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JANE ELLEN HARRISON AND THE RITUAL THEORY

Martha C. Carpentier

Abstract

This paper proves that Jane Ellen Harrison originated the "ritual theory" linking primitive religious ritual with the origins of drama in ancient Greece, in a crucial departure from Frazerian thought rather than under his "influence," contrary to common opinion. The "ritual theory" promulgated by the so-called "Cambridge Anthropologists" consisted of more than just the Tylorian concept of "survivals" of ancient rituals in later myths and folk customs, which forms the basis of Frazer's work. Because of her greater knowledge of Freud, Durkheim, Bergson, and William James, Harrison was able to discuss ritual and art as stemming from a common psychological and spiritual human impulse, thereby linking the ancient "Kouretes," leaping, dancing worshippers of Zeus, with the modern-day artist. Through a detailed examination of their differing views on the vexed question of "magic," I show specifically when Harrison left the Frazer camp and went on to form the ritual theory with her disciples Gilbert Murray and Frances Cornford. Unlike Frazer, Harrison's thinking was neither rationalist nor hierarchical, thus allowing her to find "bridges" between "savage" and "civilized" creativity that Frazer never allowed. Thus Harrison had a far greater influence on the younger generation of modernist writers, such as Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, a fact that is not often enough acknowledged.

Among the great turn-of-the-century English anthropologists and classicists, Jane Ellen Harrison alone formulated the "ritual theory," often erroneously attributed to Sir James George Frazer, which connected Dionysian ritual with the birth of Greek drama and linked all artistic process ultimately with the "common human impulse" expressed in primitive religious ritual (AAR 1913:18). She rebelled against the rationalism that dominated the thinking of her contemporaries, and for her alone among the scholars of her generation primitivism became not only a valid, but a superior way of life because it was not rational, but emotional and experiential: "The present age is concerned with affirming life as a whole, not Reason as the Lord over Life" (A&O 1915:137). Unlike Frazer, who was willing only to connect primitive religious ritual with contemporary peasant plays "acted by ploughmen for the purpose of fertilising the brown earth" (GB 1911: V, i, 33), for Harrison all art "in some sense springs out of Religion; and...between them is a connecting link, a bridge, and that bridge is ritual. On that bridge, emotionally, I halt" (Rem. 1925:84).

But Harrison paid a price for her "heresy," as her friend and collaborator Gilbert Murray states: "With all her fame and influence, she never became an accepted orthodox authority. She was always frowned upon by a fair number of important persons: she was always in spirit a little against the government, against orthodoxy" (*JEH* 1928:20). Orthodoxy still minimizes her role as senior member of the "Cambridge Anthropologists," minimizes her influence on modernist writers as compared to Frazer's, and misunderstands that her evolution of the "ritual theory" was not formed under the influence of Frazer, but rather in rebellion against his views. Some scholars, certainly, have perceived the importance of Harrison's work and its direct influence on modernist writing: for instance Stanley Edgar Hyman, Robert Allen Ackerman, and Harry C. Payne. Jane Marcus has discussed Harrison's profound influence on Virginia Woolf.¹ But none of these essays can compare with the scope of John B. Vickery's influential study of Frazer's opus, *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough* (1973), and studies of Frazer's influence continue to proliferate, such as Robert Fraser's recent *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination* (1991).

Science has long since determined that Frazer was not a significant founding father of anthropology. It is time for literary criticism also to realize that Frazer was but one of a large group of classicists, anthropologists, folklorists, professors, and students with a generous sense of community and shared knowledge, all greatly excited by the advent of anthropology and its application to myth, folk customs, and classical literature.² Indeed, Frazer does not make the grandiose claims for his influence that Vickery and others have long made for him. As he wrote in a preface to the *Golden Bough*, E.B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), which first defined concepts central to the study of ritual such as "survivals" and "animism," "opened up a mental vista undreamed of by me before," while "the central idea of my essay—the conception of the slain god—is derived directly, I believe, from my friend...Robertson Smith" (1911:xiv).

Vickery also mistakenly sees Frazer as one of the "four major figures in what came to be called the Cambridge School of Anthropology," an understandable error, since Frazer was an anthropologist of sorts and at Cambridge (1973:89). However, most contemporary anthropologists, literary historians, and myth critics—such as Joseph Fontenrose, Haskell M. Block, Frank M. Turner, and Robert Allen Ackerman—preface the name "Cambridge Anthropologists" with the adjective "so-called" since it is a complete misnomer. As they all attest, the members were Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray, Francis Cornford, and A.B. Cook; only three of them resided at Cambridge and none were anthropologists. T.S. Eliot did not mention Frazer in 1920 as a member of the "philosophy [that] arose at Cambridge," but identified the Cambridge ritualists, in a review of Murray's translation of *Medea*, as follows: "Few books are more

fascinating than those of Miss Harrison, Mr. Cornford, or Mr. Cooke [*sic*] when they burrow in the origin of myths and rituals" (36-43). According to a contemporary, then, these were the classicists who promulgated the "ritual approach" to Greek myth upon the foundation laid by comparative anthropology.

Jane Harrison was the eldest of the group, its organizer, its inspiration, and its matriarch. She wrote to Murray: "You see there are only two people who are scholars and with literary minds who understand that...mythology and *origins*...are at the back of everything—F.M.C. here for Cambridge and I hope you for Oxford." Her role was to explore Greek religion, while "the philosophical investigation belonged to Francis Cornford [and] the delicate literary task she assigned to Gilbert Murray" (Stewart 1959:84-85). She insisted that both friends contribute chapters to *Themis*, the highly theoretical volume in which she first connected the birth of Greek drama to Dionysian ritual. When she was ill, A.B. Cook, the fourth member of the "Cambridge School," was "summoned to her bedside" to correct proofs of *Themis* (102), just as she read and critiqued in turn Cook's proofs of *Zeus* (see Cook 1915:I, xiv; II, iv). The tributes and dedications of these three to their mentor are many, but Murray's, from the preface to his *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (1912) is most eloquent: "I cannot adequately describe the advantage I have derived from many years of frequent discussion and comparison of results with a Hellenist whose learning and originality of mind are only equalled by her vivid generosity towards her fellow-workers" (xii).

Nevertheless, most of the above-mentioned contemporary scholars, with the exception of Ackerman, still attribute Murray's, Cornford's and Cook's productions to Frazer's influence. They describe Harrison as a disciple of Frazer, mistakenly believing that her work "followed" his, when in actuality her major works appeared concurrently with the three editions of *The Golden Bough* (1890, 1900-03, and 1911-12). One reason for this persistent disregard of Harrison's innovation is that modern restatements of the "ritual theory" are too general. It is commonly held to mean the view that rituals preceded myths, so myths evolved as explanations of rituals. If this basic anthropological discovery comprises the "ritual theory," then it is indeed to be found throughout Frazer's work—as well as that of all the other scholars of the period who reinterpreted myths as "survivals" of primitive customs and rituals. The Tylorian theory of "survivals" evolved naturally into the idea that rituals preceded myths, since that is what "survivals" are—"relics" in folklore of acts once performed: "processes, customs, opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has evolved" (Tylor 1871:I, 16). Thus, Frazer could hardly have seen himself as proposing anything radical when he stated "It needs no

elaborate demonstration to convince us that the stories told to account for Diana's worship at Nemi are...made up to explain the origin of a religious ritual" (GB 1911: I, i, 21).

While *The Golden Bough* may be based on the assumption that "myth and ritual mutually explain and confirm each other," this in no way connects ritual with art, drama, or literature, and certainly not with modernist art (39). Frazer was able to explain many myths and folk customs because he stressed their relationship to seasonal rituals invoking fertility, which he saw as the crux of primitive existence. However, he never came close to making the leap, or to use Harrison's metaphor, crossing the "bridge" between ritual and art. As Harrison wrote in the preface to *Ancient Art and Ritual*, her purpose was not to give a "general summary" of ancient rituals. For case studies of primitive ritual she in fact recommends the *Golden Bough*, from which she took many ritual "instances" to illustrate her ideas (1913:253). Rather,

the point of my title and the real gist of my argument lie perhaps in the word "and"—that is, in the intimate connection which I have tried to show exists between ritual and art. This connection has, I believe, an important bearing on questions vital to-day, as for example the question of the place of art in our modern civilization, its relation to and its difference from religion and morality; in a word, on the whole enquiry as to what the nature of art is and how it can help or hinder spiritual life. (v)

It is clear from this quotation how consciously Harrison crossed the bridge not only between ritual and ancient art, but even to the place and purpose of art in modern life. That Frazer never crossed such a bridge is equally clear upon examining his discussion of "the parallelism between the modern drama and the ancient worship" of Dionysus. By "modern drama" Frazer did *not* mean Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* playing at the Abbey Theatre. He meant the peasant dramas "annually performed at the Carnival in the villages round Viza, an old Thracian capital" by "mummers" and "masqueraders" dressed in goatskins. These public "ceremonies" included displaying an infant in the Dionysian "winnowing fan," wild dancing while "the gypsy man and wife enact an obscene pantomime on the straw-heap," miming "the forging of a ploughshare, a mock marriage, and a pretense of death and resurrection" (V, i, 24-34).

Just as Frazer shared a fascination with the "survival" of ancient rituals in modern peasant customs with Tylor and so many other anthropologists and folklorists of his day, so too they maintained a strictly hierarchical, rationalist division between the mentality of the contemporary European peasant and the "English yokel," still mired in superstitions, and the enlightened, educated English gentleman. For

Frazer the link between "the high tragedy of the death and resurrection of Dionysus" and "a rustic mummers' play acted by ploughmen for the purpose of fertilising the brown earth" was perfectly clear, but he would never have dreamed of establishing a link between Dionysian ritual and himself, or any other modern intellectual. Ploughmen are still primitives; civilized gentlemen are not. As intrigued as he was with primitive ritual, he was no more willing than any of his predecessors or colleagues to admit "civilised" modern European man's deep psychological kinship with the "savage."

But for Jane Harrison there was no hierarchy separating modern from primitive based upon a superior rationality.

These partitions we are apt to arrange into a sort of order of merit or as it is called a hierarchy, with Reason as head and crown, and under her sway the emotions and passions. The result of establishing this hierarchy is that the impulsive side of our nature comes off badly, the passions and even the emotions lying under a certain ban...A more fruitful way of looking at our human constitution is to see it, not as a bundle of separate faculties, but as a sort of continuous cycle of activities. (AAR 1913:38)

She considered primitive man important, not as an intriguing relic from the distant past, but "since we realize that our own behavior is based on instincts kindred to his" (29). Unlike Frazer, she absorbed the other incipient sciences of the early twentieth century, psychology and sociology. Influenced by Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1912), William James's studies of mysticism, Emile Durkheim's collectivism and Henri Bergson's *durée*, her interests expanded to consider the "common *emotional* factor it is that makes art and ritual in their beginnings well-nigh indistinguishable" (26). This is a step Frazer never took, one that connects Harrison directly with modernism.

Yet for all her latent mysticism, Harrison's work was always empirically grounded. As Murray concluded, "she was not swept away by every wind of vain doctrine" since "her knowledge of Greek literature and archaeology was so wide and so intimate" (JEH 1928:20-21). While her research might not measure up to the rigorous demands of today's scientific methodology (nor does Frazer's, as anthropologists have pointed out), she was in fact far more scientifically oriented and better trained than Frazer. Frazer "himself had never been on a field trip and indeed was the leader of the armchair, or as Andrew Lang christened it, Covent Garden school of anthropology" (Vickery 1973:83). Harrison, however, traveled yearly to museums and archaeological excavations across Europe—to Athens, Crete, Delphi, Olympia, Eleusis, Sicily, Etruria and Berlin—studying with the innovative turn-of-the-century archaeologists, such as Wilhelm Doerpfeld, Ernst Curtius and M. Homolles. Indeed, both Doerpfeld and

Homolles relied upon her to write up and announce their findings to the English (Stewart 1959:11-15, 19). And, in addition to the usual profuse scholastic, philological and anthropological references, Harrison's work was always filled with concrete pictorial evidence such as vase paintings, tablets, bas-reliefs and layouts of excavated temples and theatres. Her discussion of the origins of Greek drama in Dionysian ritual is supported by a detailed discussion of the excavated Dionysiac Theatre at Athens (AAR 1913:144).

Harrison's first work, *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens* (1890), grew out of her early archaeological training. She soon absorbed the tenets of the new anthropology and in her *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* she discussed many of the same Hellenic festivals and rituals that Frazer did in the *Golden Bough*. Her footnotes reveal their early relationship as colleagues, sharing information and sources, sometimes agreeing and sometimes disagreeing in interpretation (1903:111, 126-127, 132), just as his do when he praises and cites her work on the "Mystica Vannus Iacchi," the winnowing fan of Dionysian ritual (GB 1911:V, i, 5).

However, Harrison goes far beyond Frazer in establishing the priority of the original Greek matriarchal "chthonic" goddesses and gods over the later patriarchal "anthropomorphic" Olympians. The power of matriarchal goddesses in pre-Olympian Greek religion began to emerge in the *Golden Bough*, primarily in Part V, "Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild," but Frazer's intention was never to pursue the important role of women in primitive religions. His study of the "dying god" led him inevitably to the omnipotent mother-consorts at the root of such sacrificial fertility cults, but Jane Marcus is quite right in stating that despite a general "urge in late Victorian anthropology to get back to the mother of us all...Frazer in reaction concentrated almost exclusively upon rituals of the death and rebirth of the male/son while scarcely noting that such rituals were once part of the worship of the Great Mother" (1987:37). It was up to Harrison to delineate the genesis of matriarchal goddesses from more primitive chthonic *daimones*, *keres* and agricultural "Maiden-Trinities," to explain their role in the rituals of seasonal festivals, and to trace the superimposition of the Athenian Olympian hierarchy over indigenous matriarchal cults of Demeter and Kore, Hera, Aphrodite, Dionysus, and others. She did this in her first major study, the *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903), "a work of genius" according to Murray, which "transformed the whole approach to the study of Greek religion...a book which, in the current phrase, made an epoch" (JEH 11-12).

Harrison's conviction that the "ancient ritual of the Mother and the Son long preceded the worship of the Olympians" (*Rem.* 1925:71-2) was strengthened on another trip to Crete in 1904, which led to *Themis*. There the archaeologist R.C. Bosanquet showed her a fragmentary "Hymn

of the Kouretes found in the temple of Diktaean Zeus," more evidence of "the magical rite of the Mother and the Son, the induction of the Year-Spirit who long preceded the worship of the Father." Murray describes *Themis* as a "dangerous" book. Harrison's young disciples admired it, but it was "too full of new ideas, or rather of new lights which made all the material on which they fell look different" to be accepted by the "orthodox circles" of her Cambridge professors (*JEH* 1928:14-15). F.M. Cornford declared he never understood *Themis* until he read *Ancient Art and Ritual*, which was Harrison's contribution to the Oxford "Home University Library," designed to make classical scholarship more accessible to the general public. There she summarizes succinctly and forcefully how Greek drama evolved from rhythmic dances and "dithyrambs" chanted on the circular "orchestra" by the primitive "chorus" of Athenian worshippers celebrating the springtime rebirth of Dionysus. Thus, the "ritual theory" which directly connects the origins of artistic expression to religious ritual evolved throughout Harrison's opus. Doubtless, Frazer influenced her, but early in the 1890s, while ritualism was a vague impulse as yet unformulated in her mind. A closer examination of the evidence reveals that the "ritual theory" that inspired all the works of the Cambridge School, far from being "Frazer-generated," as Vickery and others believe, was in fact developed by Harrison in a radical departure from Frazerian thought.

By 1901 Harrison had already relegated Frazer's influence on her to "a few shy radiant moments under the Golden Bough" (Stewart 1959:37). She did acknowledge her debt in the introduction to *Prolegomena*: "To all workers in the field of primitive religion Dr Frazer's writings have become so part and parcel of their mental furniture that special acknowledgement has become almost superfluous" (1903:xiv). This tribute clearly supports the contention that Frazer's influence on Harrison was early and inchoate rather than specific or theoretical. In later life Harrison mocked the overvaluation of Frazer's work at the expense of others who had contributed as much, if not more:

Classics were turning in their long sleep...I had just left Cambridge when Schliemann began to dig at Troy. Among my own contemporaries was J.G. Frazer, who was soon to light the dark wood of savage superstition with a gleam from *The Golden Bough*. The happy title of that book—Sir James Frazer has a veritable genius for titles—made it arrest the attention of scholars. They saw in comparative anthropology a serious subject actually capable of elucidating a Greek or Latin text. Tylor had written and spoken; Robertson Smith, exiled for heresy, had seen the Star in the East; in vain...but at the mere sound of the magical words "Golden Bough" the scales fell. (*Rem.* 1925:82)³

While this suggests that Harrison did not take her celebrated colleague too seriously, she disagreed strongly with his theory of magic, and it was in this disagreement that the "ritual theory" was born. The relation between magic and religion had been debated from Tylor's basic definitions on, and even today the question remains unsettled. Tylor's explanation of magic rested on the theory he called "Association of Ideas," primitive man's inability to distinguish between a subjective thought and objective reality (1871:I, 116). For the "savage," according to Tylor, objects associated in his thought must also be associated in reality, thus "the Zulu may be seen chewing a bit of wood, in order, by this symbolic act, to soften the heart of the...woman he wants for a wife" (118). Symbolism and analogy are not subjective, but as real as the actual occurrence they connote. Harrison acknowledged her debt to Tylor when she described magic as man's gloriously "egocentric" effort to impose his will on the universe. Primitive man "does not pray," she wrote, "he *wills*." "Instead of asking a god to do what he wants done, he does it, or tries to do it himself; instead of prayers he utters spells." He "recognizes no limits of his own power" because he does not divide his subjective mind from objective reality. Harrison almost envied such a state of mind in which "the limitations of personality fall away" (*A&O* 1915:162-172).

But, by the early 1900s Tylor's definitions of religion and magic were condemned as too rationalistic, largely due to the increasing popularity of Codrington's *The Melanesians* (1891) and R.R. Marrett's *The Threshold of Religion* (1909). For these anthropologists magic was not merely primitive man's effort to control his universe for practical purposes, i.e., to bring rain or to encourage fertility, but was rather the expression of a pre-intellectual "vitalism," a spiritual force inherent in nature and man. They cited evidence of this life force among the Melanesians, who called it *mana*, and among the Iroquois, whose word for it was *orenda*. Harrison embraced this view, while still accepting Tylor's "association of ideas," but eschewed his rationalistic definition of primitive man's belief in spiritual beings (which he called "animism"), as an attempt to explain the causes of natural phenomena such as death and dreams. For Harrison, to interpret primitive man's vital spirit world as a cognitive explanation of natural phenomena, was to attribute a "quite alien quality of rationality" to his mind: "Man is at first too busy *living* to have any time for disinterested *thinking*. He dreams a dream, and it is real for him. He does not seek to account for it any more than for his hands and feet." Magic, according to Harrison, was entirely "emotional, pre-intellectual" and experiential: "The real savage is more actively engaged...he is busy practicing magic, and, above all, he is strenuously engaged in dancing magical dances." And she defined *orenda* as "the soul of magic...your bodily life, your vigour, your passion, your power, the virtue that is in you to feel and do." This "power, actually experienced in person by the individual, and by him projected," not only informed magic for Harrison,

but religion, ritual, and, ultimately, art. All are "the projection of man's inner experience, vague and unanalyzed, into the outer world" (*A&O* 1915:162-169).

In contrast, Frazer's interpretation of magic reveals his rationalism and hierarchical thought. Although also based on Tylor's "association of ideas," his theory was far more rationalistic than Tylor's ever was. For Tylor, magic and "animism" were closely related since both grew out of primitive man's inability to make "psychical distinctions" between subjective and objective, imagination and reality, himself and nature. For Frazer, magic and religion were not only unrelated, they were antithetical. He defined an "opposition of principle between magic and religion," since he saw the "fundamental conception" of magic to be "identical with that of modern science": both are founded upon "the faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature" (I, i, xx). Magic and science comprise man's attempts to understand the "laws of nature" so that he may "turn the order of natural phenomena to his own advantage." The difference is that magic is a "misconception of the nature of the particular laws," while science is a true understanding; magic is "dross" while science is "golden."

Religion Frazer defined as "a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life" (I, i:221-222). Only when the "inefficacy of magic" became apparent did "the shrewder intelligences" among men turn to religion, the perception of nature as resulting from God's law, beyond man's control except through prayer and placation of the deity (237). For Frazer religion could only be defined in classical Platonic/Christian dualities: it was rational and elevated because it resulted from abstract thought, while magic was material and inferior because the result of practical experience. In a typically colorful passage he imagined the "practical savage" replying to "the philosophical radical": "'Can anything be plainer,' he might say, 'than that I light my twopenny candle on earth and that the sun kindles his great fire in heaven?'" (243).

Frazer's view of magic as serving entirely material purposes reveals his hierarchical conception of humanity. Religion was the result of "human reason" alone; therefore, it separated civilized man from "the merely animal intelligence" of "savages" and marked a crucial departure in "the evolution of our race." This "deepening sense of religion," he wrote, "this more perfect submission to the divine will in all things, affects only those higher intelligences who have breadth of view enough to comprehend the vastness of the universe and the littleness of man. Small minds cannot grasp great ideas; to their narrow comprehension, their purblind vision, nothing seems really great and important but themselves. Such minds hardly rise to religion at all" (240). Thus Frazer, like so many of his nineteenth-century colleagues, straddled a remarkable divide between empathy and contempt for primitive peoples. On the one

hand, the poetic power of his imaginative leap into the ancient world enabled him to make many myths and fertility rituals comprehensible for the first time. Yet on the other hand, he could vent an astonishing contempt for the “lower” peasant class whose religious customs he described so superciliously—“the muzzy mind of the Sicilian bumpkin who looked with blind devotion” to his gods and goddesses (V, i:59).

Jane Harrison vehemently opposed such rationalistic, hierarchical thought. While working on *Themis* she wrote in a letter that, “The question now stirring is the relation between Magic and Religion (Frazer is all wrong in thinking them utterly opposed)” (Stewart 1959:96). She announced her divergence from Frazer more publicly in an essay entitled “Darwinism and Religion,” where she criticized “the view held by Dr. Frazer” that magic and religion “are at the outset diametrically opposed” (A&O 1915:173). Harrison may have praised Frazer’s “immense learning,” but she disagreed with his paternalistic disdain for pagan ritual as “mainly a delusion and a darkness, a savage thing, a snake hardly scotched” (Z&D 1915:303). Religion, for her, was not submission, but participation. Frazer’s “higher intelligences” who rationalized religion and subjugated man to his gods, in her opinion, destroyed the glorious mysticism and “egocentrism” of primitive man’s “pre-intellectual” religious experience, expressed in his ritual dancing and chanting.

For Harrison, primitive man’s beauty was that he refused to bow to the “vastness of the universe” and his own “littleness”; rather he participated communally in the gigantic forces of nature through “dancing magical dances” (A&O 1915:162). She described true religious experience as “Alpha,” which originated in magic, man’s active participation in the vast “impersonal forces” of nature. The “supreme golden moment” of “Alpha” was achieved in the “aneikonic” mystery cults of Dionysus and Demeter, “life-spirits barely held” by their “half-Olympian” anthropomorphic images: “Dionysus is a human youth, lovely, with curled hair, but in a moment he is a Wild Bull and a Burning Flame. The beauty and thrill of it!” (193-205).

These cults had been superseded but never thoroughly stamped out by “Omega, a full-blown theology,” that is, the “eikonic” anthropomorphic Olympian hierarchy. In pitting Alpha against Omega, religion against theology, aneikonism against eikonism, Harrison again expressed a vigorous rejection of the “rationalized, man-made eikon” to which civilized man had reduced “the terror and emptiness of the Absolute,” diminishing god to a reflective image of himself and his social order. “Eikonism takes the vague, unknown, fearful thing, and tries to picture it as known, as distinct, definite...The vague *something* becomes a particular *someone*...eikonism *pragmatizes* the divine god.” Interestingly, Harrison holds the exact opposite valuation to Frazer here: later more civilized religions are pragmatic, while contrarily more primitive aneikonism “aims at union; in a word, it is sacramental, mystical.” Religion should be

just such a mystical "reaction to the whole, the unbounded whole," not the imposition of a moral code, for both morality and knowledge are "limitations" for Harrison on religious experience of the "unseen": "We have confused theology—a rational thing that can be intellectually defined [and] morally imposed—with religion, an external reaction towards the unknown, the hidden spring of our physical, spiritual life" (193-205). Thus, contrary to Frazer, she saw magic as the "spiritual protoplasm" out of which religion, science, and art all evolved (163). And again contrary to Frazer, Harrison crossed the "bridge" from ancient religious ritual to the spiritual crisis of the modern age, which she felt as strongly as any of the modernist writers:

To be an Atheist, then, to renounce eikonic theology, is to me personally almost an essential of religious life. I say this in no spirit of paradox, but as a matter of deep conviction. The god of theology is simply an intellectual attempt to define the indefinable; it is not a thing lived, experienced; it almost must be a spiritual stumbling block to-day. (205)

Her definitions of magic and religion, so diametrically opposed to Frazer's, led Harrison to formulate the "ritual theory," the "bridge" connecting ritual and artistic process. As she examined primitive ritual, she concluded that "oddly enough, an impulse emotional in itself begets a process we think of as characteristically and exclusively intellectual, the process of abstraction" (AAR 1913:42). For ritual is an abstraction from life, and art is a further abstraction: "The savage begins with the particular battle that actually *did* happen; but, it is easy to see that if he re-enacts it again and again the *particular* battle or hunt will be forgotten, the representation cuts itself loose from the particular action from which it arose, and becomes generalized, as it were abstracted." While both ritual and art rise out of the same emotional impulse, their difference lies in their respective distance from "immediate action." Ritual is a "re-doing or a pre-doing" whereas art is "cut loose from immediate action...The end of art is itself." Thus she saw ritual as one step removed from life and one step preceding art—"a bridge between real life and art" (135).

Harrison described man's shift from ritual to art not only as a step further away from action, but also as a shift from participant to spectator:

In his actual life he hunts and fishes and ploughs and sows, being utterly intent on the practical end of gaining his food; in the *dromenon* [rites] of the Spring Festival, though his *acts* are unpractical, being merely singing and dancing and mimicry, his *intent* is practical, to induce the return of the food-supply. In the drama, the representation may remain for a time the same, but the

intent is altered: man has come out from action, he is separate from the dancers, and has become a spectator. (136)

The "foundation-stone" of her theory here is indeed Frazerian materialism; the "practical end" of ritual is described as ensuring the food supply. But the process of "abstraction" she describes, leading away from ritual to art, also leads away from Frazer. She parts from him directly "on the question of personification, in which so much of art and religion has its roots." The kind of intellectual "abstraction" that would lead a primitive, according to Frazerian theory, to "'personify the Spirit of Vegetation'" or "'embody the Spirit of Summer'" in a mummery is, for Harrison "foreign to his mental habit." The intent behind ancient ritual may be practical, but its *experience* is mystical. The dancer "begins with a vague excited dance to relieve his emotion"; he "does not 'embody' a previously conceived idea, rather he begets it" in his own person (70-71).

In a sense, Harrison almost regrets the evolution of primitive ritual into mature art, since although "art is unpractical," it is also "cut loose from immediate action" and signifies a loss of communal spiritual participation (128). The evolution of spring rituals at the Dionysia into sixth-century Athenian drama resulted from an infusion of the Homeric epic. According to Harrison, "the new wine that was poured into the old bottles of the *dromena* at the Spring Festival was the heroic saga" (146), yet rather than describing this process as a revitalization, she describes it as a "death," as the "life-story of the life-spirit" gave way to plots about "human individual heroes" (145). It seems that the "decay of religious faith" is "an impulse to the birth of art" (137) and, as this process evolves, man becomes increasingly isolated from the direct experience of god: "man has come out from action, he is separate from the dancers."

Here Harrison reveals an affinity with the modernist writers that Frazer never had. It is no coincidence that the above line is reminiscent of Yeats's plea in "Among School-children": "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" For both, dance represented the most experiential art form, in which life and the recreation of life that is art cannot be separated. Indeed, at times Yeats's theory of drama seems directly derived from Harrison's work, in its emphasis upon the ritualistic power of dance to induce spiritual states. He became inspired by Japanese Noh drama because he found in it a way "to elaborate life in a ceremony, the playing of football, the drinking of tea, and all great events of State, becoming a ritual" ("Certain" 1916:235). He found the ritualistic movements of the masked Japanese dancer able to "recede from us into some more powerful life," and to draw us "for a few moments into a deep of the mind," and he imagined that the performer of his Cuchulain, "wearing this noble, half-Greek, half-Asiatic face, will appear perhaps like an image seen in reverie by some Orphic worshipper" (221-225). Like Harrison Yeats was convinced that "in very early days the arts...were

almost inseparable from religion, going side by side with it into all life," and he often referred to poets as "the priesthood of an almost forgotten faith" ("Ireland" 1901:203-204). Both Harrison and Yeats mourned the loss of spirituality in the modern generation, stripped away by the rationalism and materialism of nineteenth-century science, and both saw art as the expression of religious ritual in modern life. Like Yeats, Harrison sought all her life to restore a sense of mysticism and magic to modern life, to rediscover the momentary union with divinity that the dancer experiences.

Certainly, too, the young writer who boasted of replacing the "mystery of the Mass" with a new sacrament, "by converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own" could have been her disciple (Ellmann 1981:169). Like James Joyce, Harrison rejected the oppressive, moribund morality of nineteenth-century Christian dogma, and insisted that the sacrament must be "a thing lived, experienced." Similarly, when D.H. Lawrence asserts the real novel's purpose, to remind readers of God's existence in "the very darkest continent of [the] body...And from Him issue the first dark rays of our feeling, wordless, and utterly previous to words: the innermost rays, the first messengers, the primeval, honourable beasts of our being, whose voice echoes wordless and forever wordless down the darkest avenues of the soul, but full of potent speech" ("N&F" 1936:759), he echoes Harrison's oft-repeated insistence that religion and art both are "the projection of man's inner experience, vague and unanalyzed, into the outer world" (A&O 1915:168).

Jane Marcus has ably discussed the profound "role model in scholarship and in life" Harrison was for Virginia Woolf and has offered several interpretations of Woolf's moving tribute to Harrison in *A Room of One's Own* (85-86, 92). Indeed, the title of Woolf's essay, "The Narrow Bridge of Art" is clearly taken from Harrison, and the call Woolf issues there for the novel to leave behind "fact-recording" and become more "impersonal," "give the relations of man to nature, to fate; his imagination; his dreams" seems inspired by Harrison's views (G&R 1927:18-19). Both Woolf and Lawrence employ Harrison's beloved image of "leaping" as the signifier of ritual and artistic expression. Woolf describes "J.H." in *A Room of One's Own* as "the bent figure, formidable yet humble" who seems to reveal "the flash of some terrible reality leaping, as its way is, out of the heart of the spring" (1929:17). And Lawrence's description of "the life that bounds and leaps...from out of the original dark forest within us...the inbounding, inleaping life" (757), echoes Harrison's definition of the Dionysian dithyramb as "a leaping, inspired dance" (AAR 1913:77).

Harrison translated the fragmentary "Hymn of the Kouretes to Zeus," the "Zeus-Leap-Song" that inspired her *Themis*, "To us leap for full jars and leap for fleecy flocks and leap for fields of fruit...(Stewart 1959:90-

93). Leaping was, for her, the quintessential expression of humanity's ritual, communal experience of divinity. Vital, experiential divinity is the "terrible reality" Harrison found in the "heart of spring" and offered to modernist writers, who eagerly embraced it. Of all the late nineteenth-century English anthropologists and classicists, Harrison alone seems wholly of the twentieth century. Hers was not the vision of nineteenth-century rational man, elevated above primitive "savages" by virtue of his superior intellect, but of the modern psychological self whose artistic expression manifests the same spiritual and emotional impulses as ancient ritual.

NOTES

¹ The best general appraisal of Harrison remains Robert Allen Ackerman's several articles in the early 1970s. It is regrettable that Ackerman chose to write a biography of Frazer rather than Harrison, since Sandra J. Peacock's 1988 biography, *Jane Ellen Harrison: The Mask and the Self* is disappointing. Peacock reduces Harrison's considerable scholarly achievement to a simplistic "Freudian" analysis of her "rage" at various men "who had betrayed her" and her "inability to separate individual, personal hurt from the general notion of masculine power" (198).

² Harrison is not the only anthropologist/classicist whose influence is neglected due to persistent overvaluation of Frazer's importance. There are many whose research was more ground breaking than Frazer's and who were demonstrably as familiar to modernist writers, such as E.B. Tylor. In a 1923 article entitled "The Beating of a Drum," T.S. Eliot chastises "literary critics" for "perpetually perusing the writings of other critics," urging them instead to study the "sources": Darwin's *Origin of the Species* and E.B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (11). On several occasions Eliot decried the "jungle" of researchers that had proliferated since "Tylor, and Robertson Smith, and Wilhelm Wundt, who early fertilised the soil, [and] would hardly recognize the resulting vegetation" ("Euripides" 1920:43). D.H. Lawrence twice declared his preference for Tylor's *Primitive Culture* over Frazer's *Golden Bough* in letters during 1916 (593, 630), and Evelyn Hinz has cited Lawrence's enthusiastic response to Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* and its profound influence on *The Rainbow*. There is absolutely no evidence that James Joyce read *The Golden Bough*, as even Vickery admits, yet Joyce owned Harrison's *Mythology* (Connolly 1955:19).

³ This passage also suggests an answer to the mystery of why Frazer's work superseded other more innovative scholarship: his "genius for titles," for lush Ruskinian phrasing—"the fleeting beauty of the damask rose, the transient glory of the golden corn, the passing splendour of the purple grapes," etc. (V, i, 2). Indeed, Frazer indicated in his prefaces on

more than one occasion that, given the choice between scientific veracity and artistic effect, he would choose the latter (see I, viii; also xxvii). The modern anthropologist Joseph Fontenrose has scorned the "persistent vogue of Frazer's views among nonspecialists" due to his literary "mystique" (1966:14, 36). Harrison, it would appear, had the perspicacity to share this view as early as 1925.

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