

Jane Ellen Harrison: The Early Work

Robert Ackerman

I

THE CAMBRIDGE RITUALISTS were Jane Ellen Harrison, Gilbert Murray, Francis Macdonald Cornford and Arthur Bernard Cook, who, from about 1900 to 1915, worked together on the origins of Greek religion and the origins of Greek drama.¹ For me the group is best approached by focusing on the career of Jane Harrison, with the work of Murray, Cornford and Cook seen in its relationship to her. Since each member of the group was a considerable scholar in his own right, this decision calls for comment.

¹ It should be noted that in terms of friendship and collaboration—the criteria by which one may fairly judge Miss Harrison and her friends truly to have constituted a group—Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941), though a lifelong Cantabrigian, was not a member of this or any other Cambridge group. The reasons lay in basic dissimilarities of temperament and intellectual outlook (it is of course no contradiction to say that the group was strongly influenced by Frazer’s work). Examples of the temperamental and personal differences abound. Two may suffice. Despite the undeniable beauty of his prose style Frazer was practically unable to function in the give-and-take of ordinary conversation and never engaged in controversy except in writing (see Bronislaw Malinowski, “Sir James George Frazer: A Biographical Appreciation,” in *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays* [Chapel Hill 1944] 181–82); by contrast, the members of the group, and in the highest degree Miss Harrison, were all sociable persons. Frazer’s inaccessibility was heightened when, at the age of forty-five (and much to the surprise of academic Cambridge), he married; his wife, by all accounts an exceedingly formidable woman, set herself up as the door-keeper of her famous spouse, deciding who might and who might not gain access to the great man. See the amusing postscript Miss Harrison adds to her letter of February 1901 to Lady Mary Murray, in which she describes a conversation with Mrs Frazer: “P.S.—Mrs. Frazer (your double!) has been sitting on my bed for two hours, telling me ‘who not to know’, i.e. who has not paid Mr. Frazer ‘proper attention’! This is the price I pay for a few shy radiant moments under the Golden Bough—Good conservative tho I am I am ready for any reform in the Game Laws for the Preserving of Eminent Husbands.” Jessie Stewart, *Jane Ellen Harrison: A Portrait in Letters* (London 1959) 37; hereafter STEWART.

As a result, relations between Frazer and the group were correct but no more. Aside from that remarkable class in Hebrew taught by Professor Kennett that had as its members Frazer, Miss Harrison, Cook and Cornford (Stewart 171), there is little evidence of intimacy or collaboration between Frazer and the others. In the voluminous Frazer correspondence in Trinity College Library there are perhaps a dozen communications to the members of the group, nearly all of them perfunctory. On the other side, there was respect tinged with

To understand in what way the Cambridge Ritualists *were* a group, one must know something of Jane Harrison's life and temperament. She was one of that talented first generation of women admitted to English university education, entering the recently established Newnham College, Cambridge, in 1875. She and others like her (one thinks of her contemporary fellow Yorkshirewoman Beatrice Potter Webb) showed that women, given the training, could pursue and attain the highest goals of intellectual life. She was born 9 September 1850 (four years before Frazer) into an upper-middle-class Nonconformist family and, like all women of her time and class, educated at home by a series of governesses. Fortunately, after some struggle on her part, her exceptional gifts caused her to be sent away to school at Ladies' College, Cheltenham, in 1867 and then on to Newnham. Nevertheless, she suffered (or claimed she did) throughout her life from having begun the study of Greek relatively late, and despite her obvious *Sprachgefühl*, she never was as competent in her philological scholarship as she would have wished.²

This matter of her adequacy in scholarship had important consequences throughout her life. Miss Harrison was, in every period of her adult life, always connected in a deeply emotional way with some male scholar of (supposedly) superior philological attainments who acted as a technical adviser and, just as importantly, as an essential emotional support. First it was the art historian D. S. MacColl, and then Francis Cornford, with both of whom she seems to have been in love.³

irreverence, as witnessed in an unpublished letter from Miss Harrison to Murray dated January 1910 in which she asks him to compose a few Greek sentences that she might use in inscribing one of her books to Frazer. "The real λόγος of this letter is to ask you to make an inscription for old Adonis. I must send him a copy as his greatest joy is to think he influences the trend of modern thought and I have no Liddell and Scott—pity my desolation . . . Please write *something*—he will never know your neat little footprint." In the margin Mrs Stewart glosses "old Adonis" as Frazer. This and other unpublished letters of Miss Harrison appear with the kind permission of Miss M. E. Lane.

² In her pamphlet on Russian aspects she lists the languages she has learned, "in a scrappy and discreditable way." These included, among living tongues, three Romance, three Scandinavian, German, three Oriental and five dead languages—plus Russian, of course, which she learned so well in her sixties that she taught it after the War. *Aspects, Aorists and the Classical Tripes* (Cambridge 1919) 6.

³ MacColl (1859–1948) is something of an exception in that he was not a philologist but an art historian (later Keeper of the Tate Gallery); at the beginning of her career, however, Miss Harrison was more closely involved with art history than with classical scholarship, so that, *mutatis mutandis*, his rôle was exactly the same as that of the scholars to be discussed below.

There were as well older men with whom she was likewise close, although probably not in love: as an undergraduate it was her teacher A. W. Verrall (to whom *Prolegomena* was dedicated),⁴ in her first years back at Newnham R. A. Neil;⁵ and then there were A. B. Cook and, pre-eminently, Gilbert Murray, both younger men, to both of whom she was deeply attached. And of course each of these men, in his own way, returned her affection. It is thus possible to see the Cambridge group, biographically speaking, as a particular happy time in Jane Harrison's life, when her emotional and intellectual energies were most closely bound up with those of its three other members. In one sense, then, the reason for the group's coming-to-be was that Jane Harrison had a need for making passionate intellectual friendships.

If this hypothesis is generally correct, it may explain how and why each member of the group was close to Jane Harrison but not how or why they were a group. Here we must de-emphasize sentiment and point to the fact that she was the center because she seems, at least in the early years, to have had a broader conception of their common subject matter than any of the others. For this reason she was able to afford each of the others an important intellectual stimulus, just as she had done with men like Verrall and MacColl, who were in no sense members. The exception here is Cornford, who met Miss Harrison at the outset of his career; one is sure that their intense personal relationship was instrumental in determining the direction and tone of Cornford's scholarly work.⁶ Although each man had independently been attracted to the ethnographic approach to the classics, she was able to broaden all of them by introducing them to material to which they were largely strangers. Specifically, she was able to offer a wide and deep knowledge of Greek art and archaeology, and later of contemporary work on religion, psychology, sociology and philosophy, that was invaluable to Cook, originally a folklorist; to Murray, originally a literary and textual scholar; and to Cornford, originally a student of philosophy. And, reciprocally, their work extended her

⁴ For Verrall, see the memoir by M. A. Bayfield in A. W. Verrall, *Collected Literary Essays Classical and Modern* (Cambridge 1913) ix–cii.

⁵ Miss Hope Mirrlees, Miss Harrison's closest friend at the end of her life, told me in August 1969 that Miss Harrison was thinking seriously of marrying Neil when he died suddenly.

⁶ Murray in his obituary of Cornford emphasizes the crucial influence Miss Harrison had on Cornford's early work. "Francis Macdonald Cornford, 1874–1943," *ProcBritAc* 29 (1943) 421–32.

own areas of interest and competence, so that their collaboration must have been deeply satisfying and exciting in an intellectual sense. As Gilbert Murray wrote in retrospect to her biographer Jessie Stewart, “We were as you say a remarkable group; we somehow had the same general aim and outlook, or something, and the work of each contributed to the work of the others. We were out to see what things really meant, looking for a new light our elders had not seen.”⁷

All this might help to explain certain social facts otherwise perhaps difficult to account for: e.g., how it was that around 1905 Francis M. Cornford, then a newly elected fellow of Trinity College, and Gilbert Murray, former professor of Greek at Glasgow, nearly ten years his senior, and without a college affiliation at Cambridge, should have become close friends and co-workers. This is not impossible on its face, but given the rather rigidly stratified social and academic world of British universities at the time, it is unusual, to say the least. The answer is that they, along with Cook, first came together in their affection for Jane Harrison. It is difficult to be absolutely sure now because the only letters that have survived in any appreciable numbers are those of Miss Harrison to Murray, but it is likely that each man in the group, especially in the early years, was closer to Miss Harrison than to any of the others.⁸

The evidence for this interpretation of Miss Harrison’s life is abundant but difficult to summarize. The main document is the biography of Jessie Stewart, first Miss Harrison’s student and then her close friend from 1900 onwards. This work, subtitled “A Portrait from Letters,” is based on the more than eight hundred letters from Miss Harrison

⁷ Stewart 83. The combination of intellectual and moral stimulation and generous friendship that Jane Harrison provided is attested in the prefaces to Murray’s *Rise of the Greek Epic* (1907) and *Four [later Five] Stages of Greek Religion* (1912), where he states that his first two chapters are merely recapitulations of *Themis*; and Cornford in his prefaces to *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (1907), *From Religion to Philosophy* (1912), and *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (1914) everywhere acknowledges her extraordinary assistance and magnanimity. Others of her friends, writing in the *Newnham College Letter* after she died or else in the Jane Harrison Memorial Lectures, give glowing witness to Miss Harrison’s personal qualities. And Miss Harrison from her side gives eloquent testimony to Murray and Cornford for their assistance and friendship in the introductions to *Prolegomena* (1903); *Themis* (1912), to which both contributed chapters; and *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913). Cornford’s dedication of *Thucydides Mythistoricus* to Miss Harrison reads: ὄναρ ἀντ’ ὄνειράτων πολλῶν τε καὶ καλῶν.

⁸ One can sense the deepening friendship between Murray and Cornford in my “Some Letters of the Cambridge Ritualists,” *GRBS* 12 (1971) 113–36. However, the earliest letters between them that I found dated from 1907, after they had known each other for some years.

to Gilbert Murray that date from 1900 to the end of her life. The letters naturally permit unequivocal judgements only about Miss Harrison's relationship to Murray, but Mrs Stewart supplies a great deal more from her own memory and the memories (and some letters) of others; she makes it clear (without being indiscreet) that Miss Harrison's life really consisted in a series of these passionate scholarly collaborations. Miss Harrison herself alludes to this in her own memoir, characteristically called *Reminiscences of a Student's Life*:

By what miracle I escaped marriage, I do not know, for all my life long I fell in love. But, on the whole, I am glad. I do not doubt that I lost much, but I am quite sure that I gained more. Marriage, for a woman at least, hampers the two things that made life to me glorious—friendship and learning.⁹

Mrs Stewart as well provides specific evidence concerning the profound depression that settled over Miss Harrison's life when Francis Cornford married in 1909. Cornford's young wife, Frances Darwin, sensed that Miss Harrison—"Aunt Jane" as they called her (until she asked them not to)—was in love with him even though she was old enough to be his mother.¹⁰

II

Reading anything by or about Miss Harrison, one is struck equally by her intellectual power and her passionate nature. From without,

⁹ (London 1925) 88: the entire memoir has been reprinted in *Arion* 4 (1965) 312–46. See also Miss Harrison's deeply moving letter to Francis Darwin, Cornford's fiancée, in Ackerman, *op.cit.* (*supra* n. 8) 121, in which she speaks of the pain attendant on Cornford's natural withdrawal from her as his relationship to Miss Darwin deepened.

¹⁰ In an unpublished note made in connection with the preparation of the biography (preserved in Newnham College Library), Mrs Stewart writes that Miss Harrison was likewise apparently in love with MacColl, with whom she traveled to Greece in 1888. She was told by those who knew Miss Harrison in the nineties that she went into a deep depression when MacColl married in 1897, despite the fact that she had refused him earlier. In an unpublished letter to Lady Mary Murray, written 15 March 1902, on the occasion of Murray's lecturing at Newnham on *Hippolytus*, Miss Harrison says: "I often reflect on the sorrows of being married to a genius because genius is like God who belongs to everyone up to the limits of their power to comprehend. I long ago refused to marry a man I cared for because he was a genius [MacColl, presumably] and some instinct told me I dared not and tho I am an oldish woman and fairly lonely I have never repented." For a description of her reaction to Cornford's marriage, and his typically male astonishment when told by his wife what Miss Harrison's real feelings were, see Stewart 112. (Unpublished Stewart materials used by kind permission of Mrs Stewart's daughter, Mrs Jean Pace, of Cambridge.)

she lends herself to easy paradoxes: a tough-minded sentimentalist,¹¹ a woman who could speak of “falling in love” with Greek or Russian and who became excited about grammar, an intellectual who always kept an engaging childlike quality. But these are merely paradoxes; they resolve into a unified being, one of those rare and fortunate persons who seem to recognize no barriers between specialist knowledge and everyday life and who bring to both an extraordinary energy and integrity.

One of the keys to understanding Miss Harrison’s life and achievement is perfectly obvious, but bears naming nevertheless—she was a woman. That is, if we may deal in generalizations, as a female she had not been brought up to stifle the expression of emotion, as had the majority of her male colleagues. After all, women in mid-Victorian England were supposed to be repositories of emotion, if little else. Likewise she was not as constrained as were her fellows by existing models of proper scholarly behavior. This is not to deny her male friends and colleagues their individuality nor to assume that they were all conformists. I merely allude to the obvious fact, true then as now, that in England men were not permitted the same range of emotional expression as women. Nor am I arguing that once her sex is noted everything about Miss Harrison becomes clear. But nothing can be understood without starting from that point.

Because she was a woman I am sure (without being able to prove it) that to some extent at least her world found her behavior charming (and excusable), where the same behavior in a man would have been thought childish or bizarre. For instance, she seems never to have lost the habit or ability, which psychologists tell us is common in children but tends to die out with maturity, of thinking in pictures—eidetic imagery. (She was intensely visual, as her ten years of lecturing and writing on art demonstrate.) Thus, once she became friendly with Murray she gave him two nicknames—Cheiron, from the kindly, sage centaur, and Ther, from *θήρ*—and in her letters never addressed him otherwise. In a letter to him from Algiers during Christmas 1902, she writes: “How absurd it is for this Polar Bear to be sent southward and a thin Kangaroo to be leaping about in the snow.”¹² Translation: her theriomorph is the bear (she kept an old teddybear as a promi-

¹¹ An unpublished letter to Murray of 1904 happily quotes A. W. Verrall’s description of her as one who “simply reeks of ‘sentiment’.”

¹² Stewart 34.

ment item of furniture in her rooms at Newnham, and was passionately fond of anything ursine), and his is the kangaroo because he was Australian. Now this may be dismissed as embarrassing playfulness between friends, never intended for other eyes. But it does testify to something deeper: her natural intuitive feeling for what may be called (with all due reservations) "primitive" modes of thought. She even personified her books. She called *Prolegomena* "the fat and comely one," whereas the copy of Nauck's fragments of Euripides, a gift from Murray, became "the slim handsome one."¹³ And in describing the Orphic tablets translated by Murray and printed as an appendix to *Themis*, she writes: "What a beautiful learned appendix and how therish it is!"¹⁴ Or she opens her review of J. C. Lawson's *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* by exclaiming, "Who loves not Cheiron?"¹⁵

But this playful and sentimental tendency toward the primitive and the 'natural' tempered a profoundly rationalistic and intellectual nature. Miss Harrison was perhaps a sport in the world of classical scholarship of her time (or any time), but she was not there by sufferance. She was able to hold her own in a world of men who at the time employed the most rigorous scholarly criteria of all the various divisions of humane letters. And it was the whole woman—the whole person—whose work is here in question; the woman who could write (in 1913), acknowledging the rôle of sex in what seem to be purely 'intellectual' matters, "We watch the physical and emotional sides of knowledge in our own minds: anyone who makes even a small mental discovery can note the sudden uprush of emotion, often a hot blush, sometimes tears in the eyes. How can such a sensuous process be insulated from a thing so interpenetrating as sex?"¹⁶

After encountering such an insight from a lady in her sixties, one is not surprised to learn that she was one of the earliest partisans—albeit an unwilling one, for her style of life had been formed in a more inhibited area—of Freud in England. Her advocacy of his work is only

¹³ *Ibid.* In an undated letter quoted by Stewart, *loc.cit.* (*supra* n.4), Miss Harrison writes, "Nauck's old mottled cheeks are shining with joy because he has got a really sound inscription in him."

¹⁴ Stewart 35. A favourite word in her letters is 'therish', which means anything especially admirable because natural and instinctive.

¹⁵ CR 24 (1911) 181.

¹⁶ "Scientiae Sacra Fames," in *Alpha and Omega* (London 1915) 107. The paper was originally delivered in 1913.

the best example of her amazing willingness to remain open to new thoughts or, what is nearly as good, to recognize her prejudices as such and compensate for them. In a delightful and revealing essay called “‘Crabbed Age and Youth’,” she takes as her text a remark much repeated in recent years but apparently uttered for the first time by Rupert Brooke as an undergraduate: “No one over thirty is worth speaking to.” Her reaction is characteristic and worth quoting:

Now, when I had recovered from the blow to my personal vanity—for, of course it was nothing else—I said to myself: “This is really very interesting and extraordinarily valuable. Here we have, not a reasoned conclusion, but a real live emotion, a good solid prejudice, a genuine attitude of gifted Youth to Crabbed Age. Give me an honest prejudice, and I am always ready to attend to it.” The reasons by which people back up their prejudices are mostly negligible—not reason at all at bottom, but just instinctive self-justifications; but prejudice, rising as it does in emotion, has its roots in life and reality.¹⁷

The passage embodies the wit and the remarkable wholeness of mind and heart that characterize her best work. It is playful paradox, to be sure, but it goes deep. For all of Jane Harrison’s mature scholarly thought was an attempt to get down behind and beneath rationalization to deeper-lying, and therefore (to her) more authentic, emotion. And thus her idea of religion, inspired by Emile Durkheim, another of the Continental thinkers whose work she helped to assimilate and disseminate, is that it “is not the aspiration of the individual soul after a god, or after the unknown, or after the infinite; rather it is the expression, utterance, projection of the emotion, the desire of a group . . . Religion, in its rise, is indistinguishable from social custom, embodying social emotion.”¹⁸ I shall not examine these ideas more closely now; the point here is that the tone of this serious intellectual dismissal of theology and the emphasis on prerational social emotion is of a piece with the playful rhetoric of the more personal passage from “‘Crabbed Age and Youth’” that likewise denigrates social rationalizations in favor of “emotion [that] has its roots in life and reality.” In the latter essay she goes on to say that she has remained

¹⁷ *Alpha and Omega* 3. In the essay Miss Harrison does not name the “utterer of the doom,” but Brooke is identified in Christopher Hassall’s biography, *Rupert Brooke* (New York 1964) 108.

¹⁸ “Unanimism and Conversion,” *Alpha and Omega* (*supra* n.16) 50, 51.

young by continuing to share one of youth's leading traits, a burning insistence on following the truth wherever it leads. One believes it to be true of her as of few others.

We have here a complex of behavior and belief in the life of one woman. We can say of her that she had a temperamental predilection toward the primitive and the emotional as more authentic than the developed and the reasoned, but invoking 'temperament' is notoriously a way of excusing one's inability to proceed further in analysis. Or we can point to her fundamental understanding of the emotional basis of all human behavior and her view of the interpenetration of what were conventionally distinguished as mental and physical, but these beliefs certainly do not explain her expressive style. In fact we have come full circle: her emotional nature causing ideas that enhance feeling over reason to appear reasonable to her, and the ideas themselves being presented in a personal, passionate, 'unscholarly' manner. We may fairly employ here the language usually reserved for the criticism of literature: both the manner and matter of Jane Harrison's mature work form an integrated whole, both being the products of a unified vision of life. Thus, in an unpublished letter to Jessie Stewart, Miss Hope Mirrlees, her closest friend during her last, 'Russian' period (see PLATE 7), wrote: "I am sure that you must realize the really great problems that we should have to deal with if a full life of Jane were written, as the intellectual and sentimental strands are inextricably interwoven."¹⁹

The passion with which she imbued her beliefs has another facet in her love for language. She tells us in her charming and all-too-brief memoir that if she had her life to live over again she would change but one thing: instead of devoting herself to primitive religion, she would become a student of language. Her purpose would not have been to become a mere polyglot; rather, in the best romantic spirit, she felt that truly learning a language is the best and only way to enter into the collective soul of its speakers. She says, in her little book on Russian aspects: "Twice in my life it happened to me to fall in love with a language. Once, long ago, with Greek. Again, only yesterday, with Russian . . ."²⁰ Thus it was that her life, which had lost its *raison d'être* with the collapse of all scholarly work and loss of friends atten-

¹⁹ Letter of 1 July 1954, in the Jessie Stewart papers in Newnham College Library, and used with Miss Mirrlees' kind permission.

²⁰ *Aspects, Aorists and the Classical Tripes* (*op.cit.*, *supra* n.2) 3.

dant upon the outbreak of war, regained its momentum in the study of Russian. And when in 1915, in an attempt to teach English to Russian emigrés, she began the language in earnest, she stopped all work on classics.²¹ Her *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1921), though its title intentionally evokes the *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* of 1903, is not primarily about Greek religion at all but is rather a deeply personal and mystical attempt to synthesize the ideas on philosophy, psychology and religion that had grown out of her work.

III

Having got somewhat ahead of the story, it is fitting to return to the beginning and tell it in a more orderly fashion. Miss Harrison, having been passed over at graduation for a classical lectureship at Newnham,²² settled in London, lecturing and studying at the British Museum. During these London years (the eighties) she became a fluent German scholar and took several trips abroad, visiting the great Continental museums, especially those of Germany. The valuable lessons she learned in Europe and in her work at the British Museum, especially in the interpretation of pottery and other artifacts, are everywhere to be seen in the abundant illustrations that may be said to constitute a trademark of all her works. They are also evident in the way in which she consistently based her arguments primarily on things, not words. She was always basically an archaeologist rather than a philologist.

During these years she supported herself by writing and lecturing. And from Mrs Stewart's biography we know that it was also during these years (specifically the late eighties), that she passed through a profound crisis. The change this produced in her is readily revealed by a comparison of these early writings with the dramatically different later work.

Listen to her in the preface of *Introductory Studies in Greek Art*, first published in 1885.²³ She begins by asking why we should study Greek art.

²¹ Her last piece of classical scholarship was the review article on "Greek Religion and Mythology" for the 1915 *Year's Work in Classical Studies*.

²² In favor of the "safer" Margaret Merrifield, later Mrs A. W. Verrall. See Stewart 10.

²³ Jane Harrison, *Introductory Studies in Greek Art* (London 1885). Page references to be given in parentheses in the text. The book remained popular enough to reach a fifth edition by 1902.

The answer is, I believe, found in a certain peculiar quality of Greek art which adapts itself to the consciousness of successive ages, which has within it no seed of possible death,—a certain largeness and universality which outlived the individual race and persists for all time. The meaning of this quality, which we call Ideality, it is the sole object of this little book to develope.

The heart of the book is a critical examination of the sculpture of Phidias, about which she says,

Greek literature is the best and only comment on Greek art; what is expressed but undefined in Phidias is clearly articulate in Plato.

And she concludes (p. vi):

I shall be satisfied if, by the help of the wisdom of Plato, I can show any of the citizens of the state why, eschewing the dry bones of symbolism and still more warily shunning the rank, unwholesome pastures of modern realism, they may nurture their souls on the fair sights and pure visions of Ideal art.

This paragraph is as far as one can be from the Jane Harrison of after 1890. A reader of her later work would turn hundreds of pages in vain to see a mention of the word 'Ideality', with a capital I, for she is no longer interested in it. In fact, the mature work of Miss Harrison and her fellow Ritualists may be thought of as a countermovement to the idealizing tendency that so clammily chills nearly every discussion of Greek art through the nineteenth century. Indeed, in her later work she never even gets to Phidias and the fifth century; her whole focus shifts to the Archaic Age, and the statues that figure as illustrations are the early Korai of the seventh and sixth centuries. And as for Greek literature—and Plato, no less!—being the best and only commentary on Greek art, one can say only that just as her attention turns to Archaic art, so it turns to pre-classical literature. Plato will rarely be quoted; her most frequent references will be to antiquarian writers and collectors of, and commentators on, old myths and rituals. Literature will be ransacked to provide illustrations of rituals fallen into desuetude more than read for its own sake. And as for the "rank, unwholesome pastures of modern realism,"

one can only wince at the podsnappery and recall that the eighties featured the famous trials in which Henry Vizetelly, Zola's translator and publisher in England, was prosecuted by the National Vigilance Association and twice convicted of selling obscene literature. The attitudes suggested here are in fact completely uncharacteristic of the later Miss Harrison, who is remarkably free of the prudery which one might expect in a lady of good Victorian upbringing.²⁴

The passage quoted above from *Introductory Studies in Greek Art* presents the characteristic tone of the early Jane Harrison. But in that work can also be found the elements typical of the mature work of the next decades. For example, from the first chapter (p.2) come these words about the quest for origins:

In bygone days of art-criticism originality was claimed for the Greeks as their especial, distinguishing gift. Original they were, but not in the narrow sense of borrowing nothing from their predecessors. The historic instinct is wide awake among us now. We seek with a new-won earnestness to know the genesis, the *origines* of whatever we study . . . If critics in the past approached archaeology from the artistic and purely contemplative standpoint, critics of today incline to its historical, scientific aspect. Hence our first duty in speaking of Greek art is to show by the light of recent discoveries its relation to the art of Egypt, Assyria, and Phoenicia which preceded it.

This is the authentic nineteenth-century obsession with history that was a dynamic force in all of Miss Harrison's work.

In another of her early works, *Myths of the Odyssey in Art and Literature* (1882), Miss Harrison remarks in the preface (pp. xxi, xxii):

²⁴ In this connection Miss Harrison tells a delightful story in her memoir (*Reminiscences* [*supra* n.9] 34). As an old woman she was appointed Justice of the Peace, and on one case it was reported that the prisoner had used particularly profane language. The magistrates were interested to know just what the prisoner said, but as it was unbecoming to utter the offending words, they were written down and passed around the bench. "The unknown to me has always had an irresistible lure, and all my life I have had a curiosity to know what really bad language consisted of. In the stables at home I had heard an occasional 'damn' from the lips of a groom, but that was not very informing. Now was the chance of my life. The paper reached the old gentleman next to me. I had all but stretched out an eager hand. He bent over me in a fatherly way and said, 'I am sure *you* will not want to see this'. I was pining to read it, but sixty years of sex-subservience had done their work. I summoned my last blush, cast down my eyes and said, 'Oh no! No. Thank you so much'. Elate with chivalry he bowed and pocketed the script."

May I add one word to the end I hope to attain? I believe the educational value of a study of archaeology to consist far more in the discipline of taste and feeling it affords, than in the gift of definite information it has to offer . . . the best gifts of archaeology,—the trained eye, quick instinct, pure taste, well-balanced emotion,—these we may be thankful if we gain in a lifetime.

This passage, so evocative of Pater and the esthetic movement, is illuminated by a few unpublished notes jotted down by Jessie Stewart in connection with a description of Miss Harrison's early years. They are useful in providing a general context for this early work. Although they lack amplification, they need none. Mrs Stewart wrote:

love of brilliant generalisation
 rage for art in '80's
 Rossetti her favourite poet
 belief in beauty
 creation of beauty higher than research and scholarship
 poetry must be Swinburnian
 the aesthetic movement made appreciation of Greek vase painting
 possible
 Jane's urge aesthetic not scientific
 desired a pattern, not the truth
 regarded Dörpfeld and Ridgeway as materials
 for pattern, *i.e.*, her aesthetic sense
 satisfied by conclusions elicited from
 masses of data
 Verrall made Greek literature living—
 Jane made Greek religion living.²⁵

Some of these jottings, like that about Miss Harrison's favorite poet being Rossetti, are interesting without throwing any fresh light on her work; such a fact only fits the esthetic milieu we know of from her university days, as recorded in the memories of fellow students: she was "the dominating figure in a group of friends; like a Rembrandt picture, with a highlight on her vital imposing figure, tall, willowy, the tight-fitting olive-green serge of the days of the aesthetic craze, her hair in a Greek coil . . .,"²⁶ or "This was the Pre-Raphaelite

²⁵ Unpublished note in Stewart papers in Newnham College Library.

²⁶ Stewart 7. This exactly describes the photograph of Miss Harrison, dressed as Alcestis in a student theatrical of 1877, that is the frontispiece of Mrs Stewart's biography.

period: we papered our rooms with Morris, bought Burne-Jones photographs and dressed accordingly."²⁷

Others of these notes go much deeper, e.g., "Jane's urge aesthetic not scientific," and "desired a pattern, not the truth." These remarks in fact point to attitudes that characterize all her work in both tone and content. For instance, to her the psychological fragmentation that resulted from the rationalistic view of religion we see in Frazer must have been distinctly unsatisfactory from an esthetic point of view. In this case, rationalism explains away, rather than explains, and leaves the phenomena unaccounted for. She must have seen Durkheim's view of religion as projection of group needs and wishes, as not only in tune with her own intuitions but unifying rather than atomizing and therefore more likely to be right: it was her "desire to see a pattern." (This of course does not mean that she did not believe Durkheim in fact to be correct, in an intellectual sense; only that she must have felt assured he was right because of the clarity and elegance with which so many kinds of phenomena were brought together and illuminated.) In the same vein we hear her writing (in an unpublished letter) to Murray about her colleague Arthur (later Sir Arthur) Pickard-Cambridge (1873–1952), whose *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy* (1927) was the most damaging scholarly attack on the Cambridge's group's case for ritual origins for tragedy: "... dear Mr. Pickard [-Cambridge], how like him to raise difficulties about the babe Bromios [*i.e.*, Dionysus—see *Themis*² 92]—I am so weary of people whose minds are in bits—and for all his adorably kind gentle face one feels his mind is in rather small bits."²⁸ Many, perhaps all of us, tend to make intellectual judgements in esthetic terms; Miss Harrison is here only pleasantly explicit.

And finally, from Mrs Stewart's list, the "rage for art in '80's" and "the aesthetic movement made appreciation of Greek vase painting possible" suggest why Miss Harrison might have been drawn to popularize Greek art history in the eighties. The esthetic movement, along with the efforts of those in the preceding generation, e.g., Ruskin and Morris, to generate a heightened esthetic consciousness, made art and 'culture' more of a mass commodity than ever before in

²⁷ Stewart 7, 8.

²⁸ Unpublished letter, dated in Mrs Stewart's hand "October 1911," in Newnham College Library.

England.²⁹ And we know that Miss Harrison's lectures were very popular, both in the British Museum and with the other audiences, mostly schools, before whom she appeared.

I have already mentioned the personal and intellectual crisis through which Miss Harrison passed around 1887. The facts are not as clear as they might be, but enough exists to enable one to speak with some assurance. The cause, or at least one of the main causes, was the condemnation passed on her esthetic standards and style of life, and especially on her esthetic method of lecturing, by her close friend D. S. MacColl. Apparently she was in the habit of delivering what she later called an *Epideiktikos Logos*, a set or show oration, in which she would attempt to overwhelm her audience through her fervor and brilliance. MacColl regarded her lectures as performances of an overheated, sensationalistic and superficial kind and related them to her desire to live as intensely and beautifully as possible. Her whole life seems to have toppled at this time, and she tells us that she went through a kind of "mystical" conversion. Such an experience, so typical of the nineteenth century, has as its characteristic rhythm "depression, loneliness, a sense of disaster bringing a 'conviction of sin'," which leads without the conscious intervention of the will to "exaltation, peace, and joy, a new focus, a sensation of oneness."³⁰ This dramatic and harrowing time came to an end when in 1888 in the company of MacColl and several other friends she paid her first visit to Greece.

One need not attempt to analyze this critical period further; it suffices to note it as the watershed after which everything is new and different. Not quite everything, to be sure—her penchant for origins, noted earlier in the study of Greek art, will remain but will now be exercised in the search for the roots of religion. But from this time on she eschewed sensationalism as a lecturer (although she was a very effective instructor at Cambridge), and, more importantly, wholly changed her main interests. She remained an archaeologist, but no longer did she regard archaeology of worth merely as an ancilla to literature, as she had for example in her book on the myths of the

²⁹ Despite the scandalous behavior of some of those who toiled as priests in the church of art, the 1880s in England seem to offer, *mutatis mutandis*, an analogy to the "mass acceptance of culture" in the United States of the 1960s. In both decades significant new groups in the population became comfortable enough in the use of their money and position to find it desirable to participate in what had hitherto been an art-culture of a higher class.

³⁰ Stewart 115. Mrs Stewart is summarizing an autobiographical reference in Miss Harrison's essay of 1912, "Unanimism and Conversion," *op.cit.* (*supra* n.18) 62-64.

Odyssey. She still was committed to the search for beauty, but perhaps her crisis caused her to question her standards of the beautiful, and it is likely that her trip to Greece, scrambling around the ruins of Athens and learning of the latest findings from the director of the excavations, Professor Wilhelm Dörpfeld, opened her eyes to a larger view of Greek art. But whatever it was, from now on she combined her interest in origins with her love of Greek art and used them to study the earliest Greek art, not its classical incarnation in the work of Phidias.

The “*new birth*”³¹ she experienced is displayed in the work she published in 1890, immediately after her return from Greece: a translation of Maxime Collignon’s *Mythologie figurée de la Grèce*, entitled *Manual of Mythology in Relation to Greek Art*; and the long historical introduction to a translation of Book I of Pausanias, *Attica*, by her friend Margaret Verrall, the translation and introduction published together as *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Greece*. Even though the *Manual of Mythology* is not a production of Miss Harrison’s, the translator’s preface sounds the new note that will be heard in all her future work.

If we would know the truth about the origin of mythological types, it is to archaic art we must look,—to a time when the utterance of the artist, if sometimes rude and inarticulate, was always robust and sincere. Truth with the early artist comes even before beauty; as yet he works for a people whose faith is more developed than their senses.

The study of mythography is in England yet in its infancy, but it may safely be prophesied that not many years will elapse before it becomes not only part of the advanced discipline of the classical scholar, but also an indispensable and attractive element in classical school teaching. M. Collignon’s manual offers an admirable introduction to the study, and as no English handbook exists a translation was much needed.³²

The profoundest result, however, of her personal upheaval was not these books, prophetic though they are of her later work. The “*new birth*” through which she went was in fact a *rite de passage*, a death and

³¹ The reference of course is generally to her key concept of initiation ritual and specifically to her analysis of conversion in “Unanimism and Conversion,” *op.cit.* (*supra* n.18) 42ff.

³² Jane Harrison, “Preface,” *Manual of Mythology* by M. Collignon (London 1890) v.

rebirth, which she would come to understand in *Themis* as the paradigmatic Greek religious ritual. I am not claiming that she wrote *Themis* as a result of the events of 1887–88. To be sure, she did not perceive the key rôle of initiation rituals until after 1905, a long fifteen years after the events now being narrated. Nevertheless, her scholarly work and her personal life were inextricably interwoven in a way that is rare for most intellectuals. And I have no doubt that she later embraced initiation and rebirth as enthusiastically as she did because her own experience must have given her the subjective feeling of rightness that she apparently needed before making an idea completely her own.

IV

Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens (1890) might be called the first book of the Cambridge Ritualists, even though Miss Harrison had at this time not even met Murray, Cornford or Cook, because it indicates the general direction to be taken by the group later. Its orientation, however, is still primarily archaeological, discussing the connections between the myths and the artifacts that have been dug up; there is nothing yet about literature as such.

Here is Miss Harrison in the preface to the book, written, it should be recalled, in the flush of enthusiasm attendant upon her return from Greece:

... I have tried everywhere to get at, where possible, the cult as the explanation of the legend. My belief is that in many, even in the large majority of cases, *ritual practice misunderstood* explains the elaboration of myth . . . Some of the loveliest stories the Greeks have left us will be seen to have taken their rise, not in poetic imagination, but in primitive, often savage, and, I think, always *practical* ritual. In this matter—in regarding the myth-making Greek as a practical savage rather than a poet or philosopher—I follow, *quam longo intervallo*, in the steps of Eusebius, Lobeck, Mannhardt, and Mr. Andrew Lang. The *nomina numina* method [*i.e.*, Müllerian comparative mythology] I have utterly discarded—first, because I am no philologist; and second, because, whatever partial success may await it in the future, a method so long over-driven may well lie by for a time. That I have been unable, except for occasional illustration, to apply to my examination of cults the comparative method is a matter

of deep regret to me, and is due to lack of time, not lack of conviction. I may perhaps be allowed to ask that my present attempts be only taken as *prolegomena* to a more systematic study.³³

If myth arises from ritual misunderstood, to study myth we must fix on what the primitive did, not what he (might have) thought.

At this point she is sure that a ritual misunderstood will explain only a relatively small group of myths, even though she suspects that most myths should be so understood. And for all her implied difference with the dominant Tylorian rationalism, she is still willing to assume a “myth-making mind” inside which the investigator can move. For instance, when later she considers a group of myths that seem expiatory in tone but puzzling to us because it is not clear what is being expiated, her conclusion is that the confusion exists only in our minds—“To the myth-making mind that was simple enough.”³⁴

In her long introductory essay to this guidebook to the ruins of Athens Miss Harrison reminds the reader of Otfried Müller in her careful dissection of the myths into their various components, except that she has the inestimably great advantage of forty additional years of archaeology: she has, therefore, many more parallels at her fingertips, and implicitly also a rather large body of evolutionary ethnographic data and speculation as a theoretical framework. Her emphasis on topography and vases implies that myths are not importantly (or at least primarily) to be thought of as verbal constructions (which ultimately might be analyzed philologically) but as secondary developments of a cultic reality that was located in the physical existence of Greece (not in the Greek imagination) and which therefore have to be studied with that scene in mind.

As might be expected from the prolegomenon of a beginning (albeit forty-year-old) scholar, the book is not of great theoretical interest. As mentioned above, she implicitly accepts an evolutionary development of both technology and psyche. And she makes clear her commitment to the comparative method in her expression of regret at not having been able to pursue this approach in what after all is really a handbook, intended for tourists clambering around the broken remnants of Athens.

³³ *Mythology and Monuments* iii. Miss Harrison's italics. Her regret about lack of time derives from the fact that her part of the book was written in three weeks (Stewart 11).

³⁴ *Ibid.* xlii.

Before passing to her later work it is appropriate here to note that *Mythology and Monuments* appeared in 1890, the same year as the first edition of *The Golden Bough*. The simple fact of contemporaneity seems conclusive evidence that any formulation which has ritualist criticism emerging from under the shade of *The Golden Bough* is mistaken.³⁵ The important facts in this stage of Jane Harrison's life are not her reading *The Golden Bough* but her archaeological training in general and her trip to Greece in particular. In Athens Professor Dörpfeld, the director of the excavations being conducted by the German Archaeological Institute, personally conducted her over the ruins of the ancient city, showing her how closely and strongly cultic reality stood behind mythic narrative (whether narrated in a story or depicted on a vase). And later she and MacColl had traveled to other important classical sites. Considering the idealistic nature of her earlier writing, it can only have been the Greek experience, combined with a readiness to rethink her basic approach to the past, that led her to the theory of the precedence of ritual over myth. Nor was William Robertson Smith any more of a factor in influencing her thought, for we should surely have some mention of her having attended the lectures that were printed as *The Religion of the Semites*, and no evidence to that effect exists. Add to this the fact that she was in Greece during part of the time that Smith was lecturing, and we may safely deny Smith any formative rôle in her ideas.³⁶

All this notwithstanding, she must have read *The Golden Bough* soon after its appearance, for in the preface she contributed to the English translation in 1892 of a standard German manual on Greek mythology she briefly discusses the various approaches to mythology then available. After dismissing the philological viewpoint she turns to "the Folk-lore Method, of which Mr. Andrew Lang and Mr. J. G. Frazer are, in England, the best known exponents."³⁷ She explains that this method asks us to understand the origins of the Greek gods not in light of the Vedas ("which is a relief, as so few of us can read

³⁵ As, for instance, that of the literary historian Stanley Edgar Hyman in *The Tangled Bank* (New York 1962) 439.

³⁶ Of course she read Smith, and indeed was having her students read him in 1900 (Stewart 14), if not earlier. Miss Harrison having been so closely associated with the ritualist interpretation of myth, it is frustrating that no documents from the period exist that would permit a more definite statement of her reasons for becoming a ritualist.

³⁷ Jane Harrison, "Preface" to Katherine Raleigh's translation of A. H. Petiscus, *The Gods of Olympus* (New York 1892) vi.

them”) but from what we have learned from the analogous practices of “the contemporary Savage.” She continues:

The shock was severe at first, but we are settling down, and most of us now recognize the substantial soundness of the position. No less do we, and probably its original supporters, see clearly its inadequacy as applied to Greek mythology. It leaves us with the beginning of things, with certain primitive elementary conceptions, and takes no heed of the complex structure reared on the simple basis. The seductive simplicity of the “Corn-mother” and the “Tree-spirit,” and, worst of all, the ever-impending “Totem,” is almost as perilous as the Old Sun and Moon snare.

So we see Miss Harrison has gone over and now numbers herself as one of the folklorists. And we also see that she has moved so recently that she still can offer criticisms of the new approach from a relatively detached perspective; she is not yet the partisan she will become. When she names Frazer she must be referring to *The Golden Bough*, since he had published nothing of note between 1890 and 1892. Of its three editions this one, it should be recalled, was the most ritualist in orientation. It was nevertheless not very substantial theoretically, being basically a series of what the last century called ‘dissertations’ on comparisons between the priestly kingship at Nemi and analogous rites drawn from peasant or primitive practice. Thus what she must have gained from Frazer was not the crucial connection between myth and ritual, for she had that already in 1890 in *Mythology and Monuments*, but the comparison between Greek religion and ‘savage’ folklore. And here too *The Golden Bough* cannot have been more than suggestive because most of it is based on Mannhardt—i.e., Central Europe—and not on classical Greece at all. Nevertheless, this quotation, drawn from her preface to what was doubtless a rather obscure publication,³⁸ clearly shows that by the early nineties Miss Harrison had been persuaded of the basic worth of the anthropological approach; what she had now to do was to become enough of an anthropologist to employ it. This was to occupy her for the next decade.

Let us return to this noteworthy preface once more, for in her ensuing remarks she sets forth what she deems to be the task of the student of Greek mythology, now that he has been given the comparative anthropological approach. She says that even granting the

³⁸ It is neither given in the bibliography in Stewart nor mentioned in Miss Harrison’s memoir.

basic analogy between “the stately ritual of the Greek temple” and “the sympathetic magic of the savage,” this is but the beginning of the mythologist’s work.

He has the demons and spirits of primitive man at one pole, and the “gods of Olympos” at the other; while a link in this chain is wanting he knows no rest. It is not enough for him to hint airily that Dionysos may have been a bull or a tree. . . . what he must do, or fail, is to trace each Saga to its local home, to carry out the work that the great H. D. Müller [*sic*—K. O. Müller is meant] began before his time, to disentangle the “confederacy of local cults” from which the ultimate Olympian assembly was formed.³⁹

The importance of the anthropological method to students of Greek mythology, which they are now beginning to realize, is that Greek religion must have evolved from more primitive forms and that therefore what passes as the fount of Greek religion—Homer—was in fact the result of a long religious development. But, she says, too little is yet known of pre-Homeric religion to warrant dropping hints to this effect, as some writers apparently were doing. “It may be possible ten years hence to write a manual on the historico-tribal method, but the time is not yet.” So until that time comes the best thing to do is repeat the verities of the good Dr Petiscus (whose original manual had appeared in 1863; this was a translation of the *twentieth* edition); at least he does not mislead or confuse the reader with cryptic hints of a new way of understanding the entire subject.

This last sentiment is remarkable as a rare example of Jane Harrison favoring the prudent way over the speculative. Apparently, she had now become convinced that the folkloristic method offered so much promise, once it was worked out, that premature and ill-considered guesswork must inevitably damage the real work at hand.

With the publication of *Mythology and Monuments* Miss Harrison attained a certain scholarly celebrity; she was invited to join the German Archaeological Society and was awarded honorary doctorates from Durham and Aberdeen universities. During the nineties, however, while she lived what seems to have been a rather unhappy existence writing and lecturing in London, she was groping toward the idea that there was a deeper, more primitive layer of gods underlying the Homeric stratum of Olympians. She published in *Classical*

³⁹ “Preface” to *The Gods of Olympos* (*supra* n.37) vi, vii.

Review a series of notes and reviews on archaeological topics and some, interestingly enough, on the connections between artifact and literature: *e.g.*, in 1898 a series of notes on the light shed on three odes of Bacchylides by the close inspection of certain vases.⁴⁰ Then in 1898 she was offered and accepted the first Research Fellowship at Newnham and returned to her old college for what would be a stay of nearly a quarter of a century.

The return to Newnham marked an epoch in her life. She had demonstrated her competence by achieving an international reputation as one of a handful of women in an ultraconservative field of scholarship. By making the move she rejoined the academic world, in which she felt at ease.

During the twenty years that had ensued since she had gone down from Cambridge she had moved somewhat uneasily, searching for a subject matter. She began by attempting to elucidate the relations between Greek art and Greek literature, then moved to the history of Greek art as seen from the viewpoint of archaeology, and finally had seen the light in sighting the darkness that underlay the lambent achievement of the classical period.

She was a Darwinian, like practically every intellectual of the time, but when she went back to the university she was not yet a fully competent anthropologist. Although she had embraced the comparative method she lacked as yet the materials with which to make wide-ranging comparisons. It is here probably that Frazer had his greatest influence—in putting at her disposal large bodies of comparative data illustrating certain recurrent motifs in primitive religion. During the next five years following upon her return to Newnham, she threw herself into anthropology and paid less and less attention to literature; she made the acquaintance of the men who were to be her closest friends and coworkers; and she wrote the first of the books that will ensure her a place in the history of classical scholarship.⁴¹

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⁴⁰ "Archaeological and Mythological Notes on Bacchylides," *CR* 12 (1898) 85–86.

⁴¹ Some of the research for this paper was made possible by a grant in 1969–70 from the Council on Research in the Humanities of Columbia University. I should also like to thank the University Seminar in Classical Civilization at Columbia, whose members heard an earlier version of this paper on 20 January 1972 and who helped and encouraged with their questions and comments.



JANE ELLEN HARRISON *en Famille*, circa 1920

Center, Miss Harrison; *second from left*, Miss Hope Mirrlees, friend and companion to Miss Harrison in her last years. All others are members of the Lane family, Miss Harrison's nieces and nephew: (*standing*) the Misses Ella, Una and Monica Lane and Mr H. M. Lane, and (*in foreground*) Miss Hilda Lane.

(Photograph courtesy Miss M. E. Lane)