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IS THE SONG OF SONGS A "SACRED MARRIAGE" DRAMA?

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One of the prevailing mythologies in OT study is that the Song of Songs is really a dramatic "script" that has been preserved for us by the Jewish community as part of Holy Scripture only because its true nature has been obscured and forgotten. Whether one attempts to reconstruct the drama as Calvin Seerveld has done,[1] complete with stage directions, new music for the old lyrics, and woodcuts to illustrate scenery and wardrobe (or lack of it), or whether with S. N. Kramer we conclude that Canticles, "in our undoubtedly expurgated form,"[2] includes some "passionate and rhapsodic love songs . . . which are cultic in origin and were sung in the course of the *hieros gamos* or 'sacred marriage' between a king and a votary of Astarte, the Canaanite goddess of love and procreation whom even so wise a Hebrew king as the great Solomon worshipped" (1 Kgs 11:5),[3] the basic issue is really to what literary genre the Song of Songs belongs.

Although Kramer refrains from actually saying that Canticles is a sacred marriage rite as it now stands, his argument strongly suggests that this is precisely the case. It is only on this ground, he argues, that the sensuous, erotic book "that fairly reeks of love and passion, of lust and desire . . . passed the sharp eyes of the austere, puritanical rabbis to whom chastity, virginity, and sexual purity were sacrosanct." [4] He goes on to say that in his opinion the theory proposed by T. J. Meek that the Song is "a modified and conventualized form of an ancient Hebrew liturgy celebrating the reunion and marriage of the sun god with the mother goddess which had flourished in Mesopotamia from earliest days" is "essentially sound and constructive, in spite of the fact that a number of assumptions, influences, and arguments have turned out to be erroneous, wholly or in part." [5]

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[1]C. Seerveld, *The Greatest Song* (Palos Heights, Illinois: Trinity Pennyasheet, 1967).

[2]S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1969) 99.

[3]S. N. Kramer, "Cuneiform Studies and the History of Literature: The Sumerian Sacred Marriage Texts," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107/6 (Philadelphia, 1963) 489.

[4]S. N. Kramer, *Sacred*, 85. This last statement contains some assumptions on the nature of the rabbinic understanding of human sexuality that will not stand up to investigation, but they are better treated in another context.

[5]Ibid., 89. Although Meek was not the first to suggest this—that honor belongs to W. Erbt in *Die Hebräer: Kanaan im Zeitalter der Hebräischer Wanderung und Hebräischer Staatengrundungen* (1906)—it was Meek who was instrumental in popularizing the view. His initial presentation of the thesis was in a paper before the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis in 1920, subsequently published as "Canticles and the Tammuz Cult," *AJSL* 39 (1922) 1-14 and followed in quick succession by two other articles by Meek: "Canticles and the Fertility Cult" in *A Symposium on the Song of Songs*, ed. W. H. Schoof, published by the Oriental Club of Philadelphia in 1924, and in the same year "Babylonian Parallels to the Song of Songs," *JBL* 43 (1924) 245-252. This view also underlies Meek's introduction to Canticles in *IB* and the *Westminster Bible*.

Kramer's book is a masterful presentation of the modified theory and a stimulating book in its own right. In it he marshalls the evidence for numerous parallels that he finds not only between the Dumuzi-Inanna cult and Canticles[6] but also between that myth and the NT—specifically, implications that the "story of Christ . . . must have had its forerunners and prototypes," the most important of which was the dying god theme.[7] These implications suggest that the NT "story" was just that—another "story"—and seriously undermine the essential historical foundation of the Christian faith. It is these far-reaching conclusions drawn by Kramer that suggest to me that a re-examination of his basic thesis is essential. It is important, however, to examine the theory in terms of its impact on the understanding and applications of Canticles itself. Such an examination must take several factors into account.

It needs to be observed first that there is considerable confusion in the literature over some basic terms. Careful definition and distinction needs to be made among "drama," "liturgy," "ritual" and "pageant." Nothing is gained by less than precise use of these words.[8]

A *drama* is a composition designed to be acted on stage, in which a story is told or an event or characterization is portrayed through actions and dialogue. In many ways no better definition has been propounded than Aristotle's: To be

[6]"It is now evident that the similarities and resemblances between them are not confined to the general stylistic features, such as the portrayal of the lover as both shepherd and king, and the beloved as both bride and sister, or the formal interlacing of soliloquies, colloquies, and refrains; they extend to theme, motif, and occasionally even to phraseology" (S. N. Kramer, *Sacred*, 92). On p. 151 n. 13 to the above statement he notes that these standard Sumerian/Akkadian themes were common all through the ancient Near East: "All this in no way detracts from the inspired and inspiring genius of the Hebrew poets who transformed the rather static, conventionalized Mesopotamian motifs and formal stylistic patterns and quickened them with the breath of life. There is, for example, little of the delight in nature or of the touching human tenderness that pervades the biblical book (cf. especially 1:5-7; 2:8-17; 5:1-8; 7:7-13) in the rather aloof, highly stylized Sumerian compositions, whose authors never seem to be able to free themselves of rigidities of temple ritualism and palace protocol."

[7]Ibid., 133. It may seem out of place in an academic treatment of this question to mention popular books that deal with the issue. In this instance, however, the best response is found at that level. C. S. Lewis in chap. 14 of his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Geoffrey Bless, 1955), describes his growing awareness of the strength of the historicity of the NT accounts of the death and resurrection of Christ. He remarks that they do not have the "flavor" of myth; they are "reportage." They are the culmination of all the myths. In the words of one whom Lewis calls "the hardest boiled of all atheists" commenting on the NT stories: "Rum thing, this dying god bit; seems to have really happened once" (ibid., 211). "Rising" of the dead god was formerly understood to mean "resurrection," but more recently O. Gurney in *JSS* 7 (1962) 147-160, esp. 153, and S. N. Kramer in *BASOR* 183 (1966) have argued that the "release" from the underworld for a half-year was possible only because Geštinanna replaced him there for that period. E. M. Yamauchi in *JSS* 11 (1966) 10-15 interprets the "rising" of Tammuz as his "rising up with the other dead to the funeral offerings that were made for him." This element of the Tammuz cult, while interesting in its own right and important in its application to other areas of Biblical theology, lies outside the immediate interests of this paper. For further study on the question see the material in S. N. Kramer, *Sacred*, 107-133; T. Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays in Mesopotamian History and Culture* (ed. W. L. Moran; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1970) 73-101; and T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University, 1976).

[8]The definitions that follow are based on the appropriate entries in *The Oxford English Dictionary* and Webster's Third Edition.

"drama" a piece has to have a beginning, a middle and an end.[9] The basic assumption here is that a drama has to be self-contained and self-consistent. Unity, progression, climax and resolution are essential elements.[10] In a more mechanical or technical way Etienne Drioton, in his work on dramatic material from Egypt,[11] lists three criteria for the identification of dramatic works: (1) the placing of the name of a speaker at the head of a speech; (2) stage directions inserted at appropriate places in the dialogue; and (3) a general non-narrative style that is indicated by the nature of the text, the grammar and the dialogue. H. W. Fairman[12] adds four other elements to these: "a story, a development of a theme, an element of combat of one kind or another" and the drawing of character, although this last is not always present in early dramatic writing. Needless to say this list is not exhaustive, and even the presence of these elements in a literary piece does not necessarily make that piece a "drama."

Liturgy, in its original secular context, meant rendering service to the nation or community at one's own expense. During the intertestamental period a specialized cultic sense attached itself to the term. While this can be identified in non-Biblical literature from the beginning of the second century B.C., the best evidence for the shift comes from the LXX, where *leitourgein* was used to translate *śrt* in its cultic uses (principally in Exod 28-39, Num, Chr, and Ezek 40-46) and *leitourgia* is used some forty times to translate *'bdh* when that word is used in a cultic context. These are generally limited to the priestly sacrifices and prayers in the LXX.[13] In post-Biblical usage and contemporary ecclesiology, "liturgy" becomes an ordered ceremony of worship in which all the participants, clergy as well as laity, have their prescribed roles to fill. "Liturgy" is distinct from "drama" in that in drama a select group performs for the edification or entertainment of the larger audience while in liturgy, closely defined, congregation as well as leaders have their carefully designated parts to play.[14]

Ritual is a broader term that includes not only the order and words of the reli-

[9]*Poetics* VII, 1450b-1451a.

[10]For a summary treatment of dramatic theory see the article by H. Popkin in J. Gassner and E. Quinn, eds., *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama* (New York: Crowell, 1969) 183-187. That volume also has an extensive 93-page appendix that contains excerpts from the classic statements on dramatic theory ranging from Aristotle's *Poetics* and the first-century-B.C. (?) *Coislinian Tractate* to N. Frye and F. Dürrenmatt. More extensive discussion of the theory of drama can be found in A. Nicoll, *The Theatre and Dramatic Theory* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962), and J. Gassner, *Form and Idea in Modern Theatre* (New York: Dryden, 1956).

[11]E. Drioton, *Le Théâtre Égyptien* (Editions de la Revue du Caire; Cairo, 1942). His essay "Le Théâtre dans l'Ancienne Egypt," *Revue de la Societé d'Histoire du Théâtre* 6 (1954) 7-45, is perhaps his best. Cf. H. W. Fairman, *The Triumph of Horus: An Ancient Egyptian Sacred Drama*, with a chapter by D. Newton and D. Poole (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1974) 8-13.

[12]H. W. Fairman, *Triumph*, 9.

[13]Cf. H. Strathmann, "*Leitourgeō*," *TDNT* 4, 215-222, esp. 218-221.

[14]See M. H. Shepherd, Jr., *The Worship of the Church* (New York: Seabury, 1952), esp. 48-52, for a concise treatment of liturgy and worship in a contemporary church setting. Shepherd remarks: "St. Benedict of Nursia described the liturgy of his monks, namely their corporate acts of worship, as the work of God, and deemed it the most important activity of the religious community."

gious ceremony but also the recording and preservation of the ceremonies and the words of the rites themselves in a permanent form. The rites may simply have a long traditional history among a people or may be the special prerogative of a specially trained group of priests or officials.[15] But in either case the primary focus in "ritual" is on the preservation of the specific words and their meanings in the ceremonial re-creating of the liturgy.

Pageant is a word that is not normally applied to ancient materials. The term comes from Middle English *pagyn* or *padgin* and is used to describe a procession or open-air presentation that, using elaborate costumes, music and sometimes scenery, represents (or, if you will, "re-presents") an important event or person in the community. Often a pageant consists of short scenes in which spoken or sung lines are presented from a stage or moving platform. In the context of our discussion the essential difference between drama and pageant is that the latter is a kind of patchwork of individual, self-contained scenes or tableaux linked rather loosely in chronological or geographic sequence.[16] The former is a unified piece that has an integrity of its own apart from the specific historical events it is re-enacting. Both drama and pageant may have cultic (liturgical) or ritual elements, but these are essentially secondary, especially in drama, to the main purpose of re-enactment or re-creation. I suggest that in the light of the current state of the evidence at hand it is crucial to be careful in our own use of these terms in describing the cultic rituals of the ancient world.

Material that is often identified as "drama" is known from several ancient Near Eastern cultures—e.g., Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hittite and Canaanite—but since the best examples come from Egypt and Mesopotamia, I will limit this paper to a consideration of these two. Specifically, and beginning with the Egyptian materials, we turn to a recent work by H. W. Fairman[17] that traces the growing understanding of the nature of the material first published by himself and A. M. Blackman.[18] There had been earlier attempts to isolate material that could le-

[15]The question of the close links between ritual and the origins of drama, of course, has been a major investigation for many years. Aristotle, in chap. 4 of the *Poetics* (1449a), suggests that tragedy began with the leaders of the dithyramb—a wild bacchanalian song or hymn to Dionysius or Bacchus associated with the cult celebrations. Many since have also linked drama with cult. In modern times J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* is the classic treatment that spawned a host of offspring. In our own field of interest the names S. H. Hooke (*Myth and Ritual* [Oxford, 1933]; *Myth, Ritual and Kingship* [Oxford, 1948]), T. Gaster (*Thespis* [Harper, 1961]), T. Jacobsen ("Religious Drama in Ancient Mesopotamia" in *Unity and Diversity* [eds. H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1975]; *Toward the Image of Tammuz* [Harvard, 1971]; and *The Treasures of Darkness* [Yale, 1976]) and S. N. Kramer (*The Sacred Marriage Rite* [Indiana, 1969]) have been most closely associated with this view. F. Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theatre* (1949), N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), and O. B. Hardison, Jr., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages*, all speak to this relationship in a broader field.

[16]This is the sort of "drama" Aristotle describes as "episodic . . . the worst of all plots and actions . . . in which the episodes have no probable or inevitable connection. . . . Poor poets compose such plots through lack of talent; good poets do it to please the actors" (*Poetics* IX, 1451b).

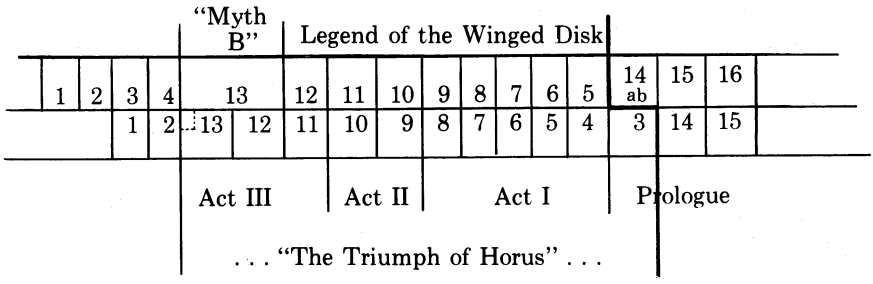
[17]H. W. Fairman, *Triumph*.

[18]H. W. Fairman and A. M. Blackman, "The Myth of Horus II: The Triumph of Horus Over His Enemies: A Sacred Drama," *JEA* 28 (1942) 32-38; 29 (1943) 1-36; 30 (1944) 5-22.

gitimately be called "drama." [19] The texts collated and published in these places (except Fairman) are fragmentary and are essentially cultic or liturgical. They may be "drama," but they are probably best described as "liturgical drama." [20] It was only with the publication ourgical drama." [20] It was only with the publication of *The Triumph of Horus*, a combination of reliefs and texts engraved on a Ptolemaic temple at Edfu about 85 miles north of Elephantine, that it became clear that there was what can legitimately be called "secular" drama in Egypt. Although *The Triumph of Horus* is still "somewhat primitive religious drama" it remains the best-developed example of Egyptian drama yet identified. Fairman states that the "external shape and form of the work is obvious and certain." [21] Speeches are assigned to individual people. The whole text is speech and song without any narrative structure, and there are a number of "stage directions" that differ in grammatical form and content from the rest of the text.

The reliefs are in two registers, 16 in the upper row and 15 in the lower. "The Triumph of Horus" is found in reliefs 3-13 in the first (lower) register. The remainder of the reliefs are various other myths and related episodes also associated with the festival of victory.

This sketch, adapted from Fairman, shows the layout of the reliefs and the numbers he assigns to them.



Note particularly the reverse order of the reliefs in the two major myths.[22] In his treatment of the scenes Fairman identifies relief 3 as the prologue, reliefs 4-8

[19]K. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen: I. Das "Denkmal memphitischen Theologie" der Schabakostein des Britischen Museums* (1928); *II. Der dramatische Ramesseumspapyrus* (1929). Cf. also n. 11 *supra* for bibliographic detail on Drioton, and cf. the further discussion and bibliography in H. W. Fairman, *Triumph*, esp. vi-vii and 1-13.

[20]T. Gaster, *Thespis*, 79-83, 90-92 and 375-405, deals extensively with the earlier material, but in my opinion an examination of these works sustains Fairman's conclusion that "drama" is not a very accurate description of that literature. Cf. H. W. Fairman, *Triumph*, 15-19.

[21]Ibid., 19, 26. "In form it is a play, and falls easily and automatically into acts and scenes without any manipulation of the reliefs or their order. The acts are distinct from each other in their content, yet they show a consistent development of the main theme. In the text we find many explicit references to individual speakers, a limited number of stage directions which would be difficult to explain except as parts of a drama, even a little elementary characterization. It is certainly 'dramatic,' it even has a certain degree of tension and excitement, and it is obviously designed to give an important part to a chorus and to cater for a strong element of audience participation."

[22]See ibid., 14-16, for Fairman's discussion on the reliefs. He suggests that the reverse order is a device to draw attention to the self-contained nature of these items.

as the five scenes of Act I, 9-10 as the two scenes of Act II, 11-13 as the three scenes of Act III, and the small rectangle in the upper left-hand corner of relief 13 as the epilogue. Each relief contains a hieroglyphic text and an illustration or "scene design" (Fairman suggests that these may be mime sequences). The script of the play is preserved in the chorus texts at the left of the relief, and a small text sequences above each figure. These identify the speaker and give the speech he or she has. An introductory choral speech begins most scenes and is preserved in a horizontal line of text across the top of the relief.

The basic theme of the play is the triumph of Horus, the god-king of the united kingdom of Upper and Lower Egypt, over his traditional enemy Seth. In the myth Seth is represented by the hippopotamus, and much of the play revolves around the harpooning of the hippopotamus and the eating of its flesh by the gods at the ritual banquet in Act III.[23]

Fairman indicates that while the ritual destruction of Seth provides the framework of the play the real theme is a nationalistic pride in the divine nature of the Egyptian kingship. The usurping Ptolemies were certain to be ousted as the true (reincarnated) Horus would one day be restored. If this evaluation is correct "The Triumph of Horus" is to be understood not as a re-enacted "ritual/liturgy" but as a kind of nationalistic propaganda statement—clearly understood by the people, but in the eyes of the foreign rulers of the nation a harmless cultic-religious ceremony that was essentially superstition.

The play is relatively short, the Padgate production running about an hour and ten minutes, and rather repetitious. In each scene except the last the rite of harpooning the hippopotamus forms a central motif. Elaborate descriptions of the valor of the king, the strength of his weapons and the bloody impaling of the animal are key items. In the last scene, which describes the annihilation of the enemy (Seth/hippopotamus), the hippopotamus is dismembered by the sacred butcher and the various parts of the animal offered to various gods of the pantheon who promptly devour them. The epilogue rehearses the numerous epithets of Horus in a fourfold choral song of triumph over the defeat of his enemies.

The impression gained from reading the Fairman script is that this piece is closer to "re-enacted ritual" than to drama in the full sense of the word. Certainly it shows the items mentioned above, but it still falls short of real dramatic confrontation. Of all the characters, Isis alone seems to show some development. The others, including Horus, seem to be stock characters of a rather flat sort. One wonders too at the violence of the script in the ritual slaughter, but given the content of so much contemporary film and television violence it is probably naive even to raise such an issue.[24] Yet it is certainly a piece that makes sense when in-

[23]Although the "Horus" text is late (third century B.C.) there is mention of a feast, "Harpooning the Hippopotamus," in the First Dynasty literature, and a seal impression of Udimu, fifth king of the First Dynasty, shows the king performing the harpooning and then wrestling with the hippopotamus. Similar material is extant all through the texts and inscriptions; cf. E. W. Fairman, *Triumph*, 34-35, 56-57, which suggests that the archaic language in the play is an indication that we are dealing with an ancient document that has been updated to the contemporary (Ptolemaic) period.

[24]In commenting on the second Padgate production D. Newton and D. Poole in ibid., 74, remark: "But at the end, it was Professor Fairman who indicated the underlying difficulty. He felt the second production had not only been worthwhile, but had added to the first, but, he said, there was 'Still not enough blood'. . . . "

terpreted as a drama. It is "produceable" without any major emendation to the text and with no arbitrary assignment of speeches to certain characters. It is also actable, albeit in a somewhat stylized and mime-oriented way. "The Triumph of Horus"—as it stands—makes good theatre.

In contrast to the Egyptian *Myth of Horus* material the presence of a Mesopotamian drama form is much more difficult to establish. Here again the key problem is one of definition. It is beyond question that the literary material that could even be considered in the "drama" category is closely associated with the cultic life of the Mesopotamian community. Saying that, however, is not saying that the cultic material is "dramatic" within the definition used above. Thorough examination of all the cultic material from ancient Mesopotamia would fill volumes, but in spite of the danger inherent in a somewhat arbitrary selection one must begin somewhere.

Jacobsen has suggested[25] that four types of drama may be identified in the early Mesopotamian literature: the sacred marriage drama, the mourning drama, the road of no return drama, and the search and fetch drama. All of these are associated with the fertility theme and are rituals carried on to ensure the fecundity of land, animals and people. These four, Jacobsen argues, continued into the first millennium when they were supplemented with the battle drama, a new type that memorialized the battles of Ninurta with Anzu, Asakku or Enmesharra, or of Marduk against Tiamat, Kingu, Anu or Enlil.

These themes have been discussed by both Jacobsen and Kramer,[26] and it is not my intention in this paper to discuss the ritualistic elements so obviously present in these texts. Of more immediate interest is whether these are in fact "drama" in the sense that we have used the term in the discussion of the Horus myth.

Admittedly it is dangerous to draw conclusions from selected material, but it appears to be safe to say that these mythic-poetic texts do not fit the definition of drama. Certainly there are elements of progression and climax—the preparation of the goddess and the bed for the rite, the trip to the bed and the detailed description of the consummation and the aftermath of the sacred marriage as such—but there is little or nothing in these texts of assigned speeches, stage direction, non-narrative style or character development. Rather the texts are very repetitious and highly descriptive with speeches by various, often unidentified, speakers interspersed with long narrative sections in standard poetic style. This last feature marks these poems as very different from the Horus myth where the narrative sections are very brief and in nonpoetic style. There they are fairly obviously "stage directions," while here they are part of the poem.

Jacobsen makes much of the "performance" of these rituals, thus in a magical way fulfilling the demands of the goddess and assuring fertility. He notes that there was even widespread "audience participation" in the fact that all the worshippers were to be involved in the cultic re-enactment. But again, this hardly makes for "drama"—ritual, yes; liturgy, yes; pageant, perhaps; but drama, no.

There is, however, one series of texts published by W. G. Lambert that depict

[25]T. Jacobsen, "Religious," 65-97.

[26]T. Jacobsen, "Religious"; S. N. Kramer, *Sacred*; idem, "Cuneiform."

a much more explicitly patterned ritual.[27] Lambert characterizes this reconstructed text as "some love lyrics between Marduk and Ishtar of Babylon," set in the framework of a ritual that took place at midday or evening on specific days, usually the fourth day of the month, "in the Street of Eturkalamma"—the temple of Ishtar—in Babylon. The text, as Lambert has reconstructed it, is a collection of seventeen fragments plus two fragments of what he calls the "Ritual Tablet." This badly-damaged latter document is a list of incipits of what are apparently texts to be recited in a particular order and at certain times with appropriate ritual acts. For example: 1:6, "as in the month Tammuz, the . . . th day"; 2:22, "This is what takes place on the 4th day at noon and in the evening in the Street of Eturkalamma and at the River"; 2:24, 3:4, "as on the fourth day"; 2:4, "one potstand which the *Kurgarru*-priest will . . . (. . .)"; 2:12-13, "The Lady will pass through the Gate of My Lady and will . . . (. . .); Zarpanitum will go down to the garden and will keep saying to the gardener"; 3:1, "From the House of Lament to the Bīt Qulê he/she will stand in front of Ninayitum"; 3:5-6, "Facing the Akitu of Sarrat-Nippuri he/she will stand and . . . from the Akitu to the city-gate of Uras"; 3:10-12, "He/she will . . . and will depart from the city gate and facing Hursagkalamma the *Kurgarru*-priest will kneel on his knees and recite prayers and utter his chants. He will arise and sing"; 4:3-4, "(This is what takes place . . .) at noon and in the evening in the Street of Eturkalamma . . . (. . .) (so many) lines, the regular rites . . . (. . .)."[28] Lambert argues that this "Ritual Text" gives an outline into which the other fragmentally preserved poetic units can be fitted. Unfortunately the texts are so fragmentary that it is impossible to reconstruct the whole ritual in any meaningful way, but there is enough to get a good concept of the general tenor of the whole and precise knowledge at a number of specific points.

There are three main characters in the ritual: Marduk, his consort Zarpanitum, and his mistress Ishtar of Babylon. She is identified as his "girl friend" (*tappattu*) or "concubine" (*k/qinîtu*). The speakers in the various sections are usually suggested by grammatical hints rather than by name, and the speeches are interspersed with narrative sections. Lambert comments that the speeches have a lyrical tone very rare in cuneiform and that the "bold imagery and most explicit eroticism" have few parallels in ancient Mesopotamia.[29] The scene ap-

[27]W. G. Lambert, "The Problem of the Love Lyrics," in H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts, eds., *Unity*, 98-135. An earlier treatment of these fragments is W. G. Lambert, "Divine Love Lyrics from Babylon," *JSS* 4 (1959) 1-15. Cf. idem, "The Cult of Ishtar of Babylon," *Le Temple et le Cult* (*CRAIBL* 20 [1975]) 104-106, for a brief treatment of another twelve fragments now included in his "Problem" essay.

[28]The reference numbers used in this paper are arbitrarily chosen for convenience. The first figure is the number assigned to the individual fragment under consideration. The figures after the colon are the lines quoted. Since some of the publications number lines on the recto and verso of a tablet consecutively and others number them separately, I have found it expedient to assign a separate "fragment number" to the recto, verso or separate column of a given side whenever the publication begins renumbering lines. This leads to the possibility of some confusion, but it seems to be the least difficult approach. See Appendix for documentation of the texts and a chart of the numbers I have assigned to them.

[29]Perhaps the closest in content (but not lyricism) would be some of the *SA.ZI.GA.* potency incantations (cf. R. D. Biggs, *SA.ZI.GA. Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations* [Locust Valley, N. Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1967]), although these are an entirely different genre. Turin Papyrus No. 58001 would be the closest from the Egyptian literature.

pears to shift from the temple (palace?) of Ishtar to the bedchamber (6), to the river and canals (7, 10:4), back to the bedchamber (or to a second one? [9:4] 11:10), to a banquet (12), to a garden (13) in the temple of Eturkalamma (Ishtar) (13), to the river (14:13). Much of this is of course speculative, owing to the condition of the texts, but this general outline seems at least consistent with the texts.

Unfortunately even this material contains little that marks it as "drama." The assigning of specific texts to specific situations on the basis of the incipits in the "Ritual Tablet" is a valid method even if some different assignment of the fragments is in fact more correct. But the "Ritual Tablet" is not a script as the Horus relief is. Lambert remarks that "the Ritual Tablet is clearly only one of a series, which presumably covered the whole year." [30] Thus, while the "Ritual Tablet" could be a kind of stage manager's cue sheet, Lambert's comment suggests rather that it is more like a section from a "Book of Common Prayer" or a missal.

The texts can be read in sequence and the "pageant" aspect of the material is at least imaginable, but as the material now stands it would make very poor theatre.

It will be apparent by now that I find the use of the term "drama" out of place in describing most of this ancient literature. Only in the *Horus Myth* is there unambiguous evidence of "drama," and this in its present form from long after the golden age of Greek drama. But at least it is actable without major emendation of the text and without arbitrary manipulation of the material.

But to return to the question which is central to this paper: Is Canticles a "sacred marriage" drama? Immediately we encounter a two-pronged problem: the identification of Canticles as a "sacred marriage" ritual and the identification of Canticles as "drama." And in this area we are dealing with more problems of definition. The myth of Horus is drama, but it has nothing to do with sacred marriage rites; the Mesopotamian ritual text and its related poems appear to be sacred marriage rites, but if our discussion above is valid it has nothing to do with "drama." Does Canticles somehow bridge the gap between these two genres? This question is not an easy one and the answer must of necessity extend far beyond the scope of this paper, but the following summary can be offered.

First, there are a number of interesting parallels between Canticles and the ritual text and its accompanying poems. Lambert makes this comparison: "Both are love poetry with no apparent sequence or development. In both there are frequent changes of speaker and at times narrative or monologue occurs. In both scenes change and the lovers appear to have left their metropolitan environment." [31] Certainly there are a number of standard *topoi* that are shared by these literatures (as well as with the Egyptian love poetry from the New Kingdom period): Perfumes, plants, animals, descriptive songs, songs of adornment, and so forth, are all common to this literature.[32] But is there sufficient evidence in the

[30]W. G. Lambert, "Problem," 98. The colophon of the Ritual Tablet (4:4) indicates that these are the "regular rites" (*kīnajātu*).

[31]W. G. Lambert, *JSS* 4 (1959) 7.

[32]See most recently J. B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978).

text of the Song as it now stands to sustain Kramer's argument—noted above—that Canticles is "a collection of love lyrics some of which may have been sung at a Palestinian Sacred Marriage Rite going back to Sumerian roots"? [33] Here the answer must be "No." In spite of numerous attempts to identify a yearly enthronement festival in Israel in which the reigning king, representing the fertility deity Yahweh, re-enacts the rites, no convincing case has yet been made.[34]

Second, it needs to be asked if Canticles and the Mesopotamian ritual texts reflect a similar form. Here the answer is a qualified negative. Even allowing for the fragmentary nature of the ritual texts it is difficult to imagine any essential unity in them. With Canticles, however, in spite of the lack of scholarly unanimity on the question a reasonable case can be made for the unity of the work.[35] Some of the same elements are present in the ritual texts and Canticles, but Canticles is more cohesive.

Nor does Canticles have in the text the kind of thing the ritual texts contain: instructions to participants regarding order of speeches, actions to be performed, or stage blocking. Where these elements do occur in Canticles they are in the narrative itself and form an integral part of the speeches. For example Cant 3:6-11 is a description of the wedding procession coming up from the desert, but it is couched in the language of conversation, not direction. Similarly Cant 4:8b, "Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards," is an invitation to the woman, not a direction to the actors and stage crew.

Third, one of the major difficulties in classifying Canticles as "drama" has been the proper assigning of speeches to different characters. As early as the

[33]S. N. Kramer, *Sacred*, 84.

[34]For a concise summary of the issue and the problems involved see E. Yamauchi, "Cultic Clues in Canticles?", *BETS* 4 (1961) 80-88. Note 21 to this article reads in part as follows: "Kramer (in a personal communication, August 2, 1961) maintains the cultic interpretation of Canticles with modifications by assuming: 1) that the Hebrew scribes would not spend their time transcribing secular love songs, therefore the songs that were transcribed were probably ritual in character; 2) that since the lover is designated as both king and shepherd, his beloved was probably an Astarte votary (with Solomon's partiality for the cult of Astarte); 3) that the Hebrew love songs, which are similar to the Sumerian ones used in 'sacred marriage' rites, were probably used in similar Hebrew 'sacred marriages'; 4) that such a 'sacred marriage' would not likely have arisen independently but would probably have been derived from Mesopotamia; and 5) that it was the king—Solomon—not Yahweh, who married the goddess Astarte."

Yamauchi continues: "Though Kramer's reasoning is less speculative than that of Meek's, we would raise the following questions as to his assumptions: 1) Even less likely to me than the notion of the Hebrew scribes transcribing secular love songs is the notion of them transcribing pagan cultic songs to be preserved in the canon. 2) The designation of the lover as a king and as a shepherd does not constitute strong evidence that his beloved was an Astarte votary. 3) The striking similarity of the Sumerian love songs to Canticles does not prove the latter's derivation from the former any more than the striking similarity of Canticles to Arabic and Egyptian love songs. 4) The 'sacred marriage' in Israel is a pure hypothecation. There is no explicit, unambiguous reference to the *hieros gamos* in the Bible. Meek's reference to the marriage allusions in Hosea is curious, not convincing. If it be argued that these references were 'sublimated,' it may be asked why all the other explicit references to Moloch, to Baal, to idolatry, etc., were not also suppressed."

[35]For a recent summary of the options see M. Pope, *Song of Songs* (AB 7C; 1977) 40-54. J. C. Exum, "A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs," *ZAW* 85 (1973) 47-79, presents a detailed study of the structure of the Song, concluding that it shows "a unity of authorship with intentional design, and a sophistication of poetic style" (49, 78).

fourth century the scribe of Codex Sinaiticus had made marginal notes assigning speeches and indicating to whom they were addressed, but there has been no agreement on either the divisions or the assignments in subsequent writers. In the same way the act/scene divisions have been widely divergent, with almost as many different suggestions as there are commentators.[36] Again this is in direct contrast to the Egyptian and Mesopotamian "drama scripts."

Finally, it is necessary to look at Canticles from the point of view of a theatrical technician. Considerable experience in theatrical production and direction has persuaded me that Canticles, as it stands, is unactable. It would be virtually impossible to stage effectively without major rewriting, and even if staged it lacks sufficient dramatic punch to hold an audience. One could, perhaps, choreograph a dance routine around 6:13-7:11 (if we knew what a *mḥlt mḥnym* looked like) or a "rumble" à la *West Side Story* around 5:6-8. Or, if one followed Seerveld's woodcuts for wardrobe, one would probably get an audience but the show would still fail dramatically. A play is the result of the combined effort and contributions of an author, director, actors and technical crews, but without a viable script the director, actors and technicians are left floundering. Canticles would leave them doing just that.

In summary, while the Song of Songs reflects many motifs and *topoi* that are common in ancient Near Eastern love poetry and sacred marriage rituals, it is only by extensive and subjective emendation and manipulation of the text that any sort of "sacred marriage drama" can be found here. Canticles is lyric love poetry, not drama.

APPENDIX

The numbers assigned to the Mesopotamian ritual fragments and love lyrics published by W. G. Lambert in H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts, *Unity*, are as follows:

1. BM 41107 obv., col. i.
2. BM 41005 obv. ii, col. ii.
3. BM 41005 obv. iii, col. iii.
4. BM 41107 rev. iv, col. iv.
5. "Group I," "Section I": K4247+8492+13760+15375 obv. i, lines 1-38; K7924 obv. i, lines 14-49; 83-1-18, 464 obv., lines 32-44; BM 33879 (Rm IV 441), lines 1-33.
6. "Group I," "Section II": K7924 obv. ii.
7. "Group I," "Section III": K4247 rev. iv or vi, lines 6-35; 83-1-18, 464 rev., lines 1-15.

[36]For example, the *RSV* has 30 stanza divisions with no speakers named; the *NEB* has 38 divided among the bride, the bridegroom and the companions; the *Living Bible* has 33 shared by Solomon, the girl and the young women of Jerusalem; the *JB* has 26 including a prologue and four appendices supplementing the speeches of the bride, bridegroom and chorus. Segond in the French version makes 12 divisions, the Vg incipits indicate 44 as the correct number, and the rabbinic division provides 21 segments with no apparent concern for speakers. Exum, "Literary," makes 29 units in a series of parallel poems and inclusions with the two lovers as the principal characters, supported by the daughters of Jerusalem. R. Gordis, *The Song of Songs* (KTAV, 1974) 35-37, identifies 28 "songs and fragments" classified under nine different motifs and patterns. F. Delitzsch suggests a six-act, twelve-scene "melodrama," although he does remark that the Song "is not a theatrical piece" (11).

8. "Group I," "Section IV": K7924 rev. iii.
9. "Group I," "Section V": K7924 rev. iv.
10. "Group II": K6606+9944+Sm 1891+82-5-22, 569: Column A.
11. Same, Column B.
12. Same, Column C.
13. "Group III": K6082+81-7-27, 241: Column A.
14. Same, Column B.
15. Same, Column C.
16. "Group IV": LKA 92, K 212a, lines 1-23; 81-2-4, 294 obv., lines 12-23; + restoration of lines 18-22 from BM 46336+46371 obv., lines 9-11.
17. RM 385 (dup. in obv. by BM 46336+46371 rev., lines 8-18).