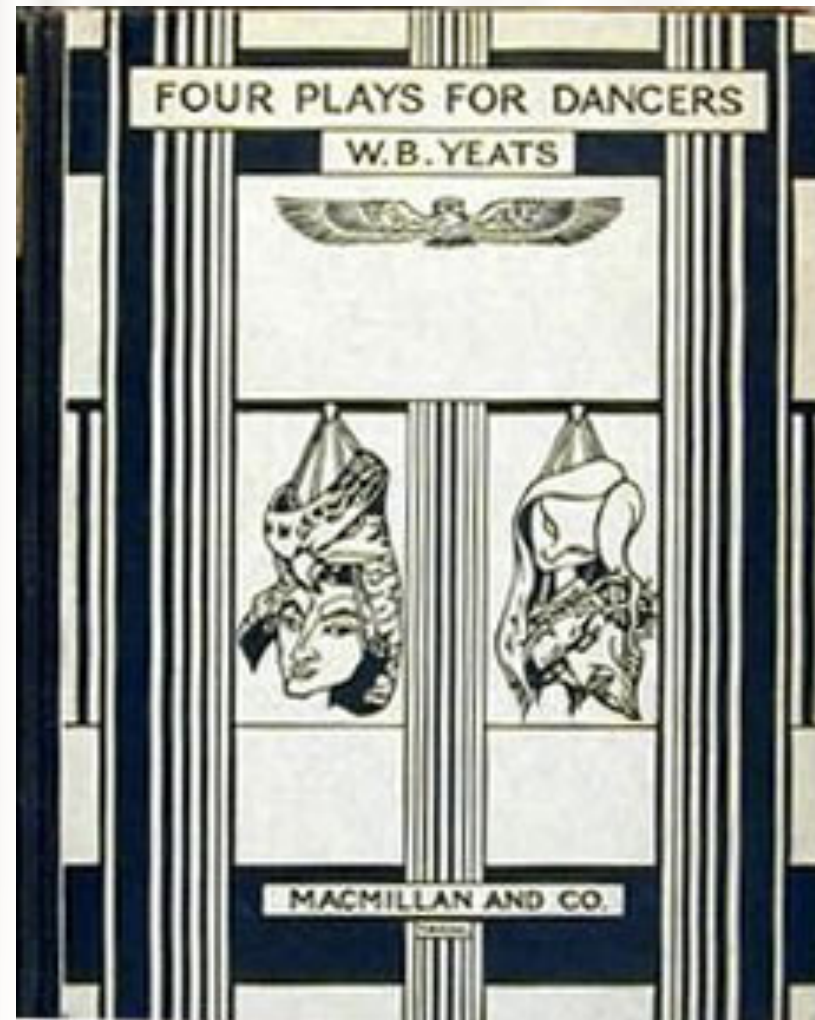


- ① *At the Hawk's Well*
- ② *The Only Jealousy of Emer*
- ③ *The Dreaming of the Bones*
- ④ *Calvary*



*Four Plays for Dancers* – Frontispiece of the 1921 edition

(From W.B. Yeats, "Introduction" to *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, from the manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa, chosen and finished by Ezra Pound)

In fact with the help of these plays translated by Ernest Fenollosa and finished by Ezra Pound I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect and symbolic, and having no need of mob [crowd, mass of people] or press to pay its way – an aristocratic form. [...]

I hope to have attained the distance from life which can make credible strange events, elaborate words [...]

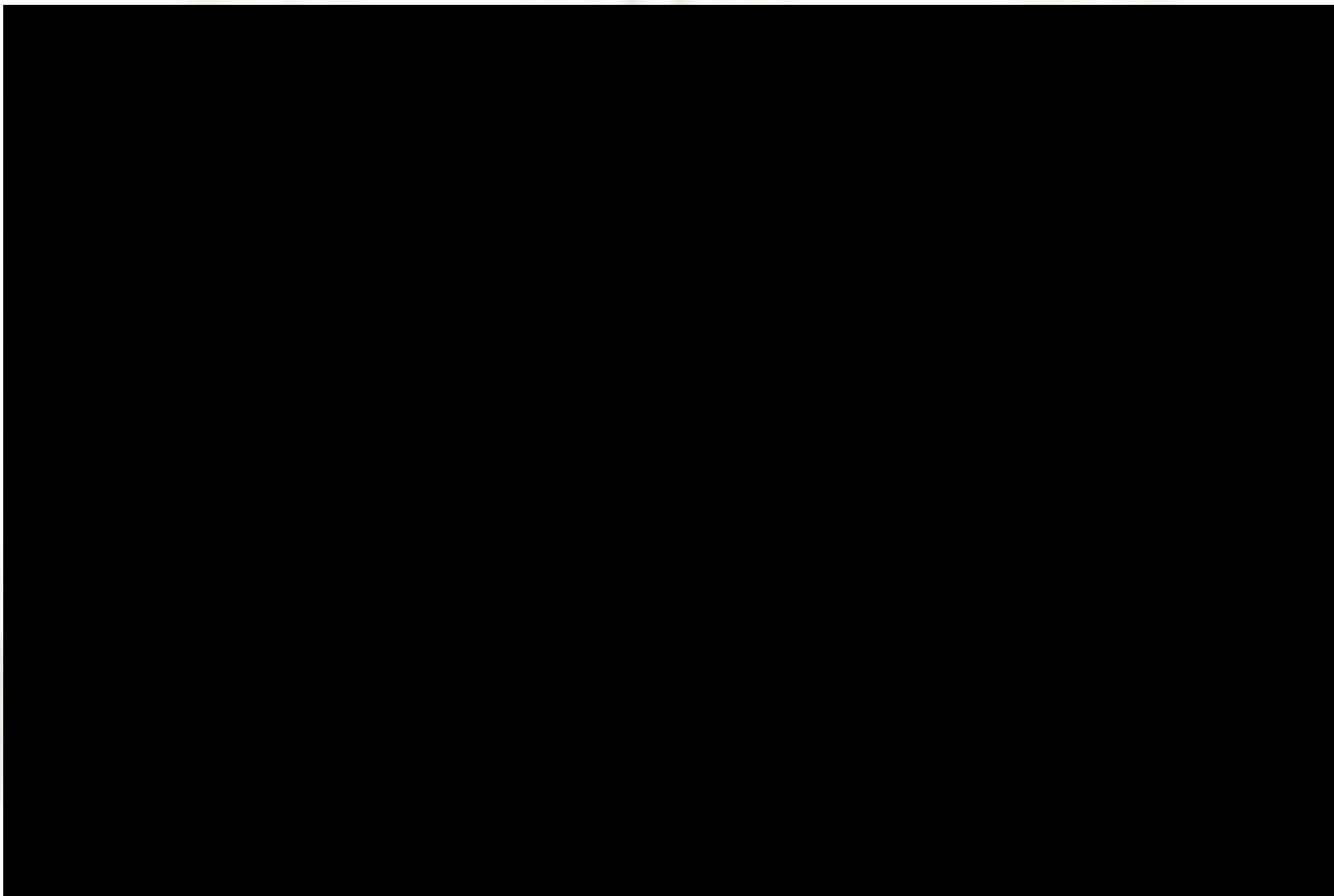
I have written a little play that can be played in a room for so little money that forty or fifty readers of poetry can pay the price. There will be no scenery, for three musicians, whose seeming sun-burned faces will I hope suggest that they have wandered from village to village in some country of our dreams, can describe place and weather, and at moment action, and accompany it all by drum and gong or flute and dulcimer [string instrument].

Our unimaginative arts are content to set a piece of the world as we know it in a place by itself, to put their photographs as it were in a plush [rich, luxurious] or a plain frame, but the arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation. [...]

Therefore it is natural that I go to Asia for a stage convention, for more formal faces, for a chorus that has no part in the action and perhaps for those movements of the body copied from the marionette shows of the 14th century. A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player, or for that face repainted to suit his own vulgar fancy, the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice; [...]

The white and purple curtain was no doubt to hang upon a wall behind the players or over their entrance door for the Noh stage is a platform surrounded upon three sides by the audience. No 'naturalistic' effect is sought. The players wear masks and found their movements upon those of puppets [...]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lu5Vn1vQ5i4>



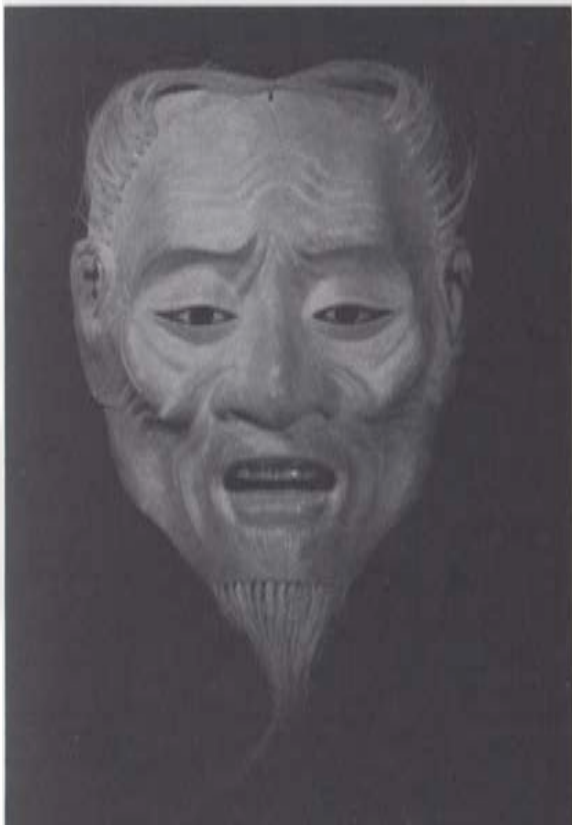
Noh Theatre (Dance of the Ghost)



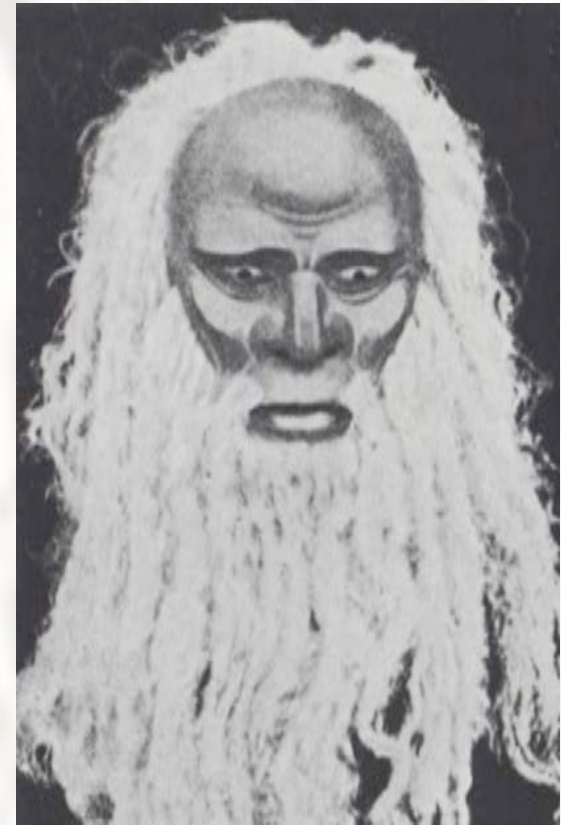
(From W.B. Yeats, "A Note to *At the Hawk's Well*", 1916)

I have found my first model - and in literature if we would not be parvenus we must have a model - in the "Noh" stage of aristocratic Japan. [...] I do not think of my discovery as mere economy, for it has been a great gain to get rid of scenery, to substitute for a crude landscape painted upon canvas three performers who, sitting before the wall or a patterned screen, describe landscape or event, and accompany movement with drum and gong, or deepen the emotion of the words with zither or flute. Painted scenery after all is unnecessary to my friends and to myself, for our imagination kept living by the arts can imagine a mountain covered with thorn-trees in a drawing-room without any great trouble, and we have many quarrels with even good scene-painting. Then too the masks forced upon us by the absence of any special lighting, or by the nearness of the audience who surround the players upon three sides, do not seem to us eccentric. [...] 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.

Noh:  
mask used for and  
Old Man



Mask designed by  
Edmund Dulac for  
the Old Man in the  
1916 production of  
*At the Hawk's Well*.



[from W.B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921) – Preface, 1920]

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 [cetra] 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*.



## *At the Hawk's Well (1916)*

### PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THREE MUSICIANS (*their faces made up to resemble masks*).

THE GUARDIAN OF THE WELL (*with face made up to resemble a mask*).

AN OLD MAN (*wearing a mask*).

A YOUNG MAN (*wearing a mask*).

*The Time --- the Irish Heroic Age.*

*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 the screen before the play begins. If necessary, they can be carried in, after the audience is seated, by the First Musician, who also can attend to the lights if there is any special lighting. We had two lanterns upon posts designed by Mr. Dulac at the outer corners of the stage, but they did not give enough light, and we found it better to play by the light of a large chandelier. Indeed I think, so far as my present experience goes, that the most effective lighting is the lighting we are most accustomed to in our rooms. These masked players seem stranger when there is no mechanical means of separating them from us. The First Musician carries with him a folded black cloth and goes to the centre of the stage towards the front and stands motionless, the folded cloth hanging from between his hands. The two 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: [...]*



*As they unfold the cloth, they go backward a little so that the stretched cloth and the wall make a triangle with the First*



Design for Black Cloth used in "At the Hawk's Well."

*Musician at the apex supporting the centre of the cloth. On the black cloth is a gold pattern suggesting a hawk. The*



Musician in "At the Hawk's Well." NEW WAVE,

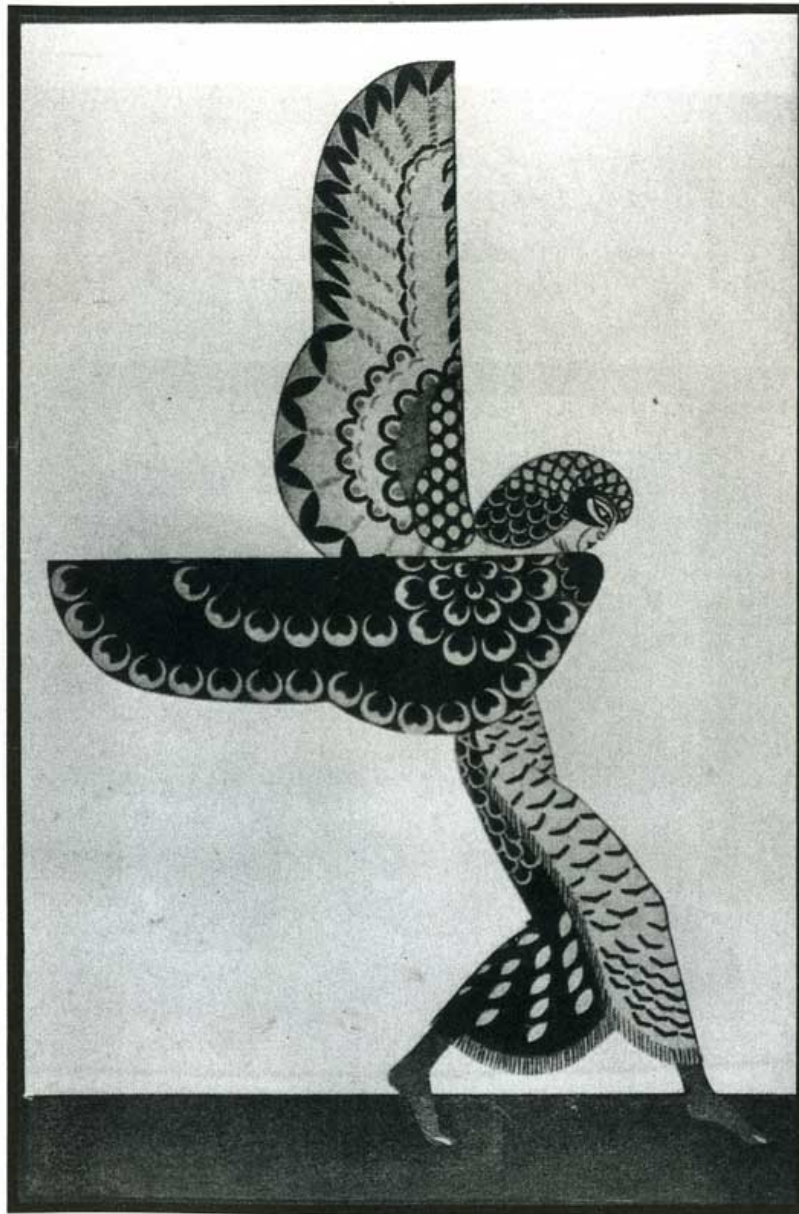




Old Man in "At the Hawk's Well."

*[...] His movements, like those of the other persons of the play, suggest a marionette.)*





*[...] the Girl has begun  
to dance moving like a  
hawk. The Old man  
sleeps. The dance goes  
on for some time.)*

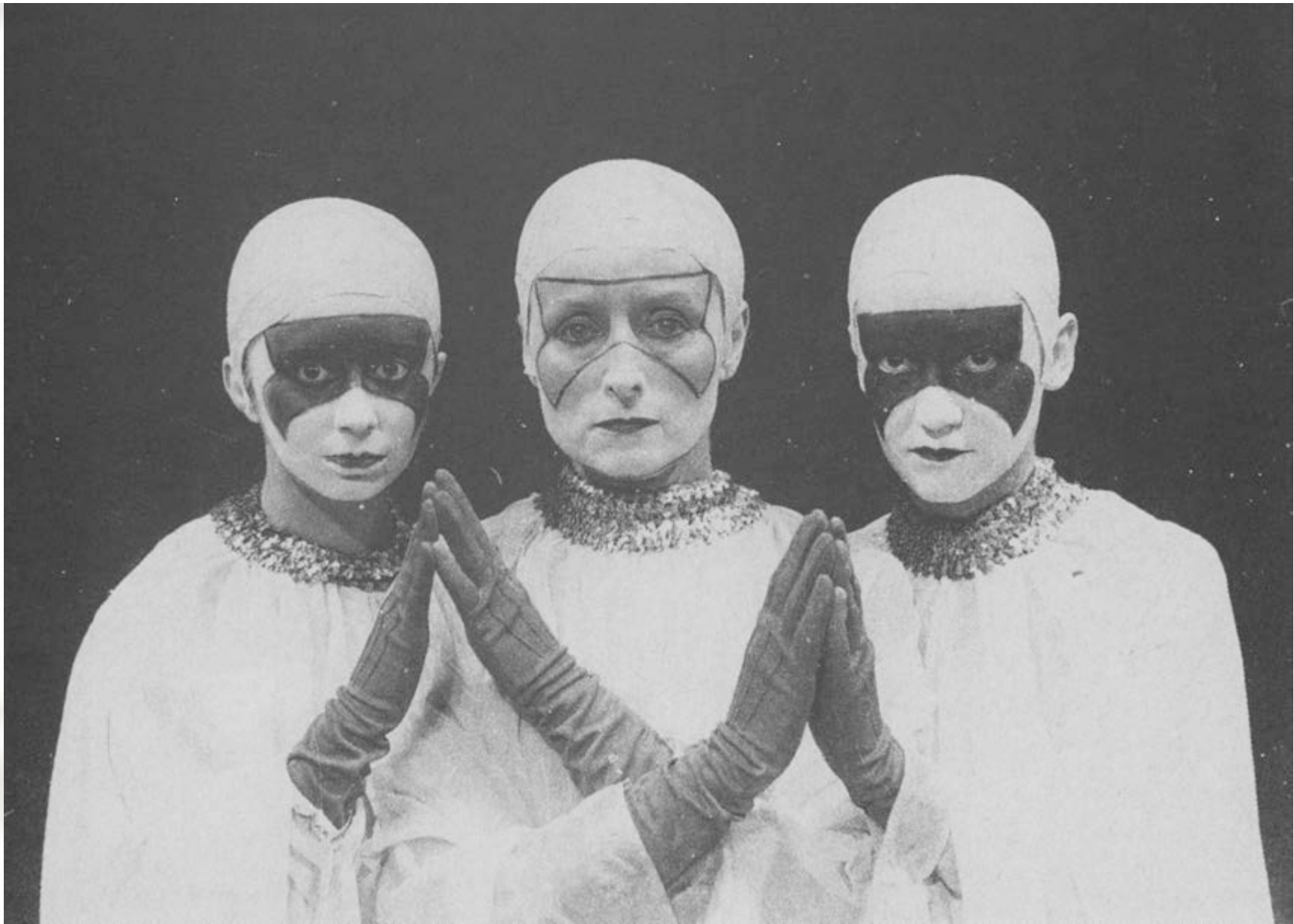
Edmund Dulac: La Guardiana del Pozzo in  
*At the Hawk's Well*, 1921,  
Dublino, Abbey Theatre Collection



Young Man in "At the Hawk's Well."

"He who drinks, they say,  
Of that miraculous water  
lives for ever."





The 1984 production of *At the Hawk's Well*  
at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin

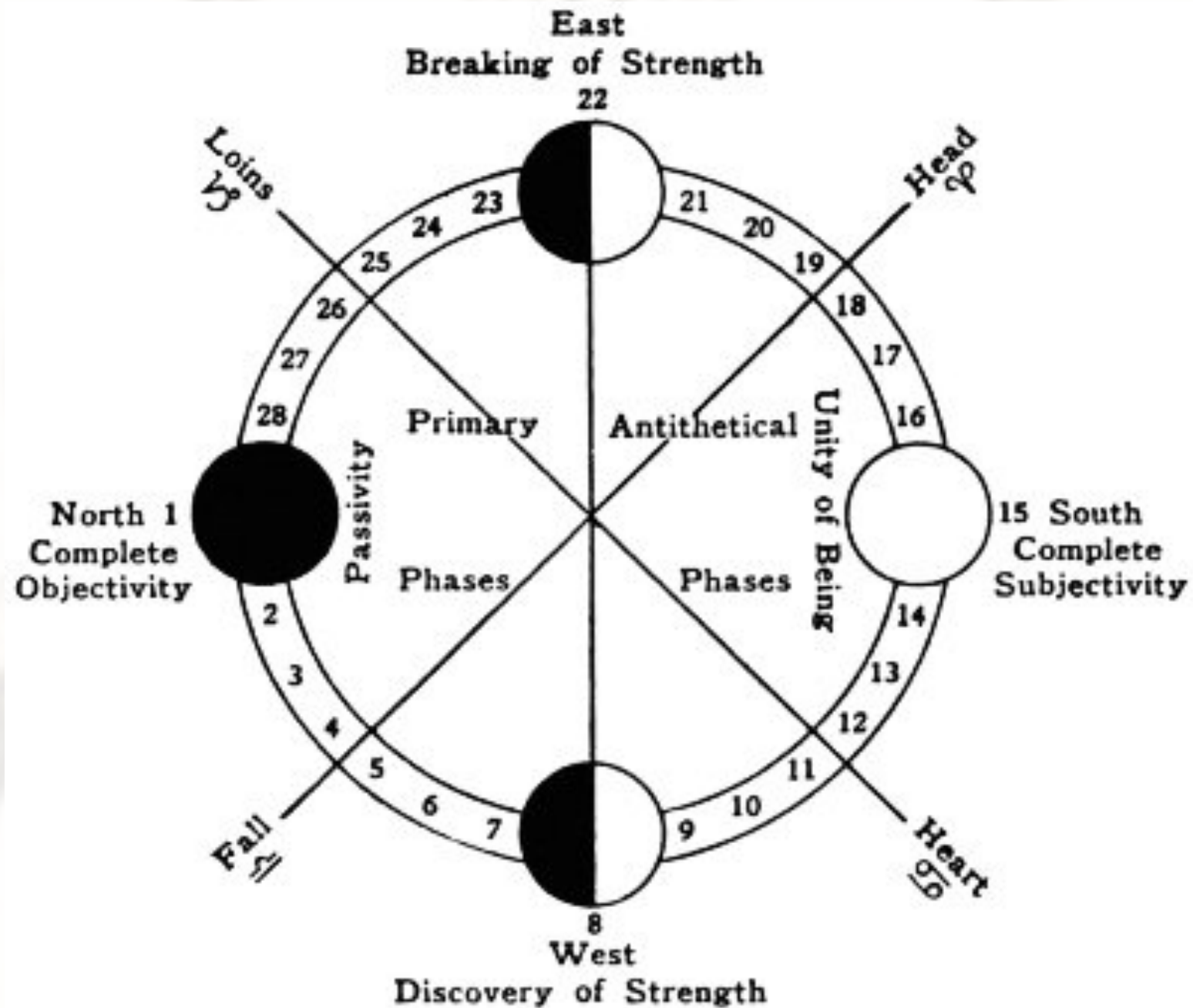




Michio Ito wearing the hawk head-dress for the 1916 production of *At the Hawk's Well* (photograph by Alvin Langdon Coburn).

My play is made possible by a Japanese dancer whom I have seen dance in a studio and in a drawing-room and on a very small stage lit by an excellent stage-light.

(Introduction to *Certain Plays...*)



## II

On the grey rock of Cashel I suddenly  
saw  
A Sphinx with woman breast and lion paw,  
A Buddha, hand at rest,  
Hand lifted up that blest;  
And right between these two a girl at  
play  
That, it may be, had danced her life away,  
For now being dead it seemed  
That she of dancing dreamed.  
Although I saw it all in the mind's eye  
There can be nothing solidier till I die;  
I saw by the moon's light  
Now at its fifteenth night.  
One lashed her tail; her eyes lit by the  
moon  
Gazed upon all things known, all things  
unknown,  
In triumph of intellect  
With motionless head erect.  
That other's moonlit eyeballs never moved,  
Being fixed on all things loved, all things  
unloved,

Yet little peace he had,  
For those that love are sad.  
O little did they care who danced  
between,  
And little she by whom her dance was  
seen  
So she had outdanced thought.  
Body perfection brought,  
For what but eye and ear silence the mind  
With the minute particulars of mankind?  
Mind moved yet seemed to stop  
As 'twere a spinning-top.  
In contemplation had those three so  
wrought  
Upon a moment, and so stretched it out  
That they, time overthrown,  
Were dead yet flesh and bone.

(W.B. Yeats, "The Double Vision of Michael  
Robartes", *The Wild Swans at Coole*, 1919.)





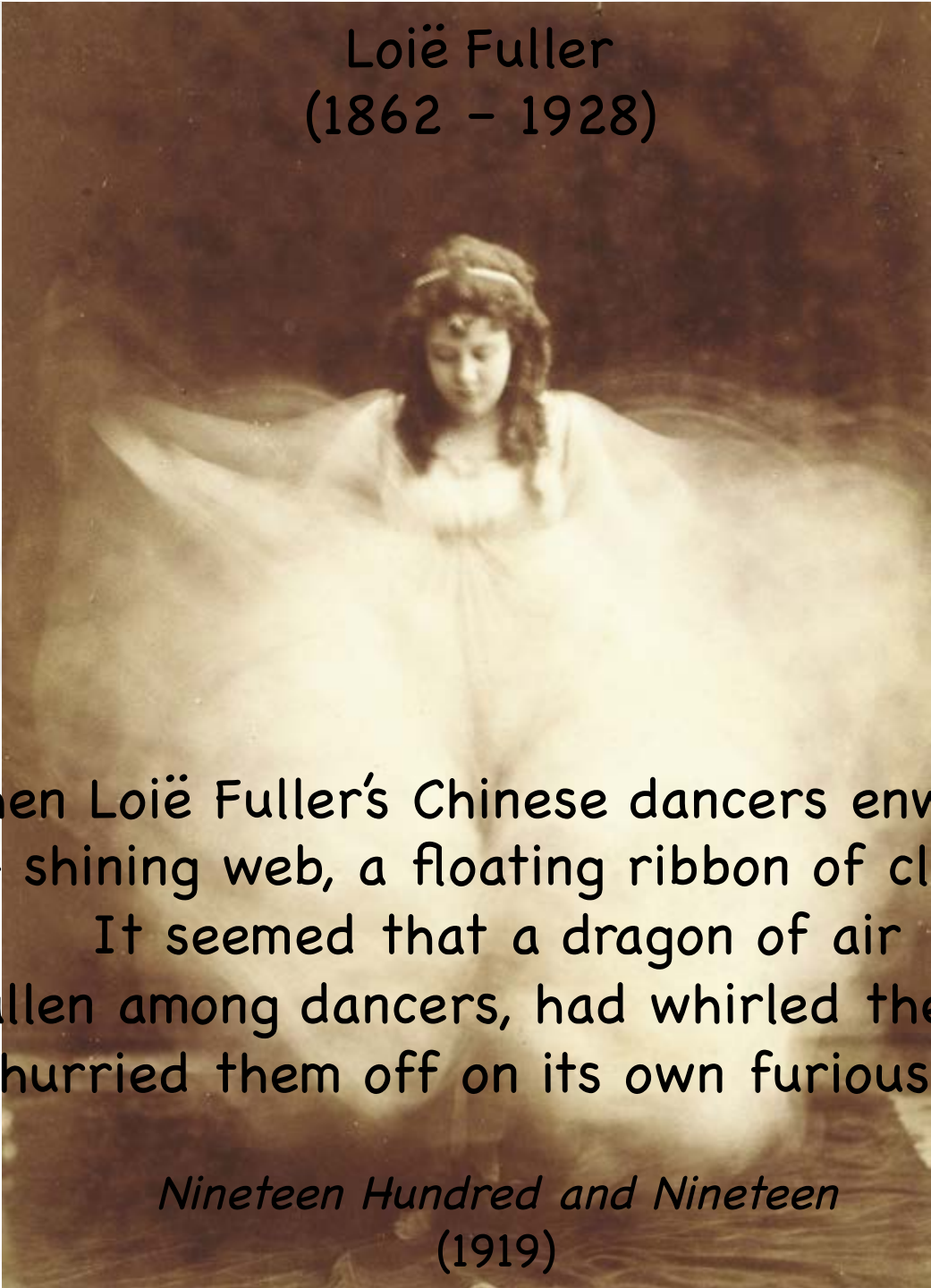
Foto © EmanuelePennacchio.com

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec  
*At Music Hall*  
*Loïe Fuller (1892)*





Loië Fuller  
(1862 – 1928)



When Loië Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound  
A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,  
It seemed that a dragon of air  
Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round  
Or hurried them off on its own furious path;

*Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*  
(1919)



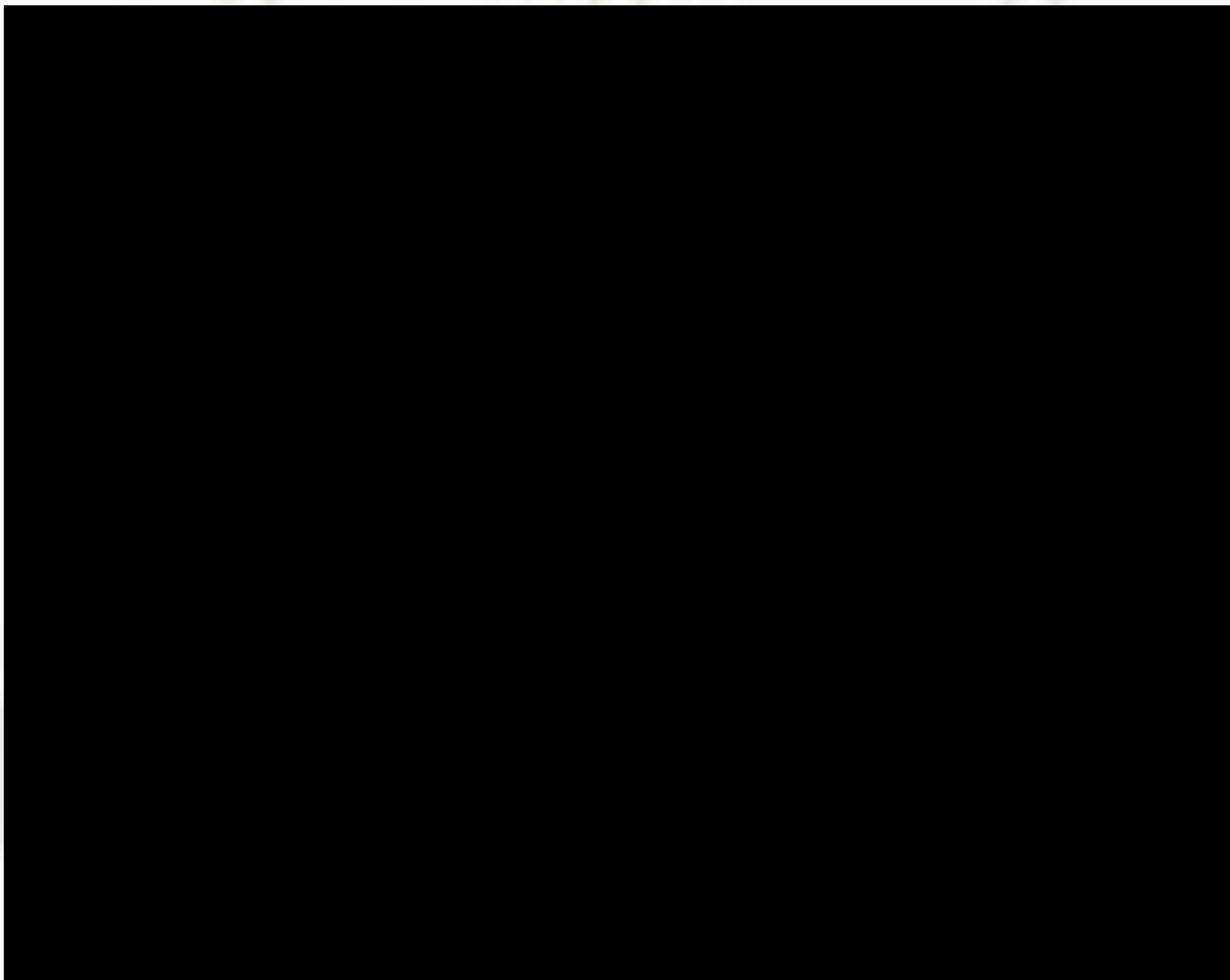
# DANSE SERPENTINE

Lumière n° 765

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Isadora Duncan  
(1878 – 1927)





Petruška (1911)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKOCSHu17ig>





Vaslav Nijinsky  
(1889 –1950)



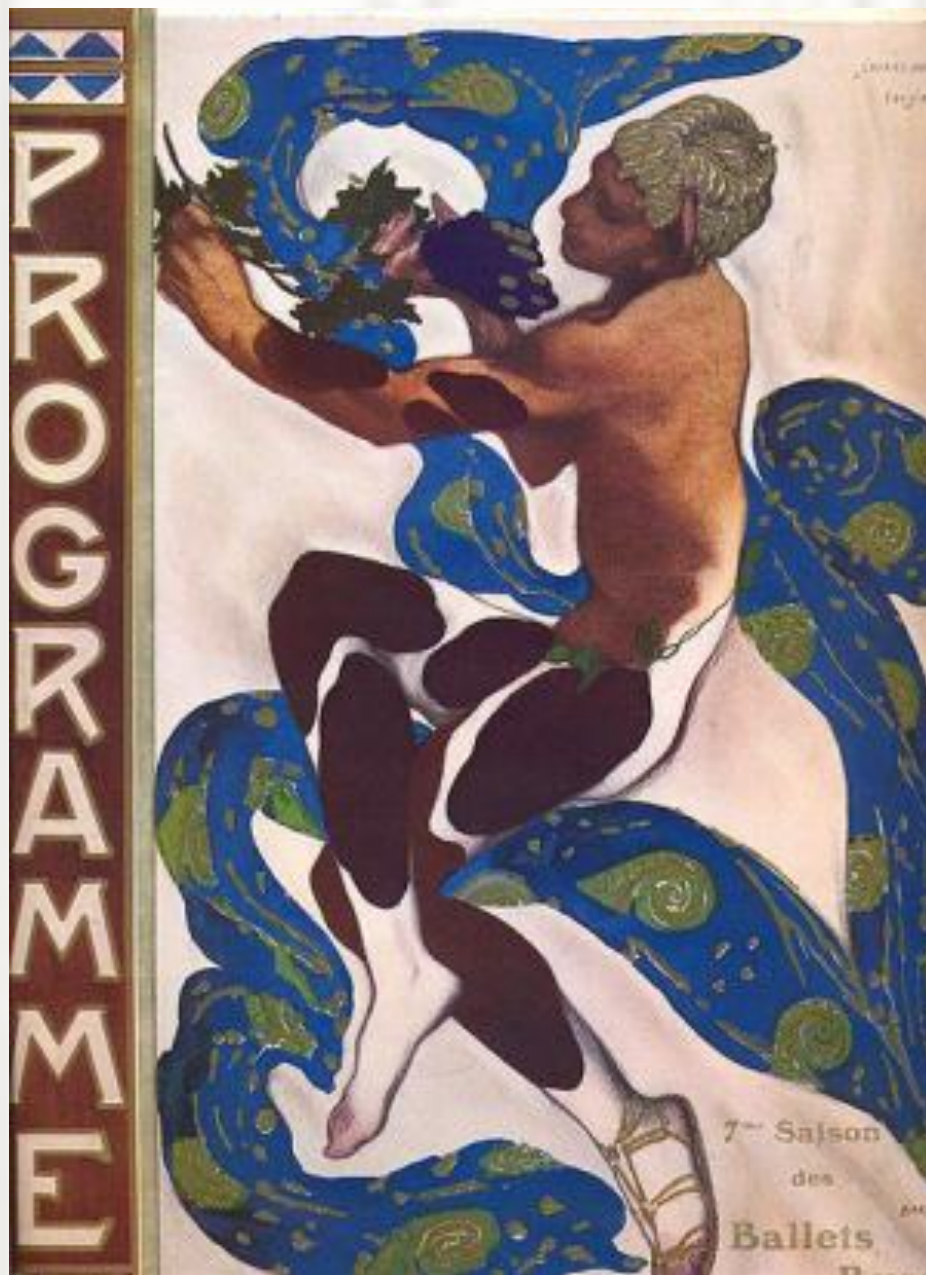
Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune (1912)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vxs8MrPZUIg>

Vaslav Nijinsky  
'Faune'









Nurayev's "Homage to Nijinski" – 1979

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7b1FkZYarU>