Highlights in Anglo-American Drama

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Viewpoints from Southeast Europe

Edited by

Radmila Nastić and Vesna Bratić

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-8682-3
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8682-6

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HIGHLIGHTS IN ANGLO-AMERICAN DRAMA: VIEWPOINTS FROM SOUTH-EAST EUROPE— AN INTRODUCTION

RADMILA NASTIĆ AND VESNA BRATIĆ

The present volume represents viewpoints on some aspects of modern Anglo-American drama and dramatists written by scholars from ex-Yugoslav republics and resulting from long years of common interest and cooperation in the field between the corresponding English Departments in the region. The impetus that led us to embark on this project was the *Word Across Cultures* Conference organised by the Institute of Foreign Languages, University of Montenegro in Podgorica, Montenegro in July 2014.

The scholars who participated in the conference's literature section were able to observe that most of the papers presented focused on (post)modern Anglo-American drama, which led us to conclude that Anglo-American drama is a growing field of interest among regional literature scholars; this gave us the inspiration to work towards creating a book on the topic. What ensued were extensive discussions between the participants and a wide network of drama scholars as to the content and title of the prospective book. Finally, we settled on the title HIGHLIGHTS IN ANGLO-AMERICAN DRAMA: VIEWPOINTS FROM SOUTH-EAST EUROPE which, we believe, best reflects the joint interests and efforts of our contributors, who range from experienced scholars of international standing, to mid-career specialists and young scholars with noteworthy international references.

We would like to think that this book will appeal to both an academic and a non-academic readership. The academic readership will certainly benefit from this book, since English and, especially, American drama is not appropriately represented by the number of book titles it deserves world-wide. Some authors even go so far as to call American drama (and, *mutatis mutandis*, the drama scholarship) "a bastard child", "an illegitimate offspring" of literature (and literature scholarship). While

working on our doctoral theses, even the youngest among us had to cope with a noticeable shortage of books or volumes of essays on Anglo-American drama, and we had to resort to individual papers spread across diverse journals. Each drama scholar knows how difficult and time consuming it is to search through a variety of journals on mostly general topics in order to find useful drama-based papers, which is why searching for a drama-specific book feels somewhat like hunting for pearls. This is why we believe the book makes a genuine contribution to drama scholarship, not only by the very value of its content but as a source of ideas for prospective young researchers.

The volume can also be used by undergraduate and Masters students to help with seminar and Masters papers, especially bearing in mind the number of students represented by the English departments from which the contributors come, some of which include drama courses as part of their syllabi.

The South-East European perspective on Anglo-American drama also represents a valuable addition to existing drama scholarship, since all the contributors are from the ex-Yugoslav republics and write from a standpoint of multiple othernesses. The book might also be of interest to theatre and film scholars and the general non-academic readership, notably among theatre and film enthusiasts, because of the variety of approaches adopted in the papers.

The first chapter, as an appropriate introduction to the volume, centres on one of the founders of modern English drama, W. B. Yeats and the perfomative aspect of drama, while the remaining chapters explore a variety of postmodern British and American plays and playwrights. The second chapter dwells on social criticism in Harold Pinter and David Hare and the third on Pinter's American "counterpart" David Mamet and the phenomenon of "(retro)active revenge of the other" explored in his recent plays. The fourth chapter continues in the same vein, exploring how American society is re-created in the tales "told" in the plays of Sam Shepard, where both the norm and the Other are equally elusive in the Mexican dreamland landscape. In the fifth chapter we are back in the UK, exploring the overtly postmodernist plays by Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Kane. The chapter centres on Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire* and follows logically from the previous chapter, as Sam Shepard and Wenders shared postmodern(ist) artistic interests, made apparent in their collaboration on *Paris, Texas.* The sixth chapter ventures on a journey through the sinister fairy-tale land of Martin McDonagh's Ireland, commenting on contemporary violence, while the seventh employs a sociological and anthropological approach to marriage and relationships in

Anglo-American drama. The eighth chapter opens up the entirely new question of the reception and theatrical publication of Anglo-American plays in the region. It deals with the (non)presence of a scholarly discourse on American drama in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the ninth and the tenth focus on the reception of Harold Pinter's works in Slovenia and Croatia, respectively. The ninth considers a production of *The Birthday Party* as an intriguing blend of both play and film, and the tenth embarks on the venture of further examining how Harold Pinter's work is received in Croatia.

CHAPTER ONE

YEATS'S PLAYS AND TRADITIONAL THEATRE

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1. Introduction

William Butler Yeats began writing plays very early in his career and, to the end of his life, considered playwriting an important aspect of his literary creation. Writing at a time when, in the theatre, realism prevailed, he increasingly felt the need to side with the opposite camp, the one that, over the decades, produced the anti-naturalistic theories and experiments of Antonin Artaud and Jacques Copeau in France, of Max Reinhardt and Bertolt Brecht in Germany and of various alternative theatres in Moscow and St Petersburg (later Leningrad), to name just a few. Since "[r]ealism is created for the common people and was always their peculiar delight" (Yeats 1916, viii), and since, in the theatre just as in anything else, Yeats is an aristocrat believing in a primordial authenticity of the particular human expression he is observing and undertaking, he cannot but deplore the existence of a stage—and its consequent identification with the theatre in general—whose guiding ideal is a thorough reproduction of the outside, "real" world. The contemporary situation, however, was only the tip of an iceberg: for almost three centuries, the voice and bodily gestures had been losing their expressivity (Ibid.,ii), and it was high time we discovered "grave and decorative" gestures and scenery, recovered the artificial potential of the human voice, as well as "dresses of so little irrelevant magnificence that the mortal actors and actresses may change without much labour into the immortal people of romance" (Yeats 1903, 265-266). All this was in order to realize a theatrical maximum, seen as a maximum distancing from everyday, "functional" practices, as a maximum activation of properties specific to the theatre. This naturally led Yeats to the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total theatre including and unifying all kinds of

arts. Such drama goes back to the times of yore, when the boundary between art and religion was ill-pronounced, and very permeable. As early as 1899, Yeats writes that he wants a drama that will be performed in hidden temples, with its own priesthood, that will, he hopes, "make their Art into the Art of the People" (qtd. in Ellmann 1979, 133).[1] For Yeats, as for so many others, the theatre had begun in ritual (Yeats 1903, 266, but also in many other places), and it was the site to which it had to be redeemed.

Much has been made of the influence of the Japanese *nō* drama on Yeats – too much. Yeats's intuition, which, coupled with his artistry, made him the profound poet he was, would have been a poor thing, indeed, had he needed to wait for an external factor to be put in motion. Quotations like the above from 1899, along with specific references to his plays, could be easily multiplied to show that Yeats had been groping for different, non-naturalistic, solutions well before the noteworthy winter of 1913/14, when he was introduced (textually rather than performatively, alas) to the world of *nō*.[2] The latter was only a crystallization of a growing vision.[3] In the present chapter I intend to show that virtually all "innovations" of Yeats's maturing dramatic theory and practice (he constantly rewrote his own plays, in search of the right form) had already been shared by many, sometimes all, great theatrical traditions of the world, sometimes for centuries, or at a time well over two millennia before his own earthly existence. Yeats saw none, but intuited the primordial, ritual, religious sensibility, common to them all. *Nō* is only a part of a much wider world stage, by far the largest part of which does, true enough, pertain to South, Southeast and East Asia. At his own home, Yeats took the best of the traditional theatre he had at his disposal: Greek drama (see especially his versions of Sophocles's Oedipus plays, or *The King's Threshold* (1904), modelled on classical Greek drama), medieval and Elizabethan drama (e.g., the latter's influence on the technical setup of *On Baile's Strand* (1904)). Of course, by Yeats's time their performative features had all been long dead and forgotten, unlike the bulk of dramatic practices outside the West. A chapter-size consideration can only scrape the surface, but it should suffice to show Yeats the playwright as belonging to a tradition into which he was not born (the same could be said for almost all of Yeats). I concentrate on the performative aspects of both Yeats's theatre and traditional theatres, and use the term *traditional* in the loose meaning of pre-modern—which roughly coincides with pre-naturalistic—but give preference to what might more properly be called *classical* drama and its offshoots, rather than to the many folk forms. I am deliberately downsizing my references to *nō*, though fully aware of the

true status it has in both Yeats's and the world's dramaturgy. A more proper examination of a subject already sufficiently analyzed would fit ill with the space I can afford.[4] In some cases the theatrical forms examined are not particularly old, but they can with certainty or in all likelihood be derived from older, more "classical" forms, which derivation authenticates their presentation of traditional practices.

2. The stage

"I call to the eye of the mind..." By the time the two musicians first pronounced these words to open *At the Hawk's Well* (1917)—which, in its turn, opens *Four Plays for Dancers*, the first of an immediate *nō*-inspiration—Yeats had already amply experimented with the scenery, reducing it to suggestive essentials, and leaving the more literal, descriptive, lacunae to be filled by the creativity of the actor and the imagination of the audience, always supported by the text of the play itself. Thus, in the same play, the stage can already be "any bare space before a wall against which stands a patterned screen" (Yeats 1921, 3). The screen (or curtain) pattern may be of mountain and sky, as in *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1919). The important thing is that it should only suggest, only create the atmosphere, the mood—which can imply representing something that is an accompaniment to, not a reflection of the text—and should not be a precise mimetic prop to the physical locale (Ibid., 53). Any rich, heavily painted, ready-made scenery ridicules the world-creating potential of the text, underrates the actor's powers to express it, and stifles the imagination of the audience. The setting, like the costuming, should be symbolically decorative— colours are thus more than welcome—which lifts it out of time and place, carrying it nearer to faeryland (Yeats 1911, 217).

This is in perfect harmony with the aesthetics of traditional theatre. In contrast to a cluttered and, starting with the Baroque, a perspective-ridden Western stage, traditional scenery, including the stage background, is always kept to a minimum. *Khon*, the classical dance drama of Thailand, and the oldest still to be seen there, even goes as far as featuring simple movements against a white screen (even though its rich plots, based as they are on the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, offer ample opportunities for visual literalization of its ambience). *Jingxi*—best known as Beijing opera—makes use of a non-representative, multicoloured backdrop owned personally by the star actor of the troupe (Bowers 1960, 283). Ancient Greek theatre was no exception: in its exemplary period (fifth century BC), the only background was the façade of the *skēnḗ* building, possibly

decorated in architectural perspective. In *At the Hawk's Well,* the well is indicated by a square blue cloth (Yeats 1921, 5), but Yeats can also represent things synecdochically, i.e., offering a part for the whole. Thus, his preference for a forest pattern over a forest painting to indicate a forest (qtd. in Ellmann 1979, 132) is strikingly reminiscent of some traditional practices, like the *nō* substitution of a framed twig for a forest.[5]

Traditionally, arm in arm with poor scenery, go modest stage properties. Objects used by the actors are make-believe or at least stylized, rather than literally present. In *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919), Emer moves her hand *as though* putting logs on an *imagined* fire and stirring it into a blaze (Yeats 1921, 33), just as in *jingxi* more stable props like door thresholds and stairs are only suggested through mime (the actor pretends to open a door and takes a high step whenever entering a room). A castle wall can be indicated by a blue cloth with painted white bricks, held up by stage attendants. Some props mean what they are (pots, cups, brooms), some are again synecdoches (oars mean a boat), while others can be all kinds of things, depending on the context (a chair can be a chair, but also a throne, a garden bench, or a tower, if the actor stands on it, an impenetrable barrier, if the heroine stands behind it in distress, or a surmountable obstacle, if a warrior jumps over it in acrobatic bravado) (for more, see Bowers 1960, 283-284).[6] The *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the oldest treatise on classical Sanskrit theatre (*nāṭya*), dating from at least the first centuries AD, allows for both realistic and conventionalized kinds of props, but the former were not to be simply borrowed from real life; rather, they were expected to be especially made for the purpose.[7] Here, too, parts may have represented wholes, and either props were made of cloth-covered cane frames (like in *nō*), or a piece of cloth would be stretched over the frame and then painted so as to resemble the wanted object (as in Assamese *aṅkīya nāṭ*, which, though not more than half a millennium old, is very probably one of the closest relatives of *nāṭya*, now centuries dead). Even a form as realistic and popular as Thai *likay*—only two hundred years old, but, performatively, heir to classical forms—does away with a stage setting, keeping only a dais and a few chairs brought in by the actors themselves, if needed.

Among the innovations of the *Four Plays for Dancers,* we find the unfolding and folding of a black cloth. In *At the Hawk's Well* the First Musician stands motionless at the front centre of the stage, with the folded cloth hanging from his hands. The other two musicians appear and start slowly unfolding it. It is while they are doing this that they also start unfolding the words of the play: "I call to the eye of the mind..." Unfolded, the cloth presents a golden hawk pattern. The cloth is slowly

folded up. As such, this element, found in all four "*nō* plays", is not a *nō* feature, and it remains curious as long as we do not amplify our understanding by other theatrical traditions. I argue that it performs the function of a curtain. The curtain is always a metaleptic threshold, i.e., a boundary line between worlds. Although we tend to identify it with the one belonging to the proscenium arch, this is a modern, Western invention. Traditional theatres, if introducing a curtain, tend to have it at the rear, or, as in *nō*, at the beginning of the *hashigakari* bridge, for curtained entrances. The role of the curtain may become especially dramatic. In Japanese *kabuki* there is a door covered by a curtain whose metal rings hang on a metal rod. Their squeaking announces the imminent emergence of somebody important. In the Indian *rās līlā* the curtain opens to reveal Kṛṣṇa (usually spelt Krishna) and Rādhā, the highlights of this religious performance. This is very much like revealing the golden hawk on Yeats's cloth. There is more, however. Of particular interest is the use of a loose curtain in a number of Indian theatres, starting possibly with *nāṭya* itself, where a curtain—and even more than one, for a multiple scene—might have been held by attendants and then lowered or pulled aside to present a character. This is certainly what we find in some later theatres. In *kūṭiyāṭṭam*, the Keralite form believed by many to still preserve much of the original *nāṭya*, a simple red curtain is used for special entries, while its close relative, *kathakali*, has gone the farthest. The first preliminary dance is performed behind the hand-held curtain. Very often, before a major character appears, he slowly peeps from behind the curtain. However, when a powerful character appears for the first time, a struggle is staged between the character and the curtain. Accompanied by drums and cymbals, the character performs a number of dance sequences only partly visible to the audience – until the curtain is dropped, and the character is manifested in his full glory. This playing with the curtain, known as *tiranokku*, is only the most moving elaboration of the idea of introducing one world into another, of making them meet, an idea I believe Yeats's cloths also essentially shared.

Inspired by Gordon Craig's conception of the theatre, Yeats experimented widely with lighting, too. Actually, it was one of the trends of the day, but also of another era into which the West had stumbled unaware of its precedents. Methods of spotlighting different locales at a time had been known and used in India for centuries. Among the Japanese inventions, there were lighting techniques which bathed the actors in sunlight or shadow, according to the needs of the moment, but we also find long candlesticks protruding out to the actor's face as a spotlight (Bowers 1960, 321). Nevertheless, the preferred mode (when at all

necessary: Greek drama, for example, was performed by daylight) seems to have been uniform lighting, whether in Asian or in Elizabethan theatres, with no pretense of realism, so that the source of the light itself was (and very often still is) in full view of the audience. Here, too, Yeats could not possibly agree more when he opted for a large chandelier: "Indeed I think, so far as my present experience goes, that the most effective lighting is the lighting we are most accustomed to in our rooms" (Yeats 1921, 3).

This brings us to the last and boldest aspect of the stage: the mechanical effects. It is not that traditional theatre does not know of these; it is that it cannot think highly of them. The more distant from its roots a theatrical tradition becomes, the greater its thirst after special effects. Greek theatre is a case in point: Aeschylus and Sophocles have no use for a *deus ex machina*, but it is introduced by Euripides, to come into vogue by the time of post-classical, Hellenistic theatre. Once again, in a truly traditional theatre everything can be suggested by words, mime and gesture (e.g., the Indian *mudrās*), the nature of a characterand the stage conventions, and then savoured and completed by the audience.[8] Yeats was open to the possibility of using mechanical effects, "when it represents some material thing, becomes a symbol, a player, as it were" (Yeats 1966, 342). In other words, this occurs when such effects become an *organic* and, as such, *functional* part of the whole. It is this final, overarching effect that matters, and if at other times it can be produced by means aggressively antinaturalistic, there is no fundamental contradiction involved. In *The Green Helmet* (1910) we are offered orange houses, a vivid green seaand Black Men with eyes looking green from its reflection.

3. The players

The player is the second of Yeats's three pillars of drama (these are treated in his essay "Play, Player and Scene"). The actor should be non-conversational, make no irrelevant gestures, and look like a painting in a frieze (Yeats 1962, 172 and 176-7). These are all expectations by which traditional theatre puts much store, and I shall shortly come back to each of them. Yeats's dramatic universe is in fact player-centered, the player using all of his various potentials and thus becoming the foremost vitalizer of the written germ into the full-fledged world of the play. This view of the player as an all-round performer is a far cry from the common modern understanding of the actor as the faithful imitator of real life. Unlike with Yeats, in not a few traditional theatres, the text of the play is of secondary importance and highly typified, the real event being the player (in Southeast Asia the director is virtually replaced by a stage manager, who

chooses and rearranges scripts: he does not write the dialogue;instead, the players improvise around the story line, using some set patterns). Though in a much, much more sophisticated sense, even Yeats's plays could be called typified, amplifying moments of particular states of the soul and evoking redemption. Besides, there are certainly true archetypes among his characters (e.g., the self-aware Old Man). General, primordial types, not particularized and psychologically nuanced characters, have been the true inhabitants of most traditional theatre since Greek times (even when on the surface they might seem to be highly individualized).[9] Yeats openly and repeatedly denies the importance of the character in tragedy. All true tragic art is passionate art, "the drowner of dykes, the confounder of understanding", moving us to a trance-like intensity that makes of the persons on the stage humanity itself (Yeats 1911, ix). Yeats talks of *moods*, rather than characters, autonomous realities only putting on various masks for their drama. What happens on the stage is a gradual intensification of a fundamental human emotion, a moment of supreme passion unfolding the depths of the human being and his or her existence. This is what makes David R. Clark call Yeats's theatre "a drama of perception": his plays move from passion to perception; they are recognition scenes, showing heroic suffering turning into deep knowledge (Clark 1965, 15-16). This certainly is a direct influence of *nō*, but, again, features as the ultimate *raison d'être* of traditional theatre in general, whether tacitly implied or elaborated upon, as in Aristotle on Greek tragedy or Zeami Motokiyo on *nō*, and, with special and systematic treatment, in Indian criticism, with its doctrine of the eight (later nine) *rasas*, aesthetically spiritualized states of mind, clearly to be distinguished from as many related *bhāvas*, which are merely their psychological, natural conditions within our daily life.

Whoever feels the need for such noble theatre must of and within himself, even without outside influences, intuit that the goal must be achieved through some kind of distancing from what we grossly call the real world.[10] Detachment, mimetic asceticism, stylization, a ritual-like quality evoking a world of superhuman transcendence—whatever you name it, the dream requires an actor more accomplished than can be provided by the tradition-emancipated performative infrastructure at Yeats's disposal. Yeats was well-aware of the problem. Having grouped together his plays *The King's Threshold*, *Deirdre* (1907) and *On Baile's Strand*, he writes in a letter that each one of them requires "one player of genius and that is out of reach probably henceforth for ever" (Yeats 1954, 674).

The most obvious moment to be reconsidered regarding the actor is his appearance. Yeats attaches great importance to his costume, which has to be magnificent, but he is quick to warn that the most facile way to "achieve" this is—as has happened, in fact, during the deterioration of Western theatre—to make it "more and more magnificent, that the mind might sleep in peace, while the eye took pleasure in the magnificence of velvet and silk and in the physical beauty of women" (Yeats 1903, 264-265). Such magnificence is irrelevant. Starting with *The Green Helmet,* one observes that colours become ever more functional in Yeats's plays, not only to contribute to a mood or atmosphere, but as highly significant, symbolic entities. The costumes in the watershed *Four Plays for Dancers* are carefully minimalistic and powerfully suggest a ritualistic presence (of a Celtic inspiration, I may add). This, too, comes close to *nō* and Greek theatre, but traditional theatre equally offers a great many examples of articulating non-realistic costumes at the opposite, meticulously luxuriant pole. The entire twenty-third chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, for instance, is dedicated to *āhārya*, one of the four aspects of acting, including costumes and make-up. Their sumptuousness still survives in *nāṭya's* presumed heirs and/or offshoots, *kūṭiyāṭṭam* and *kathakali*, with symbolic meanings revealing the nature of every character. In the West, a late product such as the Tudor stage still used colours as symbolic expressions of character, with even the beard and hair reflecting emotions and changing to show changes in feeling (Linthicum 1936, 14).

That Yeats embraced the use of masks in the theatre, after centuries of their eking out an existence most suspect in the eyes of the various official Christianities, can come as no surprise in a man who made the mask the pivot of his entire worldview. His first dramatic uses of the mask were for grotesque effects. At one point in the evolution of *The Hour-Glass* (1914),[11] the Fool is given a mask, the better to designate him a principle, not a human being. The same happens with the Angel who appears to the Wise Man in the 1912 version (Yeats 1966, 644-6). By the time of the *Four Plays for Dancers,* Yeats's masks have clearly come to serve the purpose of another distancing element, much in accordance with Craig's ideas. The actor thus becomes only the bearer, the support of a particular mask, which is the real character. The realities of the characters are to be read from the features of the masks they wear. The ontological relation existing between the actor and the mask is programmatically revealed in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, "written to find what dramatic effect one could get out of a mask, changed while the player remains upon the stage to suggest a change of personality" (Yeats 1921*,* vi). Instead of masks, painted faces were another way for Yeats to detach the actor from the

character and, basically and foremost, to dissociate the two worlds they inhabit.

, *Nō* certainly makes use of masks (mostly exquisitely symbolic in their neutral universality, which lends specific expressions to specific tilts of the head and the voice), and before he learnt about this, Yeats, of course, also knew of *commedia dell'arte* and Greek theatre, both masked. Once again, however, make-up (including masks, to be sure) has been an integral part of the longing within traditional theatre to remove itself from the common world. Apart from the various folk forms of theatre and quasi-theatre, with their omnipresent masks, I am even tempted into observing that the farther we move eastwards, the greater the overall tendency to substitute painted faces or facial movements for solid masks. Greek theatre, apparently the oldest we know of, used masks in all of its dramatic forms (including the members of the tragic chorus). Dionysus, god of tragedy, was often present as a mask on a pole. Interestingly, Greek make-up was said to have started as face painting—as early as Thespis, who was in general credited as the father of Greek tragedy—soon to solidify into a cloth mask. Moreover, even at this early stage, we find the not uncommon theatrical practice of one actor playing more than one character, just as is the case in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (Yeats 1921, 33).[12] The twenty-third chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* extensively treats, among other things, the actors' ornaments, colours, painted body parts, all according to the status of the character. The term *pratiśira* (23.134-135), though commonly translated as mask, remains vague and might just as well denote only making up the face (see 23.182-192), and special kinds of crowns and hairstyle. Significantly, *kūṭiyāṭṭam* and *kathakali,* which are most probably *nāṭya*-derived, both favour heavy make-up over a ready-made mask, preserving the latter only for some special animal or half-animal roles—possibly revealing a folk influence—though *kṛṣṇāṭṭam*, one of *kūṭiyāṭṭam's* predecessors, included proper masks (Zarrilli 1984, 176).[13] This, however, is south India. The north-eastern *manipuri* introduces another possibility: faces so motionless that they become masks of themselves, which is also found in Yeats's insistence on the graveness of expression. This strategy is anything but rare further in Southeast Asia. In Bali, a paradise of performative arts, across its various forms we find both make-up and masks, but also the possibility of making only one's own face and body, such as they naturally are, so intensely expressive as to turn an old man into a young warrior or a beautiful princess (Pronko 1974, 18). If a theatrical tradition opts for painting faces instead of putting on masks or something else, this, too, can be done in more than one way. Yeats's version seems restrained when compared to the striking, sometimes even

shocking geometrical designs found in Japanese *kabuki* or Chinese *jingxi* (with the former rather bichrome, stressing the facial features, and the latter, symbolically colourful, obliterating or even aggressively ignoring them (e.g., eyes painted above or under the natural ones)), or to the sublimely grotesque make-up of *kūṭiyāṭṭam* and *kathakali*. Highly indicative of the true nature of the mask, once the *kathakali* actor's make-up has been completed, once the *nō* actor has put on his mask, they are no longer, perceived either by themselves or by others, as this-worldly actors, but as the otherworldly characters thus evoked. Finally, the already mentioned innovation in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* of one player changing roles on the stage has been known for centuries, not in *nō*, but in *kabuki* (Pronko 1974, 192) and Marathi *tamāśā* (Abrams 1993, 295). The make-up and costumes change, but the transformation can occur even during the scene, e.g., with an assistant taking hold of the actor's top kimono at the shoulder and pulling it off, only to disclose a different kimono underneath, representing a different state or character.

Another distancing concern shared by Yeats and traditional theatre involves the actors' movements. In some instances, these were deliberated with the greatest sophistication (the *Nāṭyaśāstra*). Again, unsatisfied as he was with the "little whimpering puppets" (Yeats 1923, 122) of the modern naturalistic theatre, Yeats experimented with statuesque posing and movement stylization long before his *nō* experience. Here I limit the discussion to the element I find most intriguing, the one I propose to call the marionette factor. One immediate influence on Yeats was, again, Gordon Craig, the dramatic visionary who argued that "the actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure – the über-marionette we may call him" (Craig 1957, 81). Yeats himself wrote of "those movements of the body copied from the marionette shows of the 14th century" as perhaps one of the things he felt impelled to look for in Asia (Yeats 1916, vii). Indeed, its theatres could have proved for him an inexhaustible inspiration. Puppet theatre has been abundantly present in Asia, but especially curious is its repeated intimacy with ordinary human theatre. Both *kathakali* and *yakṣagāna* (another south Indian dance-drama, itself with conventions directly reflecting *nāṭya*) gave birth to puppet theatre companies enacting plays as close as possible in style to that of the original forms.[14] Uday Shankar, the great modern Indian dancer and choreographer who introduced Indian folk dances to the world, was inspired by puppet theatre. Sometimes his human figures played puppet roles and the dancers moved like puppets. That is, his human dancers learnt from puppets, the underlying ideal obviously being a metaleptic detachment. Man becomes secondary. This has been observed in Burma,

too, known for its puppet or marionette shows (*yousshim bwé* or *yokthe pwé*). There—to borrow a happy turn of phrase—"puppets set the standard a good dancer must abide by" (Sein and Withey 1965, 23). The most complex and astonishing development I know of occurred in Indonesia, whose famous *wayang kulit*—shadow puppet theatre centuries old and almost certainly of animistic origins—engendered *wayang wong*, a theatre with human actors imitating the movements and stories of *wayang kulit*. *Wayang wong*, in its turn, engendered *wayang golek*, in which the puppeteer sticks his puppets in the banana tree trunk before him (serving as the stage), and then moves their arms by means of bamboo slivers, in the fashion of *wayang kulit*. In other words, the puppets imitate human beings imitating shadow puppets (Bowers 1960, 219). Such a double remove comes close to Craig's idea of the über-marionette: man imitates the man-made marionette but then goes even beyond—*über*—a mere reconstruction, tending to embody an equally unhuman and unthinglike stance.

The most refined stylization of body movement is, of course, dance. It is difficult to find a single form of traditional theatre that is not either dance-drama or at least drama with dance elements. Dance is possibly the greatest single influence of *nō* on Yeats, visible in the very title he chose to collectively designate his four "*nō* plays": *Four Plays for Dancers*. Though he never saw a *nō* performance, he well understood that its action culminates with a prolonged moment of sustained passion, expressed through dance (*mai*).[15] The climax of action is, in fact, the climax of dance (hardly a peculiarity of *nō*). To take an example outside the poetics of the *Four Plays*, in *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939) the Old Man calls for a dance and "the tragi-comedian dancer, the tragic dancer, upon the same neck love and loathing, life and death". What he has around him instead makes him "spit three times. I spit upon the dancers painted by Degas" (Yeats 2001, 546).

In traditional theatre the dance dimension can take a great number of different manifestations, much more elaborate than in Yeats's usage. For the present purpose, I shall outline just a couple of essentials. There is a common distinction between pure, abstract dance and mimetic dance (unlike modern theatre, in which mime is by default seen as something comic, in traditional theatre such meaning is implied only in clowns' mime). There is also a third, intermediary possibility: gestures are used symbolically, but the symbolism is abstract, unrealistic and utterly conventional, not mimetic (the best-known instance is the Indian *mudrās*).[16] Thus, Indian tradition distinguishes three kinds of dance: the already familiar *nāṭya* (with its characteristic use of *mudrās*), the mimetic

nṛtya, and *nṛtta*, pure dance, all derived from the same Sanskrit verbal root, *nṛt* (or Prākrit *naṭ*), meaning to dance. In the case of the closely related Southeast Asian theatre, James Brandon distinguishes three kinds according to the way dance is employed. First come battle scenes performed as dance; secondly it may take the form of a conventionalized gesture language during dialogue or song passages, and, thirdly, whole sections of the story may be represented through dance, as in ballet (Brandon 1967, 142). Yeats's dances seem to have been of the abstract, "pure" kind, influenced as they were by *nō*, where dance, *mai*, is typically of that sort, although there are also more representational variants. The island of Bali, swarming with various dance forms, offers a number of such dances, *legong* being the most abstract, while *tjalonarang* includes pure dance only as its interludes (Pronko 1974, 20 and 23). The latter is also true of *tillana*, any of the pure dance insertions within *bharatanāṭyam*, the best-known of Indian classical dances. Another dance form with no conceptual meaning is Thai *rabam* (Bowers 1960, 146). Instead of listing other examples, let me point out that, in the West, dance played an overwhelming role in ancient Greek theatre. Actors danced as a matter of course, and since, at least in the beginning, these were actually playwrights themselves, the first tragedians (Thespis, Phrynichus, Pratinas) were called dancers, not actors or authors (Arnott 1989, 56), just as "to perform *nō*" is *nō o mau* in Japanese, literally "to dance *nō*" (Inoura and Kawatake 1981, 112). After all, the very word *orkhḗstra*, indicating the stage, is derived from the verb *orkheῖsthai*, to dance. Once again, the enchanted world to which the stage belongs requires representational means only remotely reminiscent of the everyday world. One's movements cannot present an exception.

Of course, the same holds true for the auditory aspect of the actor's performance. It is one of the things Yeats found deteriorating in the course of time:

> When the first day of the drama had passed by, actors found that an always larger number of people were more easily moved through the eyes than through the ears. The emotion that comes with the music of words is exhausting, like all intellectual emotions, and few people like exhausting emotions; and therefore actors began to speak as if they were reading something out of the newspapers. They forgot the noble art of oratory, and gave all their thought to the poor art of acting, that is content with the sympathy of our nerves [...] verse spoken without a musical emphasis seems but an artificial and cumbersome way of saying what might be said naturally and simply in prose. (Yeats 1903, 182-183)

As summed up by P. Ure (1963, 47), Yeats wanted a drama whose primacy would be on speech, because only speech could express the innermost soul with sufficient subtlety. Just as the actor is to avoid any irrelevant or obtrusive gesture, so should his pitch and note change only when necessary. The audience's full attention is otherwise spoiled. "[T]ragic drama must be carved out of speech as a statue is out of stone" (Yeats 1911, x). A tendency in the textual body of Yeats's plays has been rightly noted, also starting with the *Four Plays for Dancers*: words take on a determinative value; the former lyric softness gives way to a language often masculine and objective, by realistic reference to place and action (Clark 1965, 18-19). Yeats's search for the right way to chant poetry underlies his pursuits in the field of drama (particularly when it comes to those plays or parts of plays which *are* written in verse). Yeats must have felt comfortable with Artaud's idea of language as a form of *Incantation*, producing physical shock, shattering as well as manifesting things (Artaud 1958, 46). Yeats's stress on words fits well with the classical Greek idea. Before the fourth century BC, the Greeks were a strikingly oral culture, so that even dramatic action was preferably described, not shown. Peter Walcot infers therefrom the presence of so many messengers in the tragedies: the supposed—I would even say *ideal*—seeing organ is not the eye, but the audience's imagination, moved by the words of the actor (Walcot 1976, 32).

In imaginative theatre, there is no place for ordinary language, either. Instead, words should be pronounced with a highly stylized gravity, recited, chanted, even sung. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* takes great care of the stylized verbal aspect (*vācikābhinaya*)—for it is "the body of the dramatic art" (15.2)—and dedicates to it no less than four whole chapters (15-18).[17] In the total theatre of *nāṭya*, though the musical part was usually realized by a different type of performer, the actor, too, could occasionally sing and even play an instrument. *Jingxi* actors sing as a matter of course, Greek dialogues seem to have been performed in the form of monotonous singing (or quasi-singing), and there is a fascinating example in the *nāṭya*-derived *kūṭiyāṭṭam* of the character *Śaṅkūkarṇa* chanting a short passage of dialogue and articulating, in the process, every single word with a particular gesture. Then he repeats the gesture text at a slower pace, emphasizing the facial expressions appropriate for the mood of each word. Finally, he repeats all the gesturing and chanting as before (Richmond 1993b, 109). I shall shortly come back to the musical aspect, for it is perhaps more intimately connected with the chorus and the musicians than with the actor.

A provision at the beginning of Yeats's "Note on 'The Dreaming of the Bones'" makes me consider one last moment. We read: "Dervorgilla's few lines can be given, if need be, to Dermot, and Dervorgilla's part taken by a dancer who has the training of a dancer alone; nor need that masked dancer be a woman" (Yeats 1921, 129). Although this seems to be a highly technical instruction, motivated by sheer convenience, its possibility in itself reminds one of traditions in which such shifts have been widely and systematically practiced, as a matter of course, or even of principle. Asian theatre is (and, even more, used to be) typically male-cast, but there are notable qualifications to be made in this regard. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* (35.28-39) recognizes all kinds of possibilities, depending mostly on the desired effect. There are both male and female actors, and both can play either male or female roles. Some roles are ideally meant for children. We cannot possibly know how far this unrealistic strategy went in theatrical practice, but in *kathakali*, to take an example, female roles are still played by men, while, conversely, in the still popular *vasant rasa*, for instance, the central figure, the god Kṛṣṇa is usually played by a young girl. *Jingxi*, the Beijing opera, though male-cast, features female roles as its main interest, and its greatest stars are regularly those playing female roles (Pronko 1974, 286; for more, see Scott 2001). More famous in this respect is Japanese *kabuki*, with its *onnagata*, the male actor so specialized in female—*ideally* female—roles that it has been said that whoever has grown accustomed to their willowy beauty cannot but be utterly shocked by the "unfeminine" movements and behaviour of women in modern Japanese plays. Again, if a woman wanted to play a female role, she should imitate the men who have already so subtly embodied the 'woman' in a woman (Pronko 1974, 195). The practice was not unknown in the West (before males playing females became possible for comic purposes only), and the tradition was not preserved only from classical Greek to Elizabethan theatre, but as late as the Restoration. Paralleling the above comment on the *kabuki onnagata*, we thus find Samuel Pepys noting of the actor Edward Kynaston in Fletcher's *Loyal Subject* that he "made the loveliest lady that ever I saw in my life" (Thorndike 1960, 372). The reason behind this gender shifting is certainly not single, and its complexity is beyond the reach of this article. However, I do feel the need to stress even here that, allowing for practical considerations—the various kimonos worn by the *onnagata* are quite heavy, the wig can weigh up to thirty pounds, and in Sri Lankan *kolam* some of the masks need to be supported by a wooden sword—the main driving force, even when subconscious, must be a grand metaleptic detachment, stylization, an artificialization so sublime that the already double figure of actor *and* character is once more doubled, into man *and*

woman, thus giving birth to an otherworldly being, the transcendent androgyne abolishing all pairs of opposites and recovering the primordial unity. At least for native audiences, there is also the clear aesthetic effect of not letting the world of the stage slavishly emulate the world of outside realities. Finally, to preclude any facile gender-centered charge invoking chauvinistic concerns, suffice it to say here that from ancient India we have evidence of all-women companies, and even today there are women's troupes (in Japan, too) in which all characters are played by women.

4. The chorus and the music

The present subheading, joining two dramatic aspects, may seem an unjustified cobbling up of loose ends, but the relationship between the actor, the chorus and the music in traditional, total theatre is so intimate that one could more readily criticize making the former a separate subheading than subsuming the remaining two under a common one. And this is another dimension Yeats felt to be an unforgivable lacuna in modern theatre. I have great difficulty understanding the background of comments such as the following one: "Even the argument that [any of the *Four Plays for Dancers*] is not a play 'in the traditional sense' but makes 'dramatic sense' in its music and dance is not valid when one remembers that there are no dance steps, no musical notes" (Sharp 1959, 81). The comment charges Yeats with offering us only words and nothing but words. That words were central to Yeats's idea of his own theatre has already been stated in this chapter, and Yeats himself made no bones about it (taking this as a dramatic shortcoming seems to be a matter of personal taste, and I have already pointed out that it was also the underlying idea of the earliest Greek theatre). But what does it mean that there are no dance steps? True, Yeats does not seem to have fixed in writing any steps to be observed by all future actors, but then—sooner than delivering them orally on the spot, I suspect—he probably left the matter to the extemporizing of the actor, or to the discretion of the director. This is particularly likely since Yeats had no living tradition on which to build, while in various classical theatres the dance steps constitute one of the deliberately refined aspects of an entire aesthetic organism. Be that as it may, there *are* dance steps. Just as there is music, for which there *are* notes, attached to the first edition, at least for two of the four plays for dancers (for *At the Hawk's Well*, by Edmund Dulac, and for *The Dreaming of the Bones*, by Walter Rummel). Sharp's comment is preposterous at its face value.[18] In fact, the opposite is true. Yeats was one of the few trying to remedy the fatal Aristotelian legacy of the West. It was Aristotle, not Yeats, for whom it

was all just words, words, words, and who virtually excluded from his dramatic considerations the musical and the visual aspects, a phenomenon which was subsequently only aggravated by post-Renaissance interpreters of his *Poetics*.

I shall first present the chorus, this great extension of both the actor and the public, a metaleptic oddity whose perspective is so protean that it is made up of all the perspectives appearing in a play and its performance. The chorus can be anyone—a character in the play; a personal or impersonal public commenting, warning, advisingor predicting; a god; destiny; of this world; of another; of no world—which makes it everyone. The chorus was a truly ingenious entity that could not leave Yeats's voracious imagination indifferent. One of the things he looked for in Asian theatre, considered to be more authentic, was precisely a chorus "that has no part in the action" (Yeats 1916, vii). A passage in his essay "Emotion of Multitude" expresses very well both his appreciation of the chorus and, to further qualify Sharp's accusation, his own repulsion at any *wrong* use of words in drama:

> The Greek drama has got the emotion of multitude from its chorus, which called up famous sorrows, long-leaguered Troy, much-enduring Odysseus, and all the gods and heroes to witness, as it were, some well-ordered fable, some action separated but for this from all but itself. The French play delights in the well-ordered fable, but by leaving out the chorus it has created an art where poetry and imagination, always the children of far-off multitudinous things, must of necessity grow less important than the mere will. This is why, I said to myself, French dramatic poetry is so often a little rhetorical, for rhetoric is the will trying to do the work of the imagination. (Yeats 1903, 339-340)

This was published in 1903, and again predates Yeats's acquaintance with *nō*. As early as *On Baile's Strand* (the next year), the Fool and the Blind Man function both as a sub-plot, commenting on the relation between Cuchulain and Conchubar, and a chorus. Parallel to their this-worldly dimension, there is the Chorus of Women, introducing a supernatural element (for more, see Taylor 1976, 22-23). This comes close to the mutiple functions of the Greek chorus, as sketched at the beginning of this subheading. In *Deirdre* the chorus of women musicians is relatively removed from the action but still manipulates the reaction of the audience, while the First Musician even hints to the others a secret about developments. This is still before Yeats's "initiation" into *nō*, where—just as in Yeats's later practice—the chorus can replace the voice of the dancing protagonist, as well as function as commentary, accompaniment,

even interlocutor. Other traditional theatrical forms offer a fascinating metaleptic variety in the kind and degree of the chorus's involvement/non-involvement in the action. Some seem to have been adumbrated by Yeats even without direct contact with any of them. In Bali *sanghyang djaran,* a horse trance dance is performed with the priest wearing a hobby-horse tail around the waist. The chorus calls him and the priest heads toward it. Then the chorus calls him from the other side and he goes back (Pronko 1974, 22). In Gujarati *bhavāi* there is a male chorus dressed as women, singing, dancing and helping actors in various ways (with the properties, holding a light, etc.). The members can even walk amidst the audience, e.g., to beg for money in order to help the impoverished character on the stage (Gargi 1962, 88). More often, however, the role of the chorus seems to be less invasive and restricted rather to accompanying description and narration, or it may consist of one or two side-singers. In Japanese *kabuki* a side-singer often intones the story, while with vast gestures and mime, the actor intensifies his emotion and only takes over the best speeches. In the larger part of Southeast Asia, dancers/actors too old to perform join the sitting chorus to sing out the narrative. The performers execute what they hear (in Indonesia the audience often gives more attention and respect to the singing narrator—*dalang*—than to the action and its performers (Bowers 1960, 21). All the texts of Thai *khon* are sung by side-singers. They sing out the name of every character, for the audience to recognize them, and then chant the speeches of each one, changing the tone. The actors approximate the meaning through slow gestures and movements; these are then repeated faster (Ibid., 133-137).[19] Reminiscent of Greek theatre and its practice of changing the chorus's identity (reflected in changes in the subject) is *kathakali*. Although here *all* the lines of the characters are delivered by the onstage vocalists, not by the actors/dancers—in Yeats's dance plays words are often delivered by a musician—there is a switch between the narrative sections in the third person (usually in metrical Sanskrit and sung by the vocalists) and the first-person dialogue and/or soliloquy (in a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam, interpreted by the actors) (Zarrilli 2000, 41). The average audience can hardly follow the language, but is highly familiar with the content. Similarly, in *nō* the audience cannot understand the archaic Japanese but needs the help of accompanying booklets. Such a strategy is always founded on the high esteem in which a tradition and its language are held, and/or on the fact that what matters in much traditional dance theatre is the performance, not the text. Though of a completely different origin, an echo of the practice can be found in Yeats's "Note on 'Calvary'":

> I HAVE written the little songs of the chorus to please myself, confident that singer and composer, when the time came for performance, would certainly make it impossible for the audience to know what the words were. (Yeats 1921, 135)

By the time of *The Words upon the Window-Pane* (1934) and, especially, *Purgatory* (1939), the dancers, the masksand the chorus had all disappeared from Yeats's dramatic world. Belonging, in Yeats's vision of history, to the objective phase of a dying cycle, when human beings are reduced to mere fragments, incapable of spiritual transcendence, the characters collapsed into doomed witnesses and commentators, the new version of the bygone choruses (see Clark 1965, 102 and Nathan 1965, 240).

By now it must have become clear that in traditional theatre music is omnipresent. It cannot always be clearly separated from other dramatic aspects. Its various modes and functions would be too many even for a far larger chapter than this one. It can be instrumental, vocal or both, intended as independent or as accompaniment, even as a highly determining part of action itself. In *kabuki*, the string *samisen*, sounding much like the human voice, can become openly mimic and follow the actor's intonations, even continue his speech or emotions (helped by a narrator or a group of singers). The speech can even pass, without break, from actor to narrator to instrument (Pronko 1974, 152-153). In other cases (Greek drama, Indian *nāṭya*), we do not know how exactly music (and dance, for that matter) were integrated into a performance. But in India, as summed up by Richmond (1993a, 46), songs were definitely used for purposes as far apart as introducing the first appearance of a characteror a character's exit, reinforcing an already established mood, changing the mood or marking when the situation changes, or when there is a gap in the action due to a scenic mishap.

A great problem for Yeats had been precisely how to integrate songs into the action and the meaning of a play, but by the time of *The Green Helmet* they seem to have grown into dramatic climaxes (see also Taylor 1976, 20 and 31). In *The Dreaming of the Bones*— Yeats drew his instrumental music from the flute and percussion instruments of *nō*, but these are characteristic of most traditional theatre—the musicians alternate between straight narration and singing, the latter being the atmospheric, lyrical part (another common division). A musician can also become a participant in the action (as in *Calvary*, where the First Musician is imagined to be present on Calvary to witness Christ's ascent to the top of the hill). Nor did Yeats's high dramatic ambitions leave out music. He had initially dreamt of dramatic songs in which every word, every cadence

would be audible and expressive, and of a music "that shall mean nothing, or next to nothing, apart from the words" (Yeats 1923, 129-130).[20] In time, however, he gave up on finding a musician submissive enough, or an audience capable of hearing properly the words accompanied by music (Ure 1963, 116).[21]

5. Conclusion

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Yeats took his dramatic activity seriously, but this was certainly a domain in which his self-confidence and clarity of vision were inferior to his range in the field of poetry or even fiction. What he was clear about was that the Western theatre of his day was a "theater of idiots, madmen, inverts, grammarians, grocers, antipoets and positivists, i.e., Occidentals". These are Artaud's words (Artaud 1958, 41), but I cannot envisage Yeats hesitating whether to subscribe to them. However, how to change such a dismal situation was an altogether different question. He constantly rewrote his plays, often more than once, testing them on the stage and then repairing the faulty parts (always to the benefit of the male element, as Yeats put it, to achieve "an increase of strength in the bony structure" (Yeats 1923, 186-187)). For some plays there even existed a "stage version" and a "reading version" (Ure 1963, 23-24). However, I feel his growing suspicion of any opportunity to properly stage his plays was not occasioned so much by his lack of any specific vision, as by the abundance of his general vision. He felt only too well what an astonishingly grand artistic and spiritual entity the theatre is, but lacked the concrete knowledge to reveal it. This may be what James Flannery (1976) means when he argues that Yeats's theatrical ideas are of greater significance than the plays themselves. Yeats was possibly right when he wrote to T. S. Moore that, "I always feel that my work is not drama but the ritual of a lost faith" (Yeats and Moore 1953, 156).[22] Still, there is also a conspicuously general note to Yeats's suspiciousness:

> It will take a generation, and perhaps generations, to restore the theatre of Art; for one must get one's actors, and perhaps one's scenery, from the theatre of commerce, until new actors and new painters have come to help one [...] (Yeats 1903, 266)

It has been my intent throughout this chapter to indicate—despite the size of the subject and the scarcity of space—how close Yeats's theatrical intuition, only a special manifestation of his total intuition, brought him to the theories and practices of traditional, total theatre—despite the fact that

he never saw one, Western or Eastern, but was only carried along by the contemporary wave of general discontent with modern theatre. Being part of that discontent—only several decades removed—I cannot but assert that, any specific evaluations of his merits and demerits apart, he thus resuscitated, in stage and all of its flesh, much of what the theatre, primordially and authentically, means. True theatre, the one being a genuinely *spiritual* experience, cannot live away from ritual, however interpreted and however staged. Yeats frequently mentions this core part of the theatre, and many traditional theatres were, or still are, performed within or before temples and shrines, by priests, in connection to a religious festivity, or at least they can be traced to some form of spiritual engagement. My choice of traditional forms has aimed at representativeness, but it must be kept in mind that traditional theatre is by no means limited to the Eurasian continent.[23] I have limited myself mostly to the performative aspects, though there would be much to say about the others as well (composition, plot and characters).

To repeatedly tax Yeats with having misunderstood and deformed both the form and spirit of *nō*— to the point of asserting that he was diametrically opposed to all its levels (Stucki 1966, 106)—is to repeatedly read into his "*nō*-plays" and their underlying inspiration a purpose of the critics in question, not of Yeats. Yeats was certainly not trying to write a *nō* play of his own, but his own version of a traditional play—with inevitable colourings of his own time, place and self. Neither need his unhappy statement that "[i]t is an advantage of this noble form [*nō*] that it need absorb no one's life" (Yeats 1916, ii) be taken as a sign of his superficiality, but rather of using such a "noble form" according to *his own* needs, in order to ennoble *his own* plays, to create something of a traditional theatre of *his own*. Because he, too, felt that a "noble form" is what theatre is about, after all. And this is also what, for over a century now, some have been feeling in the West when claiming—so preposterously, on the surface—that by using some of the techniques characteristic of Eastern theatre, many dramatic masterpieces *of the West* would come much closer to their original productions. Like anything else that is sacred, a sacred theatre tends to be essentially one.

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