

Recovering Ritual: A Brief Comparison of the Ancient Greek *Oresteia* and the Apache *Na'ii'ees* as Performance

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There is a certain tension between the material and the spiritual, yet never without the impossibility of an embrace between them . . . art-making is a spirit practice . . . to push the distinction between art and spirituality emphasizes a weakness in our view of both.

Allison Knowles, 2001

Traditionally theatre performance is viewed as an ever-changing commodity and valued as an art form, while ritual, regardless of its theatrical nature, is often perceived as static, with no aesthetic or financial value, and segregated to belief systems of localized cultures. However, theatre, like ritual, is based on these same cultural patterns and must also be experienced through performance communicated through the body's senses. Ritual, without the visceral, lived experience, can be deadened and disempowered by relocation and the removal of sacred values, just as theatre without the occurrence of performance is left as a reconstructed powerless artifact.

Whether upon a stage or within a sacred space, it seems, as audience or performer, the experience of ritual and theatre suggests a necessity for transformation. Since before recorded history human beings have sought to communicate with unknown powers outside of the physical plane, and their chosen conduit for the task is performance. The inherent yearning to "see the face of God" or escape for a moment into the metaphysical has not changed through time and can be easily documented by the perpetuation of theatre and ritual performance throughout the world. The division between ritual and theatre allegedly begins during the "Golden Age" of Greek theatre, marking the removal of the metaphysical from performance in the West and its dependence upon the written text. Definitions of difference, such as oral versus written, primitive versus civilized, or pagan versus Christian, have isolated Western concepts of theatre, ritual, and art from the rest of the world and can be deemed as political in nature. For the purposes of this study performance is defined as re-enactments before an audience, and both *theatre* and *ritual* are viewed as performance. The definition of these terms is based upon the social anthropologist Victor Turner's concept of ritual and theatre as actions born from social conflict, which stimulate the transition between *what is* and *what becomes*. Although museums and the written text have been situated as performance,¹ *recovering ritual* necessitates an experience of performance rooted in the immediacy of a lived exchange.

¹ It is not my intention to negate the broad implications of performance within academia, but for this study the term *performance* is perceived as a lived experience between audience and participant and is temporal in nature.

For thousands of years the indigenous populations throughout the world have performed transformation rituals. These ancient sacred rites are known to be performed through dance, music, costumes, masks, and transformative ceremony upon sacred ground one or two days a year as an offering to the gods throughout indigenous populations.² Many of these ancient transformations are connected through similar mystical and transcendent experiences of the participants. In the West, however, only the enactments of myths created by an ancient and designated civilized Greek culture are considered theatre and the source of drama as we know it today. The Western canon has promoted for centuries the unlikely assumption that a tribal community five hundred years before Christ created in isolation the European hybrid that we know today as “classical Greek theatre.”

Many scholars have questioned prehistoric performance ritual as theatre and have especially rejected those without a written text.³ For example, Native American religions are largely ignored and designated as “primitive,” aligning with the misconception that the many diverse religions existing within indigenous tribes are neither complex nor speculative.⁴ Today, ancient and current indigenous myths and their oral re-telling through ceremony can be viewed as complex, dramatic, and filled with supernatural forces just as the ancient Greek. These oral performances express diverse histories, moral questions, and religions through dance, prayers, songs, words, and spectacle. Through indifference, prejudice, and the weight of historic written texts, the West has long designated one culture’s sacred re-telling as theatre created by a civilized population and bound to a written text, while dismissing the others as “crude manifestations” devoid of deeper meaning and strictly oral in nature.⁵

As with all documentation and research surrounding cultures without an existing written language, scholars must often cross disciplines into archaeology and anthropology. The problem with this method, as with all historical research is the socio-political weight distributed by Western science and centuries of religious intolerance. Partly due to 2,500 years of accepted assumptions and several centuries of prejudice within the Western historic canon toward anything seen as anti-Christian, transformation rituals of indigenous populations have been largely ignored as a source of early

² Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 357-379.

³ Charles Robinson, *An Anthology of Greek Drama* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), vii-xxi. Robinson simultaneously negates all sacred rituals by announcing their primitive status while privileging the later written text.

⁴ Paul Radin, *Primitive Religions* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957), 3-4.

⁵ Ake Hultkrantz, *Native Religions of North America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 1-20. Hultkrantz tracks the religious practices of prehistoric Indian tribes in North America and documents rituals of hunting religion.

performance text.⁶ Further prejudice against oral performance is supported through political policies, such as the banning of Native American ritual performance in the late nineteenth century. This prohibition was not repealed until 1978, when the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed.

Perhaps, the European embrace of Greece is because much of the ancient world has been recovered. Nomadic and oral cultures leave little behind and have been notoriously disregarded by the West. However, scholars, past and present, do not reconstruct the past from surviving remains, but *recontextualize* a past acceptable to its particular culture's belief system.⁷ Recontextualization is a process which mediates the past for the present. Historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists do not reconstruct the past from found remains or historic events, but rather translate the past and its civilizations into a language their own culture can navigate. This scholarly procedure translates the foreign into understandable terms for each particular culture through time, but also reshapes the "other" into its own image often sanctifying the common and negating the sacred.⁸ It freezes the culture, weighted artifact by artifact, in a particular era, forming historical monuments such as the Golden Age of Greece or the Native American trapped within a nineteenth-century image.

Through the process of recontextualization the Greek word *tragoidia*, literally translated as "goat song," is transformed into the theatrical term "tragedy" for the West, and the beginning of theatre, although an oral presentation, is dated by its connection with the *polis* due to the survival of a written record. Recontextualization can also be viewed as a political act serving the colonizers and their dominant religious and cultural ideologies. Thus one recovered artifact is privileged as priceless art from an ancient civilized culture, while another is labeled a cooking utensil from a primitive tribal community. When one examines the Western culture's dominant ideologies and reliance upon the written text, it appears far more probable that what has been labeled as unique in the Golden Age of Greek theatre is based upon text and not performance, a text fabricated and packaged by medieval monks and supported by nineteenth-century archaeologists and scholars as they embraced cultural Darwinism and negated the oral, labeling one savage and the other *civilized*.

As often found in a museum or on the *History Channel*, the experience of recontextualization is a form of dead performance allowing its audience a seemingly clear perspective of the "other" as entertaining, and promoting the illusion that the audience has gained the information necessary to understand a specific era or culture. This kind of

⁶ Elizabeth Scott, *Those of Little Note* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994) 3-7, provides examples of prejudice by those in power through history and archaeological misrepresentations of people and cultures.

⁷ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001), 11.

⁸ Through this process a common cooking bowl can be reestablished as a work of art or a sacred basket into a domestic tool.

performance should also be recognized as a highly sculpted political journey, created by historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and curators, substantiating accepted ideologies for those who are willing to pay the price for their condensed and reformulated knowledge. The distancing effect produced enables the West to appropriate a culture as an object and negate the power of its rituals while creating a profit. One of the many limitations with this type of performance filling the museums and history texts of the West is the cultural and religious prejudice that has riddled the fields of archaeology, history, and anthropology, leaving in its wake entire populations, histories, and gender outside such civilized terms as *theatre*, *art*, and *philosophy*.⁹

My personal participation with two contrasting performances of ritual, one as a recontextualized historical monument and another devoid of the process, may serve as an example of the experience of ritual enactment and further clarify the living-and-dead exchange inherent in the two distinct types of performance. Recently, I attended a tour at the Kimbell Art Museum in Ft. Worth, Texas, entitled *The Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt*. Encased in glass, climate controlled, enhanced by light, with stationed security guards among strategically placed pedestals, plus a thirty dollar entrance fee, all this underlined the value and privilege afforded these artifacts. The burial ritual of the Egyptians was fully described through printed cards, an on-going recorded narrative, a brief film detailing the religion and techniques of the ceremony, and finally a reproduced burial chamber. A few curious facts were occasionally presented, such as the Egyptians prized people of light skin more than those of dark complexion. There was no documentation of this interesting statement, but the assumption was presented as truth and appreciated by the white audience within the museum. The exit was through a museum shop selling reproductions of the various ancient artifacts, such as jewelry molded into the accepted Egyptian icon and numerous books upon the subject. As I looked around me at an audience enthralled and buying reproductions of ancient gods, I realized that I was alone in my feeling of horror. I had not experienced Egyptian ritual, but had observed the recontextualization of a sacred ancient ritual into a Western commodity, packaged for my palette and reshaped for my consumption.

The museum, much like historical narration, is a recontextualized performance and holds the once-living culture frozen in the nebulous pre-history designated as "ancient." The process sculpts into the dominant culture's ideology a reproduction of Egyptian ritual devoid of its source belief system and environment. Once powerful and sacred burial rituals are regimented to art galleries and observed as the easily digested historical monument *Ancient Egypt*. This distancing effect allows the West to appropriate a culture, negate the power of its rituals, redefine its sacred objects as commodities, and relegate its dead as historic artifacts.

Several weeks before my excursion into the Kimbell, I witnessed the Apache puberty ritual *Na'ii'ees* in Arizona. Of the four-day ritual, only two days are performed

⁹ Michael Blakey, "Socio-Political Bias and Ideological Production in Historical Archaeology," in *The Socio-Politics of Archaeology*, ed. Joan Gero, David Lacy, and Michael Blakey (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), 5-17. The entire book of essays details the prejudicing of categories for political means.

outside within a sacred space before an audience. Both the Egyptian and Apache representations were of ancient sacred ritual, and yet one was displayed as exquisite art, shaped and repositioned, while the other was not. The Egyptian burial ritual was disempowered, dissected, and placed in the hierarchy of art based primarily upon what the market is willing to pay. In contrast, the Apache ritual, performed without relocation or translation and retaining its belief systems maintained its function, power and beauty through its communication to the body's senses. As an observer of the museum performance, I gained reconstructed pieces of the whole, mediated through Western ideologies, but was no closer to experiencing the lived ritual performance of the ancient Egyptians than I would be if I had merely opened a book.

The Apache performance retained Victor Turner's concept that ritual is an action which performs the transition between *what is* and *what becomes*. Therefore, if we adhere to Turner's concept, it would seem that to gain any understanding of the "living" performance one must experience the corporeal action of ritual, which negates any form of ownership and discards ritual's placement as art and commodity, but does not negate the enactment's inherent drama. This suggests that the performance of ritual as drama or theatre as ritual is a communication through the body's senses and cannot be owned except through the recontextualization process, which transforms the living experience into a dead artifact, commodified and translated by the dominant culture. Recontextualization seems to defeat any definition of ritual or theatre as an active verb.

By negating the immediate and lived exchange in today's performance, the transformative activity of ritual and theatre are torn from their metaphysical base and can no longer fulfill the human need of transcendence. This type of "dead" performance advocates the illusion that knowledge of the other is obtainable without experience and can be compared to our examination of an insect secured by a pin under glass. Yes, now I know what a butterfly is. I have seen it, killed it and captured it for eternity, still and frozen in time. However, if I have not experienced the butterfly and its flight across a flowered field, can I ever know its full beauty, function, or power?

Perhaps it is necessary to remove an object from its environment to study it more fully, just as dissecting an animal gives us a greater understanding of how it functions. Nevertheless, the animal must be killed and the object displaced, and in so doing the lives of both are ended, and our knowledge of the found or captured is never complete. Examining pieces does not automatically necessitate any understanding of the whole. Placing the temporal and active life of performance, whether theatre or ritual, into the containment of recontextualization negates its power, reconstructs its meaning into the once living, and validates division as a means of definition.

It is through these unearthed remains of the written text that the bedrock of the historic monument known as the Golden Age of Greek theatre is initially formed. As the found written word is relocated and detached from its belief systems, the power of Greece's oral culture and sacred performance is negated. The division between ritual and theatre begins as performance is removed from its sacred arena and bound by the written document. This separation is further enhanced by the reconstruction of the Greek oral

ritual performance through translated texts within a dominant Christian culture. "Otherness" is recontextualized through medieval interpretations into an acceptable and valued written commodity lacking the inherent metaphysical base of oral performance.

In performance ritual the human being is transformed, the community healed and the Gods placated.¹⁰ Although Aristotle's *Poetics* was unknown to Latin and early Christian scholars, contemporary scholars continue to use its interpreted categories as a means to separate forms of theatre. Theatre works through a similar transformation or *catharsis*, which purges and heals its audience. Aristotle vaguely defines an ideal where both audience and participant are transformed. His description of the ideal tragedy presents a theatre form strikingly similar to the rituals of indigenous people created by song, dance, and the oral re-telling of a transformation myth.¹¹ It is through this transformation of the participant that the community experiences pleasure and agony, conflicts are healed, and unity of the *polis* is achieved. If we consider Aristotle's *mimesis* as the oral re-enactment of myth within a sacred place and ritual as the physical re-enactment, myth can be seen as framed by the ritual of performance. The individual as participant in the ritual becomes the hero in the ritual substitute we know as secular theatre.

In order to question the line of separation between the oral and written created by the West, between what is labeled theatre and defined as a product of a civilized culture and what is identified as ritual and defined as the superstitions of indigenous or primitive peoples,¹² it is first necessary to remove the fifth-century B.C. Greek performance from the European Renaissance definition of theatre. By the comparison of the performances of two origin myths, Apache and Ancient Greek, numerous similarities in technique and function are established which question the West's separation of theatre from its metaphysical base for ideological purposes. For example, Greek performance masks can be documented as early as seventh century B.C.¹³ The masks and their similar resemblance through time and myth variation suggest their ritual importance. However, the written text of the *Oresteia* cannot be documented until the second century B.C.¹⁴ The earliest medieval source of the text is found to contain only 190 lines that could originate linguistically from the time of Aeschylus.¹⁵ The Apache origin myth is still performed today as the female puberty ritual *Na'ii'ees*.

¹⁰ Bharat Gupt, *Dramatic Concepts: Greek & Indian* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1994) 67.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S.H. Butcher (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 31-32.

¹² *Ibid.* 2.

¹³ A. David Napier, *Masks, Transformation and Paradox* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 47-48, 55, 61. Includes photographs of material remains.

¹⁴ C.J. Herington, *Poetry into Drama: Early Tragedy and the Greek Poetic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 45.

¹⁵ Looking for the written source of *Agamemnon*, I began a correspondence with Dr. R.K. Dawes, who documented his findings and the earliest existing written text dated to the tenth century A.D.

Until recently much of the scholarship of native transformation ritual and the Western concept of tragedy have been contaminated and distorted through the Christian perception of good and evil. In contrast to Christian ideology, the ancient Greeks and Apaches view the forces that control their worlds, in themselves, as neither good or bad. In addition, the beliefs of many contemporary scholars that ritual activity is unchanging and that tragedy is necessarily solemn have led to many misconceptions surrounding Greek and Apache performance. If ritual is perceived as a present action produced to affect the cosmic cycle of events, although based in traditional practices, its meaning can vary dramatically and its structure can be exploited and changed in various ways. The ritual enactment of the Greek myths and their oral performance with spectacle, music, and dance shifts with each re-telling, and yet the basic story remains the same. The same can be said for the many variations of the evolving ritual performance of the Apache tribes. The dramatic enactment is reshaped by the re-teller or singer, and yet the structure and traditional symbols remain the same. The effectiveness and transitory state of either ritual relied upon its active oral performance to produce harmony within the tribal community. To be able to understand many of the similarities between Greek oral culture and that of the Apache, it is important to remember that performance was each culture's form of communication of myth, and verbal utterances were creative acts of the highest order.¹⁶ The written text is only the smallest part of the dramatic ritual, and it followed rather than preceded their rituals.

The Apache, like the Greeks, place man or woman in the center of their myths and are concerned with human values, individual responsibilities, the renewal of beliefs, continuation of the community, and wisdom gained through stress.¹⁷ The gods or some supernatural force are also present in their myths. Turner's concept of ritual as a product of social conflict whose enactment forms a bridge between *what is* and *what is to come* applies here as well. Ritual and theatre are each spawned from this conflict, and each portrays the journey of transformation within its leading participant and the continuance of the tribe through its practice. When performed and received as an active agent of change, the myth transforms both the participants and the audience through Aristotle's concept of purging the self through *mimesis* and *catharsis*. A comparison of the Apache origin myth enacted through the female puberty ritual to the origin myth of the House of Atreus performed during the Festival of Dionysus should further establish my view of the similarity of the oral performances and also question the historical discrimination of the Western canon. To further study the effect of the rituals, their similarities and necessity of performance for each culture we must first look to the their foundation in origin myths.

The *Oresteia*, a trilogy in its written form, begins with the end of the Trojan war and the murder of a Greek king (Agamemnon), then depicts the plot and murder of Clytemnestra (*The Libation Bearers*), and concludes with the judgment of Athena and formation of the *polis* (*Eumenides*). Through their commitment to duty and intense

¹⁶ Keith Basso, "To Give Up on Words." *Apachean Culture, History and Ethnology* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1971.), 151-159.

¹⁷ Robinson, viii.

suffering, Electra and Orestes are purified of their great-grandfather's original act and transformed by the judgment of Athena. The community (represented as family and Athens) with the aid of the gods establishes justice found through suffering, adherence to duty, and perseverance.¹⁸ Transcendence may only be obtained through the wisdom of the gods and the judgment of one's peer, represented as the birth of the *polis*.

The Apache myth enacted during the puberty ritual of young Apache women, *Na'ii'ees*, is an ancient ceremony that enables the participant to gain the physical and mystical power of *Esdzanodehe* or Changing Woman.¹⁹ The dramatized myth re-tells the religious beliefs of the tribe, its origin, and rejuvenates the community through a new generation of "life givers" as they battle an ancient enemy and are transformed through their reclaiming of ancient virtues.

The most important function of Dionysian worship similar to that of the goddess Changing Woman was to insure fertility and strengthen the tribe. The ritual or myth telling was performed to guarantee the productivity of human beings and the land, communicate the history of a people, and bind the spectators with each other and their universe. The similarities found within the function, preparation, and performance of the rituals continues to question their separation within the Western canon. In both performances the use of dance, song, ritual costumes, poetic language and sacred symbols assist in the process of transcendence. The Greek re-telling often ends with a common ritual known to the audience, and the enacted stories, even while often using a foreign metaphor, are slanted toward known Athenian ritual and practice.²⁰ A belief that the gods are participants both in audience and enactment combined with the ceremony of preparation to create a sacred space for the enacted myth. The benefits to participant, gods, and community enable the ritual to retain its base in religious myth and mystical experiences.²¹ The importance of the outdoor spectacle in relationship with the gods and the world of the Greek and Apache signify within both cultures a spiritual connection with the rhythms of their lives and nature. The gods were in every part of Greek life as with the Apache.

The ancient Apache Sunrise Ceremony or *Na'ii'ees* is an arduous four-day series of rituals followed by four days of teaching and recovery that young Apache girls experience after their first menstruation, and it concludes with their entrance into womanhood through the enactment of a myth. The ritual ends with a feast including the

¹⁸ Robinson, xi.

¹⁹ Sydele Golston, *Changing Woman of the Apache: Women's Lives in Past and Present* (New York: F. Watts, 1996). From field studies the puberty ritual is retold and described through the Chiricahua Apache.

²⁰ Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making* (London: Routledge, 1996), 308-311. A brief account of the festival of Dionysia can be found here as well.

²¹ Sian Lewis, *The Athenian Woman* (London: Routledge, 2002). Using archaeological findings, the author represents the life of the Athenians through women's daily lives.

entire community. The performance of the *Oresteia*, plus a satyr play, concluded the fifth day of the Festival of Dionysus and required nine months of preparation.²² The traditions and repeated ceremonies necessary before the final enactment of Greek myth were complicated, and they prepared the community as well as its participants for the ritual transformation. The Greeks, like the Apache, rewarded the participants of the enactment and the community with a feast at its end.

The preparations leading to the enactment of the myth and the climax of the Apache Sunrise Ceremony are strictly followed, just as they were for the Festival of Dionysus. Traditional robes, participant purification, dances, songs, sacred tools, and prayers had to be created. For the Apache performance, a dance ground must be selected and prepared. An Apache female is chosen to teach the participant her role, and a Shaman must be found to sing the ceremony. A sponsor or godmother is found for the pubescent girl and the ritual tools and costumes must be made through separate ceremonies under the direction of the Shaman. Four days before the ritual begins, family and friends gather to prepare the food for the community. Sacred dances and songs last until midnight each evening as the space is transformed into a sacred place. Participants must be purified within the sweat lodge, before they may take part in any part of the preparation. There are two days of active personal purification of the participant and two days of public performance.

The Apache puberty ritual represents far more than a change in social and physical position of a single female. In addition to the ritual's recognition as a declaration of one woman's availability for marriage, it is also a time in which the entire Apache community is renewed. Through the re-enactment of the sacred stories of creation and the transformation of the girl into a goddess, the Apache world is made anew. The association of the beginning of menstruation with the holy powers of creation establishes health, beauty, newness, and power to the community that experiences the ritual.²³

Preparation for the Festival of Dionysus involved the entire community, as Greek dancers and singers were chosen from the community, and the enactment to be presented was orally re-told and chosen eleven months before the Festival. The teller of the myth trained the dancers, invented the music, movements, and performances. The robes of the participants are said to have resembled the attire of the Dionysian priests,²⁴ thus symbolizing the sacred and ceremonial function of the performer of the myth. Masks were used to portray age, gender, and emotion. The similarities of the masks represented in numerous artifacts, regardless of the diversity of myth, suggest the recognizable masks

²² Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festival of Athens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 57-101. A detailed description of performance and preparation is given. Much is founded on mere assumption and an interpretation of the times.

²³ Golston, "Introduction."

²⁴ Napier, 30-40, describes the ritual performance of the Greeks.

were ceremonial and an important aspect of the ritual. None remain today except those made of clay from the sixth and seventh centuries B.C.

Purification was necessary for the participants and the performance space.²⁵ This was performed through individual sacrifices and prayers as well as physical preparation and chanting. Through animal sacrifice and the chants of priests, the ground was declared sacred where the ritual was enacted. Prayer was performed before and during the enactment. The ritual re-telling was performed through dance and song. Local rituals, such as Electra's enactment of rites for the dead above her father's grave in *The Libation Bearers*, as well as Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon with a bull's horn (an instrument used by priest in animal sacrifice) and her laying of the fabric for her husband to defame in *Agamemnon*, are sprinkled throughout the *Oresteia*. Such reenactments of current sacred rites within the re-telling of ancient myth suggest what has been labeled and defined as theatre was not so very different from the ceremonial ritual of the Apache. The Greek ritual, which the West has labeled theatre, was far more than a performance gift for a specific god, but stressed the current social conflict inherent in the tribe and portrayed the means to regain harmony.

The day before the Greek festival in Athens, the participants were introduced, along with the myths they would be enacting. On the eve of the first day, all normal activities ceased and at dusk the wooden effigy of the god was escorted by young men into the city by torch light. The next morning the ten tribes would assemble with their sacrificial bulls and skins of wine. The emblem of the erect phallus, a symbol of fertility, was also a sacred part of the possession. Dances were performed depicting the myths of Dionysus, sacrifices were made, and the entire male community seemed to be involved either as audience or participant.²⁶ Ten boys' dithyrambs and ten men's dithyrambs were performed before various altars along the parade route leading to the sacred performance space honoring all twelve Olympian gods. Throughout this day, sacrifices of live animals, the pouring of wine into the ground as blessings, and the consumption of wine continued according to the traditions and specifications of the priests. The parade would end at the sacred performance space and near the temple of Athena. Even a seat was left open for the visiting deity, Dionysus, in whose honor the myths and rituals would be performed under the watchful eye of the city's patron, the goddess Athena. The Festival of Dionysus was performed in early March and promised the fertility of the harvests.²⁷ The *catharsis* exchanged during the performance of rituals and myths allowed the audience to be purified through the performers' re-telling. The ceremony gave pleasure and a promise of fertility through the agony and purification of mythical characters, just as the Apache ceremony promises a continuation of the tribe through the enactment of a goddess returning to her people.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jennifer Wise, *Dionysus Writes*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), gives details of the preparation and participants.

²⁷ Oscar Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 9th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002), 28.

Perhaps it is the fixed and written text that stops the evolution into transcendence and removes the re-creation of myth from the living, sacred ritual which defines Western secular theatre. Or, it may be the colonizers' use of difference as a means to devalue a conquered population's culture that re-shapes a living sacred performance into a dead and repositioned artifact. Whatever the reason, the political ramifications of the separation of drama and ritual cannot be ignored through history, nor can the definition given to the Greek enactment of their myths by the West, which is quite different from the ritualistic telling of myth through word, song, and dance performed upon sacred ground in the fifth century B.C. The early Greeks spoke of their origins, honored their gods, and transformed their community through their enactments of myth. Only through interpretation of written texts are these ancient Greek rituals designated as theatre. Let us not forget the worship of the *phallus*, the parade headed by an effigy of a god, and the sacrifice of animals upon an altar, which preceded the performance of the myth.²⁸ I see little difference in the ceremonies of the Greeks with those of the indigenous populations such as the Apache. The Apache performances, if anything, seem far more civilized and dramatic than our violent renditions of Greek texts. Each culture found the enactment of their origin myth as a means to gain wisdom and rebirth producing harmony and continuance within the tribe.

As historians or scholars approach a politically constructed "historic monument" such as the Golden Age of Greek theatre or the image of the Apache, the process of examination should be viewed as active. We must look at any history of a people or any cultural product, such as performance, as a place of diverging interpretations, of debate, power struggles, and always a battle for ownership. The similarities of the oral cultures of the Apache and the ancient Greeks can not be overlooked by the West's need to categorize what it deems civilized and its reliance upon the written text. The practices and ritual enactments of both peoples were complex, sacred, and highly dramatic. By negating the sacred power of the Greek performance of ritual and removing drama from the ceremonies of the Apache, we do a disservice to both oral cultures. The past as it was cannot be known; however, it can be reconstructed, reinterpreted, and always acknowledged as a cultural production.

²⁸ David Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31-32.