

Dancing Bodies and Gender Politics in Middle Yeats's Works

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Abstract

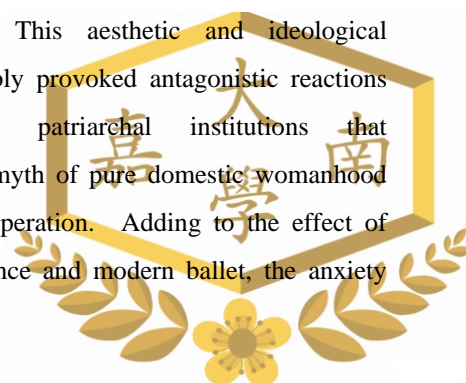
Situating William Butler Yeats in the milieu of the rising early modern dance, this paper examines the dancing bodies and gender politics in middle Yeats's works, such as in his plays *On Baile's Strand* (1904) and *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919), and other poems. Whether mythological, legendary, or human, middle Yeats' dancers represent an oppositional force to rigid notions of nationality, gender, and religion, just as early modern dancers combat against the physical constraints of classical ballet and Victorian conceptions of pure womanhood to liberate the female body. This aesthetic and ideological rebellion inevitably provoked antagonistic reactions among various patriarchal institutions that perpetuated the myth of pure domestic womanhood to ensure their operation. For instance, Irish patriarchs in *On Baile's Strand* view the Sidhe dancers as threatening to their political establishments and laws; to exorcize these marginal forces and ward them securely outside patriarchal society, the forefathers devise an elaborate ritual to "blow the witches out." Yeats further dramatizes the power struggle between human women and the Sidhe in his play *The Only Jealousy of Emer* where Cuchulain's wife Emer and his mistress Eithne band together against the bird-woman-witch dancer, Fand. The power struggle between these three women provides a locale for us to examine Yeats's gender politics in relation to the various women's movements of the early-twentieth century. Yeats, in befriending and writing about the dancers, partook in dialogues that often revealed him as a supporter of women dancers' artistic achievements and of their proto-feminist outlook.

Keywords: dance, gender, W.B. Yeats

I. Introduction: Historical Background

Whether mythological, legendary, or human, middle Yeats' dancers represent an oppositional force to rigid notions of nationality, gender, and religion, just as early modern dancers combat against the physical constraints of classical ballet and Victorian conceptions of pure womanhood to liberate the

female body. This aesthetic and ideological rebellion inevitably provoked antagonistic reactions among various patriarchal institutions that perpetuated the myth of pure domestic womanhood to ensure their operation. Adding to the effect of early modern dance and modern ballet, the anxiety



ignited by the meteoric rise of dance halls in the 1890s rose to an apex in the 1910s among orthodox clergy and laity, to whom these crowded public spaces cradled moral corruption, substance abuse, and above all, sexual promiscuity. In his book *Modern Dances* (1910), the Reverend Don Lugi

Despite their scorn for the sensual nature of dance, anti-dance advocates often lambasted it with an ironic mixture of contempt and voyeuristic pleasure. For instance, Walter Higgins of the *Labour Leader* (June 26, 1908) condemned early modern dancer Maud Allan's performance *The Vision of Salome* with a puritanical eye scrutinizing for pornotropic detail:

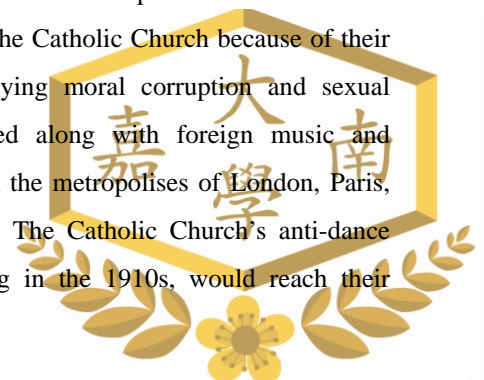
I am inclined to accept the old Puritan judgment of dancing. Miss Maud Allan's presentation is, beyond doubt, diabolic...her body is tortured into inconceivable postures. One moment she is the vampire, softly lulling her victim to sleep with rhythmical movement of body and gentle waving of hands; next, she is the snake, her sinuating body and piercing eyes holding him spellbound; next she is the lynx, crouched to spring. Always the fascination is animal-like and carnal.

The shape-changing quality of Allan's dance reverberates with that of Yeats's Sidhe dancers, who are constantly referred to as the "shape-changers;" both Allan and the Sidhe pose threats to patriarchal societies that view their dances as outward manifestations of women's fickleness and dangerous sexuality. Whereas Higgins labeled Allan's dance "baleful and insidious" as "the incarnation of the bestial as in Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley," Yeats praised the visionary beauty of Beardsley's Salome, and the image of Allan's Salome left an important imprint on his later works. The inherent

Satori crusaded to prohibit dance on the ground that "many healthy young women who practiced it became 'infected by a syphilitic young man on the dancing floor: and that far from being healthful it puts a very severe strain on the nervous system.'"

enmity between these anti-dance and pro-dance attitudes was summed up by Arthur Symons's statement that "The abstract thinker, to whom the question of practical morality is indifferent, has always loved dancing, as naturally as the moralist has hated it" ("The World as Ballet" 387). In the midst of this religious anti-dance haze, Anglo-Catholic Sacramentalists, starting earlier on in the 1890s, expressed a dissension, with which Yeats, Symons, and their fellow Rhymers were closely associated. The ballerinas of the Alhambra and the Empire Music Halls usually met with the Rhymers at the Crown public house after their performances; the group included the Anglo-Catholic Reverend Stewart Headlam who proposed to study dance as a religious activity (Fletcher 54). In *Church Reformer* (October 1884), Headlam exalted dance as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, ordained by the Word of God Himself;" he went on to debunk both puritanical and sensualist views on the dance: "Your Manichean Protestant, and your superfine rationalist, reject the Dance as worldly, frivolous, sensual, and so froth; and your dull, stupid sensualist sees legs, and grunts with some satisfaction: but your Sacramentalist knows something worth more than both of these."

In Ireland the cultural impact of dance halls also started to alarm the Catholic Church because of their perceived underlying moral corruption and sexual impurity imported along with foreign music and dance steps from the metropolises of London, Paris, and New York. The Catholic Church's anti-dance activities, starting in the 1910s, would reach their

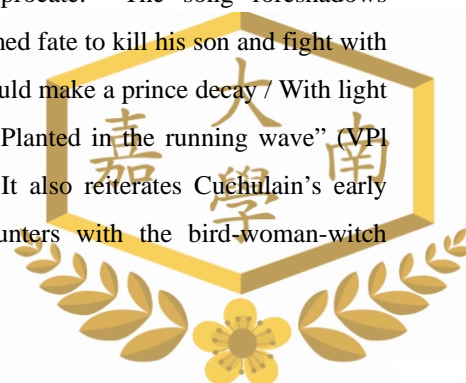


final climax with the Irish government's approval of the Public Dance Halls Act in 1935, which limited dancing exclusively to the licensed halls with licensed supervision (Austin 7). Ironically, part of this anti-dance campaign to ward out foreign influence also became "a primary cause of the disappearance of traditional music and dance in Ireland during the 1930s" (7). As fiddler Junior Crehan from County Clare lamented, the loss of traditional music and dance due to the Dance Halls Act has left the Irish "a poorer people" (16). This animosity between the Catholic Church and the Irish dance and music supplies a central conflict in Yeats's play *The King's Threshold* (1904), where dance joins the poet Seanchan's protest against the coercing forces of politics, military, and religion. To restore the poet's right in the court, Seanchan carries out a hunger strike at the king's threshold. Fearing that the poet's death would bring notoriety and bad luck on him, the king sends several messengers to dissuade him from the protest. Among them, the monk is most disdainful toward the poet's protest since the "wanton imagination of the poets" (VPI 285: 434) endorses fantasy and desire that are detrimental to a religious life of "obedience / Discipline, and orderliness" (VPI 291: 547-48). One of the court ladies argues against the monk, "You stirred it up that you might spoil our dancing. / Why shouldn't we have dancing?" (VPI 291: 550-51). The relation between poetry, music, and dance is so intimately related that the dancers "cannot dance, / Because no harper will pluck a string" (VPI 286: 459-60), and no musicians will ever play again if the poet laureate dies. The court ladies' complaint further infuriates the monk, who bellows out: "The pride of the poets! / Dancing, hurling, the country full of noise, / And King and Church neglected" (VPI 291: 562-63). To him, the Dionysian propensity of poetry and dance can only disrupt religious discipline and jeopardize

the national body.

II. Patriarchal Oppression of Dance in *On Baile's Strand*

Operating under a similar anti-dance rationale, Irish patriarchs in *On Baile's Strand* also view the Sidhe dancers as threatening to their political establishments and laws; to exorcize these marginal forces and ward them securely outside patriarchal society, the forefathers devise an elaborate ritual to "blow the witches out." In this play Conchubar's kingdom faces two potential adversaries, Cuchulain and the Sidhe, with the latter posing the more potent threat as Conchubar states that "the wild will of man could be oath-bound, / But that a woman's could not" (VPI 495: 389-90). To ensure that Cuchulain's wild personality and mighty strength will serve instead of menacing the succession of Conchubar's future heirs, Conchubar cunningly pressures Cuchulain into taking a loyalty oath, preceded by singing the incantation passed down from "the old law-makers" (VPI 493: 387) who bid them "sing against the will of woman at its wildest / In the Shape-Changeers that run upon the wind" (VPI 495: 390-92). This song zooms in on the Sidhe's changeability and fatality: "The women none can kiss and thrive, / For they are but whirling wind, / Out of memory and mind" (VPI 495: 400-402). The Sidhe's association with the whirling wind of Herodiades and Salome becomes a trope of mere destruction and desolation. Their vampirism draws substance from their prey; they awaken desire but do not reciprocate. The song foreshadows Cuchulain's doomed fate to kill his son and fight with waves: "They would make a prince decay / With light images of clay / Planted in the running wave" (VPI 495: 403-405). It also reiterates Cuchulain's early and future encounters with the bird-woman-witch dancer Fand:



Or they'd hurl a spell at him,
That he follow with desire
Bodies that can never tire
Or grow kind. (VPI 495: 410-13)

For the first time, we learn the secret of Sidhe's deathless bodies,

for they anoint
All their bodies, joint by joint,
With a miracle-working juice
That is made out of the grease
Of the ungoverned unicorn. (VPI 497: 413-17)

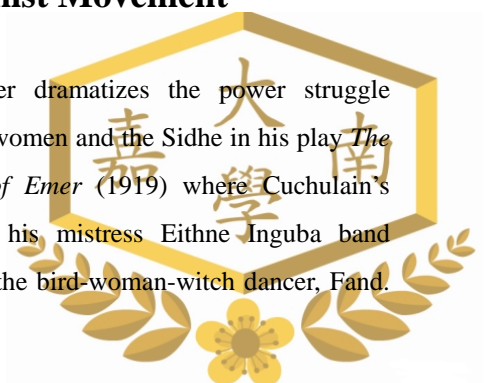
Not only are the Sidhe's bodies deathless, they are marked with a doubly loaded occultist and nationalist agenda with the grease of the unicorn, emblematic of Ireland (as shown in the play *Unicorn from the Stars*). The word "ungoverned" puns on their independence from both British imperial government and Conchubar's patriarchal society. Their deathless bodies can never get tired from dancing or lovemaking, but the pain and destruction equate the pleasures they bring: "the man is thrice forlorn, / Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost" (VPI 497: 418-19). Contrary to the overflowing treasures of youth, dance, and wealth promised in Yeats's early fairyland, the Sidhe now bring men destruction and barrenness. Not without coincidence, it was in the same 1906 collection, where the status of the Sidhe changed from goddesses to witches, that Yeats included this incantation to blow the witches out for the very first time.

Although the curse of the bird-woman-witch dancer predestines Cuchulain's killing of his own son, it is the completion of the male-homosocial-bonding ritual that directly leads toward this tragic event. After the incantation, the king, Cuchulain, and other subjects throw in their swords into the fire that seals the male homosocial bond and circumscribes the patriarchal boundaries inside the realm of "the

threshold and the hearthstone" (VPI 499: 448) with the wild feminine principle barricaded outside. Then the anonymous young man (no one knows at this moment that he is Cuchulain and Aoife's love child) shows up to fight the best man in Conchubar's kingdom; Cuchulain takes an instant liking to this young man and pleads with Conchubar to spare his life. The tragedy unfolds when Conchubar and others insult the very core of Cuchulain's masculinity by insisting that the Sidhe have bewitched him. Caught between following his gut feelings to spare the young man and validating his masculinity, Cuchulain gives in to peer pressure from his comrades; after all, he shoulders the reputation as the superhero who killed kings, dragons, and "witches out of the air" (VPI 467: 104). Upon the declaration of a war against the Sidhe ("There is no witchcraft on the earth, or among the witches of the air, / that these hands cannot break" [VPI 517: 669-71]), Cuchulain is trapped in his destiny. He slays the young man, realizes too late that he has killed his only son, descends into madness, and fights the waves (mistaken as king Conchubar). The epiphany that his true enemy is Conchubar and not Aoife nor the bird-woman-witch dancer accelerates Cuchulain's mental breakdown; it ultimately exposes the hypocrisy of Conchubar's patriarchal society that, in its attempt to eradicate the wild feminine force and secure male dominance, slaughters the father-son relationship it prides itself on.

III. Early Modern Dance and the Feminist Movement

Yeats further dramatizes the power struggle between human women and the Sidhe in his play *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919) where Cuchulain's wife Emer and his mistress Eithne Inguba band together against the bird-woman-witch dancer, Fand.

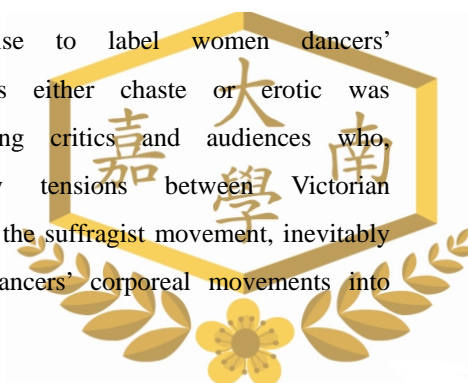


The power struggle between these three women provides a locale for us to examine Yeats's gender politics in relation to the various women's movements of the early-twentieth century. Through their different attempts to expand the female sphere in the socio-political milieu, early modern dance and the feminist movement were bound to converge or clash in one way or another. As dance historian Janice Ross states, "by the first quarter of the twentieth century they [the dancers] would be the physical equivalent of suffrage—emblems of a newly liberated female body functioning in tandem with a newly awakened mind" (28). On the other hand, early modern dancers like Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and Maud Allan were not political activists; they, much like Yeats, expressed their skepticism about improving women's position through political agitation. Fuller, for example, "believed in a kind of feminism, a kind that had nothing to do with politics" (Current 326); and Duncan once told a room full of suffragists and feminists that the vote would not solve women's plight (Daly 163). In his works Yeats often campaigns against the mingling together of the feminine and political spheres, and sets up an oppositional imagery between dancers and women in politics: while the dancer's perfectly-proportioned body epitomizes unity of being, the woman in politics is likened to an inanimate stone or a withered body. This polar difference, no doubt, is subject to feminist criticism. Nonetheless, few critics would argue against, if at all, early modern dancers' contribution to women's movements. Fuller and Duncan, for instance, exemplified the New Woman by rebelling against conventional gender codes, taking up choreography and management, positions formerly occupied exclusively by men in classical ballet; as a result, they were able to produce new images of women for a growing female spectatorship, undiluted by male authorship. Yeats, in befriending and

writing about these dancers, also partook in dialogues that often revealed him as a supporter of women dancers' artistic achievements and of their proto-feminist outlook.

The convergence and clash between early modern dance and feminist movement in the early twentieth century was probably best (in a historical rather than literary sense) captured in a farcical play *Salome and the Suffragettes* that dramatizes the meteoric success and controversy surrounding Maud Allan's solo dance *The Vision of Salome*. In this play, while Allan and the leading British politicians are having tea on the terrace outside the House of Commons, the suffragists attack them with strawberry jam and kidnap Allan. Panic-stricken, Prime Minister Asquith exclaims, "What can I do about Salome? If she does not appear at the Palace tonight there will be a revolution!" (Cherniavsky 154). Upon the suffragists' demand for "the enfranchisement of women" in exchange for Allan's freedom, Asquith finally promises the vote to women to diffuse a potential national crisis (154). While this play caricaturizes all the parties involved with a demeaning humor, it does underscore the power of early modern dancers, either in their onstage or offstage personas, to provoke or sway political movements. As Yeats described in the earliest draft of "His Phoenix" (January 1915), "In nineteen hundred eight or nine Maude Allan had the cry;" during those two years Allan's performances swept the high society in London and aroused much controversy over her embodiments of femininity onstage.

The impulse to label women dancers' performances as either chaste or erotic was ubiquitous among critics and audiences who, conditioned by tensions between Victorian womanhood and the suffragist movement, inevitably translated the dancers' corporeal movements into

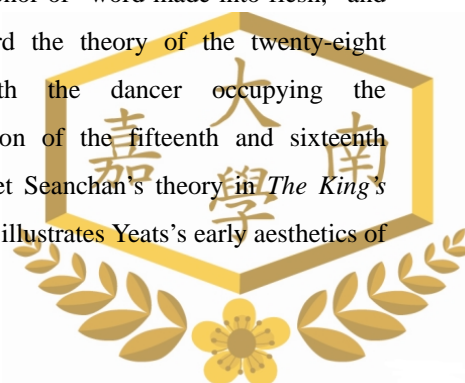


political statements. Receptions of Allan's contemporaries Loie Fuller and Isadora Duncan similarly embraced episodes of fame and controversy, pertaining to their aesthetic innovations and representations of femininity. Rising to stardom in the 1890s, Fuller dazzled her audiences (among them Mallarme, Rodin, Symons, and Yeats) with dances of fire, lilies, and serpents created by wielding several-foot-long draperies on a darkened stage partly illuminated by multi-color lights. As an inventor of several modern-stage lighting techniques, Fuller anticipated effects of projecting colors with lights, later used by the theater reformer Gordon Craig and Yeats. One critic in *Liberation* appraises her contribution to the modern theater: "Cinematic art, multimedia, abstract, performance, interactivity, contemporary dance: at the end of the 19th- century, Loie Fuller had already invented everything." Her ability to innovate and fascinate derived from a combination of talent and strong will to materialize her own vision of feminism in her profession; as she once wrote to her lifelong companion Gabrielle Bloch, "Equality's the thing. Therefore make thyself worthy to be any man's equal" (Current 326). A few months before Allan's controversial debut of *The Vision of Salome* in London in 1908, Fuller's *The Tragedy of Salome* (1907) was exalted by the French critic Jules Claretie of *Le Temps* as "a vision of a theater of the future, something in the nature of a feminist theater." Like Fuller, Isadora Duncan revolutionized the conceptions and stage presentations of dance, yet unlike Fuller, her focus was not technical/technological but rather on the reform of the dancer's body. Dissatisfied with the "sterile movements" of classical ballet, Duncan set out to liberate the dancer's body from the restricting costumes and movements of ballet that had resulted in the deformation of the body ("The Dance of the Future" 56). The dance of the future, she declared,

dedicated itself to the shaping of "the ideal form of woman" by restoring "original strength" and "natural movements" to the female body (61). The image of Duncan dancing barefoot and uncorseted became an icon of women's emancipation from "the hidebound conventions that are the warp and woof of New England Puritanism," as she stated after the Boston scandal that caused her performances to be canceled due to her deliberately-exposed breast in dancing *La Maseillaise* (*Isadora Speaks* 48). Duncan's pronounced Dionysian stance that sought to defy conventional womanhood triggered opposing responses from critics: while some disparaged the corporeality of her dances, others downplayed that quality in order to market her as a chaste, and thus genuine woman artist. After viewing her *Iphigenie en Aulide*, dance critic Henry Taylor Parker of *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 28, 1908) stated, "For though Miss Duncan be bare of feet and legs, of arms and shoulders, there is in her and in all that she does a pervading suggestion of chastity and of a singular and virginal innocence" (Holmes 58); he went on to describe her as a stereotypical fairylike ballerina, "she is as incorporeal as the sylphs, as fairy footed as the elves. Her dancing is as intangible, as un-material, as fluid as are sound or light" (60).

IV. The Dancer's Symbolic Place in the Yeatsian System

Middle Yeats's conception of the body started out as an aesthetics of embodiment, a reworking of the biblical metaphor of "word made into flesh," and progressed toward the theory of the twenty-eight incarnations with the dancer occupying the paramount position of the fifteenth and sixteenth phases. The poet Seanchan's theory in *The King's Threshold* (1904) illustrates Yeats's early aesthetics of embodiment:



If the Arts should perish,
The world that lacked them would be like a
woman

That, looking on the cloven lips of a hare,
Brings forth a hare-lipped child. (VPI

264-65: 136-39)

In this theory, the female body functions as a mere surrogate to be impregnated by masculine arts, which alone determine the identity of this metaphoric child. Yeats's later poems "The Phases of the Moon" (1919) and "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" (1919) discard the conception of the female body as a passive womb, and elevate its athletic, self-sufficient qualities. According to Yeats's theory (to be elaborated in *A Vision*), there are twenty-eight types of incarnations corresponding to the twenty-eight phases of the moon, each having its own unique personality and physical traits. As recapitulated in Yeats's portrayal of the immortal dancer Fand in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, the perfectly proportioned body of the dancer (usually gendered as female) symbolizes the unity of being unique to the fifteenth and the sixteenth incarnations. The fifteenth incarnation, as Robartes explains in "The Phases of the Moon," can only exist outside of the human realm:

All thought becomes an image and the soul
Becomes a body: that body and that soul
Too perfect at the full to lie in a cradle,
Too lonely for the traffic of the world:
Body and soul cast out and cast away
Beyond the visible world. (VP 374: 58-63)

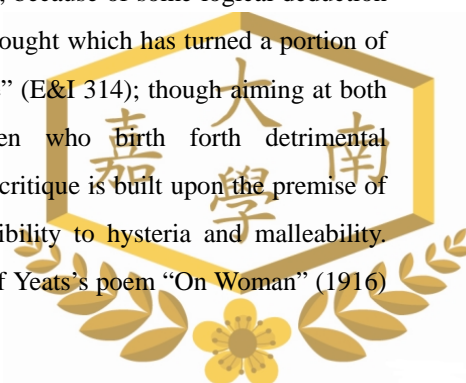
While the first two lines stress the bodied quality of this existence, such an embodiment is too perfect and singular to be born as a human and it inhabits an invisible ethereal body. It is only at the sixteenth phase that this ethereal body reincarnates into "a beautiful man's or woman's body" (VP 374: 64). The dancer thus occupies an intriguing locale where

the human body and ethereal body, biology and art, and life and death converge.

The dancer's symbolic place in the Yeatsian system at the same time raises questions concerning his representations of women, especially when it comes to the oppositional embodiments of the dancer and the intellectual woman. According to Yeats, while the dancer exemplifies the unity of being, the intellectual woman has traded her femininity for thoughts that are alien to her nature, and when internalized, turn the living flesh into stone:

Women, because the main event of their lives has been a giving themselves and giving birth, give all to an opinion as if it were some terrible stone doll. Men take up an opinion lightly...but to women opinions become as their children or their sweethearts . . . At last the opinion is so much identified with their nature that it seems a part of their flesh becomes stone and passes out of life. (A 372)

In arguing against women engaging in politics or opinions, Yeats adopts a sexist rhetoric that differentiates the two sexes based on women's reproductive capability/disability; this analogy of women turning into stone due to political engagements gradually develops into a standard Yeatsian trope. As a consequence of the *Playboy* riot and other events, Yeats became increasingly skeptical of political fixations and viewed the new nationalist generation as "a hysterical woman who will make unmeasured accusations and believe impossible things, because of some logical deduction from a solitary thought which has turned a portion of her mind to stone" (E&I 314); though aiming at both men and women who birth forth detrimental abstractions, this critique is built upon the premise of women's susceptibility to hysteria and malleability. The first stanza of Yeats's poem "On Woman" (1916)



reiterates the message that urges women to banish thoughts because they are not scripted in their gender role:

May God be praised for woman
That gives up all her mind,
A man may find in no man
A friendship of her kind
That covers all he has brought
As with her flesh and bone,
Nor quarrels with a thought

Because it is not her own. (VP 345: 1-8)

This opening crusade for traditional gender coding nevertheless takes a turn in the second stanza, where the poet relates the biblical anecdote of Solomon and Sheba, and how "Solomon grew wise / While talking with his queens" (VP 345: 11-12), especially with Sheba who is extolled for both her intellect and sexuality. The conflated image of Sheba as a cerebral queen and a Salome-like "[p]erverse creature of chance" (VP 346: 41) not only defies the codes of femininity in the first stanza but also reverses the gender roles with her "iron wrought" hardness (VP 345: 17). As the speaker praises woman who gives up her mind in the first stanza, he soon contradicts himself in the second stanza, praying to "live like Solomon / That Sheba led a dance" (VP 346: 42-43), yielding himself to Sheba's masculine lead in the *pas de deux*.

This praising for and yielding to a woman with iron-wrought personality and political power undermines the credibility of Yeats's argument against women in politics. Especially when examining his life, we find that he was often attracted to and befriended powerful strong-minded women, such as actress Florence Farr, socialist Constance Markiewicz, and Irish political revolutionary Maud Gonne (Cullingford, *Gender* 7). Like Sheba and Aoife, Gonne is depicted by Yeats as a fiery lofty queen and an undying phoenix immortalized in "His

Phoenix" (1916). This poem again portrays the antithetical images of the dancer and the woman in politics, except that this time the praise aims at the later, the poet's beloved Maud Gonne. The first three stanzas are constructed with the same seven-line listing of beautiful women with a one-line rebuttal, "I knew a phoenix in my youth, so let them have their day," that exalts Gonne's aristocratic beauty above all those women. In the second stanza, Yeats categorizes the celebrated dancers (St. Denis and Pavlova) and actresses (Gaby and the anonymous player) of the early twentieth century:

The young men every night applaud their
Gaby's laughing eye,

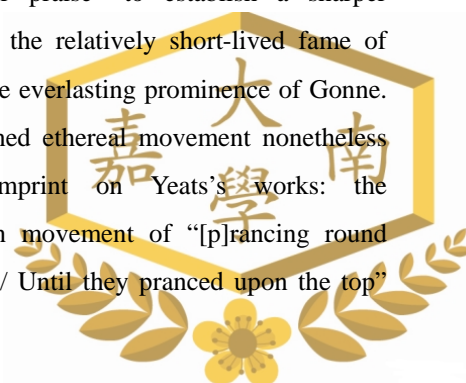
And Ruth St. Denis had more charm
although she had poor luck;

From nineteen hundred nine or ten,
Pavlova's had the cry,

And there's a player in the States who
gathers up her cloak

And flings herself out of the room when
Juliet would be bride (VP 353-54: 9-13)

In the earliest draft of "His Phoenix" (January 1915), Yeats began his poem by listing three prominent dancers—Anna Pavlova, Ruth St. Denis, and Maud Allan—who initially inspired the subject matter of this poem: "Pavlovna is beyond our praise, Gabys a laughing eye / Though Ruth St. Denis has no luck she had an Indean charm / In nineteen hundred eight or nine Maude Allan had the cry." Yeats's account recapitulated the phenomenal success of the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova, but later he decided to drop out "beyond our praise" to establish a sharper contrast between the relatively short-lived fame of the dancer and the everlasting prominence of Gonne. Pavlova's renowned ethereal movement nonetheless has left its imprint on Yeats's works: the previously-unseen movement of "[p]rancing round and prancing up / Until they pranced upon the top"



(VP 331: 17-18) in “Under the Round Tower” (1918) may indicate a ballet influence coming from observing Pavlova’s performances. Early modern dancer Ruth St. Denis was memorialized for her “Indian charm” in *Radha* (1906) where she emulates the Hindu goddess Radha, delivering a sacred message for her worshipers through “The Dance of the Five Senses.” Although the poet eventually omitted the Canadian dancer Maud Allan in the next drafts, her controversial *The Vision of Salome* proved to influence Yeats’s later dance imagery profoundly. After assembling these acclaimed women, the poet turns away from them and their patrons with mixed jealousy and disparagement. While Yeats was no doubt fascinated by these dancers and applauded their aesthetic achievement, at times he felt uneasy about their popularity sweeping not only the literary elites but also the bourgeoisie that was rapidly replacing the aristocracy. The inescapable mesh of artistic success and commercialism triggered in Yeats anxiety about the spectatorship of early modern dances: quite contrary to his idea of an unpopular theater without the presence of press or unwanted audience, these dancers’ success relied heavily on press publicity, strategic marketing, and middle-class patronage. The quick pacing used in categorizing the dancers and actresses each in one line reflects the poet’s anxiety and his foretelling of their short-lived fame, contrary to the elaborate praise woven for his beloved. In the final stanza Yeats summons up the image of Maud Gonne who represents the diminishing aristocratic beauty that stands out in the rising mass culture:

There’ll be that crowd, that barbarous crowd, through all the centuries,

And who can say but some young belle may walk and talk men wild

Who is my beauty’s equal, though that my heart denies,

But not the exact likeness, the simplicity of a child,

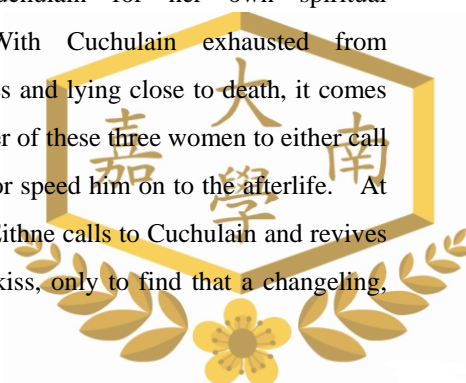
And that proud look as though she had gazed into the burning sun,

And all the shapely body no tittle gone astray. (VP 354: 25-30)

To the poet, Gonne is the best dancer among all with her proud look, shapely body, and her ability to self-regenerate; her aristocratic beauty will, though not applauded by the crowd, outlive the popular like an undying phoenix. Like the dancer who epitomizes unity of being of the fifteenth and sixteenth phases, Gonne’s body maps out unity of culture “where all superiorities whether of the mind or the body were a part of public ceremonial” (A 274).

V. Power Struggle between Human Women and the Immortal Dancer in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*

Having examined early modern dancers’ representations of femininity in relation to Yeats’s portrayals of the dancer and the woman in politics, we can better analyze the contention between the three women Emer, Eithne, and Fand in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. In this triangular struggle, Emer exemplifies the virtuous, self-sacrificing wife extolled by patriarchal society; Eithne, a submissive mistress content with her inferior lot to Emer’s; and Fand, the aggressive, narcissistic supernatural woman who claims Cuchulain for her own spiritual completion. With Cuchulain exhausted from fighting the waves and lying close to death, it comes down to the power of these three women to either call him back to life or speed him on to the afterlife. At Emer’s request, Eithne calls to Cuchulain and revives his body with a kiss, only to find that a changeling,



Bricriu of the Sidhe, has usurped his body. With Eithne leaving the stage at this moment, the plot indicates that this battle is to be fought between Emer and Fand—a reprise of the encounter between the patriarchal domestic ideal and the wild feminine force in *On Baile's Strand*. Emer's belief that "all the enchantments of the dreaming foam / Dread the hearth-fire" again anchors the fight against the Sidhe on the domestic symbol of the hearth-fire (VPI 539: 113-14). This fire ritual fails to barricade the Sidhe as it does in *On Baile's Strand*: Bricriu, who inhabits Cuchulain's body, is able to set forth a "ransom" for releasing Cuchulain's spirit if only Emer can renounce his love forever (VPI 545: 159).

Bricriu, however, is not the only member of the Sidhe that Emer needs to wrestle with; Fand, whose ethereal body cannot be harmed by Emer's knife, also enters the stage to seduce Cuchulain's ghost with her dance (VPI 549-51). Fand asserts her presence with movements that are carefully calculated to flirt with Cuchulain's desire by prolonging but not consummating it with erotic pantomime: "*The Woman of the Sidhe moves round the crouching Ghost of Cuchulain at front of stage in a dance that grows gradually quicker, as he slowly awakes. At moments she may drop her hair upon his head, but she does not kiss him*" (VPI 551: 219). As the tempo of the dance quickens, Cuchulain is awakened. He recognizes her as the guardian he encountered earlier in *At the Hawk's Well*:

I know you now, for long ago
I met you on a cloudy hill
Beside old thorn-trees and a well.
A woman danced and a hawk flew,
I held out arms and hands; but you,
That now seem friendly, fled away,
Half woman and half bird of prey. (VPI 553: 239-45)

Cuchulain is suspicious of Fand's present affability

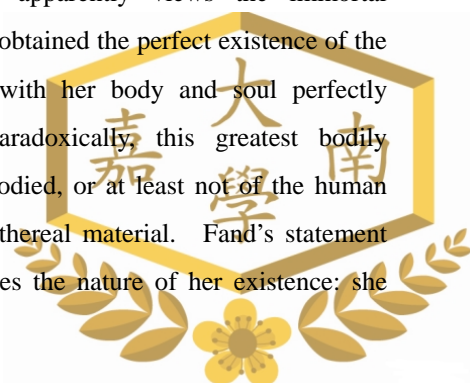
and insists on her dangerous otherness as a hybrid bird-woman, which Fand strategically refutes by emphasizing her sexual desirability as a woman. Instead of running away from him as in *At the Hawk's Well*, she now invites him for a *pas de deux*:

Hold out your arms and hands again;
You were not so dumbfounded when
I was that bird of prey, and yet
I am all woman now. (VPI 553-54: 246-49)

Compared with her early appearance in *At the Hawk's Well*, Fand's humanity as a woman is enhanced in this play: instead of giving out hawk cries and moving around like a hawk, she speaks and behaves like a human. Nonetheless, the womanhood she represents is still set apart from that of Emer and Inguba, as her costume and movements convey an artificial, metallic feel: "*Her mask and clothes must suggest gold or bronze or brass or silver, so that she seems more an idol than a human being. This suggestion may be repeated in her movements. Her hair, too, must keep the metallic suggestion*" (VPI 551: 219). Cuchulain identifies the metallic light radiated from Fand with the light of the full moon:

As when the moon, complete at last
With every labouring crescent past,
And lonely with extreme delight,
Flings out upon the fifteenth night? (VPI 551: 222-25)

As Yeats explains in a note that the "invisible fifteenth incarnation is that of the greatest possible bodily beauty, and the fourteenth and sixteenth those of the greatest beauty visible to human eyes" (VPI 566), Cuchulain apparently views the immortal dancer as having obtained the perfect existence of the fifteenth phase, with her body and soul perfectly harmonized. Paradoxically, this greatest bodily beauty is disembodied, or at least not of the human body but some ethereal material. Fand's statement further complicates the nature of her existence: she



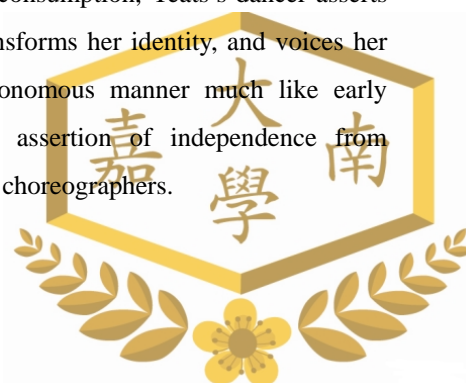
explains to Cuchulain that she has not yet reached the perfect incarnation, “[b]ecause I long I am not complete” (VPI 551: 226). She is not incomplete due to her aloneness but due to her desire for him, and she can achieve the fifteenth phase only when she and Cuchulain consummate their relationship: “When your mouth and my mouth meet / All my round shall be complete” (VPI 555: 262-63). Theoretically, Fand already possesses immortality and an ethereal body of the fifteenth phase; her need for Cuchulain underscores a prerequisite of an antithetical male, physical force in order to obtain completion. However, this kind of union seems to contradict the pure, self-sufficient existence of the fifteenth phase; or, maybe it is all part of Fand’s trickery to seduce Cuchulain, as the Sidhe are “dexterous fishers and they fish for men / With dreams upon the hook” (VPI 549: 205-206). The ambiguity is left unresolved since Fand’s scheme is cut short by the intervention of Bricriu, god of discord, who urges Emer to renounce Cuchulain’s love in exchange for his life.

Although Emer appears to win the battle against the bird-woman-witch dancer with her virtuous self-effacement, it is Bricriu who stages the event with a self-serving agenda to frustrate his enemy Fand. Arguing that in *The Only Jealousy* “It is *this* female sexuality that must be erased from the lives and experiences of ordinary women and thus from which the ordinary woman must be in turn erased” (96), Koritz criticizes Yeats as “bent on reassuring himself that real women, human women, are not like women who dance” (100). While Yeats does differentiate the bird-woman-witch dancer from Emer and Eithne, and Emer indeed sacrifices her desire to rescue Cuchulain, Eithne’s sexuality is not negated but even triumphs over Fand’s at the end. Upon Emer’s renunciation of Cuchulain’s love, he comes back from the world of the Sidhe and cries out for the

embrace of Eithne (“Your arms, your arms!”) (VPI 558: 258). In this play the power struggle between the mortal and the immortal, and women and men grows more complicated: the god plays the puppeteer maneuvering both the mortal and the supernatural women by pitting them against each other, and the mortal man being traded as a mere commodity. The fact that Fand’s dance occurs not exactly at the climactic moment but Emer’s renunciation does also downplays Fand’s dominance in *The Only Jealousy*, whereas her dance in *At the Hawk’s* wields more controlling power over Cuchulain and the movement of the plot. The vocalizing of Fand’s desire and the counterbalancing of her power by Emer and Eithne underscore middle Yeats’s increasing emphasis on the corporeality and humanity of the dancer whether she be a supernatural or a human woman.

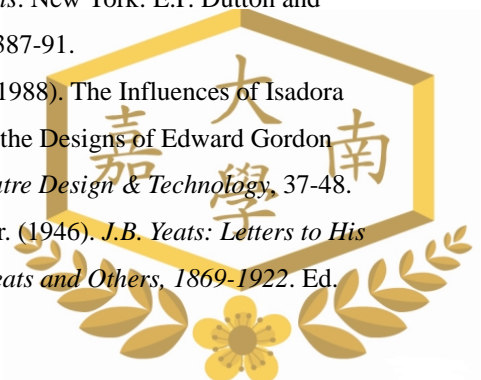
VI. Conclusion

Spinning and moving in between the realms of masculine and feminine, sexual and spiritual, life and death, middle Yeats’s solitary dancers challenge our interpretations of the body and gender by dismantling the binary operations imposed by patriarchal ideology. To read the dancers’ marginal status in Conchubar’s male-homosocial society in relation to their paramount position in Yeats’s theory of the twenty-eight incarnations enables us to map out the evolution of Yeats’s poetics and his critique of Victorian and Irish nationalist conceptions of pure womanhood. Far from being an aesthetic object on display for male consumption, Yeats’s dancer asserts her presence, transforms her identity, and voices her desire in an autonomous manner much like early modern dancers’ assertion of independence from male dancers and choreographers.



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葉慈中期作品中的舞動身體與性別政治

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摘要

將葉慈放置於現代舞的早期發展環境中，本文旨在探討葉慈中期作品中的舞動身體和性別政治，如他的戲劇『在巴利的海灘』（1904 年）和『艾瑪的唯一嫉妒』（1919 年），以及其他詩作。無論是神話，傳說，或人類，中期葉慈的舞者代表了與僵化的國籍，性別，宗教觀念對立的力量；正如早期現代舞者反抗古典芭蕾舞的身體限制和維多利亞時期的純女性概念，以解放女性的身體。這種美學與意識形態的反抗不可避免地引起父權機構的敵對，以確保其純家庭女性神話的永久運作。例如，『在巴利的海灘』中愛爾蘭族長視精靈舞者為其政權和法律的一種威脅；為要驅除這些邊緣的力量，並將他們排除於父權社會之外，這些族長制定詳細的儀式，以“趕走女巫。”葉慈在『艾瑪的唯一嫉妒』中進一步戲劇化人類女性與精靈舞者之間的權力鬥爭；可呼蘭的妻子艾瑪和他的情婦艾絲妮聯合對抗鳥-女人-女巫舞者，芬德。這三位女性的角力戰提供了一個場域，讓我們審查葉慈的性別政治與二十世紀早期的婦女運動的關聯。與舞者為友並寫作舞者的葉慈，在不斷地參與對話中，展現出他支持女性舞蹈者的藝術成就和其女性主義觀點。

關鍵詞：舞蹈，性別，葉慈

