background signalling the death of the slave dealer; the emergence of Pisanelle from the steps of the proscenium for Act II, and the silent death of the Prince of Tyr.¹⁵⁸

D’Annunzio asked Astruc to carefully arrange the invitations and seating to accommodate “le Tout-Paris” for the final dress rehearsal and opening night at the Châtelet on 11-12 June 1913; the audience included Chaliapin, Puccini, Colette, Edmond

¹⁵⁵Abel Hermant, quoted in Gérard Abensour, “Meyerhold à Paris,” 17. [A strange system of speech, which alternates yelling and murmuring both equally inarticulate, preventing us from catching a single verse, a word, a syllable.”] Meyerhold attended the final dress rehearsal of Maeterlinck’s *Marie-Madeleine* in Paris on 21 May 1913. See “Meyerhold à Paris,” 21.

¹⁵⁶Gérard Abensour, “Meyerhold à Paris,” 12 and Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 174-175.

¹⁵⁷Vsevolod Meyerhold, quoted in Gérard Abensour, “Meyerhold à Paris,” 23. [“It is one of my successful realizations,” “that reminded me of the period of Vera Komissarzevskaja’s theatre.”]

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*

Rostand, Diaghilev, Antoine, Paul Fort and Jacques Rouché; despite a major heat wave, the run of ten performances was sold out.¹⁵⁹ The critical reception was negative to mixed. Ida Rubinstein once again garnered the most praise, as the critic of *Le Gaulois* typically remarked, "Ses gestes ont de la noblesse et sa danse du dernier acte, élégante, discrète, danse d'attitudes plus que de virtuosité, est émouvante et a des reflets de tristesse."¹⁶⁰ Meyerhold's direction was not frequently assessed, possibly because critics were not attuned to considering a director's work. But those critics who did comment on Meyerhold's contribution often remarked on the unity and musicality of the piece, as did Jean Schlumberger in *Nouvelle Revue Française*:

Il va de soi que tout l'effort du metteur en scène porte sur le caractère d'unité qu'il veut imprimer à son oeuvre: le décorateur et le musicien, le protagoniste et la foule, les bruits et les couleurs et les mouvements doivent pour lui fondre leurs effets, réunir leurs efforts, pour donner l'impression d'un ensemble cohérent, et par tout ce qui se voit, s'entend, se comprend, ne fasse qu'un et tende au but: restituer sa vie unique et diverse au drame qu'a rêvé le poète.¹⁶¹

The lavishness of the enterprise was denounced for its lack of financial sobriety: "Dire que, grâce à cette somme bien dépensée...Qu'Antoine eût pu diriger à l'Odéon deux saisons sans souci d'aucune sorte."¹⁶² And the creation of spectacle seemingly for its own sake precipitated a conservative reaction against the idea of "total theatre" and in

¹⁵⁹Gérard Abensour, "Meyerhold à Paris," 9, 24 and Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 175.

¹⁶⁰Félix Duquesnel, quoted in Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 178. ["Her gestures have nobility, and her dance in the last act, elegant, discreet, a dance of attitudes rather than of virtuosity, is moving and has reflections of sadness."]

¹⁶¹ Jean Schlumberger, quoted in Gérard Abensour, "Meyerhold à Paris," 19. ["It is agreed that the entire effort of the director focuses on the expression of unity that he wants to imprint on his work: the designer and the musician, the protagonist and the crowd, sounds and colors and movements have to meld their effects for him, they must unite their efforts, to give the impression of a coherent whole, and by all that is seen, heard, understood, be only one and tend to the goal: to restore the unique and diverse life to the drama the poet dreamed of."]

¹⁶²Edmond See, quoted in Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein: Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, 176. ["To think that, with this money well spent...Antoine could have directed at the Odéon for two seasons without having to worry at all."]

defense of a "dramatic" and "verbal" theatre, as the remarks of critic Henri Ghéon demonstrate:

A mesure que se marient plus harmonieusement sur le théâtre, musique, lumière et couleurs, plus déplacé, plus superflu y semble le verbe dramatique. Le spectacle dit tout. A-t-on besoin de mots? Qu'y a-t-il de trop dans *La Pisanelle* telle qu'on la représente au Châtelet, sinon la parole rythmée de M. Gabriele d'Annunzio? Gardons-nous bien de condamner le cinéma: le ballet russe, si passionnément que nous l'admirions, n'est rien de plus que le cinéma des artistes. Oui, l'art monte sur le théâtre, mais pour nous donner le ballet, la pantomime, la féerie...et que devient le drame dans tout cela?¹⁶³

Both *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* and *La Pisanelle* were productions which overran the boundaries of conventional genres, and critics found it difficult to assess the totality of these works the more they continued to define these projects within the narrow confines of drama or ballet.

D'Annunzio's plays had long been criticized for being staged poems, for lacking dramatic action. In these two projects with Ida Rubinstein the playwright did not address this problem, and nor was he ever really interested in it. Instead, fascinated with Rubinstein's beauty and stage presence, D'Annunzio attempted to realize several of his "Théâtre de Fête" ideas with dance and movement playing a central role. Intrinsic problems were revealed however as D'Annunzio went into production with these projects. The playwright's practice of accumulating elements (arts, periods, sources, styles, etc.) in his work did not seem to transfer well to collaborative efforts with other artists where integration of elements usually needed to take precedence over accumulation. D'Annunzio was drawn to the pictorial surfaces and images of the

¹⁶³Henri Ghéon, quoted in Gérard Abensour, "Meyerhold à Paris," 20. ["In proportion as music, lighting and colors marry more harmoniously in the theatre, the more displaced and superfluous seems dramatic speech. The spectacle tells all. Who needs words? What is excessive in *La Pisanelle* as it is performed at The Châtelet, if not the rhythmic words of Mr. Gabriele d'Annunzio? We should take care not to condemn the cinema: the Ballets Russes, however passionately admired by us, is nothing more than the cinema of artists. Yes, art ascends to the stage, but in order to give us ballet, mime, enchantment...and what becomes of the drama in all that?"]

Sébastien and Pisanelle legends, from sweeping vistas to the many accoutrements and baubles with which Bakst decorated the sets. By crowding his long texts with images and references, D'Annunzio had already reached a kind of "saturation" point, and paired with Bakst's designs in performance, the text and decor together seemed redundant. No wonder that Rubinstein's mute expressive poses became the most cogent unifier of these productions.

Chapter Four: *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Grete Wiesenthal*

I. *Hofmannsthal and the Expansion of Language*

Critics often point to the "crisis of language" allegedly suffered by Hofmannsthal at the turn of the century to explain why the Austrian writer shifted away from writing lyric poetry and drama and focussed his attentions on experiments in the theatre and with non-verbal forms of dance, pantomime and music.¹ Yet a cause-and-effect interpretation obscures an interesting complex of related issues which Hofmannsthal carried over into his work in the theatre and his interest in dance. Rather than choosing one art over another, Hofmannsthal throughout his career displayed an abiding search for integration to bridge many dualities—of body and spirit, feeling and intellect, word and gesture.

As early as the 1890s when Hofmannsthal was just establishing his career as a lyric poet, he was already expressing dismay over the current "degradation" of poetry to the level of "embellished confession" and an attendant "decay of the spiritual in art."² In an 1896 essay, Hofmannsthal argued for the autonomy of poetry and the creative freedom attributed to other arts, making references to movement and dance:

A poem is a weightless weaving of words which through their ordering, their sound and their content call forth a precisely transcribed, illusively distinct, fleeting soul state which we call mood, in that they join the memory of the visible and the memory of the audible with the principle of movement...We should be allowed to be artists in words as others are in white and coloured stone, in metals, in purified sounds or in dance.³

Hofmannsthal also raised concerns about the self-sufficiency of verbal language in the

¹See for example Herman K. Doswald, "Hofmannsthal's Turn to Drama and the Theater," *Theatre Research International* 6 (#1 Winter 1980/81), 44-45.

²Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Poetry and Life," in *Symbolism: An Anthology*, edited and translated by T. G. West (London: Methuen, 1980), 64.

³*Ibid.*, 64, 66.

theatre. "People are tired of listening to talk," he asserted in an 1895 monograph on the actor Friedrich Mitterwurzer,

They feel a deep distrust with words. For words have pushed themselves in front of things. Hearsay has swallowed the world...We are in the grip of a horrible process in which thought is utterly stifled by concepts. Hardly anyone is now capable of being sure in his own mind about what he understands, what he does not understand, of saying what he feels and what he does not feel. This has awakened a desperate love for all those arts which are executed without speech: for music, for the dance, and all the skills of acrobats and jugglers.⁴

"Ein Brief" (1902), Hofmannsthal's well-known meditation on the powers and limitations of language, touches on many issues of the time: the relationship of words to emotional experience, the difficulty of defining the self, the nature of truth in communication. This imaginary letter from Lord Chandos, a poet, to the scientist and philosopher Francis Bacon is dated 1603, at the close of the Elizabethan period and another *fin de siècle*. Through his alter-ego Hofmannsthal explores the loss of confidence in the expressive powers of language and the dangers of extreme aestheticism; both result in a sense of isolation and ironically a loss of feeling. "My situation, in short, is this," concedes Chandos,

I have utterly lost my ability to think or speak coherently about anything at all...I felt an unaccountable discomfort whenever I simply tried to pronounce the words "spirit," "soul," or "body." I found myself inwardly incapable of expressing an opinion...because the abstract words that the tongue necessarily shapes when passing any kind of judgment simply fell to dust in my mouth like decaying mushrooms.⁵

Chandos "renounces" future literary activity, but his talent has already abandoned him without his knowing how or why, and he looks back with nostalgia on a past period

of almost perpetual intoxication, [when] the whole of existence struck me as one vast unity. The intellectual and physical spheres appeared to be no more contradictory than did the life at Court and that of animals, than art and non-

⁴Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Michael Hamburger, "Art as Second Nature: The Figures of the Actor and the Dancer in the works of Hugo von Hofmannsthal," in *Romantic Mythologies*, edited by Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 226-227.

⁵ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter*, translated by Russell Stockman (Marlboro: The Marlboro Press, 1986), 19.

art, or than solitude and society. I perceived nature in all things...And in all of nature I perceived my own self...The one was like the other, neither was inferior, whether with respect to its dreamlike otherworldliness or in its physical immediacy...Everywhere I felt myself at the center; never was I conscious of deceptive appearances.⁶

Chandos enjoyed a secure belief in form which "lends order to its material, so completely does it permeate and transfigure it, creating poetry and truth together."⁷ But now he is dismayed at how social discourse is "incapable of penetrating to inner life of things" and the unity of self and world, word and action is gone:

Everything fell into fragments for me, the fragments into further fragments, until it seemed impossible to contain anything at all within a single concept. Disjointed words swam about me...I could not look into them without dizziness, their incessant turning only drew me down into emptiness.⁸

Although the decidedly anti-mystical Bacon has suggested medication, Chandos does not want merely to be cured of his current anxiety about language, but he wants to be able to express himself in a different and more encompassing way. He tries to create a new connection between feelings and words, and treasures those rare glimpses of an "exalted life" triggered by ordinary objects and felt through the body:

I came upon a half-filled watering can left under a walnut tree...the water in it black from the shadow of the tree, and with a water skipper skimming its mirror from one dark margin to the other—that this juxtaposition of trifles should have sent shooting through me, from the roots of my hair to the marrow of my heels, such a thrill at the presence of the infinite that I might have cried out in words that, had I but found them, would have called down the very cherubim in which I do not believe.⁹

Sensing that his "body is made up of nothing but ciphers," Chandos longs for "a medium more direct, more fluid, more incandescent than words"¹⁰ with which to convey

⁶*Ibid.*, 17.

⁷*Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁸*Ibid.*, 21.

⁹*Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 27, 31.

the mystery and beauty of life.

Hofmannsthal's tributes to actors from this early period attest to his interest in gesture and the expressivity of the human body. Eleonora Duse "acts the sense, not the words," he commented to a friend in 1892; her "wordless gestures" were not a practice of simply acting in the pauses between the lines, but comprised a level of communication that went beyond words:

Duse does not play herself, she plays the poet's *Gestalt*. And where the poet is lame or leaves her hanging, she makes his dolls living beings, beings with a spirit which he lacked, with a clarity of expression which he could not find, and does it with a unified, creative power and a gift for intuitive psychology...Duse's technique...fluttering, fine, half secret gestures of the body betray the quicksilver movements of the soul.¹¹

In "Die Duse im Jahre 1903," an essay on the actress, Hofmannsthal writes that Duse "offers up the entire demonic strength of her body" and he envisions her performing the hymns of Pindar:

She will lift her arms and, forgetting herself, will set her feet to dancing a victory dance, will fling back her head and will no longer be able to bear being a mere godly voice, will wish to become a body possessed by gods, a tragic dancer, an actress.¹²

It is an image not far removed from the final dance of *Elektra*, the play he was writing at the time of this essay.

Hofmannsthal's poems occasioned on the deaths of Friedrich Mitterwurzer (1897), Hermann Müller (1899) and Josef Kainz (1910), three of the most celebrated actors in the German-speaking theatre around the turn-of-the-century, extol their exceptional physical presence and use of movement. Of Mitterwurzer he wrote,

From one mask he would creep into another,
Spring from the father's body to the son's,

¹¹ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Eleonora Duse I," in *Prosa I*, 67-68, quoted in Suzanne E. Bales, "Elektra: from Hofmannsthal to Strauss" (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1984), 23.

¹²Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Die Duse im Jahre 1903," in *Prosa II*, 62-63, quoted in Suzanne E. Bales, "Elektra: from Hofmannsthal to Strauss," 25.

And, like to garments, change the forms he wore...
 For his whole body was a magic veil,
 Within the folds of which were dwelling all things¹³

And about Müller,

He was so strong! his body so endowed
 With power of change that, as it seemed, no net
 Was able to contain him! What a being!
 He made himself transparent, let the whites
 Of his eyes betray the utmost secrecies
 That slumbered there within him, and he breathed
 The spirits of imaginary creatures
 Into himself like smoke and sent them through
 His pores again into the light of day
 He would transform himself, and out would well
 Strange beings, hardly human, but so living¹⁴

As W. E. Yates points out, Hofmannsthal was particularly enthralled by the ability of these actors to reflect universal experience and fantasy, and their “magical capacity for constant change...stress[ing] the mimic element supplementing the spoken word—a living sorcery.”¹⁵

According to Benjamin Bennett, by 1895 Hofmannsthal was well acquainted with Kleist’s essay “Über das Marionettentheater” (1810) and had “developed a strong critical attitude toward it.”¹⁶ Hofmannsthal lauded this work as

¹³Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “In Memory of the Actor, Mitterwurzer,” in *The Lyrical Poems of Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, translated by Charles Wharton Stork (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), 64-65.

¹⁴Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “On the Death of the Actor, Hermann Müller” in *The Lyrical Poems of Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, 67.

¹⁵W. E. Yates, “Harbingers of Change in Theatrical Performance: Hofmannsthal’s Poems on Mitterwurzer and Kainz,” in *Patterns of Change: German Drama and the European Tradition: Essays in Honour of Ronald Peacock*, edited by Dorothy James and Silvia Ranawake (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 201.

¹⁶Benjamin Bennett, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3.

“the most dazzling piece of philosophy since Plato’s myths,”¹⁷ and he shared Kleist’s fascination with the interaction of the subconscious and the body. In his deceptively simple dialogue, Kleist ostensibly discusses the nature of puppet performance with a *premier danseur* of the opera theatre, but their conversation opens out into wider considerations about the nature of performance. Describing the puppets, Kleist’s dancer admits that “it is true that the range of their movements is rather limited, but those which they can command they accomplish with a grace and ease which every thinking person can only wonder at.” Since the puppets are “without affectation” and their bodies obey only the laws of gravity, they exhibit “an admirable quality which one looks for in vain among the majority of our dancers.”¹⁸ Kleist expands his analysis by discussing different kinds of moving bodies: the trained dancer represents highly conscious and technically refined movement; while the swimmer represents unconscious beauty marred by a loss of innocence once the youth has compared himself to a famous Greek statue. The efficiency of the puppet’s mechanical figure is contrasted with (and bizarrely parodied by) the idealized natural state embodied by an expertly fencing bear. Kleist mostly adheres to the Romantic preference for creative spontaneity over conscious craft, for the perfection achieved by an unconscious or impulsive gesture over any movement that is consciously performed. Yet Kleist does not totally embrace primitivism: the dancer contends that humanity can never regain lost innocence, that state of unconscious “grace” which the dancer locates at the puppet’s center of gravity. Instead, we can only go forward, extending awareness to the point of transcendence:

when knowledge has...passed through infinity, grace will reappear. So that we

¹⁷Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Brittain Smith, “*Pas de Deux: Doing the Dialogic Dance in Kleist’s Fictitious Conversation About the Puppet Theater*,” in *Compendious Conversations*, edited by Kevin L. Cope (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 368.

¹⁸Heinrich von Kleist, “Puppet Theatre” in *What is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*, edited by Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 180-181. No translator is credited.

shall find it as its purest in a body which is entirely devoid of consciousness or which possesses it in an infinite degree; that is, in the marionette or the god...we must eat again of the tree of knowledge in order to relapse into the state of Innocence...That is the last chapter of the history of the world.¹⁹

Hofmannsthal was probably drawn to several issues in Kleist's essay. As Naomi Ritter points out, all four of the protagonists of the essay are performers in some way—the puppeteer and his figures, the swimmer, the bear, the dancer.²⁰ Hofmannsthal would be sympathetic with the implication that true art is defined as one which engages society, and requires a performer, an audience, and the sharing of a unified expression in time, of which a text is not always a necessary component. Although Lord Chandos recoils from making generalizations and feels that he has no adequate language with which to capture the unique qualities he perceives, Hofmannsthal saw in movement and gesture a means of expressing individual “grace” or the instinctual essence of a personality. In his essay “On Pantomime” (1911), Hofmannsthal considers the arts of physical acting, pantomime, dance and movement as sharing one continuum as he makes references to the work of Nijinsky, Sada Yacco, Duse and Ruth St. Denis. By theatricalizing the “relationship between humans and invisible powers,”²¹ movement and gesture could express the uniqueness of a personality while contextualizing it within viscerally shared experience:

In pure thought, personality appears by virtue of its nobility and strength, though not in a way perceptible to everyone. So too in pure gestures the true personality comes to light, and the renunciation of individuality is more than amply compensated. We see a human body that moves in a rhythmic flow, in response to infinite modulations prescribed by an inner genius. It is a man like ourselves who moves before us, but more freely than we ever move, and yet the purity and freedom of his gestures convey exactly what we want to convey when, inhibited and spasmodically, we discharge our inner plenitude. But is it only the freedom

¹⁹Ibid., 184.

²⁰Naomi Ritter, *Art as Spectacle: Images of the Entertainer since Romanticism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 48.

²¹Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “On Pantomime,” *English Review* 36 (1923), 261. No translator is credited.

of the body that delights us here?...Words arouse a sharper sympathy, but it is vicarious, as it were, intellectualized, generalized; music, a more intense sympathy, but it is vague, longingly digressing; that evoked by gesture is clear and all-embracing, vividly present, joy-giving. The language of words is seemingly individual, but in truth generic, that of the body is seemingly general, but in truth highly personal. Nor is it body that speaks to body, but the human whole that speaks to the whole.²²

Although Hofmannsthal champions the "truth" as rendered in gesture as a kind of pre-articulated thought, he is not giving up on words. Hofmannsthal is always seeking ways of expressing a wholeness of life experience, as the Madman challenges at the end of *Das kleine Welttheatre* (*The Little Theatre of the World*):

But what are palaces and what are poems?
The dreamlike image of reality!
The real no mortal tracery can catch:
To lead the *whole* dance, the *whole* round,
The real, can you begin to grasp this task?²³

"We and the world are not different things," and hence even poetry must "stir us bodily and transform us incessantly."²⁴ The image of the dancer provided for Hofmannsthal a means to express at one and the same time both the inner "spiritualized" self and an external, social identity, and perhaps at times appeared as a means to unify the dichotomy of inner and outer selves altogether. "None of us possesses his own self: it is wafted at us from within and without, escapes us for long periods and returns to us in a breath," cautions Hofmannsthal, "And self indeed! The word is little more than a metaphor!"²⁵

Hofmannsthal sought renewal for the theatre by exploring a fusion of

²²Ibid., 263-264.

²³Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *The Little Theatre of the World*, translated by Michael Hamburger, in *Poems and Verse Plays*, edited by Michael Hamburger (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), 263. Italics indicate Hofmannsthal's emphasis.

²⁴Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Gespräch über Gedichte," quoted in Michael Hamburger, "Poems and Verse Plays," in *Hofmannsthal: Three Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 29.

²⁵Ibid., 28.

arts—acting, gesture, ritual, music—as embodied in the performance of an actor or dancer. Although influenced by Wagner, Hofmannsthal's sense of wholeness differed significantly from a *Gesamtkunstwerk* which he felt was too heavily dominated by music; though he successfully collaborated with Richard Strauss on several operas, he also was tacitly suspicious of the power of music to overwhelm the language and characters of a libretto. Instead, Hofmannsthal tended to experiment with dance and movement in smaller forms—pantomimes, dance scenarios, and the occasions for dance or symbolic movement in the plays.

The artistic climate was also encouraging for such experimentation. Since the turn-of-the-century, many of the artists of the Vienna Secession movement had embraced the new styles of dance as demonstrated in Vienna by Loie Fuller, Maud Allan, Rita Sacchetto, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and the Wiesenthals. As Peter Werkner points out, depictions of dancers were very common among the works of the Secessionists, especially in the work of Kolo Moser, Oskar Kokoschka and Egon Schiele. Questions about the relationship of body and soul could find expression in the dancing figure, while the use of gesture and pose came to constitute a kind of compositional language of its own.²⁶

Hofmannsthal regularly frequented the Café Griensteidl with other members of the literary circle known as *Jung-Wien* (Young Vienna), and later the Kabarett Fledermaus which became a crossroads for major writers and artists of the Secession including Kokoschka, Hermann Bahr, Karl Kraus, Gustav Klimt, and dancers Gertrud Barrison and the Wiesenthal sisters. The cafés and cabarets provided hospitable environments for small forms including one-act plays, sketches, mime,

²⁶Patrick Werkner, *Austrian Expressionism: The Formative Years*, translated by Nicholas T. Parsons (Palo Alto: The Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 1993), 227-229.

monologues, short dance pieces, and for works that blended genres.²⁷ Around 1900, Hofmannsthal and several of his friends and literary peers including Hermann Bahr, Arthur Schnitzler and Richard Beer-Hofmann were all experimenting with writing pantomimes.²⁸ The general impetus, as analyzed by Donald Daviau, was a reaction against naturalism, rationalism, excessive psychology and the literary and theatrical conventions of language. Instead, these writers were influenced by the Japanese theatre where actors can move as living puppets and where the emphasis is on the essential and universal; they replaced realistic environments with symbols and characters taken from fairy tales, legends and the *commedia dell'arte*. Above all, these writers wanted to experiment with a wordless form with which they could employ many theatrical elements in order to create a direct emotional connection with their audience and generate a sense of hidden revelation and transformation.²⁹

Over a thirty-year period, Hofmannsthal wrote several works in the ballet/pantomime/dance mode. The first of these, *Der Triumph der Zeit* (*The Triumph of Time*, 1900), subtitled a "ballet," was an attempt to carry over many of the qualities of his lyrical dramas into a non-verbal and highly visual theatre piece. No "small form," this expansive three-act work anticipates many of the ideas articulated in his 1903 essay "The Stage as Dream Image." The aim of staging is "to create an image, in which not the smallest space is without significance," showing "the connectedness of all things,

²⁷Harold B. Segel, *Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 183-220.

²⁸Bahr wrote three pantomimes, *Die Pantomime vom braven Manne* (1901), *Der liebe Augustin* (1902), and *Der Minister* (1903); Beer-Hofmann wrote *Pierrot Magus* (1892) and *Das goldene Pferd* (1921); Schnitzler wrote *Die Verwandlungen des Pierrot* (1908), *Der Schleier der Beatrice* (1902) and *Der Schleier der Pierrette* (1892, 1910 with music by Hans von Dohnányi), and his cycle of one-act plays *Marionetten* (1902-1904) was influenced by pantomime and puppet theatre. See Donald G. Daviau, "Experiments in Pantomime by Major Writers of *Jung-Wien*," *Österreich in amerikanischer Sicht: Das Österreichbild im amerikanischen Schulunterricht* (OAS) 2 (1981), 19-26.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 19-21.

a fluidity of relationships," which "stimulate in us a more vivid inner vision or dream."³⁰ *Der Triumph der Zeit* is set in a romantic, pastoral, universalized fairy tale environment, evocative of the interior states of the characters and pervading a sense of timelessness. The main plot centers on the resolution of several romantic triangles to reveal true loves; character types repeat in different guises over the course of the three acts (Girl/Dancer/Lover, Poet/Young Man/Old Man, etc.) with Cupid (a god of romantic adventure) and the Gardener (a being of conservation and continuity) as twin poles between which the action shifts. Several characters are exclusively typed as dancers, usually the female romantic leads, and perform dances as expressions of introspection and falling in love. For the most part, the motivations of the characters do not originate from individual psychology but from some unidentified force which impels them like puppets or sleep-walkers to blend into the flow of time. The Second Act, serving as a kind of masque, embodies the motif of the persistence of time and destiny on an even more abstract plane through the corporeal materialization of "Years," "Hours" (austerely robed and veiled figures) and "Moments" (almost naked, cherubic children nestled in the folds of the Hours's garments) as dancers. In this Parnassian realm, the clock of creation is danced in circle and winding chain formations. Through the dancing, the use of stylized gesture and movement, and the swift transformations of scene, Hofmannsthal shows how all these rather solitary characters are linked to each other and to a cosmic world beyond.³¹

Hofmannsthal's second pantomime *Der Schüler* (*The Student*, 1901) is a

³⁰Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "The Stage as Dream Image," quoted in Alexander Stillmark, "Time and Symbol: Yeats and Hofmannsthal as Exponents of Lyrical Drama," in *Between Time and Eternity: Nine Essays on W. B. Yeats and his Contemporaries Hofmannsthal and Blok*, edited by Paul Kirschner and Alexander Stillmark (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 112.

³¹See Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Der Triumph der Zeit* in *Dramen III* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1969), 355-399. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Waltrudis Buck.

departure from the expansive and idealized nature of *Der Triumph der Zeit* and is a short and compressed piece with more particularized characters and a cold and impoverished setting. As Donald Daviau has analyzed at length, the pantomime is an adaptation of *Faust*, Part I with Freudian overtones.³² The plot concerns an Alchemist and his Shadow, his beautiful daughter Taube, a Student, and a Tramp. With his magic ring, the Alchemist conjures his Shadow, a dark, hulking figure with vacant eyes and awkward imitative movements from whom the Alchemist demands complete subjugation. Taube's entrance causes the evil Shadow to disappear and the annoyed Alchemist demands that his daughter dance for him, but she declines. Angered by her defiance, the Alchemist uses his magic ring to overpower her will and she falls into a trance; she uses her loosened hair as a veil and performs an erotic dance for him. The Student, an "Alchemist" in training, is inflamed with passion for the daughter and asks the father for use of his ring, only to be turned down and ridiculed. After the Student is rebuffed by Taube, he makes a pact with the Tramp to kill the Alchemist. Through a series of mistaken identities, Taube is disguised as her father and mistakenly killed; with chilly irony the Alchemist regards her body as the welcomed return of his Shadow. Since there are no words employed to explain motives, the piece greatly relies on varied qualities of movement to express subconscious desires and to evoke the power and violence of the Alchemist's magic.

Though it won a literary prize, *Der Schüler* was not performed and Hofmannsthal had it removed from publication within months of its initial printing in 1901. *Der Triumph der Zeit* was offered to Richard Strauss who rejected it; the ballet was eventually performed after Hofmannsthal's death with music by Alexander von Zemlinsky. One wonders if the rather complicated plots in these early pieces seemed

³²My information about this pantomime comes from Donald G. Daviau, "Hugo von Hofmannsthal's Pantomime: *Der Schüler*: Experiment in Form—Exercise in Nihilism," *Modern Austrian Literature* I (#1, 1968), 4-30.

daunting and difficult to stage given the context of a “wordless” performance. Certainly many of Hofmannsthal’s works have rather contrived plots including the opera *Die Frau ohne Schatten* or his later pantomime for Grete Wiesenthal, *Das fremde Mädchen* (1911). What seems to have been more an obstacle to performance was the lack of an appropriate dancer-collaborator who could envision expressive movement patterns and themes, without following the plot too literally.

Soon after however, Hofmannsthal saw the realization of several of his ideas about the use of dance and movement in the production of his play *Elektra* as staged by Max Reinhardt in 1903 for its premiere at the Kleines Theatre in Berlin. Hofmannsthal wrote his version of Sophocles’s tragedy specifically for Reinhardt’s company of actors, and especially for the actress Gertrud Eysoldt. Reinhardt and Hofmannsthal collaborated on many projects over the course of their careers—Reinhardt directed more works by Hofmannsthal than by any other modern author. As J. L. Styan points out,

Reinhardt chose many plays which had to be performed with a large element of mime, so that the movement and gesture of the actors, especially in the mass, could convey dramatic meaning, while at the same time take the eye decoratively. Without adopting the disciplines of the ballet master, Reinhardt’s use of his actors nevertheless aspired to the condition of dance.³³

Reinhardt had recently directed “symbolist” productions of *Pelléas and Mélisande* and *Salomé*, and his interest in movement would lead him to stage several “wordless” plays like *Sumurun* (1910) and *The Miracle* (1911). Both Hofmannsthal and Reinhardt were keenly interested in experiments with rhythms of sound and movement and stressed the unity of a production. About Reinhardt’s style, Hofmannsthal recalled that

There for the first time, one felt particularly what one was to feel so often from then on: an ordering, rhythmic instinct behind the whole which gave individual moments in the play wonderful shadings of pace and volume...it is difficult to construct a complete impression of Reinhardt’s genius unless it is this: the extraordinary power he had to give each of these so different works its own rhythm, and, through this rhythm, to make each into an organic, passionate, moving unity...that was made tangible...[and] through a rhythmic magic, sends

³³J. L. Styan, *Max Reinhardt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 24.

the audience into a kind of trance. This is related to the art of conducting.³⁴

Hofmannsthal wrote the title role for Gertrud Eysoldt,³⁵ who was famous for her portrayals of other transgressive women like Lulu and Salomé, described by the Berlin critic Julius Bab in telling images:

She had the sexual, lank, sharply-moving body of a young boy...[and] the disconnected, grimacing demeanor of a cat. Eysoldt created art...by fashioning demons out of the heroines of weakness which the avant-garde dramatists drew in passionately exaggerated style; she created sirens of helplessness.³⁶

Hofmannsthal conceived of Elektra as a character outside the amplitude of "normal" psychology, and characterized her as a being of animal ferocity and impulse. Throughout the play he gives indications of her movement quality (crouching, leaping, running, jumping) and her highly emotional vocal range, including inaudible whispers, beastly groans and violent screams. The image of a ritualistic, murderous dance is a prime leitmotif of the play, as Elektra initially proclaims to the dead Agamemnon:

Father! your day will come!...
we, your blood, will dance around your grave:
and above the dead men I will lift my knee
high in the air, step by step, and they
who will see me dance, yes, even they
who will see my shadow only from afar
dancing so, they will say: for a great king
this royal pageantry is being held
by his flesh and blood, and happy is he
who has children that dance such royal dances
of victory around his noble grave!³⁷

When Aegisthus returns, Elektra escorts him into the house where Orestes has just killed

³⁴Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Reinhardt bei der Arbeit," in *Aufzeichnungen*, 339-340, quoted in Suzanne E. Bales, "Elektra: from Hofmannsthal to Strauss," 80.

³⁵For an extended analysis of the ways in which Hofmannsthal created his character of Elektra to match the acting style and physical attributes of Eysoldt, see Sally McMullen, "From the Armchair to the Stage: Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* in its Theatrical Context," *Modern Language Review* 80 (July 1985), 637-651.

³⁶Julius Bab, quoted in Suzanne E. Bales, "Elektra: from Hofmannsthal to Strauss," 84.

³⁷Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Electra in Three Plays*, translated by Alfred Schwarz (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966), 76-77.

Clytemnestra, and her non-verbal anticipation is expressed in a dance of death for Aegisthus as she "circles around him in a kind of weird dance."³⁸ After the final killing, Elektra's triumph is evoked in her climactic dance, with the transitional monologue serving to remind the audience that Elektra's act is not merely personal, but connected to an entire society:

[Elektra] crouching on the doorsill

Do I not hear? can I
not hear the music? why, it is coming
from inside me. The multitude who carry torches
and whose steps, whose endless myriad footsteps
make the earth resound with hollow rumbling
everywhere, they are waiting for me...
because I must lead the dance, and I cannot;
the ocean, the enormous twentyfold ocean
buries my every limb with his weight, I cannot
raise myself!...

Elektra has risen. She comes striding down from the doorsill. She has thrown back her head like a maenad. She flings her knees up high, she stretches her arms out wide; it is a nameless dance in which she strides forward...Elektra stops, looks at [Chrysothemis] fixedly.

Be silent and dance. All must
approach! here join behind me! I bear the burden
of happiness, and I dance before you.
For him who is happy as we, it behooves him to do
only this: to be silent and dance!

*She takes a few more steps of the tensest triumph and collapses.*³⁹

As she dances herself to death in order to be reunited with her father, the dance takes on several possible meanings: fulfilled justice, liberated sexuality, expiring hate. But as Michael Hamburger suggestively points out, Hofmannsthal terms Elektra's dance as "nameless" in the sense of being indescribable but also in the sense of being beyond words and reason.⁴⁰ At several points in Reinhardt's production, the transformative

³⁸Ibid., 136.

³⁹Ibid., 138-139.

⁴⁰Michael Hamburger, "Plays and Libretti," in *Hofmannsthal: Three Essays*, 92.

power of frenzy was demonstrated as Eysoldt's emotion and physicality reached such a pitch of intensity that it modulated into a trance state.⁴¹ Hofmannsthal's description of Eysoldt's final dance as resembling that of a "maenad" (literally a "madwoman" possessed by Dionysus in a ritual setting) suggests movements that are ecstatic but also highly stylized as those depicted on a Greek vase.

In many of his works, dance connotes for Hofmannsthal variations and combinations of anguish, madness, ecstasy and liberation; the expression of passion in movement often symbolizes ultimate freedom, and the escape from human limits brings on a transformation into death. Hofmannsthal concludes his 1905 essay about Oscar Wilde with a Persian aphorism: "He who knows the power of the dance of life fears not death. For he knows that love kills."⁴² The motif of the female dancer's self-generated death is certainly not original with Hofmannsthal, but the context of her dance for Hofmannsthal is expanded beyond personal psychology and implies the interrelatedness of lives. Like a medieval dance of death (used quite traditionally at the end of *Death and the Fool*), Elektra's dance has a private, a social, and a cosmic connection.

This quest for wholeness is again taken up in Hofmannsthal's 1907 dialogue *Fear*, in which two Greek dancing girls discuss the nature of their dancing for the pleasure of men and its effect on their souls. While Hymnis chatters on about the triumphs and failures of rival dancers and the "pantomimes invented by poets," Laidion asks some hard questions:

Fool! What do you get out of dancing?...Can you forget yourself, can you get rid of all fear?...You are aping the gestures of animals and trees: do you ever become one with them? You step out of your garment: do you step out of your fear?...And what could it be that makes us dance if not fear? It holds the strings

⁴¹Suzanne El Bales, "*Elektra: from Hofmannsthal to Strauss*," 115.

⁴²Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Sebastian Melmoth," in *Selected Prose*, translated by Mary Hottinger and Tania & James Stern (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952) 305.

up there, fastened to the centres of our bodies, and pulls us to and fro and makes our limbs fly. And when I, as Bacchante, fling my feet, and my arms and hair fly towards the stars, do you think it is pleasure? Don't you see that it is fear that makes me leap?⁴³

Laidion is obsessed with the story about an exotic island where dancing occurs as a unifying ritual for the whole community and where "Everything—fear, desire, all choice, all unquenchable restlessness—everything has been transformed at the limits of their bodies...to them everything is ineffable. And they dance."⁴⁴ Words then fail Laidion and she starts a kind of trance dance, only to awake abruptly with the cold realization of her current lack of connection to any sense of god or community. Hofmannsthal's belief that "the whole must move together" was so fundamental to his thought that he could even parody the ambitiousness of the statement in his *Prolog für ein Puppentheater* (*Prologue for a Marionette Theatre*, 1906). Here the Poet indulgently expounds on the connectedness of all things, until his monologue is preempted by the call of a cuckoo and the start of a marionette play.⁴⁵

Elektra was Hofmannsthal's first stage success: within four days of its premiere, twenty-two German theatres had acquired the rights to produce the play. Hofmannsthal was elated by the experience, but knew that he required the right collaborators in order to continue, as he confided in a letter to Hermann Bahr a few weeks later:

I have a great desire...to create many beautiful things for the theatre, but I am deeply aware of the fact that I am greatly dependent on the theatre as it actually exists. I wish there were more actresses of the Eysoldt caliber. If Mitterwurzer were still alive, if Adele Sandrock were not lost to the [Viennese] stage, if we had something that would approximate the young Sarah Bernhardt or the Duse—I believe I would write a new play every three months...for I am very much

⁴³Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Fear in Selected Prose*, 158-161.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁵Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Prologue for a Marionette Theatre*, translated by Pierre Loving, in *Ten Minute Plays*, edited by Pierre Loving (New York: Brentano's, 1923), 17-24.

attracted by this strange impure form of art.⁴⁶

Hofmannsthal partly got his wish: all of the actors he cites above were known for their strong physicality and stage presence, and within the next two years, Hofmannsthal had been introduced to the American dancer Ruth St. Denis, who was making her Vienna and Berlin debuts in 1906.

Hofmannsthal had met Isadora Duncan through Gordon Craig in 1904⁴⁷ and had admired her performances, and he had seen Maud Allan's *Vision of Salomé* (with music by Richard Strauss) in Vienna in 1903. But it was the stage images created by Ruth St. Denis that most inspired him during this period. The immediacy of St. Denis's dancing impelled Hofmannsthal to write a long review of her performance of *Radha*, a work in her early Orientalist style with music from Delibes's *Lakmé*. In "Die unvergleichliche Tänzerin" ("The Incomparable Dancer" published in *Die Zeit* in 1906), Hofmannsthal expressed his fascination with her "extraordinary immediacy...this thing without comment, this great seriousness without a trace of the pedantic: all this creates about her the empty space which always surrounds extraordinary things."⁴⁸ Here he found gesture and movement used autonomously for artistic and transcendental ends—her performance required no "mediation...[or] cultivation; it will not illustrate, will not elucidate. It presents us with something totally strange, without pretending to be ethnographic or sensational. It is there simply for the sake of its beauty."⁴⁹

⁴⁶Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in A. M. Nagler, "Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Theatre: An Address Given at the Plenary Session of the Federation in Vienna on July 2, 1959," *Theatre Research/Recherches Théâtrales* 2 (#1, 1960), 10.

⁴⁷For a description of the unsuccessful collaborations between Hofmannsthal and Craig from 1904-1910, see Herman K. Doswald, "Edward Gordon Craig and Hugo von Hofmannsthal," *Theatre Research International* 12 (#2, February 1976), 134-141.

⁴⁸Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Her Extraordinary Immediacy," translated by David Berger, *Dance Magazine*, September 1968, 38.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 37.

Hofmannsthal found her work to be particularly modern in temperament, combining “the real and the sensuous” and imbued with a spiritual quality that was neither “sentimental nor allegorical.” Although he maintains that her dances are “indescribable,” an excerpt from the review illustrates the kinds of elements Hofmannsthal found memorable:

She sat in the hieratic attitude of the Buddha on the lotus flower: legs crossed...palms pressed together tightly. Nothing stirred; her eyes were open, but her eyelashes did not move. Some untold force held together her entire body...There was no forced, artificial stiffness in it, but rather an inner spiritual necessity. From the depth of this seated girl, there flowed into these rigid limbs from that substance which lifted the great gestures of Eleonora Duse...In the course of the dance she plays with a string of pearls, with a flower, with a wooden goblet. But she is concerned with these objects only symbolically...In this prodigious stylizing force—the strange relationship between a rare human being and an ancient tradition—all traces of sentimentality have been wiped out. It is like her smile...It goes to the limits of sensuality and yet is chaste. It is entirely given up to the senses and yet signifies something higher. It is wild and yet subject to eternal laws...I can still recall movements like her falling down, kissing her own fingers, draining the beaker. These are engraved in the memory in the same way as the sublime details of the Elgin marbles or the color of a Giorgione.⁵⁰

Hofmannsthal saw in St. Denis’s dances a fulfillment of how dance could unite and ultimately transcend distinctions between form and content into a direct expression of the body.

St. Denis was greatly admired by writers and artists during the two years she performed in Germany and Austria, where classical ballet did not have a strong tradition, and where Duncan had already laid the groundwork for the appreciation of more modern forms of dance. St. Denis’s patron and promoter was Count Harry Kessler, who was also a close friend of Hofmannsthal, Strauss and Reinhardt. Kessler and several of his colleagues offered to have a theatre built for her in Weimar which would serve as a venue for contemporary theatre, dance, music, sculpture and painting. St. Denis however could not bring herself to sign a five-year contract: her career was taking off and she was still only twenty-six. Hofmannsthal thus lost a potentially unique

⁵⁰Ibid., 38.

opportunity for a long-term collaboration.⁵¹

Meanwhile, Reinhardt had approached St. Denis to perform in his revival of *Salomé* for the 1907-08 season, and though she was intrigued by the role, she refused on the grounds that Wilde's play was too decadent, and the dancing only secondary.⁵² St. Denis wanted to perform a *Salomé* more in keeping with depictions in biblical accounts and asked Hofmannsthal to write a twenty minute text to precede her solo dance. "The basic idea," Kessler advised Hofmannsthal, is that "the dance can and must be very strong poetically, captivating in beauty of language and tone, so that the dance blooms from it as a flower of poison."⁵³ The mention of "poison" certainly arouses decadent connotations, and it appears that Hofmannsthal and St. Denis were working from two very different concepts of the character, perhaps further miscommunicated by Kessler's intercessions between the two artists. Moreover, while St. Denis wanted him to write only a prelude to her dance, Hofmannsthal was more interested in combining dramatic and movement elements to create an integrated theatrical work, as this fragment from his *Salomé* scenario for her dance suggests:

Every limb being tested, vain self-enjoyment of the limbs' own harmonies. Everything is here to serve, each sphere and form of nature used by this servitude. The gesture perceived as the acme of existence. In front of an idol under whose deadly eyes the gratified elation becomes torture. The idol is forcefully spiraled upward in order to become humble. Specter of fear, the whole world converged in the idol. Touch of nocturnal air. The flame of a torch dying down, a shadow on the ground.⁵⁴

The two worked together on the piece for some months, but their project was soon abandoned. Though her biographer Suzanne Shelton cites "personal friction" as the

⁵¹Walter Sorell, *Dance in its Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 337.

⁵²Suzanne Shelton, *Ruth St. Denis: A Biography of the Divine Dancer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 76-77.

⁵³Harry Kessler, quoted in Suzanne Shelton, *Ruth St. Denis: A Biography of the Divine Dancer*, 77.

⁵⁴Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Walter Sorell, *Dance in its Time*, 337.

problem,⁵⁵ St. Denis was really not interested in collaboration and only wanted a contribution from Hofmannsthal of a text that would enrich the atmosphere for her choreography. In his next partnership with the Austrian dancer Grete Wiesenthal, Hofmannsthal would find a dancer with whom he could more closely and fruitfully collaborate.

II. Grete Wiesenthal

The achievements of dancer / choreographer Grete Wiesenthal (1885-1970) have only begun to be recorded by dance history. She was especially admired during the Vienna Secession period when her dances were seen to share an affinity with the natural, strongly defined lines of Art Nouveau and Secessionist styles. But soon after her work was eclipsed by exponents of the broadly defined expressionist "Ausdruckstanz" style including Mary Wigman, Harald Kreutzberg, Rudolph Laban, Oskar Schlemmer and Valeska Gert. With the recent coincidence of the Austrian celebration of Wiesenthal's 100th birthday and the international tours of several major exhibitions of Viennese art of the period, some new interest began to focus on her accomplishments, although almost exclusively by German and Austrian critics.

From an early age, Wiesenthal was keenly sensitive to music and the rhythms of movement. Her father, painter Franz Wiesenthal and her mother Rosa emigrated from Hungary to an old villa outside Vienna and surrounded their six children with music, art and nature. Grete was first fascinated by the six-step waltzes danced by peasants in their village, and she and her sisters were soon performing their own free variations for the amusement of the family and local farmers. Once she had seen *Rund um Wien*, a pastiche ballet performed at the Court Opera Theatre in 1893, Grete and her

⁵⁵Suzanne Shelton, *Ruth St. Denis: A Biography of the Divine Dancer*, 78. Shelton relates that St. Denis became romantically involved with Hofmannsthal's brother-in-law, a liaison of which Hofmannsthal and Kessler strongly disapproved.

next oldest sister Elsa yearned to become ballerinas.⁵⁶ Grete began studying ballet at the Court Opera's Theatre School in 1895 and Elsa in 1896, but they soon became disillusioned because the repeated technical exercises yielded little joy, as Grete recounts:

Es war eine wundervolle Welt, in die ich da hineinkam, aber man mußte sich früh gewöhnen zu entsagen; es war so bitter, daß wir Kinder, wenn im Probesaal die Tänzerinnen so herrlich tanzten, in unsere Studierhoserln schlüpfen und in einen anderen Saal studieren gehen, das heißt tanzen lernen mußten. Und da war keine Spur mehr vom wirklichen Tanz.⁵⁷

Though their mother contended that the girls should all learn how to knit, they insisted that they wanted to learn to play the piano instead and, after making a continual din on the family furniture, the parents finally acquired a piano which Grete marks as the true beginning of their dance studies:

Endlich an einem Ostertag kam das Klavier... Unser Musikverständnis wurde immer feiner und tiefer und die Musik war es, wodurch in uns die erste Ahnung von einem anderen Tanzen kam. Bisher hatte ich voll Hingabe alle akrobatischen Ballettkünste studiert u. mit Enthusiasmus ausgeführt. Aber ich mußte darauf kommen daß diese Bewegungen alle ohne Zusammenhang mit der Musik ausgeführt wurden. Zum Beispiel mußte ich in Coppelia zu der feinen köstlichen Musik von Delibes unsere ewig gleichbleibenden pas anpassen, es kam ja nur darauf an im Takt zu bleiben und nicht aus der Linie zu kommen, als ob wir eine Compagnie Soldaten beim Defihieren hätten darstellen sollen. Um das Zusammenwachsen von Musik und Bewegung wußte niemand. Das erkannte ich und ich dachte und sprach mit meiner Schwester darüber und meine Wünsche nach einem anderen Tanzen, einem wahrhaften Tanzen wurden immer fester und bestimmter und zugleich lernte ich an den Ballettänzen wie man es nicht machen

⁵⁶Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz* (Salzburg: Residenz-Verlag, 1985), 15-17. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Mark Haag.

⁵⁷Grete Wiesenthal, "Tanz und Pantomime," *Hofmannsthal-Blätter* 31/32 (1985), 36. Translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Mark Haag. ["It was a wonderful world, which I got totally caught up in, but one had to get used to denial early on; it was so bitter, that we children, while the ballerinas danced so magnificently in the rehearsal hall, we slipped into our student outfits and went off to a different hall to study—that means we had to learn to dance. And in that place there was no trace of real dance."] This lecture was given by Wiesenthal in Hugo Heller's Art Salon in Vienna on 27 October 1910.

darf.⁵⁸

Grete Wiesenthal writes that she felt no emotional connection with ballet technique and could find no mentor at the school who understood her true interests in dance; with some pride she admits that she often annoyed the head of the school for “dancing to her own drummer.”⁵⁹ Still, Grete persevered and became one of the school’s most accomplished pupils. In 1901 she played a small role in *Wienerwalzer* at the Opera, and by 1907 she was regularly performing in the *corps* where her original talent was recognized by Gustav Mahler (then director of the Vienna Opera) and Alfred Roller (designer, and a major representative of the Vienna Secession) as they tried to integrate ballet more organically into opera performance. Roller approached Grete Wiesenthal and asked her to work out her own solo for the mute character of Fenella in D. F. Abuer’s opera *Die Stumme von Portici*, but to do so in secrecy since the Opera’s court-appointed ballet master, Joseph Hassreiter, would never agree to allow a young girl from the *corps* have her own solo. Upon auditioning her piece for Mahler and the musical director Bruno Walter, Wiesenthal remembers

Num aber kam die Probe vor Gustav Mahler, von dessen Entscheidung es allein abhing, ob ich die «Fenella» darstellen sollte. Voll banger Erwartung ging ich in Begleitung Bruno Walters in das Direktionszimmer Mahlers. Und da stand ich vor ihm, den ich so sehr bewunderte, so tief respektierte und dem ich nun beweisen wollte, daß es im Ballettkorps nicht nur Marionetten, wie er sich auszudrücken liebte, sondern auch denkende und selbstschaffende

⁵⁸Ibid., 37. [“Finally on an Easter day, the piano arrived...Our understanding of music became ever finer and deeper and it was the music which gave the first notion of a different sort of dance. Up to that point I had, full of devotion, studied and mastered all the acrobatic ballet arts with enthusiasm. But I had to get to the point where I could see that all these movements were all conducted without any connection to the music. For example, in *Coppelia* I had to accommodate our eternally unchanging pas to the fine, tasteful music from Delibes, it was only a matter of staying with the beat and not getting out of line, as if we were supposed to depict a company of soldiers in file. Nobody knew anything about the growing-together of music and movement. I recognized this and I spoke about it with my sister and my wish for a different dance, for a truer dance became ever stronger and more defined and at the same time, with the ballet dances, I learned how one should not do it.”]

⁵⁹Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 20.

Tänzerinnen geben kann. Alfred Rollers Anwesenheit half mir über die nervöse, gar nicht entgegenkommende Art Gustav Mahlers hinweg, und mit einem schweren Seufzer warf ich alle Angst und Zweifel ab und spielte die erste Szene. Als ich zu Ende war, hörte ich kaum die lobenden Worte Mahlers, aber um so interessanter nahm ich das auf, was er kritisierte. Als ich entlassen war, wußte ich gar nicht, ob ich gewonnen oder verloren hatte.⁶⁰

When Hassreiter found out that he had been sidestepped, he submitted his resignation; it was not accepted and he remained the ballet master of the Vienna Opera until the end of the Hapsburg reign. But the success of Wiesenthal's dancing put her into the public spotlight for the first time and her rather unique physical and artistic qualities were recognized, as one reviewer observed:

Eine solche Fenella hat wohl noch keine Bühne gesehene...Ein kleines Mädchen, mager, sogar hager, mit langem Hals und einem Kopf, nichts weniger als absolut schön. Ein Kopf, wie er der Phantasie eines Knopffh entsprungen sein könnte...Denn man sah jeden feinsten Muskel spielen in diesem Gesicht, in diesen Händen, in diesen Fingern. Fräulein Wiesenthal hatte Stellungen, die stilisiert empfunden sein mochten, aber doch natürlich wirkten. Sie hat einen Erfolg erzielt, obgleich sie so ganz von der «schönen» Schablone abwich, trotz ihrer prachtvollen dunkelblonden Haarfülle.⁶¹

Grete and Elsa Wiesenthal left the Opera Ballet and the promise of a regular contract three months after *Die Stumme von Portici* not because of political

⁶⁰Grete Wiesenthal, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 26. ["Then came the test with Gustav Mahler, upon whose decision it depended, whether or not I would get to depict 'Fenella.' Full of pounding expectation I went accompanied by Bruno Walter into Mahler's director's room. And there I stood before him, who so amazed me, and whom I so deeply respected and to whom I was supposed to prove that there are in the ballet not only marionettes, as he liked to put it, but also thinking and creative dancers. Alfred Roller's presence helped me get past Gustav Mahler's manner, which was nervous and hardly welcoming. With a heavy sigh I tossed aside all angst and doubts and played the first scene. As I finished I could barely hear Mahler's words of praise, but with all the more interest did I appreciate his critique."]

⁶¹Unnamed reviewer, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 27. ["Such a Fenella has never seen the stage before...A small maiden, thin, even haggard, with a long neck and head, nothing less than absolutely beautiful. A head which could have sprung from the fantasy of Knopffh...For one could see each fine muscle playing on her face, in these hands, in these fingers. Fraulein Wiesenthal has moments which could be perceived as stylized but which seemed quite natural. She has achieved a success, although, despite her stunning dark blonde hair, she completely avoided the 'pretty' clichés."]

friction, but because they were more interested in pursuing their own artistic ideas. Wiesenthal never denounced ballet as a form, but she saw that ballet as an institution in Vienna was stagnating; it functioned more as a social event than as an artistic pursuit. Most traditional romantic ballets had been created for smaller stages and thus dances produced at the Opera usually had to be extended to fill-up the larger space. New choreography broke little ground and mostly provided elaborate formations and parades to show-off the solos of the prima ballerinas.⁶² "Allmählich vollzog sich in mir eine Wandlung als Tänzerin," Grete explained, "Noch aber war ich unsicher und tastend und sah nicht klar, wo ich hinwollte. Aber ich wußte, daß bei den Tänzen in den Balletts meine Sehnsucht nach Ausdruck unbefriedigt blieb und ich alles unlebendig empfinden mußte."⁶³ Grete first experimented with choreographing dances to Chopin and Strauss waltzes, and although the music helped her to generate movement, she felt that her body was too static and closed-up like a column with only her arms moving freely. Something was evading her grasp of form, and Grete looked to nature, examining the structures of flowers, the patterns of leaves and the movements of animals for new models. For *The Wind*, her first piece in this new mode, she asked Franz Schreker to compose music according to her design of its rhythms:

Ich wählte mir den Wind als Thnema, weil er mir die Möglichkeit gab, ein kleines Drama auf der Bühne zu zeigen. Ich zeigte, wie der Wind leise um die Bäume und Sträucher streicht und die Blätter leise beben und zittern, wie es plötzlich wieder still wird, wieder anhebt, wie der Wind immer stärker wird, die jungen Bäume sich neigen, Stille, leises Zittern, endlich kommt er sausend in Wirbeln, der Wind bricht los. Es beginnt ein Kampf zwischen den Winden und einem alten Riesenbaum. Dieser Baum fällt endlich, es ist Ruhe, und leise zittern die Blätter

⁶²Reingard Witzmann, "Sehnsucht nach neuen Ausdrucksformen: Grete Wiesenthal zum 100. Geburtstag," *Ballett-Journal/Das Tanzarchiv* 34 (#1, February 1986), 62. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Waltrudis Buck.

⁶³Grete Wiesenthal, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 20. ["Gradually there came to fruition in me a transformation as a dancer. However, I was still unsure and tentative and could not see clearly which way I wanted to go. But I knew that my longing for expression had remained unsatisfied in dance and that I would perceive everything as lifeless."]

nach. Da hatte ich die Möglichkeit, die verschiedensten Bewegungen, die verschiedensten Stimmungen rasch nacheinander zu zeigen. Aber doch war alles *nur Rhythmus und Bewegung*. Alle Bewegungen waren Symbole.⁶⁴

Wiesenthal's interest "to show a small drama" led her to shape "characters" with contrasts in movement, creating a continuum between pure dance and what she termed the "new pantomime":

Die neue Pantomime unterscheidet sich von der alten dadurch, daß sie sich *nicht* durch eine Zeichensprache—wie sie die Taubstummen z.B. benutzen, verständlich macht. Sondern die großen Massenbewegungen, die der einzelnen Figuren, ihr Liegen, Sitzen, Stehen, Schreiten und zuletzt ihr Tanzen erzählt die Handlung, muß die Handlung klar machen...Tanz der höchste Ausdruck der neuen Pantomime sei.⁶⁵

Wiesenthal's evocation of natural imagery recalls the dancing of Isadora Duncan. Although Duncan had appeared in guest performances for the Vienna Secession Exhibitions of 1902, 1903 and 1904, it appears that Grete never saw the American dancer perform, but was inspired by descriptions of her technique of "dancing herself" and her costumes and poses "à la grecque."⁶⁶ Grete was further influenced by the feminist writer Marie Lang (soon to become her mother-in-law) who saw Duncan's dancing as heralding a new sense of freedom for the female body and a "revelation of

⁶⁴Grete Wiesenthal, "Tanz und Pantomime," 39. ["I chose the wind as the theme, because it gave me the possibility to show a small drama on the stage. I showed how the wind lightly caresses the trees and the shrubs and the leaves lightly shake and quiver, how it suddenly becomes still again, starts up again, how the wind becomes even stronger, the young trees bend, still quiet quivering, finally it comes rushing in a whirlwind, the wind breaks out. There begins a struggle between the winds and an old huge tree. Finally the tree falls, there is quiet and the leaves quietly tremble. There I had the possibility to show the most diverse movements, the most diverse moods, one quickly after the other. But still everything was *only rhythm* and movement. All the movements were symbols."]

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 40. ["The new pantomime is distinguished from the old that it *does not* make itself understood through a sign language, such as that used by deaf people, for example. Rather the large mass movements, those of the individual figures, their lying, sitting, standing, stepping and finally their dancing relates the action, they must make the action clear...Dance is the highest expression of the new pantomime."]

⁶⁶Andrea Amort, "Messenger of the Waltz: In Commemoration of Grete Wiesenthal's 100th Birthday," *Ballett International* 8 (#2, 1985), 22.

Hellenic mystery.”⁶⁷ The graphic artist Alfred Roller, one of Wiesenthal’s mentors, acknowledged his debt to Duncan’s pictorial style which often used motifs from classical antiquity. Critics regularly remarked on the affinities between the two dancers, but Wiesenthal tried to distance herself from Duncan. As Ingeborg Prenner suggests, Wiesenthal’s reluctance to align herself directly with Duncan’s style reflected a conscious strategy to avoid being identified with the many Duncan copiers and a need to develop her own dance form without external labels.⁶⁸

Within a week of leaving the Opera in 1907 the “Wiesenthals” became a freelance group of three as they incorporated a third sister, Berta, into the dances. The launching of their performing career came about through a network of poets, musicians and artists connected to the Secession movement, and particularly to Klimt’s splinter group, the *Kunstschau*.⁶⁹ Festivals and parties were low cost and informal venues for collaboration, and the Wiesenthals were first asked to perform at a garden party on 6 and 7 June 1907. The event was arranged by Gustav Klimt and his fellow artists Koloman Moser and Josef Hoffmann as an occasion where their students from the Vienna School of Applied Arts (linked to the *Wiener Werkstätte*) could show off their new projects. In the midst of Weigl’s Dreher Park an open air stage was erected with a billowing white curtained backdrop set-off with trees. The Wiesenthals performed a pantomime entitled *Die Tänzerin und die Marionette* based on a poem by Max Mell with music by Rudolph Braun. Grete choreographed the piece and played the central role of the Dancer, the architect Josef Wimmer designed the fairy tale settings, the painters Erwin Lang (who soon married Grete) and Rudolph Huber (who married Elsa) sketched

⁶⁷Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 24.

⁶⁸Ingeborg Prenner, “Grete Wiesenthal” (PhD dissertation, University of Vienna, 1950), 102. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Christiane Moolhuyzen.

⁶⁹Patrick Werkner, *Austrian Expressionism: The Formative Years*, 26.

costume designs, and students from the school built the costumes and sets, and performed in the work. Grete noted that the party became a celebration of "art, nature and youth" and that it stood out from other events due to its "great artistic dynamism."⁷⁰ Most fortuitous was the presence of Hugo von Hofmannsthal at the rehearsal for the garden performance in Huber's atelier. Perhaps consumed by work on his dialogue *Fear* which was written during this period, Hofmannsthal neglected to complement the sisters on their performance and abruptly asked Grete upon their first meeting if she ever felt any rhythmic insecurity while dancing the waltz. Irritated but intrigued, she responded that given her fine ear for music, it was not possible. The next day she received an apologetic letter from the writer with an invitation to visit his family in Rodaun; from this point on she was a regular guest and Hofmannsthal became a devoted friend of Wiesenthal.⁷¹

Hofmannsthal contacted his friend Fritz Wärndorfer, the financial patron of the Wiener Werksätte and manager of the Kabarett Fledermaus, and arranged for the Wiesenthals to perform in one of the Kabarett's first dance programs in January 1908.⁷² As Harold Segel has shown, the Kabarett Fledermaus can be seen as an extension of the Secession in its design, decoration and clientele. In its small, semi-circular auditorium one could see a variety of events: short plays, poetry readings, song and dance routines, and performances which often defied the usual genre categories like Oskar Kokoschka's "shadow drama" *The Speckled Egg*, a kind of puppet-play / cinemagraphic allegory with

⁷⁰Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 27-29.

⁷¹Ingeborg Prenner, "Grete Wiesenthal," 186.

⁷²Reginald Witzmann, "Grete Wiesenthal—Eine Wiener Tänzerin," in *Die neue Körpersprache—Grete Wiesenthal und ihr Tanz* (Vienna: Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, 1986), 13. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Christiane Moolhuyzen.

a dancer as the central character.⁷³ In this context, dance was a particularly appealing form because it could be used to express the decorative and linear styles of Secessionist art through live performance of the body. At the Fledermaus “dance” performances covered a wide range of approaches including the artist Wimmer-Wisgrill’s arrangement of white painted nude actresses posing as decorated sculpture; the “Aubrey Beardsley” dances of Miss George; the skit-dances of Brattie Young and Nelly Moyse elaborately costumed by the artists Wimmer-Wisgrill and Kolo Moser; and the period dances of Gertrude Barrison, authentically costumed by Carl Hollitzer.⁷⁴ “The Fledermaus is young and full of propulsive energy!” exclaimed Peter Altenberg (the writer and friend of Hofmannsthal), “It has opened its doors to the ‘evolutionary efforts’ of the new dance art...Alone of all institutions the Fledermaus can reap the glory of placing its premises at the disposal of bold experiments with youthful eagerness.”⁷⁵

Of all the dancers at the Fledermaus, Grete Wiesenthal’s work was the most successful expression of the values of the Secession in dance. Starting with the waltz—the quintessential Austrian social dance—Wiesenthal transformed the technique and visual form of the dance into a complex artistic expression. What the audience saw at the Fledermaus in 1908 was only the beginning of her experiments which developed quite rapidly in the next two years. The sisters performed waltzes to Chopin, Johann Strauss, Beethoven, Schumann, Massenet, and Lanner/Schubert, in trios, duos and solos for Grete. Helga Malmberg, Peter Altenberg’s biographer, saw the Fledermaus performance on 14 January 1908 and describes her first impressions of the dances:

Zwei ganz junge, elfenhaft zarte Mädchen in einfachen weißen Kleidern tanzten einen Walzer von Chopin. Man spürte sofort, daß hier etwas ganz Neues versucht wurde: eine seelisch-beschwingte Natürlichkeit des Tanzens...Nichts

⁷³Harold B. Segel, *Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret*, 183-219.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 214-218.

⁷⁵Peter Altenberg, quoted in Harold B. Segel, *Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret*, 217.

erinnerte an Dilettantismus. Es gab keinerlei künstliche Stellungen; alles war aufgelöst in Bewegung. Jeder Schritt war der Musik angepaßt, der Melodie hingegeben. Die anwesenden Künstler waren begeistert—die Maler von der bildhaften Wirkung der Tänze, die Musiker davon, wie sich alles aus dem Rhythmus der Tänze entwickelte. Immer wieder trafen einander in diesem ersten Walzer die zwei Schwestern mit hochoberhobenen Armen; es sah aus wie Blumen, die sich schließen. Wir wurden sofort an das Bild «Primavera» von Botticelli erinnert.⁷⁶

As Malmberg perceives, one of the most salient qualities of their dancing was the sense of freedom and abandon. Grete commented that it was natural, yet strange given their classical training that the movements of their first dance pieces could evolve from such a free expression of their emotions. While other dancers of the period found inspiration for movement from folklore, gymnastics or from studying poses and pictures, Grete sought less conscious means. "What moves us comes to us freely and vividly," she explained, and refrained from any further elaboration since "too much of the unconscious is involved." Thus the "turning inward" of the new "expression" dance challenged her to develop a movement language from her own "ecstasy and musicality."⁷⁷

About Grete's performance of her solo "Donauwalzer" ("Danube Waltz") set to Johann Strauss's music, a dance which became her signature, Malmberg writes,

Als erste nach der Pause erschien die älteste Schwester, Grete Wiesenthal, in einem weiten Gewande aus grüner Seide. Das schöne goldbraune Haar des jungen Mädchens wehte aufgelöst um ihre Schultern. Die Kindlichkeit dieser Erscheinung war rührend. Zugleich aber fühlte man deutlich eine große erotische

⁷⁶Helga Malmberg, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 29-30. ["Two very young, elf-like, tender maidens in simple, white dresses danced a Chopin waltz. Once could immediately sense that here something completely new was being attempted: dance with a naturalness made dynamic by the soul...Nothing bespoke dilettantism. There were no artificial positions; everything was resolved in movement. Each step fit the music, devoted to the melody. The artists present were enthused—the painters by the dance's picturesque effect, and the musicians by the way in which everything was developed from the dance's rhythm. Again and again the sisters met each other in this first waltz with arms upraised; it looked like flowers coming together. We were reminded immediately of Botticelli's painting 'Primavera.'"]

⁷⁷Grete Wiesenthal, "Unsere Tänze," in *Die neue Körpersprache—Grete Wiesenthal und ihr Tanz*, 12, 10.

Anziehungskraft...Es ist schwer zu beschreiben, worin eigentlich Gretes besondere Wirkung bestand. Man konnte schon beim ersten Auftreten feststellen, daß sie eine Persönlichkeit war. In ihrer Kunst blieb sie stets in den Grenzen des Natürlichen, aber verglichen mit Elsa hatten ihre Bewegungen etwas Barockes. Alles an ihrem Tanz wirkte plastisch und dramatisch. Bald warf sie den Kopf so weit zurück, daß ihre langen Haare fast den Boden berührten, bald streckte sie beide Arme und sprang jauchzend in die Höhe. Die Schwerkraft schien in solchen Augenblicken überwunden. Dann wieder schüttelte sie mit anmutiger Bewegung die Haare zurück und ging ein paar Schritte zierlich und beherrscht mit streng abgebogenen Händen. Wie Ähren im Winde bogen sich ihre Glieder im Rhythmus der Musik...Der Beifall war frenetisch: kein Publikum kann so impulsiv und enthusiastisch applaudieren wie die Wiener.⁷⁸

Grete evidently embodied what so enthralled Hofmannsthal about a language of gesture, expressing the uniqueness of a "personality" while exploring "the relationship between humans and invisible powers."⁷⁹ As she evolved her technique, the "Donauwalzer" soon became a very complex dance and representative of her approach.

Though almost a social institution in nineteenth-century Austria, the waltz was from its inception a Romantic dance of rebellion against the stylized and courtly minuet. As Walter Sorell observes,

To waltz was an open invitation to break with the routine of the past, with the protocol of formality, with etiquette often bordering on exaggerated subtleties. In its close embrace, the waltz defied such studied politeness. It held out a personal freedom, an individual pursuit of happiness, because its intoxicating rhythm in 3/4 time and its closeness, as much as the couple chose, offered an ecstatic experience.⁸⁰

⁷⁸Ibid., 30. ["First after the intermission appeared the older sister, Grete Wiesenthal, in a full robe of green silk. The young maiden's beautiful gold-brown hair was blown loosely about her shoulders. The childlike quality of this appearance was touching. However, at the same time one sensed precisely a tremendous erotic power of attraction...It is hard to describe what Grete's special effect consisted of really. One could already ascertain at her first entrance that she was a personality. In her art she always remained within the boundaries of the natural. But compared with Elsa her movements had something baroque. Everything in her dance created a plastic, dramatic effect. Then she threw her head so far back that her long hair almost touched the ground, or she stretched out both her arms and sprang rejoicing into the air. Gravity seemed to be overcome at such moments. Then again she shook her hair back with a charming motion and took a couple of grand, commanding steps with rigidly bent hands. The way wheat bends in the wind in rhythm to the music...The applause was frenetic: no audience can applaud so enthusiastically and impulsively as the Viennese."]

⁷⁹Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "On Pantomime," 261.

⁸⁰Walter Sorell, *Dance in its Time*, 204.

Fascinated with the possibilities of the waltz's mesmerizing rhythm and its subtle retardations of tempo, Wiesenthal evolved what she termed the "swinging, floating element in dance" through exploring the maximally possible stability while maximally extending the body.⁸¹ Her technique, called the "adventure of turning," is based on the circles of the waltz and requires from the dancer a daring to extend into all vertical and horizontal positions, swinging, stretching, jumping and floating to experience the limits of equilibrium. In his review of her "Donauwalzer" dance critic Hans Brandenburg described the effect of this "turning":

Harmonisch löst sich eine Bewegung aus der anderen, und konzentrisch scheint Grete Wiesenthal alle Kreise, die im Raum leben, in sich hineinzuziehen. Der Kreis, die vollendetste geometrische Figur, welche die choreographische Gestaltung des Walzers, sei er nun Gesellschaftstanz oder Kunsttanz, bestimmt, wird hier in vielgestaltigsten und formvollendeten Variationen geboten. Mit dem Anschwellen der Töne wird auch der Fluß der Tanzbewegungen in gleicher Weise gesteigert. In weitausladenden Schwüngen und Sprüngen durchmißt sie den Raum, alsbald den Strom der Bewegung wieder in ruhigem Gleichmaß verklängen lassend. Doch dann ein Aufbrausen des musikalischen Themas und gleichzeitiges Hochschnellen Grete Wiesenthals aus dem festen Stand. So, als wären die Gesetze der Schwerkraft für sie illusorisch, scheint sie sekundenlang im Sprunge zu verharren und, als würde sie auch imstande sein, die Fallgeschwindigkeit ihres Körpers zu regulieren, gleitet sie sachte und leicht wie ein Federball wieder zu Boden.⁸²

Wiesenthal contends that the impetus for the turning does not come from the convention of the pirouette with the risk of becoming a kind of "spinning top," but from intuition;

⁸¹Reginald Witzmann, "Grete Wiesenthal—Eine Wiener Tänzerin," 18.

⁸²Hans Brandenburg, *Der moderne Tanz* (Munich: Georg Müller Verlag, 1917), 69. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Christiane Moolhuyzen. ["Harmonically one movement loosens from the other, and Grete Wiesenthal seems to pull in a concentric way, every circle that is in the room, into herself. The circle, the perfect geometric figure, that defines the choreographic form of the waltz, in social dance or in art dance, is shown here in multiform and perfect variations. With the swelling sounds, the flow of dance movements increases in the same way. In wide swings and jumps she covers the room, soon the flow of movements dying down into quiet steadiness. But then a surging of the musical theme and at the same time a jumping up from Grete Wiesenthal out of the fixed pose. In a way, as if the rules of gravity are an illusion for her, she seems to remain in jumps for seconds as if she was also capable of controlling the speed of her body falling down, she glides like a shuttlecock, softly and lightly, to the ground again."]

the dancer surrenders herself to the momentum of the turning, but never completely loses herself. The dancer's intuitive experience of equilibrium is both her source of control and her impetus for movement, a dynamic that is not far removed from Kleist's state of creative "grace." Wiesenthal's exploration of balance coupled with her emphasis on the use of continual movement visually reads as a kind of floating through space and constituted what she termed her "spherical technique."⁸³ Through her use of strong diagonals, turns within jumps, and extreme extensions, Wiesenthal attempted to "stretch space" and to present the experience of floating and swinging within a transcendental atmosphere.⁸⁴ In a 1908 letter to Erwin Lang, Oskar Kokoschka indicates that he was strongly influenced by Wiesenthal's revelation of psychic and spiritual states through her use of line and gesture:

Wiesenthal has five or six moments in each dance that I look forward to, almost with my whole body...the unfolding of the limbs in the "Danube Waltz"...or in the Beethoven figure, the terrifying displeasure expressed by means of the bending body, the gentling of a sound with a lowering of the hands...These moments fill me with a dark warmth that stems from the hypersensitivity of my reactions. I have always been able to orient my innermost feelings only by such things, phenomena that could not themselves respond to me, but that allowed me to find my own equilibrium again.⁸⁵

Similar to Hofmannsthal's wish to bridge subjective feeling and external form, Wiesenthal sought in the dance both a clear line of form and an ecstatic experience. "Der Wiener Walzer mit seinem fließenden vom geschlossenen Kreis zur offenen Spiralenform war für Grete Wiesenthal," concludes Reginald Witzmann, "das künstlerische

⁸³See *Lecture-demonstration on Grete Wiesenthal*, videotaped at the Ballet School of the Vienna State Opera, May 1982 (25 minutes), introduced by Gunhild Schüller and danced by Hedy Richter, a former student of Grete Wiesenthal. Also, "Champagne Dance" choreographed by Wiesenthal with music by Johann Strauss, in *The Magic of Dance (Part III)* videocassette, 1979. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

⁸⁴See Ingeborg Prenner, "Grete Wiesenthal," 118-126 for an extended analysis of her technique.

⁸⁵Oskar Kokoschka, *Briefe*, Vol. 1, 1905-1919, edited by Olda Kokoschka and Heinz Spielmann (Düsseldorf, 1984), 8f, quoted in Patrick Werkner, *Austrian Expressionism: The Formative Years*, 79.

Ausdrucksmittel für das ineinandergreifen von Wirklichkeit und Spiel, von Diesseits und Jenseits geworden."⁸⁶

The Wiesenthals were a huge success at the Fledermaus where they performed several times during 1908. Hofmannsthal introduced the sisters to Reinhardt the same year with the hope that he and the director would collaborate on several projects that would merge poetry, painting, music and gesture. Writing to Edmund Reinhardt, Hofmannsthal described how he had rewritten the prologue and concluding scene for his version of *Lysistrata* with the dancing of the Wiesenthals in mind; the play was staged by Max Reinhardt and performed with the dancers in February 1908. A year later Grete danced the part of the "Elf," a role created for her in Reinhardt's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Munich Künstlertheater. Wiesenthal's dream of a "new pantomime" found fulfillment in Reinhardt's first production of *Sumurûn* (1910) in which she played the title character at the Kammerspiele of the Deutsches Theater. Directly collaborating with Reinhardt and the poet Friederich Freksa, Grete initially brought to the process her unscripted pantomime *Auserkorene*, a movement study exploring the progress of a love affair, and another section contrasting states of wakefulness and dreaming. She says that her pantomime became the "kernel" from which they worked on *Sumurûn*, which was loosely adapted from *The Arabian Nights*.⁸⁷

Although the Wiesenthals were in many respects Hofmannsthal's discovery, their sudden success ironically prevented any sustained collaboration with the writer, at least initially. The sisters toured widely during 1908 (throughout Germany

⁸⁶Reginald Witzmann, "Grete Wiesenthal—Eine Wiener Tänzerin," 20. ["The Vienna waltz with its flowing from a closed circle into an open spiral form, was for Grete Wiesenthal the means to artistically express the interlocking of reality and play, of this side and beyond."]

⁸⁷Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 33-34, and Grete Wiesenthal, "Tanz und Pantomime," 39.

and Austria, and to St. Petersburg),⁸⁸ and in 1909 they performed at the London Hippodrome (among acrobats, singers and clowns) and at the Théâtre de Vaudeville in Paris. Grete became the toast of the Vienna “Kunstschau” summer exhibition of 1908, for which she was commissioned to create two new pantomimes, *Der Geburtstag der Infantin* (based on *The Birthday of the Infanta*, a fairy tale by Oscar Wilde, with music by Franz Schreker) and *Der silberne Schleier* (written for her by Max Mell with music by Karl Lafite).⁸⁹ Wiesenthal was admired by the Secessionists not only as an interesting dancer, but as a performer who was temperamentally open to experimenting with modernist elements of line, rhythm and form. Upon watching reconstructions of Wiesenthal’s dances for a 1986 exhibition, dance critic Horst Koegler was impressed by “how akin she was to the group revolving around Klimt, Josef Hoffmann and Kolo Moser. The figure-work of the arms and the body positions seemed as though they were projected into the space from one of Kolo Moser’s pictogramme-like letter-combinations.”⁹⁰ Equally compelling was the perception that she created her art from an intense, spiritual impulse. Gustav Eugen Diehl, editor of the periodical *Erdgeist*, an important forum for artists of the period, often wrote about Wiesenthal’s performances and viewed them as “ecstatic, obsessed, religious...like the dance of the first Bacchantes.”⁹¹

⁸⁸Isa Partsch-Bergsohn relates that during one of these tours the young Mary Wigman saw the Wiesenthals perform and was “spellbound by the expressiveness of their hands and the smooth flow in all their dances,” and from this experience decided that she too wanted to be a dancer. See *Modern Dance in Germany and the United States: Crosscurrents and Influences* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 17.

⁸⁹Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 34, 181.

⁹⁰Horst Koegler, “The Rediscovery of Grete Wiesenthal: Vienna International Ballet Festival ‘86,” *Ballett International* 9 (#6, June 1986), 30.

⁹¹Gustav Eugen Diehl, “Die Damen Wiesenthal in Wien,” *Erdgeist* 3 #1 (1908), quoted in Patrick Werkner, *Austrian Expressionism: The Formative Years*, 231.

III. *The Hofmannsthal-Wiesenthal Pantomimes*

Wiesenthal did not ally herself with either dance or with pantomime, but viewed the two forms as sharing a basis in expressive rhythm. She found in Hofmannsthal a special rapport and understanding of her technique:

Hofmannsthals große Liebe für den Tanz, sein tiefer Sinn für den Rhythmus schufen in ihm das feinste Gefühl für den Aufbau des wordlosen Spiels...Ich vertraue meinem Dichter, ich vertraue der Macht der empfundenen, im Rhythmus um die stärkste Lebenswahrheit ringenden Gebärde.⁹²

Between 1909 and 1911 Hofmannsthal and Wiesenthal closely collaborated on two pantomimes, *Amor und Psyche* and *Das fremde Mädchen*. Though they developed these pieces with the tacit understanding from Reinhardt that he would produce them, Hofmannsthal and Wiesenthal worked with this material at a leisurely pace in the spirit of a sabbatical. Hofmannsthal had yet to have any of his pantomimes produced and he was beginning work on *Jedermann* in which he hoped to make extensive use of gesture. Wiesenthal had been on tour for more than a year and had remarked about how "overdanced" she felt and how she longed to return to the rehearsal hall. Both were eager to experiment on expanding a language of gesture, and Hofmannsthal persuaded Wiesenthal to take time off and collaborate:

Indem ich mir die Kunstform «Pantomime» ausgehend von Reinhardts «vermischter» Form klar zu machen suchte, ist mir auch klar geworden, welche großen reichen Möglichkeiten hier für Sie da sind, das natürliche zweite Stadium Ihrer Entwicklung, eigentlich grenzenlose Möglichkeiten, Ihr Inneres zu entfalten,

⁹²Grete Wiesenthal, "Pantomime," *Hofmannsthal-Blätter* 34 (Autumn 1986), 44-45. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Mark Haag. Wiesenthal wrote the essay for an unidentified newspaper, and it was published September 1911. ["Hofmannsthal's great love for dance and his deep sense of rhythm created in him the finest feeling for the construction of the wordless play...I trust my poet, I trust the power of gestures which are viscerally felt and which struggle for the strongest life-truth in rhythm."]

aus dem Innern schöpfend ein Äußeres, unendlich Vielfältiges zu entwickeln.⁹³

It is interesting that both artists wrote essays about the art of gesture and pantomime during 1910-1911 for public lecture and for publication in newspapers; clearly they were excited by this “new form” and wanted to stimulate interest in its potential.

Hofmannsthal and Wiesenthal’s collaborative process seems to have been a perfect marriage of personalities and aesthetic views. For both pieces, Hofmannsthal and Wiesenthal began by exploring source material through discussions between themselves, but also with artists and musicians. Hofmannsthal then wrote a first draft scenario, not focussed on a linear plot (as were some of his earlier pantomimes), but built around characters, images and shifts of emotional states. In a way, Hofmannsthal returned to some of the techniques of his lyrical dramas; although he was no longer writing verse to be spoken, he did retain a sense of musicality, color and movement to create a scenario, or what Wiesenthal aptly termed a “framework for rhythmic play.”⁹⁴ Wiesenthal then worked with these elements in rehearsal by herself, but also with Hofmannsthal, as she describes:

Wie der Dichter dazu kam, diese Szenen zu schreiben? Man glaube ja nicht, daß sie am Schreibtisch entstanden sind. In einem stillen Garten im schönen Aussee wurden alle diese Szenen von mir zunächst in allen Gebärden und Gesten, in Schritt und Gang versucht...Bis ganz allmählich, von Versuch zu Versuch schreitend, der Dichter die Szenen voneinander schied und sie bis zur geringsten Bewegung mit Rhythmus durchdringen konnte. Hofmannsthals Idee, das unheimliche Erlebnis eines jungen Elegants in einer merkwürdigen visionären Nacht, gab nur das Gerippe für die Pantomime *Das fremde Mädchen*. Die klassische Fabel von *Amor und Psyche* war die feste Grundlage für das zweite Stück. Dann erst kam die gemeinsame Arbeit, die den dichter sehen, mich die

⁹³Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 96. [“When I tried to understand the form of art ‘Pantomime,’ starting from Reinhardt’s ‘blended’ form, I also understood what rich possibilities there are for you. The natural second phase in your development, actually endless possibilities to unfold your inner self, create from your inner an outer with an endless variety.”]

⁹⁴Grete Wiesenthal, “Pantomime,” 44.

Dichtung erkennen, ihren Rhythmus empfinden ließ.⁹⁵

Working in this way, Hofmannsthal believed that the “new pantomime” was as powerful and flexible a form as spoken drama. “Once a situation is created,” he explained, “the dancer is given an opportunity to embody some general human characteristic out of the abundance of his own personality...every turn of the head, every movement of the foot, every motion of the arm, is different from every other.”⁹⁶

On a first reading, the two pantomimes appear totally unrelated: *Amor und Psyche* is a romantic allegory placed in a fairy tale setting, while *Das fremde Mädchen* concerns the fascination of a rich young man for a squalid, urban underworld. Yet in both pieces, the central character undergoes a radical transformation, breaking out from a familiar world and entering a new, uncharted level of awareness. Hofmannsthal saw in the “new pantomime” the means to theatricalize directly the experience of this transformation, and to express the nature of “invisible powers” and “unknown realms.”⁹⁷ Dance expressed fundamental powers of transformation as well for Wiesenthal:

...dessen letztes Geheimnis vielleicht ist, daß der menschliche Körper, dieser arme, profane Körper, der in einem Menschenleben allen Stadien des Zerfalls unterworfen ist, bis er zu Staub wird, daß gerade er schon hier in seiner Erdenform im Tanz die leuchtende Verwandlung über das Irdische hinaus uns

⁹⁵Ibid., 44-45. [“How did the poet come to write these scenes? One would hardly believe that they originated at the desk. All these scenes were attempted by me to begin with, in all the gestures, in step and movement, in a quiet garden in beautiful Aussee...In a completely gradual manner, stepping from attempt to attempt, the poet split the scenes from one another and was able to saturate them with rhythm down to the smallest movement. Hofmannsthal’s idea, The Uncanny Experience of a Young Elegant in a Remarkable, Visionary Night, provided but the skeleton for the pantomime *Das fremde Mädchen*. The classic fable ‘Amour and Psyche’ was the sure basis for the second piece. Only then came the collaboration, which allowed the poet to see and me to recognize the poetry as well as to perceive its rhythm.”]

⁹⁶Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “On Pantomime,” 263.

⁹⁷Ibid., 261.

ahnen läßt.⁹⁸

Since 1909 Hofmannsthal had been thinking about adapting the “Amor und Psyche” (or “Cupid and Psyche”) story for either an opera or ballet based on his readings of the myth from the Latin author Apuleius’s *Metamorphosis*.⁹⁹ In June of 1910 he sketched out three scenes based on the story in a letter to Grete Wiesenthal, and emphasized the connection between the material and the use of movement to convey the “ritual kernel” of the story:

Der «Amor und Psyche» Stoff schreint mir drei ganz reine tänzerische Hauptsituationen herzugeben. Es werden wohl dieselben sein, die auch antike Tänzer und Tänzerinnen gewählt haben werden, wenn sie diesen Mythos darsellen, denn in ihnen resumiert sich der eigentliche Gehalt des schönen Märchens.¹⁰⁰

Hofmannsthal saw that the non-verbal language of pantomime could impart the images of the myth in their “purest form” and arouse a rich response in the spectator’s imagination. Perhaps under Wiesenthal’s influence, Hofmannsthal was particularly concerned with making a narrow selection from among the several plots of his source, and he wrote to her on 5 July that

Sie haben ganz recht, ich kann Ihnen zur der «Psyche» jetzt nichts mehr dazu geben, nichts Nennenswertes mehr, weder in einem Gespräch noch Brief. Alles was an mir war, geben zu können, lag in der Zusammendrängung des Stoffes auf das Wesentliche, in diese drei Situationen. Das Wesentliche ist immer auch

⁹⁸Grete Wiesenthal, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 52. [“The last secret [of the dance] perhaps is that the human body, this poor, profane body, which is subject to all the phases of decrepitude in the course of a human life, until it becomes dust, that precisely here, already in its earthly form, it allows us to sense the coming of a brilliant transformation beyond the earthly.”]

⁹⁹Gisela Bärbel Schmid, “Amor und Psyche, zur Form des Psyche-Mythos bei Hofmannsthal,” *Hofmannsthal-Blätter* 31/32 (1985), 58. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Mark Haag.

¹⁰⁰Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Gisela Bärbel Schmid, “Amor und Psyche, zur Form des Psyche-Mythos bei Hofmannsthal,” 58. [“The ‘Amor und Psyche’ story seems to me to offer three purely dancerly main situations. They will certainly be the very dances which the ancient dancers would have chosen were they to depict this myth, for the real content of this beautiful myth is summarized in them.”]

zugleich das einfach-Symbolische, welches keiner Auflösung, keiner Deutung bedarf...Ich möchte manches sagen, beschränke mich auf das Andeutende. Wo es Ihnen nichts gibt, ist auch nichts verloren...¹⁰¹

Hofmannsthal emphasized that the pantomime constituted "a series of pure positions and gestures" which originate from "true images, like hieroglyphics." The gestures that usually accompany acting Hofmannsthal felt were "impure," and weighted down with realistic detail and indulgent sentiment; in contrast, he cites St. Denis's gestures which were "free from acting elements."¹⁰² Both artists were trying to project an intense "soul-state" onstage, not only to convey the mythic proportions of the characters, but also to create a transformative effect on the audience. Wiesenthal describes the kind of intensity she was trying to sustain through rhythms of movement and gesture:

Wer jemals einen großen Schreck erlebte, wer einmal in einer schweren Gefahr schwebte oder zu schweben vermeinte, wird sich der merkwürdigen Erscheinung erinnern, daß in ihm mit nie zuvor oder nachher erlebter Schärfe die Situation, in der er sich befand, haften geblieben war. So als ob er in diesem Augenblicke mit ganz andern Augen gesehen hätte; nichts in Raum und Bewegung ist ihm entgangen, nicht die Fülle des Ganzen und nicht die Winzigkeit des Details. Eine sonst nichtssagende Körperwendung, ein Augenaufschlag, ein alltäglicher Farbfleck prägen sich unverlöschlich ein, und es ist, als ob in solchen Momenten ein stärkeres, mit allen Kräften gesammeltes Dasein lebendig gemacht worden wäre. So sollte der Schauspieler der Pantomime sehen, so sollte die Pantomime wirken. Und dies ist nicht die Wirkung einer dem Leben nachgezeichneten Realität, das kann einzig, wenn ich so sagen darf, *der Rhythmus in der Darstellung* hervorrufen. Er verleiht den Dingen, indem er sie einer schalen Wirklichkeit entreißt, ein eigenes blutvolles Leben, er steigert sie zu einer reineren höheren

¹⁰¹Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 96. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Christiane Moolhuyzen. ["You are right that I can not add anything more to 'Psyche,' nothing important, not in a conversation or in a letter. I put everything that I could give, the compact material, the essence, into these three situations. At the same time the essence always equals simple Symbolism, that does not need a solution or explanation...I want to say a lot, but keep me to the important. Where it does not give you anything, you won't lose anything..."]

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

Lebenswahrheit.¹⁰³

The three sections of the pantomime chart the progressive phases of Psyche's transformation. In the first, the mortal Psyche waits in her palace with high expectation for her lover, the god Amor, who visits her each night only in secret and dark invisibility. When he "appears," their lovemaking is expressed in an extended dance, towards the end of which Amor abandons the unaware Psyche. The second scene occurs in the underworld of shadows and finds Psyche in a near-death state enduring the depths of despair over the loss of Amor. "Everything here is in the power of the dancer,"¹⁰⁴ writes Hofmannsthal, and he envisions her dance of suffering as

...zunächst starr dastehen, von grausiger gestaltloser Finsternis umrungen; ihre totenhafte Starrnis löst sich zu noch höherem Leiden. Ein Suchen und Nichtfinden, ein Wissen: du wirst niemals finden,—ein Sich-aufraffen, immer wieder, ein Schreiten und vergebliches Schreiten, ein Schreiten, das nicht von der Stelle führt, so könnte in einer Sprache, die nur der Körper der Tänzerin findet, alle Qual des Tantalus, Sisyphos und der Danaiden in den Stellungen eines Wesens abgewandelt werden, bis zum rasenden verzweifelten Drehen, zur völligen

¹⁰³Grete Wiesenthal, "Pantomime," 43. ["Whoever has experienced a feeling of terror, or whoever has been suspended in a moment of great danger, or supposed that he was so suspended, will remember such a remarkable phenomenon, the situation in which he found himself, remains stuck in him with a sharpness which he has never experienced before and will never experience again. Thus it is as if in this instant he had seen with completely different eyes; nothing in the surrounding space, no movement escapes him, neither the plenitude of the whole nor the tiniest detail. A turn of the body which otherwise says nothing, the blink of an eye or a speck of color make an indelible mark, and it is as if in such moments a stronger form of being with all of its forces were brought to life. This is how the actor of the pantomime should see, and this is how the pantomime should create its effects. And this is not the effect of a reality transcribed from life; only *the rhythm of the depiction*, if I may put it this way, can call forth that [life]. It [the rhythm] lends a genuine, full-blooded life to things, by tearing a stale reality from them, it raises them to a purer, higher life-truth."]

¹⁰⁴Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Amor und Psyche in Dramen III*, 100. Translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Christiane Moolhuyzen.

Verdunkelung der Seele...und zur völligen Erstarrung.¹⁰⁵

Amor rescues her and, overcome with joy and only "half-conscious," she "descends into the forbidden like a maenad" by lighting the lamp to see her lover against his express command; the flame consumes his image and he disappears, leaving her in a death-like sleep.¹⁰⁶ In the third section, Amor awakens her to an immortal state, expressed in "fluid" and "floating" movements.¹⁰⁷

Hofmannsthal's treatment of the myth departs significantly from the usual allegory of the progress of the soul (Psyche) guided by love (Amor). By choosing to have the story performed by a solo dancer, Hofmannsthal strongly emphasizes the role of Psyche and minimizes the influence of Amor. Focussing on Psyche's transformation, Hofmannsthal indicates his interest in the psychological dynamics of the myth: here the love object is mostly a projection of Psyche's desires, and her transformation comes about once she has renounced limits set by her fears. As Michael Hamburger has shown, Hofmannsthal was well-read in the current psychological literature and his library contained many hand-annotated volumes including those by Freud, Jung and Adler.¹⁰⁸

A similar theme of transformation is evident in *Das fremde Mädchen* but here the problem is set in a non-mythic, modern urban environment. Where *Amor und Psyche* was compressed and designed as a solo, *Das fremde Mädchen* contains a wider

¹⁰⁵Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Gisela Bärbel Schmid, "Amor und Psyche, zur Form des Psyche-Mythos bei Hofmannsthal," 61. ["...first standing stiffly, surrounded by grayish formless gloom; her deathly stiffness resolves into still higher suffering. A search and not-finding, a knowing; you will never find,—a hauling oneself up, again and again, a stepping and useless stepping, a stepping which does not move from its place, in this way, in a language which only the dancer's body finds, all the torments of Tantalus, of Sisyphus and the Danaides could be transformed into the positions of a being, until it becomes a furious, desperate turning, a complete darkening of the soul...and a complete ossification."]

¹⁰⁶Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Amor und Psyche*, 100.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁰⁸Michael Hamburger, "Poems and Verse Plays," in *Hofmannsthal: Three Essays*, 25-26.

range of characters and possibilities for movement. Hofmannsthal's first sketch for this pantomime was entitled "The Uncanny Experience of a Young Elegant on a Remarkable, Visionary Night," and the piece that he and Wiesenthal developed explored the contrasts between two societies: the smug, sheltered world of wealthy couples enjoying the expensive pleasures of the city, and a surging underworld of violent "hoodlums" and petty thieves. In a café, a "cheerless" and "discontented" young man and his glamorous girlfriend become aware of a group of gypsies, "huddled together on the cobblestones" outside who stare expectantly at the privileged couple. One of the gypsies forces forward a beautiful young girl who gazes at the man through the café window with an imploring gesture. The gypsies quickly withdraw their bait, but the girl has captured the imagination of the man, and he follows the beggars out of the restaurant and into the back alleys and basements of the city in search of the "strange girl" who has touched his heart. In a seedy bar, the girl is commanded to dance for the man; he tosses some coins her way, and she performs a strange dance in which she both reveals and conceals her sorrows, as Wiesenthal describes:

Dort tanzt sie vor ihm; erst gezwungen und widerwillig, dann aber dämmert in ihr die Erkenntnis, daß dieser Mann der erste ist, der sie in ihr selbst sieht, ihre Sehnsucht und ihren Schmerz, den Glanz und die dunkle Trauer in ihrer Seele. Ein Rausch der Freude kommt über sie, aller Zwang fällt von ihr, bis ihre Glieder sich lösen zu dem Tanze, der sie selbst, das Beste, Höchste und Schönste in ihr ist.¹⁰⁹

She soon becomes weak and pale and ends her dance with gestures of "yearning" and "inconceivable innocence." Though the man tries to follow the girl offstage, she is swiftly hustled away by the beggars, and he is left with his bewildered girlfriend who has been

¹⁰⁹Grete Wiesenthal, quoted in Gisela Bärbel Schmid, *Das unheimliche Erlebnis eines jungen Elegants in einer merkwürdigen visionären Nacht: Zu Hofmannsthals Pantomime Das fremde Mädchen*, *Hofmannsthal-Blätter* 34 (Autumn 1986), 50. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Mark Haag. ["She dances before him there; at first compelled and coerced, then however it dawns upon her, that this man is the first to see her in herself, he sees her longing and her pain, the glimmer and the dark sorrow in her soul. A rush of joy overcomes her, all compulsion falls from her, until her arms and legs take to the motion of the dance, which is the best, the highest and most beautiful in her."]

watching with "fright and repugnance." After returning home, the man is visited by an apparition of the girl in bondage by her captors and imploring his help; he goes off to search by himself and enters knowingly into a trap for ransom set by the beggars. He fights them off for the rescue of the girl; in the process, she is mortally wounded, but lives just long enough to see the young man revived.

In synopsis, the pantomime can sound like a conventional romantic melodrama, but in its structure and emphasis, the piece is less about chase scenes, and more about the strange power the girl has to draw the young man out of his material existence. In the first part of the pantomime, the "indifferent, almost sad" man watches the movements of the gypsies like images in a dream or film, and ponders this different realm of life "the way you look into an aquarium."¹¹⁰ Through the revelation of her personal sorrow as expressed in her dances, the man experiences a mysterious and anguished connection to the girl, which eventually leads him to a greater capacity for empathy. The ambiguity inherent in the choice of "fremde," meaning "strange," "alien," or "foreign," attaches to the girl's dances the sense that she is also undergoing a process of discovering and asserting her identity. As performed by Wiesenthal, these sequences were not dances of simple seduction, but of complex emotion, as critic Herbert Jhering observed:

Grete Wiesenthal tanzt als fremdes Mädchen, und in diesem Tanz ist ihre Grazie, ihre Sinnlichkeit, ihr ganzes Wesen, das sich hingeben will und doch verwahrt und in der Haltung der Arme und Hände seinen reinsten Ausdruck findet. Schenkend und wehrend zugleich hebt sich der Arm, und leise gekrümmt sind die schlanken Finger; die schmale Hand will sich öffnen und schließt sich doch, sie will geben und nimmt doch zurück. Wie Grete Wiesenthal vor dem unbekanntem Manne zurückschauert, bebend vor Scham, wie sie diese Scham zaghaft, scheu überwindet, selbst noch nicht wissend, was in ihr aufkeimt, wie sie immer jubelnder im Rhythmus ihres Körpers sich befreit—das hat für mich, gerade weil diese Erlösung sich so ohne Krampf und irdische Schwere nur im Fließen und Wiegen eines kinderschlanken Körpers andeutet, etwas so Erschütterndes, daß

¹¹⁰Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Das fremde Mädchen*, in *Dramen III*, 105-113. Translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Waltrudis Buck.

nur die größten schauspielerischen Leistungen daneben bestehen können.¹¹¹

Amor und Psyche and *Das fremde Mädchen* were performed together in September 1911 at the Theater in der Königgrätzer Straße und Gastspiele in Berlin; later that fall the pieces were performed in Vienna, Dresden and London. The bill was directed by Wiesenthal, and included several of her solo dances. Erwin Lang designed the costumes, "adapting the colors to the rhythms of the movement;" Hannes Ruch, the musical director of the *Fledermaus*, wrote "simple music that gave the effect of a poster" for *Das fremde Mädchen*, and Rudolf Braun composed music for *Amor und Psyche*.¹¹²

Several critics remarked on how these pantomimes shared visual affinities with the current silent art cinema. Leonhard Fiedler observes that Wiesenthal was unique in "knowing how to make her soul visible" through movement and gesture, a quality that the best silent film actors also shared:

Das aber ist es, was die größten Filmkünstler als die Chance und die Aufgabe des Films erkannt haben. Und das ist es auch, was die größten Künstler des Wortes—allen voran Hugo von Hofmannsthal, der wie niemand sonst die Skepsis gegenüber dem Ausdrucksvermögen der gesprochenen und geschriebenen

¹¹¹Herbert Jhering, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 105. Translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Christiane Moolhuyzen. ["Grete Wiesenthal dances as the strange girl, and in this dance her grace, her sensuality, her whole nature, wants to give it all and yet protests at the same time and finds its pure expression in the position of arms and hands. The arms lift giving and holding back at the same time, and the slim fingers delicately bend; the small hand wants to open but closes nevertheless, she wants to give but takes back though. The way Grete Wiesenthal shivers back from the unknown man, trembling for shame. How she timidly overcomes this shame, not knowing what germinates inside her. How she frees herself more and more exulting, through the rhythm of her body—to me it points at something so startling, that only the greatest performances can exist next to this, just because this freeing is without any cramp or earthly heaviness but only in flowing and rocking of a childishly slim body."]

¹¹²Grete Wiesenthal, "Pantomime," 44 and Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 38.

Sprache formuliert hat—an Grete Wiesenthals Kunst so faszinierte.¹¹³

In 1913 the noted Swedish director Mauritz Stiller filmed *Das fremde Mädchen* in Stockholm with Swedish actors and Wiesenthal in the title role. Once the film successfully opened in theatres, the German firm Deutsche Bioscope announced a "Grete Wiesenthal Film Series" which included *Kadra Sâfa*, an oriental drama along the lines of *Sumurûn*, by D. J. Rector; *Erlkönigs Tochter* based on a story by the Danish writer Stellan Rye; and *Die goldene Fliege* (also Rye) which was never finished. As Fiedler points out, the "new pantomime" as practiced by Reinhardt, Hofmannsthal and Wiesenthal influenced experiments in film as an autonomous art form, and many noted film performers came through Reinhardt's productions. Unfortunately, none of Wiesenthal's films survive, but from viewing still photographs, one can discern her photogenic qualities.¹¹⁴

Hofmannsthal was especially thrilled with the productions of the two pantomimes and wrote to a friend a few days after the opening:

Psyche wird allmählich etwas wundervolles werden, das *fremde Mädchen* ist schon heute fast völlig *da*, fast völlig realisiert—ich sah die beiden Pantomimen 2 Abende nacheinander, da kann ich mich auf mein Gefühl verlassen, daß das keine verlorene Sache ist, sondern der anonyme Anfang (zögernde Anfang) eines großen Erfolges.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Leonhard M. Fiedler, "Zum Filmstar prädestiniert?: Grete Wiesenthal und der frühe Stummfilm," in *Die neue Körpersprache—Grete Wiesenthal und ihr Tanz*, 27. ["It is this that the great film artists have recognized as the opportunity and the duty of the film. And it is also what fascinated the great artists of the word—first and foremost Hugo von Hofmannsthal who as nobody else formulated a skepticism towards the expression of spoken and written language—in Grete Wiesenthal's art."]

¹¹⁴Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 39-41 and Reginald Witzmann, "Grete Wiesenthal—Eine Wiener Tänzerin," 19.

¹¹⁵Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Rudolf Hirsch, "Zu zwei Tanzdichtungen Hofmannsthals," *Hofmannsthal-Blätter* 6 (Spring 1971), 417. Excerpts translated for the purposes of this dissertation by Waltrudis Buck. ["*Psyche* will slowly turn into something wonderful, the *Strange Girl* is already almost *there*, almost completely realized—I saw the two pantomimes on two successive evenings, and I can rely on my intuition that this is not a lost cause, but the anonymous beginning (hesitant beginning) of a big success."]

The first production of any of his pantomimes had shown Hofmannsthal that there was potential in the form and that he could successfully collaborate with artists whose medium was quite different from his own. In Wiesenthal's performance, he saw the fulfillment of his hopes for a language of gesture, born of intuition and talent, and creating a unity among several kinds of awareness. Hofmannsthal wrote to Countess Degenfeld about his elation in August 1911, late in the rehearsal period for the pantomimes:

Gestern im Wald spielte Gretl für mich Amor und Psyche und ich war ganz betroffen, tief bezaubert von dieser Fülle des Einfalls, dieser lieblichen, und in den finstern Momenten fast grausigen Erfindung, diesem fließenden Reichtum und der tiefen Klugheit und Kraft, die das alles aneinanderbindet zur Einheit, vom einen zum andern eine wahre *Linie* erstehen läßt. Unendlich zum Herzen geht ein solches lebendiges Gebilde, das mit dem Moment des Genießens dahin ist—wie das Leben selbst, und worin alles wahr ist und doch alles zart, gereinigt. Wie ich mich in diesem Jahr den 3 Künsten der Musik, der Schauspielkunst und dem Tanz, verknüpfen konnte—und gar nicht planmäßig, ganz von selber ist es gekommen.¹¹⁶

The idea that these opportunities arose without planning is only a half-truth, since Hofmannsthal had been trying to extend the possibilities of drama into dance and music for over a decade. The period from 1911 to 1912 was indeed a fruitful time for the writer and offered evidence for his ability to work in several forms: in addition to the pantomimes, *Der Rosenkavalier*, the Strauss/Hofmannsthal opera was first performed in Dresden; his play *Jedermann* was premiered in Berlin; and the Strauss/Hofmannsthal opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*, with two extended scenes written for Wiesenthal, opened in Stuttgart.

¹¹⁶Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 36-37. ["Yesterday in a forest Grete danced Amor and Psyche for me and I was quite touched, deeply enchanted by this endless stream of brilliant ideas, this tender and in its gloomy moments almost terrifying discovery, this flowing wealth and the profound cleverness and force, which links all of this in a unity, draws from one to the other a true *line*. Such a lively image, which is gone with the moment of enjoyment—like life itself—goes endlessly to the heart. In this image everything is true and yet tender, purified. How I have been able to link myself in this year to the three arts of music, drama and dance—and not at all by plan, it happened all by itself."]

By 1912, Hofmannsthal was in discussions with the Ballets Russes offering the idea that somehow Diaghilev, Hofmannsthal, Nijinsky, Wiesenthal and Reinhardt could begin a collaboration. Towards this goal, Hofmannsthal and Count Harry Kessler wrote a *libretto* for *Josephlegende*, a ballet based on the biblical story of the shepherd Joseph and his rejection of the wife of Potiphar, set in Renaissance Venice, and contrasting the wealth and corruption of the society with Joseph's moral purity. The one-act ballet was presented by the Ballets Russes in 1914 with music by Richard Strauss, costumes by Bakst, set by José Maria Sert, choreography by Michel Fokine, and with Léonide Massine making his Ballets Russes debut in the role of Joseph. Hofmannsthal's interest in a language of gesture, matched by Fokine's facility with mime created a piece which dance historian Cyril Beaumont describes as "not so much a ballet as a wordless play in the manner of *Sumurûn*."¹¹⁷ Hofmannsthal was full of enthusiasm for more projects, and hoped to write "hundreds of ballets for the Russians,"¹¹⁸ but with the start of the war further collaborations between Hofmannsthal and the Ballets Russes were deferred. Wiesenthal had signed a contract to appear as a guest artist for the 1913 Paris season of the Ballets Russes, but touring and film commitments postponed the date indefinitely.¹¹⁹

During the war years Hofmannsthal and Wiesenthal continued to collaborate, but sporadically and usually communicating by letter rather than working together in rehearsal. In 1914 Hofmannsthal worked on sketches for a pantomime entitled *Der dunkle Bruder* (*The Dark Brother*) which examined the relationship between

¹¹⁷Cyril W. Beaumont, *Complete Book of Ballets* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Company, 1941), 601.

¹¹⁸Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 38.

¹¹⁹Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 38.

the brothers Reinhardt, Max and Edmund; Hofmannsthal hoped that Wiesenthal and Gertrud Eysoldt would play roles in the work, but it was never completed.¹²⁰ Between 1912 and 1916, Hofmannsthal and Wiesenthal worked separately on two further pantomimes, *Taugenichts* (*The Good-for-Nothing* or *The Happy-Go-Lucky*) and *Die Biene* (*The Bee*). *Taugenichts* is set in fairy tale version of the Vienna Woods and follows the escapades of a free-spirited young man who simultaneously woos his true love, a servant girl named Anna, and also her Lady. Wiesenthal planned on playing the incorrigible Happy-Go-Lucky character instead of the ingenue, and Hofmannsthal infused the role with many occasions for dance and music.¹²¹ In 1915, Wiesenthal discussed the pantomime with the composer Erich Korngold, but the project was set aside; music was later composed by Franz Salmhofer when the piece was produced as a ballet, *Der Taugenichts in Wien*, by the Vienna Opera Ballet in 1930 with Wiesenthal as choreographer and dancing the title role.¹²²

On the surface, *Die Biene* appears to be a romantic fairy tale placed in an exotic Chinese setting, but in its use of symbols, the piece explores strong emotions concerning adultery. The principal figure is a bee queen who falls in love with a scholar, circling and entwining him until he can no longer resist. He leaves his wife and children behind and follows her into the world of the bees where he partakes of many pleasures; meantime the human wife has poisoned herself and returns as a ghost. Through the numbness of winter sleep the scholar is reborn into a human love for his wife and is finally reunited with her. Visually, the piece is remarkable in its contrasting of different emotional states through sudden shifts of inner and outer focus, outsized or

¹²⁰Ibid., 42.

¹²¹See Hugo von Hofmannsthal, quoted in Rudolf Hirsch, "Zu zwei Tanzdichtungen Hofmannsthal's," 418-420. Only fragments of the text of this pantomime remain.

¹²²Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 48-49.

miniaturized objects, and the stylized, animalistic quality of the movement. Hofmannsthal wrote an initial, unfinished scenario for Wiesenthal while she was on tour; she worked on the piece for almost two years and invented her own ending. Clemens von Franckenstein wrote music for the pantomime, and Wiesenthal performed the role of the bee queen and produced the piece in Darmstadt in 1916, and later in Zurich and Vienna.¹²³

By 1916 World War I had undermined the ability of Wiesenthal and Hofmannsthal to continue their collaboration, though they remained close friends. In their work together they had experimented with creating a "hieroglyphics of the body," a language of gesture and movement which they hoped would forge a direct emotional connection with their audience. Eschewing a conventional concept of pantomime which mimes literal surface action, both Wiesenthal and Hofmannsthal were concerned that gesture and movement be "pure," that they cohere into autonomous compositions which sustain emotion and artistic style. The thematic materials of these pantomimes center on profound emotions and soul states: love, sacrifice, abandonment and transformation—usually through death. The convention of the interior monologue takes on a new kind of visceral intensity in these works and, coupled with Hofmannsthal's strong interest in the study of the subconscious, buried impulses and motivations could find expression through the movement of the body, free from distancing description and "rational," verbal language.

On his own, Hofmannsthal wrote several more pantomimes between 1916 and 1928, the year before his death. *Die grüne Flöte* (1921) is a "ballettpantomime" which harkens back to the style of *Die Triumph der Zeit*; set in a Chinese fairy-tale realm,

¹²³Ingeborg Prenner, "Grete Wiesenthal," 187-189 and Rudolf Hirsch, "Zu zwei Tanzdichtungen Hofmannsthals," 419-423. Hirsch's article contains the text of Wiesenthal's copy of the pantomime.

the characters undergo transformations through ecstatic dances.¹²⁴ And finally, Hofmannsthal wrote a trio of pantomimes, *Axt-Pantomime* (1922), *Christianus der Wirt* (1927) and *Gott Allein Kennt die Herzen* (1928), which he planned to accompany the *Salzburger Grosse Welttheater*. As Naomi Ritter has pointed out, these pieces are concerned with the dynamics of social revolt and are a departure from the more abstract works he created with Wiesenthal. In a 1927 letter, Hofmannsthal spoke about the difficulties inherent in writing pantomimes since the advent of film,¹²⁵ but the fact remains that he experimented with the form for almost three decades. His perseverance indicates how central dance and movement were to his aesthetics, as Michael Hamburger observes:

It is characteristic of Hofmannsthal's works of every period, even the social comedies, that the most crucial thoughts and feelings of his personages cannot be rendered in words, only intimated by gesture, music, or silence; the conventions of speech are masks that conceal more than they convey, or ciphers that must be translated into a medium other than words.¹²⁶

¹²⁴Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Die grüne Flöte*, in *Dramen III*, 244-250.

¹²⁵See Naomi Ritter, "Hofmannsthal's Last Pantomimes: The Problem of Revolution," *Modern Language Studies* 12 (#2, Spring 1982), 3-12.

¹²⁶Michael Hamburger, "Poems and Verse Plays," *Hofmannsthal: Three Essays*, 15.

Chapter Five: *Paul Claudel, Jean Börlin and the Ballets Suédois*

Claudel's decision to write a ballet scenario, *L'Homme et son désir*, in 1917, should not be seen as a departure from his "literary" work as poet and playwright, but as an important experiment situated at the center of his concerns, both philosophically and theatrically. Thematically, Claudel's interest in ballet reflected his idea of man as engaged in a "dance of passion," torn between illusion and desire; and theatrically, dance embodied Claudel's fascination with the art of gesture and total theatre.

I. *Claudel and the Motion of the Body*

Ideas about movement, the body, and its sensorium are at the very center of Claudel's philosophy of art and existence.¹ According to Claudel, all objects have motion in common, a motion that is not temporary, but which constitutes the very energy of life:

Pure movement exists in the skies, whose earthly reflection is expressed by a transcription of infinite variety. A body cannot be at once in two different places; it must therefore visit them in succession. In other words, it must cease *to be there* if it is *to be here*. Why this change of place and what is the meaning of the words *here* and *there*?... I declare that the whole universe is nothing but a time-marking machine... But considered purely in itself, [motion] is primarily a change of place, the departure of a body from the point it had occupied at first... Its choosing of a new place must therefore be due to a stronger, external power; it yields to coercion. But from the trajectory [a body] follows there results a sense of natural direction, or gravity, and the tendency of retracing its steps. And such is the origin of motion, in the skies and in clocks, such is the initial pulsation... I am a combination of body and soul, the origin of movement is in the shivering which takes hold of matter in contact with this different reality: the Spirit. It is the extension of a handful of stars in space; and the source of time, the fear of God, the essential repulsion, recorded by the engine of the worlds.²

¹The organization of my thoughts on this issue has been greatly assisted by the discussion of Claudel's aesthetics with regard to Proust and van Gogh in Angelo Caranfa, *Claudel: Beauty and Grace* (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1989).

²Paul Claudel, *Poetic Art*, translated by Renee Spondheim (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), 20-23. Claudel wrote these essays during 1903-1904.

Objects move to know themselves; meeting resistance creates form. Human beings know themselves through movement, through the engagement of the world through their senses; movement is the animator of the senses which are in a constant state of vibration or "equilibrium" of tensions:

No object has been created once and for all; it does not stop being created... it expresses the state of permanent tension of the effort whose expression it is... We are the authors of our sensations; between us and them there is a cause and effect relationship... we create ourselves in such or such a state of sensitivity. That which creates us is the very thing which gives us knowledge.³

For Claudel, the "simple" senses of touch, taste, and smell give us "impressions" of our environment, while the "higher" senses of sight and hearing yield comprehensive "images" that capture the simultaneity of various movements in life. The eye and ear are instruments by which the self receives the rhythms of the movement that animate it, using its own sensations as a kind of reciprocal and changeable wave:

It can be said that sound is both the portrait of movement and its image, abstract and sensitive at the same time. The person auditively informed becomes sound, that is, modified by sound, just as, in the alternative of sight, it becomes color, that is, modified by color in its vibratory roots. Thus, it becomes the instrument of pure movement and of time on the march... Movement is the very act, the expressive condition, the meaning of all things... Man is free to create the sonorous image of this pace of life; and this is the origin of music and speech.⁴

Thus, for Claudel, knowledge comes from within, the external world is mediated by the senses, and art is created through sonorous images which are placed in correspondence between space and time, body and soul. Music draws human beings into the movements and rhythms of nature, creating relationships in time to corresponding patterns of emotion. Dance harmonizes the movements of the external body, reflecting an internal harmony of the body's relationship with natural cycles and forces. Whatever the genre, for Claudel, art is an extension of nature, a way to experience the harmony of God's creation. Thus as a playwright, the theatrical elements at his disposal—scenic, lighting

³Ibid., 64-65.

⁴Ibid., 71.

and costume design, movement, dance, music, film, pantomime, variations of speech and verse—were not only potential components of a total theatre event, but a means for a spiritual exploration of experience that in its very being was integrated in nature.

From his first production experience with *L'Announce faite à Marie*, staged by Lugné-Poe at the Théâtre de L'Oeuvre in 1912, Claudel was intrigued by the problems of theatrical realization. "I myself, far from scorning the technical problems of the theatre, am fascinated by them," Claudel admitted to Gide, "It's really most absorbing to work on problems of gesture, ensemble, and attitude, and then to watch it all coming alive and taking shape."⁵ Similar to Yeats's early attempts to place primary focus on language and simplified movement, Claudel shows that he was preoccupied with the problem of the actor's movement onstage, but did not yet know how best to communicate his intentions to actors. After observing Roger Karl, who played Jacques, Claudel advised the actor that

Je voudrais que vous exprimiez l'optimisme de Jacques Hury, dans la première partie du rôle, par des gestes de bas en haut, en vous mettant de profil, un peu comme un personnage de vitrail. Dans toute la fin, au contraire, je vois vos gestes faire le mouvement de haut en bas, pour exprimer plastiquement votre désespoir.⁶

Claudel's request shows his interest in the visual impact of movement, and its ability to express emotion, but his direction as stated would be difficult for an actor to execute. And perhaps this inexperience with actual stage movement prompted Claudel to advise Marie Kalff, who was to play Violaine, to "*Avoid unnecessary movements and facial*

⁵Paul Claudel, *The Correspondence 1899-1926 between Paul Claudel and André Gide*, translated by John Russell (New York: Pantheon, 1952), 191.

⁶Paul Claudel, quoted in René Farabet, *Le Jeu de l'Acteur dans le théâtre de Paul Claudel* (Paris: M. J. Minard, 1960), 7-8. ["I would like you to express the optimism of Jacques Hury, in the first part of the role, with gestures going from the bottom up, placing yourself in profile, somewhat like a character on a stained glass window. At the end, on the contrary, I see your gestures moving from the top down, to express plastically your despair."] Unless otherwise credited, the English translations of French in this chapter are by Stéphane Douard.

expressions. There is nothing more beautiful and more tragic than complete immobility."⁷

In the program notes for the production, Claudel again emphasized the need to rid the stage of affected posturings, and to base movement on an inner impulse of character:

In movement and gesture, too, anything brusque, violent, artificial, or jerky should be avoided, and there should always be a feeling for grouping and attitude. I have a particular horror of what I call a stage walk: two big steps and one little one, followed by a halt. No grimaces or convulsions. In dramatic movements a gesture which unfolds slowly and tragically is better than an outburst. But here too the actor should beware of mannerisms and affectation, and do as his heart tells him.⁸

As indicated by the title of Claudel's volume of art criticism, *L'Oeil écoute*, hearing is the most valuable of senses for this poet because it is most attuned to perceiving the invisible, including the voice of God. Furthermore, as Ann Bugliani has persuasively argued, Claudel believed that

Seeing is concrete and physical. It is associated with hands and touching... Hearing is ethereal and spiritual...seeing is masculine in character; hearing is feminine. In this connection, it is interesting to note how many of Claudel's female characters boast of excellent hearing...It is so that this femininity might triumph that so many of Claudel's characters are blind or blinded.⁹

Music therefore becomes the art which most directly speaks to the soul, and which expresses the movements of nature: "La musique est le seul art ait pour matière le mouvement lui-même."¹⁰ Claudel travelled to Hellerau in June 1913 to assist on early rehearsals for a production of *L'Announce faite à Marie* and attended a performance of Gluck's *Orpheus*. It is not surprising that he would easily recognize Dalcroze's goal of

⁷Paul Claudel, *Claudel on the Theatre*, edited by Jacques Petit and Jean- Pierre Kempf, translated by Christine Trollope (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1972), 13. Italics indicate Claudel's emphasis.

⁸*Ibid.*, 15.

⁹Ann Bugliani, "The Role of Hearing and the Voice in Claudel's Works," *Claudel Studies* II (#1, 1975), 44-45.

¹⁰Paul Claudel, *Journal I (1904-1932)*, edited by François Varillon and Jacques Petit (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 245 (7 February 1913). ["Music is the only art which has as its matter movement itself."]

"Music, alive and visible in the human body."¹¹

Since October 1911 Claudel had served as the French Consul-General at Frankfurt, and he became acquainted with the publisher Jakob Henger, who was a strong admirer of his work. Henger settled in Hellerau in 1912 in order to devote himself to translating and publishing Claudel's work, thus preparing the way for the writer's warm reception in this special community.¹² In the performance of Gluck's opera by Dalcroze's students, Claudel saw the realization of many of his ideas; in September, Claudel articulated his perceptions in an article which appeared anonymously in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*:

Between music and the body there is a common element, movement, a common measure, time, and a common expression, rhythm. [Dalcroze] teaches them to listen to music, not passively, but participating with their whole being, their whole body...The musical phrase animates and is itself animated; it follows, governs, inspires, unfolds, and develops the gestures, attitudes, and steps which come naturally to our bodies, but which in daily life have no chance to find more than timid, random and stilted expression...When the body has completely submitted itself to music, it is sometimes as though it had been created by it... Choruses are no longer rows of miserable lifeless dummies, but become great sentient beings, utterly filled and animated by the life of the drama and the music. From this point of view, the performances of Gluck's *Orpheus* at Hellerau were incomparable. It was the first time since the days of Greece that true beauty had been seen in the theatre.¹³

Claudel was much impressed with the architectural simplicity and flexibility of the theatre's design, and with the advanced stage lighting techniques which "[gave] the much despised third dimension back its glory and turns each figure into a statue, with shadows and highlights modeled as though by the hands of a perfect sculptor."¹⁴ Claudel was provoked by this experience to consider the possibilities of a non-

¹¹Paul Claudel, *Claudel on the Theatre*, 17.

¹²Annie Barnes, "L'Announce faite à Marie at Hellerau (October 1913)," in *Claudel: a Reappraisal*, edited by Richard Griffiths (London: Rapp & Whiting, 1968), 34.

¹³Paul Claudel, *Claudel on the Theatre*, 18.

¹⁴*ibid.*

illusionistic style of performance. Until Claudel attended this *Orpheus*, rehearsals for *L'Announce faite à Marie* had proceeded according to the realistic stage directions printed in the script; immediately afterwards, Claudel wanted to eliminate almost all scenery and reconceive his play as staged on several levels, "like those of the old mystery plays."¹⁵ In the use of levels, Claudel saw a means by which to theatricalize ideas about simultaneity and various modes of reality, as described by the composer, Darius Milhaud:

Claudel had always advocated vertical scenery, on the grounds that when you read a book you held it vertically in front of you, not horizontally. Thus the aesthetics of Hellerau exactly corresponded with his ideas... Some scenes in *L'Announce faite à Marie* took place on two planes at once: the human and the divine. When Violaine broke off her engagement, she was playing on the upper plane, whereas her mother was seated down below in front of the fire, which was suggested by a reddish glow through a pile of blue cubes. When Violaine ascended to heaven at the end of the play, her brilliantly lit silhouette stood out against a great shining cross behind the draperies representing the firmament. Light played a very important part at Hellerau, and conferred a wonderful sense of mystery on the performances.¹⁶

Claudel and his director, Wolf Dohrn, took time out to restage the play on three levels, thereby adding more rehearsals and postponing the opening. Friedrich Düsel, critic for the Berlin review, *Westermanns Monatshefte*, perceived how the play's continuity was now a product of its physical and verbal rhythms, rather than its locale. As quoted by Margret Andersen in French, Düsel writes:

La division en trois étages ou niveaux, pareille à celle des anciens Mystères, ne signifie pas grand'chose; l'élément décisif étant le suivant: convaincu que le principe de l'illusion de théâtre d'aujourd'hui est, non techniquement mais artistiquement au bout de ses ressources, on essaie à Hellerau de trouver des moyens d'expression plus intellectuels en renonçant aux procédés naturalistes. Le mot magique qui harmonise tout, c'est le rythme—rythme du mot et rythme du

¹⁵*ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music*, translated by Donald Evans, edited by Rollo H. Meyers (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 54-55.

geste.¹⁷

Although there was very little music used in this production, Claudel treated the text itself as music. The prompt book shows a series of symbols in Claudel's handwriting which indicate musical dynamics and tempi: crescendos, decrescendos, points of musical climax and flow, and other musical directives such as "sforzato" or "cantilene."¹⁸ The movement was pared down and its tempi calibrated to match the emotion and pacing of the language. The theologian Martin Buber, in an essay written for the program, "Le problème de l'espace au théâtre," meditates on the power of the abstract setting and simplified movement to distance the spectator, while at the same time, putting him at the center of a spiritual experience, and concludes that Claudel "est engagé dans une sphère qui va au-delà de l'art."¹⁹

During the months following his work at Hellerau, Claudel was inspired to apply the new ideas he acquired about the use of music and movement to his current project, a translation and adaptation of the three plays comprising the *Oresteia*. Darius Milhaud composed scores for the plays, collaborating closely with Claudel on the overall concept, and Claudel corresponded with Lugné-Poe about possibilities for the physical production. Claudel had hoped that this project would be staged at Hellerau, but the war intervened, and he shifted his sights to a future production in the Hellerau style at

¹⁷Friedrich Düssel, quoted in Margret Andersen, *Claudel et l'Allemagne* (Ottawa: Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1965), 69-70. ["The division into three floors or levels, similar to the old Mysteries, does not itself have meaning; the decisive element is the following: convinced that the principle of the illusion of theatre of today is, not technically, but artistically at the end of its resources, one tries at Hellerau to find more intellectual ways of expression by renouncing naturalism. The magic word that harmonizes all is rhythm—rhythm of the word and rhythm of the gesture."]

¹⁸Annie Barnes, "L'Annonce faite à Marie at Hellerau (October 1913)," 41-43.

¹⁹Martin Buber, quoted in Margret Andersen, *Claudel et l'Allemagne*, 67. [Claudel "is engaged in a sphere that goes beyond art."]

the Roman theatre at Orange.²⁰

Unfortunately, this project was never fully realized,²¹ but during the several years after Hellerau and through his collaborations with the directors Lugné-Poe, Jacques Copeau and Georges Pitoëff, Claudel experimented with utilizing simplified and heightened movement for symbolic effect, though within the limitations of realistic settings. “Marthe est l’Église, et Lechy le vice—L’Église ne peut pas s’agenouiller devant le vice,”²² Claudel advised Copeau for the 1914 production of *L’Échange*; and Georges Castella remembers Charles Dullin, playing Louis Laine in this production, emphasized “tout ce qui lui semble offrir une apparence de symbole par des attitudes expressives.”²³ Overall, Claudel intended that “Marthe alone [should] be a real woman between three sinister puppets with stiff movements and *impassive* faces (we could almost use masks).”²⁴ René Farabet observes that for Claudel, “L’acte corporel, stylisé, est transféré au niveau du symbole, il obéit à un rite, il a une valeur presque liturgique.”²⁵

Still, Claudel wanted an actor’s movement to follow the interior action, rather than merely to illustrate the action already stated in the text, and he could be quite sensitive to the discovery of internal motivation, as Eve Frances recounts from a

²⁰Margret Andersen, *Claudiel et l’Allemagne*, 65.

²¹*Les Choéphores* was the only play of the trilogy to be produced; it was performed in Brussels in 1935 with Ida Rubinstein in the role of Clytemnestre.

²²Paul Claudel, quoted in René Farabet, *Le Jeu de l’Acteur dans le théâtre de Paul Claudel*, 96. [“Martha is the Church and Lechy is vice—the Church cannot kneel down in front of vice.”]

²³Georges Castella, quoted in René Farabet, *Le Jeu de l’Acteur dans le théâtre de Paul Claudel*, 105. [“everything which seems to offer him an appearance of a symbol with expressive attitudes.”]

²⁴Paul Claudel, *Claudiel on the Theatre*, 28.

²⁵René Farabet, *Le Jeu de l’Acteur dans le théâtre de Paul Claudel*, 96. [“The corporeal action, stylized, is transferred to the level of symbol, it follows a rite, it has an almost liturgical value.”]

rehearsal for *L'Otage* in 1914:

L'attitude de Sygne à la fin du deuxième acte est l'objet de grands débats. La Croix est accrochée au mur du fond de la scène. Elle s'est traînée à genoux jusqu'à elle pour supplier Dieu de lui épargner le sacrifice odieux au'on lui demande. Elle ne peut cependant tourner le dos au Christ au moment de son ultime soumission...Et il ne serait guère esthétique non plus qu'elle fût dos au public à cette minute suprême...Le débat se prolonge...A la fin, les genoux usés, endoloris, pantelants, je me sens si fatiguée que j'étends le bras pour chercher un appui sur les propres genoux de l'abbé Badilon-Lugné Poe assis à mon côté, et Claudel, soudain crie: Voilà, Francis, restez ainsi, c'est magnifique! Ainsi fut fait.²⁶

Claudé learned from observing these directors how movement could be wed to interior motivation. Georges Pitoëff, for example, found movements for the characters in *L'Échange* (1917) "en fonction directe de leurs impulsions;"²⁷ for his own character, the wild and instinctive Louis Laine, Pitoëff chose movements where he could maintain contact with the soil, lying down, sitting or on his knees.²⁸

A sense of stasis and sculptural immobility had profound meanings for Claudel, indicating a spiritual state of equilibrium and grace. During his stay in Japan during the 1920s, Claudel was fascinated by the slowness and static qualities of Noh drama, but even during this earlier period, Claudel recognized the theatrical qualities of stasis, and advised Eve Francis (playing Ysé in fragments from *Partage de Midi* in 1916) that "L'immobilité...peut produire le maximum d'émotion. De toute façon je désire le lenteur dans les mouvements. Chez l'acteur la voix est à peu près tout et plus les

²⁶Eve Francis, quoted in René Farabet, *Le Jeu de l'Acteur dans le théâtre de Paul Claudel*, 113-114. ["The attitude of Sygne at the end of the second act is the subject of great debate. The cross is on a wall on the back of the stage. She dragged herself to it on her knees to beg God to spare her the odious sacrifice she is asked to make. She nevertheless cannot turn her back on Christ at the time of her ultimate submission...And it would not be very aesthetic either if she turned her back to the public at this supreme minute...The debate goes on...At the end, my knees worn out, painful, in pieces, I feel so tired that I stretch my arm to find support on the knees of the Abbott Badilon (Lugné-Poe) who is sitting next to me, and Claudel suddenly screams: Here it is Francis, do not move, it is magnificent! So it was."]

²⁷Georges Pitoëff, quoted in René Farabet, *Le Jeu de l'Acteur dans le théâtre de Paul Claudel*, 114. ["in direct relation to their impulses"]

²⁸René Farabet, *Le Jeu de l'Acteur dans le théâtre de Paul Claudel*, 100.

mouvements sont rares plus ils prennent de caractère.”²⁹ Darius Milhaud reports that in rehearsal during this time, “Claudel aimait aussi inventer des poses sculpturales...Il se drapait dans un drap de lit, prenait la pose voulue, disposait l’ordonnance des plis.”³⁰

From 1917 to 1919, when Claudel served as French Minister Plenipotentiary in Rio de Janeiro, he employed Darius Milhaud as his secretary; Claudel worked at recovering French investments while Milhaud translated coded messages and organized receptions and concerts for the benefit of the English and French Red Cross. In 1912, Milhaud had met Claudel through their mutual friend, the writer Francis Janmes, who warned the young composer that Claudel was “high-strung, as restless as a force of nature, wore a Chinese robe with a consul-general’s hat, hated the scent of vanilla, and was always prepared to pack up for some post in far-distant lands.”³¹ Undaunted, Milhaud played for him song-settings of Claudel’s poetry, *Les Poèmes de la Connaissance de l’Est*. Claudel was so impressed that he immediately asked Milhaud to accompany him to Hellerau and assist with rehearsals for *L’Announce faite à Marie*; despite major differences in temperament and religious beliefs, their remarkable collaboration endured over forty years, and produced more than a dozen works.

Claudel saw in Brazil “a virgin land; a country where nature is untamed...[and] at the same time one which gives the idea of classical antiquity.”³² Both men were enthralled with the exotic beauty and sounds of the Brazilian landscape:

²⁹Eve Francis, quoted in Michel Lioure, *L’esthétique dramatique de Paul Claudel* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1971), 581-582. [“Immobility...can produce the maximum of emotion. In any event, I prefer slowness in movements. For the actor, the voice is almost everything, and the rarer his movements, the more character they have.”]

³⁰Darius Milhaud, quoted in René Farabet, *Le Jeu de l’Acteur dans le théâtre de Paul Claudel*, 104. [“Claudel also liked to invent sculptural poses...He would wrap himself in a bed-sheet, take the desired pose, arrange the disposition of the folds.”]

³¹Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music*, 43.

³²Paul Claudel, quoted in Louis Chaigne, *Paul Claudel: The Man and the Mystic*, translated by Pierre de Fontnouvelle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1961), 182.

Rio had a potent charm. It is difficult to describe that lovely bay, ringed with fantastically shaped mountains covered with a light shading of forest or crowned with solitary red-brown pinnacles of rock, sometimes topped with lines of palm trees that stand out like ostrich feathers in the murky light of the tropics against a sky shrouded in pearly gray cloud...But the lure of the forest was greater yet. It began even inside the city, for so luxuriant was the vegetation that it invaded the least patch of unoccupied land...Claudel and I often took the Corcovado funicular as far as Paineras, where we followed a little track along a rivulet from whose banks we looked down a mountainside drowned in a torrent of dense vegetation in which glittered the shiny, silvery leaves of the bilo-bilo. No sooner had the sun set than, as if operated by an invisible switch, all kinds of crickets, copper-toads, which imitate the sound of a hammer banging on a plank of wood, and birds with dull, sharp, or staccato cries peopled the forest night with their different noises, which sometimes rose swiftly to a pitch of paroxysm.³³

This immersion in the sights and sounds of what they viewed as primitive nature greatly influenced their artistic work, but so too did visits from troupes and performers from Europe; most decisively for Claudel and Milhaud was the series of performances given by the Ballets Russes in Rio in 1917. Claudel had often made it known that he had little use for classical dance:

I have never had much taste for the conventional art of ballet as it is practiced, often with soulless perfection, by many subsidized companies, or by the sinister Pavlova. I don't like it any more than I do the tricks of singers and violinists. Beauty is something you rarely find when you are looking for it. It is natural that false artists, exasperated by the glorious fickleness of inspiration, should try to replace it with a formula.³⁴

Various references in Claudel's journal to dance performances in this time period are also highly critical; upon first seeing the Ballets Russes, Claudel was at best "interested" by Nijinsky, but was suspicious of sweeping production values:

Ballets Russes. Ensemble chatoyant, mais aucun principe d'art réfléchi. Les ensembles sont des marmelades. Nijinski est un homme intéressant, il n[ous] dit avoir trouvé la notation de la danse. Dans le *Spectre de la Rose*, dans les *Sylphides*, il est affreux. Car il y a quelque chose au-dessous du mauvais, c'est la perfection dans le mauvais...2 voies. La danse doit-elle être l'expression d'un sentiment ou

³³Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music*, 71-72.

³⁴Paul Claudel, *Claudel on the Theatre*, 44.

a-t-elle un but purement décoratif?³⁵

Spectre de la Rose and *Les Sylphides* were essentially romantic ballets and, despite Fokine's innovations, Claudel saw in the costumes, music (Weber and Chopin) and the virtuosic dancing, only a "soulless" art form. Believing that dance should be based in organic movement and express the spiritual, Claudel

was one of those who could appreciate only the Oriental style of dancing, in which the feet scarcely ever leave the ground; it is like a speech, each phrase of which starts from the solar plexus, and as the body turns to face every point on the circumference of a circle, the phrase ripples through the limbs to the fingertips—a complete movement, slowly unfolding or suddenly flashing into flame.³⁶

But after seeing Nijinsky in *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, Claudel exclaimed,

And that *Après-midi d'un faune*, ah! what loveliness, what joy, what a poignant melancholy. It took place both in Sicily and on that abandoned terrace in the middle of the virgin forest that my friend Milhaud knows well, near a great overflowing basin beneath a wall of green stones, and the flaming moon among the leaves like the cymbals in every gap of the orchestra."³⁷

Nijinsky's choreography, influenced by Meyerhold's "static theatre" and Dalcroze's eurhythmics, eschewed ballet conventions and romantic sentiment; it embraced two-dimensionality, stylized movement and angular gestures, and expressed a bold, instinctual view of sex. Lynn Garafola has perceived that "crucial to *Faune* was the mating of static images with the cadences of rhythmical movement and the stylized forms of symbolist theater."³⁸ Not only did the choreographic style resonate with

³⁵Paul Claudel, *Journal I*, 383 (17 July 1917). ["Ballets Russes. The whole is shimmering, but not reflecting an artistic principle. Nijinsky is an interesting man, he tells us he has devised a notation for dance. In *Le Spectre de la Rose*, in *Les Sylphides*, he is horrible. There is something below the bad, it is the perfection of the bad...2 ways. Does dance have to be the expression of a sentiment, or can it have a purely decorative purpose?"]

³⁶Paul Claudel, *Claudel on the Theatre*, 44.

³⁷Paul Claudel, "Foreword," translated by Lord Derwent, in Romola Nijinsky, *Nijinsky* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1934), xv-xvi.

³⁸Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 55.

Claudél's interest in slow movement and sculptural poses, but most importantly, in Nijinsky's movement he perceived a metaphysical dimension. Several years later, Claudél wrote of the "divine" dancer:

He is the greatest human creation, lyricism incarnate, standing like a god among the jerking puppets that we are. He paints our passions on the canvas of Eternity, he takes our most misused gestures, as Virgil took our words and images, and transports them into the blissful realm of all that is intelligent, powerful, and ethereal.³⁹

Although Claudél never expressed much enthusiasm for the Ballets Russes, he spent time with the company when it was in Rio, getting to know the dancers as people, and seeing their work in rehearsal. He and Milhaud also must have learned something about the intricacies of creating and producing a modern ballet, as the composer recounts:

The troupe came to spend the evening at the Legation. We were eager to hear the details of Cocteau's ballet *Parade*...which had just been given its first performance in Paris. Ansermet described to us the scenery and costumes by Picasso, and the accessories with which Satie had augmented the orchestra, such as a typewriter, a roulette wheel, and a siren. Dressed in their [rehearsal] clothes, the dancers... now reproduced Massine's choreography in the tropics, and though it had scandalized the Parisian public, it delighted [Claudél] and his friends, perched on piles of woolens in the grand ballroom of the Legation, which had been transformed since the beginning of the war into a sewing-room for war charities.⁴⁰

Claudél invited Nijinsky and his wife Romola, to be his guests at the Legation, and there he had time for long discussions: Claudél "indoctrinated Waslaw in the wonders of Oriental art," and the writer learned about the poetic possibilities of dance.⁴¹ Claudél was even captivated by the ways in which the dancer moved offstage:

He walked as tigers walk; it was not the shifting of a dead weight from one foot to the other, but all the complex of muscles and nerves moving buoyantly, as a wing moves in the air, in a body which was not a mere trunk or a statue, but the

³⁹Paul Claudél, *Claudél on the Theatre*, 44-45. Claudél's essay on Nijinsky was written in 1927.

⁴⁰Darius Milhaud, *Words without Music*, 79.

⁴¹Tamara Nijinsky, *Nijinsky and Romola* (London: Bachman & Turner, 1991), 167.

perfect organ of power and movement. Every tiny gesture, as for example when he turned his face forward toward us and his small head swung round suddenly on his long neck, was accomplished gloriously, with a vivacity both fierce and sweet, and at the same time an overwhelming authority. Even in repose, he seemed to be dancing imperceptibly.⁴²

Claudé was so caught-up in the experience of watching and thinking about dance that he decided to write a ballet scenario for Nijinsky over the next several weeks. Subtitled a "poème plastique," *L'Homme et son désir*⁴³ would have many similarities to *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, and perhaps the fact that Mallarmé had provided the source poem for the earlier ballet also had an influence. Claudé used the term "plastique" in the sculptural sense that his words and images could be molded into a dance by a poet-dancer like Nijinsky. Thus, in devising his ballet, Claudé was conscious of not merely writing a scenario to be illustrated by movement, but of creating a performance "poem" that united image, movement, music and design.

The theme of the ballet was not dissimilar from several of his other works and was that of "man trapped in a passion, an idea, a desire, and vainly endeavoring to escape, as though from a prison with invisible bars, until the point when a woman, the image of both Death and Love, comes to claim him and take him with her offstage."⁴⁴ Claudé set to work, collaborating with his friends, Milhaud, and the painter Audrey

⁴²Paul Claudé, *Claudé on the Theatre*, 45.

⁴³Until 1921, the title of Claudé's ballet was *L'Homme et son destin*.

⁴⁴Paul Claudé, quoted in Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, trans. Ruth Sharman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 125.

Parr:⁴⁵

L'Homme et son désir is the fruit of the collaboration of three friends who, during the year of 1917, held a picnic of ideas, music and design every Sunday in the Serra above Rio de Janeiro. This little drama in movement had its birth in the atmosphere of the Brazilian forest which, in its vast uniformity, seemed like an element in which we were immersed. It is most strange at night, when it begins to be filled with movement, cries, and gleams of light; and it is one short night that we are trying to show in our poem.⁴⁶

Claudé took Nijinsky for long walks in the forest "so that he could understand what Darius and he felt;" Nijinsky agreed to choreograph and dance the ballet, but his health was already failing, and soon after the Rio tour ended his career.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Claudé and his friends continued to work on the ballet:

During the weekends in Petrópolis, Audrey Parr and Cacique—the nickname she gave to Claudé—prepared the sketches of the scenery. He would suggest all the colors of the vast carpet that was to cover the four tiers [of the set] and link them together by draping their walls; and the appearance of the characters, which Audrey would cut out of cardboard and paint at once.⁴⁸

Parr constructed a table-top, small-scaled theatre in order to help Claudé visualize his ideas, much like the model theatre Craig had given Yeats with which to experiment. Hélène Hoppenot published ten libretti containing the scenario for the ballet,

⁴⁵Audrey (also known as Andrée) Parr was the Polish wife of Raymond Parr, attorney for the British Legation in Brazil. Claudé had befriended "Magotine" (as he called her) in Rome several years earlier, and she did sketches for many of his works. The writer Henri Hoppenot, secretary to the Legation, recalled that "C'était une créature pleine de vivacité et d'esprit, douée pour tous les arts...Claudé tournait comme un gros papillon de nuit autour de cette flamme virevoltante...[Il] rêva toute sa vie de rencontrer un artiste qui se prêtât à traduire fidèlement, sur le papier, ses imaginations de poète. Margotine dessinait avec goût et se montrait compréhensive et docile. Son mérite était grand car Claudé n'était pas un maître facile." See Henri Hoppenot, "Préface," in *Cahiers Paul Claudé 3: Correspondance Paul Claudé—Darius Milhaud: 1912-1953* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 18-19. ["She was a creature full of petulance and spirit, gifted for all the arts...Claudé flit about this spinning flame like a large moth...During all his life he dreamed of meeting an artist who could faithfully express, on paper, his poetic imagination. Margotine drew with taste, and proved to be understanding and docile. Her merit was great because Claudé was not an easy master."]

⁴⁶Paul Claudé, *Claudé on the Theatre*, 45.

⁴⁷Madeleine Milhaud, quoted in Roger Nichols, *Conversations with Madeleine Milhaud* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1996), 14.

⁴⁸Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music*, 81-82.

descriptions of the choreography as Claudel imagined it, and Parr's sketches of the dancers and designs for sets and costumes.⁴⁹

On his return to Paris in 1919, Claudel approached J. Rouché, director of the Paris Opéra, about producing his ballet, but with no success.⁵⁰ During the winter of 1920, Milhaud tried to interest Diaghilev in the project through the intercession of Misia and José-Maria Sert, who were great admirers of Claudel. Though Diaghilev was generally amused by the music of "Les Six," he failed to appreciate Milhaud's piano reduction of his distinctively orchestrated score for *L'Homme et son désir*:

It was therefore amid an atmosphere heavy with skepticism and unspoken reservation that I played my score. The icy silence that followed it was broken by a conversation in Russian between Diaghilev and Massine. I soon realized that my symbolic and dramatic ballet no longer corresponded with the needs of the day.⁵¹

Since Milhaud's friend Arthur Honegger had just received a commission for *Skating Rink* from Rolf de Maré, founder of a new company, the Ballets Suédois, Milhaud asked Honegger to help him arrange an audition with de Maré for Claudel's piece:

When I submitted to him my *L'Homme et son désir*, he agreed to put it on in spite of the singers, the orchestra of soloists, and the large number of percussion instruments required. Through his generosity our Brazilian collaboration came to fruition.⁵²

During its brief existence, the Ballets Suédois boldly challenged conventional definitions of concert dance with its innovative, multidisciplinary approach, and proved to be the most appropriate venue for the realization of Claudel's experiment.

⁴⁹Henri Hoppenot, "Préface," *Correspondance Paul Claudel-Darius Milhaud 1912-1953*, 19-20.

⁵⁰Paul Claudel, *Correspondance Paul Claudel-Darius Milhaud 1912-1953*, 51 (letter #31).

⁵¹Darius Milhaud, quoted in Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale, *Misia: The Life of Misia Sert*, 226. Diaghilev later commissioned Milhaud to write the score for the ballet *Le Train Bleu*, which had a libretto by Cocteau.

⁵²Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music*, 110.

II. *The Ballets Suédois*

Between 1920 and 1925, the Swedish Ballet, a highly experimental ballet company based at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées as the Ballets Suédois, produced a very eclectic repertory of twenty-four new works drawing from a wide range of contemporary forms and styles, including symbolism, expressionism, cubism and dada. Collaborating with a long and diverse roster of then Paris-based artists, including Fernand Léger, Pierre Bonnard, Jean Cocteau, Paul Claudel, Francis Picabia, Francis Poulenc, Erik Satie, Luigi Pirandello, and Cole Porter, the Ballets Suédois strove “traduire dans l’art du geste les conceptions d’un modernisme,”⁵³ serving as a kind of performance gallery of modern arts.

Writing in 1923 about the early fall season in Paris which, within a few weeks would include performances by Isadora Duncan, the Ballets Russes, and the Ballets Suédois, Allan Ross Macdougall quipped that “Paris is about to have the opportunity of seeing the Cause, the Effect, and the After-Effect.”⁵⁴ Duncan had helped to inspire Nijinsky, Fokine and other members of the Imperial Ballet to break away from a traditional ballet institution and, with the support of a wealthy amateur, to form the Ballets Russes. Similarly, a decade later, Jean Börlin and members of the Royal Opera Ballet of Stockholm were so thrilled by the experience of dancing in several of Fokine’s works choreographed for the Ballets Russes that they were easily wooed by Rolf de Maré to join a company devoted to expanding the concept of ballet performance. On the surface, the Ballets Suédois appeared to be an imitation of Diaghilev’s company in their

⁵³Gustave Bret, quoted in Pierre Tugal, “L’Art de Jean Borlin,” in Rolf de Maré, *Les Ballets Suédois dans l’art contemporain* (Paris: Editions du Trianon, 1931), 165. [“to translate into the art of gesture the ideas of a modernism.”]

⁵⁴Allan Ross Macdougall, “Ballets Russian and Swedish,” *Shadowland* 1923, 49, Ballets Suédois clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

initial choice of repertory, collaborators and aesthetic approach; yet while the Ballets Russes gave prime focus to the dancing of a production, the Ballets Suédois ventured further into total theatrical spectacle by allowing other arts to dominate, especially visual and design elements.

As Nancy Van Norman Baer observes, the Ballets Suédois can be seen as an extension of its founder's art collection, which by 1920 included works by Braque, Bonnard, Brancusi, Dufy, Miró and Picasso.⁵⁵ Rolf de Maré's (1888-1964) interest in art had originally been nurtured by his grandmother, Wilhelmina von Hallwyl, who was heir to one of Sweden's largest fortunes and a passionate art collector, and who built a private palace that functioned as both home and museum. Although de Maré helped his grandmother to choose and catalogue her collection, he received an agricultural education in hopes that he would one day manage the family estate.⁵⁶ Early on, de Maré displayed a great interest in folk dance, though he knew little of ballet. Folk dance had mostly disappeared in Sweden as an activity for the average person, but it enjoyed a resurgence of popularity among university students during the early years of this century and became a regular entertainment on country estates, where de Maré learned the dances.⁵⁷ Proud of his Swedish heritage, de Maré traveled throughout Sweden systematically to study its national dances, music, costumes and customs, which he would later draw upon in commissioned works for his ballet company.⁵⁸

De Maré's interest in modern art was sparked by his romantic

⁵⁵Nancy Van Norman Baer, "The Ballets Suédois: A Synthesis of Modernist Trends in Art," in *Paris Modern: The Swedish Ballet 1920-1925* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1995), 11-12.

⁵⁶Erik Näslund, "Animating a Vision: Rolf de Maré, Jean Börlin, and the Founding of The Ballets Suédois" in *Paris Modern: The Swedish Ballet 1920-1925*, 40-41.

⁵⁷Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 8.

⁵⁸Robley Munger Hood, "The Ballets Suédois: Modernism and the Painterly Stage" (PhD dissertation, University of Denver, 1986), 18.

relationship with Nils Dardel, who would become one of Sweden's most important modern painters. Dardel had moved to Paris in 1910 to study with Matisse, and de Maré soon followed him there where he was introduced to the foremost artists and dealers of the time. Dardel and de Maré travelled extensively before and during World War I, visiting India to study religion, accompanying Prince William of Sweden to the coronation of the King of Siam, collecting sculpture in Java, studying art in China, Korea and Japan, living as "cowboys" in the American Southwest for several months, and further travelling to South America, Africa and Siberia. In each country, de Maré "stayed as long as it interested me," visiting museums and studios for objects representative of each country's "popular art in all of its forms."⁵⁹ As Robley Munger Hood points out,⁶⁰ Dardel and de Maré were not only collecting artifacts, but ideas, sensibilities and impressions from a variety of cultures:

I also appreciated works of art by ancient and contemporary masters and I collected indigenous art objects as well as canvases of certain painters whose composition corresponded to my sensibility.⁶¹

All of this travel and collecting brought de Maré to the realization of how stagnant Swedish "high" culture was and how it might be revived through the formation of a company that could draw from Swedish folk culture and the modern visual arts creating a "kind of permanent exhibition of folklore" through its presentation of native dances mounted "in decors, not realistic, but of an artistic interpretation," and intended to "seize the aspiration of the present hour and...translate plastically the emotions of artists."⁶²

⁵⁹Rolf de Maré quoted in "The Ballets Suédois: Modernism and the Painterly Stage," 17-20.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 20.

⁶¹Rolf de Maré, quoted in "The Ballets Suédois: Modernism and the Painterly Stage," 20.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 22.

Another impetus for de Maré's dream of a dance company was the presence of Michel Fokine in Stockholm, beginning in 1913 when he was hired as director of the Royal Opera Ballet. Fokine was impressed with the company's level of technique, but recognized that it lacked artistic identity and choreographic talent. Fokine modernized this company, and mounted revivals of some of the major works he had created for the Ballets Russes, including *Cléopâtre*, *Les Sylphides*, and *Shéhérazade*. Pleased with the results, he suggested to the conservative management of the Royal Opera that the company should tour his work abroad; the board declined and the war intervened.⁶³ After the war and his second break with Diaghilev, Michel and Vera Fokine returned to Sweden to teach and tour the provinces; Rolf de Maré invited them to stay at Hildesborg, his estate, and it was through their many discussions that de Maré came to understand what might be involved in launching a Swedish ballet company, modelled on the Ballets Russes.⁶⁴

Early in 1918, de Maré was introduced by Nils Dardel to Fokine's prize ballet student, Jean Börlin, and de Maré immediately fell in love with the dancer. Börlin (1893-1930) had studied at the Royal Opera ballet school since the age of eight, where he received an excellent training in technique, but was unchallenged artistically: here pure ballets were rarely performed and dances were usually created only to serve as spectacle for opera. When Fokine arrived in 1913, he not only provided dances that had new artistic and dramaturgical goals, but he cast against the ballet hierarchy and according to who was most suited for a particular role; as a result, many young dancers in the corps de ballet were given a chance to extend their range, including Börlin.⁶⁵ Fokine has

⁶³Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 8.

⁶⁴Sally Banes, "An Introduction to the Ballets Suédois," *Ballet Review* (#2-3, 1978-79), 28-29.

⁶⁵Erik Näslund, "Animating a Vision: Rolf de Maré, Jean Börlin, and the Founding of the Ballets Suédois," 42-45.

recorded how he recognized Börlin's talent from the start:

My first memories of Jean Börlin date from [when] I was just beginning to stage ballets with Stockholm's Royal Opera company. The company was small, but very talented...of all the company's dancers, it was Jean Börlin who thrilled me the most. He was still a boy and had not made a name for himself yet...I remember seeing him in the role of a young faun, in a rehearsal for *Cléopâtre*. He crossed the stage with great bounds, landed with all his force and glided over the boards among the group of bacchantes. What character! What ecstasy! It was the fanatical sacrifice of a body, bruised and battered, in the quest for maximum choreographic expressiveness. It was a revelation.⁶⁶

During the summers of 1915 and 1916, Börlin toured the Swedish provinces performing his own works that strongly reflected Fokine's influence, as can be deduced even from some of the titles: *Rosendröm*, *Faun*, *Egyptisk Offerdans*, and *Bacchanal*. Having built on his academic training, Börlin acquired Fokine's sense of total expressive action, as Pierre Tugal has described:

The technique of Jean Börlin was already very assured; he was flexible, elegant and gracious. Nevertheless, the vivacity and nervous elasticity of the dancers born under the midday sun and the completely oriental frenzy of the Russians were still foreign to us. At this time Börlin, to [use] the image of Nietzsche, was solely under the influence of Apollo. But in the studio of Fokine, the impetuous god [Dionysus] was awakened in him. The art of Börlin—sober, intellectual, pure-bred—came from audacious pursuit and at times attained sublime stylizations which delighted Fokine.⁶⁷

In 1918, de Maré took on Börlin's education as his prime project. Börlin resigned from the Royal Opera, and de Maré supported his private study with Fokine in Copenhagen. In a letter to de Maré, Börlin gives a hint of what he was studying: "I've got a difficult assignment for tomorrow, a solo by old Pepita plus begin composing in Greek style."⁶⁸ From Fokine, Börlin learned how classical technique could be integrated with more contemporary and freer styles of dance. As Erik Näslund points out, "Fokine's

⁶⁶Michel Fokine, quoted in Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 280.

⁶⁷Pierre Tugal, quoted in Sally Banes, "An Introduction to the Ballets Suédois," 30. Pierre Tugal was hired by de Maré in 1932 as the first curator of the Archives Internationales de la Danse in Paris.

⁶⁸Jean Börlin, quoted in Erik Näslund, "Animating a Vision: Rolf de Maré, Jean Börlin, and the Founding of the Ballets Suédois," 45.

body elasticity and the importance he put on the expressivity of the arms would also be characteristic features of Börlin's dance and choreography."⁶⁹ According to Bengt Häger, Börlin had seen Isadora Duncan perform in Stockholm in 1906 and he met Émile Jaques Dalcroze in 1911, and their work had a profound influence on him.⁷⁰ Börlin began performing solo concerts in Copenhagen of his own choreography, and his dancing was praised by critics for its plasticity, rhythmic subtlety, and its pantomimic quality. Back in Stockholm, Börlin performed as a guest soloist with the Royal Opera in Fokine's *Schéhérazade*, *Cléopâtre*, and *Le Dieu Bleu*, in roles originally created for Nijinsky, but he declined the invitation to rejoin the company permanently.⁷¹ Instead, de Maré sent his protegee to travel and study throughout Europe, to familiarize himself with new ideas in art and dance. He started in Paris where he met Picasso, and the art dealer Alfred Flechtheim, who introduced Börlin to abstract and expressionist painting; it is likely that Börlin went to Hellerau in 1918, that he stayed with Mary Wigman in Zurich in 1919, and he may have come into contact with the Dadaists there, as Laban's wife, Suzanne Perrottet attests. De Maré accompanied Börlin to Spain where they viewed El Greco's paintings in Madrid and Toledo, and where Börlin studied Spanish dance with José Otero; in North Africa, Börlin learned the dances of the whirling dervishes; and in London, he first saw the Ballets Russes in productions of *Parade* and *Le Tricorne*.⁷²

Back in Paris early in 1920, de Maré decided that the city was the best site to launch his dream of a modern ballet company. From de Maré's point of view, Sweden had proven inhospitable to new forms of dance, while Paris was at the forefront

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 10.

⁷¹Erik Näslund, "Animating a Vision: Rolf de Maré, Jean Börlin, and the Founding of the Ballets Suédois," 45-46.

⁷²Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 10, and Erik Näslund, "Animating a Vision: Rolf de Maré, Jean Börlin, and the Founding of the Ballets Suédois," 50-51.

of modern art and performance, largely due to the residency of the Ballets Russes. In addition, de Maré's family in Sweden, already embarrassed over his friendship with Dardel, was scandalized by his relationship with Börlin; and, as Erik Näslund points out, the intrigue surrounding de Maré and Börlin became the source of consistently negative publicity for the Ballets Suédois in Sweden.⁷³

De Maré took a seven-year lease on the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and planned Börlin's debut solo performance as a kind of preview of the Ballets Suédois. This theatre was hailed as one of Paris's largest and most modern spaces when it opened in 1913; its design of reinforced concrete gave its structure a strength and lightness that minimized the need for interior columns and maximized open playing space and unimpeded sight lines. The theatre's lavish decoration—wall paintings, sculpture, curtains, reliefs—was mostly executed by sculptor Antoine Bourdelle and painters of the Nabis school. Bourdelle was especially interested in Greek forms and in the work of Isadora Duncan, after whom he modeled many of his images.⁷⁴ "To me it seemed that there, through her, was animated an ineffable frieze wherein divine frescoes slowly became human realities. Each leap, each attitude of the great artist remains in my memory like flashes of lightning."⁷⁵ Having obtained the perfect theatre environment for the concert, de Maré attempted to secure the critical climate as well by founding *La Danse*, the only Paris dance magazine of the period, and acquiring the publications *Le Monsieur*, *Paris-Journal*, *Le Théâtre*, and *Comoedia illustré*. This strategy narrowed several avenues of publicity for the Ballets Russes, and placed the Ballets Suédois foremost in

⁷³Erik Näslund, "Animating a Vision: Rolf de Maré, Jean Börlin, and the Founding of the Ballets Suédois," 46.

⁷⁴Robley Munger Hood, "The Ballets Suédois: Modernism and the Painterly Stage," 31-36.

⁷⁵Antoine Bourdelle, quoted in Dorée Duncan, Carol Pratl, and Cynthia Splatt, *Life into Art: Isadora Duncan and her World*, 106, 109.

the public eye.⁷⁶

De Maré presented Börlin in a solo debut concert at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on 25 March 1920 in which he performed seven of his own compositions against a simple, neutral backdrop. The major expense of the thrice-repeated concert was a forty-five piece orchestra, conducted by Désiré Émile Inghelbrecht, a pupil and close friend of Debussy, who became the musical director for the Ballets Suédois.⁷⁷ The program demonstrated Börlin's interest in an eclectic mix of styles and sources for choreography, and his keen visual sense, which served him throughout his career with the Ballets Suédois:

Every tableau which creates an impression on me is channelled, through me, directly into dance. This is why I owe so much to both the old and the modern masters. They have helped me enormously. Not that I have ever tried to copy them by creating "tableaux vivants." But they make me think, inspire me with new ideas, new dances. I envy painters. Their works are immortal. They carry their own life within them, independently of their creators. A dance is fairly short-lived. As short-lived as the dancer himself.⁷⁸

Börlin often started with his own drawings to begin work on choreography and saw the unity of a production as similar to the balance of a visual composition. Börlin was not limited by the parameters of conventional ballet, but sought

a new kind of theatre art, perhaps opera, perhaps drama, perhaps ballet, but with the intention that everything would fall into a definite style, that everything would melt together into a harmony of song, speech, dance, costumes, scenery, music. It was to be a unity of everything, like in a painting.⁷⁹

The most noteworthy piece of the program appears to have been *Sculpture nègre* with

⁷⁶Ironically, de Maré also became Diaghilev's landlord, since he sublet the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées to the Ballets Russes when the Ballets Suédois was on tour. See Lynn Garafola, "The Ballets Suédois and the Ballets Russes: Rivals for the New," in *Paris Modern: The Swedish Ballet 1920-1925*, 68.

⁷⁷Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 13.

⁷⁸Jean Börlin, quoted in Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 279.

⁷⁹Jean Börlin, quoted in Erik Näslund, "Animating a Vision: Rolf de Maré, Jean Börlin, and the Founding of the Ballets Suédois," 51.

Börlin costumed by the artist Paul Colin to closely resemble a carved African sculpture, complete with a full-head mask. The music, of the same title, was composed for Börlin by Francis Poulenc, and the dancing had a weighted and stylized quality, as the critic Pierre Scize described:

The body's flexible points all bend as if under the weight of an abominable compulsion...It rose up, slowly and as if ossified by years of contemplative immobility. And what this god unveiled before our eyes was the primitive eurhythmics of the first beings: and extraordinary vision in three-dimensional form.⁸⁰

Other pieces included *Devant la mort*, an expressionist piece with Börlin portraying a Christ figure descending from a medieval cross; *Danse céleste*, for which Börlin drew upon his study of de Maré's films of court dances of Bangkok; solos based on Swedish folk dances; and *Derviches*, a solo based on the Muslim trance dance, in which the music ("Dance of the Seven Veils" by Glazunov, which Fokine had previously used for Ida Rubinstein's *Salomé*) and the choreography functioned independently of one another.⁸¹ As Lynn Garafola points out, *Derviches* was probably also influenced by Mary Wigman's solo *The Dervish* (1917), which Börlin probably saw in her studio. From her solo *Idolatry* (1919), in which she was costumed in a straw shift, whirling until she collapsed in a primeval forest, Börlin might have found inspiration for *Sculpture nègre* and *L'Homme et son désir*.⁸² Overall, Börlin demonstrated his talent for choreographing and performing in works that were highly visual and grounded in a modern dance language. Critics regularly remarked on the unfamiliar sources for his dances, the unusual movements and use of stillness, weight, and pantomime, but inevitably recognized his talent:

⁸⁰Pierre Scize, quoted in Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 13.

⁸¹Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 13-19.

⁸²Lynn Garafola, "The Ballets Suédois and the Ballets Russes: Rivals for the New," 75, 78.

A new dancer of the first rank has been revealed in the person of M. Jean Börlin...His style is reminiscent of that of Isadora Duncan and Nijinski, and is characterised by delicate and minute movements of the arms and hands. His mastery of technique is remarkable, no less than his power of characterisation, but his dances are strange to a degree, which makes them difficult to appreciate properly when seen for the first time.⁸³

The debut season of the Ballets Suédois opened on 25 October 1920 and included nine new works all choreographed by Börlin. De Maré designed the first of two programs purposely to present "inoffensive ballets," calling upon "recognized painters and musicians, ones who were nevertheless said to be progressive."⁸⁴ *Jeux*, with music by Debussy, was performed against an impressionist backdrop by the painter Pierre Bonnard, and costumed by couturiere Jeanne Lanvin. Börlin did not see Nijinsky's original *Jeux* when it was presented by the Ballets Russes at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1913; both versions used the game of tennis as a metaphor for a modern love triangle, though Börlin's choreography was said to be far less eccentric and more innocently youthful than Nijinsky's.⁸⁵ *Iberia*, with music by Isaac Albéniz, and decor and costumes by the artist Alexandre Steinlen, was reminiscent of Massine's *Le Tricorne* for the Ballets Russes, but Börlin focused less on well-known Spanish dances, and more on the spirit and everyday movements of the culture.⁸⁶ Revolving around midsummer night's festivals held in Swedish villages, *Nuit de Saint-Jean*, with music by Swedish composer Hugo Alfvén, was based on Swedish folk dances which were stylized and abstracted by Börlin, and was designed by Nils Dardel in bright colors and flattened perspective.⁸⁷

⁸³"A New Dancer," in *The Dancing Times*, April 1920, Jean Börlin clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

⁸⁴Rolf de Maré, quoted in Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 60.

⁸⁵Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 15, 73-75, 296.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 15, 77-87.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 15, 88-93.

The second program of the Ballets Suédois season opened on 8 November 1920 and was decidedly more controversial, featuring two “expressionistic” ballets. Eleven years and the experience of World War I separated the debuts of the Ballets Russes and the Ballets Suédois; de Maré believed that ballet had often been a prisoner of its own aestheticism, and for this new era, he “endeavoured to breathe into [ballet] the very breath of modern life...new cadences had begun to jar on us.”⁸⁸ *Maison de fous*, an expressionist ballet with a scenario by Pär Lagerkvist, was disturbing on several accounts: a huge sprawled creature with immense arms and hands deformed in pain was painted on Nils Dardel’s backdrop and hovered over the dwarfed figures of the dancers; and Viking Dahl’s score lacked development and compounded the static quality of the dance. Börlin’s dancers each depicted an individualized form of madness through intense gesture and movement; these minidramas were performed simultaneously so that the audience’s focus was consistently shifting among the multiple actions onstage. In order to tap into the dancers’s emotions, Börlin asked them to improvise their own movements based on their personal reactions to the material, which Börlin then edited, repeated and juxtaposed to form a visual composition.⁸⁹ Most critics regarded *Maison de fous* as an affront to ballet decorum given its wide range of emotions and grotesque vision of human form:

It is the kind of dance one might have dreamt of in the influenza season, a very ghoulish thing...Strange, grotesque, and almost horrible, the performance makes more calls on the miming of the ballet than on their powers of dancing. But it is as interesting as it is gruesome, and it was received with considerable applause.⁹⁰

For *El Greco*, Börlin anticipated the critics and subtitled this expressionist dance as “mimed scenes.” The background, painted by the Paris Opéra’s chief scene painter,

⁸⁸Rolf de Maré, quoted in Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 60.

⁸⁹Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 16-17.

⁹⁰*The Times* [London], 3 January 1921, quoted in Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 97.

Georges Mouveau, created a synthesis of several El Greco paintings, which Börlin echoed in sweeping gestures, attitudes of the whole body, and intense facial expressions. Contrary to conventional ballet technique, Börlin placed little emphasis on the legs and travelling through space, and instead the characters's dancing was "glued to the spot" in order to intensify the movement and the emotion.⁹¹ Perhaps because the ballet succeeded so well with presenting the visual essence of this renowned painter, Börlin's performance and choreography were more readily appreciated by the critics. According to *Paris-Journal*, Börlin was "the very incarnation of the naked young man with his half-crazed eyes and ascetic face, swarthy but pale, his close-cropped scull and puny beard, in whom El Greco's entire art is summed up and condensed."⁹² This second program was rounded out by several more accessible works: an expanded version of *Derviches* for five dancers; *Les Vieges Folles*, a piece based on eighteenth century Swedish folk art, songs and dances; *Chopiniana*, a series of *pas de deux* in the style of Fokine's *Les Sylphides*, intended to show-off the classical technique of the performers; and *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, a suite of four dances based on eighteenth-century court forms, with settings and costumes by the painter Pierre Laprade, and music by Maurice Ravel in memory of the composer François Couperin.⁹³

In the space of fifteen days, Börlin had accomplished a prodigious amount of work for the first season of the Ballets Suédois: he presented nine new dances and, in each very different piece, he danced a principal role, all the while serving as ballet master and supervising the daily training of the company. As Lynn Garafola points out, collaborating with twenty-one painters, writers, composers and designers in just one season, Börlin's artistic point of view gave the season a stylistic consistency.

⁹¹Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 18-19.

⁹²*Paris-Journal*, quoted in Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 19.

⁹³Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 17-18, 101-102.

Reviewers regularly commented on the static, pantomimic quality of the movement, the frieze-like compositions, and the emotional intensity of the work, as a critic for *Scandinavia* described:

The Swedish Ballet departs entirely from the Asiatic, gorgeous, half-barbaric and decidedly erotic style [of the Russian Ballet] as much as it does from conventional platitude... It desires something more than merely dancing, technical capacity and masterly execution; it desires to give expression to a thought, an idea. It also desires to interpret the inner life—the emotion of the human soul.⁹⁴

III. *L'Homme et son désir*

When Claudel set aside his "plastic poem" entitled *L'Homme et son destin* in 1917, it read as an allegory of primitive man awakened to his passion for life, and fated to succumb to a woman's power. But through Claudel and Milhaud's collaboration with the Ballets Suédois, Claudel found theatrical realization in his first produced ballet scenario, now retitled *L'Homme et son désir*, for his abiding ideas about time, duration, movement, the body and its dynamic sensorium.⁹⁵

Early in 1921, when the planning for the production started to take place, Claudel was finishing up his assignment as Minister to Denmark, and making preparations to become Ambassador to Japan.⁹⁶ In Copenhagen, he and Audrey Parr continued to work on the costume and set designs, which were realized in Paris by Marie

⁹⁴Hans Alin, quoted in Nancy Van Norman Baer, "The Ballets Suédois: A Synthesis of Modernist Trends in Art," 14.

⁹⁵Worried about the possible sensationalism of the title, Claudel mulled over the idea of naming the piece *Man and the Forest*: "Autre chose, Je désire, étant donné l'état d'esprit du public parisien, que le titre *L'Homme et son désir*, qui paraîtrait ridicule, soit changé. On pourrait prendre celui de *L'Homme et la forêt* qui donnerait bien le caractère brésilien que les costumes vont accentuer." See Paul Claudel, *Cahiers Paul Claudel 3: Correspondance Paul Claudel—Darius Milhaud: 1912-1953*, 67-68. ["One more thing, given the Parisian frame of mind, I would like that the title *L'Homme et son désir*, which would sound ridiculous, be changed. We could take instead *L'Homme et la forêt* which would render well the Brazilian character that the costumes will accentuate."]

⁹⁶Louis Chaigne, *Paul Claudel: The Man and the Mystic*, 183-184.

Muelle and Georges Mouveau, respectively. In the months before his own production, Claudel saw several dance performances of note, including Massine's *Le Sacre du Printemps* danced by the Ballets Russes, and *El Greco* by the Ballets Suédois.⁹⁷ Claudel was intermittently available during the rehearsal period for the premier of *L'Homme et son désir*: Prince Hirohito was visiting Paris during this time, conveniently bringing Claudel back to France. Milhaud remembers that frequently Claudel "would suddenly appear on the stage of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées wearing a morning coat and top hat and interrupt the rehearsal at the most unexpected moments to suggest some new steps to Börlin."⁹⁸ Day to day, the production was closely supervised by Milhaud in collaboration with Jean Börlin, who choreographed the piece and danced the central character of the Man.

Claudel's setting, the use of four levels framed by the proscenium arch, was strikingly realized by de Maré's company. Eschewing all realistic elements, Claudel hoped to capture the essence of a primeval Brazilian forest when "it is most strange at night, when it begins to be filled with movement, cries, and gleams of light."⁹⁹ For a 1921 advance article in *La Danse*, which was included in Ballets Suédois programs, Claudel elaborated on the setting:

We have simply spread [the forest] like a carpet—violet, green, and blue—around the central blackness on the four tiers of our stage. This stage appears vertical to the eye, like a picture, or a book being read. It is, if you like, a page of music in which each action is written on a different stave. The Hours of Night, all in black with gilded headdresses, move one by one along the topmost ridge. Below, the Moon, led across the sky by a cloud, like a servant walking before a great lady. At the very bottom, in the waters of the vast primeval swamp, the Reflection of the Moon and her Servant follows the measured walk of the celestial pair. The drama proper takes place on the platform halfway

⁹⁷Paul Claudel, *Journal I* (1904-1932), 498-499.

⁹⁸Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music*, 110.

⁹⁹Paul Claudel, *Claudel on the Theatre*, 45.

between heaven and earth.¹⁰⁰

Claudé's simple use of platforms was undoubtedly influenced by Dalcroze's theatre at Hellerau, and the placement of the main dancing area midway between "heaven" and "earth" suggests a medieval *platea*. "On peut dire que de même que *L'Annonce faite à Marie* se rattachait aux mystères du Moyen Age, *L'Homme et son désir* continue la tradition de nos vieilles moralités."¹⁰¹ Not dissimilar to a medieval Book of Hours, *L'Homme et son désir* is comprised of eight sections, each with a dominant static image; and its characters of Mar., Woman, the Hours, and Moon personify psychic and spiritual states. Totally lacking the narrative focus and didactic function of the morality play, Claudé's medievalism easily combines with his scenario's many symbolist elements including its iconographic images, the use of shadows and doubles, the contemplation of dreams and borderline states between life and death, and the exploration of correspondences among sensations, colors, movement, sound and rhythm.

Claudé's set was highly unusual for dance since it divided the stage space into four narrow planes, configured like a staircase; this placed significant limitations on movement. Each tier was approximately five and one-half feet high; the height from the stage floor to the top of the highest level would have been about eighteen feet. The dancing took place on each of these four levels simultaneously, with each group of dancers appearing like a musical phrase on several staves; dancers did not however move from one tier to another. Each tier was masked by a false proscenium arch, emphasizing the vastness of the playing area, and providing a series of frames with which to distance the action from the audience. The strong rectangularity of the setting was further pronounced by the way in which it was painted: the platforms were painted

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 46.

¹⁰¹Paul Claudé, *Supplément aux oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Centre de Recherches Jacques-Petit, 1994), III, 141. ["One can say that just as *L'Annonce faite à Marie* was related to medieval mysteries, *L'Homme et son désir* continues the tradition of our old morality plays."]

a deep green, with a wide ribbon border of crimson; diamonds of black and crimson were painted on the risers of the platforms at center, center right and left, thus strongly segmenting the space to heighten its symmetrical and formal qualities.¹⁰²

On the top or fourth level processed the Hours of the Night. These women moved very slowly, almost imperceptibly, in single file, with arms at their sides, continuously from stage left to right. The twelve black-robed dancers had their faces veiled and their heads covered to mask their bodies completely in black cloth; attached to the right side of each dancer's head was a large tear-shaped cut-out covered in gold foil, giving the impression of a halo or flame. Backing the fourth tier was a black drop on which was depicted the top half of a huge globe, painted to represent a view of planet earth from space. The procession of the Hours of the Night commences before the music begins, and the procession of the White Hours, representing the dawn, starts to appear on the fourth tier just as the main action is ending. Claudel thus materializes the constant flow of time in theatrical terms. As George Klawitter points out, "within the linear action on the top and bottom stage levels, Man appears, on the middle level, not isolated from nature and time, but rather as a visitant in its inexorable flow."¹⁰³

On the third tier up from the stage floor moves the Moon, accompanied by a "cloud-like Servant" who guides it. The Moon was robed and masked in pale yellow cloth, her head outlined by a dark blue disk (similar to those worn by the Night Hours) and holding in profile the larger disk of a red tambourine by curving it in her arm. In this image is suggested the phases of the Moon, and its several colorings. The guiding Servant is completely covered in a black unitard, with a dress/cape of several layers of diaphanous black gauze, to create the "cloud" effect Claudel imagined. On this third

¹⁰²Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 26-29, 122-137. See also photographs and water colors of *L'Homme et son désir* in Rolf de Maré, *Les Ballets Suédois dans l'art contemporain*.

¹⁰³George Klawitter, "Claudel's *L'Homme et son désir*, a Plastic Poem," *Claudiel Studies* 4 (#2, 1977), 46.

level, the Moon and its Servant move from stage right to left, both in profile, with the Servant moving up from the floor to goad the Moon ahead; the Moon is always upright, though inclined from the waist at times. On the stage floor, or first level, Moon and Servant II move from stage left to right, directly replicating Moon and Servant I's movements, but in reverse image to suggest the reflection of the Moon on Water. In the movement of these three levels, Claudel creates correspondences among time, music and movement:

*Avec les Heures et la Lune dont la marche et le défilé sur des mouvements particuliers et à des paliers différents ne cessent pas pendant toute la durée de l'action, on obtient l'équivalent plastique de ce qu'est la basse pour la musique.*¹⁰⁴

The second level had considerably more depth than the other tiers, providing space for a somewhat wider range of movement; here the main action of the scenario was danced. Although no film or notation survives of the actual choreography, Claudel gave a fairly detailed description of the movement in his article for *La Danse*, which was published concurrently with the production:

The principal character is Man in the grip of primeval powers, robbed by Night and Sleep of both face and name. He enters led by two women, identical in their veils, who confuse him by turning him round and round like a child blindfolded for a game. One is Image and the other Desire, one is Memory and other Illusion. Both mock him for a while, then disappear.

He remains there, standing with outstretched arms, sleeping in the brilliance of the tropical moon, like a man drowned in deep waters. And all the animals, all the noises of the eternal forest come out of the orchestra to watch him and din in his ears: the Bells and the Panpipes, the Strings and the Cymbals.

The man begins to move in his dream and to dance. And his dance is the age old dance of nostalgia, Desire and Exile, the dance of captives and deserted lovers, of those insomniacs who pace in a fever from one end to the other of their verandah, of caged beasts that fling themselves and fling themselves again—and again, and again—upon the impassable bars. Sometimes a hand from behind pulls him back, sometimes a fragrance which saps all vitality. The theme of

¹⁰⁴Paul Claudel, *L'Homme et son désir*, 643. ["With the Moon and the Hours, whose march and procession followed particular movements on different levels and did not stop during the entire length of the action, we have the plastic equivalent of what bass is to music."] In April 1917, Claudel finished a marionette play, *L'Ours et la Lune*, which also includes a procession of hours.

obsession becomes more and more violent and frenzied, and then, at the darkest of the dark hours before the dawn, one of the women returns, and circles round the man as though fascinated. Is this a dead woman? Or a live one? The sleeper grasps the corner of her veil; she whirls round him and her veil unwinds until he is wrapped around like a chrysalis, and she is almost naked—and then, joined by the last wisp of stuff, very like that of our dreams, the woman puts her hand on his face and both move away to the side of the stage.¹⁰⁵

Dancing the principal role of Man, Börlin remained onstage the entire length of the ballet. Costumed only in briefs to represent “man in his nakedness,” Börlin’s entire body was painted with shiny, yellowish makeup, and his hair was close-cropped except for a short tuft at the crown of his head. From photographs, one sees that Börlin achieved an image of sculptural nudity that Claudel intended. As one critic conceded, “To be publicly nude for thirty-five minutes and avoid looking ridiculous truly requires a great deal of talent. Jean Börlin did not look ridiculous.”¹⁰⁶ Yet Claudel had loftier meanings behind the Man’s nakedness:

On s’est trop contenté de voir dans le ballet un spectacle agréable aux yeux fourni par une mince anecdote. J’estime, pour ma part, que le corps humain est un merveilleux instrument propre à traduire les plus subtiles sentiments. C’est l’expérience que j’ai voulu tenter dans *L’Homme et son désir*. Le poème n’est pas un prétexte à des arrangements décoratifs destinés à amuser le regard, il est la traduction par un être en mouvement, par un corps nu qui est la forme de l’âme et dans un milieu approprié, d’un sentiment, d’une pensée, d’un état passionnel. Il répond à cette idée que la danse, comme les autres arts, a essentiellement pour but l’expression et que ce merveilleux corps humain est fait tout entier et non pas le visage seulement, pour rendre l’âme visible en son état de danse, de décision, d’essor.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Paul Claudel, *Claudel on the Theatre*, 46.

¹⁰⁶Antoine Banès, quoted in Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 28.

¹⁰⁷Paul Claudel, quoted in Katia Bogopolskaia, “Claudel et la danse,” *Saisons de la danse*, February 1995, 40. [“People have been too content to see in the ballet an agreeable spectacle provided by a slight anecdote. In my estimation, the human body is a marvelous instrument fit to translate the subtlest sentiments. It is this experience that I have wanted to attempt in *L’Homme et son désir*. The poem is not a pretext for decorative arrangements destined for an amusing look, it is the translation by a being in motion, by a naked body that is the form of the soul and in an appropriate milieu, of a sentiment, of a thought, of a state of passion. It responds to the idea that the essential purpose of dance, as the other arts, is expression, and that this marvelous human body in its entirety, and not the face alone, is capable of rendering the soul visible in its state of dance, decision, flight.”]

Claudé presents a world in which life appears as a shifting series of illusions over which time and nature rule; caught in veils of dreams and desires, Man is naked and vulnerable. Born “blind” at the start of the piece, Man is awakened to life by “sounds of the eternal forest,” the “animals” represented by sounds from the orchestra, materialized in the danced characters of “Bells,” “Panpipes,” “Cymbals” and “Golden Strings.” Costumed more as puppets than as people in helmets, panreeds, bells and disks, these characters were allied with the geometric decor and contrasted with Börlin’s exposed humanity. Spanning an entire life-cycle from birth to death, Börlin, according to Bengt Häger, “employ[ed] formidable physical agility, an extraordinary sensitivity and depth of emotion, and highly expressive arm movements, at once precise and discreet... created to express an inner reality—like a soul laid bare.”¹⁰⁸ Several critics commented on the sculptural quality of Börlin’s dancing, comparing his movement for the “captive man” sequence with the sculpture of Michelangelo.¹⁰⁹

The double Women, figures of Memory and Desire, were swathed in veils to heightened their phantom quality, and recall the billowing illusions of Loie Fuller. Though there is no evidence that Claudé ever saw Fuller perform, his sister Camille knew her through Auguste Rodin, and for a time, was working on a sculpture of the dancer.¹¹⁰ In many of Claudé’s plays, a woman is the mediator between God and man; and in *L’Homme et son désir*, her Eve-like appearance, her trance-like gestures of goading and seducing, underscored by a lone female voice above a solo drum beat, theatricalize what Claudé believed to be “ce pouvoir sur nous de la femme pareil à celui de la

¹⁰⁸Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 28.

¹⁰⁹Katia Bogopolskaia, “Claudé et la danse,” *Saisons de la danse*, February 1995, 41.

¹¹⁰Richard Nelson Current and Marcia Ewing Current, *Loie Fuller: Goddess of Light* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 125.

grâce.”¹¹¹ Doubles fascinated Claudel and were a means to theatricalize the body and its movement:

J'ai eu l'idée de doubler chacun des personnages d'un autre personnage semblable mais muet qui lui sert en quelque sorte d'ombre, ou si l'on veut de témoin...L'un des personnages représente ce qui parle, ce qui intervient dans le drame, et l'autre simplement ce qui est permanent, ce qui existe, ce qui est occupé à nous regarder pendant que nous agissons...ce qui dans un homme ou dans une femme est le témoin continu de lui-même, son site personnifié, sa statue, ou comme disait Platon, son Idée.¹¹²

The use of doubles—the Women, reflections of Moon and Hours, and the implied double of Man—all suggest elements of choreographic structure, heightened by the symmetrical quality of the set. Doubles engaged in movement dramatize inner psychic dichotomies, while music and an overall choreographic concept provide a context of “natural” wholeness.

One other major element completes and unifies these four levels of simultaneous action: the music and the placement of the musicians. Parallel with Claudel's vertical concept of stage space, Milhaud envisioned the musicians placed along both sides of the first three tiers, and grouped according to his orchestration plan:

I could visualize several independent groups: on the third tier, to one side a vocal quartet, and on the other, oboe, trumpet, harp, and doublebass. On the second tier, on either side, the percussion. On one side of the first tier, the piccolo, the flute, the clarinet, and the bass clarinet; on the other, a string quartet. I wanted to preserve absolute independence, melodic, tonal, and rhythmic, for each of these groups. I realized my desire, and in order to facilitate the execution of my score, written for some instruments in common time, for others in triple time, and for others in six-eight, and so on, I inserted an arbitrary bar-line every four beats,

¹¹¹Paul Claudel, quoted in Jacqueline Giry, “Images et métamorphoses du corps féminin dans l'oeuvre de Claudel,” *Claudel Studies* 22 (#1-2, 1985), 33. [“this power woman has over us similar to the power of grace”].

¹¹²Paul Claudel, *Théâtre II*, 1485-1486. [“I had the idea to double each of the characters with another similar but mute character that serves like a sort of shadow, or if one wants, as a witness...One of the characters represents what speaks, what intervenes in the drama, and the other simply represents what is permanent, what exists, what is busy looking at us while we act...what is, in a man or in a woman, the continual witness of the self, his personified state, his statue, or as described by Plato, his Idea.”]

adding accents to preserve the authentic rhythm.¹¹³

Although Milhaud ideally wanted the musicians onstage, practicality won out: the real musicians played from the pit, and Audrey Parr designed life-sized, two-dimensional cut-outs of "musicians" playing the specific instruments and placed onstage as the composer had specified. The bodies of these "musicians" were painted black and outlined in white,¹¹⁴ suggesting shadow figures, and also the influence of jazz on Milhaud's music. At its simplest, Milhaud's score is based in 4/4 time, reflecting the steady, regular movement of the Hours and the Moon. However, the simple time signature is frequently overwhelmed by the score's many melodic lines and rhythmic materials. Christopher Palmer has aptly described how Claudel's theme is expressed in Milhaud's compositional method:

L'Homme et son désir has striking affinities with Ives's *Central Park in the Dark* and many works...which aspire to the ideal of freedom from bar-lines and key-monopolies. This is all in the interest of emulating Nature, exploring the complexities of man's *relationship* with Nature, penetrating the deeper mysteries of Nature herself, recording for all to hear at least one night in the life of our vanished Eden. The music ranges unselfconsciously from euphony to cacophony; but since cacophony is not synonymous with atonality, and since tonality is an acoustical fact of Nature, it is an acoustical fact of Milhaud's music too, however uncompromisingly dissonant it may sound.¹¹⁵

Thus, the music was visually, rhythmically and harmonically striated by its reflection in the presence of the musician figures and dancers. This configuration greatly heightened the overall sense of simultaneity and theatricalized Claudel's sense of the double nature of time.

¹¹³Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music*, 82. Olivier Messiaen, the composer known for *Quartet for the End of Time* and other pieces exploring duration and polyrhythms, saw the Ballets Suédois production of *L'Homme et son désir* and was entranced by its tiered structures. See Harry Halbreich, *Olivier Messiaen* (Paris: Fayard, 1980), 28.

¹¹⁴Nancy Van Norman Baer, "The Ballets Suédois: A Synthesis of Modernist Trends in Art," 20.

¹¹⁵Christopher Palmer, "Darius Milhaud: Poet of Provence," in Darius Milhaud, *My Happy Life: An Autobiography*, translated by Donald Evans, George Hall and Christopher Palmer (London: Marion Boyars, 1995), 15-16.

L'Homme et son désir was first performed by the Ballets Suédois on 6 June 1921 at the Théâtre de Champs-Élysées; it shared the season with another vanguard premiere, *Les Mariés de la tour Eiffel*, written by Cocteau with choreography by Börlin and music by "Les Six." The critical reaction to *L'Homme et son désir* in France was generally favorable, and Pitts Sanborn's remark is typical: "The effect is unique. After a moment or so, one forgets the bizarreness of the background and the absence of dancing in any accepted sense of the term. The figure of man in the center of his cubistic world becomes the sign of all men."¹¹⁶ And *Paris musical* reported that "As for Börlin, he choreographed and danced it as no one else could possibly have done. Thanks to him, we have a new art form."¹¹⁷ The distinguished dance critic André Levinson however, was concerned that the Ballets Suédois, like the Ballets Russes, had allowed design elements to predominate at the cost of the art of dance.¹¹⁸

There was sustained controversy over Milhaud's music, especially its unusual unaccompanied percussion sections, which the critic Lawrence Gilman found to be an asset to the score:

With an orchestra that apparently includes every kind of percussion and noise-producing instrument known to man, from pneumatic drills to police whistles, Milhaud does amazing things. As you listen to it the huge, inchoate terrors of the tropical night, blended with a sensuality that is sometimes of animal ferocity and sometimes of wiredrawn subtlety, issue from the orchestra and lay hold of you. In conjunction with his instruments he uses an effect of wordless voices behind the scenes that is often of haunting and original beauty; and his frenzied, barbaric climax is a thing not easily to be forgotten.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶Pitts Sanborn, "The Swedish Ballet," *Shadowland*, December 1921, 66. Ballets Suédois clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

¹¹⁷*Paris musical*, quoted in Bent Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 28.

¹¹⁸André Levinson, *André Levinson on Dance: Writings from Paris in the Twenties*, edited by Joan Acocella and Lynn Garafola (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), 63-68.

¹¹⁹Lawrence Gilman, "The Swedish Ballet Comes to Town, with Some Musical Moderns in its Train," *Tribune* [New York], 26 November 1923, Ballets Suédois clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

On several occasions, Milhaud stressed how grateful he was to de Maré for keeping *L'Homme et son désir* in the Ballets Suédois repertoire despite the controversy.¹²⁰ Indeed, the ballet was presented fifty-six times over the next three years, and toured with the company throughout Europe and America, taking-up an entire railway car to accommodate its sets, lighting equipment and costumes.¹²¹

In England, the ballet was a source of controversy on moral grounds, and an unsuccessful attempt was made to induce the House of Commons to take action against the Royal Court Theatre, where the Ballets Suédois was to perform.¹²² *L'Homme et son désir* premiered in America at the Century Theatre in New York, one week before Max Reinhardt moved in to reconstruct the space for *The Miracle*. A select audience was appreciative of the performance, but mainstream critics accused the troupe of pretentiousness and "Eiffel Towerism;" the critic for *Evening World* sarcastically remarked,

"Man and his Desire," the third number, was so subtle even in the printed explanation that we, a poor low-brow, cannot attempt to explain it. We can say though that M. Borlin, as the Man, was naked enough to exhibit a fine physique while Mlle. Strandin after a period of calisthenics displayed a form such as no Broadway revue can brag of. A great deal of imagination is required to follow this number. Nevertheless we believe that—as in the case of olives—one might eventually learn to like it even though he be a product of the Middle West.¹²³

Unfortunately, the Ballets Suédois was a short-lived company and, at the close of its

¹²⁰Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music*, 110-111.

¹²¹Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 25, 292.

¹²²"Next the Swedish Ballet," in *The New York Times Magazine*, 11 November 1923, 13.

¹²³Bide Dudley, "Les Ballets Suedois Proves Unusual Entertainment," *Evening World*, 26 November 1923, Ballets Suédois clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

fifth season in 1925 with the production of *Relâche*,¹²⁴ de Maré disbanded the troupe, due to a large financial debt, and the artistic and physical exhaustion of its choreographer and dancers. By the nature of its enterprise, few of the company's works have been revived; however, a new production of *L'Homme et son désir* was presented at the Dalcroze Institute at Hellerau in 1926.¹²⁵

Claudé was quite pleased with the outcome of his collaboration with the Ballets Suédois; in his journal he noted, "Je suis acclamé. Toute la salle se tourne vers ma loge. Quelques protestations contre la musique de Darius Milhaud...Börlin, superbe dans sa nudité."¹²⁶ He further elaborated on the experience several years later, writing that

Il est rare que des auteurs qui dans le domaine du ballet s'avancent hors des chemins battus aient été accueillis et interprétés avec autant d'intelligence et de bonne volonté. Personnellement l'expérience des Ballets Suédois a été pour moi pleine de leçons fructueuses.¹²⁷

It was quite fortunate that a ballet company which was so open to collaboration with writers would be available to Claudé just when he began to experiment with dance. Claudé found in Jean Börlin, as he first saw in Nijinsky, the poet-dancer who could transform his words and images into a performed poem.

After the premiere, Claudé returned to his diplomatic post in Japan, and beginning in the later part of 1921, he saw many performances of Noh and Kabuki, he read scholarship about and translations of the plays, and he became acquainted with

¹²⁴*Relâche*, a Dada-inspired "instantaneous ballet" devised and designed by Francis Picabia, had choreography by Jean Börlin, music by Erik Satie, and incorporated a film by René Clair, *Entr'acte*. See Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet*, 249-273.

¹²⁵Margret Andersen, *Claudé et l'Allemagne*, 122.

¹²⁶Paul Claudé, *Journal I*, 508 (6 June 1921). ["I am acclaimed. All the hall turns to my box. Some protests against the music of Darius Milhaud...Börlin, superb in his nudity."]

¹²⁷Paul Claudé, quoted in Rolf de Maré, *Les Ballets Suédois dans l'art contemporain*, 186-187. ["It is rare for authors who leave the beaten path to be welcomed in the field of ballet and interpreted with so much intelligence and good will. Personally the experience of the Ballets Suédois has been for me full of fruitful lessons."]

several Japanese theatre professionals.¹²⁸ In September 1922, Claudel was asked by Fusuke Nakamura, a noted Kabuki actor, if the Hagoromo-Kai theatre company could mount a production of *L'Homme et son désir* with a score to be composed by Kosaku Yamada (who had written music for Michio Ito). Claudel refused the offer, stating that his piece was “composée pour les Européens,” and that it “ne produirait aucun effet sur la scène japonaise,” but promised to rewrite *L'Homme et son désir* “qui serait mieux adapté à la scène japonaise.”¹²⁹

The new play, now titled *La Femme et son ombre*, was presented at the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo in March 1923, a “great success,” Claudel wrote to Milhaud.¹³⁰ It shares the same theme as the earlier work, but shapes its characters and opportunities for movement according to Noh theatre techniques. As Shinobu Chujo points out,¹³¹ the major difference between the two plays is that in *L'Homme et son désir*, the Man we see onstage is not the necessarily the Man himself, but his double who

¹²⁸See John K. Gillespie, “The Impact of Noh on Paul Claudel’s Style of Playwriting,” *Theatre Journal* 35 (#1, March 1983), 58.

¹²⁹Paul Claudel, quoted in Shinobu Chujo, “Influences du Japon sur *La Femme et son ombre*,” *Claudel Studies* 16 (#1-2, 1989), 73. [Claudel refused the offer, stating the his piece was “composed for Europeans,” and that it “would not bring about any effect on the Japanese stage,” but promised to rewrite *L'Homme et son désir* “which would be better adapted to the Japanese stage.”]

¹³⁰Paul Claudel, *Correspondance Paul Claudel-Darius Milhaud 1912-1953*, 73 (letter #54). Claudel wrote to Milhaud: “Ici on a donné avec un grand succès *La Femme et son ombre*. J’avais des acteurs vraiment épatants, d’une grâce, d’une souplesse et d’une expression tragique superbes. La Lune qui défilait en haut derrière les pins et les reflets représentés par des enfants qui se glissaient un miroir à chaque main entre les nénuphars étaient moins réussis, en grande partie faute de répétitions. La musique purement japonaise, shamisen, flûte, petit violon, harpe de bois, gong, tambours, chanteurs, m’a paru absolument remarquable.” [“Here, *La Femme et son ombre* was played with great success. I had truly stunning actors, endowed with superb grace, suppleness and tragic expression. The Moon which passed above, behind the pine trees, and the reflections represented by children who glided with a mirror in each hand between the water-lilies were not as well-done, mainly because of a lack of rehearsals. The music was purely Japanese, Shamisen, flute, small violin, wooden harp, gong, drums, singers, it seemed absolutely remarkable to me.”]

¹³¹Shinobu Chujo, “Influences du Japon sur *La Femme et son ombre*,” 74.

appears in the “real” Man’s dream; in the Japanese version, the Man becomes the Warrior, the *waki* character, who encounters a Woman, the *shite* character, and the Woman’s Shadow, or the ghost of the Woman he has loved and lost to death. The setting is night, in a deserted, foggy area, the “border between two Worlds;”¹³² the stage is divided into three levels, the top level for the Moon, the middle for the actors who perform downstage of a screen, and the stage level for the water which reflects the Moon. The Warrior is obsessed by the Shadow, while the Woman taunts the Man, “Illusion vaine! C’est moi qui suis la réalité.”¹³³ In *L’Homme et son désir*, the Woman’s body, as shown through her dance, was a source of salvation for the Man; but in the later play, the Woman’s body is also dangerous and brings about his damnation. The Warrior tries unsuccessfully to separate the Woman from the Shadow with his sword, only to strike the Shadow, leaving the Woman dead. This major section of the piece relies on contrasted movements between the Woman and the Shadow, the interplay between worlds of reality and dream:

The whole thing gives the impression of a dream...[the actors] must move in a kind of trance...Every gesture springs from a kind of hypnosis, in harmony with the music—the inexhaustible flood of our grief, rising and falling—and with the chorus which is our memory...It seems as though with each gesture he has to overcome not only gravity and the folds of the immense garment, but death itself; the gesture is the slow copy in eternity of a dead passion. It is life brought back from the Shades and mirrored in our mind’s eye...We see each of our actions frozen in immobility, and nothing is left of movement but its meaning.¹³⁴

The Noh theatre provided Claudel with a movement convention designed to explore and, at times to bridge, the gap between visible and invisible worlds, with its trance-like slowness, suggestiveness and close relationship to music.

During the 1930s, Claudel continued to apply the “fruitful lessons”

¹³²Paul Claudel, *La Femme et son ombre*, in *Théâtre* II, 651.

¹³³*Ibid.* [“Vain illusion! I am the reality.”]

¹³⁴Paul Claudel, “Letter to Professor Miyajima,” (1926) in *Claudel on the Theatre*, 55.

from the Ballets Suédois experience. He wrote several "mimodramas," including *Le Jet de Pierre* (1936) and *La Danse des morts* (1938); not created for a particular dancer or company, these stand as isolated experiments, and were not produced during his lifetime. More interesting is his increased use of dance and heightened movement in many of his otherwise "straight" plays of the period. In the revised version of *L'Échange*, for example, Claudel literally has Louis dance his emotion at several crucial moments in the play, "standing, dancing, and declaiming," to which Marthe responds, "we're like dancers turning back to back, never together, yet never seeing each other."¹³⁵ Tobie, in *L'Histoire de Tobi et de Sara*, expresses through the movement of his body, his long fight with the magical fish. *Le Livre de Christophe Colomb* is infused with stylized movement as Columbus and his doubles roam through a universe that refuses to cohere, and also includes several formal dances, as the "Four Quadrilles" of Envy, Ignorance, Pride and Avarice dance to instill panic and fear. And in his vast drama, *Le Soulier de satin*, statues come to life, characters swim for the duration of an entire scene, the courtiers of the floating palace of the King of Spain mime the movements of the sea in stylized "rhythmic gymnastics," and in the scene of "L'Ombre Double," the long-separated hero and heroine are reunited, but only the movement of their shadows is seen. Claudel saw the realization of many of these moments in performance through his collaboration with Jean-Louis Barrault, who directed six of Claudel's plays during the 1940s and gave them a distinctive production style that was largely informed by movement and mime. Claudel saw in Barrault the perfect actor, one who "comprend que l'on doit jouer non seulement avec la langue et les yeux, mais avec tout le corps, se servir des ressources

¹³⁵Paul Claudel, *The Exchange*, translated by Louise R. Witherell and H. Lawrence Zillmer in *Claudel Studies* II (#2, 1975), 8-9.

infinies d'expression que fournit le corps humain."¹³⁶

¹³⁶Paul Claudel, quoted in Michel Lioure, *L'esthétique dramatique de Paul Claudel*, 580-581. [Barrault "understands that one has to play not only with one's tongue and eyes, but with one's whole body, to serve the infinite resources of expression that the human body provides."]

Conclusion: *Dance-Theatre as a Collaborative Genre*

Throughout this dissertation, collaborations between theatre and dance have been studied on two interrelated levels: the interaction among art forms within a work, and the specific collaborative relationship among artists creating a production.¹ All of the works were expressly created for stage performance; the collaborative nature of these pieces requires some level of realization in order to effect the integration of dance and dramatic elements. While each of these projects was initiated by a poet-playwright who brought a dancer into what was initially conceived as a dramatic context, the process of collaboration at its best allowed both artists to imagine their work in new ways.

That these projects occurred at the turn-of-the-century was auspicious for the particular forms and methods they utilized. Symbolism provided an artistic climate that was particularly conducive to interactions between theatre and dance. In its belief in fundamental correspondences among the arts, symbolism encouraged experimentation with artistic elements (motion, color, pattern, or rhythm, for example) abstracted from their primary art forms and applied to other disciplines. Symbolist playwrights experimented with new forms to express their subjective visions, and in 1907 Meyerhold predicted that the new "stylized" theatre "anticipate[d] the revival of the dance."² Early modern dancers were redefining how the body could be expressive: no longer servants to traditional technique or the hierarchy of a ballet company, these dancers

¹The orientation of my thoughts in this Conclusion has been assisted by discussions of Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang* and Kokoschka's *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* and the aesthetics of collaborative form in Thomas Jensen Hines, *Collaborative Form: Studies in the Relations of the Arts* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1991), 99-144.

²Vsevolod Meyerhold, "The Stylized Theatre," in *Meyerhold on Theatre*, translated and edited by Edward Braun (New York: Hill & Wang, 1969), 63.

expressed a personal vision, often deriving movement directly from the experience of their own bodies. While earlier conventions had typed the performer into a limited number of dance roles, the authority and vision of early modern dancers demonstrated that the dancer's image could be invented anew. Moreover, from the early reforms of Fokine, the individuality of the dancer was more fully recognized, as was his contributions to the making of a dance. For all four playwrights, dance provided a way of extending language into "inexpressible" realms, and the non-referential nature of interpreting dance movement became analogous to the creative process.

The playwrights under study were intrigued by problems of theatrical realization and took an active part in the production of their works, hence the inclination to reach out to dancers. In their first attempts to make the stage a place for poetry, they stylized and minimized movement and scenery, often gravitating towards stillness and evocative poses. Yeats's collaborations with Craig and Monck on revivals of *The Hour Glass* and *The Countess Cathleen* for example explored the possibilities of stylized and static movement in a mostly two-dimensional stage environment; the characters in D'Annunzio's early symbolist plays are "statuesque" in pose and theme; and both Claudel and Hofmannsthal were fascinated by the visual impact of movement to connect personal gesture to larger themes. In all of these early experiments, the playwrights were preoccupied with the problem of the actor's movement onstage, but the solution was often to impose a set of restrictions so that the movement could be subordinated to the poetic design and meaning of the verbal text. In their later collaborations with early modern dancers, movement was generated from the artistic vision and technique of a particular dancer, and playwrights had to confront the problem of allowing movement to reign more as an equal component with the verbal text.

The function of "form" in these projects is complex. On one level, the playwright needed to choose an initial frame for his text, whether it be a play, a libretto,

or a ballet or pantomime scenario. Claudel and D'Annunzio were drawn to medieval mystery plays for their simple, iconographic power, while Hofmannsthal preferred the use of fairy tales, legends and allegory with their ritualized patterns of action. Yeats and Claudel discovered in Noh a long tradition of theatre practice that incorporated dance and movement, and a structure based on the intersection of natural and supernatural worlds. In adapting these forms, plot was usually subordinated to patterning of events based on musical structures (variations, recapitulations, cadences, etc.), and speech was not based on the design of realistic conversation, but took more stylized modes of recitation, chant and song. In creating their contributions, the dancers also created form. Music was the prime formal element for choreography of the period. Dance compositions tended to be short, thematic material was minimal with ideas repeated rather than developed, and movement was based largely on rhythmic and melodic patterns of the music. In sharing a musical orientation to form, both playwrights and dancers had the opportunity to share a method of working. Unlike the actor, the dancer in these projects embodies an image more than she directly "impersonates" a character; these pieces call on the dancer not merely to be the interpreter of an already existing text, but to be the creator of an aspect of the production that remains uniquely her own.

The degree of integration of dance and text (as well as other elements including music and design) varies considerably; each project presents its own set of challenges concerning how to direct the audience's focus among theatrical elements. Yeats was particularly sensitive to the problem of balancing the demands of a text with the contributions from dance and other component arts. By selecting pared-down and abstract movement, simple music and a minimal setting, he retained control over the audience's focus in *At the Hawk's Well*. Yeats had a strong grasp of the overall shape of this piece and he learned to recognize the points at which he needed to diminish the impact of his text: during the rehearsal period he was continually engaged in a process

of deleting sections of verse so that the dance could more fully assert itself. With *Fighting the Waves*, Yeats felt that he had “discovered a new form by this combination of dance, speech and music.”³ For this production, he created his text with collaboration foremost in mind: writing in prose, he nearly eliminated narrative description and incorporated a complex orchestral score and an ensemble of dancers.

Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien and *La Pisanelle, ou La Mort parfumée* are works in which a sustained integration of component arts was not achieved. D’Annunzio’s texts were densely packed with allusions and images that seemed redundant when paired with the lavishness of Bakst’s decor. Working mostly in isolation from each other, D’Annunzio, Rubinstein and their other collaborators had no adequate opportunity during the developmental and rehearsal process to effect the integration rather than the mere accumulation of elements. *La Pisanelle* was perhaps the more successful of the two collaborations due to the fact that Meyerhold tried to reduce the dominance of the text by treating it more as a musical accompaniment to the visual spectacle than as a primary element.

The productions discussed in the preceding chapters span some nine countries and almost a quarter century, and they were all recognized as defying conventional genre categories in their time. Can these projects be said to constitute their own tradition or genre of the “dance play” or “dance-theatre?” In choosing to write plays for dancers, all of these playwrights were conscious of writing in what they viewed as a new genre. Yeats was most emphatic in naming his series of “plays for dancers” and appears to have been the first to use that descriptive phrase. Hofmannsthal wrote “wordless plays” for what he termed the “new pantomime,” Claudel created his “poèmes plastiques,” and D’Annunzio devised “mimodramas” for

³W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, 768.

his expansive “Théâtre de Fête.” The diversity of these terms suggests that this was a rather diffuse and informal movement, buoyed by the period’s keen interest in the expressive qualities of the body. These writers were all contemporaries⁴ and to varying degrees knew of each other’s work, but each invented his own dance-play form for himself, in collaboration with particular dancers. Though they shared a similar creative impetus and many symbolist affinities, their working methods and materials were quite varied, and the productions they created were strikingly different in scope and tone.

Audiences and critics were usually at a loss to perceive the overall shape or intent of these works. Typical of the average response was the remark of one reviewer about *Fighting the Waves*; he wrote that the piece was “neither poetry, drama, ballet, nor music,” though “being something of all four, is good theatre.”⁵ By the nature of their creation, these collaborations between playwrights and dancers challenged their audience’s expectations about genre and form. At their basis, these works disrupt realistic conventions governing the coordination of words and gestures, while combining dance and theatrical elements in new, more abstract ways. It is therefore not surprising that all of the works in this study met with mixed to negative reviews from the contemporary press, though individual aspects of these productions garnered praise, especially the performances of dancers. The originality and diversity of these works continues to obscure the visibility of this diffuse genre, and current scholarship tends to cast these collaborations as peripheral to each playwright’s main body of work. The one exception is Yeats’s *At the Hawk’s Well*, which has received a great deal of critical attention, but usually from a literary point of view without discussion of the effects of the work in actual performance. The complex and unique nature of these pieces however

⁴Yeats (1865-1939), D’Annunzio (1863-1938), Hofmannsthal (1874-1929), Claudel (1868-1955).

⁵*The Times*, 31 March 1930, 9.

can be appreciated only through an exploration of their initial rehearsal and production periods, set within the context of their collaborators's artistic goals.

Yeats probably has the most defined legacy: his dance plays directly precipitated a small movement among several in his circle: Gordon Bottomley, Sturge Moore, Laurence Binyon and Terence Gray all wrote dance plays in verse, some based on Noh models, which were performed in alternative venues such as John Masefield's garden theatre in Oxford and the Festival Theatre in Cambridge. Yeats was briefly associated with London's Group Theatre which was founded by Rupert Doone (a former soloist with the Ballets Russes), and Yeats's influence can be seen on the theatre's production style of integrating dance, music, mime and dialogue, and its presentation of several dance-inspired plays by W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood during the 1930s, notably *The Dance of Death*, *The Ascent of F6*, and *On The Frontier* (in which the dancer Lydia Lopokova played the principal role of Anna and Benjamin Britten composed the score).⁶ "If there is a future for drama, and particularly for poetic drama," queried T. S. Eliot in 1928, "will it not be in the direction indicated by the ballet?"⁷ Although Eliot was an ardent admirer of the Ballets Russes and wrote several articles extolling the art of ballet, dance did not find its way into his plays, though images of dancing frequently occur in his poetry. Several critics have charted Yeats's influence on later British and Irish playwrights including John Arden, Harold Pinter and Edward Bond,⁸ but while some of these plays may contain dance-like movement, they

⁶See Earl Miner, *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature*, 216-218, 226-227; Glenda Leeming, *Poetic Drama* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 138-159; and Michael J. Sidnell, *Dances of Death: The Group Theatre of London in the Thirties* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).

⁷T. S. Eliot, "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 46.

⁸See Katharine Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett*, 195-219 and Irena Janicka-Swidarska, *Dance in Drama: Studies in English Renaissance and Modern Theatre*, 158-172.

were not originally conceived as "dance plays" per se. Samuel Beckett was known to have held Yeats's dance plays in high regard and wagered that he would "give the whole of Shaw for a sup of the Hawk's Well."⁹ Beckett's use of ritualized movement closely coordinated with rhythmic speech had strong affinities with Yeats's method, and one of his last works was a completely danced play, *Quad* (1982).

Yeats's dance plays have been intermittently revived, usually in small, alternative theatres. Although the dance plays were for a long period neglected by the Abbey Theatre, they have recently been revived under the aegis of the "W. B. Yeats International Theatre Festival" which has been regularly held during the 1990s, and the plays have also been consistently presented by the Lyric Theatre in Belfast since the 1970s. In England his plays have been produced mostly by fringe and academic theatres, and in the United States they have been presented by university theatres as well as off-off-Broadway, most notably by dancer/choreographer Jean Erdman and her company at the Theatre of the Open Eye. Erdman brought to Yeats's plays her extensive study of myth and ritual and her distinguished experience as a principal dancer with Martha Graham's first company. Her productions strove to fully realize the fantasy elements of the plays by using more dancers than Yeats indicated in his texts to materialize conflicting aspects of characters and themes; her attention to the interplay of music (composed for her work by Teiji Ito, Michio Ito's nephew), movement and lighting was quite effective.¹⁰ Yeats's dance plays seem to hold a special attraction for experimental

⁹Samuel Beckett, quoted in Katharine Worth, "Enigmatic Influences: Yeats, Beckett and Noh," in Masaru Sekine and Christopher Murray, *Yeats and the Noh: A Comparative Study* (London: Colin Smythe, Ltd., 1990), 149.

¹⁰See *Moon Mysteries* (contains *A Full Moon in March*, *The Cat and the Moon*, and *The Only Jealousy of Emer* by W. B. Yeats), directed and choreographed by Jean Erdman, videotaped in performance on 15 December 1974 at the Theater of the Open Eye, New York by Global Village. Videocassettes (74 minutes). New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

directors and groups: as discussed in Chapter One, productions of Yeats's plays influenced the formation of the Little Theatre movement in Japan during the 1920s, and in Paris during the 1970s, Le Théâtre d'Aran, a group of actors trained in Grotowski's technique, devoted themselves to performing the work of Yeats.¹¹

D'Annunzio and Claudel's dance plays were dependent on a much more complex level of production than were Yeats's, and therefore revivals have been few and limited to established companies. *L'Homme et son désir* was presented at the Dalcroze Institute at Hellerau in 1926, mostly through the promptings of Milhaud, and a new production was staged for the Rome Opera Ballet in 1956 by the Hungarian choreographer Aurel Milloss who was trained by Laban and Cecchetti and known for his expressionistic style. Ida Rubinstein appeared in several rather conventional revivals of *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* during the 1920s and 30s at the Paris Opéra, Covent Garden and La Scala. Debussy and D'Annunzio pursued plans for a film version of the work which were unsuccessful. Concert versions in the form of an oratorio were made and often performed, and several choreographers, most notably Serge Lifar and Maurice Béjart, created ballets based on the material. Robert Wilson's visually stunning 1988 Paris Opéra production was remarkable in capturing the exotic and dream-like atmosphere of the original work accomplished through a completely different, minimalist style of staging. Large sections of the text were cut, and Debussy's score was augmented by an aural design that included recorded text and modified sounds of arrows hitting their targets; all movement was highly stylized and the dance episodes typically

¹¹See James W. Flannery, *W. B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 374.

underplayed the extreme emotion of the moment.¹² Because of the hybrid nature of these works, the revivals which appear to have been most successful are those which have taken a bold and fresh look at the material and which were free to explore the collaborative process anew.

In 1947, upon rediscovering after several decades a woodcut he had made of Grete Wiesenthal in performance and some of Hofmannsthal's letters to the dancer, Erwin Lang wrote to her,

Ich war an die schöne Zeit mit Hugo und Dir erinnert und den Anfang unserer Bestrebungen. Es erschien mir wunderbar, daß der geistige Raum, in dem wir uns einstmals begegnet sind, uns noch immer einschließt...So grüßt mich aus dem Holzschnitt etwas Unvergängliches, das erlebt wurde und gedeutet. Die Flügel, die uns damals gewaschen sind, haben uns auch weiter getragen über Herrlichkeiten und Abgründe. Lächle nicht...in der ich jetzt lebe, werden die Erinnerungen oft deutlich und die Lebensadern sichtbarer.¹³

Although D'Annunzio and Rubinstein may have had a somewhat strained working relationship, the opportunity for these five sets of artists to collaborate comprised a particularly rewarding and renewing period in their lives. Through an ongoing dialogue during the inception, rehearsal and performance of these pieces, both playwrights and dancers had a greater need to objectify, articulate and share their ideas and methods than artists usually have when working alone or within the conventions of a single discipline. What is most evident in all of these dance-theatre projects was the central role played in their realization and unique form by the collaborative process.

¹²See *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, performed by members of the Paris Opéra Ballet, directed by Robert Wilson, videotaped at a dress rehearsal at the Maison de la Culture, Bobigny, France on 25 March 1988 by Jacques Bernard. Videocassettes (179 minutes). New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection.

¹³Erwin Lang, quoted in Martin Lang and Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Grete Wiesenthal—Die Schönheit der Sprache des Körpers im Tanz*, 51. ["I recalled the lovely times with Hugo and you and the beginning of our strivings. It seemed wonderful to me that the spiritual space where we met still encloses us...Thus I was greeted from the woodcut by something which has not passed away, that was experienced and noted. The wings which we grew at that time have borne us further over magnificent things and abysses. Do not laugh...the memories often take on greater significance as the veins of life become more visible."]

Appendix: List of Collaborations Studied

Title: *At the Hawk's Well*
 Playwright: W. B. Yeats
 Dancer: Michio Ito
 Choreograher: Michio Ito
 Composer: Edmund Dulac
 Director: W. B. Yeats
 Designer: Edmund Dulac
 Date: 4 February 1916*

Title: *Fighting the Waves*
 Playwright: W. B. Yeats
 Dancer: Ninette de Valois
 Choreograher: Ninette de Valois
 Composer: George Antheil
 Director: Lennox Robinson
 Designer: Dolly Travers-Smith, Hildo Krop
 Date: 13 August 1929

Title: *The King of the Great Clock Tower*
 Playwright: W. B. Yeats
 Dancer: Ninette de Valois
 Choreograher: Ninette de Valois
 Composer: Arthur Duff
 Director: Lennox Robinson
 Designer: Dolly Travers-Smith, George Atkinson
 Date: 30 July 1934

Title: *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*
 Playwright: Gabriele D'Annunzio
 Dancer: Ida Rubinstein
 Choreograher: Michel Fokine
 Composer: Claude Debussy
 Director: Armand Bour
 Designer: Léon Bakst
 Date: 22 May 1911

Title: *La Pisanelle, ou La Mort parfumée*
 Playwright: Gabriele D'Annunzio
 Dancer: Ida Rubinstein
 Choreograher: Michel Fokine
 Composer: Ildebrando Pizzetti
 Director: Vsevolod Meyerhold
 Designer: Léon Bakst
 Date: 11 June 1913

Title: *Amor und Psyche*
 Playwright: Hugo von Hofmannsthal
 Dancer: Grete Wiesenthal
 Choreographer: Grete Wiesenthal
 Composer: Rudolph Braun
 Director: Grete Wiesenthal
 Designer: Erwin Lang
 Date: 15 September 1911

Title: *Das fremde Mädchen*
 Playwright: Hugo von Hofmannsthal
 Dancer: Grete Wiesenthal
 Choreographer: Grete Wiesenthal
 Composer: Hannes Ruch
 Director: Grete Wiesenthal
 Designer: Erwin Lang
 Date: 15 September 1911

Title: *Die Biene*
 Playwright: Hugo von Hofmannsthal
 Dancer: Grete Wiesenthal
 Choreographer: Grete Wiesenthal
 Composer: Clemens von Franckenstein
 Director: Grete Wiesenthal
 Designer: Erwin Lang
 Date: 19 November 1916

Title: *L'Homme et son désir*
 Playwright: Paul Claudel
 Dancer: Jean Börlin, Ballets Suédois
 Choreographer: Jean Börlin
 Composer: Darius Milhaud
 Director: Jean Börlin
 Designer: Audrey Parr
 Date: 6 June 1921

*Denotes date of first performance.

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PAGES
290-351

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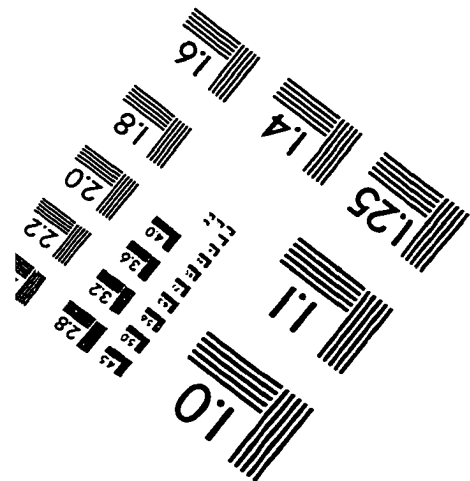
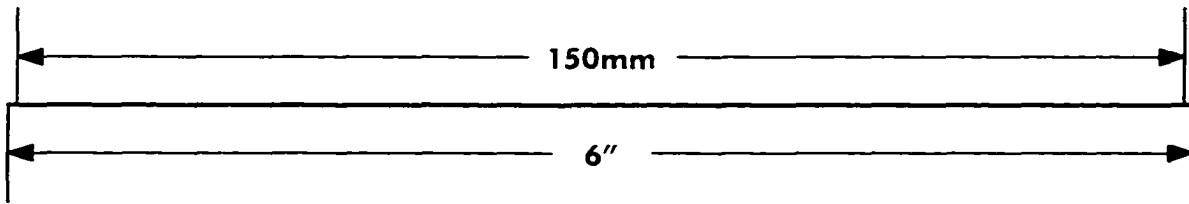
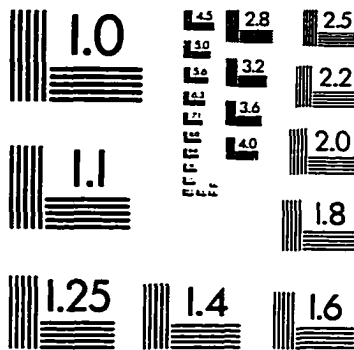
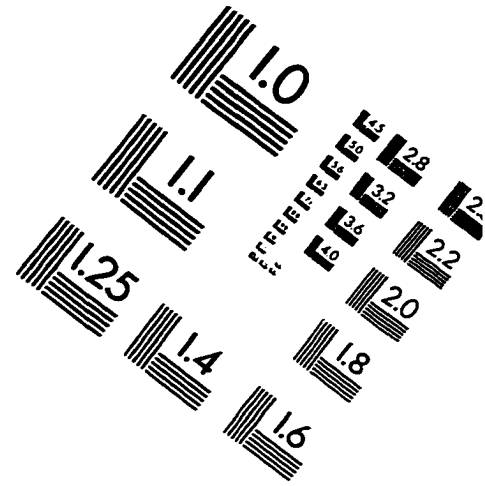
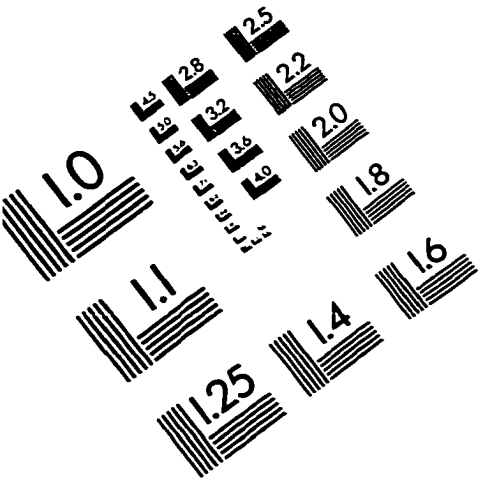
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