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Is There a Universal Genre of "Drama"?

Conjectures on the Basis of "Dramatic" Texts in Old Testament Prophecy, Attic Tragedy, and Egyptian Cult Plays

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The scholarly interpretation of ancient texts is a cross-cultural undertaking from both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. The texts of the ancient world must be considered synchronically; however, they are written in different languages and originate from different cultural areas. Diachronically, the texts must be interpreted in a manner that is appropriate to their origin but is meaningful to modern readers. Thus, concepts of genre have a crucial function.

In literary research, modern concepts of genre are often applied to ancient texts. For instance, in OT studies in Germany, the biblical Joseph story and the book of Jonah are sometimes called *novelles* (which should not to be confused with the English *novel*). In German literary terminology, a *novella* tells "an event that could happen in reality and that claims to be new."[1] A mere transmission of this definition to biblical texts or texts of other ancient literature seems hardly adequate.

Therefore, concepts of genre in a cross-cultural application must be constructed in a very careful manner. They must span great expanses of time, they must be meaningful for texts and readers from different cultures, and last but not least, in doing so, they must correspond to the general needs and ideas of human communication or behavior. I would like to call these concepts *universal*.

Author's note: A more detailed and expanded German version of this essay, "Ist das Drama eine universale Gattung? Erwägungen zu den 'dramatischen' Texten in der alt. Prophetie, der attischen Tragödie und im ägyptischen Kultspiel," is published in my *Gottes Vorstellung: Untersuchungen zur literarischen Ästhetik und ästhetischen Theologie des Alten Testaments* (BWANT 9/15; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007).

1. G. Schweickle and I. Schweickle, eds., *Metzler Literaturlexikon: Begriffe und Definitionen* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990) 329. My translation.

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Under modern conditions and based on recent discourse, this may sound strange. Poststructuralist literary studies maintain a skeptical attitude toward general concepts as such, toward concepts of genre in particular, and even more toward the assumption that there could be suprahistorical, human, or even metaphysical ideas that influence the production or reception of texts. Suspicion of essentialism lurks everywhere. Therefore, some recent scholars advise renouncing the concept of *genre* as such, as do some representatives of historical criticism of the OT. Nevertheless, modern literary studies as a whole have not bidden farewell to genres, because they function as a system of communication. Authors and readers refer to genres. Genres are, according to the definition of a modern literary scholar, "historical facts" that exist "in the form of real literary works and as nonobligatory rules or usages embodied in texts or drafted by contemporary literary theory."[2]

I personally do not see any contradiction between a concept of genre that is historically constructed and faithful to the texts on the one hand and related to anthropological essentials or ideas on the other. Thus, my concept of a universal genre will be somewhat essentialistic.

In the following, I want to present a set of ancient texts that are called "dramatic" or "drama" in each respective discipline—that is, in Egyptology, classical studies, and in OT studies. These texts will be the basis for examining whether there is a "universal" concept of genre that can be called *dramatic* or *drama* that is appropriate to the texts and meaningful for modern readers. It is assumed that the presence of a speech is the basic criterion for labeling a work a *drama* or *dramatic*, whereas nonverbal elements such as music and dance are concomitant elements.

In the first section below, I will give a short introduction and characterize the texts. In the second section, I will demonstrate two literary criteria that are crucial for understanding texts as being "dramatic." Third, I will point out two central social and intellectual functions of dramatic texts. And finally, I will return to the question of the universality of the concept *dramatic/drama*.

The Texts

The texts taken into consideration here originate from the Old Testament, from Egypt, and from Athens. They stand not only for

2. U. Suerbaum, "Text, Gattung, Intertextualität," in *Ein anglistischer Grundkurs: Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft* (ed. B. Fabian; Berlin: Schmidt, 2004) 82–125, esp. p. 97. My translation.

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themselves but also for other similar texts, even considerable corpuses of texts in each area of provenience. The texts are the following:

- Speeches in the books of Micah and Hosea that are representative of the speeches of the OT prophets
- Texts and images from the reliefs in the Temple of Horus in Edfu in Middle Egypt, the so-called "Play of Horus,"[3] representing the old Egyptian cult plays as transmitted in the "Dramatic Ramesseum Papyrus" or in the "Mamisi" of the Temple of Isis in Philae[4]
- Passages in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*[5] as an example of Classical Attic tragedy

These three texts and the corpuses that they represent are quite near each other in time of origin.

In the prophetic corpus of the Hebrew Bible, or the OT, there are few passages going back to the times of the earlier, "classical" prophets, Amos, Hosea, Micah, or Isaiah, in the late 8th or early 7th century B.C.E. Most prophetic speeches as well as the structures and plots of the prophetic Scriptures must be traced back to the literary work of the transmitters and redactors in the 6th to 4th centuries B.C.E.

The Attic tragedies were written exclusively in the 5th century in Athens. Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* is the most recent of all of them; Sophocles probably finished it in 406, the year of his death. It may have been staged for the first time in 401, after the siege of Athens by the Spartans.

For the Egyptian texts that can be interpreted as cult plays, a much longer span of time must be taken into consideration. The "Dramatic Ramesseum Papyrus" includes a "Play in Honour of Sesostris I," a king of the Twelfth Dynasty, approximately 1950 B.C.E. In contrast, the texts and pictures of the temple reliefs in Edfu and Philae are Ptolemaic; that is, they stem from the 4th to 1st centuries B.C.E. Our example, the Edfu "Play of Horus," was finished in approximately 110 B.C.E., during the reign of Ptolemaeus IX Soter II. The subject of the play, The Myth of Horus, is much older, of course.

Altogether it can be said that most of our texts stem from the second half of the first millenium B.C.E., but some Egyptian texts are

3. A. M. Blackman and H. W. Fairman, "The Myth of Horus at Edfu—II: The Triumph of Horus over His Enemies—A Sacred Drama," *JEA* 28 (1942) 32–38; *JEA* 29 (1943) 2–36; *JEA* 30 (1944) 5–22. Idem, *The Triumph of Horus: An Ancient Egyptian Sacred Drama* (London: Batsford, 1974).

4. See J. C. Goyon, "Dramatische Texte," *LÄ* 1:1140–44.

5. Text according to Sophocles, *Dramen: Griechisch und deutsch* (ed. W. Willige; 3rd ed.; Zurich: Artemis, 1995). www.gutenberg.org/files/31/31-h/31-h/htm#colonus.

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considerably older. The texts all come from the same cultural area, the eastern Mediterranean region. Nevertheless, they differ in many respects, and it is difficult to discover any literary dependence, even though some scholars assume this sort of connection between the prophetic speeches and the Greek tragedies.

It is beyond dispute that the Attic tragedies of the three great Athenian poets Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides should be considered "dramatic." They were written for the annual theater contest during the festival of the Great Urban Dionysia in March and April. They normally were put on stage by their authors in the Theater of Dionysus in Athens. The theater's construction and equipment as well as its ensemble are known to some degree. The ensemble consisted of two to three actors and the choir. We also are generally informed regarding the conventions of the performances, such as the masks, painting, dances, and music. Attic tragedy is the archetype of Western European dramatic and stage traditions, and it is mainly responsible for the close connection between drama and stage. We will question this close connection in this essay, especially the question whether acting and performance are essential elements of a dramatic text. As is well known, this question has been discussed since the *Poetics* of Aristotle.

Whether the Egyptian texts that are interpreted as "dramatic" were ever put on stage is much less certain than regarding the Attic tragedies. H. W. Fairman, an editor of the "Play of Horus," concluded that it was "a . . . religious drama acted annually at Edfu during the festival of victory."[6] It was Fairman's edition of the play, not the play itself that was performed in 1974 by the drama department of a British university college. It is very possible that a priestly lecturer declaimed the text of the play (see below, pp. 77–78). For the actual readers, the dramatic character of the play depends exclusively on its texts and on the relief paintings.

Admittedly, only a minority of OT scholars share the interpretation of the Hebrew prophetic speeches as dramatic texts. In the German-speaking context, this minority is represented, for example, by Klaus Baltzer and, most recently, by Stefan A. Nitsche—apart from myself, of course. Klaus Baltzer interprets Deutero-Isaiah as a "liturgical drama" that was performed during the Festival of Unleavened Bread, most likely in the outer court of the temple in Jerusalem.[7] In Baltzer's opinion,

6. Fairman, *The Triumph of Horus: An Ancient Egyptian Sacred Drama*, 19.

7. K. Baltzer, *Deutero-Jesaja* (KAT 10/2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1999) 29–38. See also the English version of this commentary published in in the Hermeneia series.

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Deutero-Isaiah was written in the second half of the 5th century; this means that it was contemporary with the Attic tragedies. Accordingly, Baltzer points out several corresponding features in the Greek texts and in Deutero-Isaiah, such as the so-called hymns of Deutero-Isaiah (for example, Isa 42:10–13; 44:2–32), which he compares with the chorus in the Attic tragedies. S. A. Nitsche interpreted the so-called Apocalypse of Isaiah (Isaiah 24–27) as a dramatic text—initially on the basis of mere literary criteria. In a second assessment, based on the *Isaiah Scroll* (1QIsa[a]) from Qumran, he showed that the poetic layout of the scroll—that is, its *spatia* and *paragraphoi*—support this interpretation.[8] My own work in this field is mainly a literary analysis of the books of Micah and Hosea.[9] In the opinion of the above-mentioned exegetes, including myself, the literary form of the text is decisive for its dramatic character, as I will show.

Literary Criteria of Dramatic Texts

As demonstrated in detail in my work on Micah, there are primarily two literary criteria by which texts are characterized as "dramatic": (1) by means of direct speeches and addresses, changing speakers, themes, and perspectives, they evoke the impression of actors' entrances; (2) the speeches visualize the scene of the entrances—in other words, they stage the location and other visual circumstances embodied in the speeches. Both criteria will now be demonstrated.

Speech as Scenic Entrance

Onstage, an entrance, which is "the appearance or exit of at least one person,"[10] is the smallest unit of acting. In dramatic texts as we know them, entrances are denoted and delimited by stage directions that announce by name the next person speaking. In prophetic texts, there are no stage directions of this sort.[11] This is why the texts are not identifiable as dramatic texts at first glance. Nevertheless, entrances give structure to the prophetic speeches. These structured entrances

8. S. A. Nitsche, *Jesaja 24–27: Ein dramatischer Text. Die Frage nach den Genres prophetischer Literatur des Alten Testaments und die Textgraphik der großen Jesajarolle aus Qumran* (BWANT 166; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006) passim.

9. H. Utzschneider, *Micha* (ZBKAT 24/1; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2005) passim; idem, "Situation und Szene: Überlegungen zum Verhältnis historischer und literarischer Deutung prophetischer Texte am Beispiel von Hos 5,8–6,6," *ZAW* 114 (2002) 80–105.

10. B. Asmuth, *Einführung in die Dramenanalyse* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994) 41.

11. By the way, as far as we know the earliest manuscripts of Greek dramatic texts did not announce the next speaker by name but with poetic alignment or paragraphs set off with spaces, as S. A. Nitsche found in the Qumran manuscripts.

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are identifiable by mere textual signals, especially by change of speaker or addressed persons, who are indicated by the personal pronouns "you," "I," or "we"; or by announcing the next speaker by his or her name or function. Entrances are also emphasized by other textual or structural signals, such as by a change of theme or perspective. This may be demonstrated by considering the Prologue of the book of Micah (Mic 1:2–7) as an example:

2 Listen, peoples, all of you!
Pay attention, Earth and her fullness.
The lord, YHWH, is against you as a witness,
The lord, YHWH, from his holy palace.

3 Yea, behold, YHWH is setting out from his place,
He is descending and trampling upon the heights of the earth.
4 The mountains are melting beneath him,
valleys are splitting open [meanwhile],
like wax in the presence of fire,
like water cascading down a sluice.

5 All of these are because of Jacob's misconduct
and because of the sins of the house of Israel.
What is Jacob's misconduct?
Is it not Samaria?
What is the height of Judah?
Is it not Jerusalem?
6 And so I will make Samaria into stones for vineyards.
And I will pour her stones into the valley.
And her foundations I will lay bare.
7 And all her carved images will be scattered,
all her gifts will be burned by fire,
and all her idols I will make a desolation.
For from the fee of a prostitute she gathered them,
and a fee of a prostitute they shall become.

Verse 2 begins with an imperative, that is, with direct speech, but the speaker is not mentioned. Nevertheless, the entrance of this speaker is implied. He or she cannot be God, because God is mentioned in the third colon of the verse in third person. The speech is addressed to "the peoples, all of you." Their presence is presupposed—in whatever form.

Verses 3 and 4 represent the second entrance. They are separated from the preceding entrance by the Hebrew *ki*, a formative signal; in the English translation, this is rendered "Yea." Moreover, there is a change of theme, and the speech has a new direction. The peoples are no longer the addressees. A spectacular advent of God, a theophany, is

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depicted. The character of the text as direct speech is indicated by the Hebrew particle *hinnēh*. Connected with a participle, it forms a *futurum instans*–construction. This construction presupposes the presence of a speaker. We are reminded of the so-called *teichoscopia*, with the prophet as speaker.

The last entrance is separated from the preceding by the textual signals in v. 5: the connecting phrase "all of these" is a back-reference; the questions open a new speech. In v. 6, it is clear that the speaker represented by the pronoun "I" is God. The destruction of the city of Samaria is depicted as in the preceding theophany in vv. 3–4.

As a whole, the scene consists of three entrances. In the first entrance, the people are addressed by an unknown speaker, probably the prophet; in the second entrance, the prophet depicts a theophany; and in the third, YHWH himself is the speaker. The theophany and the speech by God point at the temple as the location of the scene.

Speech as Performance

Dramatic texts and theater are closely connected. I want to make the case in this essay that dramatic texts in themselves are theatrical in the sense of the Greek word θεάομαι, which means 'to look at, to behold'. Dramatic texts are inherently (audio-)visual without being staged. What do the speaking or addressed persons look like? How are they dressed? What is their facial expression? In which environment do they move? Which noises accompany the performance of the actors? By implicitly answering these questions, the texts themselves are "synaesthetic."

I want to demonstrate this by considering some passages in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. Especially in the prologue and the *parodos*, Sophocles sketches an outline of the location of the whole play. As a stranger and a suppliant (ἱκέτης; see below) looking for a resting place, the blind Oedipus, guided by his daughter Antigone arrives at a region that Antigone describes as an idyllic place near Athens. There are laurels and olives, and a nightingale is singing (lines 16–19). This short description of the Attic landscape is repeated and amplified in a famous chorus later in the play (lines 668–94).

Not only is the background of the scenery depicted in speeches, so are the visual elements of the story and the persons themselves. Antigone asks her father to sit down on an unhewn stone (line 19). An inhabitant of Colonus who happens to be passing by wants to drive Oedipus from his resting place: "The spot thou treadest on is holy ground!" (line 39). But Oedipus refuses to leave, and so the man from

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Colonus departs to ask his fellow-citizens for advice. Meanwhile, Oedipus and Antigone hide themselves in a grove, waiting for the decision of the citizens of Colonus. It arrives in the shape of the chorus; Oedipus appears and terrifies the men of Colonus with his appearance and his voice: "O dread to see and dread to hear!" (line 140). But they call him to come closer, guided by Antigone. Oedipus's steps out of the grove are depicted by repeated exchanges, which illustrate the burdensome walk of the old and blind man:

> "Thy hand then!"
> "Here, O father, is my hand."
> . . .
> "Shall I go further?"
> "Aye."
> "What, further still?"
> . . .
> "Follow with blind steps, father, as I lead." (lines 170–83)

So, the speech's content imagines the location and the actions carried out by the characters. The German technical term *Wortkulisse*[12] refers to scenery included in texts. Of course, these textual *Wortkulissen* need to be supported by the readers' imaginations, and gaps must be filled in by means of intertextual knowledge. For instance, the horror evoked by the appearance of Oedipus is illustrated in the audience's memory of the fact that Oedipus blinded himself with his own hand in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (line 1268). In a way, the reader is like the blind Oedipus: "Ears to the blind, they say, are eyes" (line 138), or in the translation of Ernst Buschor: *Mein Auge ist das Ohr. Ich sehe die Rede* ('My eye is my ear. I see the speech'). This is exactly what is meant by *Wortkulisse*.

It would be interesting to compare this performance in the imagination of readers and listeners with our knowledge of the staging of *Oedipus at Colonus* in Athens in the 6th century B.C.E. I suppose that acting the play on a real stage needs the cooperation of the audience to the same extent that reader cooperation is necessary in a *Wortkulisse*. And both—the real stage with its scenery and the *Wortkulisse*—depend on the dramatic text. I think that Aristotle was right when he insisted that both 'imagination' (ὄψσις) and 'performance' (ἄγών) are based on the textual capacities of the drama, such as the plot (μῦθος), the persons, and the speech (λέξις; see Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450b).

12. Asmuth, *Einführung in die Dramenanalyse*, 52.

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Functions of Dramatic Texts

The Imagining of Mythological and Historical Narratives in Dramatic Texts

It is common in the OT prophetic literature for speeches to be embedded in narratives and vice versa. The extensive narratives in the book of Jeremiah are well known in this regard. In the Hebrew version, the narratives (Jeremiah 26–45) appear within a framework of speeches (Jeremiah 2–25/46–51). In the Minor Prophets, there are also narratives embedded in speeches—for instance, at the beginning of Hosea.

The book of Micah is one of The Twelve works that is without (or nearly without) any narrative. Nevertheless, clear connections with the historical narratives of the OT can easily be found. My first example is the word of doom against Zion in Mic 3:12:

> Therefore on account of you Zion will be ploughed like a field
> And Jerusalem will become a rubble heap
> And the mountain of the house (will become) heights of the forest.[13]

The prophetic word is found once more as a quotation in narrative in the book of Jeremiah (Jer 26:18–19). This narrative flashes back to the time of Jeremiah from the end of the 7th century to the end of the 8th century B.C.E. It deals with the conflict between the prophet Micah and the representatives of the Jerusalem kingdom and Hezekiah himself. If one relates the narrative and the word of Micah to the Assyrian conquest of Israel and Judah, Micah's word of prophecy appears to be holding Jerusalem responsible. According to the narrative, Hezekiah repented his sins and therefore Jerusalem was not captured. However, in the time of Jer 26:18–19, Jerusalem is being threatened by the Babylonians. Jeremiah warns and requires repentance. But Jehoiakim refuses to repent and Jeremiah is threatened with the death penalty. So in Jeremiah 26, Micah's oracle and the obedience of Hezekiah function as a contrast with the disobedience and misconduct of Jehoiakim. In the book of Micah itself, the prophetic word is clearly connected with the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (see Mic 4:8–10).

Another example of the relationship between a prophetic speech and the traditions of the Assyrian conquest appears in Mic 1:10–16. In this poem, the scene of the Assyrian campaign of 701 B.C.E. is reproduced. In some sort of flashlight-teichoscopia, the speaker shows the

13. Translation according to F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commmentary* (AB 24E; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 378.

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destruction of towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem, whereas the undamaged city, which in v. 16 is depicted as "mother," is requested to be in mourning for her children.

10 In Gath don't report it,
don't weep at all!
In Beth-leaphrah
roll yourselves in the dust!
11 Pass on your way,
inhabitants of Shapir,
in nakedness and shame.
. . .
(to the mother Jerusalem:)
16 Make yourself bald and cut off your hair
for the children of your delight!
Make yourself as bald as the eagle,
for they have gone from you into exile.

In the OT, a number of narratives can be found that deal with this memorable situation (2 Kgs 18–20; Isaiah 20). The narratives show that the experience of the destruction of Judah and the salvation of Jerusalem has been made paradigmatic of the official political theology in the Jerusalem kingdom in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C.E. The dramatization of this narrative tradition in prophetic speeches not only transported the experiences of the past into the present for the listeners but also updated these experiences with new interpretations. The speeches allowed the listeners to take part in these events and at the same time showed them in a new light for each new generation of listeners. So the speeches are both: a renewal and a generalization of the traditions.

A quite similar type of intertextuality can be found in the relationship between the Attic tragedies and the narrative traditions of old Greek myths and epics. "The material of tragedy is myth,"[14] says Hellmut Flashar, a well-known German interpreter of Sophocles. Apart from oral traditions and vase paintings, poetry, especially epic poetry is the most important source for the tragedies. They imagine, interpret, and generalize the traditions of the past, just as the prophetic speeches do. Once more, Hellmut Flashar states, "The present is reflected in the past and becomes available for generalization."[15]

Quite striking is the intertextuality between the "Play of Horus" and a narrative version of the Horus myth called the "Myth of the

14. H. Flashar, *Sophokles: Dichter im demokratischen Athen* (Munich: Beck, 2000) 18 (translations mine).

15. Ibid.

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Winged Disk."[16] This myth is depicted in the register above the play on the same wall in the Edfu temple precinct. The contents of the myth and the play are closely related, for example, in the use of the hippopotamuses as images of mythical and political enemies and in harpooning as the method of destroying them. Possibly both texts were read, though at different feasts.

Thus, in the Egyptian cult plays, the same connection between imagining and generalization of mythical and epic traditions can be detected as in the dramatic texts from Israel and Greece. J. P. Sørensen points out the transparency of the mythical Horus to the present king, which is imagined and performed in the play:

> primeval and present are dramatically juxtaposed and made to mirror each other as the stages in a redundant mythical process. Although the drama delineates a descent from primeval to present level, from hippopotamus to human enemy, from Horus to Ptolemy IX, it does not in a historical sense narrate the story of how the present condition came to be. Rather it recasts the present in its mythical form and shows it, idealized in terms of royal ideology, as variation on a mythical theme.[17]

Consequently, it can be said that the intertextuality between dramatic speeches and historical epic played an important role in the three cultural realms. In dramatic texts, significant traditions of the past were imagined, interpreted, and generalized.

Drama as Reflected Ritual

The cultural anthropologist Victor Turner pointed out that there could be a mutual, perhaps even a dialectical relation between social dramas and cultural performances. Life is both an imitation of art and vice versa.[18] Doris Bachman-Medick has carried on this approach. Social rituals and stage dramas are both concerned with situations of liminality that are faced by societies as well as by individuals. Birth, marriage, and death are some of these situations, which are important motifs in social life and in literary dramas. However, literary dramas

16. See A. Egberts, "Mythos und Fest: Überlegungen zur Dekoration der westlichen Innenseite der Umfassungsmauer im Tempel von Edfu," in *4. Ägyptische Tempeltagung: Feste im Tempel* (ed. R. Gundlach and M. Rochholz; Ägypten und Altes Testament 33/2; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998) 17–29. D. Kurth, *Treffpunkt der Götter: Inschriften aus dem Tempel des Horus* (Zurich: Artemis, 1994) 217.

17. J. P. Sørensen, "Three Varieties of Ritual Drama," *Temenos* 22 (1986) 79–92, esp. p. 83.

18. See V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982).

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are not simply reproductions of social dramas. Dramas are reflections of rituals; that is, rituals can be justified, distanced, criticized by literary dramas, and even led *ad absurdum*. A good example in modern theater of a reflected ritual is Bertolt Brecht's play *Kleinbürgerhochzeit*.[19] I am convinced that this approach is also appropriate for our ancient dramatic texts and is able to shed new light on them. In all these texts, rituals are present in one way or another. I turn to examples.

The second part (or "scene," as I see it) of Micah (Mic 1:8–2:6) is full of references to mourning rituals: the nakedness and crying of the prophet (Mic 1:8, 10), the forbidden weeping of the people of Gath (Mic 1:10), the rolling in the dust (1:10), the baldness of Mother Jerusalem (Mic 1:16), and last but not least, the Woe speech of the prophet in Mic 2:1–2 as the climax:

1 Woe—planners of iniquity and doers of evil on their beds
In the light of the morning they do it,
Because they are mighty
2 When they covet fields,
then they seize [them]
and houses
they steel them.[20]

The Woe speech intrinsically belongs to the mourning ritual for a deceased individual. In the normal course of the ritual, it introduces the obituary for the deceased. In this speech, the mourners imagine the bereavement they suffer. In Mic 2:1, the Woe speech is definitely not used for this function. It is intentionally distanced and used to point out the consequences of the evil done by the mourned ones. Of course, these doers of evil are quite alive, but their deeds are lethal to their victims and, in the long run, to themselves. Christof Hardmeier called these Woe speeches *Trauermetaphorik* 'metaphors of mourning' and stressed their rhetorical function. He is quite right—but that is not all. The citations of rituals portray those who cite them in a role. By citing a ritual out of context with its intrinsic function, the prophet becomes an actor and the ritual a drama.

A very interesting case of a reflected ritual appears in Hos 6:1–6. The poem in Hos 6:1–3 is usually understood as a "community lament"

19. See D. Bachman-Medick, "Kulturelle Spielräume: Drama und Theater im Licht ethnologischer Ritualforschung," in *Kultur als Text: Die anthropologische Wende in der Literaturwissenschaft* (ed. D. Bachmann-Medick; 2nd ed.; Tübingen: Francke, 2004) 98–121, esp. p. 102.

20. Translation by Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 257 (revised slightly).

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or a part of it. In the ritual itself, a common lament is normally followed by an oracle from God, who responds to the lament; of course, an oracle of salvation is expected. Indeed, in Hos 6:4–5 God becomes the speaker. But with this oracle, the structure of the lament is both maintained and broken.

The lament of the people:

1 Come, let us return to YHWH!
Although he tore us apart, he will heal us.
Although he smashed us, he will bandage us.
2 He will revive us after two days,
and on the third day he will raise us up.
We will live in his presence so that we know him.
3 We will pursue knowledge of YHWH.
His utterance is as certain as sunrise.
He will come like rain for us.
Like spring rain, he will water the earth.

This is followed by a speech of YHWH addressed to the people:

4 How shall I deal with you, Ephraim?
How shall I deal with you, Judah?
Your mercy passes away like a morning cloud,
and like early dew, it passes away.

In the lament, the people assure themselves of the certitude of God's salvation and expect a positive oracle. In the following oracle, God doubts the truthfulness of the people and denies their expectations. There is a negative correspondence between God's own reliability and the people's loyalty. In my opinion, this means that the dramatic text is criticizing and rejecting the ritual of public lament, because it has lost its foundation. And it does so by using the forms and language of the ritual. But this is not the end. In the last part of his speech, YHWH introduces a new theological perspective on his relation to Israel, a relationship that is not founded on rituals but on *ḥesed* (which means 'mercy' or 'loyalty', or even 'love') and knowledge.

6 For I desire mercy rather than sacrifice
and knowledge rather than offerings.

Finally, OT rituals are used to structure a prophetic book or parts of it. The second part of the book of Micah (Micah 6–7), for instance, is structured as a *rîb* 'lawsuit', including all parts of it such as the hearing of evidence, accusation, sentence, and act of grace.

The relation between ritual and drama that we have illustrated with OT dramatic texts can also be supported by Greek tragedies. F. Zeitlin

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has shown in detail that the tragedies contain the whole ritual world of ancient Greece: rites of purification and expiation, suppliant and apotropaic ritual, rituals of celebration, and mantic rituals, not forgetting the *rites de passage* surrounding birth, marriage, and death.[21]

Similar to prophetic books, tragedies can be constructed around rituals. In particular, the ritual of ἱκετεία ('supplication') has lent its structures and themes to classical tragedies. The ἱκετεία is a ritual by which strangers ritually plead for the right to settle among other ethnic groups. Aeschylus and Euripides wrote plays entitled Ικετίδες 'suppliants'. And also our example, Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, is on the whole designed as a ἱκετεία. Oedipus and his daughter plead for permission to stay in Colonus. But there are obstacles: the citizens of Colonus reject their supplication at first. Creon and Polyneices try to force them to return to Thebes. It is Theseus, the ruler of Athens, who ensures that Oedipus and Antigone can remain in Colonus. Ultimately, however, Oedipus dies and finds asylum and rest in a tomb in the holy grove of Colonus. Against this background and based on the ritual of ἱκετεία, the aged Sophocles was facing death and was probably reflecting his own life and, in doing so, the fate of humankind.

A highly sophisticated use of rituals can be seen in Sophocles' *Antigone*. By contrasting the rituals of power and mourning, Sophocles designs the two antagonistic characters of his play: Creon and Antigone. Antigone resists the rituals of power by performing the rituals of mourning to an excessive extent. This may be understood as a critical attitude toward ritual as such; a new perspective on the motives of human behavior is winning the upper hand over the ritual layer. Antigone expresses this perspective in her famous words: "Love and not hatred is the part for me" (line 524).

The relationship to ritual seems to me to be rather close both for the dramatic texts of the Hebrew Bible and for the Greek tragedies. In both, rituals are reflected, distanced, and criticized. This may merely be a poetic device for constructing plots or developing characters. But to me it appears more and more to be a way to open up new theological or anthropological perspectives.

Let us now have a short look at the world of Egyptian cult plays.

In the "Play of Horus," a bridge is built between the dramatic text and performance, on the one hand, and the ritual itself, on the other,

21. See F. I. Zeitlin, *The Ritual World of Greek Tragedy* (Ph.D. diss., Colombia University, 1970) passim.

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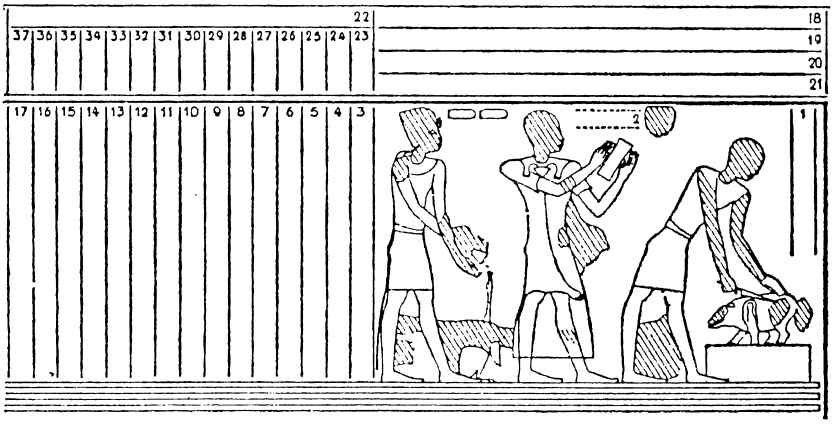

Fig. 1. Scene from Edfu showing a scene from the "Play of Horus." First published by Émile Chassinat, Le Temple d'Edfou, *vol. 10, fasc. 2 (Cairo: Institut Française d'Archéologie orientale, 1960), pl. 146. Copyright © IFAO.*

especially in the last scene of the play.[22] Figure 1 shows a butcher slaughtering a Hippopotamus, a priest reading a papyrus scroll (probably the play itself), and the king feeding a goose with corn. The dramatic text on the left side of the image opens with a description of the victorious king:

> The King of Upper and Lower Egypt
> Son of Re
> (Ptolemaeus-may-he-live-for-ever-Beloved of Ptah)
> is triumphant in the broad hall,
> he has overthrown the *Mnryw* of all the countries of Asia.
> Lo he is triumphant in the broad hall,
> he has suppressed his enemies,
> he has taken hold of his back,
> he has clutched the foes by their forelocks.

What follows are "stage directions" that repeat the image in words and introduce the concluding hymn:

> Bringing in the Hippopotamus in form of a cake before
> him-with-the-uplifted-arm.
> Dismembering by the butcher.

22. Blackman and Fairman, "The Myth of Horus at Edfu—II," *JEA* 30 (1944) 13–15. Fairman, *The Triumph of Horus*, 113 (fig. 1).

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> Recital of this Book against him by the chief lector on the twenty-first day of the second month of Proyet.
> To be spoken by the prophets, the fathers of the god, and the priests: . . .[23]

In this last scene of the play, characters act in sacral roles but in human ways. In addition to the chorus and the king, mainly Gods—Horus, Isis, Seth—have been speaking and acting in the preceding scenes. The hippopotamus, which represented Seth and was harpooned by the God Horus in the preceding scenes, is now present in the form of a cake, which must be divided. My assumption is that the last scene of the "Play of Horus" represents the interface between ritual and drama. The preceding mythological scenes or speeches of the drama aim toward the ritual depicted in the last scene. Or seen the other way around, the ritual, which is celebrated every year, is the last part of a mythical act that recurs in a dramatic performance. We may imagine this performance as a "real" play on stage, as declaimed by a priest, or simply as a mute relief on the western wall of the temple precinct.

The connection between drama and ritual is a crucial moment for the dramatic texts of antiquity (and presumably, not only in antiquity). However, this connection appears in quite different shapes. In Egypt, the connection is very close. There is as far I can see no intellectual gap between drama and ritual; on the basis of myth, they are intertwined. Thus, drama reflects ritual in that drama gives the mythological reason for the ritual. In Greece and in Israel, however, we observe a more complicated and distant relationship. The function of justifying ritual disappears. The citation of ritual can be a poetic device. The alienation from rituals can be seen as a means of characterizing or criticizing the participants in the rituals. Even the rituals themselves can be put into question.

Drama as a Universal Genre?

It was the aim of our examination to construct a concept of dramatic genre that might be called "universal" because it spans great cultural distances from both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective and because it is linked to basic human needs and ideas. On a broad basis of ancient Mediterranean texts, it can be demonstrated that speeches that form an actor's "entrance" (pp. 67–69) and that educe scenic imagery (pp. 69–70) meet the basic literary criteria for being considered dra-

23. Text according to Blackman and Fairman, "The Myth of Horus at Edfu—II," *JEA* 30 (1944) 13.

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matic texts. These criteria can be applied not only to texts in the classical and modern theatrical tradition but also to texts that have been declaimed or have been transmitted and read only in written and illustrated form. As basically dramatic texts, they also can be shown to fulfill certain social and intellectual functions. They imagine and renew historical and mythical traditions of their society by interpreting and generalizing them (pp. 71–73). However, they can also reflect the ritual texts of their society by justifying, distancing, or criticizing the rituals (pp. 73–78).

Regardless of many differences, the texts compared above are similar enough to subsume them in a genre called *dramatic texts*. The functions of these dramatic texts are not confined to antiquity: (1) renewing and interpreting fundamental traditions by transmitting them in "great narratives" and (2) reflecting social or religious rituals are basic needs and ideas that are part of human communication and behavior. Therefore, this genre can rightly be called *universal*.

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