

YEATS ON THEATRE

W. B. Yeats is recognised globally as one of the most significant poets of the past century. And yet, in his Nobel address, he singled out his work in the theatre as his main accomplishment. *Yeats on Theatre* restores Yeats not only as a playwright, but as a writer and thinker who, over forty years, produced a body of theory covering all aspects of theatre, including the possibilities of performance space, the role of the audience, and the nature of tragedy. When read as a whole, in conjunction with his plays, letters, and extensive manuscript materials, Yeats's theatre writings emerge as a radical, cohesive, theatrical aesthetic, at odds with – and in advance of – the theatre of his time. Ultimately, the Yeats who takes shape in *Yeats on Theatre* is an artist who thinks through theatre, providing us with an urgently needed reassertion of the value of theatre as embodied thought.

CHRISTOPHER MORASH has published widely on Irish studies, with books on Irish Famine literature, Irish theatre history, media history, and spatial theory. He has collaborated with the Abbey Theatre and chairs the judging panel for the Dublin Literary Award.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51538-9 — Yeats on Theatre
Christopher Morash
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

YEATS ON THEATRE

CHRISTOPHER MORASH

Trinity College Dublin



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-51538-9 — Yeats on Theatre
 Christopher Morash
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
 New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781316515389

DOI: 10.1017/9781009031509

© Christopher Morash 2021

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2021

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Morash, Chris, 1963– author.

TITLE: Yeats on theatre / Chris Morash, Trinity College Dublin.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2021008426 (print) | LCCN 2021008427 (ebook) | ISBN 9781316515389 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009031509 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Yeats, W. B. (William Butler), 1865–1939 – Knowledge and learning. | Theater – Philosophy. | Yeats, W. B. (William Butler), 1865–1939 – Dramatic works. | Yeats, W. B. (William Butler), 1865–1939 – Dramatic production. | Theater – Ireland – Dublin – History – 20th century. | BISAC: LITERARY CRITICISM / European / English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh

CLASSIFICATION: LCC PR5908.D7 M67 2021 (print) | LCC PR5908.D7 (ebook) | DDC 822/.8–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021008426>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021008427>

ISBN 978-1-316-51538-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	ix
Introduction: The Exact Moment	i
1 The Playwright as Thinker	15
The Imaginary Hypertext Variorum	16
First Drafts	20
The Early Abbey	26
Accomplishment	31
Late Style	37
2 The Fugitive Organum	43
First Attempts	44
Towards a Manifesto	48
Thinking in the Theatre	52
Thinking through Theatre	57
Final Visions	60
3 Tragedy and Comedy	65
Tragedy	66
Comedy	82
4 Form	93
Character	94
Action	104
Words	108
5 Spaces and Objects	113
Space	118
Colour and Light	129
Objects	136
6 Bodies and Voices	143
Bodies	147

Masks	157
Voices	163
7 Audiences	171
The Real Audience	172
The Imaginary Audience	178
The Magical Audience	186
Conclusion: A Moment of Intense Life	198
<i>Notes</i>	203
<i>Bibliography</i>	231
<i>Index</i>	243

Acknowledgements

This book was started before I took up a three-year term as Vice-Provost of Trinity College, Dublin; so, firstly I would like to thank my editor at Cambridge University Press, Ray Ryan, for keeping faith with this project while it was on pause. Universities have become such complex organisations that it is no longer always possible to come back to scholarship after time in senior management; Ray helped make that possible, and for that I owe him a debt. I would also like to thank Trinity College for the sabbatical that allowed me to finish the book. In the process of writing, the book gained considerable robustness from the advice of more than one reader who contributed to Cambridge's peer-review process. Enthusiastic correspondents and conversationalists, including Mark Fitzgerald, Sean Golden, Nicholas Grene, Nicholas Johnston, John Kelly, Ben Levitas, Pierre Longuenesse, Akiko Manabe, Martin Middeke, Melinda Szuts, and Tom Walker have all provided inspiration. I am also always conscious when writing about theatre that some of my foundational ideas were developed in tandem with my friend and collaborator Shaun Richards when we co-authored our 2013 book, *Mapping Irish Theatre*; so he remains, always, my unseen collaborator. Over the years of working on the book, I encountered many kindnesses from librarians and archivists, particularly those in the National Library of Ireland, the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, the Hardiman Library of NUI Galway, and the library of Trinity College Dublin. Like any Yeats scholar today, I also must acknowledge an earlier generation, who did so much of the heavy lifting in editing manuscripts in ways that have transformed the field. I was also fortunate enough, when I began to tell people that I was writing on Yeats and theatre, to be invited to give talks, which gave me an opportunity to road-test various ideas, for which the book is much the better. For those opportunities, I would like to thank friends and colleagues not only in Trinity College Dublin, but in Cambridge University, the University of Zurich, Radboud University, the University of Augsburg, University of

Notre Dame, the University of Porto, Charles University in Prague, NUI Galway, the Irish Literary Society in London, and the Sorbonne, who hosted the 2019 conference of the International Yeats Society. To everyone involved in those events, I owe warm thanks. I also must acknowledge the warm generosity of Simon Starling for allowing me to use the striking image from his work *At Twilight* for the cover. I wrote the final sections of this book during the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, when I was effectively confined to a small village in County Meath with my family, who tolerated the burgeoning pile of Yeats books that became part of our cocoon. This book, a relic of that strangely intense time, is for them; and, most especially, for my wife Ann, as ever.

Abbreviations

This book was written at a point in the history of Yeats studies when the number of large, long-term textual and bibliographic projects was finally reaching critical mass. Hence, when possible, texts by Yeats have been taken from the Scribner *Collected Works*, with the exception of Volumes 1 and 2 (*The Poems* and *The Plays*), where the earlier Variorum editions were generally preferred because of their more complete textual apparatus. For the same reason, the published volumes of the *Collected Letters* (supplemented with the Allan Wade *Letters* and the edition of Yeats's correspondence with T. Sturge Moore) have been preferred, and the InteLex Past Masters database was used only for those letters not included in the published volumes. When referring to books in the library of W. B. Yeats and George Yeats, the reference is to Wayne K. Chapman's 2019 short-title catalogue, unless the annotations are significant, in which case the reference is to Edward O'Shea's earlier catalogue. On the same principle, when using manuscript materials, where these have been published in the Cornell Manuscript Materials series, the edited version has been referenced unless there was a point of significance in the uncollated originals.

- Chapman* Wayne K. Chapman, *The W. B. & George Yeats Library: A Short-Title Catalog* (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2019). Reference is to 2006 Short-Title Catalogue accession number.
- CL1* *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Volume I: 1865–1895*, Ed. John Kelly and Eric Domville (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
- CL2* *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Volume II: 1896–1900*, Ed. Warwick Gould, John Kelly, and Deirdre Toomey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

List of Abbreviations

- CL*₃ *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Volume III: 1901–1904*, Ed. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
- CL*₄ *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Volume IV: 1905–1907*, Ed. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
- CL*₅ *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Volume V: 1908–1910*, Ed. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2018).
- CW*₁ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume I: The Poems*, Ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan, 1983).
- CW*₂ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume II: The Plays*, Ed. David R. Clark and Rosalind E. Clark (New York: Scribner, 2001).
- CW*₃ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume III: Autobiographies*, Ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999).
- CW*₄ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume IV: Early Essays*, Ed. Richard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007).
- CW*₅ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume V: Later Essays*, Ed. William H. O'Donnell (New York: Scribner, 1994).
- CW*₆ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume VI: Prefaces and Introductions*, Ed. William H. O'Donnell (New York: Scribner, 1989).
- CW*₇ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume VII: Letters to the New Island*, Ed. George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer (New York: Scribner, 1989).
- CW*₈ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume VIII: The Irish Dramatic Movement*, Ed. Mary Fitzgerald and Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 2003).
- CW*₉ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume IX: Early Articles and Reviews*, Ed. John P. Frayne and Madeleine Marchaterre (New York: Scribner, 2004).
- CW*₁₀ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume X: Later Articles and Reviews*, Ed. Colton Johnson (New York: Scribner, 1994).
- CW*₁₃ *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume XIII: A Vision: The Original 1925 Edition*, Ed. Catherine

List of Abbreviations

xi

- E. Paul and Margaret Mills Harper (New York: Scribner, 2008).
- CW_{I4}* *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume XIV: A Vision: The Revised 1937 Edition*, Ed. Margaret Mills Harper and Catherine E. Paul (New York: Scribner, 2015).
- Explorations* *Explorations: Selected by Mrs. W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1956).
- InteLex* *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, Oxford University Press, Gen. Ed. John Kelly (InteLex Electronic Edition, 2002).
- LWBY* *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, Ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954).
- Memoirs* *Memoirs: Autobiography – First Draft; Journal*, Transcribed and ed. Denis Donoghue (New York: Macmillan, 1972).
- NLI* National Library of Ireland.
- NUIG* Archives Collections, Hardiman Library, National University of Ireland, Galway.
- NYPL* The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.
- O’Shea* Edward O’Shea, *A Descriptive Catalogue of W. B. Yeats’s Library* (New York: Garland, 1985). Reference is to Yeats Library accession number.
- TCD* Manuscripts and Archives, The Library, Trinity College Dublin.
- TSM* *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence 1901–1937*, Ed. Ursula Bridge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953).
- VP* *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, Ed. Peter K. Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1966).
- VPL* *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats*, Ed. Russell K. Alspach and Catharine C. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1966).
- WBY* William Butler Yeats.
- YVP_I* *Yeats’s Vision Papers: Volume 1: The Automatic Script: 5 November 1917–18 June 1918*. General Editor, George

List of Abbreviations

- Mills Harper; ed. Steve L. Adams, Barbara J. Frieling, and Sandra L. Sprayberry (London: Macmillan, 1992).
- YVP₂ *Yeats's Vision Papers: Volume 2: The Automatic Script: 25 June 1918–29 March 1920*. General Editor, George Mills Harper; ed. Steve L. Adams, Barbara J. Frieling, and Sandra L. Sprayberry (London: Macmillan, 1992).
- YVP₃ *Yeats's Vision Papers: Volume 3: Sleep and Dream Notebooks, Vision Notebooks 1 and 2, Card File*. General Editor, George Mills Harper; ed. Robert Anthony Martinich and Margaret Mills Harper (London: Macmillan, 1992).

Note: Works listed in the Abbreviations section, above, are not included in the bibliography. When citing manuscripts, the following conventions have been used: crossed out text is indicated with ~~crossing~~; inserts in pencil on a typescript are set in *italic*; inserts in ink are set in **bold**; and a partially illegible word or phrase is placed in square brackets, preceded by a question mark – [? like this].