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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. MAKING COMPARISONS

A HISTORY OF HELLENOCENTRICITY

It has long and universally been assumed that drama developed "out of ritual." Yet only a broad comparative study could offer proof of a necessary link. The evidence for the origin of drama in Greece has been collected and studied for more than a century. This is in sharp contrast to the dearth of comparative material from other cultures. Anthropology is much more interested in the theoretical and synchronic relations between ritual and theatre than in any genetic or *historical* relationship. Cultural historians in other fields have also neglected the question of the origin of drama, with the striking exception of historians of the mediaeval liturgy, who are themselves divided on the question of whether liturgical drama developed organically or imitated classical models. By default Hellenists dominate the field.

This is somewhat paradoxical because it was comparative anthropology, particularly the work by James Frazer, which inspired the first full-blooded articulation of the ritual theory of drama by the so-called Cambridge Ritualists. But the Cambridge Ritualists were all professional Hellenists and drew primarily on Greek evidence. Moreover, they inherited from early comparative anthropology a Eurocentrism and progressivism, pronounced even for western Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[1] The Cambridge Ritualists classified all the foreign ethnographic material as comparative evidence for ritual, not drama, with the result that whereas ritual was universal, drama appeared a uniquely Greek achievement. Did the result of this early experiment in comparative anthropology simply rig out another of the cultural "contests," so loved by the Victorian and Edwardian anthropologist, that only the West (i.e., Greece) had won – indeed, could win, because the definition of "drama" was itself Helleno- and Eurocentric?

The few works that touch on the history of drama outside of Greece and mediaeval Europe do not suffice to answer this question.[2] There are numerous works, some directly inspired by Cambridge Ritualism, investigating cultures in which something like drama might be said to have developed "organically": ancient Egypt, Etruria, Roman Italy, India, China, Japan.[3] But (1) in some cases (Rome, mediaeval Europe), it is certain that any supposed "organic" development was overtaken by the (re)discovery of ancient Greek drama, whereas in the other cases (India, China and, through them, indirectly, Japan), it is still often claimed that the seed spread from Greece; (2) more important, the "drama" found in these and other cultures (unless or until overtly Hellenized) still seems remote from drama "as we know it" (which again raises concerns about the Hellenocentricity of our definition of drama). Greece still maintains a privileged position in universal theories of the origin of drama. It is not yet possible to say whether this position is justified.

COMPARATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

It could be argued that it is precisely the comparative element that was responsible for the Cambridge School's huge success with its contemporary reading public (not to mention literary, intellectual, and theatrical circles) and its cool reception among Hellenists. The immediate popularity of comparative anthropology with the Victorian and Edwardian public had much to do with the implicit question of the superiority of Western civilization. In general, it offered both the assurance of Western superiority and the scandal of exposing the savage roots of its most hallowed institutions. Jane Harrison described the invention of drama as the cultural "quantum leap" that led Europe from savagery to civilization. Yet at the same time she and her colleagues characterized drama as very close to the ritual "savagery" from which it emerged. Still worse, both Nietzsche and the Cambridge Ritualists wrote as if primitive ritual still inhered in drama as an essence. For this reason, Gilbert Murray was equally comfortable detecting the ritual patterns behind the plays of Shakespeare as those of Aeschylus.[4] For the same reason, Cambridge Ritualism inspired avant-garde directors from Artaud to Schechner to *revive* moribund bourgeois theatre by stripping drama to its ritual core. The public enjoyed, no doubt differentially, both aspects of this exercise.

The scholarly reaction to Cambridge Ritualism also had an ideological dimension, if usually a different one. For many early critics, the Cambridge Ritualists were not progressivist or Eurocentric enough. Hellenists especially felt that the Ritualists had narrowed the gap between ritual and drama on one hand, and Greece and common savagery on the other. The Greek miracle was tarnished not only by the claim that it originated in ritual, which was primitive and common, but by the Ritualist's compulsive parades of cross-cultural comparanda, which seemed

to underscore the savagery behind those rituals. Above all it seemed to bring the noble splendour of tragedy down to the level of ritual, and ritual had connotations of crudity, vulgarity, and social compulsion that Cambridge Ritualism did little to dispel. For Pickard-Cambridge, the suggestion that drama developed from ritual was simply indecorous ("it is extraordinarily difficult to suppose that the noble seriousness of tragedy can have grown so rapidly, or even at all, out of ribald satyric drama").[5] For Else, it threatened to undermine faith in the creativity of individual genius (how could "the inner constitution of an art" be explained by "Dionysiac cult, mimetic dances, projection of the group-*psyche*, Oriental and Indian parallels, etc., etc.?").[6] For Friedrich, it threatened to reduce tragedy from the expression of (liberal) democratic freedom to a mode of infra-human collective conditioning ("To interpret drama in terms of ritual is almost like explaining human nature in terms of the ape").[7] But above all, cultural comparisons seemed to tarnish the Hellenist's pride in the unique splendour of the Greek miracle itself. Despite dedicating a work to the refutation of the Cambridge Ritualists, Pickard-Cambridge simply refused to discuss the activities of "peoples far removed from the Greek."[8] As late as 1966, in arguing for the origin of tragedy in sacrificial ritual, Walter Burkert felt it necessary to reassure his reader that "This will do no damage to the originality of the Greeks. Indeed the uniqueness of their achievement emerges most clearly when we compare what in other civilizations sprang from similar roots: ceremonial hunting and warfare, human sacrifice, gladiators, bullfights."[9]

NEW RITUALISM

It would not be worth anticipating our discussion of the history of scholarship (see the section "A Concise History of the Question" in this chapter) were it not for the fact that in our relativistic, multicultural, postcolonial world, the dominant sentiment among both anthropologists and Hellenists is now the opposite, namely, that the gaps between ritual and drama posited by the Cambridge Ritualists were not narrow enough.[10] For about fifteen years now, Greek studies have witnessed an unprecedented resurgence in interest in the relation between ritual and drama. Unlike "Old (Cambridge-style) Ritualism," this "New Ritualism" (as Friedrich calls it) has, until recently, shown an exclusive interest in synchronic relations between Greek drama and ritual, not diachronic or historic.[11] But the strong reassertion of the ritual character, contents, and function of Greek drama also implies that Greek drama now looks much less like *drama as we know it*. This has implications for the broader exercise of cross-cultural comparison, opening the door to a less overtly Hellenocentric and Eurocentric approach to the comparative study of the question of drama's origins.[12]

DRAMA AND RITUAL DRAMA

There have been many attempts to establish firm criteria for distinguishing ritual and drama. Among those most commonly cited are the following differentiae:[13]

1. ritual is religious, drama secular;
2. in ritual all are participants, in drama there is a sharp division between actors and audience;[14]
3. ritual has a fixed text, drama a variable text;
4. ritual is efficacious, drama is entertaining;
5. in addition to the previous points, various contextual factors have often been cited. These include typical props or instruments as well as the broadest categories of social environment. It has, for example, been argued that drama performs in complex state-level societies the function of ritual in smaller traditional communities, or that drama is an expression of a freer and more egalitarian society, whereas ritual suggests hierarchy and compulsion.[15]

Every one of these distinctive features lends itself to counterexample and deconstruction, although as a set they do help describe common popular and scientific criteria for the nonetheless useful exercise of marking differences.

There is, however, no longer any question of "quantum leaps" from ritual to drama. The categories of ritual and drama are not so much divided as joined by a continuum, and, indeed, anthropology has generated a third term that marks the very expansive middle range of this continuum, namely, "ritual–drama." It is hard to conceive of ritual without some element of drama or drama without some element of ritual. The hypothesized continuum would then range from an unusually dull Calvinist prayer meeting to *Miss Saigon*. It is interesting that all the comparative studies from Part III of this volume (sample studies of the question of the origins of drama in Egypt by LEPROHON, Japan by ZOBEL, and mediaeval Europe by PETERSEN) seem to place their traditions fairly close to the middle ground of ritual–drama, whether on the ritual side of ritual–drama (Egypt), the dramatic side of ritual–drama (Japan), or somewhere in between (mediaeval Europe).

To assert a strong conceptual link between ritual and drama is, of course, very different from establishing a historical link. For Jane Harrison, it was understood that the leap from ritual to drama was also a leap from barbarism to civilization. Today's less teleologically inclined Hellenists would seem to place Greek drama closer to ritual–drama, leaving the invention of "drama as we know it" to the Renaissance or later. It can be argued that the strongly ritual character of Greek drama has long been obscured by successive appropriations of the Greek dramatic genres as models and genotypes, exercises designed to obfuscate their differences. Yet despite centuries of

assimilation, Greek drama can still be rediscovered to be something fascinatingly other than drama as we know it.

Greek drama may be said to differ from the standard form of Western drama as generally practiced since the Renaissance on several, if not all, of the listed differentiae which are supposed to distinguish drama from ritual.

THE RELIGIOUS–SECULAR DISTINCTION. The line between religious and secular is notoriously hard to draw in any premodern culture. It is especially hard in the case of Greek drama. Drama was originally (and for most of antiquity normally) performed at religious festivals. In Athens (which took the chief role in shaping drama), tragedy, comedy, and satyrplay were performed exclusively in honour of Dionysus and in theatres attached to sanctuaries of Dionysus. In Athens, drama is described in official texts as a "choros for Dionysus" and was performed, after prayers and sacrifice, in the presence of (the icon of) the god. Greek tragedy and satyrplay (although not comedy) are also religious insofar as they are based on myth – indeed they became the primary vehicle for the dissemination of myth in the Greek world.[16] Although the myths were not usually Dionysiac myths, some scholars have seen a Dionysiac essence in their focus on family violence and destructive madness.[17] Tragedy was also particularly important in the perpetuation of local hero cult.[18]

THE PARTICIPATING–SPECTATING DISTINCTION. There are significant ways in which the production of drama at Athens (where we are best informed) was much more participatory than drama "as we know it." Most important was the citizen choros. All dramatic choroi at the Athenian Dionysia were by law composed of citizen volunteers, and the law was enforced by the strictest of penalties until the abolition of the *choregia* in 317.[19] At the Lenaia, this law was relaxed to include metics (hereditary free residents without citizen rights). The large fifteen- to twenty-four-member dramatic choroi were thus ordinary members of the community. Moreover, the total annual requirement for choreuts at Attic festivals was sufficiently high to suggest the participation of most citizen males in a choral (if not strictly dramatic) performance at some time in their life, a factor that created a bond of community and empathy between audience and the majority of performers. A conservative estimate would put the annual demand for choreuts for dithyramb and drama in Attica at just under 5,000, or something between 10 and 20 percent of the average male nonslave population for the Classical period.[20] A number of recent studies have focussed on the choral function as both a ritual element within drama and as a symbolic extension of the audience within the drama.[21] This is a considerable refinement of the notion, as old as Schlegel, that the choros acted as an ideal mediator between the fictional world of the actors and the real world of the audience. In Old

Comedy, the audience, as body politic, is still more directly involved in the action, through its social and political themes, through its (fictional) inclusion of (actual) members of the audience as *dramatis personae* or as named objects of ridicule, through direct address of the audience, especially in the parabasis, and through the final invitation to all spectators to join in the victory komos. Particularly influential has been Albert Henrichs' study of the dramatic choros' vacillation between its identity as performers and as characters in a drama, which he describes as overlaying an emotional reaction to the event onstage with "a ritual posture which functions as a link between the cultic reality of the City Dionysia and the imaginary religious world of the tragedies."[22] Many recent scholars thus conceive of the audience as participating in the drama both metonymically and metaphorically through choral dance: in either case the participation is described in ritual terms. Recent scholarship has also stressed the ritual function of the choros. Anton Bierl, for example, considers the ritual role of the comic choros primary.[23] Both tragedy and comedy include hymns or prayers in which the barrier between drama and ritual can be described as "permeable" or "dissolved."[24] It can indeed be said that "there is hardly any choral lyric that is entirely without [ritual] associations."[25] John Winkler, notoriously, attempted to make participation in dramatic choroi an actual ephebic initiation rite.[26]

THE FIXED TEXT–VARIABLE TEXT DISTINCTION. This is a much disputed distinction (see PETERSEN; PATTON). Ancient drama is far from employing a fixed text. But compared with modern drama, there is an unmistakable relative fixity in the structure, especially the choral structures, of ancient drama, and a relative fixity in its reliance on a restricted group of myths. As PATTON points out (Chapter 16) in Greece, as well as in the ritual dramas of Egypt, Japan, or mediaeval Europe, "one constant emerges . . . the mythical content." In this company, however, the (albeit failed) experiments in historical and fictional tragedy, the free mythic innovation, the pastiche of satyrplay, and the unrestricted plots of comedy all make Greek drama stand out as a good deal more like "drama as we know it."

THE EFFICACIOUS–ENTERTAINING DISTINCTION. This distinction, however tenuous, is for many still critical (e.g., Schechner's performance theory; ZOBEL's discussion of the Japanese performance traditions). Entertainment and efficacy are present in any performance, yet the predominance of one over the other is supposed to help determine whether the performance is theatre or ritual. KOWALZIG and DEPEW both regard "efficacy" as an important ritual element in Greek tragedy. It is remarkable that no fifth- or fourth-century source describes the *ergon* of either tragedy or comedy as aesthetic: "the relevant concepts," notes DEPEW, "did not emerge at least until a self-consciously aesthetic culture arose in Alexandria . . . and

quite possibly did not arise fully until the later eighteenth century." In Aristotle the pleasure of drama is described either in ritual terms, notoriously as *katharsis* (apparently both tragedy and comedy), or it is a cognitive pleasure linked to moral and political education.[27]

If there is anything to the New Ritualism, then Greek drama should not be regarded as utterly different in species from the ritual forms found in other traditional cultures; yet most would agree, we think, that Greek drama represents a "limit case" among these cultures, something much more like "drama as we know it" than any of its congeners, and not necessarily just because it served as a model for modern Western drama. But if modern Western drama is alone in being virtually distinct from ritual, than the question of drama's origins must be framed very differently. It is our contention, at least, that the question is obfuscated by a false Hellenocentricity, and it is partly to combat this Hellenocentricity that the entire third section of this volume is devoted to examining the experience of other cultures in developing modes of performance that resemble drama, that many have taken to be drama, and that by many criteria are drama. The essays by LEPROHON, ZOBEL, and PETERSEN do not by themselves answer the question whether the link between ritual and drama is universal or necessary. But they do all seem to support the existence of close historical links between ritual and drama's historical dependence on a ritual matrix, even if they caution against any narrow set of universal conditions behind the mutation of ritual into dramatic forms. Many more studies of this sort are necessary before the general question of the origins of drama can be separated from the particular question of the origins of Greek drama.

2. THE ORIGINS OF DRAMA IN GREECE

It is one thing to say that drama performs a ritual function, includes rituals, or adapts ritual forms and quite another to prove that drama has a ritual origin. Skeptics are quick to say that the historical link between drama and ritual has never been proven. And certainly, as we have seen, there can at present be nothing like proof of a general transcultural link between drama and ritual. But in the case of Greece one can take issue with extreme critics like Rozik, who, in his recent attempt to refute the ritual theory of drama, repeatedly characterizes the evidence for Greece as scarce and the arguments as already refuted.[28] In Rozik's case it is unclear what form strict proof could take. Like many critics, he regards the question as purely theoretical and shows little interest in concrete evidence.[29]

Without denying the importance of theoretical considerations, we are concerned in this book with primary evidence. There is no place here for such etiolated, psychologistic, and hardwired concepts of "theatre," as Rozik's "elementary

functions of the human brain." Rozik's diffuse concept of "theatre" may well "have emerged any time and anywhere," but the historical genres commonly classified as dramatic did not.[30] This section of the Introduction, therefore, offers a general overview of the variety of evidence that is treated and debated in the contributions of Parts I and II of this volume.

ARISTOTLE

Rozik begins his refutation of ritual theory with a self-contradiction:[31]

> The thesis that theatre was generated by ritual is relatively new in the history of theatre theory. Until the end of the nineteenth century scholars almost unquestioningly subscribed to Aristotle's dictum that tragedy originated in dithyramb and comedy in phallic songs; but he did not link either to ritual.

Certainly Aristotle would not have felt the need to explain that dithyramb and phallic song *are ritual performances*. It is not that Rozik takes dithyramb to be a form of cabaret; he cites Pickard-Cambridge for the proposition that by the time of Arion dithyramb was a secular and "pure literary composition."[32] Even if this were possible, one has to wonder at Rozik's conception of phallic song.

Rozik goes beyond Pickard-Cambridge in making this claim, but it is based in large part on a confusion which really does originate with Pickard-Cambridge, namely, the claim that "the name *kyklios khoros* ["circular chorus"] . . . always means dithyramb."[33] Scholarship has only recently begun to recover from this error. That the ancients distinguished between circular choroi and dithyrambs can be seen from the fact that in the official language of inscriptions choral performances in the theatre are virtually never referred to as "dithyrambs."[34] The term "dithyramb" properly refers in Classical Greek usage to a cultic song with Dionysiac content. Dithyrambs, properly speaking, were processional and cultic performances. Circular choroi, by contrast, were locally stationary and theatrical performances. Although "circular choroi" were originally thought to be theatrical forms of dithyramb and might be called "dithyrambs" in popular speech, from the fifth century onward circular choroi absorbed the influence of a variety of lyric forms, and, as theatrical entertainments abstracted from their cultic and Dionysian contexts, might also be performed in non-Dionysian festivals and treat non-Dionysian myths. KOWALZIG demonstrates the powerfully Dionysian character of Pindar's "dithyrambs," whereas the non-Dionysiac character of Bacchylides' (probably much later) circular choroi has, on the other hand, nothing to tell us about the character of actual cultic dithyramb in his day. In any case Aristotle's reference to *exarchontes* ("those who lead off") of the dithyramb and phallic procession place it beyond doubt that Aristotle has not theatrical "circular choroi" in mind but cultic processional hymns.[35]

Both dithyramb and phallic song belonged to Dionysiac cult. That Aristotle regarded Dionysiac cult as the source for drama is also clear from his characterization of the primordial ritual from which tragedy developed as "a satyrplay-like performance" and as a "composition for satyrs and more in the nature of a dance performance" (*Poet.* 1449a 20, 23). Satyrs in Aristotle's day, as long before, were inextricably linked with Dionysus. There can be no doubt, then, despite Rozik, that Aristotle believed tragedy and comedy to have developed from ritual and cultic forms: dithyramb was a hymn sung when leading an animal to sacrifice; *phallika* are processions involving the singing of hymns which celebrate the advent of the god Dionysus in the form of a phallus – processions which also end in sacrifice. The only question is whether Aristotle knew what he was talking about.

Is Aristotle's prehistory of tragedy "only a hypothesis and need not be treated as a sacred revelation,"[36] or must "any serious account of the emergence [of drama] . . . start from what Aristotle reports in his *Poetics*" (SEAFORD)?[37] Aristotle claims that, unlike comedy, "the transformations of tragedy and their authors are not forgotten" (*Poet.* 1449a 36–7). Possibly Aristotle published more fully on these unforgotten facts elsewhere, because there are two fragments attributed to him which deal with early drama: Themistius disputes Aristotle's claims "that the choros first hymned the gods as they entered and that Thespis invented the prologue and speeches"; Proclus quotes Aristotle as saying that Arion "first introduced the circular choros."[38] In the latter case, at least, it appears that Aristotle is drawing on sources that are all but lost to us. Not only Hellanicus (early fifth century BC) but also Solon (early sixth century BC) wrote about Arion's innovative choral performances – Hellanicus, from Lesbos like Arion, apparently drawing on local tradition, and Solon, a contemporary of Arion, conceivably from autopsy.[39]

Despite this, there is a widespread suspicion that Aristotle can have had no greater information about the early history of drama than we do and that his historical claim was simply spun out of his own preconceptions and methodological habits. Else's complaint that "nobody has investigated the rationale of the hypothesis within the context of Aristotle's own thinking" remains valid, despite Else.[40] DEPEW, therefore, addresses this question and, after a very thorough analysis, shows that Aristotle did indeed run his data through a methodological mill, largely developed in the course of his biological research. But, remarkably, DEPEW does not feel the data were invented or much distorted by the process – he feels that if anything Aristotle is inclined to exaggerate the distance between tragedy and its ritual origins. SEAFORD, indeed, argues that the derivation of tragedy out of nonserious (satyrplay-like) beginnings actually goes against the grain of Aristotle's schematic distinction between tragedy and comedy and is not likely to have been concocted to suit his argument.

It is conventional to point out that Aristotle knew many more tragedies than we do. He certainly had access to more early written sources and to oral traditions, whether or not they were accurate. More important, in our view, is the fact that he had immediate experience of the continuing rituals from which he derives tragedy and comedy. These rituals survived, in their processional pretheatrical forms, right down to Aristotle's own day.[41] Even if his connection between drama, dithyramb, and phallic rites was merely intuitive, it was based on a far greater body of experience and unarticulated comparative data than we can ever hope to recover. One might compare the situation in Japan where the observation of close parallels between Nō and Kagura performances and the archaic rituals which still survive alongside them has proven valuable for the reconstruction of the history of those dramatic forms (ZOBEL).

PRE-ARISTOTELIAN TEXTUAL FRAGMENTS

This is, of course, not to imply that Aristotle's intuitions were necessarily correct, only that a highly intelligent and well-informed witness of drama and certain forms of Dionysiac ritual in the fourth century had no difficulty in discerning their resemblances. Aristotle's authority on this matter in antiquity was unfortunately so great that little of the information found in later authors is likely to be independent of his theories.

For example, the reference to Arion in the elegies of Solon (fr. 30a W) is reported by John the Deacon as follows: "Arion of Methymna first introduced the drama of tragedy as Solon indicated in his poem entitled *Elegies*." It is not at all clear what Solon actually wrote, but he certainly did not use the phrase "drama of tragedy." Our fifth- and fourth-century sources all identify Arion as an innovator in the dithyramb or "circular choros."[42] In late antique and Byzantine authors, however, he is called a tragedian, or is said to have invented the "tragic mode" or "introduced satyrs speaking verses," all probably confusions generated by scholars interpreting their sources with the aid, or for the benefit, of Aristotelian theory.[43]

Most experts accept John the Deacon's testimony that Solon mentioned Arion in relation to musical innovations.[44] Our earliest sources also connect Arion with Corinth, the tyrant Periander (625–585) and dancing dolphins. Moreover Corinth is named by Pindar (464), who is probably thinking of Arion, as the place where "the charms of Dionysus, with the ox-driving dithyramb, first came to light" (*Ol.* 13.17–18).

We know almost nothing about the character of dithyramb before the innovations of Lasos, but surprisingly we know enough to falsify the claims of Aristotle and Solon, supposing that they are correctly reported as claiming that Arion first introduced the dithyramb.[45] A fragment of Archilochus makes it clear that Arion cannot have invented the dithyramb. Sometime around 640 Archilochus (fr. 120 W)