

# Yeats's *Noh* Plays and the 19th-Century Mystery Tradition

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**Abstract:** From 1913 to 1916 the Irish poet William Butler Yeats and the American poet Ezra Pound studied and tried to imitate Japanese *Noh* plays, brief, stark plays in which gods or spirits manifested themselves to mortals. But a European writing a play will write a European play, despite attempts to purge the play of many European aspects; for this reason, Yeats as a European playwright working in an Asian genre would discover that the work belongs to some more familiar genre: the mystery play. Although the original mystery plays were Medieval dramatizations of scenes from the Bible, the sort of mystery play that meant the most to Yeats was the 19th-century updates of mystery plays: for instance, *Cain: A Mystery* (1821) by Lord Byron.

**Key words:** Yeats; *Noh* play; mystery play; drama

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**标题:** 叶芝的能剧与 19 世纪神秘传统

**内容摘要:** 1913—1916 年间, 爱尔兰诗人叶芝与美国诗人庞德一起研究了日本能剧, 并试图模仿这种展现神灵显现于普罗大众的简洁古朴的戏剧。不过欧洲人写戏剧, 无论怎样试图摆脱欧洲因素, 最终写出来的常常仍然是欧洲戏剧; 叶芝作为一位欧洲剧作家以亚洲戏剧样式创作出来的作品仍然更接近他所熟悉的欧洲类型: 神秘剧。神秘剧源于中世纪时代对圣经中一些情景的戏剧呈现, 但对叶芝影响最大的神秘剧还是拜伦的《该隐》等 19 世纪改良过的神秘剧。

**关键词:** 叶芝; 能剧; 神秘剧; 戏剧

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In H. Rider Haggard's novel *When the World Shook* (1919), we are told that, deep in the earth, there is a tunnel crisscrossing the globe: at one point the tunnel forks, and if a huge spinning rock were to take a different fork, the ocean floor would rise and the continents sink beneath the waves. An evil being, thousands and thousands of years old, wishes to divert the rock and so destroy the earth we know:

Then bellowing like ten millions of bulls, at length far away there appeared something terrible. I can only describe its appearance as that of an attenuated mountain on fire. When it drew nearer I perceived that it was more like a ballet-dancer whirling round and round upon her toes, or rather all the ballet-dancers in the world rolled into one and then multiplied a million times in size. No, it was like a mushroom with two stalks, one above and one below, or a huge top with a point on which it spun, a swelling belly and another point above. But what a top! It must have been two thousand feet high, if it was an inch, and its circumference who could measure?

On it came, dancing, swaying and spinning at a rate inconceivable, so that it looked like a gigantic wheel of fire. Yet it was not fire that clothed it but rather some phosphorescence, since from it came no heat. Yes, a phosphorescence arranged in bands of ghastly blue and lurid red, with streaks of other colours running up between, and a kind of waving fringe of purple.

The fire-mountain thundered on with a voice like to that of avalanches or of icebergs crashing from their parent glaciers to the sea. Its terrific aspect was appalling, and its weight caused the solid rock to quiver like a leaf. Watching it, we felt as ants might feel at the advent of the crack of doom, for its mere height and girth and size overwhelmed us. We could not even speak. The last words I heard were from the mouth of Oro who screamed out:

"Behold the balance of the World, you miserable, doubting men, and behold me change its path—turning it as the steersman turns a ship! (Haggard, Web)

You will be relieved to learn that Oro's plot was thwarted. I think Yeats might have liked the notion of a dancing fire-mountain that could turn the earth into a sort of photographic negative of itself, because his *Noh* imitations based on moments of historical crisis—the third category of *Noh* imitation I will discuss here—concern a transvaluation of culture achieved by means of a dance. In these plays, *Calvary* (1920) and *The Resurrection* (1927), the pagan world sinks and the Christian world heaves itself up. (I would also include *The Dreaming of the Bones* in this category: the historical crisis concerns acquiescence to British rule of Ireland, as opposed to heroic rebellion against it.) Yeats was fascinated by the moment of equipoise, when the old and the new were at the tipping point, when the great spinning cone of the gyre was feeling out the new track of the cosmic tunnel. Mind moved yet seemed to stop, as 'twere a spinning-top.

One of the favorite characters of Medieval mystery plays was Herod, ordering the massacre of all local babies because fear of the prophecies concerning Christ, the new world-ruler, had driven him insane; Hamlet remembered this stock character when he advised a company of

actors not to out-Herod Herod. (The four major mystery cycles—Wakefield, Chester, York, and N-Town—all contain plays about the slaughter of the innocents.) The Herod play shows the most telling confrontation between pagan and Christian values to be found in the mystery cycles: if Herod is depicted as a worshiper of “Mahound”—that is, a devil, whose name is derived from Muhammed, since Islam was the chief enemy of Christianity in Medieval times.

But Yeats’s Christ-plays have less to do with Medieval theatre than with Victorian literature. Many of the great writers of Yeats’s father’s and grandfather’s generation were intensely preoccupied with the fragile moment when the balance beam between the classical and Christian eras was just on the point of tilting. This is the subject of Walter Pater’s novel *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) and of some of the finest poetry of the age. Robert Browning’s verse epistle “Cleon” (1855) concerns a first-century polymath (an epic poet, a painter, a musician so skillful he has invented a new musical mode), the epitome of all accomplishment possible in the classical world; and yet he grows uneasy when he thinks of death:

It is so horrible,  
I dare at times imagine to my need  
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,  
Unlimited in capability  
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,  
—To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us:  
That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait  
On purpose to make prized the life at large—  
Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,  
We burst there as the worm into the fly,  
Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But no!  
Zeus has not yet revealed it; and alas,  
He must have done so, were it possible!

Live long and happy, and in that thought die:  
Glad for what was! Farewell. And for the rest,  
I cannot tell thy messenger aright  
Where to deliver what he bears of thine  
To one called Paulus; we have heard his fame  
Indeed, if Christus be not one with him—  
I know not, nor am troubled much to know.  
Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,  
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcised,  
Hath access to a secret shut from us? (Browning, Web)

But from Browning’s point of view, a world without Christ, whatever its intellectual splendor,

is a world without meaning, and arrogant Cleon scorns the one thing that might bring about the salvation for which he yearns. Browning's thumb is heavy on scale.

Algernon Charles Swinburne's dramatic monologue "Hymn to Proserpine (After the Proclamation in Rome of the Christian Faith)" (1866) reads like a refutation of Browning's poem. The time is three centuries later, after Constantine had established Christianity as the official religion of the empire; the poem's speaker is a pagan, elegantly desperate, trying to hold onto the vanishing pantheon. He restates the famous words that Swinburne quotes in the poem's epigraph, *Viciste, Galilaeae* (You have conquered, Galilean), attributed to the dying Julian the Apostate, the emperor who tried to resist the Christian tide: "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath; / We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness of death." The poem's finest passage contrasts Venus with the Virgin Mary:

Not as thine, not as thine was our mother, a blossom of flowering seas,  
Clothed round with the world's desire as with raiment, and fair as the foam,  
And fleeter than kindled fire, and a goddess, and mother of Rome.  
For thine came pale and a maiden, and sister to sorrow; but ours,  
Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of flowers,  
White rose of the rose-white water, a silver splendour, a flame,  
Bent down unto us that besought her, and earth grew sweet with her name.  
For thine came weeping, a slave among slaves, and rejected; but she  
Came flushed from the full-flushed wave, and imperial, her foot on the sea.  
And the wonderful waters knew her, the winds and the viewless ways,  
And the roses grew rosier, and bluer the sea-blue stream of the bays. (Swinburne, Web)

Yeats was not particularly fond of Swinburne: "Swinburne's poetry, all but some early poems, is as abstract as a cubist picture" (*Letters* 608). But this passage lies behind some of Yeats's powerful meditations on Christianity; for example, in *On the Boiler* (1939), Yeats wrote, "the next civilisation may be born, not from a virgin's womb, nor a tomb without a body, not from a void, but of our own rich experience" (*Explorations* 437).

At the end of the poem, Swinburne's speaker yearns only for death: if Christ could drive out the pagan gods in the world of the living, maybe Proserpine still rules over the land of the dead. But if the speaker could have imagined a cosmos in which in Venus and the Virgin Mary regularly alternated as mothers of the presiding gods, he would be in the same position as Yeats—though in *A Packet for Ezra Pound* (1929), Yeats contrasted not Venus and Mary but Oedipus and Christ:

Oedipus ... passed with Theseus to the wood's heart until amidst the sound of thunder earth opened, 'riven by love', and he sank down soul and body into the earth. I would have him balance Christ who, crucified standing up, went into the abstract sky soul and body ... What if Christ and Oedipus ... are the two scales of a balance, the two butt-ends of a seesaw? What if every two thousand and odd years something happens in the world

to make one sacred, the other secular; one wise, the other foolish; one fair, the other foul; one divine, the other devilish? (*A Packet for Ezra Pound*, Web)

In *Calvary*, the role of Oedipus is played by Judas — Christ and Judas struggle to promote their opposing visions of the sacred:

*Judas. [who has just entered]* I am Judas

That sold you for the thirty pieces of silver.

*Christ.* You were beside me every day, and saw

The dead raised up and blind men given their sight,

And all that I have said and taught you have known,

Yet doubt that I am God.

*Judas.* I have not doubted;

I knew it from the first moment that I saw you;

I had no need of miracles to prove it.

*Christ.* And yet you have betrayed me.

*Judas.* I have betrayed you

Because you seemed all-powerful.

*Christ.* My Father

Even now, if I were but to whisper it,

Would break the world in His miraculous fury

To set me free.

*Judas.* And is there not one man

In the wide world that is not in your power?

*Christ.* My Father put all men into my hands.

*Judas.* That was the very thought that drove me wild.

I could not bear to think you had but to whistle

And I must do; but after that I thought

‘Whatever man betrays Him will be free’;

And life grew bearable again. And now

Is there a secret left I do not know,

Knowing that if a man betrays a God

He is the stronger of the two? ...

*Christ.* But my betrayal was decreed that hour

When the foundations of the world were laid.

*Judas.* It was decreed that somebody betray you—

I’d thought of that — but not that I should do it,

I the man Judas, born on such a day,

In such a village, such and such his parents ...

I did it,

I, Judas, and no other man, and now  
 You cannot even save me. (*Calvary*, Web)

Judas's self-assertion resists the Christian vision of the abjection, humility, and obedience proper to a man in the presence of God; Yeats, following Nietzsche, thought Christianity a religion appropriate to slaves.

Judas appears also in *A Vision*, at Phase 26, near the dark of the moon; Phase 26 is called the Hunchback, or the *Multiple Man*:

All the old abstraction, whether of morality or of belief, has now been exhausted ... there is an attempt to substitute a new abstraction, a simulation of self-expression... . He is all emphasis, and the greater that emphasis the more does he show himself incapable of emotion, the more does he display his sterility. If he live amid a theologically minded people, his greatest temptation may be to defy God, to become a Judas who betrays, not for thirty pieces of silver, but that he may call himself creator.... "The Hunchback is his own *Body of Fate*." (*A Vision*, Web)

*Body of Fate* is Yeats's technical term for the objective world as it manifests itself to a particular person. Therefore, the Hunchback has in effect turned into a *thing*: incapable of having a finite personality, he is simply a deformation, a lump of clay not yet shaped into a man. Giorgio Melchiori has made the fascinating suggestion that Yeats owes something of his conception of the Hunchback to Byron's play *The Deformed Transformed* (1822), and it is quite true that Byron's hunchback has the power to turn himself into many shapes—one shape that he ponders assuming is Caesar, and, in Yeats's poem "The Saint and the Hunchback" (1919), the Hunchback says, "A Roman Caesar is held down // Under this hump" (Melchiori 277-79).

Most of the characters whom Yeats denominates as exemplars of the moon's various phases are artists. If the Hunchback, utterly incoherent and unimaginative, were to become an artist, he could do little more than to exhibit his own falseness by means of spasms of nihilistic defiance. This is one interpretation of what the Dadaists in fact did—and it seems that Christian authoritarianism is best opposed by embracing randomness. We do not usually think of Yeats in terms of Dada, but the action of *Calvary* ends with a "dance of the dice-throwers," performed by Roman soldiers who gamble for Christ's cloak. In a note to the play, Yeats tells a story about an old Arab who has spent his life worshiping God's Chance: "If I should throw from the dice-box there would be but six possible sides on each of the dice, but when God throws He uses dice that have all numbers and sides" (Yeats, *Variorum Plays* 790). I know no better description of the God of Dada, the random number generator from whom the universe streams. As Tzara said, "Everything is incoherent ... There is no logic... The acts of life have no beginning and no end. Everything happens in a completely idiotic way (Motherwell 250-51). Most of Yeats's *Noh* imitations end with a sense of tautness, concentration, clench, but *Calvary* by contrast disperses—the gab of the soldiers has a savor of *nihil*:

*First Roman Soldier.* Although but one of us can win the cloak  
That will not make us quarrel; what does it matter?  
One day one loses and the next day wins.

*Second Roman Soldier.* Whatever happens is the best, we say,  
So that it's unexpected.

*Third Roman Soldier. [to Christ]* Had you sent  
A crier through the world you had not found  
More comfortable companions for a death-bed  
Than three old gamblers that have asked for nothing. (*Calvary*, Web)

Secular life is a zero-sum game, a vain rearrangement of the elements. Perhaps Yeats considered this strangely slack, flappy, blown-about, derisive ending appropriate for a play about Christ, a God Yeats did not love. The soldiers dance “as if throwing dice,” and I would choreograph it as a set of incoherent gestures, in which none of the soldiers paid attention to what the other two were doing.

The scene with Judas is *Calvary*'s second main episode, and the scene with the Roman soldiers the third—the first is the scene with Lazarus:

*Lazarus.* For four whole days  
I had been dead and I was lying still  
In an old comfortable mountain cavern  
When you came climbing there with a great crowd  
And dragged me to the light.

*Christ.* I called your name,  
'Lazarus, come out,' I said, and you came out  
Bound up in cloths, your face bound in a cloth.

*Lazarus.* You took my death, give me your death instead.

*Christ.* I gave you life.

*Lazarus.* But death is what I ask.  
Alive I never could escape your love,  
And when I sickened towards my death I thought  
I'll to the desert, or chuckle in a corner  
Mere ghost, a solitary thing. I died  
And saw no more until I saw you stand  
In the opening of the tomb; 'Come out!' you called;  
You dragged me to the light as boys drag out  
A rabbit when they have dug its hole away;  
And now with all the shouting at your heels  
You travel towards the death I am denied.

And that is why I have hurried to this road;  
And that is why I claim your death. (*Calvary*, Web)

Lazarus, like Judas, feels irritated that Christ has interfered with his supernal solitude, autonomy.

Yeats freely admitted that the source of *Calvary* was a story by Wilde. In *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922) Yeats prints a terse version of Wilde's story, and claims that Wilde, in publishing the tale, spoiled it by overelaboration. But I will quote here the full text that Wilde published, in *Poems in Prose* (1894), because, spoiled though it may be, it hints at the play that Wilde might have written as a companion-piece to *Salomé*:

### The Doer of Good

It was night-time and He was alone.

And He saw afar-off the walls of a round city and went towards the city.

And when He came near He heard within the city the tread of the feet of joy, and the laughter of the mouth of gladness and the loud noise of many lutes. And He knocked at the gate and certain of the gate-keepers opened to Him.

And He beheld a house that was of marble and had fair pillars of marble before it. The pillars were hung with garlands, and within and without there were torches of cedar. And He entered the house.

And when He had passed through the hall of chalcedony and the hall of jasper, and reached the long hall of feasting, He saw lying on a couch of sea-purple one whose hair was crowned with red roses and whose lips were red with wine.

And He went behind him and touched him on the shoulder and said to him, 'Why do you live like this?'

And the young man turned round and recognised Him, and made answer and said, 'But I was a leper once, and you healed me. How else should I live?'

And He passed out of the house and went again into the street.

And after a little while He saw one whose face and raiment were painted and whose feet were shod with pearls. And behind her came, slowly as a hunter, a young man who wore a cloak of two colours. Now the face of the woman was as the fair face of an idol, and the eyes of the young man were bright with lust.

And He followed swiftly and touched the hand of the young man and said to him, 'Why do you look at this woman and in such wise?'

And the young man turned round and recognised Him and said, 'But I was blind once, and you gave me sight. At what else should I look?'

And He ran forward and touched the painted raiment of the woman and said to her, 'Is there no other way in which to walk save the way of sin?'

And the woman turned round and recognised Him, and laughed and said, 'But you forgave me my sins, and the way is a pleasant way.'

And He passed out of the city.



And when He had passed out of the city He saw seated by the roadside a young man who was weeping.

And He went towards him and touched the long locks of his hair and said to him, 'Why are you weeping?'

And the young man looked up and recognised Him and made answer, 'But I was dead once, and you raised me from the dead. What else should I do but weep?' (Wilde, *Salomé* Web)

The fuller text, with emphasis on mineralization (chalcedony, jasper, the woman with the face of an idol), seems like the scenario for an unwritten play, moving in the direction of Craig's *Übermarionetten*, if not directly toward Yeats's Noh imitations, those Anglicized Japanese plays in which the Japan is to some degree Wilde's Japan, a pure invention.

Wilde had a remarkable posthumous career as an opera librettist: *Salomé* was the basis of one of the greatest of all operas, Richard Strauss's *Salomé* (1905), and Alexander Zemlinsky (Arnold Schoenberg's teacher) wrote impressive operas based on Wilde texts: *Eine florentinische Tragödie* (1917), from *A Florentine Tragedy*, and *Der Zwerg* (1922), from "The Birthday of the Infanta." And the hieratic starkness of *Calvary* seems well suited to music drama—in fact mystery plays and Noh imitations have appealed to many twentieth-century composers. In 1930 Kurt Weill composed *Der Jasager*, based on Bertolt Brecht's version of the Noh play *Taniko*; in 1958 Benjamin Britten set *Noyes Fludde* from the Chester cycle—not long afterward he composed a Christianized version of the Noh play *Sumidagawa, Curlew River* (1964); in 1962 Igor Stravinsky set *The Flood* using texts from the York and Chester cycles; and in 1972 Thomas Pasatieri set Yeats's *Calvary* as a "religious music drama."

But long before any of these, in 1894—the very year that Wilde published "The Doer of Good"—Émile Zola wrote a drama, *Lazare*, set to music after Zola's death by Alfred Bruneau (1902) and made into that rarest of things, a sacred oratorio for atheists, austere and beautiful. (The naturalistic novelist Zola had a little-studied career as an opera librettist, in collaboration with Bruneau.) The premise of *Lazare* is quite close to that of "The Doer of Good," and even closer to an alternative plot line that Wilde devised, as Richard Ellmann explains: "In another version, told at this time to Jean Lorrain, the resurrected Lazarus bitterly reproaches Christ for lying: 'There is nothing in death, and he who is dead is dead indeed.' Jesus puts his finger on his lips, 'I know it, but don't tell them' (358). In *Lazare* the friends and relatives of the dead Lazarus implore Christ to resurrect him; but Christ knows that this is a bad idea:

Aucun homme n'a connu le malheur de revenir de la mort ... Vous le voulez, vous le voulez, le terrible exemple. (Zola, Web)

No man has ever known the misery of coming back from the dead ... You want it, you want it, the terrible lesson.

As Christ knew, Lazarus indeed resists resurrection, and tells Christ:

N'ai-je pas payé à la souffrance ma dette affreuse de vivant? Je suis né sans savoir pourquoi, j'ai vécu sans savoir comment; et vous me feriez payer le double, vous me condamneriez à recommencer mon temps de peine, sur cette terre douloureuse. Quelle faute inexplicable ai-je commis pour que vous me punissiez d'un tel châtement? Revivre, hélas! Se sentir mourir un peu chaque jour dans sa chair, n'avoir d'intelligence que pour douter, de volonté que pour ne pas pouvoir, de tendresse que pour pleurer les deuils de mon cœur! (Zola, Web)

Haven't I suffered enough to pay off my disgusting debt of being alive? I was born without knowing why, I've lived without knowing how; and you would make me pay double, you would condemn me to begin again my time of pain on this wretched earth. What inexplicable transgression have I committed that you would punish me with such a punishment? Alas, to live again! To feel my flesh dying a little every day, to have intelligence only to doubt, to have a will only to be unable, to have emotions only to weep for my heart's grieving!

Zola's Christ, unlike Wilde's, takes pity on Lazarus and aborts the resurrection, allows him to relapse into unbeing:

Vous avez entendu; vous savez maintenant. Après la passion de la vie, la mort est la grande douceur ... Remettez la pierre ... Ah! pauvre créature humaine, créature de souffrance et de misère, dors, dors maintenant, à jamais heureuse pour l'éternité. (Zola, Web)

You have heard; you know now. After life's passions, death is the great sweetness ... Put back the stone [over Lazarus's tomb] ... Ah! poor human creature, creature of suffering and misery, sleep, sleep now, happy forever in eternity.

It is as if Zola's Christ is only a ventriloquist, giving voice to a half-resurrected man only to show that resurrection is not only impossible but also evil.

Yeats dealt with Lazarus's resurrection in *Calvary*, and to Christ's own resurrection in *The Resurrection*, a sort of sequel to *Calvary*, but differently textured. *The Resurrection* is a philosophical debate between the Greek, who considers that Christ is ideal, divine, and phantasmal, without a genuine human body, and the Hebrew, who considers that Christ is only a human being: "He was nothing more than a man, the best man who ever lived. Nobody before him had so pitied human misery. He preached the coming of the Messiah because he thought the Messiah would take it all upon himself. Then some day when he was very tired, after a long journey perhaps, he thought that he himself was the Messiah. He thought it because of all destinies it seemed the most terrible" (*The Resurrection*, Web). The play is unlike a Noh play in that it has no final dance, but like a Noh play in that it has very little onstage action except for the manifestation of a god:

*The Greek.* It is the phantom of our master. Why are you afraid? He has been crucified and buried, but only in semblance, and is among us once more. [*The Hebrew kneels.*] There is nothing here but a phantom, it has no flesh and blood. Because I know the truth I am not afraid. Look, I will touch it. It may be hard under my hand like a statue—I have heard of such things— or my hand may pass through it—but there is no flesh and blood. [*He goes slowly up to the figure and passes his hand over its side.*] The heart of a phantom is beating! The heart of a phantom is beating! [*He screams. The figure of Christ crosses the stage and passes into the inner room.*] (*The Resurrection*, Web)

Doubting Thomas puts his hand in the wound and feels Christ's heart. Christ's crossing of the stage, the immanence of the sacred heart, is a surrogate for the Noh play's dance: if it is only the ghost of a dance, that is fitting for this abstract drama, the ghost of a play.

Though Yeats didn't acknowledge it, *The Resurrection* is also indebted to Wilde. In *Salomé*, five Jews ask Herod to deliver Jokanaan into their clutches, but Herod refuses:

*Herod...* I will not deliver him into your hands. He is a holy man. He is a man who has seen God.

*A Jew.* That cannot be. There is no man who hath seen God since the prophet Elias. He is the last man who saw God. In these days God doth not show Himself. He hideth Himself. Therefore great evils have come upon the land.

*Another Jew.* Verily, no man knoweth if Elias the prophet did indeed see God. Peradventure it was but the shadow of God that he saw.

*A third Jew.* God is at no time hidden. He showeth Himself at all times and in everything. God is in what is evil even as He is in what is good.

*A fourth Jew.* That must not be said. It is a very dangerous doctrine. It is a doctrine that cometh from the schools at Alexandria, where men teach the philosophy of the Greeks. And the Greeks are Gentiles: They are not even circumcised.

*A fifth Jew.* No one can tell how God worketh. His ways are very mysterious. It may be that the things which we call evil are good, and that the things which we call good are evil. There is no knowledge of any thing. We must needs submit to everything, for God is very strong. He breaketh in pieces the strong together with the weak, for He regardeth not any man. (*Salomé*, Web)

Yeats's Greek, a Docetist heretic, and his Hebrew, an Arian heretic, turn this theological tumult into a more placid contesting of values—the second Jew's position, in Wilde, is very close to that of Yeats's Greek, who also claims that God manifests only a shadow of himself. And the rhetoric of Wilde's fifth Jew even anticipates Yeats's doctrine that, in the vast span of the historical gyre, the definitions of good and evil keep switching places. In *The Resurrection*'s last line before the final song, the Greek says, "Your words are clear at last, O Heraclitus. God and man die each

other's life, live each other's death." In this sense the play's terminal dance is that of the gyres themselves, the interconsuming of the *primary* Christian and the *antithetical* pagan. Perhaps Christ's divine nature is always eating up his human nature, and vice versa.

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