

FOUR PLAYS FOR DANCERS

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Four plays for dancers by W. B. Yeats

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W. B. YEATS

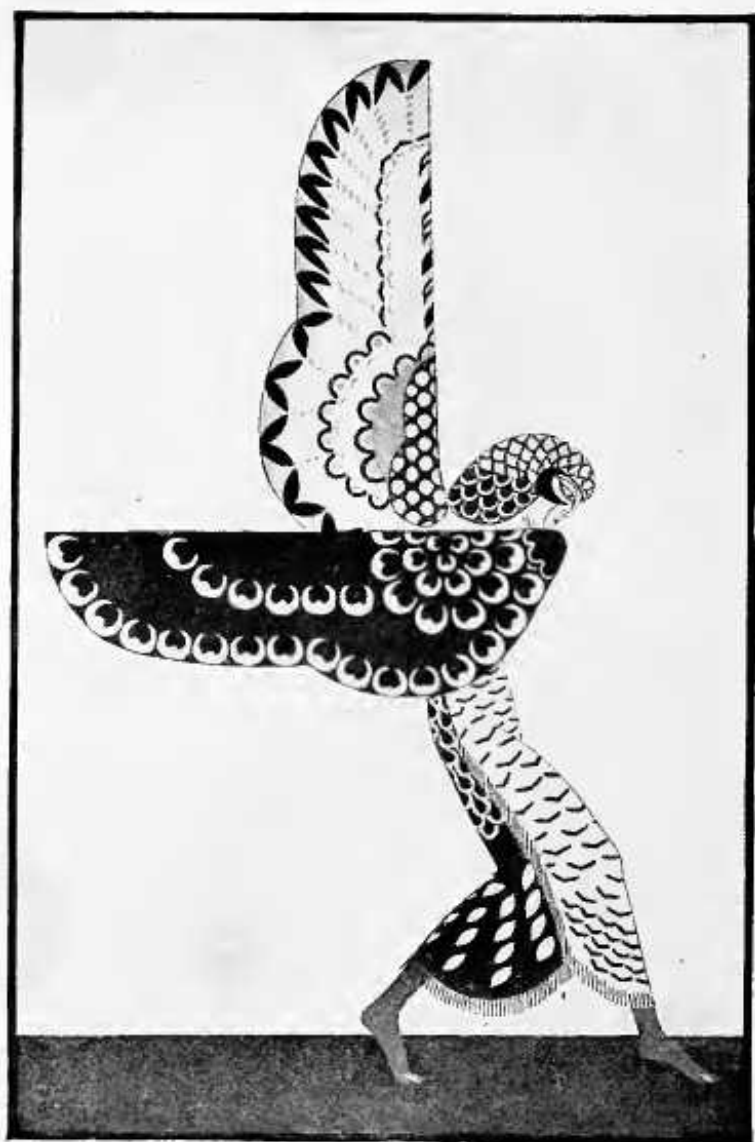
**FOUR PLAYS
FOR DANCERS**



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BY
W. B. YEATS

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PREFACE

Two of these plays must be opened by the unfolding and folding of the cloth, a substitute for the rising of the curtain, and all must be closed by it. The others, "The Dreaming of the Bones" and "Calvary," should have the same opening, unless played after plays of the same kind, when it may seem a needless repetition. All must be played to the accompaniment of drum and zither and flute, but on no account must the words be spoken "through music" in the fashionable way; and the players must move a little stiffly and gravely like marionettes and, I think, to the accompaniment of drum taps. I felt, however, during the performance of "The Hawk's Well," the only one played up to this, that there was much to discover. Should I make a serious attempt, which I may not, being rather tired of the theatre, to arrange and supervise performances, the dancing will give me most trouble, for I know but vaguely what I want. I do not want any existing form of stage dancing, but something with a smaller gamut of expression, something more reserved, more self-controlled, as befits performers within arm's reach of their audience.

The designs by Mr. Dulac represent the masks and costumes used in the first performance of "The Hawk's

Well." The beautiful mask of Cuchulain may, I think, serve for Dervorgilla, and if I write plays and organize performances on any scale and with any system, I shall hope for a small number of typical masks, each capable of use in several plays. The face of the speaker should be as much a work of art as the lines that he speaks or the costume that he wears, that all may be as artificial as possible. Perhaps in the end one would write plays for certain masks. If some fine sculptor should create for my "Calvary," for instance, the masks of Judas, of Lazarus, and of Christ, would not this suggest other plays now, or many generations from now, and possess one cannot tell what philosophical virility? The mask, apart from its beauty, may suggest new situations at a moment when the old ones seem exhausted; "The Only Jealousy of Emer" was 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. At the end of this book there is some music by Mr. Rummel, which my friends tell me is both difficult and beautiful for "The Dreaming of the Bones." It will require, I am told, either a number of flutes of which the flute-player will pick now one, now another, or an elaborate modern flute which would not look in keeping. I prefer the first suggestion. I notice that Mr. Rummel has written no music for the dance, and I have some vague memory that when we talked it over in Paris he felt that he could not without the dancer's help. There is also music for "The Hawk's Well" by Mr. Dulac,

which is itself an exposition of method, for it was written after a number of rehearsals and for instruments that have great pictorial effect.

"The Dreaming of the Bones" and "The Only Jealousy of Emer," bound together as *Two Plays for Dancers*, were printed on my sister's hand-press at Dundrum, County Dublin, and published in a limited edition in the spring of 1919, while "At the Hawk's Well" makes a part of the edition of *The Wild Swans at Coole*, printed at the same press in 1917, though not of the later edition of that book published by Macmillan. "At the Hawk's Well" and "The Only Jealousy of Emer" are the first and last plays of a series of four dealing with Cuchulain's life. The others are my "Green Helmet" and "Baile's Strand." "Calvary" has not hitherto been published.

That I might write "The Dreaming of the Bones" Mr. W. A. Henderson with great kindness wrote out for me all historical allusions to "Dervorgilla"; but neither that nor any of these plays could have existed if Mr. Edmond Dulac had not taught me the value and beauty of the mask and rediscovered how to design and make it.

W. B. YEATS.

July 1920.