

# The poetic drama of Fernando Pessoa and W.B. Yeats and the Symbolist Theatre Tradition

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## Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, *O Marinheiro*, Static & Ecstatic Drama, Yeats, Synge, Maeterlinck, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, Symbolist Theatre.

## Abstract

This essay explores the impact and influence of the Symbolist theatre and, in particular, of the dramas of Maeterlinck and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, on Fernando Pessoa and W.B. Yeats. It examines the way in which the principles underlying the theatre produced by those playwrights and that movement met with the aesthetic aspirations and philosophical inclinations of the two poets, which led them to engage with those principles and their enacting dramatic devices in their poetic drama. It also analyses points of contact between their works and works by those playwrights, their critique of their practices and efforts to surpass what they perceive as being their limitations and to make original contributions to the development of that strain of Symbolist theatre in the twentieth century.

## Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, *O Marinheiro*, Drama Estático & Extático, Yeats, Synge, Maeterlinck, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, Teatro Simbolista.

## Resumo

Este ensaio explora o impacto e a influência do teatro simbolista e, em particular, dos dramas de Maeterlinck e de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, sobre Fernando Pessoa e W.B. Yeats. Examina a forma como os princípios subjacentes ao teatro produzido por aqueles dramaturgos e aquele movimento foram ao encontro das aspirações estéticas e as preocupações e inclinações filosóficas de ambos os poetas, o que os levou a dialogarem com esses princípios e as suas estratégias de encenação nos seus dramas poéticos. Analisa, igualmente, pontos de contacto entre as suas obras e com as obras daqueles dramaturgos, a sua crítica das práticas que aqueles desenvolveram e esforço para ultrapassar o que percebem ser limitações e para oferecer contribuições originais para o desenvolvimento dessa linha de teatro simbolista no século XX.

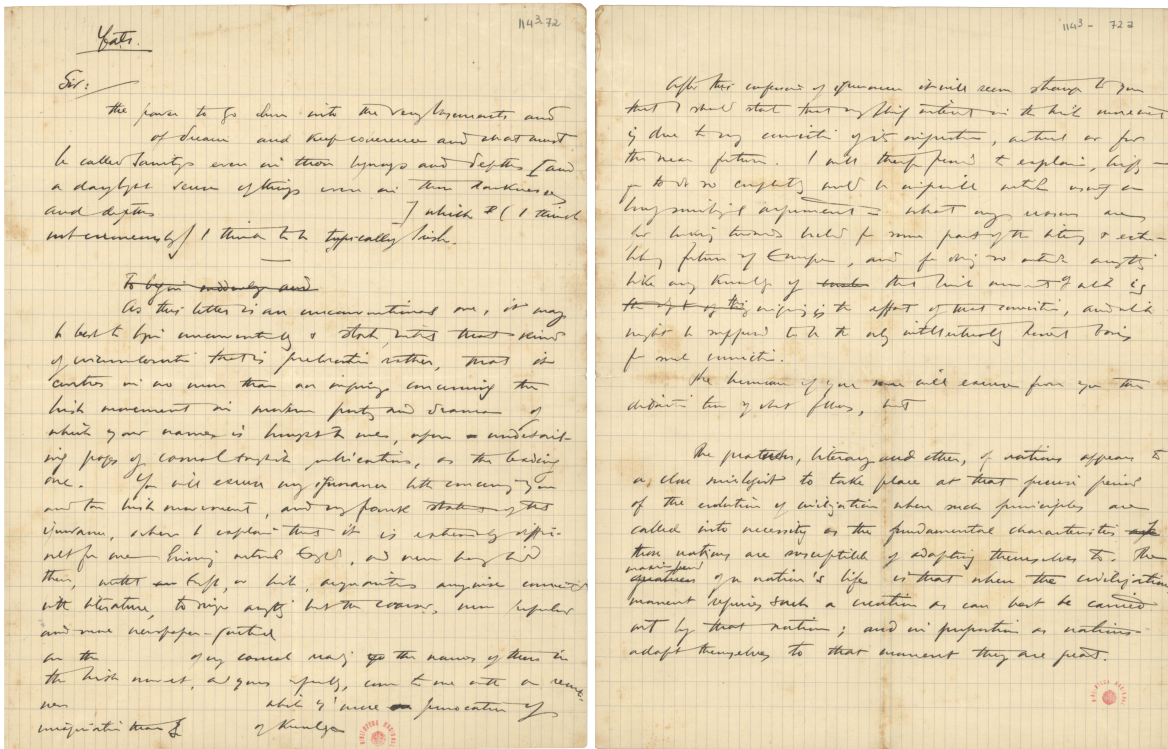
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SALOMÉ – Eu farei para mim um sonho, e esse sonho será uma historia. Irei contando alto essa historia, e vós ouvireis e sonhal-a-heis commigo. Uma ou outra de vós, quando a historia lhe fôr ensopando a alma, me irá dizendo o que vê na alma dessa historia, e que eu me esquecesse de contar. Será como um canto em que cantemos juntas no sentido, e cada uma por sua vez e na voz.

(PESSOA, 2017: 178)

Besides sharing their birthdate – 13 June, twenty-three years apart – Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) and W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) also shared the fact that they came from small nations in the western Atlantic periphery of Europe, in which, around the time of their respective literary debuts, important movements of cultural renaissance or revivalism were taking place. As literary renewal was at the heart of those movements, both writers ardently wished to contribute to them with their works. It was precisely Yeats's involvement in the so-called "Irish Literary Revival" which attracted Pessoa's attention at a time when he himself was publishing his first essays on the topic of "The new Portuguese Poetry" in *Águia*, the magazine of the "Renascença Portuguesa" cultural renewal movement. Pessoa drafted an undated letter addressed to the Irish poet which intended to be, in his own words, "an inquiry concerning the Irish movement, in modern poetry and drama of which your name is brought to me [...] as the leading one" (PESSOA, 1996: 83, adapted). The incomplete state of the draft, written in a quick, difficult to decipher hand, suggests Pessoa drafted the letter in an impulse after reading about Yeats "upon undetailing pages of casual English publications, as the leading one", as he states in the draft (PESSOA, 1996: 83) – likely Yeats's interview for the *Daily News* on 3 January 1913 (FOSTER, 1998: 477, 617) – and, as far as is known, never rewrote or sent it. However, that did not deter him from cultivating his avowed interest in the poetry and plays published by the writers that comprised the said movement, which became known for the creation of an Irish national theatre. This interest led Pessoa to acquire works by the leading figures associated with the Irish Literary Revival, namely W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge. His private library contains a 1912 anthology of Synge's plays, including *The Tinker's Wedding* (1909), *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903), and *Riders to the Sea* (1904); the anthology *A Selection from the Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (Tauchnitz, 1913), which includes selections of his poetry until 1912, narrative poems and three plays, namely *The Countess Cathleen* (1892-1912), *On Baile's Strand* (1904) e *Deirdre* (1906); and both volumes display some reading marks.



Figs. 1 & 2. Draft of undated letter addressed to Yeats by Pessoa (BNP/E3, 1143-72|72a).

In the opening paragraph of the acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize he was awarded in 1923, Yeats states, “[p]erhaps the English committees would never have sent you my name if I had written no plays, no dramatic criticism, if my lyric poetry had not a quality of speech practised upon the stage, perhaps even [...] if it were not in some degree the symbol of a movement” (YEATS, 1955: 559). By entitling his speech “The Irish Dramatic Movement”, he underscores the importance of that facet of his work for its international reception. In “The Bounty of Sweden” (1923), of which the Nobel lecture is part, Yeats describes himself as a dramatic poet, using the term “soliloquies” to describe a process of self-dramatisation through which he imagines himself as others or expresses different emotional circumstances (YEATS, 1955: 532). Pessoa also alludes to the Shakespearean soliloquies to describe his poetic production in the guise of fictional poets (for which he subsequently coined the term heteronyms) in a letter to Armando Côrtes-Rodrigues from 19 January 1915 in which he states:

Isso é toda uma literatura que eu criei e vivi, que é sincera, porque é sentida [...]. Isso é sentido na *pessoa de outro*; é escrito *dramaticamente*, mas é sincero (no meu grave sentido da palavra) como é sincero o que diz o Rei Lear, que não é Shakespeare, mas uma criação dele. [...] Por isso é sério tudo o que escrevi sob os nomes de Caeiro, Reis, Álvaro de Campos. Em qualquer destes pus um profundo conceito da vida, diverso em todos três, mas em todos gravemente atento à importância misteriosa de existir.

(PESSOA, 1998: I, 142)

[I have created and lived a whole literature, which is sincere, because felt (...). It is felt in the *person of another*; it is written *dramatically*, but it is sincere (in the most serious sense of the word); as sincere as what is said by King Lear, who is not Shakespeare, but a creation of his. (...) That is why everything I wrote under the names of Caeiro, Reis, Álvaro de Campos is serious. I have put a deep understanding of life in each of them, different in all three, but gravely attentive to the mysterious importance of existing in all of them.]

In comparing the heteronyms to utterances in a Shakespearean play, Pessoa underscores the dramatic impulse underlying his poetic depersonalization, which is endowed with an ontological and metaphysical tenor, as shown by his reference to an inquiry about the mystery of existence in the last sentence. In this way, he aligns himself with a symbolical conception of drama primarily concerned with the unfathomable human destiny, which gained particular prominence in the Symbolist theatre. Hence, both Pessoa and Yeats publicly stressed the dramatic nature and conception of their respective literary works, underlying both the poetry they produced – namely through the creation of *dramatis personae* with varying conceptual and stylistic autonomy – and their formally dramatic texts.

Unlike Yeats's public and much publicised depiction of himself as a dramatic poet in the Nobel lecture and his active involvement in a dramatic movement and theatrical productions at the Abbey Theatre, Pessoa is not normally regarded as a dramatist. However, it is significant that he chose to include *O Marinheiro* – subtitled “Drama Estático em Um Quadro” [Static Drama in One Tableau] – in the first issue of *Orpheu*, thus, first introducing himself to the reading public as a dramatic poet. In *Fernando Pessoa et le drame symboliste*, Teresa Rita Lopes reconstituted five fragmented dramatic texts at various stages of completion, including a *Salomé* (LOPES, 1977: 123). Further research in Pessoa's archive has uncovered a substantial number of dramatic works, mostly fragmentary and unfinished, some of which are only now starting to come to light. The array of poetic dramas found in his archive shows that Pessoa was interested in writing dramatically about significant and poignant mythical, literary and national and international historical personages, which included figures like Christ and Buda, a *Prometheus Revinctus*, and plays about tragic heroines like Inês de Castro. He shares this peculiarity with Yeats, who also wrote a *Calvary* and several plays about Irish mythological heroes and heroines. In doing so, I argue that the two authors sought to produce a substantive body of dramatic works in order both to assert themselves as dramatists and to establish a modern dramatic tradition in their respective national cultures, which is in keeping with their avowed literary nationalism. More recently, a critical edition of Pessoa's “Theatro Statico” [static theatre] comprising thirteen fragmentary plays has underscored Pessoa's deliberate affiliation to a significant and influential genre associated with Symbolist drama and originating in the theatre of Maurice Maeterlinck (PESSOA, 2017: 354). According to the editors, “Sem o encontro com o drama de Maeterlinck

[...], Pessoa dificilmente teria concebido o seu teatro estático” [without discovering the theatre of Maeterlinck (...), Pessoa would have hardly conceived his static theatre] (PESSOA, 2017: 357). Pessoa had four works by Maeterlinck in his private library: *Théâtre I* (1908), which included *La Princesse Maleine*, *L’Intruse*, and *Les Aveugles*, and which was signed and dated 13 June 1914; *Théâtre II* (1912), including *Pélleas et Mélisande*, *Alladine et Palomides*, *Interieur*, *La Mort de Tintagiles*; and *Théâtre III* (1912), including *Aglavaine et Sélysette*, *Ariane et Barbe-Bleu*, *Soeur Béatrice*; and *Monna Vanna* (1913) (CASTRO, 1996: 70). It seems likely that Pessoa acquired the three volumes of Maeterlinck’s dramatic works soon after the publication of the last installment in 1912 and, subsequently, the single volume with the three-act play in 1913. This timeframe coincides with the period in which he acquired the volume of Synge’s plays and the anthology of Yeats’s works. He appears to have had a marked interest in European theatre and playwrights at this time, which likely inspired him to write dramatic works, notably “static” dramas, which he began writing in 1913 and continued mostly through to 1918 (PESSOA, 2017: 11, 353).

Sensibly a decade earlier, Yeats was singly preoccupied with the Foundation of an Irish Literary Theatre, stating that it “will attempt to do in Dublin something of what has been done in London and Paris” and, regarding its rationale, adding that:

[...] one finds the literary drama alone [...] in little and inexpensive theatres, which associations of men of letters hire from time to time that they may see upon the stage the plays of Henrik Ibsen, Maurice Maeterlinck, Gerhart Hauptmann, José Echegaray, or some less famous dramatist who *has written, in the only way literature can be written, to express a dream that has taken possession of his mind.*

(YEATS, 2003: 143, my emphasis)

In this passage, Yeats mentions important precursors and chief practitioners of European Symbolist drama of note in Europe in the late 1880s and 90s. The “associations of men of letters” he mentions comprise the Théâtre Libre – run by the great practitioner of Naturalism, André Antoine, from 1887 to 1894 –, Paul Fort’s Théâtre d’Art (1890) and Aurelian Lugné-Poë’s Théâtre de l’Oeuvre (1893-96). The latter are illustrative of the coexistence of different dramatic movements in the Nineties, notably the Naturalist school of theatre – which had begun to decline – and the emerging Symbolist drama, to which Yeats’s reference to literature that expresses “a dream” alludes, evoking the theatre of Maeterlinck and Strindberg. Yeats saw productions by these companies when he visited Paris in 1894 and 1896 and he also attended special performances of plays by some of those European playwrights produced in London by the Independent Theatre Society. In February 1894, Yeats saw a performance of Villiers de L’Isle-Adam’s *Axël* at Lugné-Poë’s Théâtre de l’Oeuvre in Paris, which he reviewed for the April issue of the *Bookman*. His review, entitled “A Symbolical Drama in Paris”, inscribes the play in a larger movement of opposition to Naturalism that represents a return “by the path of

symbolism to imagination and poetry" (YEATS, 1970: I, 323). In his opinion, *Axël* "is written in prose as elevated as poetry, and in which all the characters are symbols and all the events allegories" (YEATS, 1970: I, 323), claiming that the play's "symbols: the forest castle, the treasure, the lamp that had burned before Solomon [...] for years to come dominated my imagination" (YEATS, 1989: 156). Hence, Yeats highlights the poetic and symbolic quality of Villiers's play, which, for him, epitomised "the mystical and idealist tendencies at the heart of the Symbolist aesthetic" (ROSE, 1989: 19). In particular, he underscores the Rosicrucian doctrine of renunciation of the world underpinning Villiers's play, while also highlighting its Wagnerian inspiration in electing "the stage as the setting for a great literary and religious event" (ROSE, 1989: 20). Yeats, who once claimed "I always feel my work is not drama but the ritual of a lost faith" (MENEZES, 1989: 117), was particularly sensitive to this ritualistic quality, stating many years later in the preface to H.P.R. Finberg's 1925 translation of *Axël*, "I thought it a great masterpiece, but because it seemed part of a religious rite, the ceremony perhaps of some secret Order wherein my generation had been initiated" (YEATS, 1989: 156).

Yeats's reference to a secret Order is linked to his conviction in the sacred sources of theatre, based on occultist principles through his association with the Golden Dawn, a Rosicrucian Hermetic Order in which he was initiated in 1890. This was particularly the case with his first contributions to "The Irish Dramatic Movement", which, as argued by Michael McAteer, "have been received as forms of spiritual drama deliberately set against the commercialist and realist trends within British theatre of the time" (MCATEER, 2010: 13). The critic gives as example Yeats's first play, *The Countess Cathleen* – known to Pessoa through the Tauchnitz anthology he likely acquired in 1913 –, whose first version dated from 1892 "addressed, through the medium of esoteric symbolism, a crisis in the structure of value generated by commodification in contemporary European culture" (MCATEER, 2010: 26). In accordance with symbolical processes which Yeats ascribes to the symbolist theatre, the said process of commodification is allegorically represented in the play's plot through the Merchant-Demons who buy the souls of Irish peasants impoverished by the Great Famine with gold. As noted by McAteer, the references to gold in the play originate in studies about alchemy which Yeats conducted once he was initiated into the "Internal" Order of the Golden Dawn and in initiation rituals of the Celtic Order of the Mysteries which he intended to found and was formulating at the time (MCATEER, 2010: 27).<sup>1</sup> He is said to have profusely

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<sup>1</sup> Other critics offer an anti-colonialist reading of the play, arguing that "the anti-English tendency underlying the play is evident, the merchant-demons being the English landlords" (DELMER, 1951: 193). The play provoked controversy from F. H. O'Donnell and other critics including Maurice Joy and Christian Ponder over the blasphemous attitudes it apparently supported. Critic Susan Cannon Harris argued in her book *Gender and Modern Irish Drama* (2002) that these objections are based more on the depiction of the usurpation of the "male" space of martyr by a female figure than on any perceived insult to Catholicism.

revised this play after having seen a private staging of Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna* by Lugné-Poë, in London in 1902 – whose theme of self-sacrifice is analogous to that of *The Countess Cathleen*, in which an Irish aristocratic woman sells her soul to the devil in order to save those of her countrymen. The Mephistophelic theme of Yeats's play, as well as the esoteric sources in which it was based, invite an approximation to Pessoa's *Fausto*, a dramatic poem he began writing as early as 1908 and continued working on until the time of his death, as shown by the chronological arch delineated in its recent critical edition (PESSOA, 2018: 27). Like Yeats, Pessoa also draws on the Rosicrucian doctrine of renunciation of the world, as portrayed in Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's *Axël*, which is frequently compared to Goethe's *Faust*, and was one of the sources of inspiration for Pessoa's dramatic poem. Additionally, K. David Jackson underscores the influence of the symbolist theatre of L'Isle-Adam alongside that of Maeterlinck on Pessoa's *O Marinheiro*, claiming that "a predecessor for the suspended ending of *The Mariner* can be found in the closing scenes [...] of L'Isle-Adam's *Axël*" (JACKSON, 2010: 37, 56).

In his review of *Axël*, Yeats states, "[t]he puppet plays of M. Maeterlinck have been followed by a still more remarkable portent. [...] the *Axël* of his master, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam" (YEATS, 1970, I: 323), identifying the French playwright as the predecessor of Maeterlinck's symbolist drama – which was acknowledged by the Belgium playwright himself (BITHELL, 1913, 6). Yeats was fully knowledgeable of Maeterlinck's theatre, having had the opportunity to see several of his plays staged and to read his essays. He met Maeterlinck on the occasion of Lugné Poë's productions of *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *L'Intruse*, taken to London by the Independent Theatre Society in March 1895. In a letter to Olivia Shakespeare from April 1895, he considers the Belgium dramatist "of immense value as a force helping people to understand a more ideal drama" (YEATS, 1975: 460). Reviewing a production of *Aglavaine et Sélysette* he saw in Paris in 1896, Yeats defined Symbolism as "[a] movement which never mentions an external thing except to express a state of the soul" (MCGUINNESS, 2000: 144-145). The following year, he reviewed the English translation of *Le Trésor des humbles* (1896) for the *Bookman*, which for him confirmed "[t]he mystical and Symbolist nature of the philosophical tenets at the basis of Maeterlinck's early plays" (ROSE, 1989: 46). Consequently, the impact of Maeterlinck's early theatre on Yeats's dramatic works is understandable.

*L'Intruse* (1890), Maeterlinck's second play, belonging to his *théâtre de l'intériorité*, was the first of his dramatic works to be performed in London in an English translation staged under the direction of Beerbohm Tree at the Haymarket Theatre in January 1892. Yeats saw that production and, according to McAteer, it constituted "the strongest instance of Maeterlinck's influence on Yeats's drama in the 1890s" (MCATEER, 2010: 20). The critic singles out *At the Hawk's Well* (1916) as "a play that owes much to Maeterlinck's influence" (MCATEER, 2010: 25), claiming that it displays affinities with *L'Intruse* with regards to structure – as they are both

one-act plays –, to themes, and to staging. Maeterlinck defines this play as a *drame d'attente* (ROSE, 1989: 57), in which “the plot has been reduced to a minimum and the atmosphere is pervaded by the enigmatic presence of death and the unknown” and the “characters are minimally defined” (ROSE, 1989: 63). In *L’Intruse*, the dramatic effect of the play is intensified by the family’s long wait for the arrival of a priest and nun, while in adjoining rooms offstage lie the ailing mother and the strange child she has given birth to, due to the uncertainty of their fate. The plot is also reduced to a minimum in *At the Hawk’s Well* – a play which derives directly from a ritual Yeats conducted in 1889 together with other “Golden Dawn members with the purpose of rediscovering the Celtic myths”, and is considered his “most pristine, in hermetic terms” (MENEZES, 1989: 130), and one of his most successful. The *wait* of the protagonists to drink the elixir of immortality that will purportedly issue from a magical well is equally long, lasting for the entirety of the play in the case of the Young Man – “I will stand here and wait” –, and of his life in the case of the Old Man – “I waited the miraculous flood, I waited | While the years passed and withered me away” (YEATS, 1934: 213). Additionally, it is fraught with a pronounced mood of anxiety, fear, and lethargy, analogous to that which pervades *L’Intruse* and the other *dramas d’attente*, as conveyed by these lines from the chorus of musicians in the opening scene:

SECOND MUSICIAN *I am afraid* of this place.

BOTH MUSICIANS (Singing)

“Why should I *sleep?*” the heart cries,

“For the wind, the salt wind, the sea wind,

Is beating a cloud through the skies;

I would wander always like the wind.”

(YEATS, 1934: 209, my emphasis)

Finally, as shown by the names of the protagonists, the characters of Yeats’s play are as minimally defined as those in *L’Intruse*, reflecting a characteristic of Maeterlinck’s drama, particularly pronounced in his early plays, which Yeats highlighted in his 1894 review of *Aglavaine et Selysette*, stating, “[w]e do not know in what country they were born, or in what period they were born, or how old they are, or what they look like, and we do not always know whether they are brother and sister, or lover and lover, or husband and wife” (YEATS, 1975: 52).

The indefinite quality of *At the Hawk’s Well* extends to other aspects, notably temporal and spatial representation, since the period is vaguely described as “the Irish Heroic Age” and the place is unspecified. It opens with an Old Man sitting motionless beside a dry well under a leafless hazel tree, a desolate landscape which recalls the barren, decaying landscape in *Les Aveugles* (1890) another of Maeterlinck’s *dramas d’attente* (dramas of waiting) to which Yeats refers in a letter



to Olivia Shakespeare from April 1895. The affinities with *Les Aveugles* in terms of staging can be gathered from the stage directions of Yeats's play:

The stage is any bare space before a wall against which stands a patterned screen. A drum and a gong and a zither have been laid close to screen before the play begins. [...] The FIRST MUSICIAN carries with him a folded black cloth and goes to the centre of the stage toward, the front and stand, motionless, the folded cloth hanging from between his hands. The two other MUSICIANS enter and, after standing a moment at either side of the stage, go towards him and slowly unfold the cloth, singing as they do so:

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

As they unfold the cloth, they go backward a little so that the stretched cloth and the wall make a triangle with the FIRST MUSICIAN at the apex supporting the centre of the cloth. On the black cloth is a gold pattern suggesting a hawk.

(YEATS, 1934: 208)

The bare stage set conjured up by the opening chorus of musicians corresponds to the so-called "*décor synthétique*" characteristic of Symbolist theatre (ROSE, 1989: 35), which is reinforced by the suggestiveness of the painted black cloths with stylised designs that recur in the costume of the Hawk Woman of the Sidhe (Figs. 3, 4 & 5).

The latter features corroborate Anne Cnudde-Knowland's claim that, unlike the sparse but still naturalistic settings of Maeterlinck's plays, "[i]n Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well* [...] a naturalistic reading is out of the question. The setting is not physically represented but replaced by verbal evocation and supplemented by a black and blue cloth, the latter suggesting a well" (CNUDDE-KNOWLAND, 1984: 82). This notwithstanding, and despite the stage directions in Maeterlinck's plays, they became less naturalistic when staged by the Théâtre d'Art and the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, as was the case with the 1891 staging of *L'Intruse* by the Théâtre d'Art, which featured stage sets created by Paul Sérusier and other artists from the symbolist group the Nabis. Thus, as the latter staging and the 1916 staging of *At the Hawk's Well* with designs by Edmund Dulac show, in symbolist theatre "the set should be a pure ornamental fiction which completes the illusion through analogies of colors and lines with the play.... Theater will be what it should be: a pretext for dream", as argued by Pierre Quillard In "On the Absolute Lack of Utility of Exact Staging" (DEAK, 1993: 145).



Figs. 3, 4 & 5. Costumes of the 1916 production of *At the Hawk's Well* with designs by Edmund Dulac, including that of the Hawk Woman of the Sidhe.

The climax of *At the Hawk's Well* is conveyed by the hypnotic dance of the Hawk Woman, who bewitches the Old Man into a trance and leads the Young man to chase her offstage, thereby preventing them from drinking the everlasting water of the well and attaining immortality. "For a moment, the stage is left empty, except for the still figure of the sleeping Old man [...], presenting a static stage-picture" (ROSE, 1989: 127) comparable to that portrayed at the end of *L'Intruse*, in which the old blind man is left in the room unaware of what happened while the others rush offstage. The lethargic mood is intensified by the fact that, throughout the play, the characters move slowly, stiffly and in a non-naturalistic way so as to "suggest a marionette" (as indicated in the directions), and in tune with the music of gong, drum and zither. Their movement calls to mind Maeterlinck's plays for

marionettes, among which *Intérieur* (1895), which was staged at the Abbey Theatre in 1910. In “J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time” (1910), written after he had overseen the rehearsals of *Intérieur*, Yeats gives the Belgium dramatist’s oeuvre as an example of a type of “drama which would give direct expression to reverie, to the speech of the soul itself” (YEATS, 1961: 334). According to him, this facet of Maeterlinck’s plays was responsible for producing a meditative type of theatre in which “[i]f the real world is not altogether rejected it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance” (YEATS, 1961: 243). Hence the importance of incantatory rhythms in the recitation of the lines, of song and dance in *At the Hawk’s Well*, one of his *Four Plays for Dancers*, which conflates the legacy of Maeterlinck’s Symbolist theatre with subsequent influences, notably that of Japanese Noh theatre, another source of inspiration for the ritualistic movements of the characters. Additionally, the masks worn by the Young Man, the Old Man, and the Guardian of the Well in Yeats’s play, which were inspired by the Noh masks, also aimed to distance the characters from circumstantial reality and grant them a symbolic impersonality as did the use of puppets in *Intérieur* and the other plays for marionettes. In this essay, Yeats also claims that “Maeterlinck [...] reaches the same end as Greek drama, by choosing instead of human beings persons as faint as a breath upon a looking-glass, symbols who can speak a language slow and heavy with dreams because their own life is but a dream” (YEATS, 1961: 334).

Yeats’s remarks about aspects of Maeterlinck’s theatre which he emulates in his own plays could easily apply to Pessoa’s *O Marinheiro* [The Mariner], in which the inner conflict between a lived and a dreamt existence experienced by the characters constitutes the sole dramatic action. Published in the first issue of *Orpheu* in 1915, it is Pessoa’s only complete play, which was ostensibly written on “11/12-10-1913”, as indicated in the magazine, though Pessoa claims to have revised it substantially in a letter to Armando Côrtes-Rodrigues from 4 March 1915 (FISCHER, 2012: 23). He also produced a substantial number of fragments of the play in French, which indicates an intended affiliation with Symbolist drama written in that language (FISCHER, 2012: 3-4). In effect, by choosing to subtitle his poetic drama, “Drama Estático em Um Quadro” [Static Drama in One Tableau], Pessoa signals his alignment with the kind of theatre theorised and practised by Maurice Maeterlinck. In an undated fragment found amid his papers Pessoa explains what the term represents for him thus:

Chamo theatro estatico áquelle cujo enredo dramatico não constitue acção — isto é, onde os *fantoches* não só não agem, porque nem se deslocam nem dialogam sobre deslocarem-se, mas nem sequer teem sentidos capazes de produzir uma acção; onde não ha conflito nem perfeito enredo. Dir-se-ha que isto não é theatro. Creio que o é porque creio que o theatro transcende o theatro meramente dinamico e que o essencial do teatro é, não a acção nem a

progressão e consequência da acção — mas, mais abrangentemente, a revelação das almas através das palavras trocadas ou a criação das situações através [...]. Pode haver revelação de almas sem acção, e pode haver criação de *situações de inercia*, meramente de alma, sem janellas ou portas para a realidade.

(PESSOA, 2017: 276, meus sublinhados)

By static drama I mean drama in which the plot does not constitute action, drama in which *the puppets* don't act (for they never change position and never talk of changing position) and don't even have feelings capable of producing an action – drama, in other words, in which there is no conflict or true plot. Someone may argue that this is not drama at all. I believe it is, for I believe that drama is more than just the dynamic kind and that the essence of dramatic plot is not action or the results of action but – more broadly – the revelation of souls through words that are exchanged and the creation of situations [...]. It's possible for souls to be revealed without action, and it's possible to create *situations of inertia* that concern only the soul, with no windows or doors onto reality.

(PESSOA, 2001: 20, my emphasis)

Pessoa's definition of static drama resembles Maeterlinck's "théâtre statique", a theatre of situation or of waiting in which characters rarely take part in a dramatic action, in the traditional sense of the term (ROSE, 1989: 48). Although it is not known if Pessoa read "Le Tragic Quotidien" – the essay version of the article published in *Le Figaro* on 2 April 1894 in which Maeterlinck coined the expression "théâtre statique" [static theatre] –, it is possible he might have come across references to it in Max Esch's *L'Oeuvre de Maurice Maeterlinck* (1912), since he had a copy of this book in his library.

Prior to the article in *Le Figaro*, Maeterlinck had already claimed, in an article published in *La Jeune Belgique* in 1890, that poetic drama was the instrument of the experience of mystical communion with a higher reality which true theatre aimed at achieving. However, in his opinion, this aim was destroyed in modern naturalist theatre by a performance that was too literal to convey the play's symbolic import. Therefore, he argued, theatre was best read (BRACHEAR, 1966: 347). Hence, both authors appear to believe that by inhibiting action and focusing on the text they can attain a state which, according to the Belgian playwright, allows the "interior drama" to unfold and the soul to reveal itself, through what he called "drame d'âme" in *Le Trésor des humbles*. Despite the close affinity between their understanding of "static" drama, there appears to be a difference of degree in their actual dramatic practice. As Patrick McGuinness notes, "(a)lthough Maeterlinck's theatre diminishes action, it does not eliminate it altogether" (MCGUINNESS, 2000: 235). If, as shown, there is barely any action in *At The Hawk's Well*, this feature is even more prominent in *O Marinheiro*, which relies entirely on the dialogue exchanged between the characters, written in poetic prose, to create dramatic intensity. Therefore, in emulating the Belgium playwright's (at the time) revolutionary concept, Pessoa appears to expand its poetic potential further.

As was the case with Yeats, *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles* also exercised the most significant influence on *O Marinheiro*. This is corroborated by the fact that they are profusely annotated in the three-volume edition of Maeterlinck's *Théâtre* in Pessoa's personal library. Based on the underlined sentences and excerpts in those books, Carla Ferreira de Castro claims that "a leitura dos dois dramas em um acto contribuíu, de forma idêntica, para as eventuais intertextualidades que possamos detectar no drama do autor português" [reading the two one-act plays contributed in a similar way to the potential intertextualities we may detect in the play of the Portuguese author] (CASTRO, 1996: 70-71). She specifies that in *L'Intruse* the markings correspond to "frases que aludem à vigília e ao sonho" [sentences that allude to states of vigil and dream] and, in *Les Aveugles*, to "a temática da solidão, do medo e do sonho" [the themes of solitude, fear, and dream], providing as examples, "On dirait que nous sommes toujours seuls"; "J'ai peur quando je ne parle pas"; "Moi, je ne vois que quando je rêve..." (CASTRO, 1996: 88, 89). That these aspects inspired *O Marinheiro* can be seen by the fact that Pessoa identifies "o tédio, a duvida e o sonho" [tedium, doubt, and dream] as the central themes of the play (PESSOA, 2017: 277).

The imaginary quality of *O Marinheiro* is immediately established in the stage directions through the expression "whoever imagines", resembling Yeats's evocation of "the eye of the mind" in *At The Hawk's Well*, setting the scene thus:

Um quarto que é sem duvida num castello antigo. Do quarto vê-se que é circular. Ao centro ergue-se, sobre uma eça, um caixão com uma donzella, de branco. Quatro tochas aos cantos. À direita, quase em frente a quem imagina o quarto, ha uma unica janella, alta e estreita, dando para onde só se vê, entre dois montes longinquos, um pequeno espaço de mar. Do lado da janella velam trez donzellas. A primeira está sentada em frente á janella, de costas contra a tocha de cima da direita. As outras duas estão sentadas uma de cada lado da janella.  
É noite e ha como que um resto vago de luar.

(PESSOA, 2017: 31, meu sublinhado)

A room in what is no doubt an old castle. We can tell, from the room, that the castle is circular. In the middle of the room, on a bier, stands a coffin with a young woman dressed in white. A torch burns in each of the four corners.

To the right, almost opposite *whoever imagines the room*, there is one long, narrow window, from which a patch of ocean can be glimpsed between two distant hills. Next to the window three young women keep watch. The first is sitting opposite the window, her back to the torch on the upper right. The other two are seated on either side of the window.

It is night, with just a hazy remnant of moonlight.

(PESSOA, 2001: 20-21, my emphasis)

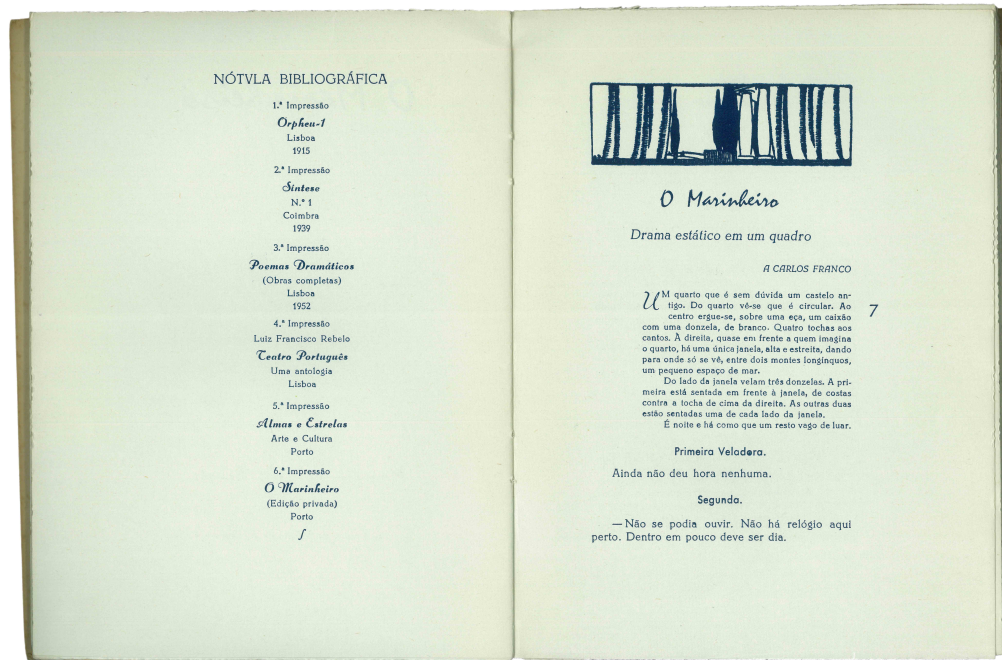


Fig. 6. First page, with stage directions, of *O Marinheiro* from a posthumous edition from 1957 with a Symbolist drawing.

By setting his play in a castle, Pessoa emulates one of the chief symbols deployed by Maeterlinck in several of his plays as a preferred setting for a theatre of interiority. In effect, the opening stage directions of *O Marinheiro* seem to emulate the “seven sleeping princesses in a barren castle beside the sobbing sea” of *Les Sept Princesses* (1891) (HENDERSON, 1904: 210). The latter play was part of a trilogy – along with *L’Intruse* and *Les Aveugles* – which the Belgian playwright devoted specifically to the theme of death. Therefore, by alluding to it at the start of his play and by introducing that same theme through the reference to the young woman in a coffin, Pessoa aligns his play with Maeterlinck’s trilogy about death, which is as looming a presence in it as in the latter’s plays. Finally, the fact that the action takes place at night also recalls the “nocturnal theatre” of dream described at length by Maeterlinck in the essay “Onirologie” and staged in *L’Intruse*. (MCGUINNESS, 2000: 144-5)

Pessoa’s reference to “puppets” in his characterisation of static drama in the excerpt quoted above also evokes Maeterlinck’s “plays for marionettes”, which it emulates through the impersonality of the characters of *O Marinheiro*. The play features three women who are numerically identified as First, Second and Third *Veladoras* [Watchers], in accordance with the order in which they utter their lines, similarly to the blind characters in *Les Aveugles*.

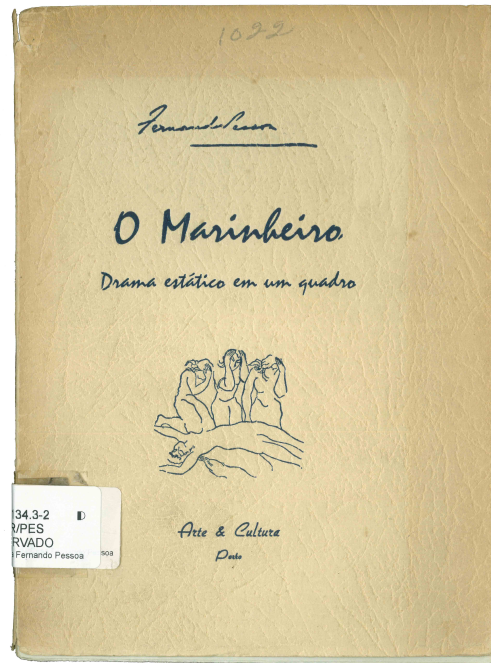


Fig. 7. Drawing of the *Veladoras* from the cover of a posthumous edition of *O Marinheiro* from 1957.

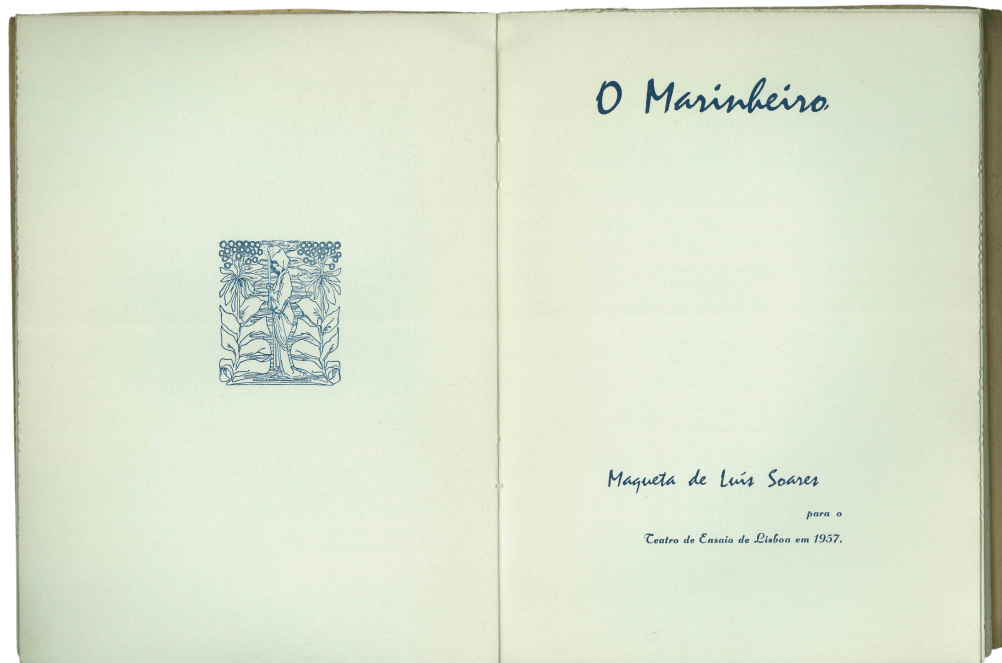


Fig. 8. Front page of a posthumous edition of *O Marinheiro* from 1957, with indication it was published for a production by the "Teatro de Ensaio de Lisboa".

The dramatic action is circumscribed to the vigil these women keep through the night watching over the body in the coffin, which lasts for the entirety of the play, creating a situation of inertia that Pessoa associates with static drama and confirming its genre as a drama of waiting along the same lines as Maeterlinck's trilogy. As the First Watcher states: "Velamos as horas que passam ... O nosso mister é inútil como a Vida... (PESSOA, 2017: 41) [We keep watch over the passing hours... Our task is as useless as Life... (PESSOA, 2001: 29)]. To escape the *taedium vitae* suggested by this remark and lessen their sense of solitude, they talk to one another while keeping watch:

Primeira: [...] Ah, fallemos, minhas irmãs, fallemos alto, fallemos todas juntas... O silencio começa a tomar corpo, começa a ser coisa... Sinto-o envolver-me como uma nevoa... Ah, fallae, fallae! ...

(PESSOA, 2017: 34)

First Watcher: [...] "Oh, let's talk, sisters, let's talk all together in a loud voice... Silence is beginning to take shape, to be a thing... I feel it wrapping me like a mist... Ah, talk, talk!"

(PESSOA, 2001: 23)

The fear that the ultimate silence of death would materialise, which is also experienced by the blind characters in Maeterlinck's play, partly explains the watchers' constant flow of exchanges, which often include repetition and echolalia as a form of reassurance and as a way of maintaining their collaborative spoken-existence. This aspect would, in fact, become a stylistic signature of Samuel Beckett's theatre, featuring in such plays as *Waiting for Godot*, which also owes much to Maeterlinck's *Les Aveugles* as well as to Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well*.

If speaking grants the watchers momentary respite from silence and solitude, they seek evasion from the anxiety and fear of the unknown associated with living through dreaming. Therefore, they while away the time sharing dreams as stories. One of these dreamt fictions – that of a mariner stranded on an island, who, out of nostalgia for his homeland begins to imagine a fictional past one – engages their exchanges for much of the play. The fate of the mariner, who eventually is unable to distinguish reality from dream from so much dreaming is a cautionary allegory of the situation of the watchers, who have themselves become so enraptured with their dreamt fictions that they have put off living. This leads them to question the very nature of reality and dream as the play reaches its climax:

Sei eu ao certo se o não continuo sonhando, se o não sonho sem o saber, se o sonhal-o não é esta cousa vaga a que eu chamo a minha vida?... Não me falleis mais... Principio a estar certa de qualquer cousa, que não sei o que é... Avancam para mim, por uma noite que não é esta, os passos de um *horror* que desconheço... Quem teria eu ido despertar com o sonho meu que vos contei?... Tenho um medo disforme de que Deus tivesse prohibido o meu sonho... Elle é sem dúvida mais real do que Deus permite...

(PESSOA, 2017: 42, meu sublinhado)



How can I be sure that I'm not still dreaming it, that I'm not dreaming it without knowing it, and that my dreaming isn't this hazy thing I call my life?... Say no more... I'm beginning to be sure of I don't know what... The footsteps of some unknown *horror* are approaching me in a night that's not this night... Whom might I have awakened with the dream I told you?... I'm deathly afraid that God has forbidden my dream, which is undoubtedly more real than He allows...

(PESSOA, 2001: 30, my emphasis)

Reflecting a fin de siècle reaction of the Symbolist theatre against positivist materialism, Pessoa's play makes the point that no matter how ethereal a dreamt thing may be, by existing in the consciousness of the subject it becomes in some sense an object of experience, as real as any other material object, only more mysterious, which leads the watchers to pose searching metaphysical questions:

Primeira – Mas sabemos nós, minhas irmãs, por que se dá qualquer coisa? ...

(PESSOA, 2017: 32)

First Watcher: "But do we know, sisters, why anything happens?"

(PESSOA, 2001: 21)

Primeira: Se olho para o presente com muita atenção, parece-me que ele já passou... O que é qualquer coisa? Como é que ela passa? Como é por dentro o modo como ela passa?

(PESSOA, 2017: 34)

First Watcher: "If I look closely at the present, it seems to have already moved on... What is anything? How does it move on from one moment to the next? How does it inwardly move on?..."

(PESSOA, 2001: 23)

Therefore, through the unsettling effect they have on the watchers, dreams prove a failed escape route to the ontological and metaphysical anxieties occasioned by the divided consciousness and paralysing lucidity underlying the condition of living:

Segunda – Oh, que *horror*, que *horror* íntimo nos desata a voz da alma, e as sensações dos pensamentos, e nos faz falar e sentir e pensar quando tudo em nós pede o silêncio e o dia e a inconsciência da vida... Quem é a quinta pessoa neste quarto que estende o braço e nos interrompe sempre que vamos a sentir?

(PESSOA, 2017: 47, meu sublinhado)

Second Watcher: "Oh, what *horror*, what secret *horror* separates voice from soul, sensations from thoughts, and makes us talk and feel and think, when everything in us begs for silence and the new day and the unconsciousness of life... Who is the fifth person in this room who extends a forbidding hand to stop us every time we're about to feel?"

(PESSOA, 2001: 34, my emphasis)

These lines recall others about the “metaphysical horror of existing” in Pessoa’s unfinished *Fausto*, showing that the play has a symbolical import rooted in the same dramatic tradition as Goethe’s *Faust* and Villiers de L’Isle-Adam’s *Axël*. Similarly to these plays, in *O Marinheiro*, argues Pessoa, “o drama é, pelo enredo fora, a sombra, passo a passo, de uma *ideia* (como nos dramas de Maeterlinck [...], aliás falhados pela *opressão do símbolo*)” [throughout the plot, the drama is the shadow, step by step, of an *idea* (as in Maeterlinck’s dramas {...}), which fail, by the way, due to the oppression of the symbol] (PESSOA, 1990: 278). As the latter observation shows Pessoa associates the Platonist idealism which underlies the dichotomy between life and dream in *O Marinheiro* with Maeterlinck’s theatre, creating in Raul Leal’s appraisal, a “verdadeiro mundo ultramaeterlinckiano, a sublimação (...) do idealismo platónico ou, antes, neoplatónico da escola pagã de Alexandria” [a veritable ultramaeterlinckean world, the sublimation of platonic idealism, or rather, neoplatonic from the pagan school of Alexandrian] (PESSOA, 1957: 52). In effect, it is this underlying esoteric symbolism which justifies its inclusion in the type of drama that Pessoa terms as “Occult or a Static Drama” (title in English) and characterises as “metaphysical” in a fragment which ends with the statement, “o aparente é o real” [the apparent *is* the real] (PESSOA, 2017: 278-79).

Despite aligning his theory on drama and a substantial part of his dramatic writing with Maeterlinck’s conception of static drama, Pessoa criticises the playwright for deploying over-determined symbols in the excerpt quoted above, implying that the demonstrative quality of his plays inhibits their dramatic expressive potential. According to Lopes, *O Marinheiro* can be seen as “uma tentativa de aperfeiçoar e ultrapassar o drama estático do dramaturgo belga” [an attempt to perfect and surpass the Belgium playwright’s static drama] (LOPES, 1977: 183). This critic identifies two stages in Pessoa’s static drama: in a first stage, his characters create situations of inertia similar to Maeterlinck’s oneiric drama; in a second stage they become visionaries in a ritual drama in which the progression of the action produces a kind of ascesis, whereby the character goes beyond the real through the power of dreams (LOPES, 1977: 127-28). A similar point is made by Castro, who claims that

Mais do que estático, este é um drama do extâse porque vive não somente da inacção, mas também da artificialidade das palavras ditas de forma ritmada e musical. Neste ponto, parece-me que Pessoa concretiza com maior sucesso que Maeterlinck a ideia simbolista expressa por Verlaine, na *Art Poétique* de 1874, quando defende uma *harmonia de sons que faça sonhar*.

(CASTRO, 2011: 86-87)

Lopes’s allusion to ritual drama whereby character transcends reality and the dramatic action gains a quality akin to a religious rite recalls the underlying principles of much of Yeats’s dramatic production, ostensible in the dramatic

devices employed in *At the Hawk's Well*. In turn, Castro's observation underscores the expressive quality of poetic language rendered dramatic through polyphonic, rhythmic delivery in Pessoa's play as accomplishing more effectively the Symbolist aim of linguistic suggestiveness.

## DRAMA—STATIC AND ANARCHISTIC

Maurice Maeterlinck and "Monna Vanna," W.  
B. Yeats and the Plays for an Irish Theatre.

The holidays bring a breathing spell in which to "loaf and invite the soul," or if not, to loaf, then at least to invite the shy imaginings of the two modern playwrights who are more purely and resolutely spiritual than any of their fellows, and whose souls, being mystical in their bent by theory as well as by practice, elude pursuit as surely as they challenge it. The Belgian, Maurice Maeterlinck, has been with us in the person of his "Monna Vanna" at the Irving Place Theatre, suggesting his quaint and only half expressed ideas of what the art of the playwright is not, but should be; while Mr. William Butler Yeats, the leader of the movement toward an Irish national theatre, is industriously promulgating his equally quaint and vague ideas of poetry and the drama by means of lectures before select and favored circles. That M. Maeterlinck's ideal is the "static" drama is sufficiently obvious because M. Maeterlinck himself invented the phrase. That Mr. Yeats's idea of the drama is anarchistic may be news to him, but as he is an Irishman by profession the news can scarcely be unwelcome.

### *Maeterlinck and the Theory of the Static Drama.*

The notion of the static drama is set forth in the essay on "The Tragedies of Daily Life" in "The Treasure of the Humble."\* M. Maeterlinck is disturbed by the primitiveness and the crudity of the themes of the plays of the public stage. The hero who tri-

that, as M. Maeterlinck has again and again assured us, his earlier plays were written to be acted by marionettes; their creepy, mystical, gold-and-purple adumbrations of love and death are too dreamily vague for concrete embodiment; the twilight motives and the febrile deeds of the characters are too fantastic for normal human speech and action. And that the latest play, "Joyselle," deals statically with motionless moods of the soul is evident to any one who is willing and able to follow its indefinite yet fine-spun symbolism. In spite of passages of rare spiritual divination and sensuous beauty, I confess that the play unmistakably bored me!

But what of "Monna Vanna?" It is said that M. Maeterlinck takes no great pride in it, admitting tacitly that in writing it he abjured his ideals, presumably with the purpose of giving his actress wife, Georgette Leblanc, a popular vehicle for her art. If so, the stage has proved a place where works of art are born: the poem possesses a double life which is not complete until a living being gets into it, and all the theories of a stageless drama fail to the ground.

"Monna Vanna" is dynamic from first to last. At the rise of the curtain we are confronted with the struggle of the besieged famine-stricken Pisa against the host of Florence without the walls. When we are in Pisa we hear only of the camp of the menacing Florentine mercenary. When we are in Prinzivalli's tent we see the lights of the beleaguered city on the back drop, the tower of Pisa

titude toward life. It may not be amiss, however, to point out that "Monna Vanna" is more convincing viewed as dynamic drama than viewed as an exponent of M. Maeterlinck's static searching of the mystical springs of spiritual life.

Mr. Yeats is manifestly, and by his own confession, a disciple of Maeterlinck, as both are disciples of Ibsen. In his "Ideas of Good and Evil"\* he echoes Maeterlinck's aversion to the theatre as the place where beauty is extinguished in the banal externalities of scenery and acting, and quotes his arraignment of primeval emotions. "The true artist is well aware that the psychology of victory or murder is but elementary and exceptional, and that the solemn voice of men and things, the voice that issues forth so timidly and hesitatingly, can not be heard amidst the idle uproar of acts of violence, and therefore he will place on his canvas a house lost in the heart of the country, a door open at the end of a passage, a face or hands at rest." It is a doctrine that has a peculiar appeal for the Irish mystic. He flees the life of cities as destructive of the emotional being and, as he tells us in "The Celtic Twilight," seeks among the peasants "to perfect symbols of sorrow and beauty, and the magnificent penury of dreams." He even believes in the fairies. "I say to myself, when I am well out of that thicket of argument, that they are surely there, the divine people; for only we who have neither simplicity nor wisdom have denied them, and the simple of all times, and the wise men of ancient times, have seen them and spoken to them. They live out of their passionate lives not far off, as I think, and we shall be among them when we die, if we but keep our natures simple and passionate." If from such passages as this it seems that Mr. Yeats does not so much believe in the fairies as he believes in believing in them, it is to be held in mind that he has the gift of mystical trances, in which

Fig. 9. John Corbin, "Drama—Static and Anarchistic", *New York Times*, 27 December 1903.

Yeats, who, in a newspaper article from 1903, was called a disciple of Maeterlinck, given the similar type of poetic dramas he produced, also criticised the expressive limitations he perceived in the latter's plays. In a letter to Olivia Shakespeare from April 1895, in which he describes a meeting in Paris with Paul Verlaine, he makes the following remarks about Maeterlinck's work:

I feel about his things generally however that they differ from really great work in lacking that ceaseless revery [sic] about life which we call wisdom. [...] I said to Verlaine, when I saw him last year, "Does not Maeterlinck touch the nerves sometimes when he should touch the heart?" [...] This touching of the nerves alone, seems to me to come from lack of reverie. He is however of immense value as a force helping people to understand a more ideal drama.

(YEATS, 1975: 51)

Yeats's criticism of the Belgium playwright is based on his specific understanding of the term "reverie" in a dramatic context, which he defines as "the speech of the soul itself", likewise placing emphasis on the expressiveness of the poetic language and delivery, as corroborated by his claim that in such kind of drama "there is some device that checks the rapidity of the dialogue" in "J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (YEATS, 1961: 333). He gives as example Greek drama, which he sees as depending "on an almost even speed of dialogue, and on a so continuous exclusion of the animation of common life that thought remains lofty and language rich" (YEATS, 1961: 333). These aspects are particularly prominent in the poetic dramas from his so-called "Celtic Twilight" period in the late nineties (comprising the bulk of the Tauchnitz anthology with which Pessoa was familiar), but resurfaced subsequently in later plays like *At the Hawk's Well*. In effect, despite incorporating some naturalistic devices gleaned from the experience of staging the plays, Yeats continued to favour writing and staging this type of Symbolist drama in the early nineteen-hundreds, including the aforementioned 1910 production of Maeterlinck's *Intérieur*, and of his own, *Lady Gregory's* and *Synge's* plays.

A masterful playwright, Synge accomplishedly practised the type of drama Yeats describes, which the latter underlined by entitling the essay he devoted to that topic "J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time", in which he acknowledged his debt to him. Synge's plays, included in the anthology Pessoa acquired, possibly still in 1912 or 1913, could also have provided some inspiration for *O Marinheiro*. In effect, Pessoa did not merely read *Riders to the Sea*, but he also attempted to translate it in what seems to be a spontaneous reaction to the poetic quality of the text, as shown by the interlinear pencil markings over the initial lines of the play in his own copy of the volume.

Despite having some action, this play of Synge's is constructed on a similar premise to that of Pessoa's play, by depicting the long vigil of a mother and her two daughters for her fisherman son who went to sea, in a crescendo of emotional intensity which culminates in the bringing of his body onto the stage to be waked. What Pessoa would call a "situation of inertia" pervades over much of the play, which elicits the revelation of the fears and anxieties of the characters through the exchanged words which, given their poetic suggestiveness – this play is notorious for expressing the colourful language of rural Ireland in the Hiberno-English dialect which Synge was famous for rendering poetically –, supersede the action on stage. Resembling *O Marinheiro* and Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well* in this regard, it is possible that his highly poetical drama could have inspired both poets. Effectively, in their most achieved works, all three authors seem to develop Maeterlinck's "static theater" towards that which Pessoa termed "theatre of ecstasy", a meditative excavation of "lofty" emotions rendered in "rich language", to borrow Yeats's epithets.



Fig. 10. Reproduction of first page of *Plays*.

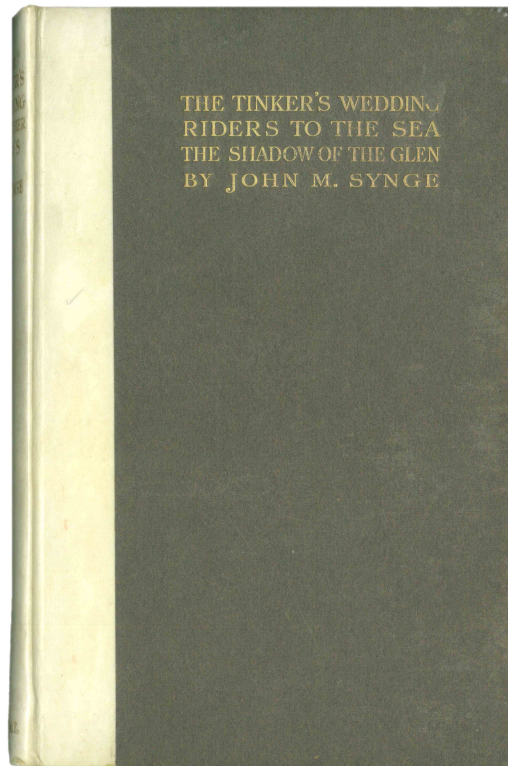
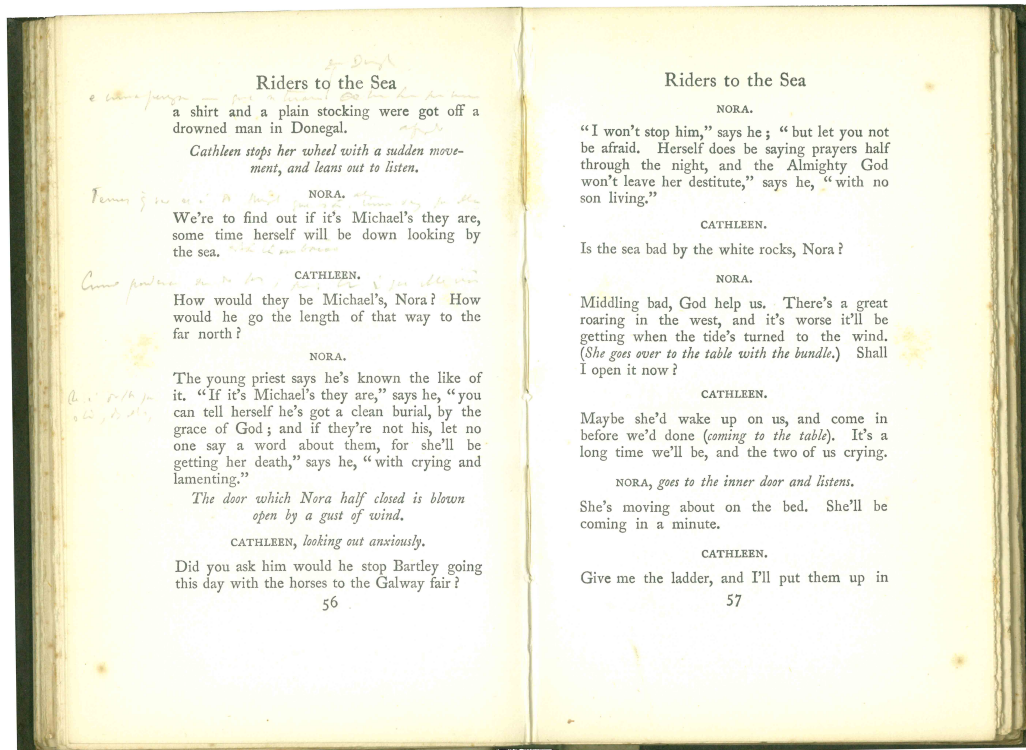
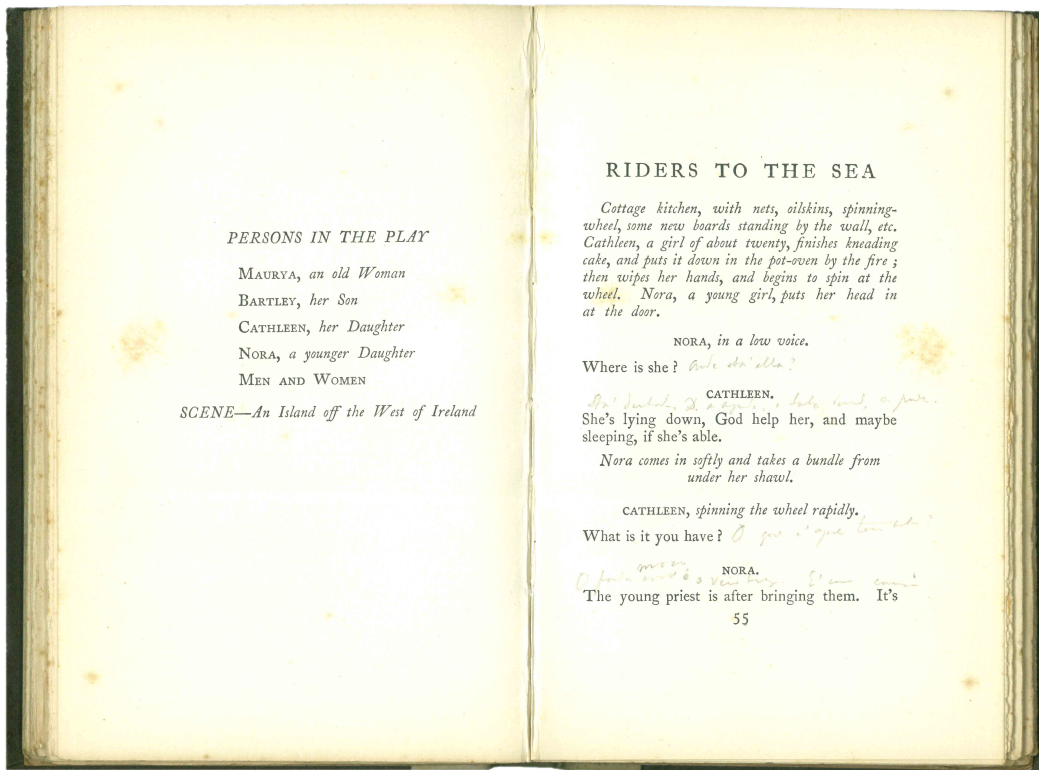


Fig. 11. Cover of anthology of Synge's plays extant in Pessoa's private library.



Figs. 12 & 13. Pages of the anthology of Synge's plays with interlinear translation of *Riders to the Sea* marked in pencil

Thus, by renouncing all action, plot, and progress, *O Marinheiro* builds on the “static theatre” genre introduced by Maeterlinck to create a play which, according to Petrus, “constitui por si só um momento singular do Teatro [ou Anti-teatro] Português” [in itself constitutes a singular moment of Portuguese Theatre (or Anti-theatre)] (PESSOA, 1957: vii). In this respect, it shows a parallel trajectory to that followed by Yeats, particularly through his so-called “Plays for Dancers” – of which *At the Hawk’s Well* was the first – and in his later verse plays, which anticipate the drama of Samuel Beckett. In doing so, Pessoa and Yeats established a bridge between the Symbolist drama of the *fin de siècle* and the new developments in Expressionism and the Theatre of the Absurd that were to follow in the early twentieth century. Despite their forward-looking experiments, Pessoa and Yeats drank deeply into the well of European Symbolist theatre in order to expressively convey the existentialist crisis of a post-Schopenhauerian pessimism exhibited in their contemporary society. In particular, they creatively incorporated the mood of estrangement, the sense of dislocation and the formal experimentation evinced in Maeterlinck’s plays into their own dramatic works, combining them with a highly suggestive hermetic symbolism drawn from analogous esoteric interests and pursuits which granted a singular originality to their strand of poetic drama.

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