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Ritual and Drama in Aischyleian Tragedy

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For nearly sixty years the English-speaking world was under the spell of a phantasm, so far as the origin of tragedy is concerned. The beginning of this obsession, or delusion, can be dated to 1912 when Gilbert Murray published in Jane Harrison's *Themis*¹ an "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy."

Professor Murray claimed to have discovered in Greek tragedy extensive remnants of a prehistoric ritual sequence in six parts, or acts. In it were enacted the passion, death, and resurrection of an *Eniautos-Daimon* or Year-Spirit who could also be, and indeed was, identified with Dionysos, Adonis, etc. The full sequence comprised an *Agôn*, a contest of Light against Darkness, Summer against Winter; a *Pathos* of the Daimon, in which he was slain, stoned, and/or torn to pieces; a *Messenger* who reported the tragic event; a *Thrênos* or lamentation over it; a *Recognition* or discovery of the slain Daimon, followed by his *Resurrection* or epiphany or apotheosis. With this last stage went a drastic *Peripety* or reversal of feeling from grief to joy.

This ritual has never been shown to have existed in ancient Greece or anywhere else.² It is a pure construction, and it was demolished by Pickard-Cambridge nearly 50 years ago.³ An awareness of these facts is at last beginning to gain ground these days;⁴ but unfortunately, in fields

¹ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2nd ed. 1927.

² It has been plausibly suggested that the real model for it was the Easter myth and ritual of Christ: Carlo del Grande, *Tragoidia: essenza e genesi della tragedia*², Naples, 1962, pp. 309-311.

³ A. W. (later Sir Arthur) Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb Tragedy and Comedy*, Oxford, 1927, pp. 185-208. It is necessary to warn the reader that T. B. L. Webster, who supervised the second edition of the work (1962), almost exactly reversed Pickard-Cambridge's conclusion, returning to a prehistoric ritual very like Murray's.

⁴ Del Grande, *op. cit.* 311, roundly called Murray's theory "una costruzione intellettualistica." Cf., as straws in the present wind, A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus' Supplikes: Play*

of study like English, comparative literature, drama, etc., where reference is often made to the origin of tragedy, everybody knows Murray while few have even heard of Pickard-Cambridge. This kind of cultural lag, one of the curses of modern scholarship, perhaps has to be borne, but it does not have to be borne gladly. It was one thing for Francis Fergusson to announce in 1949, 22 years after Pickard-Cambridge's book was published:

The Cambridge School of Classical Anthropologists has shown in great detail that the form of Greek tragedy follows the form of a very ancient ritual, that of the *Eniautos-Daimon*, or seasonal god. This was one of the most influential discoveries of the last few generations . . . ,

and to proceed without hesitation to apply this "influential discovery" to the *Oidipous*;⁵ it is quite another thing to go on repeating Murray's theory 60 years and more after its launching without betraying any awareness that it was exploded long ago.

Theodor H. Gaster, in his book *Thespis*,⁶ documented a long series of myths and rituals—Egyptian, Canaanite, Hebrew, Akkadian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Hittite—which have in common a focus on the "drama" of earth's animal and vegetable life: the annual withering of the crops and herds in the fall and their regular renewal in the spring. Gaster expressly identified these seasonal rites as the root and source of drama: all drama (pp. 3-4):

All over the world, from time immemorial, it has been the custom to usher in years and seasons by means of public ceremonies. These, however, are neither arbitrary nor haphazard, nor are they mere diversions. On the contrary, they follow everywhere a more or less uniform and consistent pattern and serve a distinctly *functional* purpose. They represent the mechanism whereby, at a primitive level, Society seeks periodically to renew its vitality and thus ensure its continuance. These seasonal ceremonies form the basic nucleus of Drama, their essential structure and content persisting—albeit in disguised and attenuated fashion—throughout all of its later manifestations.

and Trilogy, Cambridge 1969, Chap. III, esp. p. 91 n. 3; A. Lesky, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*³, Göttingen 1972, pp. 17-18; Brian Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy: Drama, Myth, Society*, London (Longman) 1973, pp. 4, 33, 38-41. More generally, Joseph Fontenrose, *The Ritual Theory of Myth*, Berkeley, 1966.

⁵ Gordon M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama*, Cornell, 1958, pp. 12-16, gives a devastating appraisal of Murray's theory and "ritual expectancy" as applied to Sophokles. His most telling point is that ritual depends on exact repetition, while the Greek plays present the stories differently each time.

⁶ *Thespis: Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East*, New York (Schuman), 1950. The foreword to the book was written by Gilbert Murray.

I have protested before against the ongoing, unthinking acceptance of the Murrayan hypothesis, and have no intention of treading that ground again here. Rather I want to call attention to an implication or corollary which will be of importance for our discussion of Aischylos. Gaster makes it more explicit than Murray, though with Murray's approval: the primitive ceremonies are the means through which "*Society* [my italics] seeks to renew its vitality;" and again on p. 4: the seasonal program of activities is performed "*under communal sanction*" [G.'s italics]. In short, to state the point canonically, drama has a social, communal root; from which it follows that individuals have no place in the pattern except as *socially representative persons*: kings, warriors, priests, petitioners, and the like.

It is obvious that a communal origin for tragedy—to focus on it for the present—accords well with the prevailing belief that tragedy began with the chorus. But I wish to raise the issue here not as a part of the question of origins, but very precisely as a question concerning the dynamic relationship between society (as represented by the chorus) and individual, and/or between ritual and drama, in *Aischyleian* tragedy. And for that purpose I should like to begin with the question: what is it that makes a drama dramatic?

We are all familiar with Aristotle's definition of tragedy as the imitation of an action, and with his dictum that the parts of the action should follow upon one another either probably or necessarily. In a complex plot, which Aristotle explicitly identifies as the best, the end may be surprising but must still be plausible. Viewed in these terms, the dramatic quality resides in the relentless, logical way in which the action marches on once it has begun, yet ends up in a new direction: a paradoxical yet compelling⁷ outcome. This is what Aristotle calls "peripety."

Drama in that sense is clearly limited to complex plots, as Aristotle himself in effect says. But Aischylos did not write complex plots. (I believe that that is the main reason why Aristotle tended to ignore or depreciate him; but that is another issue.) Indeed in most of Aischylos's plays there is hardly any action at all, much less a complex one; and little or nothing of what does happen happens on stage. In the *Persians* we see the Persian disaster successively anticipated, narrated, explained, and emotionally realized; but neither it nor anything else really *happens* during the play. In the *Seven Against Thebes* Eteokles calms the women, posts his defenders to the gates of the city, and rushes off himself to die at his brother's hands; that is all. It is a commonplace that in *Prometheus* nothing happens

⁷ *Ἐκπληκτικόν*, 1454a4, 1460b25: "smashing, emotionally overwhelming." For the key phrase *παρὰ τὴν δόξαν δι' ἄλληλα*, 1452a4, see my *A.'s Poetics: The Argument*, Harvard, 1957, pp. 329-332.

between the binding of the Titan at the beginning of the play and his descent into Tartaros at the very end. In between, lamentation, argument, explication, reminiscence, prophecy, but no action. Only in *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides* is there anything like a self-contained, ongoing sequence of events which lead from a "beginning" to an "end."

Elsewhere, and most strikingly in *Agamemnon*, there is a grandiose development of what in my book on early tragedy I called "virtual action."⁸ The sacrifice of Iphigeneia, the race of the fire-signal, the fall of Troy, the great storm on the Aigaian—all these events, in different senses, do and do not happen in the play. The play as an explicit action does not contain them, but it presents them in a way that makes us feel as we might feel if they *had* been enacted before our eyes. They exist for us as virtual happenings.

If the plays of Aischylos are dramatic, then—and I think we do feel them to be dramatic—it is not because they follow Aristotle's prescriptions for plot or "action." Nor is it, in general, because they bring us stark confrontations of human wills. In the *Seven* the striking feature is precisely that the two brothers, whose competing wills we might expect to be the mainspring of the drama, are never brought together. In the *Persians*, Xerxes and the Greeks do not meet except in the Messenger's speech, and eventually we come to see that the burden of the play is not the confrontation between these enemies but the king's *hybris*, his offense against divine law. Even in *Agamemnon* the meeting of husband and wife is curiously oblique and muffled. Only in the *Suppliants* and—once more—in the last two plays of the *Oresteia* is there a clear facing-off of adversaries: here Orestes and his mother, Orestes and the Furies.

We have still not found the secret of the dramatic quality of Aischyleian drama. I believe that that quality resides not in the inweaving of events to form an *action*, and not primarily in the explicit *confrontation* of opposing wills—although the latter also appears at times, in the *Suppliants* and the *Oresteia*—but above all in the intensity with which certain emotions are aroused in the persons of the drama and, through them, in us. It seems to me that that emotional tension, all-pervasive and compelling as it tends to be, is the primary source of the dramatic quality that we feel in the plays.⁹

⁸ *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy* (Martin Classical Lectures, XX), Harvard, 1967, pp. 99–100.

⁹ There is nothing really new here. The essential points were made in Jacqueline de Romilly's little book *La crainte et l'angoisse dans le théâtre d'Eschyle*, Paris 1958. Vickers' formulation, *op. cit.* (n. 4 above) 3: "The plays translate the *clash of will* and motive into forms which, although obeying complex literary conventions, still represent human actions, and convey them *with intensity*, . . ." [my italics], is only partially true of Aischylos.

Of the two most powerful emotions that Aischylos arouses, one—fear—belongs to the traditional Aristotelian dyad, but the other is not pity but grief, lamentation.

A drama which operates with a complex plot—the *Oidipous Tyrannos*, say—tends to bring fear into play late in the game, or at any rate not at the beginning. Aischyleian “fear,” on the contrary, tends to begin at the very beginning and to grow steadily from that point to the climax. Fear—or as we often call it, more tamely, foreboding—is in fact in a very real sense the mainspring of Aischyleian drama. His masterpiece in this line is of course the *Agamemnon*, where fear repeatedly breaks in and dominates the scene all the way up to the murder. But every other Aischyleian play shows the same thing, in greater or less strength.

Fear is an emotional anticipation of a catastrophe that is still to come; grief and lamentation are an emotional response to it after it has come. The natural place for grief, therefore, is at or near the end of the play, and three of the extant dramas—*Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *Agamemnon*—show it in that place. In the others, *Suppliants*, *Choephoroi*, *Eumenides*, and *Prometheus*, the phenomena are more complicated, and I cannot deal with all of them here.

At this point a remark on chronology is necessary. We used to think that the *Suppliants* was the oldest play of the extant seven. Most scholars tended to date it far back in Aischylos’s dramatic career, even as far back as the 490’s, less than ten years after he began to produce plays. The reason for this assumption—for it was nothing more than that—was very simple. In *Suppliants* the chorus, representing the 50 daughters of Danaos, is the protagonist of the play, and this fitted well with the universal belief that tragedy originated in a choral performance, to which the first actor was added only later. In 1952, however, our attention was called to a tiny scrap of a *didaskalia* on papyrus, not more than two or three inches square, which indicated that the *Suppliants* was produced in competition with Sophokles, and the earliest possible year for that is 466; the most likely is 463. If we accept this dating—and it is now more and more firmly accepted¹⁰—it follows that the *Suppliants*, far from being a primitive attempt, represents Aischylos’s dramaturgy not long before the *Oresteia* (458). That leaves *Persians* as our earliest extant play (472); the *Seven* comes next (467).

I should now like to propose my first major thesis: that the most potent

¹⁰ The incomparably close and carefully argued study by Garvie, *op. cit.* (n. 4 above) 1–28 is now the *locus classicus* for this subject. It can be said that the effort to ignore or argue away the evidence of the papyrus has now effectively ceased.

modes and forms of expression of fear and grief in the plays are derived from ritual, and involve the chorus especially.

The plays are permeated with ritual elements from one end to the other. That is the solid truth that lay behind Gilbert Murray's construction. And some of the elements are the same: he knew Greek tragedy too well not to have built them into his scheme. But there is a prime distinction to be made. *Pathos*, catastrophe, and *thrénos*, lamentation, belong to the native fabric of Aischyleian tragedy, but the other elements in the scheme: the tragic *agón* (the alleged ritual combat), *theophany*, and *peripety* from grief to joy, were products of Murray's imagination. They do not belong to the basic ritual patterns. To establish a background for what I mean by "basic ritual patterns," let me quote Wolfgang Schadewaldt on "Grundsituationen des Menschlichen." After speaking of the significance of *Botschaft*: messages and messengers, he says:

"Botschaft empfangen gehört zu den Grundsituationen des Menschlichen.— Was das Beispiel der Botschaft zeigt, gilt auch für jene anderen vorgeprägten Formen in den Bereichen von Kult, Staat, Rechts- und Volksbrauch, Sitte— auch Staats- und Rechtsformen sind in frühen Zeiten ursprünglich mit dem Kult verbunden. Sie alle sind gewachsene Formen des Lebens, die der Mensch aus seiner Natur erzeugt hat, als er mit der Kultur eine zweite, eigentlich menschliche Natur um sich her aufbaute. In diesen Gewohnheiten, Sitten, Bräuchen, Begehungen und Zeremonien ist es, wo der Mensch eigentlich "wohnt": sie sind *Naturformen der Kultur*."¹¹

Of all these "*Naturformen*" in Aischyleian tragedy, at least the ones that are certainly of ritual origin, the *thrénos* is the most clearly marked, both in its place and function in the play and in its metrical character and style.¹² The *Persians*—our oldest extant tragedy and only extant historical play (but its constituent forms are identical with those in other plays)—ends with a full-dress *thrénos* in proper form, a lamentation over the myriads of Persian dead and more generally over the loss of Persian empire and glory.

Here there is a difficulty of presentation. The rhythmical and stylistic peculiarities of the *thrénos*, in the *Persians* or elsewhere, cannot be rendered, or even approximately suggested, in English; and even our Greek text is only a text of words, devoid of music, gesture, and action—danced action, mimed action. Without those accents of color, sound, and move-

¹¹ "Sophokles' 'Elektra' und 'Hamlet'," lecture before the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, 26 April 1955; in *Hellas und Hesperien*² 2 (1970) 13-17. The quotation is from page 14.

¹² For the following see in detail Rudolf Hölzle, *Zum Aufbau der lyrischen Partien des Aischylos* (Freiburg diss.), Marbach a. N. 1934, esp. pp. 12-29. It is worth noting that the study was suggested and directed by Schadewaldt during his time at Freiburg.

ment, any text is no more than bare bones; and in English translation these particular bones are so bare that they make only a ridiculous clicking and clacking. The last pages of the *Persians*, in English, sound like a parody of grief. It will be necessary to do some quoting in Greek.

In the course of the play we have heard about the disaster of Salamis, from a messenger, and we have heard it explained by the ghost of the old king Dareios. Now, at line 908, Xerxes enters, a shattered man, a wraith of his old imperial self. He begins with recitative anapaests—not a rhythm of lament but of marching—perhaps to suggest how he (and a few weary men?) have dragged one foot after the other all the endless way back from Greece to Persia:

ἰώ·
δύστηνος ἐγὼ στυγερᾶς μοίρας . . .

The chorus replies in kind, 918 ff., but at 922 goes over to melic anapaests:

γά δ' αἰάζει τὰν ἐγγαίαν
ἦβαν Ξέρξαι κταμέναν, . . .

thus signalling a first raising of the emotional level. And this first anapaestic system (918–930) ends in an unusual way: not with the customary momometer or paroemiac but with a verse the second half of which suggests dochmiac character: αἰνῶς αἰνῶς ἐπὶ γόνυ κέκλιται. The hint of dochmiac signals the beginning of a further rise in emotion.¹³

Xerxes' brief strophe, 931–933, begins the lamentation proper, still in anapaests but again with the savor of a dochmiac: κακὸν ἄρ' ἐγενόμαν.

Five of the next 11 verses, in the chorus's response, Xerxes' antistrophe, and the next choral response, have a similarly ambivalent flavor, anapaestic/dochmiac:

936–7 κακοφάτιδα βοάν, κακομέλετον ἰάν . . .
940 πέμψω πολύδακρυν ἰαχάν.
943 μετὰτροπος ἐπ' ἔμοι.
945 λαοπαθέα¹⁴ σέβων ἀλίτυπά τε βάρη . . .
947–948 κλάγξω δ' αὖ γόνον ἀρίδακρυν.

¹³ Broadhead's metrical discussion of the *exodos* (*The Persae of Aeschylus*, ed. H. D. Broadhead, Cambridge, 1960, 294–297) is careful—and conservative. E.g., he favors anapaestic scansion of 934 and 936 because “the contexts are wholly anapaestic.” But it is precisely what Aeschylus does in such situations that is of interest; the exceptions, or possible exceptions, are as important as the rule. See below, pp. 79 f. and n. 17.

¹⁴ λαοπαθέα in 945, with correct long α, indicates a dochmiac rather than a resolved anapaestic metron: A. M. Dale, *The Lyric Metres of Greek Drama*², Cambridge, 1968, p. 54.

Already at this early stage we can observe one of the characteristic marks of the *goös* or *thrénos*:¹⁵ assonance of every variety, including alliteration (934, 936–937, 940), end-rhyme (934, 936–937, 940), other echoes (940 *πολύδακρυν*, 948 *ἀρίδακρυν*), gemination (930 *αἰνῶς αἰνῶς*).

Xerxes' second strophe, 950–953, introduces another modulation, a suggestion of ionics;¹⁶ the chorus in response introduces another, with a double dochmiac, a choriambic dimeter, two lekythia, a pair of anapaests, and a hypodochmius.¹⁷ The variegated rhythmic pattern continues in what follows, with dochmiacs at 973, 976, 986, 990, the last three all being 2 δ. These new variations seem to reflect a shift, if not an increase, in emotional tension: a change of key.

At line 1002 there is a major break. So far the responsion between Xerxes and chorus has been between whole strophes and anapaestic systems. Now the tempo speeds up and there is staccato responsion between short lines, seldom longer than a dimeter. Within this restricted space the phenomena of assonance which we noticed before recur, but with greater insistence. The rhythms are mainly iambic, frequently with syncopation:

- 1002 Ξε. βεβᾶσι γὰρ τοῖπερ ἀγρέται στρατοῦ.
 Χο. βεβᾶσιν οἱ νώνυμοι.
 Ξε. ἰῆ ἰῆ ἰῶ ἰῶ.
 Χο. ἰῶ ἰῶ, . . .
- 1008 Ξε. πεπλήγμεθ' . . .
 Χο. πεπλήγμεθ', . . .
 Ξε. νέαι νέαι δύαι δύαι.

Gemination and echoing, in various forms, now occupy a larger and larger place:

- 1038 Ξε. δίαινε δίαινε πῆμα, πρὸς δόμους δ' ἴθι.
 Χο. αἰαῖ αἰαῖ δύα δύα.
 Ξε. βόα νυν ἀντίδουπά μοι.
 Χο. δόσιν κακὰν κακῶν κακοῖς,

until in the final epode hardly anything is left except echoing moans: 1070–1071 *ἰῶὰ δῆ . . . ἰῶὰ δῆτα*, 1074–1075 *ἦῆ ἦῆ . . . ἦῆ ἦῆ . . .*

In all this there is little or nothing that can be called rational, coherent speech. It is not intended to be rational or coherent. What we have here

¹⁵ See Hölzle, *loc. cit.* (n. 12 above).

¹⁶ Cf. the accented beginning *Ἰάων* with the strongly accented ionics in 65 ff., where the themes of the play are broached. The ionic-chanting Persians have got their come-uppance from the "Ionians."

¹⁷ 973, though not in strict responsion, is surely dochmiac. Throughout the passage one observes this tendency toward transcendence of anapaests into dochmiacs, ionics, etc., but with a rising fervency as the lamentation goes on.

is a series of *cries*, desperate, affect-laden cries, rising out of levels of feeling far below the conscious mind. The whole thing is, to use a modern term, gut-utterance, an expression of desolation and despair going away beyond what normal, self-controlled human beings say in ordinary life.

Yet this formulation is misleading, for Greek life—unlike ours—did have a place and a constituted form of expression for just this kind of gut-utterance, when human beings were faced with the loss of everyone and everything dear to them. No doubt the scene in the *Persians* is meant in part to characterize the Persians as Orientals, lacking in dignity and self-control. But we have good reason to think that the *form* of the *thrênos*, with its responsions and echoings and urgent rhythms, was one well known to the Greek audience: that it was, in short, a native ritual form.

A proof of this, if proof is needed, is that the end (the genuine end) of *Seven Against Thebes* employs the same form, and this time the lamenters are not Orientals but perfectly good Greeks. Thus when Aischylos wants to portray the human reaction to death and the loss of dear ones, he has recourse to a form of lamentation that is known and familiar to his audience: the form in which, we can safely assume, they lamented their own dead. He achieves the dramatic effect he wants by borrowing a ritual form from real life.

But we must not think of this borrowing as an irruption of "real life," raw, unformed, undigested, into the domain of art. The *thrênos* was already a highly developed, elaborate form in the bosom of real life long before Aischylos was born.¹⁸ It has its *exarchôn* or *exarchontes* (forechanter or -chanters), its professional or at least trained and skilled female keeners, its progression of the lament from generalities and measured cadences to staccato, incoherent cries, accompanied by the beating of breasts and heads, the ripping of clothing, and no doubt some kind of dance, if only a primitive surging to and fro in time to the music.

We have fine literary specimens of the *thrênos* in the last book of the *Iliad*, in the lamentations of Hekabe, Helen, and Andromache over the body of Hektor. But the vehemence, the rapid cries, the primitive swaying and moaning have been dampened by the form under which the whole episode is subsumed; they have been transposed into the stately, long-drawn tread of the epic hexameter. (Even so, it is worth noticing that the *Iliad* too ends with lamentations and a funeral.) Thus the passionate movement is slowed and diverted. Of the *thrênos* as a literary form in its own right, i.e., as a genre of choral lyric, we have only tantalizing

¹⁸ On the *thrênos*, both "real-life" and literary, as part of the background of tragedy, see M. P. Nilsson, *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum* 27 (1911) 609-13, = *Opuscula Selecta* I (Lund, 1951) 61-68.

scraps from Simonides and Pindar, but enough to show that there too it was transformed: softened, quieted, made sentimental or reflective.¹⁹

Thus the old brutal, direct outpouring of grief in the *thrénos* or *goös* is not visible to us in the direct literary tradition. We find a remnant of its ancient form and mode of working only in tragedy, and most clearly of all in Aischyleian tragedy. The same is undoubtedly true of its rhythms. Wilamowitz conjectured long ago that the iambics—especially the synco-pated iambics—which are so characteristics of the movement of the *thrénos* belonged to the native dirges of the Athenians;²⁰ and surely we may add the dochmiac, that strange checked, cross-weaving rhythm which is akin to iambics and is found only in tragedy. Its function is to express grief and other strong emotions, but always in the tragic context.

Having said this much, we must add a further qualification. Although the rhythmical and stylistic traits of the primitive lament shine through in the *exodos* of the *Persians* (and of the *Seven Against Thebes*), it would be naive to suppose that Aischylos imported them into his dramas unmodified. The subtleties of modulation which we observed in *Persians*, between anapaests and dochmiacs, are at least as likely to be his doing as they are to be simple borrowings. In other words, Aischylos will have improved on “nature,” and we can hypothesize three stages in the artistic shaping of expressions of grief, with a bifurcation in the third stage:

1. Naive breaking forth of feeling
2. The *goös* or *thrénos* as real-life forms
3. Artistically shaped *thrénoi*:
 - a. In the literary tradition (Homer, Simonides, Pindar)
 - b. In tragedy: *kommos*

Tragedy was able to offer the *thrénos* a true home, an artistic *ambiance* in which it could nevertheless unfold its real passionate nature without compromise. Tragedy was able to do this for two reasons: (1) *rhythmically*,

¹⁹ The few fragments of Simonides' *thrénoi* collected by Page, *PMG*, 520–531 (only nos. 521 and 523 are explicitly cited as from *thrénoi*) show very markedly his meditative, pessimistic tone. On the other hand the Danae fragment (Page 543), which has sometimes been ascribed to a *thrénos*, evokes a very different tone-register, romantic and/or realistic but in any case sentimental: *ionische Weichlichkeit*.—The relatively short fragments of Pindar's *thrénoi* (frgg. 128a–137 Snell) are sufficient to reveal their reflective, consolatory character. Fr. 129, quoted by Plutarch, gives the famous picture of the life of the blessed in the other world; cf. *Ol.* 2. 58–83.

²⁰ *Commentariola metrica*, originally published in the summer and winter *indices lectionum* at Göttingen, 1895; republished, with a few changes, in *Griechische Verskunst*, Berlin 1921 (repr. Darmstadt 1958); see p. 208: “eo adducor, ut legitimos hos numeros [sc. iambos] in naeniis Atheniensium fuisse credam.”

because it did not impose a change of form, to dactylic hexameters or various song-rhythms, but allowed the *thrênos* to unfold at its own pace and in its own characteristic rhythms; and (2) *spiritually*, because it could allow the *thrênos* to express real, heartbroken grief without let or hindrance. Tragedy could do these things, where the epic and the choral lyric could not, because it was *drama* and *tragic* drama. As drama its form was broad and inclusive enough to tolerate "real-life" forms; and as tragedy it was fitted to embrace real grief in its most powerful expressions.

This second point leads us back to Gilbert Murray. His "primitive ritual" included a *thrênos*, but not a real one in our sense, for it ended by turning into a cry of jubilation over the theophany or apotheosis of the risen god. Murray's true fault was to have claimed the pattern of the Dying God as the key to Greek tragedy. Tragedy and vegetation-rites have nothing to do with each other. A god is not a tragic hero or the prototype of one, for the simple reason that gods do not die. If a god "dies," his resurrection is sure, guaranteed by the annual cycle of the seasons. The tragic hero, on the contrary, really suffers and/or dies. His passion is not redeemed by a conviction in the spectator's heart that he will rise again. (The politically oriented salvation that appears at the end of the *Oresteia* is a different kind of thing altogether.)

The annual vegetation-rites are buoyed up by the tested faith that the god will live again next year as he did this year, in the same way and the same rhythm; while tragedy is haunted by the tragic awareness that we mortals, even the greatest of us, must fail and die. This tragic fear—the other partner in the Aischyleian duo of which I spoke a while ago—permeates other ritual forms in Aischyleian tragedy as grief permeated the *thrênos*. But while the *thrênos* tends to come late in the tragic pattern, in the nature of the case these forms of foreboding, in which the soul palpitates before the unknown future, tend naturally to come early. There are two chief species: the prayer cast in the form of a hymn, and the *kommos* or lyric antiphonal. The first of these is an utterance of the chorus, the second of an actor and the chorus responding to each other in lyric rather than spoken dialogue. Such utterances are everywhere in Aischyleian tragedy.

These two ritual forms—for that is what they are—cannot be described in the same direct, simple fashion as the *thrênoi* at the end of *Persians* and *Seven Against Thebes*, for their modes of appearance vary considerably and they even play in and out of each other. But they are there, and although their modes are not always the same they perform the same function.

Assuming provisionally a certain sequence of parts as the normal beginning of an Aischyleian tragedy, namely spoken prologue,²¹ parodos (entrance) of the chorus in recitative anapaests, and first ode containing or including a prayer, we find the following variations:

In the *Seven*, after the prologue between Eteokles and the Scout, the chorus bursts onto the stage in too great agitation of spirit for a regular parodos. But after some thirty lines of frenzied allusion to the sights and sounds of battle from outside the walls, and agonized questions as to which gods can help them, they settle down (109 ff.) to a fervent prayer to all the *theoi poliouchoi*, the protector-gods of Thebes, to deliver them from the imminent catastrophe.

In the *Suppliants* there is no prologue.²² The daughters of Danaos enter at once, with a prayer to Zeus in the very first (anapaestic) lines of the parodos; then they utter lyric prayers to Epaphos, Io, and Zeus, the ancestors of their race, and to the land of Argos and Artemis, ending once more with Zeus. The whole sequence vibrates with fear and foreboding, but it also makes reference (116) to *gōoi*, grief-laden laments.

Agamemnon has the watchman as prologue, then a proper parodos in anapaests, and following that an ode of enormous length which contains as its central portion, in iambics, an intense and very unusual prayer to Zeus. The prayer and the whole ode speak of fear, allude to fear, invite fear, repeatedly.

Choephoroi begins with a prologue (mutilated, unfortunately, in our manuscripts). The chorus enters with lyric strophes, not a regular parodos, but at line 152 it addresses an agitated prayer to its dead master, Agamemnon, as the libations are poured.

Eumenides also has a prologue but no proper parodos. The chorus is discovered in the temple and is chased out by Apollo; only at line 321, as it is about to begin its "binding hymn," does it invoke its mother, Night.

The *Persians* has no prologue, and neither its parodos nor the following ode contains a prayer to any god. But the parodos expresses fear and apprehension in ample measure: fear of what the gods may do or may have done.

Since the *Prometheus* is played among gods (except for Io), there is no

²¹ The redating of the prologueless *Suppliants* to ca. 463, together with the fact that the *Seven* (467) has a prologue, helps to discredit the idea that "no prologue" = "early." Themistius, *Oration* 26, p. 816d, quotes Aristotle as saying that Thespis invented the prologue. It follows that Aischylos was free to operate with or without one, according to his purpose in a particular drama.

²² See previous note.

room for a normal prayer. In its place there is an affecting and deeply emotional appeal by Prometheus to the four elements, fire, air, water and earth (line 88 ff.); he gives expression (114 ff.) to fear, and the chorus to both fear and pity (143 ff.); and at 397 ff. the chorus sings a kind of *thrēnos*, though not of the regular form, over Prometheus's sufferings.

Five of the other six plays have one thing in common, however they begin and whether or not there is a formal prayer: the chorus passionately desires something and is in terror that the opposite will happen, i.e., that its desire will be frustrated. In the *Persians* it desires that the Persian army may return safely; in the *Seven*, that the Argive threat may be averted from Thebes; in the *Suppliants*, that it itself may be granted asylum in Argos and defense against the sons of Aigyptos; in the *Agamemnon*, that the expedition and the king may come home safely; in *Choephoroi*, that the dead king may be avenged. In *Eumenides* the chorus is the source of terror rather than its victim; yet its own position causes it some moments of fear, and it explicitly affirms (517 ff.) the sanctity and necessity of fear among men.

What the chorus desires is the initial purpose of the play; whether the desire is fulfilled varies with the play and its position in the trilogy. In any case the fervent desire of the chorus is surrounded by fears and forebodings,²³ and the fulfilment of its wish is felt to be doubtful in the extreme. This is certainly true in the four plays (*Seven*, *Suppliants*, *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*) where the chorus utters a regular prayer.

When people pray fervently to gods for the accomplishment of a wish, it is normally because they are in great uncertainty and apprehension whether it will be accomplished. And it is clear that one effect—one intended effect—of Aischyleian tragedy is to underline this apprehension and communicate it to us.

Here, then, in the initial prayers to the gods, is a ritual element that is intended to make us share in the chorus's feelings of uncertainty, apprehension, foreboding. Francis Fergusson, talking about Sophokleian drama and taking Gilbert Murray's hypothesis as his premise, speaks of a "ritual expectancy" that attends the unfolding of the play. But whatever may be true of Sophokleian drama—and the premise does not really hold there either²⁴—it is not true for Aischylos. "Ritual expectancy" would mean that we know the outcome and are on the alert to see it happen again. The forces of Darkness *will* be defeated; the sun and the light and the Daimon will emerge once more and Life will be rescued for another year, in the same way as it has been in the past.

²³ See note 9 above.

²⁴ See note 5 above.

Aischyleian drama is not based on this simple syndrome. Far from reassuring us by covert reminders, or by the very structure of the play, that everything will come out all right once more, Aischylos seeks through his use of the ritual prayer to involve us deeply in the fears and uncertainties of the chorus (and of other people of the drama, like Elektra and Orestes). All is *not* a foregone conclusion, or it is not felt as one. The ultimate outcome may be distantly known to us, as an idea, but even in those cases where it might be reassuring, the immediate effect of ritual prayers is not to bring it near but to make us share in the very real terrors of the dramatic persons, to whom it appears unspeakably remote and chancy. Ritual—*this use* of ritual—is a way of making us feel with them.

Much more could be said along the same line, about Aischylos's use of epirrhematic scenes (those in which one party, usually an actor, utters spoken verses while the other party, usually the chorus, responds with lyric utterances) and fully developed *kommoi* (in which, as in the *thrênai*, actor and chorus engage in lyric respension). These too have every likelihood of being ritual forms, or developments from them, and they too are employed to arouse fear or grief or—what is much more dramatic—a mixture of the two. The Danaids and the King, in the *Suppliants*; Cassandra and the chorus, and later Klytimestra and the chorus, in *Agamemnon*; the great invocation of the spirit of Agamemnon in the *Choephoroi*, involving Orestes, Elektra, and the chorus; the Furies and the ghost of Klytimestra, in *Eumenides*—all these scenes show a masterly use of forms derived from ritual to build grief or terror or both. Until finally, in the last great scene between Athena and the Furies, in *Eumenides*, epirrhematic and kommatic forms are used for a new and different dramatic purpose, in the opposite direction, to accompany the miraculous change of the Furies into the Kindly Ones.

So far we have spoken only of lyrical or epirrhematic scenes, within the chorus or between chorus and actor. What about the dialogue? It is usually perceived as the center of tragedy, at least in the fifth century, with the lyrical parts as accompaniment, commentary, emotional counterpoint. That view is not wrong; but it is important to get the whole into due perspective and proportion. The hero is the focal point of Aischyleian tragedy.²⁵ We mistake the form, however, if we think in terms of an exclusive dichotomy between hero: dialogue and chorus: lyrics. The hero has a share in lyrics, in the responsive forms of *kommos* and *thrênos*, and

²⁵ The attempt of John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, Oxford and New York, 1962, to banish the hero not only from the *Poetics* but from tragedy altogether (see pp. 12–13 and *passim*) is so perverse and wrong-headed it is not worth arguing with.

on the other hand the chorus, through its leader the *koryphaios*, can take part in the dialogue; but the relationship between the two remains fixed in a certain direction. Whatever the external form, lyric or dialogue, the hero—in general—leads and acts, the chorus follows and reacts.²⁶

A new question might then be asked: do ritual forms also underlie the dialogue, as they underlie considerable portions of the lyrics? I suspect such an origin for one form of dialogue at least: the so-called stichomythy, that curiously rigid scheme in which actor and *koryphaios*, or actor and actor, respond to each other line by line. It is possible that such exact responson, especially in question-and-answer sequences (e.g., *Persians* 231–245, 715–738; *Suppliants* 293–321), arose out of standing ritual practices in the consultation of oracles.²⁷

Thinking of those “Naturformen der Kultur” or “Grundsituationen des Menschlichen” distinguished by Schadewaldt,²⁸ one may be tempted to extend the concept of ritual to cover messenger’s speeches, prophetic discourse (e.g., Dareios in *Persians* 739 ff.), speeches of exhortation (*parainesis*), and other forms. At this point, however, distinctions would seem to be in order. The ghost of Dareios may be speaking in a form more or less fixed by oracular usage (it is framed by stichomythies; cf. above). It is well known, on the other hand, that the messenger’s speeches in tragedy have an epic cast: they carry its mark in their capacity to dispense with the augment in secondary verb-forms.²⁹ As for *parainesis*, its forms and procedures also had long since been defined, and in litera-

²⁶ For the point that the actor’s *rhêsis* leads off (states the issue or initiates the action that will dominate the following scene) while the chorus or *koryphaios* follows, see Aurelio Peretti, *Epirrema e tragedia*, Florence 1939, pp. 227–253.

²⁷ Question-and-answer seems to be the earliest species of stichomythy; see Walter Jens, *Die Stichomythie in der frühen griechischen Tragödie* (Zetemata 11), München 1955, pp. 3–7. But conflict-stichomythy has a chance of being as old: *ibid.* p. 7 n. 1; cf; p. 17 n. 1, which refers to “Die beiden Urformen der Stichomythie, Frage-und-Antwort und Streit.” My conjecture that the question-and-answer stichomythy may have had its origin in the questioning of an oracle is, so far as I know, a leap in the dark; but the strictness of the form suggests it. If it is correct, the two stichomythies in *Persians* 232–245 and 715–738 show Aischylos already well beyond the primitive stage of oracle-to-questioner. Cf. what was said above, p. 79, about the refinement and variability of his art. Jens, p. 13, refers to another kind, namely prayer-stichomythy, as a form of “heilige Handlung.” More investigation is needed here.

²⁸ See note 11 above, and add (*ibid.* p. 13):

Der Strom des tragischen Geschehens sucht sich nicht in beliebigen Gestaltungen seinen Weg; er wird von den vorgeprägten Formen des Lebens in Kult, Sitte, Brauch wie von Schalen aufgefangen und fortgelicet.

²⁹ W. Schmid, *Gesch. d. gr. Lit.* (Handbuch d. Alt.-Wiss.) 2.2 (1934) 118 n. 6.

ture rather than in cult: not only in epic but most particularly in elegy.³⁰

What it all signifies is that no element in the web of Aischyleian tragedy comes to it raw, without a process of pre-formation in life or literature or both. But it is possible to distinguish between ritual elements like *thrénos* or hymn, still vigorously operating in corporate fashion in the society that surrounds the drama, and elements like messenger's speech or *parainesis* whose derivation is mainly literary. And "literary" means here primarily epic and elegy, the genres which glorify the individual: hero or aristocrat. In Aischyleian tragedy these two differently weighted elements enter into a fruitful symbiosis: the hero is presented against a backdrop of communal thought and feeling,³¹ with forms of both kinds contributing to the total experience.

These findings suggest that the role of ritual in Aischyleian tragedy, though very important, is secondary rather than primary: that it is drawn upon to express forebodings of the hero's downfall and lamentations over it afterward—the emotional response to his action and *pathos*—rather than to shape the action and the *pathos* themselves. These represent, rather, the free part of the total action, while the ritual elements represent the bound part, conditioned by and responsive to the other. Which is to say that Aischylos has shaped the *action* of his plays by a relatively free use of his poetic and literary imagination, but has shaped the emotional pattern of *reaction* to it by drawing heavily on cult- and ritual-bound forms from the life around him.

(Having said this, one has to add that in the later plays Aischylos uses ritual elements in increasingly free and dramatic ways. In three at least—*Suppliants*, *Choephoroi*, *Eumenides*—they do not merely follow and react to the action, but on occasion initiate it. This is especially true of the great *kommos* in the *Choephoroi*.)

There is no time here to explore the other part of Aischylos's dramaturgy, the "free" part, in full. I will permit myself just one or two remarks. First, as to the word "free." Aischylos did not invent plots and characters out of the blue; no serious Greek poet did, at least before the close of the fifth century (Agathon; comedy is another matter). But the freedom of the tragedians in handling their inherited stories is or ought to be a

³⁰ Hermann Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, tr. Hadas and Willis, London and New York, 1975, p. 152: "occasionally they [sc. elegiacs] too are narrative, but their proper purpose is admonition, instruction, reflection." A. Lesky, *Gesch. d. gr. Lit.*³ 144: "jene mahnende und ratende Haltung, die der älteren Elegie weitgehend eignet."

³¹ See my remarks in *Origin and Early Form* (above, n. 8), pp. 76–77; also del Grande, *op. cit.* (above, n. 2) 274.

commonplace of criticism; and Aischylos is every bit as free, in his own way, as the others.

Second, the heart of every Aischyleian play is a heroic *pathos*: a killing or other deed of tragic weight and bearing which brings suffering in its train. But this *pathos*, unlike the one excogitated by Gilbert Murray, has no kinship with the march of the seasons. The march of the seasons is a majestic, compelling spectacle; it is also dependable, mindless, stupid. It does not suffer. The *pathos* of the tragic hero—Xerxes, Eteokles, Agamemnon, Orestes—has nothing in common with it, or with the suffering of the Dying God. It is *human* suffering and *real* suffering; it attaches to the hero as an individual; it is fundamentally and essentially un-ritualistic.

The concept of the hero's suffering came to Aischylos from Homer: specifically, from the *Iliad*. It is embodied above all in the hero's set speeches, *rhêseis*. The *rhêsis* too is a form, and it dominates the dialogue portions of Aischyleian tragedy. But as we have said, it is not a ritual form; it comes from another quarter of life. A man's *pathos* is his own individual affair; no other man can help him avert it or endure it.

Yet in Aischylos's vision (as in Homer's and Shakespeare's) no man is an island. The suffering of kings involves the lesser men who depend upon them. *Quicquid delirant reges plectuntur Achivi*. So the tragic chorus is drawn into the orbit of the *pathos*; and through its suffering over the *pathos*, both in anticipation (prayer) and retrospect (lamentation), we, the audience, are drawn into that orbit in turn. It is there, in that sector of the total tragic happening, that ritual and ritual expectancies have their part to play. In Athenian tragedy the heroic individual is surrounded by two collectivities: that of his own time and place, represented by the chorus, and the larger one which is not represented but actually constituted by the Athenian people assembled in the theatre. Ritual forms provide a sort of pre-tested resonance system through which the first collectivity can arouse, focus, and amplify the feelings of the second. Only through this link do the hero's sufferings generate a really common experience in the members of the audience.

Just in proportion as these ritual-bound forms were sure to achieve their intended effect with Aischylos's own audiences, they are bound to have a less direct effect upon us. We emancipated twentieth-century Americans, especially those with Protestant evangelical or low-church backgrounds, have very little organ or training for these Aischyleian and Athenian modes of feeling. Protestant America for a long time tended to regard religious ritual as Popery and frippery. And now that urbanization and fragmentation have broken the crust of custom still further, we are still further removed from the possibility of full emotional participation in a

drama like that of Aischylos. Its personages are great individuals: kings, queens, heroes; but the emotional fabric of the drama that surrounds them and responds to them is woven in good part out of ritual, i.e., communal, *public* elements. We can confidently assume that the Athenian citizen of 472 or 458 B.C. took that emotional fabric into his heart and vitals with full, immediate comprehension—no, not just comprehension, but participation. The foreboding of the tragedy to come, in prayers, epirrhematic scenes, and *kommoi*, the final outflow of feeling into *kommos* or *thrênos*, embodied in ritual forms that he had known and taken part in all his life, as son, husband, father, and citizen, made him a participant in tragic drama in a way that no modern spectator or reader can hope to be. Yet, although that ritual web was not the source or the main *raison d'être* of Aischyleian tragedy, it accounts for much of the compelling force which it still exerts, even on us today.

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